

New coalition calls for completely accessible broadcasting system in Canada by 2020:

(Toronto, 15 December 2010) Access 2020, a newly formed coalition of Canada's largest accessibility organizations, will be asking the CRTC to adopt a new approach to accessibility in its May 2011 policy hearing on vertical integration.

"While current regulatory trends mean that sight and hearing-impaired Canadians will only obtain complete access to television in thirty years, Access 2020's goal is to achieve fully captioned and described television content within the next decade," said Beverley Milligan, on behalf of Media Access Canada which is leading the Coalition. "We will be inviting the CRTC to empower Canada's accessibility organizations to research, test, develop and monitor the implementation of modern, multi-platform digital accessibility standards."

Since its members appeared at the CRTC public hearing of Shaw's purchase of Canwest in September, the Access 2020 Coalition has also appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to explain how vertical integration could benefit Canada's broadcasting system by making it fully accessible in a reasonable time frame, at no new cost to taxpayers.

"We think we can make the fastest progress in these areas by working together," said Andria Spindel, Executive Director of the Ontario March of Dimes. "Canada can achieve the Access 2020 goal with a positive and coordinated approach to the communications sector, regulators and legislators."

The Access 2020 Coalition has proposed that 1% of all TV ownership transactions from now until 2015 be allocated to accessibility research, including standards development and systematic, third-party monitoring of progress towards full accessibility in terms of captioning and described video. "Vertical integration should be harnessed to benefit the broadcasting system by funding this research on an ongoing basis," said CNIB's Vice President of Government Relations, Bill McKeown.

The first results of the Monitor 2 content analysis of major conventional TV broadcasting groups, being undertaken by Analysis and Research in Communications Inc., will be published in early 2011. The project's first phase report will address quantitative levels of captioned and described content, while in 2012 its second phase will report on issues related to the quality of captioning and description. "Understanding progress in quality and quantity issues related to accessible content requires well designed empirical research like Monitor 2," said Snookie Lomow, Executive Director of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Society. "We look forward to having these results in time for the CRTC's vertical integration hearing and its hearings into the renewal of Canada's major broadcasting groups."

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