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Disability Justice in Nova Scotia Requires More Than Funding

Budgets are not just financial documents. They are statements of values. They reveal who belongs, whose rights are prioritized, and whose barriers remain intact.

Nova Scotia's 2026–27 provincial budget includes welcome investments in disability supports and community living. That matters. For years, individuals and families have waited for movement away from segregated systems toward meaningful community inclusion. The right to live in community — not in institutional settings — is protected under provincial human rights law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

But funding announcements alone do not guarantee justice.

If we evaluate this budget without an intersectional lens, we risk misunderstanding who is most affected — and who may still be left behind.

Disability does not exist in isolation. It intersects with race, Indigeneity, gender identity, geography, and income. When those systems overlap, inequities compound.

There are three areas where this budget must go further.

First, accountability.

While funding for disability support transformation has increased, we do not yet see publicly reported targets for reducing waitlists, transitioning individuals to community living, or ensuring accessibility compliance in new infrastructure. Without measurable benchmarks, it is impossible to determine whether progress is reaching those most marginalized.

African Nova Scotians with disabilities already experience higher poverty rates, shaped by generations of systemic racism and underinvestment. Indigenous peoples experience higher disability prevalence and significant rural service barriers. 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities face elevated housing insecurity and mental health stressors. If outcomes are not tracked and reported in a disaggregated way — by race, Indigeneity, gender identity, and geography — inequities remain invisible.

Second, income security.

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented among Nova Scotians living in poverty. But poverty is not evenly distributed.

Indigenous women with disabilities, African Nova Scotian youth aging out of care, and trans individuals with disabilities face compounded economic exclusion. Incremental income adjustments do not address structural inequity. Income adequacy must reflect the real cost of living — including disability-related expenses such as transportation, assistive devices, and specialized supports.

Economic insecurity is not simply a social issue. It is a human rights issue. Without economic stability, autonomy and participation remain out of reach.

Third, community capacity.

This budget includes reductions to discretionary grants across sectors. Community-based disability organizations are often trusted access points — particularly for racialized, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities that may distrust formal systems due to historic harm.

These organizations provide peer support, advocacy, culturally grounded programming, and accountability. When funding is reduced, those already navigating compounded barriers are affected first and most deeply.

Civil society capacity is not peripheral to inclusion. It is foundational to rights enforcement and belonging.

There is also the reality of public service staffing reductions. Even where funding increases exist, implementation requires people. Reduced administrative and frontline capacity can delay access, slow service coordination, and exacerbate barriers — particularly for communities already struggling to navigate complex systems.

Nova Scotia has committed to becoming accessible by 2030. That commitment must be more than aspirational.

Accessibility must be embedded across healthcare infrastructure, housing investments, transportation systems, and service delivery. It must be culturally safe. It must be anti-racist. It must be inclusive of 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Disability justice and racial justice are inseparable. Reconciliation must include disability inclusion. Queer inclusion must include accessibility.

This budget contains building blocks for progress. But true progress requires more than investment — it requires measurable accountability, income adequacy, intersectional data, and stable community partnerships.

Progress that benefits only those closest to equity is not justice.

Nova Scotia has the opportunity to lead — not just by funding programs, but by ensuring that rights are realized equitably for those historically excluded.

Rights are not line items. They are obligations.

We look forward to continued collaboration with government to ensure these commitments translate into equitable outcomes.

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