

Disability Poverty

Time to fast track Canada Disability Benefit

More than 200 influential Canadians call on the federal government to take action

By Art Eggleton

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Wed., Nov. 3, 2021 timer3 min. read

What do former health minister Allan Rock; Sen. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia; former lieutenant-governor of Ontario David Onley; professional dancer Luca Patuelli; “Mincome” economist Evelyn Forget; bestselling author Tara Ross; Community Foundations of Canada CEO Andrew Chunilall; singer-song writer Christa Couture; disability activists Ali Mohammed and Meenu Sikand; several order of Canada recipients, noted physicians and academics — along with most major disability organizations from across the country — all have in common?

They are among the more than 200 political personalities, academics, artists, non-profit and business leaders that have signed an open letter asking the federal government to fast track the Canada Disability Benefit — and to do so with the active and genuine involvement of disabled people every step of the way.

People with disabilities make up 41 per cent of our population living in poverty.

The Canada Disability Benefit was first introduced by the federal government in the Speech from the Throne a year ago and is the direct result of years of advocacy from the disability community. Legislation tabled before Parliament recessed last summer promised a first: a federally funded income support for

persons with disabilities — that would not replace provincial programs and other supports but complement it — so that they are no longer consigned to a life lived in poverty.

Economists predict poverty in Canada would be reduced by as much as 40 per cent overall by eliminating disability poverty. It's a historic opportunity — something no government in the world has ever committed to.

It's time now to make the Canada Disability Benefit a reality.

The good news is Canadians across the political spectrum support the idea. In a recent Angus Reid survey, 89 per cent of Canadians say it's time to end poverty for people with disabilities. And in the recent federal election, all of the major political parties included the needs of persons with disabilities in their platforms.

There is a new awakening, a new dawn in our consciousness with Canadians calling for a recalculating of fairness and justice — and working toward a better future for all, including for people living with disabilities experiencing poverty.

There is no need to study the problem for years first as the federal government has indicated they might do in the last Parliament; we have oodles of data, we have public support and political will across party lines — now we need action.

As our governments prepare for economic recovery post-pandemic, the sad reality is that people with disabilities may be left even further behind. COVID-19 was especially hard on people with disabilities.

Currently, a disproportionate number of people with disabilities in Canada are depending on food banks and finding themselves

homeless. They are finding themselves without adequate daily living supports. Provincial disability benefits are failing them, falling well below the poverty line. Too many people with disabilities are considering dying from despair.

Canada is a prosperous nation — among the richest in the world. But in the heart of business affluence in this country, not too far away from Bay Street, there are people with disabilities like Ryan begging money to buy food. There is Mariam living in an inaccessible apartment as her disability progresses toward needing a wheelchair full-time. And there is Precious, whose mental health is deteriorating because she has no job to go back to as a result of the pandemic.

People with disabilities, their families, friends and fellow Canadians want Canada's 44th parliament to make history and leave a cross-partisan legacy. We expect all-party support for fast action on the Canada Disability Benefit — to make Canada the first country in the world to provide a livable income supplement for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are ready to work together with the federal government to fast-track consultation, provide the research and move quickly to implement the Canada Disability Benefit.

Let's work together and make this happen.

The open letter was co-ordinated by Disability Without Poverty, March of Dimes Canada, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Race and Disability Canada and can be found at disabilitywithoutpoverty.ca/Art
Eggleton is a former senator, MP, cabinet minister and mayor of Toronto. He is a longtime advocate to alleviate poverty in Canada.

Rabia Khedr is a national director for Disability Without Poverty and a former Ontario Human Rights commissioner. She is a member of the Minister's Disability Advisory Group.

Politics

[NDP calling on Liberals to keep campaign promise, reintroduce disability benefit legislation](#)

Social Sharing

Canada Disability Benefit legislation died when last federal election was called

[Peter Zimonjic](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 10, 2022 9:00 AM ET | Last Updated: 6 hours ago

The NDP has introduced a motion calling for the liberals to keep their 2021 campaign promise and reintroduce legislation to create a Canada disability benefit. The previous legislation died when the last election was called. (Trevor Brine/CBC)

The New Democrats will introduce a motion today calling on the federal government to re-offer its proposed disability benefit, which died when the Liberals called the last election.

NDP MP Bonita Zarrillo, the party's critic for disability inclusion, will seek unanimous consent from the House of Commons later today.

While the motion will not be binding, the NDP are making the move to put pressure on the governing Liberals to make good on their election promise to reintroduce Bill C-35.

"A Canada Disability Benefit would finally give relief to millions of Canadians who have been struggling and calling on the government to

fulfil the promise they made on this additional income support," Zarrillo said in a statement.

"The Liberals had seven years to bring measures forward, they promised to do it in the last election, but Canadians living with a disability have been left waiting. There can be no more delay."

Bill C-35 was introduced in June 2021 and received first reading, but died on the order paper.

During the 2021 federal election that followed, the Liberals said that there were more than one million Canadians with disabilities living in poverty, and promised to address the issue. Zarrillo says inflation is making the situation worse.

"Now, as the cost of food, housing and other essentials are getting more expensive, Canadians are struggling to make ends meet," she said.

"For Canadians living with disabilities, the situation is even more challenging, since they often have added costs, like medical expenses, specialized equipment and limited accessible, affordable housing," Zarrillo added.

Consultations, study ongoing, says minister

The Liberal's 2021 platform pledged to reintroduce the benefit to help ease the costs of transport, medical procedures and other expenses that add to the financial burden of people living with disabilities.

In the 2021 budget, the Liberals announced \$11.9 million over three years to fund consultations on how to reform the eligibility process for federal disability programs and benefits and prepare for the introduction of the legislation.

"This important work is underway, and will directly inform the Canada Disability Benefit," Carla Qualtrough, the minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, told CBC News in a statement.

Qualtrough said her government is working with Indigenous organizations, benefit experts and the disability community to craft the benefit.

"The reintroduction of CDB legislation was a platform commitment and is in my mandate letter. It remains a priority for our government," she said, without providing a specific date for the introduction of the legislation.

Avoiding negative effects

The platform says that once implemented, the disability benefit will deliver "a direct monthly payment ... for low-income Canadians with disabilities ages 18-64."

The bill introduced in the last Parliament did not lay out how much funding individuals would get, or how, but gave the Governor in Council scope to set most of the benefit's design elements, including: the conditions that must be met to receive it; the monetary value of the benefit; and how it will be indexed to inflation.

It is unclear if these conditions will remain in place when the Liberals reintroduce the legislation.

A legislative summary from the Library of Parliament explains that Bill C-35 was not designed to replace existing federal, provincial or territorial supports for persons with disabilities, but to supplement these programs where they exist.

Qualtrough told CBC News in a statement that ensuring the benefit actually works that way when rolled out is part of the consultation process currently underway.

"We are ... working with the provinces and territories to ensure that the Canada Disability Benefit will increase the monthly income of Canadians with disabilities living below the poverty line and not negatively impact entitlement to other programs and services," the minister said.

Canada Without Poverty Press release: Disability Poverty Advocates Applaud NDP Motion for the Canada Disability Benefit

For Immediate Release

May 10, 2022

Disability Poverty Advocates Applaud NDP Motion for the Canada Disability Benefit

(Toronto) – Disability Without Poverty is pleased to see the NDP motion calling on Government to table the Canada Disability Benefit Bill today. Over 1.4 million disabled people live in poverty across the country, and the Canada Disability Benefit presents the opportunity to help them live their lives with dignity. Now that the motion has been tabled, we expect unanimous support from all parties. We expect that the bill will be tabled quickly and fast-tracked through each of the stages it needs to pass through as legislation. Until this Bill becomes law, we will continue to ask #WheresTheBill ?

Michelle Hewitt, Co-chair of Disability Without Poverty says “Disabled people have lived in poverty for too long, and the extreme conditions have been exacerbated by the pandemic. With no increases in provincial disability assistance payments and inflation at 6.7%, disabled people need this Bill to pass now, and we are grateful that this motion is expected to be brought forward today.”

Rabia Khedr, National Director of Disability Without Poverty says “Poverty does not take a break and there are only 27 sitting days remaining before summer recess. I implore our Parliament to prioritize disabled lives. People

living with a disability in poverty want to live with dignity, but some are dying. Please implement the Canada Disability Benefit quickly. We are here to help with its design and implementation as people with disabilities to expedite the process.”