

**Salt Spring Community Alliance**  
**November 25, 2019**

## **Community Consultation on Accessibility and Inclusion for People with Disabilities**

The Province of BC asked communities to invite people with disabilities and other stakeholders together, to give feedback into the initial stages of new legislation to improve access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

On Salt Spring Island, 16 people gathered to provide that input, and these notes reflect those conversations, which were shared with the province and will feed into their process.

The first discussion was around language. Some people preferred the term “special abilities or unique abilities”, others were fine with disabled. Some preferred diversability or different abilities. Some mentioned universal accessibility. The term “handicap” was traced back to it’s origins as a “beggar sitting on the street with ‘cap in hand’”.

### **What is most important to you?**

#### **Financial:**

- Thanks to government for income increase a month after NDP got in – but it’s still less than 1/2 of minimum wage.
- Most people with disabilities struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet. And the bureaucratic hurdles that each person has to go through to be able to access financial support is sometimes impossible, especially for those with a cognitive disability. This hardship leads to many other challenges in life.

#### **Social isolation:**

- Huge issue due to lack of financial resources to be able to participate in community life.
- It would be great if events offered a disability discount along with an elderly and student discount.

- People have all kinds of physical, emotional and mental challenges that keep them isolation. Some people cannot speak – and they end up being very depressed.
- Blind people tend to find each other and do a lot of commiserating. We need more opportunities outside our own group – help to lift ourselves out of a rut.
- Social isolation impacts mental health (for example, when a person is 100% bedridden the depression, suicidal thoughts and other impacts are huge). People often abandon these people. How can we get better at taking care of each other?
- Inclusion in community: How do we ever get a chance to meet people with disabilities? There is so much segregation. We need to break down barriers, but this is not possible if we don't make human contact.

#### **Accessing Information from Government:**

- Information access is a challenge.
- 1-800 access is hell – especially inaccessible for people with cognitive disabilities.
- There is a real lack of access to services.
- Several people said they are very capable of navigating the governmental system, but experience so many barriers that they have almost given up.
- Lack of communication about changes to disability benefits: Don't get to know when there are big changes to our income – there is no advance warning from government. I had a personal worker but now that's gone. Travelled to Saanich only to find the office locked and a lot of other people lined up on the sidewalk like it was a welfare line.
- Lack of real support and follow up from Ministry: Check in frequently, find out how we are doing – don't leave burden of dealing with issues to those with disabilities – disability is enough of a burden without all the attendant issues. Problems are dealt with episodically – no one seeing the bigger picture. No one follows up to see if we were able to get our problem solved.
- There is redundancy in forms. They are needlessly redundant (i.e.: filling out forms several times to get service and access). There is an overload of forms – this is degrading, makes people feel like a number.

#### **Physical barriers:**

- Continuous challenges to get around for people who are blind or who use a scooter or wheelchair. (local issues - Art spring stairs, Ganges very inaccessible for scooters).
- There are several very steep slopes on Salt Spring that are almost impossible to navigate. There is a sidewalk in Ganges that starts in a slope and gets in steps!
- **Chairs available to sit on when standing in line:** Standing in lineups is a challenge for so many people. Why are there no places where people can sit down while they wait? Need more places to sit in town also, especially away from wet weather.

### Others:

- **Changes in the Ministry:** Frustration about the Ministry continuously changing its name. What is the point? And so much wasted expense to do this.
- **Disability and Welfare are different:** Disability and welfare services need to be separated in the minds of the public – they are not the same thing.
- **Accessibility to nature:** There are proven healing aspects to being in nature, but for most with a physical disability it is almost impossible to access. It would be so nice to have an accessible beach on Salt Spring.
- **Intersectionality:** Intersection of disability, race, sexual orientation, gender, etc must be recognized, as these all compound the challenges that people experience.
- **Housing for people with cognitive challenges:** There are so few options for good housing available for people with cognitive challenges.
- **Access to education:** Need more educational activities, there is very little available to people with disabilities beyond high school. Access to competent, valuable education and independence training. Not as many opportunities for the blind in Canada. We need education by those who are also disabled. There are very few rehabilitation education centers in Canada – one in Victoria.
- **Counseling and other support:** Lack of support for people with mental and emotional disabilities, it's like a veil. People can't get beyond their issues and challenges so that they can participate in daily life. They need more support needed so they can heal. Dying

- with dignity – there is no government move to provide social, emotional, spiritual counseling when choosing to die.
- **Transportation:** Having accessible transit that has bus stops close to home would make life so much easier.
  - **Chronic Illness & Early Years:** There is so much evidence now that the early years are strongly related to mental health later in life, and early trauma is strongly connected to chronic illness. Let's focus on getting those early years right for more people.

## **Accessibility Standards Improvements Needed**

### ***How can these areas be improved?***

**Service Delivery** (e.g. health services, customer services, education)

55% rated this their top issue / 11% rated this their second main issue / 11% rated this their third main issue

- Government officials need more experience and training in how to work with people with disabilities.
- Treat people as human beings, not as numbers.
- Video Conferencing available for meetings: Decision making processes and meetings are hard for people who cannot sit for long periods of time or who cannot leave the house. It would help so much if meetings could be accessed through video conferencing.
- Education and sensitivity training for all people in the bureaucracy.
- Life would be so much easier if we had one-step referrals to specialists, rather than the incredibly complex process involved now.
- Service delivery: they should come to us more. We need more outreach. Less “what do you need”, and more “what can we do for you”?
- Have official advocates available if someone has no spouse or family member. They could help particularly in filling out forms and communications support. Some people don't even get this support from their families and have to figure it all out themselves.
- Need Ombudsman to help ensure that people get access and their rights are respected.

- Health services – GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre should be model for the whole country - go to [www.georgiastrait](http://www.georgiastrait) and see Save Rehab.
- Customer services by the Ministry could be so much better. For example, when they make changes to disability income, they need to let us know when there are changing to income, but these are often a big surprise. Another example is helping us to understand what benefits we are entitled to, rather than having to figure it out by some mysterious process (i.e. can now own/inherit property and still get disability payments? There is money to buy shoes each year. Who knew?)

### **Employment** (e.g. hiring and retention)

11% rated this their third issue

- For blind people, Canada is a much harder place to find employment than in the US. 25-30% employment in US, 15 to 20% in Canada. There are less benefits for employers to hire in Canada– government in US has to have quota for employment.
- Living with a chronic illness can be a full-time job – doing anything on top of that is huge burden. But the rates we receive are so low, we can barely get by without another income.

### **The physical/build environment** (e.g. entranceways, parks, sidewalks, parking)

11% rated this their top issue / 33% rated this their second issue / 44% rated this their third issue

- Physical barriers: we run into problems when there are bike lanes in front of bus stops, trees in middle of sidewalk, etc. Cities are not built with our needs in mind.
- On Salt Spring, places like Moby's, Artspring and many stores are impossible to get into. How can they be forced to become accessible?

## **Information and Communication** (e.g. websites, print materials, emergency information)

11% rated this their first issue / 22% rated this their second issue / 11% rated this their third issue

- Information accessibility for this questionnaire – i.e. for the blind
- Climate emergency: need emergency services to take into account people with limitations. People who have lived with disabilities have a lot to offer in how to deal with emergency situations, so please ask them.
- Education of the public would help us in areas like the “duty to accommodate” related to housing.
- Online government websites are good for blind people using screen readers – they really help.
- Need more materials in braille.
- It seems much harder to figure out about support services if one becomes disabled as an adult, rather than at birth. How can communication be improved to ensure people really understand what support is available to them?
- It would be so great to have meetings and other gatherings available to join via Zoom. Traveling to meetings is sometimes impossible for us.

## **Transportation** (e.g. buses, ferries, taxis)

Transportation – 11% rated this their first issue / 33% rated this their second issue / 11% rated this their third issue

- GPS on buses are often wrong or very hard to understand. For example, Victoria did it wrong.
- Curb cuts – truncated domes done as a test but not continued – could do for both blind and wheelchair people
- Crosswalk audible signals not kept in good working order – need service.
- Increase funding for buses – more bus routes on SSI
- Make physical safety as helpful as possible – slowing traffic for crosswalks – proper white lines at crosswalks.

- Some get treated with rudeness on Salt Spring if they are not moving quickly enough at crosswalks.

## **Other Issues**

Inclusion in Local/Neighbourhood EMERGENCY responses to climate emergency events.

#1 Issue: Every community needs an advocate to inform, guide, help and listen

#1 Issue: Enduring and sustainable housing for cognitively challenged people who are likely to out-live their parents.

## **Measures to Ensure Compliance**

**What are the best ways to ensure that services, businesses, governments and communities actually comply with the new legislation?**

**Community hubs offering resources, tools, training and support** – 12% rated this their top choice / 50% rated this their second choice / 12% rated this their third choice

**Mandatory standards** – 25% rated this their top choice

**Recognition and awards for communities demonstrating exemplary practices** – 12% rated this their top choice / 25% rated this their third choice

**Accessibility inspections** – 25% rated this their second choice / 25% rated this their third choice

**New channels for feedback for employees, customers and members of the public** – 12% rated this their first choice / 12% rated this their second choice / 12% rated this their third choice

**Information and resources to highlight leading practices adopted elsewhere** – 12% rated this their first choice

**Funding programs and financial incentives to improve accessibility** – 12% rated this their first choice

**Requirements for accessibility plans and progress reports** – 12% rated this their first choice

**Publications and information about known barriers to accessibility** – 12% rated this their third choice

**Financial penalties for non-compliance** – 12% rated this their third choice

## Other Suggestions

- **Concept of Deliverables:** government to start getting something done within a specific time period. Practice government accountability.
- **Ombudsperson needed:** We need someone who can track the trends and identify systemic challenges that are common to several people. When our rights are violated, we need somewhere we can go and get support to deal with it.
- **Government should hire people with disabilities** to be on committees and help them with this legislation. We could be paid to sit on commissions to ensure these issues were deeply understood by law makers.