



Communication Disabilities Access Canada

September 25, 2018

Hon. Carla Qualtrough, MP
Minister of Accessibility
Minister of Public Services and Procurement
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Expectations for the Accessible Canada Act (Bill C-81)

A Message from Canadians who live with Speech, Language and Communication Disabilities

Dear Minister Qualtrough,

Thank you for bringing forward Bill C-81. We think it provides an excellent starting point to achieve a barrier-free Canada and we are delighted to have an opportunity to contribute to shaping this important legislation. During the second reading of the C-81 bill, a number of MPs questioned the expectations for the bill. As Canadians living with speech, language and communication, our expectations for the Accessible Canada Act are outlined in this letter.

We represent approximately a **half million Canadians** who have speech, language and communication disabilities not caused by significant hearing loss. We may have cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, learning disability, cognitive disability, traumatic brain injury, aphasia, dementia, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis and other types of disabilities. These disabilities can impact our ability to speak and we may use picture, symbol or letter boards or speech-generating devices to communicate. Many of us also have disabilities that affect how we hear, process and understand what other people are saying.

For us, communication access to goods and services is a two-way exchange of information between people in face-to-face interactions, over the telephone, via e-communications, at meetings and public forums, and through reading, and writing. Therefore, we want communication accommodations and supports to apply to **all government entities** that interact with the public, not just embedded in Information and Communication services and technologies. We want accommodations and supports that include and go well beyond respectful attitudes, and the provision of alternate formats, and accessible websites.

The expectations that we list here are all very achievable. CDAC and other international organizations have already developed many low cost guidelines and educational resources that can easily be utilized to address many of the communication barriers that we experience.

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We expect the Act to make all government services accessible to us by ensuring that people working in these services know:

- How to communicate with us, if we have unclear speech, use pictures, letter boards, speech generating devices and/or a communication assistant
- What to do if they do not understand what we are communicating
- How to assist us if we do not understand what they are saying
- How to make accessible plain language documents, websites and e-communications
- How to make public consultations accessible and accommodate our accessibility accommodations at meetings and committees

Specifically, we expect the following from the Accessible Canada Act:

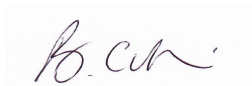
- **Employment services** will provide us with equal access to employment training and opportunities. Employers will provide us with the human assistance, assistive devices and time we need to do our jobs. We expect the government to hire many of us to work on accessibility standards committees, develop resources and provide accessibility trainings.
- **Service Canada and Canada Revenue Agency** will train staff in ways to communicate with us over the phone. They will allow us to use our authorized communication assistants over the phone or text-based communication. They will have procedures in place so that we can do this in a safe, secure and confidential way.
- **Justice Canada, RCMP, and all federal legal, justice services and courts** will develop and provide communication intermediary services to assist us communicating in these situations. Communication Intermediaries are Speech-Language Pathologists with specialized training to work in these settings. We expect government funding to develop and implement these communication support services, if we are to have access to justice in Canada.
- **Public Safety Canada** will provide training and resources to first responders, community groups and the private sector on ways to communicate with us in emergency and disaster situations. We expect them to adopt and adapt policies that are in place to safeguard people who have speech, language and communication disabilities, in the USA and other countries.
- **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada** will have policies, procedures and practices in place to allow us to communicate effectively at citizenship interviews and swearing in ceremonies as well as service providers who can communicate effectively with us when we apply for passports and visas.
- **Seniors Canada** will address the unique communication needs of seniors including seniors who have existing speech, language and communication disabilities as well as seniors who have communication disabilities due to the aging process. This includes developing and providing supports to assist seniors communicating about all kinds of abuse.

- **Elections Canada** will provide internet voting that we can use as well as have election officers who know how to interact with us, provide us with writing assistance if required and procedures to accept our authorized assistant.
- **Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunication Commission (CTRC)** will direct telecommunication companies to develop accessible, affordable telephone products and services for people with speech, language and communication disabilities. This includes telephones that can be operated with switches, training for message relay service providers in facilitating communication for people who have unclear speech or who use speech-generating devices and video conferencing for people who use picture and letter boards to communicate.
- **Transport Canada** will have trained staff who know how to communicate with us. They will find safe ways for us to keep our speech-generating devices with us as we travel and if necessary, procedures to securely and safely stow them away.
- **Health Canada** will have policies and practices to ensure that healthcare professionals can effectively communicate with us and reliably and authentically obtain our full and informed consent to treatment. In addition, we will have specific safeguards in place and monitoring procedures to negotiate all our healthcare services, especially end-of-life directives.
- **Government consultations and forums** will be accessible because trained communication assistants will be provided, similar to how ASL/QSL services are provided.
- **Financial services** will negotiate how their services can be accessible to us in terms of accessing our finances. This includes procedures for securely accepting and verifying alternate signatures or approved signatures.

In addition, we expect the Accessible Canada Act to set a high standard as a model for advancing accessibility across all provinces and territories in Canada.

We are hopeful that Bill C-81 will meet our expectations. We also hope that we will be invited to testify to the joint committee and we look forward to working with you and your team to ensure that this legislation will meaningfully address our communication accessibility needs.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director



Hazel Self
Chair of the Board of Directors

On behalf CDAC's Bill C-81 committee: Glenda Watson Hyatt, Krystine Donato, Anne Abbott and Sam Savona.

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