

Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

For Canada to have a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth, Canada must become an Inclusive and Accessible country where citizens with disabilities have access to the goods and services of our country on an equal basis with non-disabled Canadians. The impact of an Inclusive and Accessible Canada would be that people with disabilities are able to contribute to, and benefit from, the Canadian economy in the same way as other Canadians. To achieve an Inclusive and Accessible Canada, the Federal Government needs a National Action Plan on Disability. A Framework for a National Action Plan on Disability would include: 1. New initiatives to alleviate poverty 2. New supports to increase access to labour force participation 3. New investments in disability-related supports 4. New initiatives to promote access, inclusion and full citizenship. Canadians with disabilities are moms, dads, brothers and sisters; children, working age adults and seniors. We are students and educators, workers, employers and the unemployed. We are leaders of voluntary organizations and recipients of services. We are Aboriginal and from visible minorities. We live in major urban centers and in isolated communities. We are 14.3% of the population. Our issues are related to access and inclusion. As citizens we seek equal access to the goods and services of our country, province and community including: schools, community centers, libraries, parks and public spaces, access to transportation, employment, housing and disability related supports and new information technologies and communications, access to the electoral process, and an end to lives of poverty and exclusion. Disability issues are everyone's issues. Some barriers to equal participation have been removed but much remains to be done to make our communities fully accessible and inclusive. CCD reminds MPs that disability issues are not partisan issues. Our issues are of concern to all Canadians and most Canadians, at some point in their life, will access supports and services built to Create a More Accessible and Inclusive Canada.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

In its response to the Senate Report "In From the Margins" the Government of Canada stated, "Ultimately sustained employment is the best sources of income security for individuals and families." CCD agrees but sadly many people with disabilities eager and willing to work are excluded because of a variety of barriers. We acknowledge that the Government of Canada has committed to increasing access to training, education, accommodation and labour market attachment for people with disabilities. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities believes job creation for people with disabilities would be done most effectively by establishing a two-track strategy: 1. Establish specific targets for Canadians with disabilities in Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA) negotiated with the provinces. Having a specific target for Canadians with disabilities should be a requirement of transfer of both EI and

Consolidated Revenue Funds to the provinces/territories. Performance indicators must be established within LMA reporting mechanisms to highlight employment initiatives regarding persons with disabilities. 2. Both the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Labour Force Participation of People with Disabilities and the Opportunities Fund should be expanded to further increase capacity at the provincial/territorial level to address barriers. The Opportunities Fund demonstrates innovation in labour force inclusion. 3. Develop a 5 year Strategic Plan to address the employment needs of persons with disabilities. 4. First priority for new labour force investments should be given to youth (18-30) who are in transition from school to work. 5. A range of initiatives and support must be provided which include longer term supports for those with more complex needs (multiple disabilities, greater experience of discrimination, Aboriginal People, women, etc.) Indicators for measuring success must be developed that take into account those with more complex needs and/or experiencing multiple barriers. 6. Appropriate flexible accommodation is critical to success, but beyond accommodation, programs are required that create incentives to work, education and training. 7. The Federal Government must become a model employer and increase the labour market participation of persons with disabilities in the federal civil service by 1% over the next two years.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

CCD agrees with the Hon. James Flaherty, who on 15 May 2012 is reported to have said, "...we are going to have to encourage more persons with disabilities to work, more seniors to work, more aboriginal people to work, including young people." The Minister went on to say "We need to get rid of disincentives in the employment insurance system to people joining the workforce." CCD believes there are barriers beyond that EI system that must be addressed to get people with disabilities working. These barriers can be addressed through new investments. Properly executed new investments can bring change to the lives of people with disabilities. An appropriately targeted investment in disability-related supports would assist Canadians with disabilities to participate in early learning and childcare, become educated and employed, live more independently, and look after their families. Such an investment is the priority of the disability community and is the foundation upon which a comprehensive National Action Plan on Disability must be built. Central to this initiative is a commitment to deinstitutionalization and removing the stigma attached to disability. The Government of Canada must:

- Work with provinces and territories to explore ways of increasing access to and improving the range of available disability supports and of safe, affordable, accessible and supportive housing.
- Work with Band Councils to ensure equal access to disability-related supports for First Nations people with disabilities. Canadians with disabilities and their families are twice as likely to live in poverty as other Canadians and the incidence of poverty among Aboriginal people with disabilities is even higher. Existing systems of income support are failing Canadians with disabilities. The Government of Canada must commit to addressing poverty and reforming Canada's income support programs for Canadians with disabilities. First steps could include:
- Making the Disability Tax Credit Refundable.
- Making those eligible for Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits automatically eligible for the Disability Tax Credit.
- Making Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits non-taxable.
- Expanding Employment Insurance Sick Benefits.
- Reverse the slow drift to social assistance as the dominant income system for persons with disabilities.
- Ensuring new federal benefits such as the Registered Disability Savings Plan are not clawed back by provinces and territories from those on social assistance.
- Ensure that raising the age of eligibility for Old Age Security from 65 to 67 does not result in prolonged poverty for Canadians with disabilities. Long-term reforms could include:
- An expanded federal role in income support for Canadians with disabilities thus freeing up resources at provincial and territorial levels for re-

investment in supports and services. • A review of work-triggered disability income support programs to determine if they are responding appropriately to today's work environment.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

To achieve positive outcomes in employment for people with disabilities investments are also needed in other related and complementary areas. To this end, the Government of Canada must commit to addressing the following: • Transportation: Develop accessibility regulations for all federally regulated modes of transportation and restructure the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation to be consumer controlled and representative of disability organizations. • Accessible Technology: Establish a Procurement Policy for the Government of Canada that would ensure purchase only of accessible technology, thus increasing employment opportunities within the public service and accessible service to the Canadian public. Establish access standards for all new information technologies. • An Accessibility Design Centre: Create a Universal Design Centre that would act as a focal point of responsibility to harmonize, track and deliver results in the area of barrier removal best practices in universal design. This centre of excellence in universal design would become a resource to governments, community and the private sector. • Access Principle: Update the National Building Code to ensure Universal Design principles are respected. Ensure that universal design principles guide all Infrastructure initiatives. • Re-establish a specific Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Canadians with disabilities to address the ongoing concerns of Canadians with disabilities and submit to Parliament an annual report on the status of Canadians with disabilities. • Designate and resource the Canadian Human Rights Commission to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. • Support the "voice of people with disabilities" to be an active partner in public policy debates of concern to them.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

Exclusion, poverty and isolation are a shared reality for too many of the 14.3% of Canadians with disabilities and approximately one-third of Aboriginal Canadians with disabilities. The outcomes are predictable: • Many Canadians with disabilities are too likely to live in poverty. • Over two million Canadian adults with disabilities lack one or more of the educational, workplace, aids, home modification or other supports they need. • Over 56% of working-age adults with disabilities are currently unemployed or out of the labour market. For women with disabilities the rate is almost 60%. • According to the International Labour Organization, the annual loss of global GDP due to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market is between US\$1.37 trillion and US\$1.94 trillion. • More than 10,000 persons with intellectual disabilities remain warehoused in institutions, including group homes and congregate care facilities. • Slightly more than half of Canadian children with disabilities who need aids and devices require more than what they receive. Canadians with disabilities struggle to have their needs met. When times are more challenging, sadly we are often the first to feel the effects of cutbacks in services and supports or loss of employment. Canadian with disabilities must not be made worse off by federal fiscal restraint measures. Particular challenges are faced by youth with disabilities, Aboriginal people with disabilities and people with disabilities who have had a history of institutionalization; these groups face barriers which make it difficult for them to attain and retain employment. CCD recognizes that progress in addressing disability issues has been and will likely remain

incremental. CCD expects the Federal Governments will continue to seek ways to make real the “progressive realization” promise of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. To that end CCD sees investments in the following as first priorities: 1. Investments in Youth (18-30) in transition for school to work and from home to community/independent living. 2. Investments to address the vast unmet need of Aboriginal People with disabilities. 3. Investments to support de-institutionalization.