



September 10, 2021

Via E-mail

**To: The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, PC, MP, Prime Minister of Canada
Jagmeet Singh, MP, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Erin O'Toole, MP, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
Yves-François Blanchet, MP, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Annamie Paul, Leader of the Green Party of Canada**

Re: An Open Letter Regarding the Proposed Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)

On behalf of the 390,000 members of the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), I'm writing to you regarding Canada's proposed Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). Throughout our history, we have strongly advocated for better supports for people with disabilities, with the goal of them achieving full inclusion in every aspect of life.

NUPGE supports the outreach component of the online survey on DIAP. Government must always consult with the communities who will be the recipients of government action (though it's unclear why the survey is open to Canadians who don't have a disability or who don't work with or assist people with disabilities). However, NUPGE is also calling on all federal party leaders to take stronger action quickly to assist people with disabilities.

The survey, while a good start to examining how to assist people with disabilities to enter or to remain in the workforce, leaves no room for feedback from people with disabilities who aren't able to work. It won't provide the data that show the desperate reality of people with disabilities who live in poverty. The survey also leaves no room for intersectionality. People with disabilities who belong to another equity-seeking group face additional discrimination and barriers when looking for work. Their voices will not be adequately heard through the limited scope of questions on the survey. Additionally, by making the survey online only, the government is preventing those without access to the internet from providing their responses.



Underfunding and poverty levels for people with disabilities is well documented without the help of a survey. One needs to look no further than the replies to Carla Qualtrough's tweets or through tags like #ODSPoverty. These aren't Twitter trolls or bot accounts.

These are real people living in Canada who have been sounding the alarm for decades about inadequate support. And if the government requires this data presented in report form, many non-profit organizations and research firms have statistics on this issue.

22% of the Canadian population identifies as having a disability. In the news release for the Canada Disability Benefit legislation, which is now dead, the government concedes that the number of people with disabilities in Canada is likely much higher. When Canadians lost their jobs due to the pandemic, the federal government took swift action to ensure people could still pay to eat and keep a roof over their heads. The poverty crisis facing people with disabilities—regardless of their ability to work—should be acted upon with the same swiftness.

People with disabilities who can work are often forced into part-time, gig-economy jobs with no benefits. This can be particularly dire for people with disabilities who need access to lifesaving or life-altering medication and support. If a person with a disability is working but still making less than \$2,000 a month, they should be compensated. But the opposite happened during the pandemic. People with disabilities who lost their jobs during the pandemic, and applied to CERB, had that money deducted from their provincial disability cheques.

\$2,000 a month is a low amount of support. Though Canada does not maintain an official poverty line, we can all agree that \$24,000 a year is nearly impossible to live on. But if support for people with disabilities doesn't even equal the CERB precedent, how can we as a country claim to be a world leader in human rights? People with disabilities must be supported with dignity whether they're able to work or not. A person's ability to work does not change the fact that everyone should be treated with respect and given the support they need to live with dignity.

We challenge all federal party leaders to think about how they would live on the financial aid currently available for people with disabilities. As a society, we failed to support people with disabilities prior to and during the pandemic: let's not continue the pattern of failure into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry Brown', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Larry Brown
President

cc: Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board