

Federal Budget Proposal – Executive Summary

For almost 30 years, the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) has been dedicated to creating an inclusive world where people with disabilities are living to their full potential. It continues to raise awareness, change attitudes, and break down barriers for people living with disabilities.

The mission of RHF is to inspire leaders, influencers and the public to join Rick Hansen in creating a global movement to remove barriers in the built environment and thereby liberate the potential of people living with disabilities. With that foundation in place, other barriers can be addressed including employment, transportation, communication, education and healthcare.

We want the built environment in Canada, as defined by the buildings and places where people live, work, and play, to be accessible for people with disabilities by 2050.

90% of Canadians believe accessibility is a human right, not a privilege (Angus Reid Institute, 2015). 3.8 million Canadian adults have some type of disability (Statistics Canada Survey, 2012); and, with our aging population, that number is estimated to rise to as high as one in five Canadians over the next 20 years. Also, while many people with disabilities are university graduates, their labour force participation rate is significantly lower than for the able bodied population. Accessibility is key to unleashing the economic potential and independence of people with disabilities.

To achieve greater outcomes, drive social innovation and energize a global movement, we are creating the **Rick Hansen Accessibility Innovation Strategy** with a funding proposal in the amount of \$37.6 million over 5 years focused on initiatives that will:

- Increase accessibility in the built environment;
- Increase awareness and change attitudes about the potential of people with disabilities;
- Inspire communities and activate youth;
- Bring thought leaders, persons with disabilities, service organizations and others together to collaborate on solutions dedicated to removing barriers and driving change; and,
- Measure progress and celebrate success.

This funding proposal has been developed to complement the Government of Canada’s stated objectives to build a more inclusive society. We will align with, and support the efforts of, the Minister of Sport and People with Disabilities as she embarks on the development of national accessibility legislation.

Creating a world without barriers demands a “whole of government” approach beyond legislation that will raise awareness, engage people, incite action and shift attitudes in support of a long-term national and global movement. For three decades, RHF has forged partnerships and created programs that support people with disabilities while engaging leaders across Canada to raise awareness and remove barriers. RHF has been a trusted and effective partner with the federal government focused on delivering tangible results and is well positioned to continue being a catalyst for social change. The time is now to build a Canada in which nobody is left behind. The federal government has a critical leadership role to play supported by a number of RHF-led initiatives as outlined below.

Recommendations:

1. Provide \$37.6 million over 5 years to support the launch of the **Rick Hansen Accessibility Innovation Strategy**.
2. **Set aside 10% of the overall Infrastructure Fund** to help finance innovation and accessibility in the design of the built environment.

Key Constituencies

People with Disabilities – All people with disabilities will be at the centre of each of the initiatives. As noted, accessibility is key to unleashing the economic potential and independence of people with disabilities. And an inclusive society is stronger, more prosperous, more diverse and more caring.

Indigenous Communities - Leverage existing RHF Memoranda of Understanding with Indigenous groups to work directly with their communities. As Indigenous peoples have a rate of disability that is more than double the national standard (NAND 1994 in Durst and Bluechardt 2004), RHF programs will be targeted to benefit this community.

Athletes with disabilities- Leverage Rick Hansen’s long-standing commitment and experience as a decorated Paralympian to engage with the Department of Sport and People with Disabilities to work for the benefit of disabled athletes.

Disabled Veterans – Leverage Rick Hansen’s distinguished record of working with Canada’s armed forces – including as Honorary Colonel of the joint personnel services unit – to benefit disabled veterans.

Recommendation #1: Fund the Rick Hansen Accessibility Innovation Strategy

In her recently released discussion guide entitled: “Accessibility Legislation: What does an ACCESSIBLE CANADA mean to you?”, Minister Qualtrough wrote,

Accessibility legislation is an important step. Experience shows, however, that no matter how well designed legal measures are, legislation on its own is only part of the answer. To achieve lasting change, accessibility has to become part of our everyday thinking.

To help do this, legislation would be complemented by various initiatives to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of accessibility and of what individual Canadians and organizations can do, in general, to improve accessibility and remove barriers.

The initiatives being proposed are grouped into two categories: **1) Community engagement, awareness, youth leadership and inclusion; and, 2) Social innovation and accessible infrastructure**. The Access 4 All Canada 150 Signature Initiative will trigger a national call to action on accessibility and inclusion in the built environment – and beyond. The programs will build upon each other over the next five years and deliver significant results against recognized priorities of the federal government.

Most importantly, results will be delivered in partnership with a broad community of stakeholders including disability organizations, community groups, First Nations, all levels of government and the general public – in particular young Canadians who embrace the concept of an accessible and inclusive world and who will become our leaders as we work toward the 2050 goal.

In order to translate the RHF initiatives proposed below into an annualized set of programs, a comprehensive, integrated and sustained research, leadership and communications funding commitment is also required. Sustainable funding for RHF will allow for proper research to measure progress and to secure Rick Hansen's leadership to bring the disability and business communities together to amplify the Government of Canada's efforts to promote (through legislation and other means), the building of an accessible and inclusive Canada.

Community Engagement, Awareness, Youth Leadership and Inclusion

Access 4 All Canada 150 Signature Initiative – This initiative has received a contribution of \$2 million from the Department of Canadian Heritage with an additional contribution of \$1 million leveraged by RHF and partners. This initiative will provide funding for schools and communities to undertake accessibility upgrades to public spaces culminating in accessibility awareness events and celebrations. A Youth Summit will be hosted to bring young people together to focus on issues of accessibility and inclusion while developing the next generation of leaders. Finally, the 30th Anniversary of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour will be recognized by declaring a National Access 4 All Week to annualize events designed to celebrate success and measure progress on the road to an accessible Canada.

Goal: To fund a minimum of 50 accessibility infrastructure projects and associated awareness events.

National Access 4 All Week – This initiative will revitalize and codify the former National Access Awareness Week into a permanent, annual event focused on highlighting the work communities across Canada are undertaking to become fully accessible. Key elements of the week will be the Accessible Cities Award to celebrate and showcase best practices in accessibility as well as awareness campaigns and community engagement. Communities across Canada will be encouraged to spotlight initiatives, measure progress and work to promote accessible spaces and places.

Goal: To increase the number of communities engaged from 50 to 500 over the next five years.

Rick Hansen School Program (RHSP) – This program provides elementary and secondary school teachers across Canada with a comprehensive set of free bilingual lessons and resources that teach students about the potential of people with disabilities, identifying barriers and making their schools and communities more accessible and inclusive. It is estimated that over 500,000 Canadian students each year are exposed to Rick Hansen's message of inclusion and social responsibility.

Goal: To increase the number of students who learn about diversity, accessibility and inclusion through the RHSP from 500,000 to one million over the next five years.

Rick Hansen Ambassador Program - Ambassadors are individuals with mobility, sight or hearing disabilities who share their stories of overcoming challenges. Ambassador presentations are powerful, engaging and demonstrate the potential of anyone to make a positive difference in the world. Building on the momentum of the Canada 150 Signature Initiative, we are looking to significantly raise the profile and range of activities of Ambassadors who are important role models in the accessibility movement across Canada. We will recruit new Ambassadors from our Key Constituencies.

Goal: Increase number of Ambassador engagements from 300 to 1,000 over the next 5 years.

Access & Inclusion Hub - This collaboration platform is designed to facilitate connections and knowledge sharing among thought leaders, advocates and all persons and organizations working in the access and inclusion field. The Hub includes articles, forums and resources.

Goal: Build out the functionality, content and global reach of the Access & Inclusion Hub.

Social Innovation and Accessible Infrastructure

RHF Certification Program – This program will design, market and implement a professional, uniform standard to assess and rate the accessibility of all buildings and public spaces in Canada using a pan-disability lens. We intend to begin with a pilot project supported by the ESDC Opportunities Fund to employ people with disabilities (potentially including indigenous peoples, athletes with disabilities, disabled veterans and other target groups) to rate and assess buildings and spaces over the next three years. During the pilot phase, a certified rating guide and accredited training program will be tested, validated and receive official status by the appropriate authorities (e.g. Canadian Standards Association).

Goal: Validate a made-in-Canada program which will offer a world-class rating methodology to drive innovation in the construction design space and initiate a promising profession for those who receive training and accreditation.

Accessibility Lens on Infrastructure Spending – Advocate for the federal government to design and implement an “accessibility lens” (modelled on the RHF Certification Program) that will demand a higher accessibility standard for projects funded with federal infrastructure money. RHF accredited assessors will be retained by the federal government to conduct ratings and assessments of projects to ensure a uniform, world-class standard is reached. Opportunities exist to work with organizations such as the National Capital Commission to apply the higher standards to important projects (e.g. 24 Sussex renovation) and showcase them to the world. To accelerate this market shift, by working with all levels of government, incentives will be sought for developers and building owners (including access to an “Accessibility Fund” noted below).

Goal: Regardless of which level of government receives federal infrastructure funding, all projects will meet or exceed the accessibility standards of the new National Building Code.

Recommendation #2: 10% of overall Infrastructure Fund set aside to help finance innovation and accessibility in the design of the built environment.

Accessibility Fund – To assist provinces, cities, indigenous communities and the construction community to achieve a higher level of accessibility, the Government of Canada will support an accessibility fund where 10% of overall infrastructure spending will be set aside to provide incentives for some of the initial cost to meet higher standards. The fund will use the RHF Certification program methodology to determine eligibility and RHF will administer.

Goal: All projects or buildings assessed using the RHF Certification standard will automatically be eligible for Accessibility Fund support.

Conclusion: Coming out of Canada 150 and the activation of our longer term strategy, RHF will link federal government priorities of accessibility legislation and an inclusive society into a coherent multi-year plan that moves Canada along the continuum from awareness to the attitudinal shift required to achieve a fully accessible society. The RHF mission and federal government leadership will move from a focus on disability rights to embracing inclusion as an economic and cultural imperative of a modern Canada. It is a long-term undertaking; but, RHF will work closely with the federal government to systematically measure where we are, plan for where we need to be and execute on initiatives that will be the catalyst for enduring, positive change.