



**Response to
Opening Doors: Manitoba's Commitment to
Persons with Disabilities
Discussion Paper Issued by the Manitoba
Disabilities Issues Office
2009**

Submitted to
Honourable Gord Mackintosh, MLA
Minister Responsible for Persons with Disabilities
Disabilities Issues Office

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This paper reflects the feedback, comments and recommendations of March of Dimes Canada in response to select sections and topics of *Opening Doors: Manitoba's Commitment to Persons with Disabilities – A Discussion Paper*, which was issued by the Disabilities Issues Office of the Government of Manitoba in June 2009.

Housing

Your stated objective here is to improve the availability of quality housing for persons with disabilities that is affordable, accessible, supportive and safe.

In response to this objective, a general recommendation would be to establish annual targets and goals so that quality improvements in new and existing units are measurable and transparent. We also recommend tabling such annual progress to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

- Your work in promoting visitable design is highly commendable, and we encourage you to continue as much as possible.
- Amendments to the Manitoba Building Code, scheduled for release in 2011, should require all new construction and major renovations to be barrier-free, and incorporate a percentage of visitable design into new construction and major renovations.
- March of Dimes, which operates a Non-Profit Housing Corporation in Ontario and collaborates with various private sector partners, is an example of the interconnected networks through which the Government of Manitoba could partner to better promote accessible design to landlords and builders.

Employment and Income Security

The threefold objective here is to establish the Province of Manitoba as a model employer for persons with disabilities, to increase the employment rate among persons with disabilities, and to enhance the income security of persons with disabilities.

- The Civil Service Diversity Strategy establishes a commitment to increase the number of persons with disabilities in the civil service up to five percent by 2012. We recommend a higher target, and one that reflects the national population of persons with disabilities: a minimum commitment of 15%. Reflecting the national average would certainly position Manitoba as a true leader.
- The government-wide disability awareness campaign is an effective way of promoting the advantages of hiring employees with disabilities. We recommend that the Civil Service Commission augment the role of the Program Coordinator and establish a full-

support Access Centre for employees with disabilities. Such centres exist in most post-secondary institutions and help provide a “one-stop shop” for information, community liaison, advocacy, education and supports.

- As part of your Future Directions you explain that the Province will work with private sector employers to promote the hiring of persons with disabilities. We recommend that you engage the expertise and support of organizations like March of Dimes, which offers Employment Services that benefit both employers and employees with disabilities.
- In terms of what can be done to encourage private sector employers in Manitoba to hire persons with disabilities, we recommend immediate steps that would facilitate a process of identifying, eliminating and preventing barriers to employment in the private sector. In Ontario this will be accomplished, in part, through an Accessible Employment Standard, a regulation of provincial legislation that will require employers to ensure their workplaces are accessible and document steps made to ensure that recruitment, retention and promotional measures are submitted to the government on an annual basis.

Rights and Justice

As regards the objective to promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities, we recommend, as a first step, a consultation that considers the efficacy of introducing legislation like Ontario’s Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and specifically work to ensure consistency with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We envision a nationally coordinated framework of such legislation, with provincial enabling statutes, jointly creating an environment in which all Canadians live and work in a legislatively harmonized barrier-free society.

Disability Supports & Training and Education

This section has as its objective the development and maintenance of supports for children and adults with disabilities.

- We commend the measures taken thus far by the Government of Manitoba. As a next step, we recommend the introduction of a provincially-funded Conductive Education program in Manitoba. Conductive Education, a program administered by March of Dimes, merges elements of education and rehabilitation to help people with neurologically-based movement difficulties improve their independence and mobility, which also builds confidence and self-esteem.

Accessibility

When considering your Accessibility objective, which is to promote accessible, inclusive communities through enhancements to transportation, recreational opportunities and infrastructure, we strongly encourage a consideration of the regulatory framework of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

- The Act will contain five regulatory Standards: Customer Service (which is now law), Transportation, Employment, Information & Communication, and Built Environment. Each Standard works to ensure that all public sector and private sector organizations in Ontario are barrier-free in their respective areas of compliance by 2025.
- We further recommend the use of both direct funding and tax expenditures to promote enhanced accessibility throughout the Province.

Community Living

One of the questions posed in this section directly relates to many of our initiatives and the work of other organizations nationally on the caregiving front: “how can we better support persons with disabilities as they, their families and caregivers age?”

This, we feel, is a forward-looking question. People not only age *with* a disability, but often age *into* a disability. Families and caregivers fill critical roles, as your consultation questions imply. How do we begin to recognize, support and enhance these roles?

The answer is not simple, but could manifest in a province-wide consultation on designing a comprehensive caregiving strategy. And herein we link the section on “Smarter Government” to this and many of our preceding recommendations.

Many of the concepts of aging in place or caregiving are not new; but how our governments respond to, and plan for the future, as regards these concepts is new. There are governments, in the U.K. and New Zealand, for example, that have been leading the charge on incorporating caregiving into their programs and services around people with disabilities and seniors; so much so that new government agencies and departments have been created to design and deliver programs and services through smarter, more effective and more efficient government. In some cases, in the U.K., for example, the public policy and public administration around caregiving have yielded significant cost savings while simultaneously delivering more effective programs.

Concluding Remarks

It is encouraging to see governments such as yours conducting consultations to determine how to more effectively deliver programs and services to people with disabilities.

March of Dimes Canada has worked collaboratively with many governments at all levels for more than five decades. We would be delighted to work with the Government of Manitoba in helping devise sustainable and stronger public policy solutions.

We also bring to your attention an international conference that we coordinate on the very issues that your Discussion Paper highlights. Scheduled for June 2011 in Toronto, the Festival of International Conferences on Caregiving, Disability, Aging and Technology brings together delegates from around the world and from a variety of perspectives. More information may be found at 222.ficcdat.ca.

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