

Nominees Response to Question # 2

Canada is working towards federal legislation to support an accessible and inclusive Canada (For example: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/consultations/accessibility-legislation.html#h2.2>). How do you interpret this, and how can the ACSW support this effort?" – Mieke

Richard Gregory, RSW (Nominee – President)

Thank you for the question. I am encouraged that the government is looking at legislation to support an accessible and inclusive Canada. I am not always convinced that government attaches the same meaning to words like accessible and inclusive that we, as social workers, do. I do think it is an issue of social justice to ensure that everyone has equal access to resources and opportunities, understanding that 'equal' does not mean 'the same'.

I believe that ACSW has a few options for supporting initiative towards accessibility and inclusiveness. I think it is important to participate in consultations and to put forth our positions. At a national level this can be done in collaboration with CASW. Provincially, we can continue to communicate with our provincial government. Last year, we submitted several recommendations to the provincial government with regard to the budget. The following is the statement from the letter that was sent to the Finance Minister, and copied to the Premier and to related Ministers.

"The need for further education also came through in recommendations to move towards a barrier free Alberta. Building codes and licenses need to stipulate that requirements for building to be accessible for walkers, scooters, and wheel-chairs. Municipalities should be requiring that all buildings are built on the principles of 'barrier free'. Any government service that is in a rented space must be in a barrier free space. Any building that received government funding for renovations should have in those renovations the requirement that they become barrier free. It was strongly recommended that there needs to be sensitivity training for government staff, as well as builders, contractors, and building designers.

It was suggested that programs that work with people with disabilities, such as Aides to Daily Living, must be funded to levels that they are able to enhance the employability of individuals by providing equipment that will accommodate success in the work environment. This requires a comprehensive approach towards individualization."

Thank you again for your question. Sincerely, Richard Gregory

Ajay Pandhi, MSW, RSW, MA, Q-Med, BA (Nominee – Vice-President)

I thank you Mieke for this question. Even though this government is showing some serious intent, however, 411600 Canadians with physical and/or mental disabilities are currently unemployed despite being willing and able to participate in the paid labor force. So, in the interim, much more needs to be done to alleviate disability poverty. We have the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (which was introduced in 2005, with a goal of making the province fully accessible by 2025) to learn from. Ontario's experience may help guide federal law.

Council of Canadians with Disabilities suggests that for an Inclusive and Accessible Canada to be a reality, the Government of Canada must show leadership by enhancing their role in four key areas:

- Enhanced disability supports to enable Independent Living, active citizenship and full participation;
- An enhanced Federal role in alleviating poverty of persons with disabilities and their families thus freeing up dollars at provincial/territorial levels for new investments in disability supports;
- Labor force inclusion measures;
- A national social development role to promote accessibility and community inclusion.

Domestically, the current Government has made a number of commitments to addressing issues facing people with disabilities and their families. One such commitment is the 4% increase in federal accessibility funding by 2018 - which may not be enough, but it signals a path in the right direction.

ACSW's renewed relationship with CASW allows us the ability to monitor this government's promise and thereby continually keeps the pressure on them to ensure a much more accessible and inclusive Canada.

Timothy Wild, RSW

Hello Mieke,

Thank you for your question. I believe that the ACSW should maintain a visible public presence on all social policy issues; not only at the provincial level but also at the municipal and federal orders of government. As a professional body we are uniquely placed to blend the facts and faces of social issues, and link individual experiences to policy issues. They are essential when it comes to accessibility and inclusivity – the hallmarks of social connectivity and belonging. It is all well and good to have aspirations for justice and inclusion. However, the real issue is based on how the aspirations are supported by both a policy framework and financially. I have seen too

many good ideas laying dormant because they are not supported in a sustainable manner. (There are also examples of – potentially – good public policy initiatives that have unanticipated negative consequences for groups and individuals. I am thinking of some of the changes to the family's role in PDD funding and provision, and increased reliance on private retirement savings for people with disabilities).

As you may know, the social action / social justice work of the ACSW is based on the three, integrated areas of: work with partners; work with individual social workers, and work with social work interest groups. And for this integration to work, Council needs time to support local initiatives and participate as a collective body. I think the ACSW has a lot of credibility to add to social change. But for this to happen, we need social workers to bring issues to our attention and we need to advocate for well thought out policy positions. Thanks for doing this!

All the best,
Timothy Wild, RSW

Cardinal Fomradas, MSW, RSW, DCA

Thanks for the excellent question Mieke. This is a very important topic. To me accessibility and inclusion means that other abled individuals are able to fully participate in our society and are supported and accepted. This includes everything from being able to physically access all buildings without physical barriers, as well as participating in our society without any structural and societal barriers. It also means challenging ableism and changing the societal discourse about other abled individuals.

ACSW can support this effort by supporting and advocating for other abled individuals. ACSW can lobby and advocate with government as well as the private sector for increased supports for other abled individuals in terms of educational opportunities, work opportunities, and funding programs. You will note that I specifically mention lobbying and advocating with the private sector. All too often advocacy efforts are aimed solely at government, however accessibility and inclusion includes the private sector and efforts must be made in this area as well. ACSW can also challenge the societal discourse around ableism and help change the way society views other abled individuals.

On a practice level it's important for Social Workers to be there for other abled individuals. When we are working with a client who is other abled, it's important to see beyond their disability. It is important to keep the perspective that they are a human being with hopes, dreams, fears, and anxieties. Remember they are more than their disability. We must support them emotionally, and be an ally in their struggle.

Warm Regards,
Cardinal Fomradas MSW, RSW, DCA

Jolene Spies, BSW, RSW

Thanks for the question Mieke as well as the link to this material as I was not fully aware of the legislation and what it can do to positively change the lives of those with disabilities. In terms of interpretation of the legislation, I believe it is recognizing that this is an area that needs further recognition and development in helping break down those barriers for people. Living from a rural community in central Alberta, I can see how accessibility can become even more of a barrier for things such as a lack of public transportation or services to help those in the community. Perhaps communities should start with needs assessment to look at what life would be like with a disability and what changes need to be made. While this is a federal initiative, provincial and municipal government need to be brought in as well to make this a success.

In terms of the ACSW's role in this legislation, one area I believe that needs to be advocated for is the voice of rural Alberta. Often the bigger cities like Edmonton and Calgary see provincial support or even recognition. Also being a social worker in rural community such as central Alberta, it can be more challenging in helping clients to find appropriate services because of a lack of agencies or as I mentioned earlier, lack of appropriate transportation. Additionally, the ACSW can offer a unique representation in bringing our client's voices forward in helping to shape this legislation for people with disabilities and creating a more inclusive environment.

Thanks!

Enid Martin, MSW, RSW

I interpret the work of the Federal Government and in particular, the Honourable Minister responsible for Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Carla Qualtrough who is the first ever Federal Minister to hold this portfolio and who is also blind, as ground-breaking. I spoke with an administrative assistant with the accessible-Canada project who said that there is absolutely nothing in place right now with respect to accessibility to, for instance, banks, federal and provincial buildings.

Although the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act protect the rights of citizens, there is no legislation identifying accessibility to services for persons with disabilities. The Charter talks about discrimination but not accessibility and inclusivity: herein lies the gap.

Minister Qualtrough wants to “*highlight the importance of proactive legislation instead of reactive ones that come after a barrier has already interfered with somebody’s life.*”¹ By developing legislation, the risk of *exclusion* will be mitigated. I agree that as individuals and collectively as social workers, we have been doing our part to address the issues of accessibility and inclusivity for persons with disabilities, however, as a Canadian society, we have not done well.

I feel that ACSW can have an active role by encouraging members to become involved in the process. The deadline for input and completing the initial survey is next Tuesday, February 28th, 2017 and the consultation has been going across Canada since July 2016, however, the administration assistant I spoke to said that they will gladly accept e-mails or phone calls past the Tuesday deadline:

Phone: 1-844-836-8126; TTY: 819-934-6649; Fax: 819-953-4797 or

e-mail: accessible-canada@hrsdc.gc.ca

Thank you for the question, Mieke. Regards, Enid

For further information on Minister Qualtrough’s proposed legislation, see the following:

<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/a-special-edition-of-the-current-focused-on-disability-for-october-21-2016-1.3814141/minister-carla-qualtrough-says-canada-s-new-disability-act-will-make-history-1.3814165>

Cody Murrell, BSW, RSW

I think it is fantastic that building a more inclusive and accessible Canada is a priority for our government! In many respects, I believe Canada is progressive, especially when compared to many other countries, in the efforts made to be inclusive/accessible; however, there is some major room for improvement. This is an important issue the government is raising and I hope it will help start a national conversation.

For me, an inclusive/accessible Canada means that people with disabilities/impairments are able to fully participate in society. I believe, to a degree, that disabilities are socially constructed and by changing aspects of society we can dramatically lessen the impacts of disabilities. In order to make Canada more inclusive/accessible I think major improvements need to be made in the areas of transportation, meaningful employment and social inclusion. From my experience in working with people with disabilities these are the three areas that severely limit inclusivity/accessibility and are areas where improvements are possible/will have the largest impact.

I think that the ACSW can support this in several significant ways! The first is by getting involved in the consultation process. As Social Workers we have an important perspective on this issue that needs to be included. The second is by holding the government accountable by ensuring they follow through with their proposed plan and that people with disabilities have a seat at the table. The third is by spreading awareness among our members to support their involvement!