

Submission on Bill C-22

An Act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act

Submission date: November 16, 2022

Submitted to:
The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Submitted by:
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Disability Alliance BC (DABC) is a provincial, cross-disability non-profit organization and registered charity that advocates for the rights of people with disabilities. Our mission is to support people, with all disabilities, to live with dignity, independence and as equal and full participants in the community.

DABC has several direct service programs that help people with disabilities across British Columbia access critical benefits and services. Our Advocacy Access program assists hundreds of people each year to access provincial and federal income supports, special diet allowances, medical equipment such as wheelchairs and medical supplies, and information on disability-related programs and services. Our other programs include Tax AID, through which we assist people receiving provincial disability assistance to file multiple years of income taxes; Access RDSP, which assists people to access the Registered Disability Savings Plan and Disability Tax Credit (DTC); The Right Fit, which matches wheelchair-users with wheelchair accessible housing; and our Disability Law Clinic, which provides legal advice and assistance for people who have been discriminated against based on their disability.

Most of the people we assist live in extreme poverty, and many are at risk of being homeless or are homeless. We have gathered many accounts of our clients who, not having enough money to live with dignity, have had to forego medical treatments that are not covered by healthcare, or have had to access foodbanks for basic food supplies, or who face extreme social isolation because they don't have enough money for transportation. In these situations, we try our best to connect our clients to other services that may help, but often there is a gap in services that leave people with disabilities in poverty without any recourse at all. This gap in support is becoming all too common.

Since the pandemic, DABC has seen an overwhelming increase in demand for our services, particularly services which support clients in getting onto disability assistance programs. Yet, the amount one receives on provincial disability assistance is still far below the poverty line. I would like to direct your attention to the firsthand accounts of people experiencing poverty while on disability assistance as told through the stories of 20 people published by the Insufficient Art Project.¹ I hope these stories further highlight the need for

¹ <https://insufficientartproject.ca/>

the Canada Disability Benefit to act as a supplement to provincial disability assistance benefits, thereby allowing many thousands of recipients to move closer in reaching an adequate standard of living, one that brings dignity and independence at the center of financial security for people with disabilities.

In *Building Understanding: The First Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty*, we understand that “persons with disabilities continue to face high rates of poverty, especially those under the age of 65.”² Indeed, in 2019, 1,142,000 of people with disabilities were reported to live in poverty. The significance of the implementation of the Canada Disability Benefit on the lives of people with disabilities cannot be understated, and it cannot wait.

As an affiliate member of Disability Without Poverty, we fully support their witness testimony and brief submitted to the Committee. **With this in mind, we respectfully make the following recommendations to the Committee:**

- To utilize all-party support in passing Bill C-22 to Royal Assent before the end of 2022
- In the spirit of “Nothing About Us, Without Us”: To ensure the design and implementation of the standards and regulations of this benefit places disabled people with lived and living experience in poverty at the centre of a collaborate process.

With decades of experience supporting people with disabilities living in poverty to improve their financial security, as well as our experience navigating disability benefit systems on behalf of our clients, and further due to our expertise in disability law (Our Disability Law Clinic is only one of two non-profit law clinics in the country that specializes in this type of law), DABC stands ready to connect the Federal Government with meaningful engagement to people with disabilities living in poverty. We call upon the Federal Government to pass Bill C-22 without further delay.

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/national-advisory-council/reports/2021-annual.html>