

7. DISABILITY SUPPORTS

Ensure that all persons with disabilities in Manitoba achieve full inclusion in the social cultural, political and economic spheres of society.

Nearly one in six people in Manitoba have a disability. Members of First Nations and Métis communities are at least twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to have a disability.¹³⁷ Without appropriate supports, persons with disabilities face many barriers to reaching their full social and economic potential. These barriers can prevent them from benefitting fully and equitably from education, job training, employment, housing, transportation, health care, recreation, and social services. As a result, persons with disabilities can end up with relatively lower incomes and become among those most socially and economically excluded in Manitoba. The province has responded with the implementation of its Full Citizenship Strategy, the introduction of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, the establishment of a disability issues office, the introduction of a disability lens to be used across government, and the implementation of an advertising campaign to promote the advantages of hiring persons with disabilities. However, more needs to be done to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of society. We recommend the following actions:

7-1. Develop and implement clear, progressive, mandatory and date-specific standards in all major areas related to accessibility that will apply to public and private sectors, accompanied by a timely and effective process for monitoring and enforcing the standards.

Accessibility-rights legislation and mandatory standards are critical to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. In 2013, The Province of Manitoba responded to calls from the community to enact strong and effective legislation that requires the progressive removal of existing barriers for persons with disabilities, and prevents the creation of new ones. Since then the province has begun consultations on the development of accessibility standards that are to be enacted by regulation. Standards will be developed with respect to customer service, information and communication, transportation, employment and the built environment.

The key to effective legislation will be strong and effective compliance measures and the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of standards by the community. Community agencies that serve the disability community should be brought into the fold as partners of the provincial government. The Province of Manitoba should empower these agencies by granting them more responsibility and accountability for the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. This will foster a sense of ownership that will lead to ongoing improvements in the accessibility standards of local stakeholders. Community groups that contend daily with disability issues are uniquely situated to realize, assess, and report on the outcomes of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act. The Act was due in large part to the drive and ambition of independent community groups, such as Barrier Free Manitoba. The province must continue to tap into the expertise of the community by utilizing community groups as fundamental partners in the maintenance and monitoring of the legislation.

7-2. Ensure a seamless and lifelong continuum of support services for persons with disabilities.

The Province of Manitoba should increase supports for persons with disabilities and their families as they transition into adult life and towards greater independence and self-direction. This includes services and supports that address residential or transportation needs to help persons with disabilities live as independently as possible. It also includes supports to facilitate transitions

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into education and employment. The community needs to be engaged in a candid and honest discussion of the realities facing a person with a disability in Manitoba.

Quality home care services enable persons with disabilities to live safely and with dignity in their homes and as integrated members of their communities. Manitoba has been a leader nationally in home care and is the only province to recognize caregivers in legislation and provide a caregiver tax credit. However, as indicated by the Canadian Home Care Association, Manitoba is challenged to meet the home care support requirements of an aging population and the increasing demographic of persons identifying as having a disability.¹³⁸ The province should invest in improved home care services including staff continuity, technical support training, and 24-hour emergency service. There should be greater participation from the community and experts in the delivery of home care services. The Province of Manitoba should increase investments to community organizations that train independent living attendants for little to no cost in programs that are directed by persons with disabilities.

The Province of Manitoba should also partner with community groups to leverage their expertise and experience toward making the labour market more accessible to the disability community. Education and training facilities and workplaces do not always provide the supports and flexibility that persons with disabilities need to pursue education, training and employment opportunities. Furthermore, persons with disabilities face systemic discrimination, often due to a lack of awareness, which can prevent them from accessing meaningful education and employment opportunities. Specific programs should be put in place to bridge the population of unemployed persons with disabilities to gainful job opportunities. This requires ensuring that training programs and facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and geared toward employment that persons with disabilities are interested in and able to take advantage of. The Province of Manitoba's marketAbilities program could be better promoted to support more persons with disabilities in accessing and maintaining meaningful employment.

Families of persons with disabilities and the broader community need to be educated on the role they can play in facilitating transitions to professional employment and greater personal and financial independence. Frontline service groups must be supported to deliver ongoing workshops and educational sessions in the area of securing gainful employment for persons with disabilities. Barriers to education and volunteer opportunities are different for youth with disabilities than those without. Young people with disabilities need to be educated on the culture of employment. Training and orientation for navigating the landscape of the labour market should be introduced early in the high school curriculum rather than at the end or after. This will better prepare youth with disabilities for a transition into independence.