



Canadian
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commission

Commission
canadienne des
droits de la personne

Human Rights

What we learned: Housing for people with disabilities

Canadian Human Rights Commission

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About us

The Canadian Human Rights Commission promotes and protects people's rights in Canada. We make sure people are treated fairly.

We also track disability rights in Canada. Canada has agreed to follow the rules in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention is an agreement. It protects the rights of people with disabilities. The Commission tracks how Canada puts the Convention into action. You can learn more about this work here:

www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/monitoring-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities

The Federal Housing Advocate helps promote and protect housing rights in Canada. The Advocate monitors housing issues. This includes barriers to housing for people with disabilities. The Advocate's Office is based at the Commission. You can learn more about their work here:

www.housingchrc.ca/en

The Commission and the Advocate work together. We are monitoring the right to housing for people with disabilities in Canada.

The right to housing for people with disabilities

In 2020, we asked people with disabilities what issues are most important for them. Many people said housing was a top issue.

People with disabilities in Canada face many barriers to housing. Many people are forced to live in institutions. They can't get the support they need to live independently. Many people can't find safe and accessible homes. People are struggling to pay their rent. People often experience homelessness because of these barriers.

Some people with disabilities are turning to [Medical Assistance in Dying](#) (MAID) because they can't access housing and the support they need. This needs to change.

We want to help improve this situation. We are collecting information about the housing situation of people with disabilities in Canada. We will use this information to advocate for change.

We developed a system to track this information. It is called our monitoring framework. Here are examples of questions we are asking:

- How many people with disabilities are living in institutions?
- How much money do people with disabilities spend on housing?
- Do people's homes meet their accessibility needs?

You can learn more about our monitoring framework here:

<https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/monitoring-the-right-housing-people-disabilities>

What we did

We wanted to learn more about people's housing experiences. In 2022, we held an event with people with disabilities. We called this event our "Learning Circles."

We planned this event with people with disabilities and housing experts. More than sixty (60) people participated in the event. They were people with disabilities, and their families and caregivers. Some of them have experienced homelessness and housing issues.

We asked people these questions:

- What do people need to know about the housing rights of people with disabilities?
- Who is being left out of these discussions about housing? What stories can they share with us?

We thank everyone for giving us the chance to learn from them. This report talks about what we learned. It also shares ideas about how to make things better for people with disabilities.

What we learned

Here are some of the things people shared with us about their housing situations.

- **Governments should work together.**

Canada has different levels of government. For example, there is the federal government for all of Canada. Provinces and territories have their own governments. Cities and towns also have their own governments.

These governments do not always work well together. They do not agree about who should help with housing. They do not agree about who should pay for it.

People with disabilities are stuck waiting when governments disagree. People do not know where to turn for help.

- **Caregivers need support.**

Many people help care for people with disabilities. Some family members care for people with disabilities their whole lives. This can make it hard for caregivers to work. It makes it hard for them to support themselves. Families sometimes become poor because of this. Sometimes they lose their homes.

Children with disabilities still need help after their parents die. Often there is no plan for this. People have to leave their community because they cannot get support at home.

- **Safety is important.**

People with disabilities need to feel safe in their homes and communities. Many people with disabilities don't have a lot of money. They end up living in places that are not safe or accessible.

People with disabilities can experience abuse and violence at home. If someone at home wants to hurt them, they cannot leave. This is worse for people who also belong to other groups. For example, this includes people who are:

- Racialized
- Indigenous
- 2SLGBTQQIA+
- Women

People do not always think about how to keep people with disabilities safe. Some people with disabilities have asked for [Medical Assistance in Dying](#) (MAID) because they cannot find safe homes and support.

- **People need money.**

Many people with disabilities don't have enough money. Prices in Canada have gone up a lot. Housing prices are much higher than before. Support payments for people with disabilities have not gone up enough. People can't pay for housing and other needs.

Different support programs do not work together. When people with disabilities get new benefits, they often lose other benefits. People can lose benefits if they make changes in their life. This includes changes like:

- Moving in with a partner
- Getting married
- Moving to a different town or province
- Getting a job

Governments do not seem to think that paying support to people with disabilities is important. Community groups who support people with disabilities don't get enough money either.

- **Housing is a human right.**

People see housing as a thing you own. They do not see it as a human right.

People think everyone should pay for their own housing. But some people do not have enough money for this. There are not enough homes for those people. There are long waiting lists for housing. People with disabilities have to stay in housing that is not good for them while they wait.

People with disabilities are not treated fairly when they look for housing. They face discrimination. It is hard for people with disabilities to protect themselves. People keep treating them unfairly.

There are programs and rules for people with disabilities who need housing. These rules are hard to understand. They are hard to follow. There is not enough support for people who need help. People with disabilities have to make their own support systems. They need their friends and family to help them.

Sometimes governments try to help. They ask people with disabilities what they need. They have a lot of meetings. This takes time and energy from people with disabilities. And then nothing changes.

- **Housing should be accessible.**

People with disabilities need housing that is accessible. Many homes have barriers. For example, they do not have elevators or ramps. They only have stairs. This means people with disabilities cannot get in or move around. People with disabilities should have housing that meets their needs.

People's needs change over time. People's housing should support this. People should not have to leave their home when their needs change.

Housing should make it easy for people with disabilities to be part of the community. Some people with disabilities need help to do things. For example, they may need support workers to help them cook or clean.

People should think about what people with disabilities need when they build new housing. Housing should meet people's needs. We need clear rules about how to make housing accessible. People need to follow those rules.

- **People are not treated fairly.**

People who provide housing do not respect the rights of people with disabilities. This includes landlords. It also includes building owners and support workers.

Landlords have too much power over people with disabilities. They decide where people can live. They can force people to move. They do not respect people with disabilities. They only care about making money. Landlords do not understand what people with disabilities need. For example, they do not know that Deaf people use sign language. Landlords do not try to meet people's needs.

There is still a lot of ableism in housing. People with disabilities are not treated equally. People need to work hard to change this.

- **People still live in institutions.**

Many people with disabilities are forced to live in institutions. People cannot get the help they need to stay in their own homes. They have to move to an institution to get help. They have to leave the people who care about them. They must leave their family and community when they need them the most.

People with disabilities should be able to choose where and how to live. They should not have to move to institutions to get help.

- **Housing should be inclusive.**

Housing rules and programs should include everyone. People with disabilities should help make rules and programs. Other groups should also be involved. For example, this includes people who:

- Are poor
- Do not have a place to live
- Have trouble finding a place to live
- Have called help lines for housing
- Have issues with substances. This includes issues with drugs and alcohol.
- Have trouble speaking, reading, or writing
- Live in Northern and rural areas

People should be paid for their time and energy when they help. This will make sure people can participate. Everyone benefits when things are more inclusive.

Calls to action

We have ideas about how Canada can make this situation better. We call these ideas “calls to action.” We think people who make decisions about housing should do these things.

We developed these ideas with people with disabilities. Some of these ideas come from our Learning Circles event. Some are from the United Nations Convention and other human rights documents. We may update these calls to action in the future.

1. Give more support to people with disabilities.

- Give people with disabilities the support they need to live on their own. This will help them live with dignity. It will let them stay in their community.
- People with disabilities all have different needs. Services and supports should meet each person’s needs. Here are some things people might need:
 - Help with cooking and cleaning
 - Help with personal care
 - Help to run errands
 - Help to go to appointments
 - Mental health support
 - Social support
- Support people through all stages of their life. For example, support:
 - Children
 - Youth
 - Adults
 - Older persons
- Support people who are often left behind. For example, support people with:
 - Intellectual disabilities
 - Cognitive disabilities
 - Mental health disabilities

- Give special support to people with disabilities who are new to Canada. People from other cultures might think about disability in different ways.
- Support people with disabilities who live in the north of Canada and in rural communities. For example, give them support with:
 - Shelter and housing
 - Finding work and working
 - Internet and phone access
- Make sure all supports and services are accessible. They shouldn't cost too much. They should be easy to find and use. They should be in plain language.
- Support community groups. These groups work hard to help people with disabilities and make things better for them. These groups are connected to the people they help. They are trusted. But these groups do not have enough money. They need support so they can keep helping people. They should get the money they need. Their work is important.

2. Give more money to people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities need enough money to live. They should get support if they need it. They should get more money when prices go up.
- People should get enough money to pay for things they need to help with their disability. For example, this money should pay for medical supplies. It should pay for things like wheelchairs and hearing aids.
- People should also have enough money to pay for things everyone needs. For example, they should be able to pay for housing, clothes, food, and activities.
- People with disabilities should be able to make different choices. They should not lose money or support if they make certain choices. For example, they should not lose money if they get a job, move in with a partner, or get married.
- Programs that give people money should be easy to understand. For example, this includes the Canada Disability Benefit. These programs should be easy for people with disabilities to use.

- People with disabilities should help design these programs. They should also help put programs into action. It is important to make sure:
 - Everyone is included in programs
 - Everyone can access programs
 - People can make their own decisions
 - People have choices
 - People can live with dignity
- Support people who care for people with disabilities. Caregiving costs money. Caregivers should get money to help pay for this.

3. Make housing cheaper.

- Set up programs to make housing cheaper. For example:
 - Set limits on what landlords charge for housing. These limits are called “rent caps”.
 - Provide more subsidized housing. That means housing that costs less. Governments and other groups help pay for this kind of housing.

These programs would help people with disabilities. They would also help other people who don't have a lot of money.

4. Make housing more accessible.

- Make rules about building housing that is accessible. These rules should be followed in every province and territory. They should meet the needs of people with all kinds of disabilities. For example, they should meet the needs of people who:
 - Use wheelchairs
 - Are blind or Deaf
 - Have intellectual disabilities
 - Have invisible disabilities

- Include rules about fixing equipment like elevators and visual fire alarms. These things make buildings accessible for people with disabilities. Put systems in place to check these things to make sure they are working.
- Do not use government money to create more housing barriers. Use this money to build accessible and adaptable housing. Accessible housing is inclusive of everyone's needs. Adaptable housing can easily be changed to meet a person's specific accessibility needs.
- Build different types and sizes of accessible housing. People with disabilities have different needs. Some people want to live alone. Some want to live with family or friends. There should be accessible housing for single people, couples, and families.
- Encourage landlords and builders to improve accessibility. For example, lower their taxes if they make their buildings more accessible for people with disabilities.
- Give people with disabilities more money to adapt their homes. People often need to change things in their homes to meet their own accessibility needs. These changes can cost a lot of money. People need help to pay for this.

5. Improve the way governments work together.

- All governments need to help improve housing for people with disabilities. They must work together. They must respect the housing rights of people with disabilities.
- Do not make people with disabilities wait for help when governments disagree with each other. Sometimes governments do not agree about who should help with housing. Governments should make sure people with disabilities get the help they need right away. Governments can decide later on who should pay for it. This idea is based on a rule called "Jordan's Principle." You can read about this rule here:

www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824#chp04

6. Protect the health and safety of people with disabilities.

- Make sure people with disabilities get the help they need if there is an emergency. When governments plan for emergencies, they should include people with disabilities. Emergency plans should make sure that:
 - People can get out of dangerous places
 - People with disabilities have extra help if they need it
 - Emergency shelters are accessible
 - Information is accessible to everyone. There should be helpers who know sign language. There should also be help for people who cannot read or talk.
- Make sure people think about the health and safety of people with disabilities. This is important for landlords and people who build housing. They should think about the needs of people with all kinds of disabilities. For example:
 - Some people are very sensitive to different chemicals. They need places to live that will not make them sick.
 - Some people have trouble walking. They need floors that are safe to walk on and not too slippery.
 - Snow and ice make it hard for some people to move around. Doorways and entrances to housing need to be kept clear for them.
- Protect people with disabilities from violence and abuse at home. This includes abuse from people they live with. For example, it includes abuse from family members and partners. It also includes abuse from support workers.
- Support people with disabilities who experience violence or abuse. They may need:
 - Emergency support workers who know how to help people with disabilities
 - Emergency shelters where they can stay. These shelters need to be accessible.
 - Help to care for children and families
 - Access to phones and the internet
 - Help to leave their homes. They may need to leave quickly without telling their landlord first.
 - Help to find a safe, new place to live
 - Help to move into their new place

7. Make sure rules and programs are inclusive.

- Include people with disabilities when making rules, programs, and services. Everyone should be able to participate. Include people with all kinds of disabilities.
- Think about everyone's needs when making rules, programs, and services. Think about the needs of people with all kinds of disabilities. For example, think about the needs of people with:
 - Intellectual disabilities
 - Mental health disabilities
 - Invisible disabilities

Also think about the needs of other groups who are often left out. For example, think about people who are:

- Poor
- Racialized
- Indigenous
- 2SLGBTQQIA+
- Women
- Living in Northern and rural areas

All these people need to be listened to. This will help make rules, programs, and services better for everyone. People should be paid for helping with this work.

- Protect housing as a human right for everyone. This right is protected in international law. Peoples' rights are all connected. If people do not have housing, they are less safe. It is harder for them to work. It is harder for them to go to school. Protecting the right to housing helps protect people's other rights.
- Collect more information about the housing situations of people with disabilities. For example, governments should collect information about:
 - The types of places where people with disabilities live. This includes institutions like group homes, long-term care homes, and prisons.
 - The problems that people with disabilities have with their housing.

- How much money people with disabilities have.
- Collect information about people who are often left out. This includes people who do not have homes, or who have trouble finding a place to live.

8. Stop discrimination and ableism.

- Teach people about ableism and the rights of people with disabilities. Give this training to people who provide housing. This will help make sure they treat people with disabilities fairly. Involve people with disabilities when developing this training.

9. Do not put people with disabilities in institutions.

- Close large institutions for people with disabilities. Governments should work together to make this happen.
- Give people with disabilities the support they need to live in the community. Do not force people to live in group homes, long-term care homes, or hospitals. People should get the help they need to live on their own.
- Support people with disabilities when they leave institutions. Help them move back into the community. This will help make sure they do not have to go back into institutions.
- Allow people with disabilities to choose their housing. People should be able to choose:
 - Their type of housing
 - Where they live
 - Who they live with
- Protect the rights of people who live in institutions. This includes people with disabilities who live in prisons. Make sure these people are treated fairly. Make sure they have the supports they need.
- Canada has agreed to follow the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Convention is an agreement. It says people in institutions cannot be treated badly. You can read the Convention here:

www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading

The Convention has rules about tracking how people in institutions are treated. Those rules are in a document called the “Optional Protocol.” Canada should agree to follow the Optional Protocol. This would help protect the rights of people with disabilities who have to live in institutions. You can read the Optional Protocol here:

www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel

We wrote a letter that explains why Canada should follow the Optional Protocol. You can read our letter here:

www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/publications/chrc-and-oci-open-letter-calling-canadas-ratification-the-opcat

10. Make it easier for people with disabilities to have justice.

- Help people with disabilities and their caregivers understand their rights. Many people do not know about the laws that protect their rights. When people use laws to protect themselves, we say that they “have justice.” People can’t have justice if they do not know their rights.
- Give people with disabilities the support they need to have justice. Laws and rules are often hard to understand. People with disabilities often need help from experts, like lawyers. This takes time and money. People with disabilities should get help with this. They should have money to hire lawyers. They should have information about what to do when they need help.
- Make sure rules and systems that deal with people’s rights are inclusive. This includes systems like:
 - Courts
 - Human rights commissions and tribunals
 - Special courts that deal with disagreements between landlords and tenants. These courts are often called “landlord-tenant tribunals”.

These rules and systems should be accessible to people with all kinds of disabilities.

- Add protection for “social condition” to the Canadian Human Rights Act. This law protects some groups of people from being treated unfairly. For example, it protects people from being treated unfairly because of their disability, their age, and their sex.

This law does not protect people who are treated unfairly because of their “social condition”. Social condition means how much money a person has. It also means whether they receive social assistance.

Many people with disabilities are poor. Many receive social assistance. People with disabilities are often treated unfairly because of this.

Adding “social condition” to the law would help protect people with disabilities. It would protect people in some housing situations. For example, it would help protect people who live on military bases. It would also protect people who live in Indigenous communities.

- Make sure all people with disabilities can have justice. Some people with disabilities face more barriers because they belong to certain groups. For example, this includes people with disabilities who are:
 - Poor
 - Racialized
 - Indigenous
 - Women
 - 2SLGBTQQA+

Support these groups to make sure they can have justice.