



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

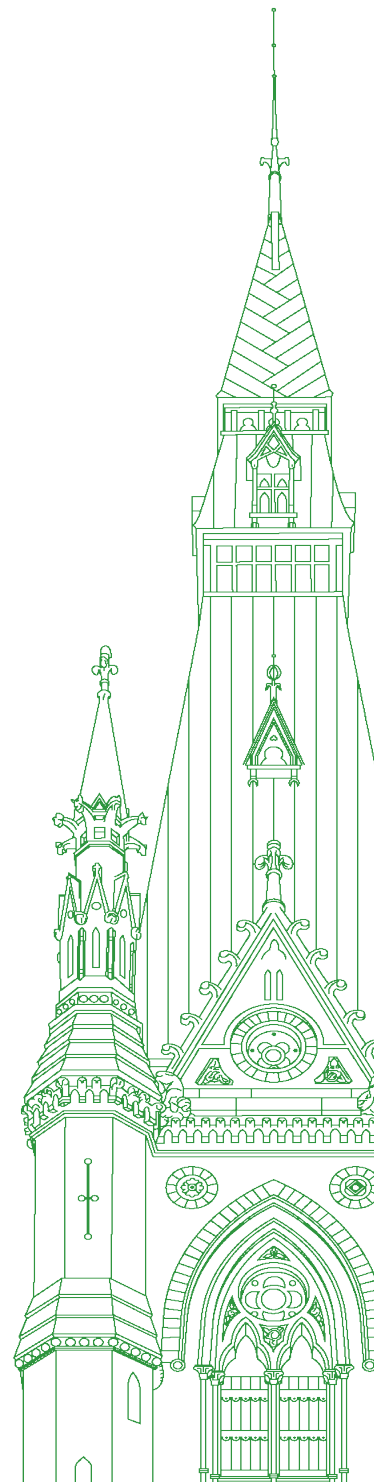
# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 012**

Friday, May 22, 2020

---



Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



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

Friday, May 22, 2020

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 12 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Pursuant to the orders of reference of March 24, April 11 and April 20, 2020, the committee is meeting for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, please click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

Before we get started, I would like to remind everyone to please use the language channel of the language they are speaking.

I would now like to thank the witnesses for joining us today. With us, appearing as an individual, we have Dr. Tammy Schirle, professor, department of economics, Wilfrid Laurier University; from Moodys Tax Law, Kim Moody, CEO and director of Canadian tax advisory; and, we're on the lookout for our third witness, who may be joining us while the opening statements are being presented, and that is, from Guardian Law, Michelle Guy, managing partner.

Dr. Schirle, please proceed with your opening remarks.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Chair, I just noticed in the lineup for our meeting on the 25th that there are more than two witnesses per hour. As was discussed in the subcommittee meeting, we agreed to go to 10 minutes for two witnesses per hour. I would ask, please, that we figure out a way to resolve this. I recognize that once we've invited witnesses we don't want to uninvite them, but perhaps we need to consider maintaining five or seven minutes until we are able to completely implement what was agreed upon at the subcommittee.

I bring this to your attention now since it's Friday and our next meeting is on Monday.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kusie. I think the suggestion that you put forward is reasonable and in keeping with the spirit of the discussions that we've had at the subcommittee. I'd be happy to continue this discussion after the meeting. I don't think we need to tie up the witnesses' time, but frankly, I agree with your approach.

Dr. Schirle, please proceed with your opening remarks. You have seven minutes.

**Dr. Tammy Schirle (Professor, Department of Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University, As an Individual):** Good morning, Mr. Chair. I thank you and the members of the committee for the opportunity to join you today.

As context for my statement, I am a labour economist. My research and teaching involve income support programs, the experience of women in the labour market, retirement decisions and the relationship between work and health.

Today I will focus on two related items. First, I will discuss the medium-term policy response needed over the next few months with concern for that part of the workforce bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 shutdown. Second, I will discuss long-term investments needed to strengthen our caregiving infrastructure in the interest of coming out of this recession with better support for Canada's long-term economic growth.

On the first point, I hope the April job numbers represent the depth of the COVID-19 impact on the loss of paid work. Moving forward, we need to think about the duration of joblessness and where jobless durations will be the most severe. I expect those who first lost paid work in COVID-19 shutdowns will also be the last to return to paid work. Those losses were predominantly experienced by women in public-facing jobs. Moreover, those losses were felt by those with the lowest wages, the lowest seniority, with hourly paid work, and by often the youngest workers.

As provinces move to reopen, we expect some industries to recover quickly. For example, I do not anticipate the April losses in manufacturing and construction to persist. Some services will rebound partially as health and safety requirements will prevent full reopening. Other services will struggle to find sufficient demand for reopening until customers feel confident with regard to their own health and their own financial security. Ultimately, this means some sectors will be delayed in offering paid work to former employees. Of course, some paid work will never rebound. Some jobs are gone. I don't expect a full recovery to come quickly.

For the jobs that become available, decisions to return to work are not always simple. First and foremost, workers must trust their employers to offer safe working conditions and will need to find safe transportation. With significant workplace outbreaks in mind, people will weigh the risk posed to themselves and ultimately to their families when deciding if it is worth taking a job.

Second, many families will have to find ways to manage their caregiving roles, whether that is child care, elder care or caring for other family members unable to care for themselves. We know this work falls primarily to women. With this in mind, we need to ensure policy in the coming months is designed to offer continued support to those unable to return to work when the CERB benefits run out. For some, this may happen in July. Support could come in a form similar to EI, while recognizing EI's coverage gaps, and be paired with services that support job searches and training for those permanently displaced. That training could focus on moving many women from low-paid work in female-dominated occupations to higher-paid work in comparably skilled, male-dominated occupations.

Income supports need to be designed with partial return to work in mind. Allowances for partial returns will facilitate the sharing of caregiving responsibilities across family members, allowing both mom and dad, for example, to take some time away from work to juggle kids' schedules rather than mom having to take the full departure.

Current CERB structures do not facilitate this type of transition. This brings me to the second item I will discuss today. I think the impact of the crisis on women and their work, both paid and unpaid, has made it clear to more people that our caregiving infrastructure is inadequate. We need to build modern, efficient and reliable infrastructure to manage this part of our economy if we want to see further productivity gains and speed up our recovery.

What do I mean by infrastructure? After previous recessions, we promoted shovel-ready infrastructure projects like road building to help stimulate the economy. Roads are part of our transportation infrastructure allowing us to more easily get people to work and move goods to market, trading beyond our own communities. No single individual or firm would build this infrastructure independently because individual benefits are not large enough to incentivize their construction. We build the roads with public funds precisely because it supports the entire economy and promotes economic growth. We then hire people, train them and pay them well to maintain that infrastructure. It is a large, long-term investment with ongoing costs that supports a well-functioning economy.

• (1110)

Historically, Canadian caregiving infrastructure was designed as a highly decentralized system. Individuals, mostly women, were responsible for providing care to family members and neighbours unable to care for themselves. This was done at a very high cost. Economists agree that opportunity costs are just as important as any other, and forgone wages for each person involved in caregiving quickly add up. With no training for many caregivers, many vulnerable people lack sufficient care. Those without family members available to help would simply go without.

Today we have built a small system for caregiving, the scale of which varies by province, but it remains highly decentralized and continues to constrain the work opportunities of many women. We can do better.

With serious investments in child care and long-term care centres we can assure a stable and reliable network of caregivers. This would allow those previously constrained by caregiving responsibilities to specialize where they are most productive, whether that is in a caregiving field or other field of work.

A shift towards specialization in each person's field of comparative advantage, combined with potential economies of scale, would boost Canadian productivity of labour and ultimately of economic growth.

I do not pretend this is a small investment. It's huge, but the current cost of our decentralized, inefficient and often substandard caregiving system is also huge. We need to fully recognize the costs associated with that system.

I also do not pretend this is simple, but I think that building this infrastructure with our provinces, territories and indigenous communities is worth the effort.

I thank you for your time and would appreciate any questions from the members.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Schirle.

We'll now go to Mr. Moody for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Kim Moody (Chief Executive Officer and Director, Canadian Tax Advisory, Moodys Tax Law LLP):** Good morning, committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear to discuss the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My name is Kim Moody. I'm a chartered professional accountant and the CEO and director of Canadian tax advisory services for Moodys Tax Law and Moodys Private Client in Calgary, Alberta. I have a long history of serving the Canadian tax profession through a variety of leadership positions, including chair of the Canadian Tax Foundation, co-chair of the joint committee on taxation of the Canadian Bar Association and CPA Canada, and chair of the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners Canada.

I intend to use my opening remarks to briefly comment on some of the challenges that we are experiencing with the Canada emergency response benefit, to provide some straightforward suggestions to address those challenges, and to briefly discuss some additional benefits for seniors.

To begin, I would like to commend the government for responding quickly to implement the CERB. It's obvious that a quick response, as compared to a perfect response, was the preferred approach, and I certainly agree with that. The CERB has definitely put money into the pockets of Canadians who are in a very challenging spot to provide for themselves and their families. With no rule book on how to respond to such an unusual challenge, the government, again, needs to be commended for its quick response.

However, now that we are two months into this crisis, with the overall picture certainly more clear than it was at the beginning, the simplicity, ease and quickness of the receipt of funds is also exposing challenges and unintended consequences. While some of these challenges have been widely reported, here are some that we are experiencing with clients and friends.

People are receiving double CERB payments. Within our firm, we know of numerous children and friends of clients who are receiving \$4,000 per month, and they're wondering what to do about that.

People who are clearly not eligible to receive the CERB, usually because they did not meet the \$5,000 total income requirement for 2019 or the previous 12 months from the date of application, or have not met the requirement of being out of work for at least 14 consecutive days for reasons related to COVID-19—there are some buddies of my son who were working and who applied for the CERB—are receiving the funds. They are often being encouraged to apply by someone they know.

People who were temporarily laid off are refusing to go back to work after being offered their jobs back, and instead want to continue to receive the CERB. While I'm not an employment lawyer, it seems to me that such people may have quit their employment voluntarily, which is the statutory language that I'll refer to in a second. If that is correct, then such a person would not be eligible to continue to receive the CERB, pursuant to subsection 6(2) of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit Act. Some employment lawyers I know have confirmed such treatment; however, I'm not seeing any enforcement of this provision whatsoever.

The CERB is appearing to be a real barrier and competition to hiring employees as employers start hiring. We have had numerous reports amongst our clients and friends of former employees preferring to be on a CERB vacation rather than return to work. We are seeing and experiencing this especially with part-time employees.

For example, my sister and brother-in-law own and operate a successful bakery in the Calgary Farmers' Market. At the beginning of the crisis, they laid off most of their staff because of the expected decline in revenues. As the crisis progressed, the demand for bread increased and far exceeded expectations. Accordingly, they needed to hire back some of their employees and/or hire new employees. Suffice it to say, it has been a difficult process to hire the required employees when the business is competing with the CERB. That's real.

Media outlets have recently reported on a memo written to Employment and Social Development Canada staff who process CERB applications that suggests they should approve the applications, even if a person has quit voluntarily, if a person was fired for cause, or if the overall application was contentious. It appears that such applications will be later reviewed. This is shocking to me and to many Canadians. While speed over perfection was clearly the preferred approach, it is not clear why a purposeful eye-closing to a review of contentious or even possibly fraudulent applications should occur. Based on our firm's experience, one could assume, reasonably, that 10% of applications may have issues.

• (1115)

With the PBO estimating that the CERB program will cost Canada \$35.4 billion, 10% of that amount is \$3.54 billion. That is a large number by any measure. Let's put it into perspective.

In 2019 the Canada Revenue Agency released its fifth report on the so-called tax gap, focusing on corporate taxes. Other reports released by the CRA examined sales tax fraud, domestic tax evasion and the use of offshore tax havens. The 2019 corporate report estimates that in the 2014 taxation year, Canadian corporations managed to pay somewhere between \$9.4 billion and \$11.4 billion less than they should have in taxes.

Personally, I have real trouble with those estimates. Anecdotally, I believe those are wildly high, but that's just me. Let's adjust that estimate down to something in the more believable category, somewhere in the range of \$3 billion to \$5 billion.

The fourth tax gap report, released in June 2018, discussed the international tax gap and personal taxes. The CRA stated as follows:

Based on international audits completed between 2014 to 2015 and 2016 to 2017, almost \$1 billion in income was uncovered and assessed from 370 individuals, 200 corporations and a small number of trusts. The additional tax identified was \$284 million. Of this, 23% was attributed to individuals and 77% to corporations and trusts linked to those [individuals].

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Could I get you to wrap it up, please. You're over your time. Thanks.

**Mr. Kim Moody:** All right.

These recoveries reflect the significant investments in the CRA to audit so-called offshore activities of Canadians. Potential CERB fraud and leakage are significantly comparable. With no upfront integrity checks, and leaving audits and integrity checks to the back end, obviously this will decrease the probability of recovering funds.

Do I have maybe one minute, Mr. Chair, to wrap up?

**The Chair:** You have less than a minute, but go ahead, yes.

**Mr. Kim Moody:** Okay.

Given the above, I have the following suggestions: One, start administering carefully, perhaps using some of the checks and balances that currently exist within the EI system as to whether employees are effectively quitting their jobs if they refuse to come back to work after being temporarily laid off. Two, introduce legislation that eliminates a person from eligibility for CERB if they have refused a reasonable job offer to work. Three, ensure that contentious applications are carefully reviewed before being approved, with appropriate investments being made in that area. Finally, develop a plan that envisions how the income supports, including CERB and the interaction between wage subsidies, are ultimately withdrawn, and consider the impacts that such withdrawals will have on long-term economic recovery.

Very briefly, with regard to seniors, I suggest that—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Moody. We're well past time. You will undoubtedly get a chance to make those points in response to questions.

**Mr. Kim Moody:** Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** We will now go to Ms. Guy.

Welcome. You have the floor for seven minutes.

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy (Managing Partner, Guardian Law):** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the government with respect to the response to COVID-19.

As a matter of introduction, I'm a family law lawyer in Vancouver, B.C. I own the firm called Guardian Law. I've been practising family law for 12 years. I'm concerned about the impact on families that depend on child and spousal support for the purpose of meeting their day-to-day needs and about what is happening, because there is no federal program in order to fill that gap of income.

In my practice, nearly all of my files end up in some sort of child or spousal support. As you may know, child support arises from and is prescribed by the federal child support guidelines. Spousal support is determined, in almost all cases, under the federal spousal support advisory guidelines. Under paragraph 11(1)(b) of the Divorce Act, the court actually cannot grant a divorce if there isn't child support in place and being paid.

As a matter of public policy, spousal and child support are critical tools to ensure equality between households and ensure that the household bearing greater responsibility for the care of children, which in most cases is the household where there's a woman, has a stable income and is compensated for the limits that parenting places on the parent's ability to engage in the workforce. Spousal and child support are widely accepted by society as necessary in ensuring fairness of income distribution.

Due to COVID-19, many employees have been furloughed, or people having businesses have suffered significant reductions in their incomes due to business closures. As a result, payers are in a position where they are significantly reducing or terminating spousal support and child support altogether. Unfortunately, clients have been coming to me, and they are completely desperate. There is no help available to them, because with CERB, the definition of income does not include child support or spousal support.

As well, the wage subsidy doesn't consider the payment of child support or spousal support to be any sort of wage—

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Ms. Guy, I'm sorry to interrupt.

I just got a note that we're having significant difficulty with interpretation. Would you happen to have a headset?

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** Unfortunately, I don't. I asked someone to bring one, but due to the time difference, they weren't able to bring it on time.

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*Translation*]

I think Ms. Gill has a point of order. Is it about the same issue I just talked about?

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** I cannot hear you. The sound is not loud enough. There has been no interpretation since the beginning. That is why I was trying to say something.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

I'm looking to the clerk and to the interpreters to see if there's anything we can do.

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** Would it assist you if I were to speak more slowly?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** There has not been any interpretation since the beginning. I don't know whether it is due to how fast we are speaking, but I think there is rather another issue. There is no interpretation.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Chair, I have noted the same thing as Ms. Gill. It has been like this from the beginning. It is probably due to the fact that the speaker has no microphone. That should be resolved, as we cannot hear her at all.

**The Chair:** Okay.

[English]

I'll ask our technical people to come in here. I presume it's because of the sound quality that we don't have interpretation. Is there anything we can do to resolve that?

**A voice:** Hello. It's Chantale, an IT ambassador.

I would recommend, if you don't have a microphone, that the best thing to do is to speak as closely as possible to your laptop. I'm not sure which model you have, so I can't tell you where the microphone is located, but get as close as you can to the laptop and speak as slowly and clearly as you can.

**The Chair:** Okay, let's give that a try.

Ms. Guy, I'm sorry to tell you this, but I think we need you to start again from the beginning as opposed to continuing on. We'll restart the clock for you.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I'm concerned that these technical difficulties are cutting significantly into our rounds. I'm not sure how we want to address this, whether we want to agree to get through two rounds or give some consideration as to where it will take us, but I am getting concerned about our time limitations, which I'm adding to with this point of order, but I feel that it needs to be recognized. I'm not sure if we want to see how things go or make a decision now, but I am worried about the amount of time we'll have for questioning.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Technical difficulties aren't unforeseen. We have allotted an hour, but we also indicated that we were going to go completely through two rounds even it meant overlapping from one panel to the other.

I think the fairest way to do this is to ensure that, at a minimum, everyone here gets one round of questioning with this panel before we release them. That may shorten the next one. I think that's within my discretion, and I think it's the fairest way to do it. Hopefully, that will be okay.

Ms. Guy, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** Thank you.

I can be quite brief in my submission, because the issue is fairly simple.

As I said before, I've been a family law lawyer for the last 12 years in Vancouver, and all of my files result in some sort of child or spousal support. Child and spousal support arise from federal legislation and are deemed to be necessary components of our social support fabric.

I've had a number of clients who have come to me who are in desperate situations. They rely heavily on child or spousal support as part of their operating budget to be able to make ends meet, but the payer has lost their main source of income, whether from being furloughed from their employment or from facing a significant re-

duction to their own business income due to closures or loss of revenue. As a result, they are turning around and terminating or significantly reducing the spousal support or the child support they are paying.

The problem with that is that the person who is relying on that income to be able to pay expenses for children, who are the most vulnerable members of our society, has no program they can turn to to try to replace that income. CERB does not define income to include child or spousal support, and the wage subsidy program does not consider the payment of child or spousal support to fall under the payment of salaries or wages.

These parents, who are normally women, are coming to me desperate because they have no way to make ends meet. Even if they negotiate with their landlords or their mortgage holder to have a cessation of payments, bills are just piling up. They still need to put food on their table. They still need to pay for those things at the end of the day. As it stands, in most cases, they're living paycheque to paycheque to get by anyway.

My submission is that there needs to be a reconsideration of the definition of income for the purpose of the CERB on a retroactive basis so that we can get some funds into the pockets of these people, or we need to redefine salaries and wages for the purpose of the subsidy program so that the payer has some incentive to continue to meet their obligation and can turn to a program to get some indemnification for their outgoing costs.

That's essentially my submission, and if there are any questions, I would appreciate the opportunity to answer.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Guy, for truncating your statement. It was very clear.

We'll allow a little extra time for questions, which we are going to start now with Mr. Vis for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question will be directed to Professor Schirle.

It's nice to have you before this committee, and I really appreciated your comments about women in the labour force this morning. It reminds me quite a bit of my mother-in-law who is an immigrant and works at a care facility but was laid off during COVID-19.

I want to ask you quickly about some comments in your article in the Globe and Mail last week.

In the same article that I referenced in our last meeting, another interviewee wondered—and this is regarding OAS and GIS—why the Liberals didn't simply provide the one-time emergency payment to seniors through the guaranteed income supplement, which would have automatically targeted low-income seniors.

The federal official who was here last week stated that the government believes that all seniors were somewhat affected by higher costs, and so he had just based the \$300 on all OAS-eligible pensioners.

In your view, would restricting the disbursement of this one-time emergency funding to GIS recipients or even a stricter threshold for OAS recipients have suitably addressed the issue? Do you have another potential solution for assisting seniors other than a blanket payment to all OAS recipients?

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I know that I've had some perhaps controversial statements in the media with respect to the extra payments that are going to seniors or that are planned to go out to seniors.

I think that making those payments to low-income seniors was a fairly obvious case to me. Many low-income seniors who are almost exclusively relying on OAS and GIS to get by are working very hard to stretch every single dollar they get, and they aren't able to do that right now. Given the higher risk to their health, I thought that made a lot of sense.

With respect to high-income seniors, I do not doubt that every high-income senior also has some extra expenses right now. They may also have some reduced expenses, given that they are not travelling and other such things. I also expect that most high-income seniors have precautionary savings available, probably in a TFSA, that they could use as a cushion to handle those extra expenses, just as any other high-income individuals do right now.

Perhaps we should not expect seniors to use their precautionary savings. I think that is a political decision that is not mine to make. It is my opinion that it would not be unreasonable to expect everyone to use up at least some of their savings right now to handle those types of extra costs.

• (1135)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. Thank you.

I have a bit of a political question here. For many years, the Liberal government accused Conservatives of sending benefit cheques to millionaire families instead of giving more money to the families that needed it.

In this instance, would it be fair to say that the Liberals are sending benefit cheques to wealthy seniors, and perhaps millionaires, instead of giving more money to low-income seniors who need it more?

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** It is not clear to me whether that will be going to millionaires. Right now, anyone who has a taxable income of less than, I believe, \$128,000 per year would be able to receive at least some old age security payment. As for whether or not people with incomes higher than that are also going to be considered, I don't think they are, but that, to me, is not well defined at this point.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Since the publication of that article last week, have you heard any suitable rationale from the government as to why it did not simply target benefits to low-income seniors when it could have done so?

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I did hear from a journalist who asked that question. I believe it was Patrick Brethour who asked that question.

My recollection is that this was believed to be the simplest way to get money out to all of the seniors.

I suspect there is some concern that needs go beyond the GIS recipients, but I would like to see a clearer statement of that.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you.

We're watching the government spend hundreds of billions of dollars on various programs right now without accounting for it.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has stated that it's possible for the debt to reach one trillion dollars this year. He also stated that the government doesn't have an overall economic plan.

If not now, when is the appropriate time for economic oversight and transparency in accounting for the federal government's spending?

I would especially like your comments on how that impacts our Canadian labour market.

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I will suggest that that's a really big question that would take me longer and a bit more research than I have time for right now. I also am not one to track deficits as closely as some of my colleagues do.

I would suggest that as long as we are able to reasonably say that these expenditures are needed, it is what we need to do.

I also think that, with the wide range of uncertainty in any estimates that could go out right now, those numbers would be fairly meaningless, to be honest, if we tried to project exactly what that debt is and how far it will go over the next few months.

We could make up numbers. We could try to pretend that we have best-case and worst-case scenarios. I know there are many numbers out there to consider, but I would not consider them right now to be reasonable estimates that provide us with a clear picture of what is coming ahead.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Schirle.

Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Next we'll go to Mr. Dong for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the panellists for coming this morning and for giving us quite an insight into different fields.

First, I want to offer Mr. Moody the opportunity to finish his recommendations on seniors. I would like to share one minute with Mr. Moody to let him finish those recommendations.

**Mr. Kim Moody:** Thank you for that. I'll briefly read this. It's just half a page.



I'll now turn briefly to benefits for seniors—

• (1140)

**Mr. Han Dong:** You have a minute.

**Mr. Kim Moody:** Here's the short story. The short story is that I actually agree with the witness who just finished talking. It should have gone to lower-income seniors. I don't like the shotgun approach. I think it should have been targeted—a rifle shot approach—to seniors who are eligible for the GIS—

**Mr. Han Dong:** Mr. Moody, I have a very limited time to ask questions, so if you can just stick with your previous recommendations, I'll allow you to finish the prepared notes.

**Mr. Kim Moody:** I'm not reading the prepared notes.

That was number one.

Number two, I did agree with the Conservative proposal on allowing a special one-time withdrawal from an RRSP. If it's repaid by December 31, 2023, it would be tax free. I also agreed with waiving mandatory RRIF withdrawals and expanding that to 100% as opposed to 25%.

Those are the two ideas that I would support.

**Mr. Han Dong:** That's great.

Mr. Moody, I'll probably start my questioning with you. I thank you very much for your recommendations. I heard the term you used for CERB in calling it a “CERB vacation”. Just out of curiosity, where do think people are spending their vacation or using their CERB money?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry, but there's just a lot of echoing going on.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kwan, I think Ms. Chabot has already risen on a point of order. I will give her the floor and come back to you afterwards.

Ms. Chabot, do you have a point of order?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, we can hear very little if anything. Even when you speak, we cannot hear you.

**The Chair:** You cannot hear me, either?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I can barely hear you. I am not blaming the interpreters for this, but we are losing the interpretation regularly because of sound issues.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Ms. Kwan, was that a similar issue that you sought to raise?

**Mr. Han Dong:** Mr. Chair, it's echoing at my end as well. There are obviously some technical difficulties.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dong, hang on one second. Ms. Kwan had a point of order as well.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** It was on the same point. It was echoing and I couldn't hear a thing.

**The Chair:** I'll go over to the interpretation folks or the tech folks. I see that Mr. Dong is wearing a headset, but the quality of

the sound clearly isn't good. Is there anything we can do to resolve that?

**Mr. Han Dong:** Maybe I'll move on to my next question. Maybe that will give us better luck.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur):** Mr. Chair, I've been told just to disconnect and reconnect the headset. Maybe that will help.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Hello? Is it better?

**The Chair:** Keep talking, Mr. Dong. It sounds better to me, but I'm not the professional here.

**Mr. Han Dong:** It's a little better on my end. I hope this doesn't take away from my questioning time.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** It sounds much better.

**The Chair:** To the interpretation and the technical folks, are we ready to roll or is there something more that needs to be done?

Okay, it looks like we're good, Mr. Dong. That won't cut into your time. You still have about three and a half minutes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Han Dong:** I'll move to Dr. Schirle.

Dr. Schirle, thank you very much for those suggestions. You mentioned coming out of COVID toward recovery. I'm wondering about the students, who are a very important part of our labour force. Can you talk about some of the employment difficulties you know they're facing during COVID and then coming out of COVID?

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** Thank you.

I suspect the interpreters are having challenges right now, but I will try to answer.

We know our that students are going to struggle going forward as they try to enter the labour market. If they try to enter the labour market during any normal recession, they take a huge cut to their potential earnings, which usually takes about 10 years to recover from.

This is a scenario where they do not get that first ideal job. They're looking at trying to get any job at all, and many of the jobs they could get right now will not contribute to their career path. That is a huge concern we have for the students who are graduating.

What we have seen at many universities is an increase in enrollments for the summer, so we suspect that many will choose to continue their education, building some further skills before going into the labour market. That seems to be a best-case scenario for them, but eventually they're going to have to get out there and try to compete. As many workplaces appear to be moving to more permanent work-from-home scenarios, it's not obvious how they're going to start the networking that also comes with starting their first career and learning in those jobs, so they have many challenges coming up.

For the students who are returning to school in the fall, my sense is that they're fairly well covered by the existing policies that have been brought forward, but I am very concerned about those who are graduating and trying to start their careers.

• (1145)

**Mr. Han Dong:** You also mentioned that there are some jobs you anticipate will not come back post-COVID. Can you elaborate a bit more on them? What kinds of jobs are you talking about, and what do you think the government should do?

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** Yesterday, we saw an excellent example. The folks at Shopify announced that many of their work-from-home arrangements are going to become permanent going forward. What that means is that they will not be using that office space anymore, and anyone who worked in that office as support staff will no longer have a job. There is no need to clean a floor when no one is in the office, so those are the types of jobs that will be the first to just disappear.

I am concerned that for things like hospitality, tourism or any kind of entertainment industry, it's going to be a very long time before those jobs come back. When we're thinking about several years down the road, we might as well think of those jobs as gone.

Also, many workplaces are completely reorganizing how they do things, often relying on more technology rather than humans to get things done, and as they make those investments, those workers will be displaced. Those investments can be productive overall. They can be beneficial to everyone, but those workers who are displaced are going to take the cost of that and are going to need retraining to find something new.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Thank you. I'll try to get one more question in.

We hear a lot about CERB and student support programs providing a disincentive for people to return to work. What's your view on this, very quickly?

**The Chair:** Mr. Dong, that's your time.

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** My general view is that a lot of this is perception more than reality. I remind people that when we look at the amount—

**The Chair:** Dr. Schirle, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Dong. We're past your time.

[*Translation*]

We now go to you, Ms. Chabot. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will share my time with Ms. Gill.

I am speaking to you, Ms. Schirle.

I will first make a comment. In a few minutes, you provided us with an analysis of the current challenges related to workers—in the context of the crisis—and going forward. Much of your analysis is similar to mine, especially concerning women. They are on the front lines in the fight against the pandemic.

As you said, the jobs that could be lost in a number of areas are jobs held primarily by women. So I will put a broader question to you. We know that the government must conduct a gender-based analysis for each of its policies. Do you think the gender issue has been taken into account sufficiently in the government's economic response plan measures?

• (1150)

[*English*]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I think some of that is yet to be seen.

With things like the CERB benefits that have been made available, it was made clear that having to take on caregiving roles, for instance, as a reason to be away from work, made someone eligible. Things like that were very important.

The bigger concerns I have are with how those benefits will work going forward as people try to make their way back into the economy. Also, when it comes to our very standard infrastructure spending, the shovel-ready projects are not going to be what help women get back to work, who are the most affected, as I said.

I think that GBA+ analysis of any stimulus spending and any infrastructure spending and the design of benefits going forward is needed.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, your microphone is muted.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I'm sorry. I will turn it on, thank you.

You said that the Canada emergency response benefit has been beneficial. It should be pointed out that the benefit has been used to cover what our employment insurance system or our social safety net does not cover. The CERB covers a number of categories of workers who did not qualify for employment insurance.

We know that the CERB will end. Do you think the employment insurance system will be revised, so that workers would be eligible for it and so that the social safety net would be wider?

[*English*]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I do hope that is part of one of the lessons we can learn as we move into a recovery phase.

I believe about 30% of people who pay into EI or are working are not eligible for EI when they are laid off. This often has to do with their status as part-time workers, multiple job holders or being self-employed in some way. Moreover, when you have to leave work for child care responsibilities, you would not be eligible for EI. These are important things to consider.

Trying to design a system that can accommodate our gig workers, our part-time workers, the more non-standard employment is challenging. In organizing their workplaces, we know that employers and employees do respond to how we design these programs.

I don't present that as a simple thing to create, but it definitely is needed.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I will also address you, Ms. Schirle.

Ms. Chabot asked you about employment insurance. The way that system currently works is particularly problematic for a category of individuals—those employed in seasonal industries. Those workers are in a black hole every year. Some measures currently exist, but seasonal workers are experiencing insecurity because they don't know how their situation will be resolved this fall.

What actions do you propose be taken to help those workers? Among others, I am thinking of workers involved in the fisheries and tourism industries.

[English]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** Seasonal work has always been a huge challenge in the EI system, and here we are facing a situation where many people coming back to work for the summer season don't have jobs to return to. I believe their benefits have been extended to account for that, but eventually those benefits will run out again, and then they will not have that work history. That is the problem here.

The ideal solution is to find them something new to do. That requires some assistance in search and training, but again, in a market where everyone is searching and training for any available work, that will be very difficult.

There are probably good opportunities here for longer-term training for many of those workers, hopefully moving them into more permanent and stable positions that are not just seasonal. That would be one opportunity here.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Schirle and Madam Gill.

Next we have Ms. Kwan, for six minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Ms. Guy.

On the issue around spousal maintenance and child maintenance, individuals who have lost that support are not eligible to receive the Canada emergency response benefit because that income is not deemed to be earned income.

Can you advise on whether spousal maintenance is taxable income?

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** Yes, child support is taxable in the hands of the payer, and spousal support is taxable in the hands of the recipient.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Then, from that perspective, taxes are paid on that spousal support or child maintenance, yet they don't qualify for the emergency benefit from the government. In your submission, you mentioned that this needs to be fixed. I believe you offered a couple of scenarios.

Could you repeat that for me, please?

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** The scenarios are that either we change the definition of income for the purpose of the CERB to be the receiving of child or spousal support, or we change the definition of wages and salaries to be the payment of child and spousal support.

From a family lawyer perspective, I prefer the option of the wage subsidy, to have that program available for the payment of child and spousal support, because that puts the onus on the payer to ensure the continuity of the payments and it gives me more tools at the end of the day to collect that money if they end up refusing to pay.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Regardless, though, what is needed is for the government to ensure that vulnerable families who rely on spousal

maintenance or child maintenance get emergency support during this pandemic, because as it stands right now, they don't have access to that benefit.

The government argues that they are already doing so much. For example, they are giving the child tax benefit to families already, and there's the GST rebate. They feel that perhaps that is sufficient, but I don't know, because they haven't taken action to rectify this glaring problem.

Can you comment on the issue around the child tax benefit, or perhaps even the GST rebate, in terms of that amount being received by families?

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** Well, it ignores just the simple cost of day-to-day living. If your income has gone to zero, the bit of extra money you might get through the child tax benefit isn't going to come anywhere close to covering what it takes to feed a child, pay your rent and pay your utilities. We need to have some basic income.

Also, the child tax benefit and those programs are dependent on previous year's income, which might have been turned off now, and it's not going to apply now if there has been a current change of income. It's reliant on the previous year, which might have been a stable year. There's a lot of fluctuation in families in terms of their financial positions.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Isn't it the case that the child tax benefit and the GST rebate applies to everyone? Even the people who do qualify for CERB will get that as well. However, for families who are reliant on spousal maintenance and child maintenance, they don't have another source of income, and the government is simply arguing that the child tax benefit and the GST rebate is sufficient for them to survive on during this pandemic.

What are your thoughts on that?

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** It seems as though that person isn't a single mom who's relying completely on their child and spousal support to make ends meet. If that goes to zero, that bit of extra money they're getting from the child tax benefit is not going to be enough. Maybe they could live in their car and continue to feed their children, but how can they feed their children and provide a house on the child tax benefit that's being provided to them?

The child tax benefit is assuming that there's some other base form of income for that family, whether it be the CERB or the wage subsidy. It's not assuming that the family income has gone to zero.

• (1200)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We've heard from other witnesses today that women primarily are impacted during the pandemic. In this instance related to child maintenance and spousal support, what are the demographics of the people who rely on that source of income to survive?

**Ms. Michelle E. Guy:** Well, primarily, in almost all cases it's women, and in almost all cases it's women who are probably in their thirties, because they have underage children. They've likely had their career disrupted very early on in their career, so their earning capacity is quite low, and they're heavily dependent on the payer to provide that stability of income. They don't have any other resource to turn to unless they happen to come from a family with money, but that's uncommon, unfortunately.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Guy and Ms. Kwan, and thank you to all of the witnesses for being here with us today.

My sincere apologies for the technical challenges we've had that cut into your time, but we're doing the best we can with what we've got. Nonetheless, your testimony was extremely valuable and your appearance here is very much appreciated.

We're going to suspend for three minutes while we get the next panel ready. Thank you.

• (1200) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1219)

**The Chair:** I now call the meeting back to order. I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today.

We have with us, as an individual, the Honourable David Onley, senior lecturer, University of Toronto Scarborough.

[*Translation*]

We are hearing from Louise Bourgeois, president of the Fédération des mouvements personne d'abord du Québec, or FMPDAQ, Olivier Villeneuve, director of the Mouvement personne d'abord de Saint-Jérôme, Sainte-Thérèse et Saint-Eustache, and Natalie Valade, resource person at the Mouvement personne d'abord de Sainte-Thérèse.

[*English*]

Finally, from Spinal Cord Injury Canada, we have Bill Adair, executive director.

Your Honour, we're going to start with you. You have the floor for seven minutes.

• (1220)

**Hon. David Onley (Senior Lecturer, University of Toronto Scarborough, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, thank you. It is an honour to be with you today.

As we've come to grips with the impact of COVID-19 on our lives, we all wish that we could just get back to normal, but then reality sets in, and we sense with some trepidation that we'll have to grudgingly accept a new normal.

As it pertains to people with disabilities, as it relates to recovering Canada's economy and as it applies to then building even greater economic prosperity for the future, I believe we should not settle for a new normal. I believe we should instead consciously develop a new, improved and accessible normal, one that embraces the Accessible Canada Act in both its spirit and its legislative letter,

not as a burden, but as one with the myriad, serendipitous benefits we hitherto haven't even been able to consider until now.

Among other things, unless we all want to wear gloves all year round, the need to create no-touch automatic doors wherever possible throughout our society should no longer be considered as just an accessibility add-on. There will be many more options to consider.

Tuesday was Personal Support Worker Day in Ontario. Yesterday was Global Accessibility Awareness Day. May 31 marks the start of National AccessAbility Week, a welcome federal government initiative.

These dates are significant, as they encompass in a general way the three types of disabled persons who, according to StatsCan, represent 22% of our people. First, there are people like me who are disabled but, with the use of assistive devices, live essentially an independent life. Second, there are those who require daily assistance from a personal support worker, PSW, to participate in society either at school or in the workforce. Third, there are seniors with mobility issues and those younger adults whose disability is severe enough that the only option is to reside in a long-term care or seniors home irrespective of age. We have a family member who fits that exact category.

It is the latter two groups who are most affected today by COVID-19. In terms of PSWs, I note that the government is looking at creating a training program for unemployed Canadians to help long-term care homes. Minister Qualtrough has said that, despite these homes being a provincial responsibility, the initiative would be available to any province seeking help in those facilities during the outbreak.

I applaud the minister for adding that the crisis is not just hitting LTCs but all collective situations, including residential care facilities for people with disabilities. She said, "Any collective living situation needs to be really, honestly dissected, and we need a better way forward in Canada on this." I wholeheartedly agree with her 100%.

On May 5, my comrade in arms, Jeffrey Preston, disability studies professor at King's College, addressed your committee and underscored the need for a better way forward when he said the following to you:

We must secure our long-term care facilities to prevent the spread of the virus from unit to unit and from facility to facility. Supporting provincial efforts to care for the caregivers is critical, including increasing PSW staffing numbers and providing regular paid time off for recharging of batteries or fighting off sickness. Scaling up the number of people working in these roles, I believe, is critical. This also means, though, a need to re-examine past practice where we warehoused disabled people of all ages in medical facilities...because of a lack of affordable accessible housing.

This pandemic is perhaps the greatest societal challenge our nation has ever faced, without exception, so I refer you all to a May 14 article in [theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com) on the coronavirus in Canada's long-term care for people with disabilities, a brilliant article written by professors Gillian Parekh of York and Kathryn Underwood of Ryerson.

Of the catastrophe in our long-term care facilities—and it truly is a catastrophe—they say:

When we look at who is disproportionately affected by this pandemic, we can't help but ask how ableism shapes notions of whose lives are valued and whose are not. As governments plan for a "return to normal" while serious systemic issues remain in long-term living facilities, is normal really what we want to return to?

• (1225)

No, it is not. We need a better way forward. Ableism is a kind of benign neglect. As Parekh and Underwood conclude, citing disability justice activist Mia Mingus, "it undergirds notions of whose bodies are considered valuable, desirable and disposable."

We've been told repeatedly to trust the science as we navigate forward. Certainly, that is important. But now that we are 76 days from the first Canadian COVID-19 fatality, it is time to do the math as well. Our population is 37,500,000. As of yesterday, over 6,150 Canadians have died of COVID, and we rank 11th in the world. A full 80% of those people, or 4,920, were in LTC homes or seniors homes, most with disabilities.

We all remember the Humboldt bus crash. Sixteen people died, our nation grieved. In the 76 days of COVID deaths, the death toll for our disabled seniors has been the equivalent of four Humboldt crashes per day for 76 days. Those are the numbers, and there are more.

What can we learn from them? Let's consider that with a population of 126,000,000 people, 25% of which is seniors, the COVID death toll for the nation of Japan, as of yesterday, is 771. They rank 73rd in the world. Canada's death toll for seniors alone is six times greater than Japan's total death toll as a nation. Their population is 3.3 times greater than Canada's, but their COVID death toll is 13% of Canada's. Why? There are detailed reasons, but, briefly, they do not shake hands as a society and have not for centuries. They bow instead. Since the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011, mask and hand sanitizer use has become widespread if not completely accepted.

Closer to home, New Brunswick—

**The Chair:** I'm going to need you to wrap it up, Your Honour.

**Hon. David Onley:** —has reported zero deaths. The question is why.

**The Chair:** We're over time. Please conclude.

**Hon. David Onley:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Next, from Spinal Cord Injury Canada, we have Bill Adair.

You have seven minutes, Bill.

**Mr. Bill Adair (Executive Director, Spinal Cord Injury Canada):** Thank you.

I'm Bill Adair, executive director of Spinal Cord Injury Canada. I'm pleased to be speaking with you today about the Government of Canada's response to COVID-19. I'm especially glad to be doing so as our organization celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Spinal Cord Injury Canada was founded by World War II veterans with spinal cord injuries, who were determined to return to Canada and make it a more inclusive and accessible place to live. I'm proud to be here with the same intentions, representing our organization and our founders.

There are an estimated 68,000 people living with spinal cord injuries in Canada. About one a day is added to that number. It is Spinal Cord Injury Canada's job to support this journey as people return to an independent and fulfilling life.

COVID-19 brings many challenges for people with spinal cord injuries. The best medical advice is to wash our hands and social distance to stay healthy. People with high-level quadriplegia—limited function below the neck—might find that handwashing isn't a simple task, nor would it be easy to put on gloves or a mask. As well, many people with spinal cord injuries use the services of a personal support worker to assist them in the activities of daily living. Social distancing is impossible in that situation.

For those with a spinal cord injury in a hospital or rehabilitation setting, COVID-19 is a serious threat due to increased exposure and because people often have a harder time with breathing and lung functions. When these people are discharged, a severe shortage of affordable and accessible housing leaves them with no choice but to move into long-term care facilities, which, as we know, puts them in grave danger. Because of scarce availability of personal protective equipment, PSWs sometimes arrive at people's homes without gloves and masks. This puts people receiving the service in a very vulnerable situation. The person can refuse service, but then how do they eat, go to the bathroom, get to bed, or get up in the morning? PSWs in the community need protective equipment just as hospitals and long-term care residences do.

Thankfully, PSWs are now considered essential workers and have received extra pay in recognition. Spinal Cord Injury Canada fully supports this change, but there have been ripple effects with the changes. Some PSWs could suddenly no longer provide services to people in the community. This change put pressure on family and friends for support, and people scrambled to try to find new PSWs in the middle of a pandemic. As well, some people tried to match the higher salary or even pay more to keep their PSW. For people on a fixed income, this was near impossible.

There have been extra out-of-pocket expenses too for services such as garbage pickup, grocery delivery, accessible equipment repair, or bulk buying of medical supplies because of availability.

To date, the Government of Canada has provided support to workers, parents, corporations, small and medium-sized-business owners, workers, families, children, students, indigenous peoples, homeless people, women facing violence, seniors, youth, seafood processors, dairy farmers, agriculture suppliers, energy companies, tourism companies, sports organizations and cultural organizations. Without a doubt, Canadians can be proud that we live in a country in which the government is responsive to our core values, and we do look after one another.

Although some people with spinal cord injuries qualify for the financial support our government has been announcing, people receiving disability benefits do not and are being left behind.

In 2019, the average CPP disability benefit was just over \$1,000 a month, and the maximum benefit anyone could get was just over \$1,300 a month. Even with access to other provincial and territorial funding programs the reality is that many people on disability supports live in severe poverty.

Furthermore, Spinal Cord Injury Canada is challenged to sustain our support for people in need. One of our provincial organizations has had to close and another is dangerously close to doing so because fundraising dollars were not able to be realized. Canadians are tightening their purse strings and people will not attend fundraising events. Yes, \$350 million was announced in April, but the application process started only this week, and now we are faced with a more complex process to request this assistance, which we will be pursuing, but this leaves our federation in a very perilous situation. More importantly the people we serve are being penalized.

That being said, there are changes that have happened because of COVID-19 that Spinal Cord Injury Canada hopes will continue into the future. Video health conferencing is an amazing option. For people with spinal cord injuries who can't get out of the house or who have difficulty getting around, this is a real benefit and should continue.

- (1230)

Canadians have adjusted to working from home. We hope that in the future, more jobs will be advertised as operating from a home office, increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities.

Women with disabilities are twice as likely as women without disabilities to experience emotional, physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner. As we all shelter at home, women fac-

ing violence are in isolation with their abuser. COVID-19 has brought to the surface this horrific systemic issue that, as a country, we must fix.

People with spinal cord injuries and disability supports have been kept in financially desperate situations, literally having to make choices between getting food and buying medication, between rent and rehabilitation.

When Canadians lost their jobs during COVID-19, the CERB offered a basic living income of \$2,000. We are calling for a universal basic income for people with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities who receive disability supports. There is no benefit to society in keeping people poor and vulnerable.

I'd like to conclude with the recommendations that follow.

The first is to develop a coordinated emergency response plan for people with disabilities, to be implemented across Canada, so that we are ready to respond when local, provincial, territorial and nationwide emergencies arise in the future.

The second recommendation is to increase the amount of accessible and affordable housing across Canada.

The third is to supply community-based health care workers with personal protection equipment.

The fourth is to continue to pay personal support workers what they are worth now and into the future.

Next is to ensure that payments made through direct funding programs—funding that supports people living in the community—increase, to ensure that people can live safely and independently in the community.

Another is to give people on disability supports the financial aid needed to cover extra disability-related costs associated with this pandemic.

Another is to continue video conferencing health services after COVID-19.

Another recommendation is to implement a national strategy to address violence against women.

Another is to implement a universal basic income for all Canadians, including people with disabilities.

Finally, we recommend implementing a nationwide strategy for disability and work to increase workforce participation.

Since March 11, when the World Health Organization first assessed COVID-19 as a pandemic, the most vulnerable among us have waited for support. All Canadians want to live with respect and with dignity. We're all in this together, and nobody should be left behind.

Thank you.

• (1235)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Adair.

[*Translation*]

We now go to the Fédération des mouvements personne d'abord du Québec.

You have the floor for a total of seven minutes. Who would like to speak?

Mr. Villeneuve, we are listening.

**Mr. Olivier Villeneuve (Director, Mouvement Personne D'Abord de Saint-Jérôme, Sainte-Thérèse et Saint-Eustache, Fédération des Mouvements Personne D'Abord du Québec):** Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Olivier Villeneuve, and I am the director of the Mouvement personne d'abord de Sainte-Thérèse organization, whose primary mission is to collectively defend the rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Our philosophy is to put individuals first. They are the ones who decide what our major policies will be and what cases we will handle. That is why I will provide a brief explanation. Afterwards, Louise Bourgeois, who is living with an intellectual disability, will speak to you about her experience during the pandemic.

During a pandemic, the various levels of government have a vested interest in every citizen having access to information whose format and content are accessible with regard to their condition. In that context, information comes before everything else. If I am well informed, my behaviours will reflect the best practices in terms of prevention and contagion, and I will tend to go to the right place to get tested, depending on my situation. What is even more important is that being well informed will alleviate Canadians' feelings of uncertainty and their distress, and it will help them maintain good mental health.

As a society, we have a duty to do everything possible so that every citizen, regardless of their condition, would have an equal opportunity to access understandable information at the same time. This is a right to equality protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

For people who speak English, the content will be translated into their language. For people who are blind, a Braille version will be provided. A person with an intellectual disability will also need the content and format of the information they receive to be adapted, so that they could play their role of responsible citizen.

Someone living with an intellectual disability will learn better if the right communication strategies are used, just as sign language is

a good strategy to support a deaf person. They will understand the message content better if the information is spoken or written in their language. Verbally, it is recommended to use short sentences with concrete and simple words to convey one idea. Speaking to them slowly without, however, patronizing them, is a winning strategy.

As for written information, it should be pointed out that some people cannot read or have low literacy. For example, posters or information texts on the pandemic should always contain sentences that use simple and concrete words, as well as images supporting the content of the information.

We have surveyed some 50 individuals with intellectual disabilities over the past few weeks, and it is clear that COVID-19 is negatively impacting their quality of life significantly. Their safe haven has collapsed in the wake of radical changes to their routines. The safe haven of their feeling of control over their life has also collapsed, given the difficulty in processing all that complex and contradictory information. We currently all feel like we are living on another planet. Imagine the tremendous feeling of emptiness experienced by those for whom processing information as it becomes available is a bigger challenge.

With the stage set, we respectfully submit to you two potential solutions related to the issue of availability of accessible and understandable information for all Canadians, including those with an intellectual disability.

First, the federal government should constantly have the reflex to provide information in plain language. Second, federal officials who are experts in dealing with people with an intellectual disability must ensure that communications, regardless of their format, are aligned with the good communication strategies I have just outlined.

On behalf of our organization's members, we want to sincerely thank you for this highly noble exercise of making Canada more inclusive.

In conclusion, here is the testimony of Ms. Bourgeois, an adult who is living with an intellectual disability in the context of this pandemic.

I yield the floor to her.

• (1240)

**Ms. Louise Bourgeois (President, Fédération des Mouvements Personne D'Abord du Québec):** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for inviting me to testify before the committee.

At first, I was scared. I had a lot of concerns. I was wondering whether the Mouvement personne d'abord de Sainte-Thérèse would be closed forever. I did not know where things were going. I felt alone and isolated. I was worried about the pandemic because, for me, it was something unknown. I did not know what COVID-19 was. It was the first time I had heard of it, and I was confused.

I had a very hard time obtaining information. It was not clear. It was not reassuring to hear that we had to stay at home. Did this mean that we had to stay inside and never go out again? The information was arriving very late. I would hear the information and, two minutes later, simplified information would arrive.

What is more, access to protective equipment is difficult for our members, who do not have a lot of money to purchase it. So the Mouvement will provide all the protective equipment, including masks.

In addition, when it comes to information and explanations, big words should not be used because our members have a hard time understanding. The information must be clear and accompanied by images, pictograms. That could be an image with three tables and an individual at each table, with an arrow between two people and the number 2 to indicate that there should be a distance of two metres between them.

Thank you for having me and for allowing me to provide my testimony.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bourgeois.

[English]

Folks, we have about 17 minutes left until we're scheduled to adjourn. In order that everyone will have a chance to pose a question, I propose that we shorten this round and allocate four minutes to each party. I hope that's in order, because if it isn't, we'll have no choice but to revert to the Standing Orders, which means that not everyone will have a chance.

We will start with Mr. Albas for four minutes, please.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In regard to the previous testimony in the first hour, some, like Mr. Moody, for example, weren't able to complete their statements. I was hoping that you would give the opportunity to all witnesses who weren't able to complete their statements to submit their thoughts to the committee. Mr Moody did have written notes.

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for being here today.

I would like to let you know, Mr. Chair, that I'll share my time with MP Rosemarie Falk.

We've heard repeated concerns about access for persons with disabilities who were in hospitals or care centres at the time of the lockdown. There was a case in my province of British Columbia, in South Surrey, where a woman with a disability, cerebral palsy, was not able to be seen by her caregiver or any of her family as she was dying. I understand that British Columbia has made some improvements on this front.

I would like to ask some of the witnesses here if they feel other provinces have had similar instances. Are your provinces, or the federal government, doing anything to address this problem?

I don't believe anyone should be faced with that kind of circumstance. It would be heartbreaking for me if a family member were to pass away without seeing someone.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Adair, please.

**Mr. Bill Adair:** Thank you for that question and that point.

The disability community, broadly speaking, applauds the new policy that the Province of British Columbia has released in the last two days regarding this issue. I completely agree that we should be calling on the Government of Canada to encourage and support all provinces and territories to adopt a similar policy to ensure that people are not left alone in a hospital setting, and also so that they can fully participate in decisions regarding their own medical care.

Thank you.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** If no one else wants to answer, I'd be happy to move on.

Since I have you here, Mr. Adair, one of the things you've raised is the challenges that persons with disabilities face every day. One thing I've seen expressed by many advocates is barriers in public spaces. Persons with disabilities are largely confined to their homes under normal circumstances, yet many people are spending this crisis saying it's torture to essentially live the life that many persons with disabilities live with every day.

What would you like to say to those people, and are you hopeful that this crisis will show how barriers to movement and participation hinder everyone, particularly given the attitudes people have expressed?

**Mr. Bill Adair:** I think there are lessons in COVID-19 for people to learn in all areas of life. Certainly people living with disabilities face a great deal of isolation, more than the general population. It shows their resilience and their capacity and their ability to be creative and to find ways to find meaning in life even though they are often living in isolation.

We're hoping that people in the general population have a newfound understanding and respect for some of the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

Thank you for that great question.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Thank you.

I'll pass the rest of my time to Rosemarie Falk, please.

**The Chair:** He left you about 20 seconds, Ms. Falk. You have a quick question and a quick answer.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** No, that's okay.

I was part of the study on Bill C-81. I recall the need for plain language and that it was kind of drilled at us that the government has a responsibility in helping create a culture of inclusion and equity.



I quickly want to know if any of you could provide this committee with examples of how the government can better ensure accessibility in its COVID-19 response.

**The Chair:** Mr. Onley, please give a short answer.

**Hon. David Onley:** Look at it through the prism of the Accessible Canada Act. Start there as a way of understanding the best way forward. The more the nature of that act is implemented, the more generally accessible society is going to be. The first people who are going to benefit from it are those with disabilities, but then everyone will benefit from it.

I used the example earlier of the automatic infrared doors. How many of us in the future are going to want to open and close doors unless we're wearing gloves? Wherever there's an opportunity to implement that aspect of accessibility, it benefits everyone.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Onley. Thank you, Ms. Falk.

Mr. Adair, I would encourage you, if you wish, to provide any supplementary information in written form. I want to make sure everyone gets a fair shot to ask questions here.

Next we're going to Mr. Turnbull, please, for four minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with MP Vaughan, so I'm going to try to time myself and stick to about two minutes here.

Thank you, panellists. I admire all of you and the work you do every day.

Mr. Onley, one thing we've been hearing is that some people living with disabilities are concerned about provincial clawbacks to their social assistance. Those who qualify for the CERB are obviously getting the \$2,000, but they're worried about those provincial clawbacks.

Our government has stated very clearly that it believes the CERB needs to be considered exempt from the clawbacks provinces and territories often employ. Minister Qualtrough in particular has been working with her provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that the CERB and provincial and territorial social assistance programs work together and support Canadians so they're not penalized for receiving the CERB.

To date, there's a mixed review from provinces and territories. Some are clawing back partially, while some are clawing back the same amount.

I wonder, Mr. Onley, if you could tell us about how those clawbacks might hurt people living with disabilities. Can you please share the impact it may have on them?

• (1250)

**Hon. David Onley:** Certainly. It's a very good question.

Fundamentally, I find the clawback of benefits for people with disabilities, such as the ODSP in Ontario, which is really the area I know best, is basically obscene. The amount of money provided by ODSP is essentially at poverty level. Nobody lives well at that level; they just exist.

These are extraordinary times. Often this additional benefit that is being made available just inches these people above the poverty level. They are just trying to decide, literally, between heating and food. I know that has become almost a cliché, but I interact with people who face that kind of decision.

I urge all members to continue pressing on that level, insofar as the provinces are concerned, in terms of not having clawbacks, and in fact to look at it the other way. Look at it as what we can do to encourage people to pursue some process of income without worrying that this amount of income is going to end up in a clawback from their benefits, which is a common fear.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Mr. Onley. That's a great response. I appreciate it.

I'm going to pass my time over to Mr. Vaughan, even though I have a lot more questions.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I have just a couple of quick questions.

Mr. Adair, you talked about supportive housing. There's been a lot of focus on long-term care housing. That's one form of support, but often people with disabilities are pushed into long-term care despite their age because of the lack of supportive housing. Would you agree that the issue here is broadening supportive housing across the country in our response, and not just long-term care?

**Mr. Bill Adair:** Yes, I would agree with that fully.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Mr. Onley, the national housing strategy has set very strong standards around accessibility, in that 20% of units must be built to universal design. Is there any justification for watering down accessible standards at this time because of the crisis?

**Hon. David Onley:** No, there is none at all.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Would you support making the accessible universal-design units a character of all new builds under the national housing strategy?

**Hon. David Onley:** Absolutely, every single one, yes.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** In terms of this issue of supportive housing, again, for people who require support to live independently, whether that's attendant care or other forms of support, if we limit it to long-term care, will we miss the impact of the lack of supports for people with disabilities if all we focus on is age supports?

**The Chair:** Please give a short answer. We're out of time.

**Hon. David Onley:** Yes, absolutely.

**The Chair:** That's a really excellent short answer.

Thank you very much, Mr. Onley. Thank you very much, Mr. Vaughan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have four minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

I will put general questions to the representatives of the Fédération des mouvements personne d'abord du Québec, whom I thank for joining us.

As you have already said, we are all experiencing a storm, so I dare not imagine the turmoil this implies for individuals with a disability.

You talked a lot about the need for information. Could you tell us what simplified information and language are? Are there ways, such as a website, to provide that?

• (1255)

**Mr. Olivier Villeneuve:** Thank you for your question, Ms. Chabot.

There is actually extensive literature on the issue. In Quebec, there have been numerous partnerships among universities, the health industry and the community to seek out evidence and to do what is best.

There is a website called Infos-accessibles, which provides strategies for that purpose. It provides references on good practices to simplify texts, and it provides examples on good writing practices and those that aim to use images to support the message.

So it is extremely important to keep in mind the condition of individuals with an intellectual disability. From 1% to 3% of people are living with an intellectual disability—so about 500,000 Canadians.

Even without a diagnosis of intellectual disability, many people have what is referred to as low literacy. By keeping in mind that many struggle to interpret the information provided to them, the authorities would be helping those people out. Especially during COVID-19, information is coming from all over the place. One day, it's white, and another day, it's black, and that is normal. It's an inexact science, and an attempt is being made to explain it.

To answer your question, Ms. Chabot, there are indeed websites for an organization or a country that wants to seek out content and know how to make its communications accessible. The website Infos-accessibles is one good example of that.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I will not be able to address Ms. Bourgeois directly, as time is running out, but I think that she mentioned images.

When the entire population was told to wash their hands and to keep a distance of two metres, how did that translate for those individuals, either for supporters or themselves? How can we help make that concrete through your movement or through other methods?

**Mr. Olivier Villeneuve:** Many organizations like ours are currently receiving information in real time, which they then explain. That information is translated into simplified language. So there is a lag between when news comes out and when our members can receive it.

Ms. Bourgeois spoke about this earlier. Scientific literature provides proven communication strategies. We must use simple texts, short sentences consisting of a single idea and as little punctuation as possible. There must not be any commas or semicolons. We use large print in our posters, with space between the lines.

The use of images, which Ms. Bourgeois mentioned, is a very reassuring referent for low literacy individuals. Low literacy does not

affect only people with an intellectual disability, but also a very large number of Canadians, unfortunately.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve and Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Next we have Ms. Kwan, who has the last round for four minutes.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much. My question is for Mr. Onley, but I don't know if he's still on our call here.

As my first question, the government decided not to go with a direct universal payment for everyone in this pandemic. Instead they went with the CERB, which is a complicated process. We are learning that this program excludes a lot of people, including seniors and people with disabilities on fixed incomes.

To address that aspect, about three weeks ago now a unanimous motion was passed in the House of Commons. It called for the government to act immediately to provide support to seniors and people with disabilities. The government came forward with a one-time payment for seniors, and people with disabilities are still waiting to see what will happen there. To that end, we need action immediately to support people with disabilities.

Would you support a call for an initiative similar to that of the CERB for people with disabilities?

• (1300)

**Hon. David Onley:** Yes, I certainly would, without any reservation whatsoever.

I think one of the things to underscore is that many people with disabilities, as I've learned, just don't have access to devices or contacts or even things we take for granted, such as the Internet or cell-phones. They just don't, so they often get left out in the shuffle, if you will. Anything that can be done that is simple, straightforward and very clear is going to hit the maximum number of people, but especially it's going to hit people who, quite frankly, in many instances, are unfortunately just not as dialed in as we are.

We have to also wrap our heads around the notion of looking at all other minorities in our society as either being people with able-bodied conditions or disabled. Unfortunately, what happens is that individuals with disabilities get clustered at the end of the train. We often hear of the various minorities—and I'll just mention a few—as indigenous, women, LGBTQ and the disabled. Well, there's no such thing as the disabled by itself. There are men who are able-bodied men or who are disabled; there are indigenous people who are able-bodied indigenous people or who are disabled, so we need to be thinking of it in that context every single time we talk about any other minority group. We have to automatically think that there are two sets to every other minority group: able-bodied and disabled. Until we do that, unfortunately, people with disabilities get left at the very end of the train.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Villeneuve, would you answer the same question?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Olivier Villeneuve:** Was the question for me?

**The Chair:** Yes. You have the floor, Mr. Villeneuve, for a quick answer please.

**Mr. Olivier Villeneuve:** I'm sorry, I did not hear the question.

Would it be possible to repeat it quickly?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Would you support a universal direct payment for people with disabilities, similar to the CERB?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Olivier Villeneuve:** Absolutely. People with a disability sometimes have a severe limitation to employment. So they depend on social solidarity. Given what is currently happening, the pandemic is changing many people's habits. To make ends meet, some people have had to get food assistance, but that is becoming increasingly difficult. So people have additional expenses.

If there were a more financially viable measure than social solidarity, we would clearly not be against it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Villeneuve.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Ms. Kwan.

We've now reached our allocated time for today's meeting.

Mr. Adair, I am so sorry. This is the second time I looked over there when you had your hand up, and we didn't get to you.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for their patience with the technical challenges that we faced today and remind you, especially when our time has been shortened because of those challenges, that you are absolutely welcome and encouraged to augment your answers or to provide any representations in writing that you wish. They will absolutely be considered by the committee, and we are extremely grateful that you were able to join us here today.

I also want to thank my colleagues very much for the accommodation in the second round to ensure that everyone was treated fairly.

With that, I wish everyone—

• (1305)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Chair, may I just raise one point? It may be a point of order.

I wonder, for future meetings, whether we could have our technical people do a test run with the witnesses before our actual meeting so that we know that they are set up. This seems to be an ongoing problem, and we lose a lot of time as a result. If we can prepare witnesses so that they are set up with their remote systems even the day before they are to appear, we can hopefully minimize the delays that are taking place as a result of technical difficulties.

**The Chair:** I'll undertake to have that conversation. Thanks for the suggestion.

Thank you very much, everyone. Enjoy your weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>