**Canadian response to the UN OHCHR Questionnaire**

**on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**(Human Rights Council Resolution 16/15)**

Please note that the Canadian input to this questionnaire is a compilation of responses provided by Federal and Provincial/Territorial government departments. It offers a representative snapshot of the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, but is not an exhaustive view of the Canadian landscape.

1. **Are there any restrictions on the right of persons with disabilities to vote and be elected? If so, what are those restrictions?**

Legally speaking, no restrictions exist at the federal level. The right to vote and to be a candidate is a fundamental right of all Canadian citizens as per the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

However, some of Canada’s provinces, in response to this questionnaire, have indicated that, while no legal restrictions exist, persons with disabilities unfortunately continue to encounter other barriers that restrict full and complete access to electoral processes, such as:

* + Challenges in locating fully accessible polling locations in small rural areas. There is currently no legislative provision, as in other jurisdictions, for voting transfer certificates for level access stations (*Newfoundland and Labrador*). Inaccessible polling locations and difficulties with getting to these locations have also been mentioned by the Province of Manitoba as a potential issue, while indicating that Elections Manitoba has a policy and procedures (including disability awareness training of persons working at polling stations) in place for decreasing such barriers and ensuring people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote.
	+ Societal attitudes that stigmatize and perpetuate stereotypes about people’s abilities and costs of accommodating disability-related requirements are also restrictive.
	+ While there have been some politicians with disabilities, systemic barriers continue to exist throughout the electoral process; such as door-to-door campaigning. Political parties are gaining awareness about non-traditional means of campaigning and engaging people in the electoral process.
	+ Financial barriers that can also restrict participation include the cost of accommodating disability. Allowable election expenses do not include expenses directly related to a candidate’s disability or that of a family member, as it is in other jurisdictions (*Newfoundland and Labrador*).

Finally the Province of Québec has indicated that legal restrictions do exist for persons with disabilities who are placed under curatorship[[1]](#footnote-1). Persons under curatorship cannot vote, nor run for office in provincial, municipal and school elections[[2]](#footnote-2). Persons under curatorship are usually considered persons with disabilities[[3]](#footnote-3).

1. **What are the steps taken by your government to ensure that persons with disabilities participate in political and public life?**

Since 1992, the *Canada Elections Act* provides that all voting locations must have level access. Elections Canada, the non-partisan independent body responsible for conducting federal elections and referendums, and which reports directly to the Parliament of Canada, has a long-standing program for potential voting locations to be examined before elections and temporary ramps are built during elections in the event a location does not have level access.

Since 2010, Elections Canada has developed accessibility standards that are more stringent and aim at ensuring that all polling stations are barrier-free. In addition, Elections Canada continues to work with the community to research and test alternative voting methods and mechanical devices that may allow electors who have a visual impairment or reduced dexterity to exercise their right to vote independently and in secrecy.

The ratification of the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) in March 2010 further demonstrates the Government of Canada’s commitment to removing obstacles and creating opportunities for people with disabilities.

The Government of Canada has also demonstrated its continued commitment to supporting people with disabilities through recent federal budgets. For example, Budget 2010 announced the extension of the Enabling Accessibility Fund as well as improvements to the Registered Disability Savings Plan.

The Enabling Accessibility Fund (EAF) contributes to the improvement of accessibility for people with disabilities in their communities. Funding is provided to support community-based projects across Canada that improve accessibility, remove barriers, and enable Canadians with disabilities to participate in and contribute to their communities. Since 2008, the EAF has supported over 600 projects that improve accessibility in communities across Canada, which have included increasing accessibility to buildings that could be used as polling stations during elections.

Also, in 2008, the Government of Canada launched the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) to help Canadians with disabilities and their families save for the future. To encourage savings, the Government of Canada pays a matching grant of up to $3,500 a year a bond of up to $1,000 a year to low-income and modest-income Canadians. Greater financial security may in turn allow people with disabilities to become more active in their communities, including in political and public life.

Further, as per the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada[[4]](#footnote-4), information about the Government’s programs, services and initiatives is provided in multiple formats to ensure equal access by all Canadians, including those with disabilities. In addition to this, the Accessibility Standard for Real Property[[5]](#footnote-5) establishes minimum requirements for providing barrier-free access to, use of and exit from federal real property.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Policy on the Duty to Accommodate Persons with Disabilities in the Federal Public Service[[7]](#footnote-7) aims to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in the federal Public Service, whether as candidates for employment or as employees: “It is the policy of the Treasury Board and the Public Service Commission to create and maintain an inclusive, barrier-free environment in the federal Public Service to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities.”

Each year, the Government of Canada transfers over $218 million to provinces through the federal/provincial Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPDs). The LMAPDs support a broad range of programs and services that respond to the labour market participation needs of people with disabilities. The federal government and provinces share the costs of programs and services that are tailored to the needs of people with disabilities so they can get the training and jobs they need. Approximately 300,000 people are assisted each year through LMAPDs.

Finally, the Opportunities Fund supports projects that help people with disabilities prepare for and get jobs or to become self-employed. The Government of Canada spends $30M each year through the Opportunities Fund, which served over 5,300 clients in 2010-2011.

At the provincial level, all provinces that responded to the questionnaire have described steps their governments are taking to ensure that persons with disabilities participate in political/public life. These steps include:

* *Alberta*: The *Alberta Human Rights Act* is the provincial legislation that protects Albertans from discrimination in specific areas and on specific grounds, including physical and mental disability. The Act – in addition to other Government of Alberta programs and services – is intended to support the inclusion of all Albertans in all areas of Alberta society, include political life.
* British Columbia: The *Election Act* includes procedures for voters who need assistance in marking a ballot. Elections British Columbia ensures that voting places are wheelchair-accessible, and provides information via TTY for deaf and hearing-impaired persons and Voiceprint for those who are visually impaired. In terms of seeking office, candidate nomination rules are determined by political parties, not by the government. In addition, British Columbia’s *Disability Strategy* ensures that persons with disabilities are able to participate in all aspects of life in the province of British Columbia, including public and political life.
* *Manitoba*: In 2000, the Government of Manitoba created a Cabinet position of Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities with a mandate to: identify issues affecting persons with disabilities; co-ordinate policy development to improve access to public services; raise awareness about living with a disability; and represent the needs of Manitobans with disabilities to other levels of government. A policy secretariat called the Disabilities Issues Office was later opened in 2003 to support the work of the Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities. Its responsibilities are to: communicate directly with members of the community; consult with organizations and citizens concerned about program gaps and policy directions; and co-ordinate work among government departments, disability groups, community organizations and business; and make Manitoba a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities. The Minister regularly meets with the disability community to receive input on programs and legislation. In addition, other members of Manitoba's Cabinet meet with people with disabilities and their organizations on issues relevant to their portfolios.
* *New Brunswick*: Elections New Brunswick developed a disability outreach strategy in 2008, which included hiring a Disability Outreach Coordinator during the 2008 municipal election, 2010 provincial election and for the upcoming 2012 municipal election. As part of this strategy, they met with the Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons and other stakeholders to ascertain what types of supports were needed for those with a disability in order to exercise their democratic right to vote. The strategy has been successful and they continue to consult. Some of the supports that are a regular part of the kit for Returning Offices are: ensuring polling stations are in accessible locations; the audio vote solution; a sip’ and puff solution allowing voters with visual or hand mobile impairments to mark their ballot independently; magnifiers; large low scent markers; American Sign Language/ *Langues des Signes Québécoise* (ASL/LSQ) interpreters; the possibility to bring a friend to assist; pocket talkers; using black on white font etc.
* *Newfoundland and Labrador:* Newfoundland’s *Accessibility Provisions* provide for: three ways to vote (by special ballot, at an advance poll or on polling day); finding polling stations and returning office locations that are wheelchair accessible when possible, and, where not possible, provide a convenient alternative; using braille templates, when needed, assisting electors who require assistance in marking ballots; transporting ballot boxes from room to room to facilitate voting in hospitals and certain residential institutions; providing a cardboard voting template to assist any person with a visual disability in marking the ballot at the advance and election day polls; allowing interpreters to provide assistance to voters at the polls; at the request of the elector, the provision of assistance in marking the ballot is available at the advance and Election Day polls. Voters may also bring a friend or relative who may assist them, after taking an oath; arranging home visits for Special Ballot voting; making Special Ballot (mail-in) voting available in all 48 electoral district Returning Offices, at 12 designated remote Special Ballot Offices, and at Elections Newfoundland and Labrador headquarters. This enables people to vote from home and mail their completed ballot to the Elections Office. This process consists of a multi-envelope system to ensure secrecy and is available to any elector that feels that he/she will have difficulty voting in person on advance or regular polling days; working in cooperation with electors who contact Elections Newfoundland and Labrador to come up with solutions to make voting accessible and providing accessibility training and awareness sessions for returning officers.
* *Nova Scotia*: A fact sheet for persons with special needs regarding assistance in voting (available at <http://electionsnovascotia.ca/pdf/news%20release/news%20release%20PAANS.pdf>), as well as amendments to the Elections Act to permit the use of new procedures and technologies to make the process easier for persons with disabilities and to allow them to vote independently.
* *Ontario:* In Ontario, there are provisions in the *Election Act* that aid electors with disabilities in casting their votes at the polling place. Under s. 55 of the *Election Act*, electoral officers have a duty to assist persons with disabilities to cast their ballots appropriately in an election. The legislation requires accessibility training for electoral officers prior to the first advance poll in an election. S. 13(3.3) of the *Election Act* says that the location of polling places has to comply with the *Human Rights Code* and accessibility standards established under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), which became law in Ontario in 2005. Polling places are also provided in hospitals, retirement homes and long-term care homes (s. 14 of the *Election Act*). The AODA has the goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025 in five key areas of daily living: Customer Service, Transportation, Employment, Information and Communications, and Built Environment. The standards will apply to private and public sector organizations across Ontario. Elections Ontario, the organization responsible for conducting elections in the province, has launched a formal accessibility program aimed at removing further barriers in the electoral process. Details of the program and the plan of Elections Ontario for reporting on accessibility under the AODA and the *Election Act* are outlined in its Accessibility Action Plan ([www.elections.on.ca/en-ca/accessibility/accessibility+action+plan.htm](http://www.elections.on.ca/en-ca/accessibility/accessibility%2Baction%2Bplan.htm)). In 2009, Ontario Members of Provincial Parliament and their staff were offered training on the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, how they can provide accessible service to their constituents and how they can support the businesses and organizations in their communities that need to comply with the standard. The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (ADO) also conducted presentations and workshops on the customer service standard to various boards of trade, chambers of commerce, private sector associations and not-for-profit conferences, associations and organizations across the province.
* *Québec* - *Political life:* The *Election Act,* the E*lections and Referendums in Municipalities Act,* and the S*chool Elections Act* have been amended on various occasions to ensure that “voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use”[[8]](#footnote-8) for persons with disabilities. Provisions have also been adopted concerning the accessibility of polling stations, mobile polling stations, and advance polling stations, and accommodation to permit persons who are unable to mark their ballot and/or who have visual, hearing or speech impairments to vote.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) also provides election staff with training on how to provide assistance to persons with a disability. Further, in November 2010, the CEO concluded an agreement with political parties to try out a new ballot for the upcoming by-elections. The modified ballot will contain candidates’ photographs and will use larger print. These changes will help illiterate or visually impaired voters, including persons with disabilities, exercise their right to vote.
 *Public life:*One of the purposes of the policy entitled Equals in Every Respect: Because Rights Are Meant to Be Exercised (*Equals in Every Respect* policy), adopted in 2009, is to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in public life. In fact, increasing “the civic participation of handicapped persons in their community under conditions equivalent to those of other citizens” is an explicit component of the desired results of the policy. As regards participation in public life in organizations specifically concerned with the interests of persons with disabilities, it should be noted that members of the Board of Directors of the *Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) (Office for handicapped persons of Quebec)* are appointed in consultation with disability associations that are most representative of the various regions of Quebec and the various types of disabilities. Moreover, persons with disabilities or relatives or spouses of persons with disabilities are appointed to 9 of the 15 seats on the Board. The chair of the Board of Directors is also appointed by the government from among these 9 persons with disabilities or relatives or spouses of persons with disabilities. Under the *Health services and social services Act,* the Board of Directors of a healthcare or social services institution that operates a rehabilitation centre for mentally impaired persons or persons with a pervasive developmental disorder, or for physically impaired persons, must be composed of two persons designated by the user committee of the institution.
* *Saskatchewan*: One aspect of Elections Saskatchewan’s vision is to identify and remove any administrative or physical barriers that challenge or deter electors, and replace with inclusive and accessible processes and procedures that will encourage the highest level of participation in the electoral events. SeeElections Saskatchewan website for more details at: [www.elections.sk.ca/officeofthechief.php](http://www.elections.sk.ca/officeofthechief.php). Pursuant to section 77 of *The Election Act,* 1996, Ch. E-6.01, a deputy returning officer may assist a voter in marking their ballot if the voter is unable to read or is physically unable to mark their own ballot. A special template for visually impaired voters has been established under this section to enable voters to mark their own ballot if such assistance is not desired. A voter may also apply for assistance prior to Election Day. Sections 103 and 127 of the *Act* respectively provide that a polling station will be established in every hospital and personal care facility in the province. Section 128 additionally provides that assistance will be provided to voters in personal care facilities in accordance with section 77. With regard to establishing polling locations, sections 36 and 129 provide that polls and advance polls shall be set up in a place that is the most convenient for the voters. In the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, Volume III, Recommendations for Changes to *The Election Act*, dated November 7, 2007; the Chief Electoral Officer recommended that polling locations for regular or advance polls also be accessible.
1. **What steps has your government taken and what mechanisms exist:**
2. **To ensure close and active consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in decision-making processes, including those related to the development of legislation and policy?**

In terms of election-related consultations, Elections Canada reaches out to national organizations representing people with disabilities on a regular basis and leverages these networks to promote information on federal elections. In addition, the organization encourages its network of Returning Officers, who is responsible for managing elections locally in 308 electoral districts across Canada, to work with their local organizations of people with disabilities. This may include engaging disability groups as decisions are made regarding the selection of polling locations or requesting advice on how to improve a site’s accessibility. During by-elections in the fall 2010 and the May 2, 2011 general election, Elections Canada leveraged its relationships with provincial and national organizations to promote its new polling site accessibility feedback process, which was an initiative designed to capture feedback from electors with disabilities to continuously work at improving service delivery. These organizations were able to extend the reach of these promotional efforts by disseminating information to their members and networks.

In 2010, as an outcome of the *Elections Canada versus Hughes* case, Elections Canada worked alongside the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and electors to implement changes aimed at increasing the accessibility of the electoral process. Through their work on this project, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities had direct input in the decision-making process with regard to new training, programs and products that were developed to improve the accessibility of polling sites. In November 2010, Elections Canada tested an assistive voting device designed to assist voters with disabilities in marking a ballot independently and in secrecy. This pilot test included working with people with disabilities and national, provincial and local disability organizations to get feedback on the device and learn about how such technology could meet their needs. In general, Elections Canada continues to build relationships with the disability community at the national and provincial levels to better understand their needs and work together to find solutions that reduce barriers and improve service delivery.

In addition to elections-related consultations, the Government of Canada also regularly consults with Canadians with disabilities and organizations, and represents the disability community through a variety of mechanisms. For example:

* + Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), in collaboration with Justice Canada and Canadian Heritage, organized a conference to educate federal officials on the rights of people with disabilities and on how to consider the impact of their work (programs, policy and legislation) on the disability community. Representatives from the disability community provided input on the day’s agenda and proposed keynote and panel speakers.
	+ A public online consultation was also held in 2009. The views expressed by stakeholders through these consultations played an important role in informing the decision on ratification of the CRPD. In addition, these views will help inform new measures that may be taken at the federal level to further implement the Convention.
	+ A number of national stakeholder organizations, including those representing people with disabilities, were invited to provide input to the federal consultations held in 2009 regarding federal housing and homelessness investments.
	+ The Minister of HRSDC has held several in-person roundtables with disability stakeholders across Canada to seek their views on a number of topics, including labour market supports for people with disabilities.

* + The Government has announced that a review of the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) program will take place in 2011 to ensure that RDSPs are meeting the needs of Canadians with severe disabilities and their families. During the review, input from people with disabilities and their families, as well as organizations which represent them, will be sought.
	+ The Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) Program is the largest federal income security program for working-age people with disabilities and Canada’s largest public disability insurance program. It provides a basic level of earnings replacement for workers, and their children, who cannot work due to a severe and prolonged disability. HRSDC engages in regular meetings and dialogue with organizations representing the interests of Canadians with disabilities in order to solicit their views on current program policies and potential areas for change.
	+ Feedback gathered from CPPD applicants and beneficiaries is also integral to the policy development process. Recently, HRSDC conducted client surveys and focus groups as part of two major program evaluations. This information deepened the Department’s understanding of the client experience, provided new insights and identified areas for further improvement.
	+ The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has also commissioned or funded numerous research projects in which people with disabilities or their representative organizations provided input.
	+ HRSDC is also engaged on an ongoing basis with people with disabilities and their representative organizations on the development and implementation of the HRSDC data and information strategy on people with disabilities. The strategy will provide access to relevant information on people with disabilities’ transitions at home, school, work, and in their communities to help them make informed choices.

Canada’s provincial and territorial governments have also taken a number of steps to consult persons with disabilities. For example:

* *Manitoba*: Since the establishment of the Disabilities Issues Office, a number of roundtables on disability issues and other types of consultations have been sponsored by Government of Manitoba. These events were open to any member of the public and particular effort was made to ensure people with disabilities and their organizations attended. Some of the topics discussed at these events were housing, disability supports, issues concerning people who live in remote areas, aging with a disability, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, and made-in Manitoba accessibility legislation. The results of these consultations were recorded and shared throughout the provincial government.
* *New Brunswick:* The Government of New Brunswick continues to support the Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons in various activities such as the *Disability Action Plan Strategy- The Path to Self-Sufficiency and Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick*. The Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons has agreed to take responsibility for collecting information updates from the departments involved to monitor actions being taken towards the implementation of the recommendations contained in the document. There is ongoing support for the Annual Disability Awareness Week (DAW). The main goal of DAW is to raise public awareness of existing barriers that prevent citizens with disabilities from full and equal participation in all aspects of their community and what may be done to correct these problems. It is also an opportunity to celebrate examples of best practices and advancements made towards full inclusion for citizens with disabilities. Government supports the New Brunswick Disability Executive Network to which government has recently given new core funding. There is current consultation through the Building Code Committee and the Employment for Persons with Disability Strategy. The Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons is an active member on both initiatives. There is also public consultation through the New Brunswick poverty reduction strategy, “The Economic and Social Inclusion Plan”.
* *Newfoundland and Labrador:* Recent provincial public consultations, hosted by the Disability Policy Office in Newfoundland and Labrador, gave people with disabilities and their families, advocates and networks, the opportunity to discuss how best to remove and prevent barriers. The input from these consultations was used to develop a strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society. The consultations helped ensure that the strategy will reflect the needs, priorities and values of residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. The implementation of the Strategy will involve ongoing input and feedback from community and disability-related organizations. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador also created a Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. The Council advises the provincial government as it develops strategies and recommendations to advance inclusion. The Council is made up of 12 to 18 people who have disability related experiences and expertise. They are women and men of different ages who come from small and large communities.
* *Ontario*: In Ontario, the Minister of Community and Social Services has established the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council to advise on the development of accessibility standards and education campaigns to help private and public sectors, as well as the general public, understand the goals and requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA). The majority of the members of the Advisory Council represent the disability community.Through its Enabling Change Partnership Program, the government is committed to improving accessibility for persons with disabilities. The program provides funding for strategic partnership projects that will significantly promote compliance with the AODA and accessibility standards. For example, the program in partnership with the Ontario March of Dimes developed a Training Manual, Just-in-Time Training booklet and Trainer’s Guide to support emergency reception centres and shelters in implementing the customer service standard on how to assist people with disabilities in emergency shelters. The Ministry of Community and Social Services has created a public awareness site on its website, Making Ontario Accessible ([www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/](http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/)), that maintains the visibility of accessibility, provides information about barriers and prepares obligated organizations to comply with the new standards. It also provides helpful resources and tools to assist obligated organizations with compliance.
* *Québec*: Besides the points mentioned under question 2 , section 61.2. of the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration*  stipulates that the minister responsible for this Act must be consulted in the development of measures provided for by law or regulation that could have a significant impact on persons with a disability. It is in fact the *Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) (Office for handicapped persons of Quebec)* that is consulted, and in turn, its board of directors, which is representative of persons with disabilities and their families. In addition, the evaluation of the *Equals in Every Respect* policy has been entrusted to the Office, which facilitates a monitoring committee made up of members of the advocacy movement behind persons with disabilities. An advisory subcommittee was also struck to direct and provide feedback on the methodology plan to the team tasked with evaluating the policy at the Office. The International Network on the Disability Creation Process, whose members represent disability and other organizations, is involved in the work of this subcommittee.
* *Saskatchewan:* The Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice regularly consults with organizations representing persons with disabilities in the development of legislation. In a recent amendment to the *Adult Guardianship and Co-decision-making Act*, the Ministry of Justice consulted a variety of individuals and organizations representing persons with disabilities. In 2009, the Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) which is composed of representatives of over 30 community based organizations providing disability advocacy and disability support, submitted a proposal to the Minister of Social Services requesting the development of an income support plan to replace social assistance for people with disabilities unable to earn enough to maintain financial independence and quality of life. In December of 2009, the Minister appointed eight members of the DISC to work with ministry officials on a Joint Task Team to develop recommendations for a disability income support program for Saskatchewan. The Task Team conducted a series of intensive consultation and planning sessions to develop a conceptual design and draft set of recommendations. These were subsequently shared with members of the public during a series of several consultation sessions across the province. In May of 2010, a report containing 50 recommendations was accepted by the Minister and subsequently released to the public with an announcement that a new program, the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) would begin operating in the fall of 2010 with an initial phased enrolment including over 2,800 individuals. A total of 8,000 - 10,000 people are expected to receive SAID benefits when the program is fully developed. Representatives of DISC have been appointed to a joint government/community Program Implementation Advisory Team to continue to develop options for continued implementation of SAID, including the design and testing of a new assessment instrument, eligibility criteria of future phases of enrolment and benefit design. The Ministry is committed to continue the collaborative process throughout the design, development and implementation of SAID. The disability community continues to be very supportive of the process.
1. **To promote participation in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with public and political life?**

At the federal level, the Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability component (SDPP-D) provides $11 million per year in grants and contributions to eligible non-profit organizations working to meet the social development needs of people with disabilities. The Program supports innovative solutions to remove barriers through improved access to programs and services, and encourages a wide range of community-based initiatives that provide effective approaches to address social issues and barriers that people with disabilities face.

Examples of steps taken by some of Canada’s provincial/territorial governments are as follows:

* *Manitoba*: Manitoba has provided financial support to provincial organizations of people with disabilities, enabling them to provide input to government on the needs and concerns of their membership. Each year in early June, the Disabilities Issues Office works with community disability organizations to raise public awareness about disability during Manitoba Access Awareness Week. Organizations are encouraged to set up public displays in the Legislative Building and to participate in an awards ceremony recognizing leadership within the disability community, non-government organizations and business.
* *New Brunswick*: Elections New Brunswick developed a disability outreach strategy, which focused on improving access to voting, barrier free voting sites for municipal and provincial elections, etc. Public awareness was done through the Disability Stakeholders Summit in May 2011 that was hosted by the Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons.
* *Newfoundland and Labrador*: the Community Grants Program provided by the province’s Health and Community Services is one example of promoting participation. Newfoundland and Labrador’s Voluntary and Non-Profit Secretariat, whose mandate it is to enhance and support the contribution of the voluntary, non-profit sector to the well-being of all our communities, is also very strong in engaging with, and providing support to, the community.
* *Ontario:* See Ontario’s response to question 3a.
* *Québec:* Besides the intended result of the *Equals in Every Respect* policy with regard to participation in public life, described in the response to question 2, it should be noted that under section 327 of the *Civil Code,* a person under tutorship may be the director of a non‑profit organization (NPO). Although that person is incapable of assuming this function for other associations constituted as legal persons, there is a provision under which such persons, including persons with disabilities, may participate in public life through an NPO.
1. **To promote organizations of persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels?**

At the federal level, the Government of Canada provides support for organizations representing people with disabilities to participate in a number of international, national events. For example:

* Canada sponsored the participation of at least 2 representatives from disability organizations in the 2010 and 2011 UN Conferences of States Parties (CoSP) to the Convention. Canada was also pleased to support a side event led by the Canadian Association for Community Living at the 2011 CoSP.
* The Government of Canada sponsored three representatives of disability organizations to attend Canada’s ratification of the Convention at the UN in March 2010.
* During a federal conference organized by Human Resources and Social Development Canada in collaboration with Justice Canada and Heritage Canada, organizations representing people with disabilities participated as keynote and panel speakers and shared their perspective and experience with participants.

Further, the Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability component (SDPP-D) is designed to improve the participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of Canadian society. To promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, funding is provided to national disability organizations to assist in building their capacity and to increase their effectiveness. The SDPP-D also provides funding to not-for-profit organizations for projects that meet the social development needs and aspirations of people with disabilities. In addition, the SDPP-D’s Accommodation Projects funding stream is designed to enable people with disabilities to participate fully in conferences and other events by ensuring that they are accessible. Eligible expenses include sign language interpretation, real time captioning, readers and scribes, support attendants, and alternate format materials.

Examples of steps taken by some of Canada’s provincial and territorial governments are as follows:

* *Manitoba*: Many organizations receive funding from the Government of Manitoba. Officials from Manitoba’s Disabilities Issues Office and other government departments also participate in local, regional, national and international organizations of persons with disabilities.
* *New Brunswick:* Organizations are promoted through the Directory of Services of the website of the Premier’s Council on the Status of Disabled Persons, which includes community and government services as well as sub-directories such as: the Directory of Career Counselling and Job Placement; Financial Aid; Transportation; Rehabilitation equipment funding; Funding for Barrier-Free Access; Vehicle and Retrofit Program; and Mobility Access Funding Programs.
* *Newfoundland and Labrador*: Various government departments, including the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, have partnerships, mainly in terms of funding, with local disability-related organizations, many of which are connected to national organizations.
* Québec: The Government of Quebec awards grants to numerous associations of persons with disabilities or relatives of persons with disabilities involved, for example, in promoting their rights and advocating for their interests. This financial support enables these organizations to make themselves known and to advocate for their clients and provide them with services. For example, in 2010‑2011, through the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales (Social Initiatives and Autonomous Community Action Secretariat), the Government of Quebec allocated nearly $4,700,000 to 72 organizations.[[10]](#footnote-10) In addition, Quebec’s annual Handicapped Persons Week, organized by the Office, helps raise the profile of disability organizations among the general public as well as among the clienteles concerned. Last, the government uses targeted efforts to give certain organizations international visibility. For example, the government will provide financial support to Kéroul, an organization with a mandate to make tourism and culture accessible to people with restricted ability, for an international convention in this regard in 2014.
1. **How are persons with disabilities and their representative organizations involved in monitoring the Convention?**

In preparation for Canada's First Report on the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the Department of Canadian Heritage consulted with approximately 700 disability related non-governmental and Aboriginal organizations on a draft outline of the report. 14 non-governmental organizations provided comments.

1. **Are statistics collected in relation to the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life? Please provide relevant statistics and data if possible.**

The General Social Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada, gathers data on social trends in order to monitor changes in the living conditions and well-being of Canadians and to provide information on specific social policy issues of current or emerging interest. Each survey contains a core topic, focus or exploratory questions, and a standard set of socio-demographic questions.

The General Social Survey, Cycle 22: Social Networks (2008)[[11]](#footnote-11) included questions on social and civic participation. Respondents to the survey were asked whether they had voted in the most recent federal election. In relation to people with disabilities, the overall voter participation rate was 75.8% for adults with disabilities (age 18 and older) and 72.0% for adults without disabilities. When broken down by age group, however, adults with disabilities were somewhat less likely to have voted than adults without disabilities of the same age. The overall rate is higher because older adults are more likely to vote than younger adults and older adults account for a larger percentage of Canadians with disabilities than Canadians without disabilities.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Adults with disabilities were slightly more likely (7.3%) than adults without disabilities (5.2%) to be members of, or participants in, political parties or groups. Rates of participation in various political activities were also higher among adults with disabilities than among adults without disabilities. For example, adults with disabilities were more likely to say they had signed a petition (28.1% compared to 24.1%), attended a public meeting (20.3% compared to 16.9%), expressed views on an issue by contacting a newspaper or politician (14.6% compared to 9.7%), participated in a demonstration or march (5.7% compared to 3.8%) and to have volunteered for a political party (3.4% compared to 2.7%).[[13]](#footnote-13)

The 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey,[[14]](#footnote-14) also conducted by Statistics Canada, collected information on the participation of people with disabilities in various civic and cultural activities. The survey found, for example, that 34.4% of adults with disabilities (age 15 and older) participated in unpaid volunteer activities in 2005-2006.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Elections Canada has attempted to survey persons with disabilities but has had challenges in reaching significant and meaningful sample sizes. As such, Elections Canada is planning on exploring better research methods in collaboration with the community but would be interested to know if there are others who may have best practices they could learn from.

Several of the provinces and territories consulted have indicated that they do not collect statistics on the participation of persons with disabilities in their political and public life, as this is already being done (at least in part) at the federal level. However, the Province of Québec has provided information below in response to this question:

* *Québec:* In a document entitled *La participation sociale des personnes handicapées au Québec : la vie communautaire* [social participation of persons with disabilities in Quebec: community life] the OPHQ [Québec Office for Handicapped Persons] provides information on the participation of persons with disabilities in public life, based on sources such as Statistics Canada ‘s 2003 General Social Survey(GSS).

#### Volunteering for a political party

According to the GSS, proportionally more persons with disabilities than persons without disabilities volunteer for a political party, usually without pay (4.2% compared with 3.2%) (Figure 1). Further, proportionally more men with disabilities volunteer for a political party than those without disabilities (5% compared with 3.2%).

Figure 1

**Proportions of the population with and without disability who volunteered for a political party in the 12 months prior to the survey, by sex and population aged 15 and over, Quebec, 2003**

Source: 2003 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada

Processed by: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

Compiled by: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2007

#### Voting rights

Persons with and without disabilities were asked if they had voted in the last federal, provincial and municipal elections (the survey was conducted between February and December 2003). As can be seen, the percentages for both groups are almost the same (Figure 2).

Figure 2

**Proportions of the population with and without disability who voted in the last elections, by election type and population aged 18 and over, and with and without disability, Quebec, 2003**

Source: 2003 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada

Processed by: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

Compiled by: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2007

However, there are significant age-based differences, particularly among 18 to 24 year olds with disabilities, who account for the most striking differences in terms of participation in elections at all levels of government: provincial (17 points); federal (13 points); and, to a lesser extent, municipal elections (6 points). Moreover, there are minor though more significant differences for persons aged 65 and over than for other age groups (Table 3).

Table 3

**Proportions of the population with and without disability who voted in the last elections, by election type, age, population aged 18 and over, and with and without disability, Quebec, 2003**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **With Disability** | **Without Disability** | ***Percentage Difference*** |
|  | ***%*** |
| **Federal elections** |  |  |  |
| 18 to 34 years | 48.2 | 61.6 | ***(13.4)*** |
| 35 to 54 years | 80.9 | 84.4 | ***(3.5)*** |
| 55 to 64 years | 87.2 | 91.0 | ***(3.8)*** |
| 65 and over | 85.4 | 92.0 | ***(6.6)*** |
| **Provincial elections** |  |  |  |
| 18 to 34 years | 49.0 | 65.7 | ***(16.7)*** |
| 35 to 54 years | 80.6 | 83.8 | ***(3.2)*** |
| 55 to 64 years | 85.7 | 89.9 | ***(4.2)*** |
| 65 and over | 82.8 | 91.1 | ***(8.3)*** |
| **Municipal elections** |  |  |  |
| 18 to 34 years | 38.5 | 44.7 | ***(6.2)*** |
| 35 to 54 years | 65.8 | 70.5 | ***(4.7)*** |
| 55 to 64 years | 78.7 | 82.0 | ***(3.3)*** |
| 65 and over | 76.7 | 83.0 | ***(6.3)*** |

Source: 2003 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada

Processed by: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

Compiled by: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2007

A slightly higher number of women with and without disabilities exercised their right to vote, except in the provincial elections, in which a slightly higher number of men participated. Otherwise, the differences are not statistically significant (data not shown).

#### Exercising certain political rights

There are a number of mechanisms available to individuals for expressing an idea or point of view, or simply for expressing their political opinions. However, in order to participate in any activity or position, individuals must keep informed in this regard. There appears to be a difference of just a few percentage points between those with and those without disabilities when it comes to keeping informed (Figure 4). Men—both those with and those without disabilities—tend to keep better informed on political issues than do women. The biggest difference can be seen in the 15- to 24-year-old age group: 25% compared with 31%, with persons with disabilities accounting for the lower percentage. Among the other groups, the differences are not statistically significant (data not shown).

Figure 4

**Proportions of the population with or without disability who sought political information, by sex, population 15 and over, and with and without disability, Quebec, 2003**

Source: 2003 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada

Processed by: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

Compiled by: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2007

Moreover, the freedom to express one’s opinion is also an important right in a democracy, and persons with disabilities seem to do so more readily than persons without disabilities (9% compared with 8%) (Figure 5). Proportionally more men and 15 to 64 year olds express their political opinion, with over 10% of them doing so. The proportion of women and persons aged 65 and over who do so is lowest, at around 5%.

Figure 5

**Proportions of the population with and without disability who have expressed a political opinion, by sex and age, population 15 years and over, with and without disability, Quebec, 2003**

Source: 2003 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada

Processed by: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

Compiled by: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2007

The mechanisms referred to above that enable individuals to express their opinions or take a position refer to certain rights such as freedom of expression and association. Among the items set out in Table 6, it would seem that more persons with disabilities express themselves in public than persons without disabilities. Otherwise, whether the action involves signing a petition or boycotting a product, there are significant differences, with lower percentages for persons with a disability in all age groups, particularly among women. In fact, there are differences of more than 10 percentage points among women with regard to these two elements, and to a lesser extent with regard to public expression (close to 8%). Last, there are twice as many women without disabilities than with disabilities who have taken part in a demonstration.

Table 6

**Proportions of the population with and without disability who have exercised certain political rights, by age and sex, population aged 15 and over, Quebec, 2003**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Total** | **Men** | **Women** | **15 to 34 years** | **35 to 54 years** | **55 to 64 years** | **65  and over** |
|  | **%** |
| **Signed a petition** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| With disability | 19.5 | 22.2 | 16.8 | 34.4 | 24.0 | 19.0 | 9.6 |
| Without disability | 26.9 | 26.0 | 27.7 | 32.6 | 27.2 | 22.5 | 12.6 |
|  ***Percentage Difference***  | ***(7.4)*** | ***(3.8)*** | ***(10.9)*** | ***1.8*** | ***(3.2)*** | ***(3.5)*** | ***(3.0)*** |
| **Boycotted a product**  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| With disability | 14.3 | 18.4 | 10.3 | 26.2 | 19.0 | 12.8 | 6.2 |
| Without disability | 22.6 | 24.6 | 20.6 | 26.9 | 23.8 | 19.2 | 7.7 |
|  ***Percentage Difference***  | ***(8.3)*** | ***(6.2)*** | ***(10.3)*** | ***(0.7)*** | ***(4.8)*** | ***(6.4)*** | ***(1.5)*** |
| **Attended a public meeting** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| With disability | 17.2 | 20.7 | 13.7 | 20.8 | 23.1 | 15.1 | 11.6 |
| Without disability | 18.0 | 19.9 | 16.1 | 16.5 | 18.2 | 21.8 | 17.5 |
|  ***Percentage Difference***  | ***(0.8)*** | ***0.8*** | ***(2.4)*** | ***4.3*** | ***4.9*** | ***(6.7)*** | ***(5.9)*** |
| **Spoke in public at a public meeting** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| With disability | 39.7 | 49.0 | 26.2 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 37.2 |
| Without disability | 37.3 | 40.4 | 33.7 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 32.5 |
|  ***Percentage Difference***  | ***2.4*** | ***8.6*** | ***(7.5)*** |  |  |  | ***4.7*** |
| **Took part in a demonstration** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| With disability | 7.0 | 9.6 | 4.4 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| Without disability | 8.7 | 8.9 | 8.5 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| ***Percentage Difference***  | ***(1.7)*** | ***0.7*** | ***(4.1)*** |  |  |  |  |

n.a.: not available

Source: 2003 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada

Processed by: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

Compiled by: Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 2007

1. **Is your Government involved in international cooperation programmes related to promoting political rights of persons with disabilities? Please describe the ways the programmes are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.**

Canada’s International Development Agency (CIDA) is involved in a number of programmes related to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.  While CIDA does not currently have a specific policy targeting persons with disabilities, its programming includes projects that aim to reduce the impact of poverty on the most marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities. CIDA’s development assistance directly and indirectly addresses disability issues, including those associated with armed conflicts, landmines, natural disasters, discrimination, and poor health and nutrition. Through its programming in the areas of health, education and governance, among others, CIDA promotes human rights and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities including through raising awareness about disability issues, addressing stigma and discrimination, reducing barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities into their societies, and improving the overall health, education, social and economic well-being of individuals and communities.

In 2009-10, approximately $66.11 million worth of CIDA aid spending identified issues related to disabilities as a significant project objective.

For example, in Haiti as part of CIDA's $150.15 million response following the devastating earthquake of January 2010, CIDA allocated $500,000 to Handicap International, which provided essential physical rehabilitation care and assistance to over 22,500 vulnerable persons with injuries and permanent/ temporary disabilities in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. Project activities include physical rehabilitation care, provision of assistive devices and technical aids, psycho-social interventions and protection services.  While CIDA's long-term development program in Haiti does not specifically target persons with disabilities, consideration to the specific needs of persons with disabilities has been incorporated into the CIDA-supported construction of the provincial hospital in Gonaïves. Through one of CIDA’s local funds managed in Port-au-Prince (Peace and Development Fund), CIDA has also contributed to the drafting of legislation on the integration of persons with disabilities in Haiti.

CIDA also provides support to a number of Canadian and international civil society organizations and UN agencies that work on disability issues in developing countries. Canada’s ratification of the CRPD underlines its commitment to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and enable their full participation in society. CIDA’s development assistance will continue to promote the human rights of all persons, including those with disabilities, in line with Canada’s international human rights obligations, including the CRPD.

For further information pertaining to federal investments and initiatives addressing disability issues, please consult the *Federal Disability Report: the Government of Canada Annual Report on Disability Issues*. You may also wish to consult CIDA’s *Project Browser,* an online resource accessible throughthe CIDA website, to obtain detailed project information related to Agency spending.

1. These are persons of full age whose incapacity to care for themselves or administer their property is total and permanent under section 281 of the *Civil Code of Québec*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See sections 1 and 234 of the *Elections Act*, sections 47 and 61 of the *Loi sur les élections et les référendums dans les municipalités* (*Elections and Referendums in Municipalities Act*), and sections 12 and 20 of the *Loi sur les élections scolaires* (School Elections Act). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As per section 281 of the *Civil code of Quebec*, and section 1, subsection (g) of the *Loi assurant l'exercice des droits des personnes handicapées en vue de leur intégration scolaire, professionnelle et sociale* (*Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration*), and section 1, paragraph 2, of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* . [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Treasury Board of Canada, 2006, *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*, available at http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12316 (EN) and http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-fra.aspx?id=12316 (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Available at http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12044 (EN) and http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-fra.aspx?id=12044 (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Applies to real property acquired (including lease renewal), under construction or undergoing major refit since October 1, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Available at http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12541 (EN) and http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-fra.aspx?id=12541 (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As stipulated in article 29)a)(i) of the CRPD. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See in particular sections 300 and 303, 301.6 to 301.22, 301,19, 347, 348 and 349 of the *Elections Act of Québec.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For a detailed list of the grants awarded, see <http://142.213.167.138/bd_recherche/subventions/Resultat_subvention.asp?LstAnnee=16&LstRegion=0&LstCirconscription=0&LstProgramme=0&LstClientele=18&LstSecteur=0&txtNom>= [French only] [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Information on the General Social Survey, Cycle 22: Social Networks can be found at http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=5024&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2 (EN) and http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV\_f.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=5024&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2 (FR). The Social Networks survey is conducted on a five-year cycle. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010, *Federal Disability Report: The Government of Canada’s Annual Report on Disability Issues*, available at http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability\_issues/reports/fdr/2010/page00.shtml (EN) and http://www.rhdcc.gc.ca/fra/condition\_personnes\_handicapees/rapports/rhf/2010/page00.shtml (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010, *Federal Disability Report: The Government of Canada’s Annual Report on Disability Issues*, available at http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability\_issues/reports/fdr/2010/page00.shtml (EN) and http://www.rhdcc.gc.ca/fra/condition\_personnes\_handicapees/rapports/rhf/2010/page00.shtml (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Information on the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey can be found at http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3251&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2 (EN) and http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV\_f.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3251&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2 (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010, *Federal Disability Report: The Government of Canada’s Annual Report on Disability Issues*, available at http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability\_issues/reports/fdr/2010/page00.shtml (EN) and http://www.rhdcc.gc.ca/fra/condition\_personnes\_handicapees/rapports/rhf/2010/page00.shtml (FR) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)