



**Communication Disabilities Access Canada**

### **About Communication Access Now (CAN)**

Communication Access Now (CAN) is a national campaign to promote accessibility for people who have speech and language disabilities.

People who have speech and language disabilities can have major barriers accessing services because some people:

- May be afraid to talk to them
- Think they are hard of hearing
- Underestimate their abilities
- Do not know how to communicate with them
- Do not know or do simple things to provide access to services

CAN provides information, education and resources about communication access for:

- Government, accessibility legislators and policy makers
- Businesses, organizations and community services
- People who have speech and language disabilities and their families
- Communication and disability services

CAN's goal is to improve accessibility to goods, services and opportunities for all people who have speech and language disabilities.

CAN is a two-year project operated by Communication Disabilities Access Canada (CDAC) with a funding contribution from the Government of Canada's Disability Component of Social Development Partnerships Program. It will be rolled-out across Canada with regional events in Vancouver, Edmonton, Quebec and Moncton.

More information: [www.communication-access.org](http://www.communication-access.org)

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## **About Communication Disabilities Access Canada (CDAC)**

Communication Disabilities Access Canada (CDAC) is a national, not-for-profit organization.

CDAC promotes human rights, accessibility, and community inclusion for people who have speech and language disabilities.

CDAC is project funded.

CDAC provides:

- Research on a range of social justice issues relating to communication disability
- Education programs for community sectors
- Resources on communication access
- Consultation to government and policy makers

Vision

- An inclusive society where people who have speech and language disabilities can meaningfully exercise their full rights of citizenship.

Project themes

- Communication access to justice
- Abuse and crimes
- Communication rights
- Accessibility
- Leadership
- Communication Intermediaries

More information: [www.cdacanada.com](http://www.cdacanada.com)



**Communication Disabilities Access Canada**

### **The Facts**

- There are 440,000 people in Canada who have speech and language disabilities that are not caused by hearing loss.
- Conditions that may cause speech and language disabilities include cerebral palsy, autism, cognitive disability, traumatic brain injury, aphasia after a stroke, dementia, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis or other conditions.
- People with speech and language disabilities:
  - Have the same rights as everyone else including equal access to goods, services and opportunities in their communities
  - Cannot get equal access to services without effective communication
  - Cannot communicate with people who are afraid to talk to them, underestimate their abilities and do not know how to communicate with them
  - Can experience serious consequences when health care professionals, police, legal and justice professionals cannot communicate with them
  - Want their accessibility needs to be meaningfully included in existing legislation and guidelines
  - Want to educate the public, businesses, private and public sectors and accessibility legislators about their communication accessibility rights and accommodations
  - Want trained communication assistants to assist them communicating within essential services



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## Quotes

My greatest barriers are people who think that because I can't speak, I cannot understand what they are saying or I am incapable of making my own decisions. People need to know that we are all different. Having a speech disability does not necessarily mean that we can't hear and understand.

**Krystine Donato** – *Research Assistant*

I want people to talk directly to me – not to ignore me. I can't get good services if people don't know how to communicate with me. **Tien Hoang** – *Mentor*

We are often ignored. People who don't know us don't talk to us. They tend to talk to the person with us. We can't begin to get access to services if people don't communicate with us.

**Paul Marshall** – *Web Master*

Communication access is more than being nice. In critical situations, I would want a trained communication assistant to help others understand my messages. These services need to be developed and made available to us so that we can have effective communication in hospitals and all essential services. **Colin Phillips** – *PhD Candidate*

I have aphasia after a stroke. It affects how I speak and sometimes I have difficulty processing what people are saying. For me, access is having people show me what they are talking about and giving me time to communicate using my device or communication book. **Bill Scott** – *Retired*

We can experience serious barriers communicating with health care, police, emergency and legal services. These are critical communication situations. Unlike people who are Deaf we have no trained communication assistant service to support us communicating in these situations.

**Nola Millan** – *Educator*.



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## **Our Accessibility Barriers**

Many of us face serious communication challenges and barriers when accessing community services.

Here are some real life examples:

- I was trying to ask if they had a piece of hardware I wanted. I tried to spell it out on my letter board. They thought I was begging and asked me to leave the store.
- The emergency response person ignored me and asked the person who happened to be beside me to give consent to treatment on my behalf.
- I wasn't accepted to college because of my speech disability.
- I was driven around the city because the para-transit driver didn't give me a chance to tell him where I wanted to go using my communication board.
- When I call government services, they think I am drunk and hang up the phone.
- Due to my physical and communication disability, I couldn't use the hospital call bell or call the nurse when I wanted attention.
- I tried to tell the police about how I was abused. They told me I would not be a credible witness because I could not speak.
- I didn't have food when I was in the hospital. The staff dropped off the tray at the end of my bed and left. I couldn't tell them I needed someone to help me eat.
- I was ordering a sandwich using my communication device and they threatened to call the police if I didn't leave the restaurant.
- My elderly mother had to give consent to a medical procedure. She needed things explained in a certain way because she has aphasia. The consent form and process was far too complex for her to understand.



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- When I was in hospital, I needed someone at all times to help the nurses understand me. That was a major stress on my family and friends.
- I want to make my will but I know the lawyer won't understand me. I don't want my family to assist me but I have nobody to help with communication.
- I have given up. I know people won't even try to understand what I am communicating. It is humiliating being ignored.
- We want our daughter to go to full time kindergarten but she only has a half time education assistant who can help her communicate.
- I lost my accounting job after I had a stroke.
- We are very vulnerable. The best victim is the one who can't tell.
- The sales clerk panicked when she saw me. I heard her say "What am I supposed to do – she must be deaf."
- I overheard a woman in a mall talking about me. She said "He shouldn't be let out on his own" – like I was an animal in a zoo.



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## **What we want**

### **1. Interpersonal Communication**

We want everyone to:

- Talk directly to us, not just the person with us
- Assume we understand unless we tell you otherwise
- Ask what you can do when communicating with us
- Watch and listen as we may use speech, body language, a communication board or device
- Give us the time we need to communicate
- Make an effort to understand our messages

### **2. Information and Communication**

If appropriate, we want you to ask us if we have accessibility requirements to:

- Communicate with you using the telephone, fax, email, text, TTY, or relay services
- Read and understand your written information and website
- Complete your forms, take-notes or sign your documents

### **3. Communication Environments**

We want healthcare, emergency, police, legal and justice services to have:

- Staff who are trained in how to communicate with us
- Communication assistants to help with communication, when needed
- Emergency picture, alphabet boards and other communication tools



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## **Moving Forward**

To improve communication access to goods and services, we want:

- Public education on communication disabilities, rights and access
- Human rights legislation to include communication access accommodations for people with speech and language disabilities
- Clear guidelines for businesses and organizations on ways to make services communication accessible
- More representation of people with different types of communication disabilities on accessibility committees
- Communication assistant training and services to assist people communicating within essential services
- Essential services to have communication access policies and procedures; trained front line staff; access to communication assistants and communication tools
- Support to educate people with communication disabilities about their access rights and how to communicate their access requirements when using community services.

**Communication Access Now** wants to work with you to improve accessibility for all people with speech and language disabilities.

Check out our website for videos, toolkits, e-learning modules and resources.

[www.communication-access.org](http://www.communication-access.org)