



Ref: 188115

Barbara Collier
Executive Director
Communication Disabilities Access Canada
131 Barber Greene Road
Toronto ON M3C 3Y5

Dear Ms. Collier:

Thank you for your letter dated September 9, 2015, addressed to me, expressing congratulations for Accessibility 2024 and the One Year Progress Update. I am pleased to respond.

As you are probably aware, Honourable Michelle Stilwell, Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation, and Molly Harrington, Assistant Deputy Minister, met with Lois Turner, Communication Access Now regional coordinator in B.C., on September 22, 2015, to discuss the suggestions outlined in your letter for the future developments of Accessibility 2024, our 10-year plan to make B.C. the most progressive province for those living with disabilities in Canada.

I want to assure you that we are aware of the concerns you have raised and that the issues that surround communications disabilities are considered and included as we implement Accessibility 2024. The goals and strategies outlined in the 12 building blocks of Accessibility 2024 apply broadly to people living with disabilities in B.C., and include people with speech and language disabilities (SLD). By achieving progress on each of these building blocks, B.C. will be a better place to live, work and visit for everyone.

I would like to highlight some of the initiatives that have been undertaken by the Province to include the communication accessibility needs of people with SLD as part of the implementation of Accessibility 2024.

- Inclusive Government:
 - As part of the release of Accessibility 2024, we created an Accessibility Secretariat that works with stakeholders both within government and within the disability and business communities (such as Communication and Disabilities Access Canada) to develop resources and materials that geared towards improving many facets of daily interaction, such as hiring practices or consumer interactions, for example.

- The Province seeks to pursue the effective and engaging public process that began with the Disability White Paper Consultation, and confirms its commitment to consult on options for a made-in-B.C. approach to accessibility related legislation. Disability organizations like Communication Disabilities Access Canada (CDAC) will have the opportunity to participate.
- Accessible Service Delivery
 - Last January, we added a link to your e-learning modules within our intranet so that Employment and Assistance Workers can learn how to best communicate with people with speech and language disabilities. The Accessibility 2024 website has also recently been updated with a link to the CDAC website.
- Employment
 - Through the Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility and the Presidents Group, we are working with stakeholders from the disability and business communities to look at what improvements can be put in place to make businesses and the overall consumer experience better and this certainly includes communications. This is also an important aspect of the hiring process for people with disabilities and is something we are looking at improving, whether it is through betterment of hiring practices for the public or private sectors.
 - Since 2005, the ministry has provided substantial funding to Communication Assistance for Youth and Adults (CAYA) to support their work in enabling better communications for persons with communications disabilities.
 - In Accessibility 2024, government has committed an additional \$2 million in one-time funding for the University of Victoria's CanAssist program that develops and assesses new devices and technologies to help increase independence for people with disabilities, including those with speech and language disabilities.
 - In 2015, the Government also provided the British Columbia Institute of Technology \$100,000 toward the Post-Secondary Communication Access Service (PCAS), and the Program for the Institutional Loan of Adaptive Technology (PILAT) will also receive \$75,000 toward equipment and software to help students with disabilities as part of B.C.'s Skills for Jobs Blueprint, and Accessibility 2024.

- Emergency Preparedness
 - The need for inclusive consultations on all aspects of emergency preparedness to ensure that all groups within the broad definition of disability are included in the conversation is something that we are committed to ensuring. We have been in contact with our colleagues at Emergency Management BC, which issued on March 2015 the BC Earthquake Preparedness Consultation Report that includes recommendations for working collaboratively to address the needs of people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations in the event of an earthquake.

- Consumer Experience
 - Our staff has also put CDAC in touch with Rick Hansen Foundation staff involved in their Planat initiative.

The ministry remains interested in working with CDAC to improve awareness of how people communicate with persons who have a communication disability, and would like to continue explore ways to work together.

I encourage you to remain in contact with Ministry staff as the work progresses.

Sincerely,



Linda Larson
Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility