# CAN | Canadian Accessibility Network


## A National Partnership for Accessibility

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The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C. M.P. Prime Minister of Canada

March 17, 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

The Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN) wishes to thank you for your strong commitment to accessibility, equity, inclusion, and diversity as expressed in your mandate letters to federal ministers. We welcome your government’s plan to find real solutions to the challenges facing Canadians, including supporting a strong economic recovery that leaves no one behind. We also applaud the direction provided to ministers to fulfil their responsibilities in ways that promote collaboration with under-represented groups and ensure that the voices of all Canadians are heard and reflected in decision-making, including those of persons with disabilities.

Headquartered at Carleton University, CAN is a pan-Canadian consortium of postsecondary institutions, non- profit organizations, service providers, associations, public sector organizations, and businesses committed to advancing accessibility for persons with disabilities. We are working to realize a shared national vision for a more accessible and inclusive Canada by linking arms with collaborators who are accessibility champions. We seek to create collective capacity that is multisectoral and sustainable to empower persons with disabilities, improve socio-economic and health outcomes for all, and change mindsets and behaviours regarding disability.

CAN’s Advisory Council, which includes many people with lived experience of disability and almost 60 collaborating institutions from across the country, met last fall to discuss your government’s election promises and how CAN might best contribute to their realization. The Council focused on two specific issues of critical importance: 1) ensuring better supported and significantly increased engagement of persons with disabilities in the workforce; and 2) ensuring accessibility of mental health services for persons with disabilities, including students.

To this end, CAN members welcome your government’s commitment to create a new stream of the Youth Engagement and Strategy Program to support 5,000 new job opportunities for young people with disabilities, to recruit 5,000 more public servants with disabilities, and to promote a Ready, Willing and Enable hiring program to support individuals with disabilities and on the autism spectrum. Employment for Canadians with disabilities is key not only to the country’s inclusive recovery and economic growth, but also to their dignity and well-being.

Meaningful employment is the gold standard of inclusion; it is a pathway out of poverty, provides safety and security, increases physical and mental well-being, and enables persons with disabilities to contribute fully to their communities.

In an era where the country is facing an unprecedented need for workers in every sector and many fields, these capable Canadians are an untapped resource. We need to embrace the opportunity to help governments, communities and employers to understand the true capacity of these talent pools both as employees and entrepreneurs. This is a critical step to heighten outreach to people not currently engaged in the labour force due to systematic barriers. The Disability Action Inclusion Plan and the Pan-Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work

which feeds into its employment pillar, are useful starting points for the implementation of initiatives designed to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce and as entrepreneurs.

We also support your government’s commitment to enhancing the availability of mental health services for persons with disabilities, including students. We applaud your intention to establish a permanent, ongoing Mental Health Transfer to help expand the delivery of high-quality, accessible and free mental health services, including for prevention and treatment; to introduce a new fund for student mental health that will support the hiring of new mental health care counsellors, improve wait times for service and increase access overall; and undertake a comprehensive review of access to federal disability programs, including for Canadians with mental health challenges. In pursuing these and other initiatives, we urge you to focus not only on the mental health services offered to individuals but also on the environments, systems, structures and policies guiding access to these services to ensure that they are fully accessible and tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities as understood through intersectional lenses. We also encourage you to work with partners to ensure that mental health services for disabled students on campuses, in communities, and in the workforce are interconnected, well-aligned, and provide multiple paths of entry to facilitate their uptake.

We will be reaching out to some of your ministers, including Minister Qualtrough with whom CAN has an established relationship. We offer our assistance as you develop the policies and programs that will enable your government to fulfil its commitments to Canadians with disabilities and their families. Our Network can convene and mobilize, on short notice, a wide range of experts in research, education and design, employment and training, policy, and community engagement, including those with lived experience of disability, to inform your efforts. We invite you and your ministers, including those copied below, to look to CAN for thought leadership and input on new initiatives; for awareness-raising, pilot testing and national roll-out as initiatives are being implemented; and for assessment and evaluation as they are being refined.

The need for a multi-sector, pan-Canadian approach has never been greater. The pandemic has laid bare the differentiated realities of Canadians and the number of individuals identifying with a disability is increasing due to a more inclusive representation, including non-visible categories. These developments, together with the progress Canada is making towards a greater understanding of the contributions of persons with disabilities and the reduction in stigma to self-disclose, make it an opportune time for CAN to partner with the Government of Canada. We look forward to working with you and your ministers to build on the momentum of the *Accessible Canada Act* and the *Employment Equity Act* Review Task Force, implement the recommendations of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and address outstanding inequities exacerbated by the pandemic in access to income, employment, and entrepreneurship, and to physical and mental health services.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss the contributions that the Canadian Accessibility Network can make to the realization of the mandate letter priorities, and we thank you again for your ongoing commitment to making Canada a more accessible, equitable, diverse and inclusive society.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Blanchard Governing Council Chair

Canadian Accessibility Network

cc: the Hon. Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion the Hon. Mona Fortier, President of the Treasury Board

the Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health

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# CAN Collaborator Organizations

## Visit [CAN Collaborators](https://carleton.ca/read/partner-organizations/) to learn more about our Collaborators

1. Abilities Centre Whitby- Ottawa
2. Accessibrand
3. Adaptability Canada Corporation
4. Ai-Media
5. Algonquin College
6. Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians Toronto Chapter
7. Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured
8. BDO Canada LLP / BDO Consulting
9. Bow Valley College
10. Branching Out Support Services
11. Bruyère Research Institute
12. Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance
13. Canadian Chamber of Commerce
14. Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work
15. Carleton University
16. City of Ottawa
17. Civic Actions
18. Community Futures Manitoba
19. D2L Desire2Learn
20. Disability Foundation
21. Distinctability Ltd.
22. Employment Accessibility Resource Network
23. Equidox-Onix Canada
24. Eviance (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies Inc.)
25. EY Canada
26. Fable
27. Fair Chance Learning
28. Inclusion Nova Scotia
29. Inclusive Workplace and Supply Council of Canada
30. Independent Living Canada
31. Ingenium
32. La Cité
33. McGill University
34. National Educational Association of Disabled Students
35. Neil Squire Society
36. Ontario Disability Employment Network
37. Ontario Tech University
38. Propeller Dance
39. Queen’s University
40. Queen’s University – Canadian Disability Policy Alliance
41. Rick Hansen Foundation
42. Saint Mary’s University
43. Specialisterne
44. Spinal Cord Injury Canada
45. St. Francis Xavier University
46. Statistics Canada
47. Thompson Rivers University
48. Transport Canada
49. University of the Fraser Valley
50. University of Manitoba
51. University of New Brunswick
52. University of Ottawa
53. University of Toronto
54. University of Victoria – CanAssist
55. University of Waterloo
56. Workplace Safety and Insurance Board
57. York University