



The Premier's Council is Listening #2

What Alberta's Disability Community is Telling Us (October 2016 - March 2017)

Council gathers advice for government by listening to Alberta's disability communities. This includes: people with disabilities and their families, advocacy organizations, service providers and government delivery staff. Council's advice aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), as per the Council's mandate in 2013.

This Listening Report is based on meetings and conversations with 19 community persons and organizations and builds on what we heard from stakeholders and reported in the first Council is Listening Report (April to September 2016). Community members that Council met with said they want to be consulted when changes are being considered to all policies that impact programs and services for people with disabilities and their families.

Affordable, accessible and available housing, transportation and access to public services for people with disabilities are themes that continue to be heard from the community. This report will share additional themes from those previously reported.

Key Themes from Community Meetings and Conversations:

- Eligibility and transition for current services and programs
- Administration of Assured Income for the Severally Handicapped (AISH)
- Safe homes modifications
- Indigenous communities service access
- Inclusive education
- Access and barriers

Discussion points that emerged in each of the themes:

- **Eligibility and Transition for Current Services and Programs**
 - Overall, Council heard that services and programs for children with disabilities work well once they are deemed eligible and the services are in place. There are also services and programs for adults with disabilities and *if the eligibility* criterion is met they can access the services they need.
 - One challenge Council heard is meeting a narrow eligibility criteria. For adults this means many people can be excluded from receiving services. For example, a person with a disability who needs community supports may not be eligible for funded services if their IQ scores are above the regulated criteria. An IQ score does not always reflect how successful the person is able to function in society.
 - Council is hearing that transitioning from childhood to adulthood can also be a challenge and can create a gap in services previously received - many community conversations noted the age range for transition is 15-24. Navigating this transition to adult services and supports can be very difficult and stressful on the entire family, and the person transitioning to adulthood can find themselves falling into a system gap.
 - When a child with a disability turns 18 and is transitioning from child intervention systems into adult services, they often do not have support networks such as families and friends who can advocate and support them through these transitional years. They experience being “lost” without connections to people or systems for support. A transition plan could be implemented ahead of time that focusses on developing community roots and mentor relationships.
 - In the Alberta consultation sessions for the development of the Canadian Accessibility Legislation, Council heard the Alberta community say the following:
 - Standardize the definition and eligibility criteria of disability across provinces.
 - Programs and services be cross disability and include all types of disability and be applicable across the lifespan based on need not diagnosis/program.

UNCRPD
Principle
People with
Disabilities to
have...

“Full and
effective
participation and

- I.Q. screening can be a barrier to accessing funding and may exclude people from getting relevant supports to live safely in their community - Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) regulation.
- Eligibility for programs can shift dramatically leaving some behind with a break in services and supports. There is a recommendation to build toward cohesive eligibility requirements to prevent this situation. Policy development in the system to use a continuum of services and supports during the transition from child to adult could move the current situation from crisis to planning several years ahead and recognizing systems extend to 24 years of age.
- **Council recommends** analysis, planning and consideration for services for people with disabilities are needs-based and available across all types of disabilities and throughout a person's lifespan. Using one definition for disability that includes cross disability and lifespan may move toward this.

Council recognizes this is long term work that must be done with diligence and sensitivity to impacts across the environment.

Comment from Community session on the proposed development of the Canadian Accessibility Legislation - Use the definition of 'disability' taken from the UNCRPD as a universal cross government

- **Community Agency Report on AISH - System barriers**
 - Council heard from the disability community about the administration of the AISH Program through conversations that are happening in person and online. Specifically, two reports regarding AISH are of particular interest in the community:
 - Report of the Auditor General of Alberta - October 2016
 - Community agency report on AISH program - fall 2016

- The themes from both reports are consistent to what Council is hearing from people's experience with the AISH program.
- Access to on-line information and applications work well for many people, however when the application formats are inaccessible, it can leave people with disabilities feeling overwhelmed.
- Wait times for applications to be processed in the system can add financial stress to an applicant that is relying on this program as their only source of income.
- A rural Indigenous community identified that the system prefers and encourages online applications. It is common in some remote Indigenous communities to lack access to cell phone service, computers and internet service. Further compounding the challenge is the limited experience in using technology to access resources and supports.
- The system requires people to confirm they have a disability every five years - many disabilities are permanent and lifetime.
- **Council recommends** there be analysis and consideration to amend the policy to acknowledge that there are permanent disabilities.
- **Council also recommends** that support people are resourced for a mobile service on reserve. Perhaps a pilot approach such as one day per week to provide and support access to on-line information and in person support to complete the application process.

UNCRPD Principle

To provide accessible information to persons with disabilities about mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, including new technologies, as well as other forms of assistance, support services and facilities;

- **Safe Homes**

- When our Council members hear from Alberta's disability communities, housing, safety and accessibility are consistent topics of discussion. In particular, the importance of prompt and timely home modification programs. When a person acquires a mobility limitation, it could prevent them from returning home if unable to have access through a door, use a washroom, stairs etc. Safety of the person is at risk if the home is not

modified to ensure the highest degree of independence and safety considerations are in place.

- Council had the opportunity to provide input on “Safe and Accessible Homes Modifications (SAHM) for People with Disabilities Project.” This project will make funding available to all Albertans with a disability who live in their own homes. Home modifications are intended to increase mobility, accessibility and functional ability of a home not currently funded under any other related programs.

- **Council recommends:**

- Guidelines for eligible modifications could be determined on whether or not a modification will lead to a better and safer quality of life for residents with disabilities. The *Barrier-Free Design Guide* can be referenced to ensure building codes are met and best practice recommendations are available for consideration:

The Barrier-Free Sub-Council of the Safety Codes Council, in collaboration with the Alberta Safety Services developed the *Barrier-Free Design Guide* as part of the Alberta Building Code. The guide provides the minimal requirements to meet the building code, and recommends best practices when building or modifying a building to meet the accessibility needs for people with disabilities.

UNCRPD Article 2 - Universal Design

“Universal design” means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. “Universal design” shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.

- Determining what is preventing access or safety in a person’s home should be how disability is confirmed - not on the type of disability alone. Even though there may be similar support needs typical with a specific disability type, not every person is the same.

- Priority on providing grant funding should be given to applicants in emergency situations. Creating a review committee to determine successful applicants would support this process.

- **Indigenous Communities**

- Council met with a number of Indigenous community groups who include support to people with disabilities and their families. Indigenous communities are reaching out to build relationships and connections with Alberta's government services and supports for people with disabilities.
- Building relationships between the community, funder and linking people up with services has had good outcomes however limited resources reduces how many people are supported. Funding for employment services for Indigenous people has not been certain from year to year. This creates pressure and uncertainty on employment support infrastructure.
- Treaty Six, Seven and Eight First Nations are in Alberta. Treaty Seven has three language groups that present additional challenges in communication and access to information and services.
- The Indigenous communities face multiple barriers with respect to community capacity and resources. Within the Indigenous community for people with disabilities, these challenges are greatly amplified including access to computers and the internet that are often not available as also noted in the administration of AISH earlier. Financial barriers can prevent people from accessing computers. Without easy access to computers, there is also a lack of experience and skills in using these systems.

UNCRPD Article 9

To promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet;

- The Indigenous communities suggested to Council members that building connections and improving access to these systems will provide the community supports that can lead to a better quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

- Some indigenous communities celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD). Council has been invited to Indigenous community events to help raise awareness of disability services and supports. There is representation from the Indigenous community on Council's Provincial Planning Committee for IDPD.
- Council heard that there are Indigenous communities which have a culture of segregation. They believe public awareness on disability and the complexities could improve inclusion of people with disabilities in their community.

- **Council recommends increased support** to public awareness resources.

- **Council recommends** consideration be given to resourcing an Alberta Supports worker expansion to offer a mobile service one day a week to the Indigenous communities on reserve.

UNCRPD Article 26

Support participation and inclusion in the community and all aspects of society, are voluntary, and are available to persons with disabilities as close as possible to their own communities, including in

- **Inclusive Education**

- Currently Alberta Education hosted a curriculum review for K-12 and Council was invited to present to the Expert Working Panel.
 - Council recommended that the historical story, progress and contributions of people with disabilities and their families in Alberta and Canada are included in the Social Studies curriculum. Through early education, the opportunity to change attitudes will increase inclusion of people with disabilities.

Voice of parents in Alberta communities -

A student with a disability that is separated or excluded from other students is a practice that exists in some schools.

- Inclusive education works best when it meets student’s needs. Modifications to what is being taught, and how it is being taught, to meet the needs of each learner to may achieve the best outcomes.
- There are benefits for students with and without disabilities being included in the same learning environment. They are a part of our society and learning together at an early age will promote understanding and inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of community.
- It is important that children with disabilities are included in age appropriate activities with their peers, on an equal basis with others; this is predictive of life outcomes in the future such as attending post-secondary education to increase opportunities for each student’s potential employment and career goals.
- There is a need for true inclusion. Simply being located in a classroom or a school building does not foster educational inclusion or social inclusion.
- Inconsistencies still exist in the level of inclusion students with disabilities experience in schools from K-12 across Alberta. Some parents have been informed that the school does not have the available resources to include their child with a disability in regular activities. While other parents have experienced their child with a disability being fully supported in all school activities.
- Of note, Alberta is a leader in the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education. The disability community stresses the importance of ensuring post- secondary education is available, accessible and inclusive for students with disabilities.
- **Council recommends** Alberta Education use a common definition of disability and outline expectations of inclusion. In addition, it is important to provide specialized training to teachers to support best practices when teaching students with disabilities in the classroom.

We heard from parents that...

“Relationships are just as important as programs.”

...on inclusion in

UNCRPD Article 24

“States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all

- **Access and Barriers**

- The UNCRPD general principles identify accessibility and full and effective participation and inclusion as important. Barriers to participation in the community prevent people with disabilities from being included in community and all that it offers.
- Using Universal Design principles to guide the design of built environments, products and communications to promote inclusion for the greatest number of people being able to access services and participate and contribute to communities.
- Raising awareness to promote change to removing barriers will educate builders and increase access to public buildings and accessible homes for people with disabilities.

UNCRPD Article 9

To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life... to ensure persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both

- **Council is working** to develop a closer relationship with Alberta Municipal Affairs Safety Code Council and the Barrier Free Sub-Council.
- While physical barriers are often easily understood by people, there are other barriers that hamper participation in the community - Council has heard that attitudes are significant barriers to inclusion. People that use wheelchairs often find the wheelchair accessible entrance at the side or rear of the building, separating them from everyone else. These situations are not providing equal access to their communities that people without disabilities have.
- To be part of and contribute to communities one must first be in it - it is crucial to have accessible, timely and affordable transportation.
- Barriers exist that prevent access to public communication such as signage and documents. People who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind,

low vision or have a cognitive disability can find public communication difficult and inaccessible.

- Access to information through technology is a large part of our lives and most often the portal to critical and social information, and can create a more accessible Alberta. The community shared that opportunities to access video conferencing has helped many people to be able to connect and access professionals for information, counseling and consultations.
- Council has reached out to support committees working on Government emergency preparedness and to ensure communication with Albertans in emergencies to ensure people with disabilities and their families continue to be considered in future responses.

Council Heard...

Financial barriers prevent many people from purchasing the technology that they would benefit from. A community member suggested that purchasing technology could be eligible for tax breaks.

- Language - inclusive and accessible language use is important. This was identified to Council in conversations with all communities. Some recent examples of advice provided by Council to government are:
 - Public Affairs Bureau
 - Elections Alberta - updating legislation
 - Status of Women - input into inclusive language document
 - Environment and Parks (Sikome Lake and Parks signage)

Voices from Community...

The Deaf and hard-of-hearing community expressed concerns over the challenges of accessing interpreters and other technology causing barriers to communication, for example; medical appointments with specialists and even delivering a child without communication!

Skilled workers are needed to work with people with cognitive disabilities across Alberta. Training in specific disability areas are also needed to support people with disabilities going through the court system.

Conclusion

Council has heard a clear and consistent message from the disability and broader community. People with disabilities want to be able to access information and participate and contribute to their communities just like other Albertans. People with disabilities and their families were hopeful that in sharing their lived experiences, what is working well, and identifying current challenges that we will better inform government on future policy and program decisions.

There is recognition that change must be done in a thoughtful and diligent manner to not cause unintended negative impacts.

Connecting in Community from October 2016 - March 2017

The Acting Council Chair and Council members met and presented to a variety of groups and people that were interested in discussing topics that promote inclusion of Albertans with disabilities.

- **Accredited Supportive Living Services (ASLS) - Peace River**

ASLS is an accredited, non-profit organization that has services in six communities in Northwestern Alberta. ASLS disability supports include; independent living and residential support programs, and permanent support housing.

- **Advisory Committee on Accessibility (ACA) - City of Calgary**

The ACA is a resource committee reporting to City Council through the Standing Policy Committee on Community & Protective Services on issues, needs and services for people with disabilities.

- **Advisory Committee on Disability Issues (ACDI) - Medicine Hat**

The ACDI provides advice to City Council and all City departments on issues related to people with disabilities. The committee also advocates on behalf of community members to other authorities which formulate policy and/or offer programs that impact people with disabilities.

- **Autism Edmonton**

Autism Edmonton has been providing services and support to people living with autism spectrum disorder and their families since 1971. Services include: educational resources on Autism, family and individual advocacy, consultation, community engagement, pre and Post-diagnosis support, and research.

- **Clients Ongoing Rehabilitation and Equality (CORE) Association - Medicine Hat**

CORE Association provides services to people with developmental disabilities and has service contracts with PDD and Family Supports for Children with Disabilities. They also coordinate a regional Autism Spectrum group to support families with information.

- **Community Futures Treaty 7 (CTF7) - Calgary**

- CTF7 provides Employment Related Programs and Services in the general and youth labour markets and for people with disabilities. An annual event for people with disabilities that offers employment training workshops and a two day career fair.
- **Drumheller and Region Transition Society (DARTS)**

DARTS is a rural non-profit organization that was incorporated in 1977 and operates under a volunteer, policy governing Board of Directors. Services are available to provide individualized support to people with developmental disabilities to live as independently as possible in the community.
- **Easter Seals Alberta - Edmonton**

Easter Seals Alberta is a registered charity that has served Albertans since 1951. Direct services, programs, advocacy and public education are provided to foster inclusion, independence and recreation for individuals with disabilities and medical conditions.
- **Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Provincial Parent Advisory Committee (PPAC) - Provincial scope**
 - Discussion on the Child and Youth Advocate Review (*September 2016*)
- **Inclusion Alberta - Edmonton**

Inclusion Alberta is a family based, non-profit federation that advocates on behalf of children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. This organization has been supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities in their desire to be fully included in community life for over 60 years.
- **International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD)**
 - Communities celebrate IDPD annually in December. Council leads the community coordination, presents Council Leadership Awards and provides event grants. Council attended and presented at the following events in 2016; (City of Calgary, City of Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Peace River, Red Deer, Siksika, St. Paul, University of Alberta, Voice of Albertans with Disabilities).
- **Learning Disabilities Association - Edmonton**

This organization provides learning disability information to its members and general public and provides support and advocacy for people living with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. They support and empower individuals to reach their full potential

through access to equitable opportunities in achieving educational, social and career goals.

- **Post-Secondary Accessibility and Disability Resource Association - Alberta (PADRA)**

PADRA provides accessibility and disability resources for post-secondary student service providers in Alberta. The membership meets regularly to discuss topics that impact student with disabilities accessing and reaching their full potential in post-secondary education.

- **Rehabilitation and Employment for Developing Independence (REDI Enterprises) - Medicine Hat**

- REDI Enterprises is a non-profit society serving the community since 1952. Working with the community, REDI provides opportunities and supports for a wide range of working and living experiences for persons with disabilities that include; employment, housing, community outreach and specialized supports.

- **Rocky Native Friendship Centre - Rocky Mountain House**

The Friendship Centre is community-based and is a member of the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association (ANFCA). As a member there are a range of key services available as well as opportunities to partner with other organizations such as: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Alberta Aboriginal relations, Health Canada and Metis Nation of Alberta.

- **Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) - Calgary**

- SPI Calgary help people with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities achieve independence, full community participation and optimal well-being. They are committed to empower others from point of injury to transition back into the community, through to aging with a disability.

- **Voice of Albertans with Disabilities (VAD) (formerly Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities) - Edmonton**

VAD advocates on behalf of Albertans with disabilities by identifying issues and challenges in the community.

- **Alberta Disabilities Forum (ADF)** is a partnership of 45 disability organizations that have come together to share information and to speak with a unified voice to advance public policy on issues of

importance to Albertans with disabilities. VAD oversees activities of ADF.

- **Wood's Homes - Calgary**

Wood's Homes is an adolescent and children's mental health and shelter centre which provides services to children and their families in Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

- **Parent of child with disabilities - rural community**