



Round Table on Disability Supports 2006

Disabilities
ISSUES
OFFICE

Manitoba 



Minister's Message

The provincial government places a high value on Round Tables as a way to hear from community experts on disability issues and to discuss ideas for making positive change.

As Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, I have a clear interest in the topic of disability supports. This issue has been identified as a priority at several recent meetings of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services. In addition, a working group led by Manitoba Family Services and Housing is now reviewing disability support programs, eligibility criteria and coordination of services across departments. It is hoped this work will lead to meaningful improvements to provincial programs.

Services for Aboriginal Manitobans with disabilities are also one of my priorities, and I am especially interested to hear community perspectives on this topic. With help from the Disabilities Issues Office, the province will work to improve the way we provide supports to this important segment of Manitoba's population.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Round Table on Disability Supports. Please be assured that your efforts will lead to stronger programming. Already, the recommendations are being shared and discussed by the departments affected.

I am pleased to present this report on the highlights of the issues addressed during the Round Table on Disability Supports.

Gord Mackintosh
Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

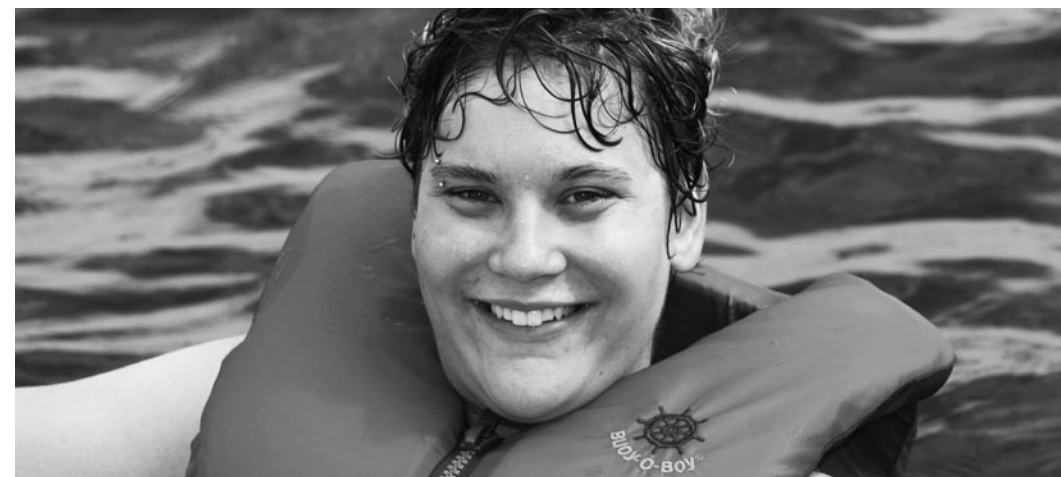
Disability supports can mean many different things to different people. For the purposes of the Round Table on Disability Supports the following definition was used:

“Any good, service or environmental adaptation that assists persons with disabilities and their families to overcome limitations that people with disabilities face in carrying out daily living activities at each stage of their lives and in participating and being recognized as full citizens, in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community.” (Roehrer Institute)

Before the actual Round Table on Disability Supports, the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) sponsored three preliminary public meetings to provide individual Manitobans with an opportunity to share their experiences and concerns with disability supports.

The first was a Town Hall meeting in Winnipeg where numerous people came together to share their stories and ideas for improving disability support services in Manitoba. A second Town Hall was held in Brandon and, with the help of Tele-Health video conferencing technology, it included participants from Winkler, Morden, Thompson, Dauphin, The Pas and Norway House. Together, these two Town Halls heard from about 170 individuals.

In addition to the Town Hall meetings, a Sharing Circle was organized to discuss the particular obstacles faced by Aboriginal Manitobans trying to access disability supports. The DIO was grateful for the collaboration it received from the First Nations disABILITY Association of Manitoba and the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development as it prepared for the Sharing Circle. With their help, the spiritual quality of sharing was celebrated in many ways, including blessings from an Aboriginal Elder and the use of “talking sticks” to encourage participation. Approximately 35 people participated in the Sharing Circle.



These three preliminary meetings set the stage for the Round Table on Disability Supports which took place in Winnipeg on March 24, 2006. Whereas the public meetings described above focused on individuals' issues and priorities, the goal of the Round Table was to identify long-term solutions to improve disability supports for all Manitobans.

Based on the comments made during the Town Halls and the Sharing Circle, the DIO decided to focus on three specific topics during the Round Table on Disability Supports. They were:

1. Personal Supports
2. Assistive Devices
3. Disability Supports During Periods of Transition

The 63 delegates who attended the Round Table on Disability Supports represented a number of Manitoba's disability organizations and service providers. Background information incorporating comments from the public meetings was sent to the delegates in advance to help them focus discussion during the event.

The recommendations which follow resulted from the 2006 Round Table on Disability Supports.

Personal Supports

In order to be included and fully participate in society, some people with disabilities require supports from other people. These supports may be a sign language interpreter, a job coach, a personal care attendant or a reader. Round Table participants proposed the following ideas:

- Centralize disability support services under one roof — for instance, in fully accessible community access centres.
- Move away from program-centred disability support services toward flexible, individual services.
- Increase consumer control by allowing people to participate in program design and by allowing individuals to choose self-managed services.
- Equalize access to disability supports for persons with mental illness, including counselling and psychiatric services.
- Improve access to disability supports for Manitobans living in rural and remote areas, including on reserves.

- Recognize that the communication supports needed by deaf-blind people are as vital to them as mobility supports are to persons with physical disabilities.
- Support a national disability supports program and/or Act.

Assistive Devices

Over the years, technology has improved the lives of individuals with disabilities. Such things as electric wheelchairs, talking computers, advanced hearing aids and a variety of other appliances have made things easier. Round Table participants proposed the following ideas:

- Create a universal disability supports program with the following features:
 - (1) a comprehensive, portable package of supports tailored to the user's needs at each stage of life;
 - (2) eligibility criteria based on a functional assessment of individual need;
 - (3) consumer control, with personal choice in buying assistive devices and the flexibility to choose from among a wide variety of approved devices offered by profit, non-profit and public sector vendors.
- Separate an assistive devices program from income assistance programs.
- Regulate distribution of assistive devices ensuring all products come with warranties, training and a method of providing consumer feedback.
- Enter into federal/provincial cost-sharing agreements to implement a comprehensive, universal disability support program that would increase eligibility and access to assistive devices.
- Create a sub-committee of the Assistant Deputy Minister's Committee on Disabilities Issues, coordinated by the DIO, to review current disability support programs and develop strategies for improvement.
- Reduce the five-year waiting period to upgrade disability supports provided through the Hearing-Aid and Telecommunications Program, in order to allow people with communication disabilities quicker access to advanced technology.
- Increase cooperation between Manitoba Health, Manitoba Family Services and Housing, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training to improve delivery of their disability support programs.
- Introduce a provincial assistive devices program as a demonstration project.

Disability Supports During Periods of Transition

Transitions are difficult for all people and they can be even more challenging for people with disabilities. Traditional transition points in life are when a child is born, when a person leaves the education system and when a person retires from the workforce. Additionally, people with disabilities who are Aboriginal face many unique cultural challenges if they need to relocate from their home community to access necessary disability supports. Round Table participants had the following ideas to make these life transitions easier for people with disabilities:

- Increase communication about disability support programs to medical offices and schools using fact sheets with an overview of programs and contact numbers.
- Support parental roles and funding parent-child coalitions to provide peer support, information services and advocacy.
- Ensure continuity, equal standards and seamless delivery of services provided by government departments.
- Create a disability advocacy body similar to the Child Advocate.
- Ensure that the existing school transition processes are known and implemented province-wide.
- Introduce new programming that allows persons with intellectual disabilities, who have graduated prior to the age of 21, to receive an equivalent range of disability supports and services as their peers who have remained in school for this period.
- Relax eligibility criteria for government-funded employment programs.
- Improve education, training and internships for employment, especially in rural areas and for First Nations Manitobans.
- Increase timelines for financial and training support when someone is looking for a job.
- Include more improvement for seniors with disabilities.

- Aggressively pursue the development of a lifelong, flexible disability support program that responds to individual need regardless of income or assets.
- Provide information technologies to reduce isolation of seniors.
- Support aging within the community.
- Develop a disability lens designed to ensure that policies and programs are accessible to all, with special reference to age, culture, ethnicity.
- Develop provincial disability legislation.
- Work with different levels of government service providers and First Nations to explore how services can be provided on reserve through existing programs.
- Consult with First Nations persons with disabilities on the development of a First Nations consumer-led disability strategy.
- Organize a province-wide gathering or forum to look specifically at issues of First Nations persons with disabilities. This forum should, among other things, review all earlier recommendations made.

Round Table participants underlined the priority they placed on the concerns of Aboriginal Manitobans with disabilities by endorsing an overall statement of support:

We, the Manitoba community of persons with disabilities, recognize and are embarrassed by the disparity of disability services available to our Aboriginal and First Nations' friends. We therefore call upon the Minister to convene a meeting with First Nations' Manitobans with disabilities, their organizations and other relevant persons to address jurisdictional issues as they relate to persons with disabilities, and to develop a First Nation disability strategy.





Conclusion

The Round Table on Disability Supports was a great success. People with disabilities, their organizations and others interested in disability issues gathered to discuss and debate the topic of disability supports. In addition, the concerns of Aboriginal Manitobans with disabilities were given special attention during the Round Table process. The resulting recommendations from the Round Table are now being reviewed by senior members of Manitoba's Government and they will have an impact on our province.

A detailed record of these Round Table discussions is available through the Disabilities Issues Office (945-7613 in Winnipeg or toll free 1-800-282-8069, Ext: 7613).

The report can also be obtained by email at dio@gov.mb.ca or online at www.manitoba.ca/dio. This document is available in multiple formats.

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