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Every Canadian Counts Coalition

Hubert van Niekerk

Executive Director at Every Canadian Counts Coalition

For more than a decade, Every Canadian Counts has been a nonprofit, volunteer-led organization bringing together people with and without disabilities to advocate for meaningful, systemic reform in disability support across Canada.

Across the country, disability support systems are marked by troubling inconsistencies and inequities. Insufficient funding, uneven access, affordability challenges, inefficient service delivery, limited knowledge sharing, and gaps in data have created a fragmented system that fails to meet the needs of Canadians with disabilities and their families.

In response, we propose a transformative solution: the creation of a publicly funded National Disability Insurance Program (NDIP). Developed through consultation with people with disabilities and stakeholder organizations, this program would provide comprehensive, lifetime support for individuals with lifelong disabilities from birth through end of life, as well as for those who acquire disabilities before the age of 65. Such a program would ensure income security, eliminate stigma, and promote equity with dignity.

The NDIP would cover a full spectrum of disability-related supports, including paid caregiving, home and vehicle modifications, psychosocial services, transportation, supported housing, education, life-skills and job training, assistive technologies, and therapeutic services. In short, it would address all needs associated with living with a disability.

The impact of such a program would be profound. It would improve the well-being of millions of Canadians while strengthening economic sustainability. By establishing entitlement-based, non-means-tested support that is portable across provinces and territories, the NDIP would recognize disability as a shared societal responsibility, not an individual burden. It would be seen as an investment in people.

Currently, individuals with disabilities, their families, and group homes receive far less support than required. Many group homes are forced to cut services or increase occupancy to remain financially viable, conditions that risk a return to institutionalization.

A national program would also generate significant cost savings by reducing reliance on crisis interventions, healthcare systems, incarceration, policing, emergency services, and social supports related to homelessness and mental health. Notably, an estimated 742,000 Canadians with disabilities are willing and able to work but are prevented from doing so due to inadequate supports.

The current system also places immense strain on caregivers (most often women) who frequently leave the workforce to provide unpaid care. This results in lost income, reduced pension contributions, and long-term financial insecurity. With access to paid caregiving, many could return to work, contributing to the economy and securing their own futures.

An NDIP represents true nation-building. It aligns with federal priorities by fostering workforce participation, supporting innovation, strengthening human capital, and bridging urban, rural, and Indigenous communities. Research consistently demonstrates the economic and social benefits of a national disability insurance model.

Such a program would also position Canada as a global leader in disability inclusion and ensure compliance with international human rights commitments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The urgency cannot be overstated. For many individuals with disabilities, years of systemic failure have already caused lasting harm. Without reform, more lives will be lost to preventable hardship, including through pathways such as medical assistance in dying. This trajectory can and must be changed.

While recent federal initiatives, such as accessibility legislation and inclusion strategies represent progress, they fall short of establishing a comprehensive, enforceable right to disability support services. Furthermore, poverty and disability must be addressed as distinct issues. Reducing poverty alone will not eliminate the added costs of living with a disability.

A national disability insurance program would create equity across regions and communities, ensuring consistent support regardless of geography. It would also address the growing economic toll of caregiving, which currently removes the equivalent of 558,000 full-time workers from the Canadian workforce each year.

The case for action is clear. Public demand for reform is increasing, while demographic pressures and rising healthcare costs expose the unsustainability of the current patchwork system. Canada has an opportunity to demonstrate bold leadership through the creation of a national disability insurance program.

The next steps are straightforward. The federal government must lead a comprehensive assessment of the feasibility, viability, and desirability of the NDIP, building on existing research. At the same time, public awareness must grow so Canadians understand the transformative benefits such a program would bring.

The time has come to implement the next major advancement in disability support.

Let us ensure that every Canadian truly counts guided by the principle of “nothing without us.”

Simply put, it is the right thing to do.