

COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group (CDAG) in Canada

MISSING BILLION

Title: Canadian COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group (CDAG)

Geography and scale: National; across Canada

Type of disability: All types of impairments

Involved actors

- Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Health Canada
- Senior Government of Canada Officials and other Ministers
- Disability advocacy groups
- Committee Members (persons with disabilities, allies, academics, and CSO leaders)

Best practice description

Recognizing the profound impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on persons with disabilities, the Government of Canada created a COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group (CDAG). The Advisory Group is made up of persons with disabilities, allies, academics, and leaders of civil society organizations who work on disability rights and empowerment. Housed within the Ministry of Employment and Social Development, the CDAG meets bi-monthly to advise the Minister, Carla Qualtrough, on the specific issues persons with disabilities are facing during the pandemic. Members of the CDAG have formed several informal working groups who also meet regularly to discuss how persons with disabilities can be included in their respective pandemic response activities and report back to the broader CDAG, the Minister, and other Ministers across the Government of Canada when appropriate. Overall, this machinery has helped to make Canada's COVID-19 response more inclusive to persons with disabilities.

Origin / impetus for best

- Government of Canada's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and its appointment of a Minister responsible for persons with disabilities.
- Minister Qualtrough's personal experiences with disability, and lifelong advocacy work on disability issues, informed need for representation of persons with disabilities in pandemic response.
- Disability community aligned behind key principles for an inclusive pandemic response, which provided room to create a committee.
- The implementation of the Accessible Canada Act (2019) has raised awareness of issues facing persons with disabilities, meaning that other ministries are aware that the "nothing about us, without us" approach to policymaking.

Impact / results of implementing best practice

- Specific guidelines on disability considerations for the COVID-19 pandemic
- Inclusive and disability-informed triage protocols
- Communication guidelines for inclusive information dissemination

Critical success factors for best practice

- Whole of government approach and collaboration
- Representation of persons with disabilities in parliament (i.e. Minister Qualtrough)
- Political will for collaboration and senior leadership drive
- Strong disability community advocacy
- Diverse and intersectional representation of the disability community, particularly Indigenous groups

Impact statement

"We know Canadians with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and are at greater risk due to health, economic, and social conditions. This is why it was essential for the federal Government to get expert advice on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities in real-time. The COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group provided valuable advice and greatly contributed to ensuring our pandemic response was inclusive from the start. I am grateful for their views and commitment." – *The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Disability Inclusion*

Lessons learned

- Jurisdictional challenges prevent full implementation of guidelines, as health is a provincial/territorial issue in Canada and similar structures were not always implemented on these levels.
- Cross-cutting approach to emergency response allowed for greater representation of persons with disabilities.

Sources

1. Government of Canada. Accessible Canada Act [Internet]. S.C. 2019, c.10 Justice Laws Website; 2019. Available from: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-0.6/>
2. Employment and Social Development Canada. Backgrounder : COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Nov 26]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/04/backgrounder--covid-19-disability-advisory-group.html>

Further links & information

- [COVID-19 and people with disabilities in Canada](#)
- [Backgrounder on Members of the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group](#)
- [Statistics Canada: Impacts of COVID-19 on Persons with Disabilities](#)