



WAVEFRONT CENTRE FOR COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY

Submission to

House of Commons Standing Committee
on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development
and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Submitted by

Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility
Vancouver, British Columbia

Friday, May 26, 2023

Brief

Established in 1956 and trusted for over 67 years, Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility is a BC-based, charitable not-for-profit organization operating as a social enterprise. Wavefront Centre serves Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing individuals, their families and the community by delivering innovative programs, products and solutions to achieve full communication accessibility.

As advocates for this community, Wavefront Centre recognizes the often invisible nature of hearing loss. Nevertheless, over the years we have witnessed tremendous strides in breaking down barriers to access and inclusion.

However, one area that continues to be a challenge for people who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing is the barrier to the acquisition of safe, accessible, affordable and reliable housing tailored to the specific needs of their disabilities.

The recent unanimous vote by Members of Parliament in favour of urging the government to address the needs of people with invisible disabilities in its National Housing Strategy is, indeed, a step forward. However, there are many more steps to take given ever-increasing residential rental costs, displacements from renovations and demo-victions, and a lack of multi-unit residential building upgrades that recognize invisible as well as visible disabilities.

As a service provider and advocate for people who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing, Wavefront Centre would be honoured to work in consultation with the government and Federal Housing Advocate, housing providers, and other stakeholders with the aim of improving access to safe, inclusive, affordable housing for individuals with invisible disabilities.

Wavefront Centre is passionate about inclusive housing and plans to examine the feasibility of establishing one or more disability-specific residential developments similar to Deaf Centre Manitoba in Winnipeg. Built in 1975, the six level, multi-unit residential building offers bachelor/studio and one-bedroom units with inclusive access for the needs of people who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing. The Centre also hosts a live theatre venue, rentable to the public, and inclusive, accessible social activities for tenants.

Wavefront Centre supports the Private Members Bill on affordable housing for people with invisible disabilities recently put forward by MP Arielle Kayabaga, and passed, recommending government:

(a) consider the presence of an expert on persons with visible and non-visible disabilities to the National Housing Council, and that the expert provides advice to the ministers on the application of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) to persons with disabilities;

(b) consider amending section 4 (Housing Policy Declaration) of the National Housing Strategy Act to include a recognition of the additional barriers to housing faced by persons with disabilities;

(c) prioritize the creation and repair of accessible units through NHS programs; and

(d) ensure that the right to adequate housing is applied equitably across all vulnerable populations, specifically persons with disabilities, both mobility and other.

(M-59 Federal Framework on Housing for Individuals with Non-visible Disabilities)

Wavefront Centre has the distinction of achieving the highest national accessibility rating under the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) program for its Vancouver head office with a score of 96 out of 100 points (96 percent).

RHFAC is a national rating system that measures and certifies the level of meaningful access to buildings and sites, based on the complete user experience of people with various visible and invisible disabilities affecting their mobility, vision, and hearing.

According to Rick Hansen, "We encourage other organizations to look at Wavefront Centre for inspiration in reviewing the meaningful accessibility of their buildings, and begin the journey towards creating a more inclusive future for everyone."

Wavefront Centre CEO Christopher Sutton says, "As the leading provider of services that break down barriers to communication for people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing, we wanted to build an inclusive environment that showcased the best in universal design for our clients, employees and community--to ensure this facility was a space that welcomed everyone."

According to the RHFAC, its program "links the necessary players for accelerating accessibility in the built environment: the decision-makers (building owners and operators), influencers and experts (design and construction professionals) and the end-users (people with lived experience)".

While more public buildings are acknowledging the need for accessibility and inclusion of people with invisible and visible disabilities, Wavefront Centre believes the same recognition is needed to offer safe, inclusive, barrier-free, affordable housing for people with invisible and visible disabilities, such as individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing.

The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification program is also applicable to existing multi-unit residential buildings as well as to multi-use residential buildings in the design and pre-construction phases.

Wavefront Centre endorses the use of the RHFAC program for multi-unit residential buildings, and also recommends the establishment of a community of practice on housing for people with invisible and visible disabilities with the involvement of government, organizations experienced in serving people with disabilities, and individuals with lived experiences of their disabilities.

Wavefront Centre would be pleased to work with government and stakeholders to continue to break down barriers to achieve safe, inclusive, affordable housing for the important communities of people we serve who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing.

Recommendations

- Recommend establishment of community of practice on housing for people with invisible and visible disabilities with involvement of government, organizations serving people with disabilities and individuals with lived experience of their disabilities.
- Recommend Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility participate in consultation with the government and Federal Housing Advocate, housing providers, and other stakeholders to work toward improving access to safe, inclusive, affordable housing for individuals with invisible and visible disabilities.

- Recommend use of the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) program for existing multi-unit residential buildings as well as for those in design and in construction phases.

Submitting Organization - General Description

Established in 1956, Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility is a BC-based, charitable not-for-profit organization operating as a social enterprise. Wavefront Centre serves Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing individuals, their families and the community by delivering innovative programs, products and solutions to achieve full communication accessibility

For more information on Wavefront Centre, please access this link:

<https://www.wavefrontcentre.ca/>

References

Hansen, R. (Retrieved 2023). <https://www.wavefrontcentre.ca/gold-certification/>

House of Commons, Canada. (Retrieved 2023). M-59 Federal Framework on Housing for Individuals with Non-Visible Disabilities.

[https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/arielle-kayabaga\(110502\)/motions/11814192](https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/arielle-kayabaga(110502)/motions/11814192)

Sutton, C. (Retrieved 2023). <https://www.wavefrontcentre.ca/gold-certification/>



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