

Disability Matters Vote Community Report Executive Summary

March 2023



Prepared by the
Disability Matters Vote Steering Committee

This community report is available in alternative formats.

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Executive Summary: Disability Matters Vote Community Report – March 2023

Background

Launched on December 3, 2015, Disability Matters Vote is a non-partisan public awareness campaign in Manitoba to bring priority attention to disability issues. Disability Matters Vote is a joint initiative of Abilities Manitoba and Barrier-Free Manitoba. It aims to achieve three goals in provincial elections:

1. To ensure all Manitobans with disabilities can participate in election activities. We want everyone who is eligible to vote to do so.
2. To raise awareness of disability issues our stakeholders have prioritized.
3. To support Manitobans to make informed voting decisions.

There are many types of disabilities such as physical, intellectual or developmental, mental and emotional, just to name a few, and close to 25% of Manitobans over the age of 15 live with disabilities (Government of Canada, 2018). Thousands more Manitoba children also live with disabilities.

Disability Matters Vote has spoken with thousands of people about issues that affect Manitobans with disabilities. These stakeholders identified five priority issues that have been the foundation of our advocacy work over the last two general provincial elections:

- Accessibility,
- Fair wages,
- Access to services,
- Employment, and
- Dignified income.

Purpose of this Community Report

The purpose of this report is to update the community about the progress Disability Matters Vote has seen in each priority area since the 2019 provincial election to March 2023.

The Five Priority Issues Updates

Accessibility

Accessibility is a basic human right that not all people get to experience. Manitobans with disabilities often face inaccessible spaces, attitudes, information, and more. At the time of the 2019 election, only two standards had been rolled out (Customer Service and Employment Standards). The Standard for Information and Communication was launched in May of 2022. The Standard for Transportation opened for consultation in February 2023. The Built Environment Standard still needs to be launched. The deadline for achieving substantial progress toward full accessibility is 2023 (Province of Manitoba, 2013).

The Manitoba Accessibility Fund was announced in June 2021. This 20-million-dollar endowment fund will award about \$1,000,000 per year to successful applicants for accessibility projects.

The Accessibility Compliance Secretariat has also been set up. The purpose of this role is to monitor compliance in the community as each new Accessibility for Manitobans Act standard is enacted.

Fair Wages

Manitobans with disabilities deserve to be supported by well-trained and qualified staff who are paid a fair and living wage. Disability support workers are one of the lowest paid human service workers in the province. Their wages are not reflective of the duties and responsibilities of the important role they have in supporting Manitobans with disabilities.

In March 2022, a one-time \$2.5 million Labour Force Support Grant was funded to help recruit and retain support staff. This grant was shared among nearly 100 organizations.

In April 2022, funded wages for disability support workers working in community homes increased from \$13.75 to \$15.11. Funding for supervisors in these community homes increased to \$16.11.

In March 2023, the provincial government tabled the 2023 Manitoba provincial budget. It contained the largest increases of new funding for Community Living and Children's disABILITY Services since these programs began. The new funding will be used to increase the funded average wage of disability support workers to an average of \$19 per hour. The funded average rate for supervisors will increase to \$20.90 per hour.

These are significant and positive steps related to fair wages for disability support workers. Continued progress is needed towards further wage increases and the development of a comprehensive training strategy that is linked to quality standards.

Access to Services

As there are many different forms of disabilities, it is hard to capture all of the unmet needs Manitobans with disabilities and their families face in accessing services. Manitobans with disabilities require a wide range of services that are vital to their health and quality of life. For example:

- Early intervention for children with autism
- Access to mental health services across the lifespan
- Respite services for children
- Substance use disorder supports
- Home care for seniors
- Day services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Hip and knee surgeries
- Psychologists and Psychiatrists
- Clinical services (Physiotherapy, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, seating and mobility specialists, dietitian, feeding and swallowing supports etc.)

Waitlists for many of these services are not publicly available. In addition, the pandemic created increased needs for some of these services such as mental health supports, and also suspended others like in the case of hip and knee surgeries. A first step towards progress in this area would be transparent and accountable dashboards like the one launched October 27, 2022 for surgical and diagnostic services (Province of Manitoba, 2022). Similar dashboards for other

health and social services are needed to know the extent of unmet needs in our community.

Timely access to services is Manitoba's obligation under Article 26 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

Employment

More than 40% of working aged Manitobans with disabilities are not employed (Government of Canada, 2014). At the same time, research shows both employees and organizations benefit from hiring persons with disabilities. There is a lot of employment potential among Manitobans with disabilities.

The Accessible Employment Standard of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act is the only major legislative progress related to employment for people with disabilities since the last election. Implementation of the Accessible Employment Standard has been phased in. As of May 1, 2022, all Manitoba employers need to comply with this standard.

Dignified Incomes

Many Manitobans with severe, profound, or permanent disabilities are unable to work. Those in need of financial help have to apply for Employment and Income Assistance to meet their basic needs. Employment and Income Assistance was not designed to provide a dignified income for people with disabilities. Employment and Income Assistance rates force adults with disabilities to live in poverty.

In October of 2021 the Disability Support Act received Royal Assent. The Disability Support Act will create a new source of income for Manitobans with severe and prolonged disabilities. Many questions remain about implementation of the new Disability Support Act, including if the income amount provided will meet the criteria of "dignified".

What's Next for Disability Matters Vote?

Disability Matters Vote is completing a stakeholder engagement process to assess whether the five priority issues still reflect what is most important to Manitobans with disabilities. We are actively seeking new partnerships to expand our reach

and representation. We have also asked Manitoba's political parties for their accessibility policies in an effort to hold them accountable to full access and inclusion for all Manitobans in this election.

Resources

Email: info@dmvote.ca

Website: <https://www.dmvote.ca/>

Disability Matters Vote
5-1146 Waverley St.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
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To get involved with Disability Matters Vote find us on social media:

<https://twitter.com/DMVoteMB>

<https://www.facebook.com/DisabilityMattersVoteMB/>

<https://www.instagram.com/disabilitymattersmb/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6OfXHQyPxVuOPNgtp2LNCw>

Donate at: <https://www.dmvote.ca/get-involved/donate>

References

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<http://www.accessibilitymb.ca>

Province of Manitoba. (2022). Measuring Manitoba's Progress on Wait Times.

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<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

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