One in Five Canadian Voters Live with a Disability: It’s Time the Country Came Together to End Disability Poverty

The disabled population in Canada forms a considerable voting base. Pre-pandemic, 22% of all Canadians were disabled. Political parties need to pay attention to what is important to the more than 6 million disabled Canadians in advance of the federal election on September 20.

Here’s what disabled Canadians are looking for when they vote:

1. Implement a Canadian Disability Benefit as soon as possible to reduce high poverty rates for people with disabilities

Canadians living with disabilities make up a staggering 41% of people who live below the poverty line. Post-pandemic, we know that the situation is worse. Disabled Canadians are making harsh choices daily, between food, medication, rent, medical devices and other daily living supports.

People with disabilities need income supplements to spend on needs, not wants. Any money will go straight back into our economy at a time when we need our economy to rebound from the pandemic.

Canadians agree—nine in 10 favour the creation of Canadian Disability Benefit as “an essential commitment for the government to make,” according to a recent Angus Reid poll.

During the last parliament, the government made bold and historic moves towards seriously reducing disability poverty:

• Introducing the new Canada Disability Benefit in Throne Speech
• Including funds for consultation
• Tabling Bill C-35 before the end of the parliamentary session

We demand that, if elected, you will again introduce legislation on a Canadian Disability Benefit and follow through on the promises of the previous government.
No delays - the Canada Disability Benefit must get into the hands of disabled people as soon as possible

We want to cut through red tape and streamline any application process for a disability benefit. If disabled Canadians have already passed an eligibility process for provincial, territorial, federal, and private benefits, automatically enroll them into the new benefit, subject to resolving issues of privacy and consent.

We also know that many disabled Canadians struggle to achieve eligibility, have been turned down by narrow eligibility rules in some provinces or simply do not apply for benefits that they are actually eligible for due to the complexity of the process, the fear of rejection, or perhaps simply not having a family doctor. We want a streamlined application process for those eligible but not currently receiving disability benefits. This should not be managed by an existing system set-up to screen out or penalize people. We need to ensure that we bring these people in from the shadows with a streamlined process that understands who they are and makes this benefit accessible to them.

We want a streamlined, easily accessible application process that can expand the benefit to ALL those eligible.

Include disabled Canadians in the policy development of a Canadian Disability Benefit – and fast-track the process

“Nothing about us without us”—the disabled community is ready, willing and able to design this benefit in partnership with government. We can do this in a speedy and thorough manner, so that any income support benefit will reach those in need quickly. A three-year consultation process is simply too long, and 74% of Canadians polled agree.

We want an accelerated consultation process to also be authentic, which means people with lived experience must be the majority of any policy design team.
Create a Disability Poverty Line recognizing the higher cost of living for disabled Canadians

Canadians with disabilities face extra costs – any income support provided must be above the official poverty line and be index linked to reflect inflation.

These extra costs include necessary medications, equipment, accessible housing, additional transportation costs – the list is lengthy and costly. A recent Angus Reid poll showed that 63% of all Canadians believe that any Canadian Disability Benefit should be set above the poverty level.

*We ask that you recognize a Disability Poverty Line above the Market Basket Measure, as not to do so would be to perpetuate the inequity faced by disabled Canadians.*

Ensure no claw backs of income support benefits and erosion of existing disability supports by provinces, including benefits, goods and services.

We hear considerable fear from disabled Canadians that this benefit will give with one hand while taking from the other – by somehow clawing back benefits that they already receive, whether it be monetary or as goods and services. Allowing this to happen would be contrary to the goals of establishing the benefit and to the detriment of disabled Canadians.

*We want existing benefits for disabled Canadians to continue alongside a new Canadian Disability Benefit.*