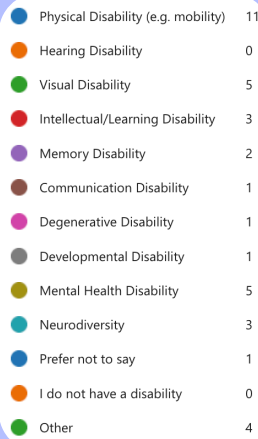
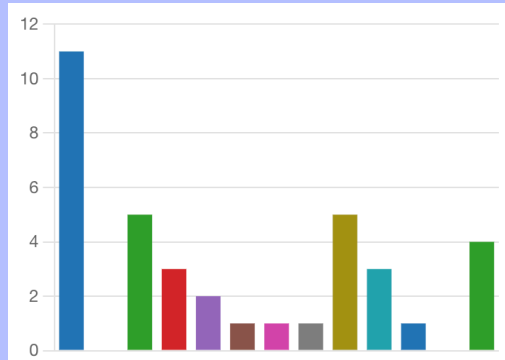


# NEWCOMERS WITH DISABILITIES FORUM

Summary Report - Focus Group and Survey Data, November 9, 2022



## Disability Types for Newcomers with Disabilities



**26**  
newcomers with disabilities responded to our survey

**24**  
newcomers with disabilities took part in focus groups

**5**  
focus groups were held in English, Farsi, Mandarin and Arabic

### NEED FOR QUALITY REFERRALS

If an organization can't help you, they need to be able to refer you to someone who can. It's so frustrating to hear, "We can't help you, goodbye." When we are in hardship, we get disappointed and depressed and we will not go further. Please just refer me to someone who can help or give me a list.

Sometimes newcomers don't know what services are available or about our rights in Canada. No one says, "Okay, you're my client, this is available to you if you request it." They pass you around, or they Google and find a bunch of lists and say, "Okay, here are ten other agencies, try them." That isn't the way!

It's difficult to find information when there's different departments, you have to go to this doctor, that clinic, fill out a form to register. Organizations need to focus on actual needs, not just say, "These are resources, here's a link, it may or may not work, go figure it out yourself." That's not good enough.

**"When you come to Canada you don't know which service is from the federal, provincial or municipal government. You don't know who to turn to for what service, especially if you have a language issue. You call and get an answering machine. With so many agencies and government departments, it gets confusing."**

**"Even patients who are born here in Canada don't know how to access services. You are asked to jump through hoops, go to this case manager or contact that health care or home care office. A lot of people don't know the difference between home care facility, health care and community health care."**

### CONSOLIDATED REFERRAL NETWORK: AN EXAMPLE

We need to consolidate disability services into a central referral network so people can more easily navigate them.

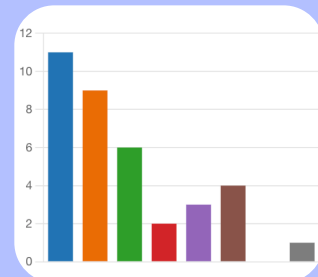
I volunteer at the ALS Society of BC. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis is a complex neurological disorder requiring access to different medical specialists. The Society consolidates all relevant resources and offers a referral network of service providers and specialists to registered patients. They collaborate with non-profit organizations serving specific needs (communication, technology, medical devices, etc.). They navigate. They provide for some needs themselves, but also offer referrals and can fast track-people through the application process. So you don't have to jump through hoops for each and every individual organization to access what you need.

Streamlining services would go a long way toward eliminating the systemic discrimination that denies access to people with disabilities, including newcomers.

**"As a newcomer I have reached several organizations and they treated me the same as they treat a person who is not blind. One organization knew I was visually impaired, but everything they gave me was for able-bodied people. I would say, hey I need this, and they would say, "Okay, lets Google it," or they would send me to another organization and I would run around without getting any help or support. The workers didn't know how to help, it was always, "Let me check to see if that's a thing." For a newcomer who doesn't speak proper English it was hard. Why am I referred to English classes for seeing people?"**



### Barriers preventing newcomers with disabilities from accessing services and resources



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## LANGUAGE/CULTURAL BARRIERS

I'm from China and I arrived almost a year ago. I don't know how to get from one place to another because of not knowing the names of places. I need to completely rely on my cell phone navigation. I do not really understand why the bus stations do not have names, like they do in China. When I was taking transit recently the electronic display inside the bus didn't show anything so I didn't know where am I. In the Sky train, my cell phone data was turned off and I didn't know how to proceed. At the time I was panicking so I just went home.

I came to Canada six months ago from Iran. I am a transgender man and I've had seven (gender reassignment) surgeries. The implant in my body is now torn and I need more surgery. When I came here I expected to have more support to find doctors and other things. My sponsor is English speaking and he didn't come to help when I went to the doctor to talk about the surgery. I didn't understand the details of the surgery and there was nobody to translate and tell me what will happen.

**"You don't have experience in Canada." How can I have Canadian experience if I just came here? They advised me to start as a cleaning lady, and I told the lady, I said, "I speak four languages and I have a bachelor degree. I will not start from the bottom."**

**"When you come here you have the obstacles and challenges. When you're settled, you can volunteer and help newcomers with disability, because you know how tough it is. Once you're settled, you have a job and housing, then you can assist newcomers with language and cultural issues and whatever they need."**

## SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

I'm not mobility blind, which means I didn't have any rehabilitation. I was able to find a family to host me temporarily. I need to solve a lot of problems now. I need housing, I need to search for a job. But the biggest problem is I need to find someone who can accompany me to places like banks, public authorities, things like that. For any country, if you want to welcome people, including people with disabilities, you need to think about those who didn't have rehabilitation in the past. This goes for not just Ukrainians only because in a lot of countries they have the same problems, in Afghanistan, and Syria, for example, and other countries.

I've been six years in Canada and still have problems. I'm blind, I don't have any family members with me, I need help with shopping, cleaning and cooking. I called a billion places in Canada, and nobody can offer me services, not even 2-4 hours a week. Many of my friends stopped the relationship because I needed so much help, so I was alone.

## PREFERENCES FOR FINDING SERVICES & RESOURCES

Our survey compared methods used by newcomers with disabilities to find services and resources. Results showed a strong preference to acquire information from newcomer & disability organizations and one social worker/navigator, and not have to search the internet themselves. This was confirmed by the focus group comments.

Category	Usually find	Prefer to find
Disability Organizations	12	18
Newcomer Organizations	8	11
Social Worker/Navigator	7	13
Internet Search Engine	10	5

**"I was a very healthy child, but at some point I fell and I have a mobility problem now. I can't stand or sit for more than two hours. I lost my job. I had two surgeries and could never find anybody to help me. I had to take care of three children while lying in bed for three months. I couldn't even go to the washroom. A nurse came everyday, but for her to come for only half an hour was not enough. If you are born with disabilities, maybe with time you learn to deal with things. But we also need to think about people who face a sudden disability. I was very frustrated and I didn't know where to go for help."**

## LONG WAITS - MEDICAL SERVICES

I was told I have to wait one year to get specialized medical tests for my daughter. Just try to imagine, for a child who is a little over 10 years old, to have to wait for one year! That is just wasting time and potential to get the help needed. There needs to be a green line or green corridor for people in need of specialized care.

Sometimes I have to write to my MP in order to get a service I'm eligible for because I didn't get a response for two months after sending inquiries every week. At the two-month mark I said, "Well, I'm going to write to my MP," and the same week I got a response. That's not fair for anyone, but especially for newcomers, because they have additional barriers on top of access to resources.

**"I'm a refugee from Syria and I use a wheelchair. One of the difficulties I faced when I came here was finding a place to take a shower because the hotel and house we were in didn't have an accessible place to bathe. After four months, they sent me to the community center to take a shower. But this is not practical, having to go to the community centre every time you want to take a shower, especially in winter time. It took them three years to make the bathroom accessible."**

## UNPAID CAREGIVERS

I'm the main caregiver for my husband who has an incurable degenerative disease. The challenge is always finding enough caregiving workers. I work from home most of the time. Because of Covid, there is an extreme shortage of healthcare workers. Because of my husband's complex medical needs we need people with a nursing background, so I cannot just go ahead and hire anybody off the street. If I hire someone who's not qualified it may later be a life-threatening situation and not fair to either an employee or my husband. Everyone's salary has gone up significantly while government funding hasn't gone up with inflation. So it's a tight budget to manage the increasing level of care that's needed.

Caregivers need an opportunity to rest because physical and emotional distress accumulates. Providing this would be very helpful.

NBP Steering Committee: David Fong, Disability Foundation; Helaine Boyd, Disability Alliance of BC; Karen Lai, City of Vancouver; Heather McCain, Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods; Chris McBride, SCI BC; Callum Bente, Self-Advocate, Vancouver Community Council of Community Living of BC (CLBC); Warren Bente, father of Callum; Kelly Dede-Marshall (social worker, representing UBCIC); Adrienne Fitch, Disability Foundation (Project Coordinator).

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