



Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario

www.cwdo.org

“Together We Are Stronger”

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February 8, 2015

The Honourable Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

Sent via e-mail: submissions@ontario.ca

Re: 2015-16 Pre-Budget Consultations

INTRODUCTION

CWDO is committed to the rights of all persons to participate fully in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social life of their communities.

We are a cross-disability organization with 1,800 members throughout Ontario.

We actively promote the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of persons with disabilities through community development, social action, and member support and referral.

Our primary activity is public education and awareness about the social and physical barriers that prevent the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in Ontario.

Our recommendations, if accepted, will not only benefit persons with disabilities, but by extension, will benefit Ontario society as a whole.

Ontario continues to take steps to advance accessibility. Charles Beer conducted an independent review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and Dean Mayo Moran conducted her independent review in 2014. CWDO was proud to assist both reviewers by providing an online forum for virtual consultation with persons with disabilities all across Ontario.

While Dean Moran’s findings and recommendations have not yet been made public, Mr. Beer concluded that Ontario was on the right track. He also noted the need for bold government leadership to make Ontario accessible by 2025.

This written response outlines key budget initiatives we believe will make accessibility a reality for persons with disabilities.

CWDO’S RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES

CWDO recommends budget commitments in five key areas:

- 1. Strengthening existing legislation and introducing new legislation to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities and promote full participation: Healthcare, Education and Employment**
- 2. Ensuring that persons with disabilities who cannot work have sufficient income to maintain their health and wellbeing.**
- 3. Providing accessible, affordable housing**
- 4. Ensuring equality of access to accessible, affordable transit in every municipality**
- 5. Providing core funding to provincial organizations to provide public education and peer support about accessibility.**

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

In June 2010, the Martin Prosperity Institute released a study, “Releasing Constraints: Projecting the Economic Impacts of Increased Accessibility in Ontario.” It was commissioned by the Government of Ontario to examine the potential economic impact of achieving substantially higher levels of accessibility.

The Martin Prosperity Institute confirmed through this study that there are opportunities for economic gains when we enable a higher proportion of Ontarians to participate fully in the province’s economy – particularly in workplaces and schools.

When people with disabilities are able to participate in the workforce in greater numbers, not only will they have more personal spending power, but the Martin Prosperity Institute projects that it could increase Ontario's GDP per capita by up to \$600 annually.

Add barrier-free education to the mix, and we would have another \$200 per capita.

Their research clearly shows that there are large pools of untapped human capital that could help drive Ontario's prosperity.

Increased accessibility benefits Ontario's businesses by increasing access to retail and tourism opportunities and by supporting the emergence of accessibility-focused businesses able to serve global markets.

Universities, colleges and other institutions can help educate the next generation of workers and develop new intellectual property to prepare businesses to compete in the growing number of markets defined by accessibility requirements and a more diverse society.

The Martin Prosperity Institute reviewed research on the costs of social exclusion and found that exclusion exacts significant costs from the entire province through increased health care demands and poverty-related social problems. These costs impact not only persons with disabilities, but have a significant impact on their families and communities.

In determining what Ontario can afford to do for persons with disabilities, the provincial government also needs to consider how much it is already costing Ontarians to chug along with the status quo. It's a waste not only of funds and investments, but a huge – and unnecessary – waste of human potential as well.

CWDO'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen existing legislation and introduce new legislation to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities and promote full participation

Proposed Standard regarding Healthcare:

CWDO recommends a number of legislative changes to be incorporated into a new standard for accessible healthcare.

- a) CWDO recommends that the provincial government enact draft legislation entitled "**The Consumer Attendant Support Services Protection Act**".

CWDO and other disability advocates across the province have been developing this legislation in recognition that people with disabilities find themselves powerless and voiceless to deal with agencies and bureaucracies about such personal matters as what time a person can get up, what a person may wear, and who will provide personal services. Our proposed legislation provides several mechanisms for improving the current system and actualizing the rights of persons with disabilities in a manner that respects our independence and dignity. CWDO would be pleased if the government Ontario would support this proposed legislation. A copy of the draft legislation is attached to this submission.

- b) CWDO recommends the provincial government make amendments to the 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) across Ontario. Specifically, CWDO is recommending that Section 7 of the Local Health System Integration Act, 2006, be amended to allow for the creation of **Accessibility Advisory Committees for each LHIN**. These committees, once established, will comprise persons with disabilities living in the community for which the LHIN has responsibility to provide health care and other support services. The committees would also advise the Board of Directors on issues related to accessibility issues, attendant support services and home care.
- c) CWDO recommends that all hospitals and other healthcare facilities as identified under the Health and Long-Term Care Act be required to purchase **patient lifts and other adaptive equipment for patients with disabilities**. Furthermore, hospitals and other healthcare facilities should be required to begin to purchase this equipment by January 1, 2016. CWDO also recommends that all hospitals and other healthcare facilities go through a consultative process with persons with disabilities when purchasing adaptive equipment for patient use.
- d) CWDO recommends all hospitals and healthcare facilities develop a **patient and family consultation and complaints process** that will allow persons with disabilities as patients to exercise more control over their healthcare needs and address specific concerns.
- e) CWDO recommends that hospitals and other healthcare facilities review the **training for staff every six months**. Training plans and policies should emphasize sensitivity toward patients with disabilities. CWDO also recommends training manuals should be available in alternative formats for the review of patients with disabilities. Training manuals should also be written in plain language.
- f) CWDO recommends that all hospitals and other healthcare facilities undergo an **accessibility access review** to ensure their facilities are physically accessible for all patients with disabilities.
- g) CWDO recommends that Ontario's healthcare **include psychological services, massage and physiotherapy and dental benefits for persons with disabilities**. We specifically recommend that this be

considered for persons with disabilities earning less than \$50,000 a year, including people with disabilities supported through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

- h) CWDO recommends that **Developmental Service Workers** be specifically trained regarding sensitivity towards persons with disabilities. Furthermore, Developmental Service Workers should assist persons with disabilities to develop individual accessibility plans to help promote education and training, legal rights knowledge and employment training.

Proposed Standard regarding Education:

- a) CWDO recommends that the provincial government streamline supports for students to access services and support their ultimate success in the job market. Students with disabilities have to navigate student loans, purchase books, supplies, apply for assistive devices, support services, and accommodations in order to have a chance to be successful in the studies of their choice. CWDO believes this process could be streamlined by having one-stop access to funding for disability-related needs. Students with disabilities – particularly students with visible disabilities such as those who are blind, deaf, nonverbal or who use a wheelchair still face discrimination in the job market. If the students also require human and/or other supports, their job prospects shrink considerably. CWDO recommends the provincial government collect data on students with disabilities by disability type in order to better track progress for students who are blind, deaf, nonverbal or using wheelchairs. Students with disabilities should not graduate with a debt load, given that their employment prospects are already lower than other students. An investment must be made in students with disabilities to help to level the playing field upon graduation.
- b) CWDO recommends that an education standard require school boards, whether publicly or privately funded, to provide accommodation to students with disabilities in a timely fashion on par with other students. Too often we hear about students who continue to wait months for material to be transcribed into braille or into another format that is usable. School libraries have too few books available in alternate formats to support students who require them.
- c) CWDO recommends that an education standard require school boards, whether publicly or privately funded, to provide accommodation to parents with disabilities who have students in attendance at their schools. This would include providing report cards in alternate formats, and providing communication supports to parents who attend school events and meetings. Parental involvement is key to a child's success in school, and the child should not be treated as a second-class citizen because the parent has a disability. Accommodation should extend to the school

premises so that parents with disabilities are able to attend concerts, parent-teacher conferences and other events hosted by the school.

- d) CWDO recommends that an education standard require a portion of funding to be set aside to be pooled to address school accommodations.

Proposed standard regarding Employment:

- a) CWDO recommends that an employment standard include a mechanism for creating an accommodation fund in the broader public sector and the private sector, specifically to support hiring and retaining staff with a disability. People with disabilities are turned down for jobs because employers – although they seldom admit it – believe they will not be able to afford the accommodation someone with a disability will need.
- b) CWDO recommends that investments be made in supporting people with disabilities to work full-time, part-time, and intermittently for those who have fluctuating health conditions. This investment would include simpler mechanisms for going on and off ODSP, continuance of benefits, and comprehensive employment counseling services including employment placement services.
- c) CWDO recommends that there be incentive for employers to hire people with disabilities in a way that does not exploit people with disabilities nor set them up for time-limited employment opportunities.

2. Ensure that persons with disabilities who cannot work have sufficient income to maintain their health and wellbeing.

It is a reality that some persons with disabilities will not be able to work or hold down a job, no matter how much they want to and no matter how much accommodation is provided. CWDO is concerned that persons with disabilities who must rely on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) do not have enough income to meet their basic human needs. Rent allowances are not based on the actual rents people must pay while awaiting a housing subsidy. There is not enough money for adequate, nutritious food.

Many persons with disabilities have special diet requirements which mean spending more at the grocery store to nourish themselves adequately. Perhaps the person must eat lean meats and more fresh fruits and vegetables to reach or maintain a healthy weight; or may need supplements to get all their vitamins; attend to a diabetic diet, or many other types of special diets. A person's health can be improved or drastically reduced by the diet they can afford.

In this day and age, a person without access to the internet and technology is truly disabled. Most information comes through email and when websites are designed properly, they are an excellent source of accessible information. Someone on ODSP cannot afford a computer, much less the monthly fees for

internet. Someone on ODSP cannot afford a cell phone and is at risk when they are out, get stuck, and have no way to contact someone for help.

We believe it would improve the quality of life of people who rely on ODSP to have the funding at a level that lets a person live in decent housing they can afford, eat proper food for their circumstances, and have access to the very types of information that other Ontarians are able to take for granted.

3. Provide affordable housing that is accessible.

Before a person can get a job or go to school, he or she needs to live somewhere that is accessible and affordable. When subsidies are not available, or the waiting list for them is too long, people with disabilities suffer. We are not in a position to find cheap rooming houses – they may be too small for our mobility devices or service animals; they may be up a flight of stairs we cannot climb; they may be located in unsavoury neighbourhoods where we, already vulnerable, are more likely to be robbed or attacked.

We need an effective and efficient system of matching persons with disabilities to accessible, affordable housing that is appropriate for their type of disability. Subsidies need to be available so we can afford to live independently in the community.

4. Ensure equality of access to accessible, affordable transit in every municipality.

We are aware through our cross-Ontario membership of the very different levels of transportation service available from one part of the province to another.

If we are not able to move about, and go from place to place, we cannot work, we cannot go to school, we cannot keep in touch with friends and family and we cannot shop or purchase services that keep the economy humming. Without accessible, affordable transportation, we are, quite literally, prisoners in our own homes.

The provincial government needs to make it possible for every municipality to offer affordable and accessible transportation. Right now, many are engaged in conversations about where to cut budget corners. Because we are a small minority, often powerless, our services are among the first considered for cutbacks. People with disabilities do not have the same range of transportation options – walk, ride a bike, hitch a ride with a friend – when there are accessibility needs. We also aren't likely to have the funds to hire an accessible taxi – even if such a thing exists in our home town.

When budgets are reduced by shrinking hours of service, we lose the right to go out at night, or on Sundays. We certainly won't have the option to take an evening or weekend job. The freedom to move is life itself. Without mobility, we are imprisoned in our homes. Municipalities need incentives to provide accessible and affordable transportation.

5. Provide core funding to provincial organizations to provide public education and peer support about accessibility.

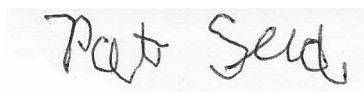
CWDO recommends that the province provide core funding to organizations of and for persons with disabilities. With recent cutbacks at the federal level by the conservative government, national disability organizations are struggling for survival. Their capacity to support their provincial organizations has all but dissolved. Without core funding, Ontario will lose a valuable layer of insight and advice. Too many provincial organizations predominantly comprising persons with disabilities have already folded. This is a great loss to Ontario and we know the province would benefit from reviving these organizations. With core funding support from the province, organizations would be in a position to assist in helping to design how legislation and policy can best be implemented. Moreover, organizations like ours would be better equipped to educate the public and their members about accessibility, and create job opportunities for people with disabilities. Working together, organizations like CWDO can help the government to achieve its goal for an accessible Ontario by 2025.

CONCLUSION

We urge you to give all of our recommendations your sincere and serious consideration.

With budget initiatives to address the needs of persons with disabilities, Ontario will ensure its citizens with disabilities will contribute to the economy. The time to invest is now.

Sincerely,



Pat Seed, Chairperson
Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario

Attachments:

- Proposed draft legislation: **The Consumer Attendant Support Services Protection Act**
- CWDO Submission on the AODA 2014 Final June 11, 2014