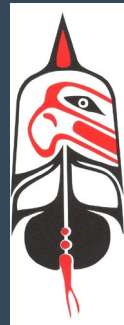


*British Columbia Aboriginal
Network on Disability
Society*



Victoria - British Columbia
www.bcands.bc.ca
Established – 1991

COVID-19 NCCIH

BCANDS is an internationally recognized and award-winning organization that holds Special Consultative Status with the United Nations.

BCANDS provides a variety of programs and services across Canada in relation to Indigenous disabilities:

- Disability Case Management
- Persons with Disabilities Benefit Adjudication
- Registered Disability Savings Plan Navigation
- Monitoring the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Accessibility
- COVID-19 Information and Support

Our Mission

“Advancing the unique disability and health priorities of Indigenous persons through collaboration, consultation, and the delivery of comprehensive client services”



Advisory Roles

Government and Community Disability and Health Advisory

BCANDS' team members serve in a variety of advisory roles to ensure that the disability and health priorities of Indigenous persons, residing both within First Nation communities and non-First Nation Communities, are known and acted upon. Some of these relationships include:

- **Appointed Member** – COVID-19 Federal Disability Advisory Group
- **Appointed Member** – Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) National Disability Advisory Committee
- **Appointed Member** – Canadian Pension Plan – Disability (CPP-D) National Advisory Committee
- **Appointed Member** – National Social Security Tribunal Advisory Committee
- **Appointed Member** – Re-Imagining Community Inclusion / COVID-19 - Implementation / Advisory Committee
- **Appointed Member** – British Columbia's COVID-19 / Accessibility Legislation Advisory Committee
- **Member** – BC Ferries Accessibility Advisory Committee
- **Member** - Indigenous National Accreditation Board - Social Work
- **Member** – British Columbia Parks Visitor Disability Advisory Committee
- **Member** – Parks Accessibility Committee – Disability / Accessibility
- **Member** - Tri-Partite Persons with Disabilities Working Group (Indigenous Services Canada – Ministry of Social Development - BCANDS)
- **Appointed Member** – Provincial Minister's Advisory Forum on Poverty Reduction
- **Appointed Member** – Provincial Minister's Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) Action Group –
- **Appointed Member** – Provincial Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility
- **Appointed Member** – Canada Post National Accessibility Advisory Panel
- **Member** - Community Living British Columbia – Indigenous Advisory Committee
- **Member** - Aboriginal Infant / Child Development Programs Advisory Committee
- **Other** leadership / advisory roles on a variety of disability related research projects nationally and internationally

Indigenous Disability in Canada

In Canada, the disability rate of the overall population is 22%. Indigenous peoples experience a rate of disability significantly higher at approximately 30%. Based on 2016 Statistics Canada information, there are over 500,000 Indigenous persons, of all ages, living with a disability(s) in Canada today.

Indigenous peoples living with disabilities predominantly live in poverty, experience higher unemployment rates, lower educational levels, higher incarceration rates, etc. and often experience discrimination and racism when attempting to access services.

Despite these statistics, Indigenous disability in Canada continues to be under-prioritized by governments, and too often within community. COVID-19 has not only amplified existing disparities, but has created new barriers.

Indigenous Disability in Canada

Collectively, the disability community of Canada (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) which includes persons living with disabilities, families, advocates and service providers feel that largely, persons living with disabilities have been excluded during the pandemic. Their increased needs have not been properly addressed at even close to the same level of other Canadians.

This includes:

- Claw back of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit by several provinces for their members living with disabilities who were eligible for the benefit
- Minimal or no increased financial support for persons with disabilities to address increased expenses and needs
- No specific disability-related funding ear marked for Indigenous peoples living with disabilities through the various federal government Indigenous funding envelopes
- \$600 benefit to persons living with disabilities is too restrictive / exclusive

COVID-19 Impacts

COVID-19 Ongoing Impacts and Effects

Since the onset of COVID-19 significant concerns and barriers have been experienced by Indigenous peoples living with disabilities. Some of these have been addressed to a degree such as access to PPE's, but many have not. These include:

Vaccinations

- The development has happened too fast, it can't be real or effective;*
- Concerns on the effect of the vaccination on Elders and those with compromised health conditions*
- Persons living with disabilities are not / will not be prioritized to receive the vaccination*
- Many people are influenced by alternative media sources, this includes concerns of government genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the vaccine used for social and mind control*

COVID-19 Impacts

Health Care

A number of concerns / barriers exist within Canada's health care systems as it relates to COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples living with disabilities. These are further complicated by systemic discrimination and racism towards Indigenous peoples, as highlighted in the recent In-Plain-Site report commissioned by the government of British Columbia, as well as Bill C-7 currently under Senate review. Some of these issues include:

- Reluctance to access health care services due to real and perceived racism*
- Concerns that persons with disabilities will not be given equal access to life saving COVID-19 interventions (triage policies)*
- Family members / support being denied access / ability to be supplemental care provider in hospitals*
- PPE utilized by hospital staff not conducive for Indigenous peoples from the Deaf community who read lips for communication*
- Limits placed on number of family members accompanying a patient (e.g. Single parents with children)*

COVID-19 Impacts

Housing

Access to safe, accessible and affordable housing has been a priority for Indigenous peoples living with a disability prior to COVID-19. The Pandemic has amplified that urgency

- Many Indigenous persons living with disability live in overcrowded and often unsafe conditions, making isolation impossible*
- Many Indigenous persons living with disabilities couch surf, live on the streets and use public or friends' showers and laundry facilities, increasing the possibility of exposure and transmission. Individuals who couch surf are not often prioritized as homeless*
- Limited and overcrowding housing within Indigenous communities, again increasing the likelihood of exposure and transmission*
- When housing is found / provided, many individuals become disconnected from their prior social circles and experience isolation and depression*

COVID-19 Impacts

Access to Services

With the full or partial closure of communities and external service providers, Indigenous peoples living with disabilities are faced with limited support to meet their needs

- Requests for mental health services has increased during COVID-19 largely due to the isolating effects of the pandemic.*
- With the closure of public facilities, such as libraries, access to free WIFI / internet has been disrupted and access to social networks and communications. Information is required for accessing and maintaining benefits and supports*
- Closure of recreational facilities has impacted rehabilitation activities, amplifying existing conditions*
- Respite services have been disrupted, childcare and access to specialized services*
- Parents of children living with disabilities are having to deal with education and behavioral issues often with minimal or no support, increasing their isolation, frustration and impact their mental health*

COVID-19 Impacts

Access to Services / Information

- With the closure of school and increased remote learning many Indigenous students and their families living with disabilities do not have technological or financial means to continue their studies adequately*
- Timely and accurate access to communications in a manner conducive to person living with disabilities continues to be a challenge*
- Increased need for programs and supports for Indigenous persons living with disabilities to escape violence*
- Access to recognized healthcare practitioners required to complete applications / medical reports*

COVID-19 Next Steps

Potential Next Steps

In order to ensure that Indigenous peoples living with disability, their needs and their disability and health priorities are known and address during a time of national crisis and ongoing, the following recommendations should be implemented:

- Creation of provincial / territorial disability and health advisory committees with member from Indigenous and urban communities*
- Timely implementation of the announced Canada Disability Benefit, with appropriate funding support and no claw backs from provincial / territorial governments*
- Creation and implementation of provincial / territorial and federal initiatives. Policies and legislation to eliminate racism and discrimination of Indigenous peoples, including those living with disabilities, within all government systems*
- Increased funding,, supports and services specific to Indigenous peoples living with disabilities, within provincial, territorial and federal jurisdictions*
- Allow ongoing flexibility in the delivery of programs and services available to Indigenous communities and organizations*

Thank You

