

## UNIVERSAL BUILDING CODES TO CREATE EQUITABLE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

### Opening Statement

British Columbia has the opportunity to ensure that people with varying abilities are able to participate fully in the workforce. The more accessible a building is, the more likely people with varying abilities will patron that place of business and be able to work in the building itself. As of this moment, there are almost one-third of working age adults with more severe disabilities who are living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> The BC building codes must be updated to ensure that all future buildings are universally accessible so that people with disabilities are able to enter the workforce.

### Background

One in five Canadians, aged 15 years and over, had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities.<sup>2</sup> Almost one-third of working age adults with more severe disabilities are living in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Among working age adults, personal income was strongly related to the severity of disability. Those with no disabilities had a higher median after-tax personal income (\$39,000) than those with milder disabilities (\$34,300) and those with more severe disabilities (\$19,200). Close to 57% of Canadians with a physical disability who are currently unemployed believe they'd be able to work if workplaces were more accessible and 49% of Canadians with physical disabilities who are working believe they could work more hours if workplaces were made more accessible.<sup>4</sup> By 2030, it is estimated that \$316 billion will be added to the Canadian economy annually as a result of spending by people with disabilities representing 21% of the total consumer market.<sup>5</sup> The economy will see a \$16.8 billion increase to our GDP if workplace improvements were made, allowing over half a million Canadians with disabilities to work more hours.

In 2018, the B.C. Government updated the BC Building Code. Important changes included:

- Increasing accessibility in small retail shops and common areas of condominium and apartment buildings;
- Increasing the number of wheelchair spaces required in public viewing spaces, and;
- Requiring more visible alarms in addition to requirements for sleeping rooms and bed spaces.

These are important initiatives that are commendable, however, it only applies to those with physically visible disabilities. There is a large portion of persons with varying abilities that require different accessibility options.

The Rick Hansen Foundation offers a best practice guide for universal building standards.<sup>6</sup> The Rick Hansen Foundation utilizes data from various accessible standards across the world. These include countries such as Ireland, Australia, and the United States. These standards provide information on accessibility for:

- entrances and automated doors;
- elevators;
- accessible lifts;
- playgrounds;

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1 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128a-eng.htm>

2 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128a-eng.htm>

3 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128a-eng.htm>

4 The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments, Conference Board of Canada, February 2018

5 The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments, Conference Board of Canada, February 2018

6 <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-10-things-to-know-about-UD/>

- ramps;
- trails;
- sensory-sensitive spaces;
- washrooms, and;
- water parks.

All of the above-mentioned areas must be accessible in order to allow people to adequately access spaces. The Rick Hansen Foundation received \$9 million in grant money to assist businesses, schools, and governments to retrofit their buildings so that they are universally accessible. The Rick Hansen Foundation also rates sites based on their level of accessibility by rating:

- Vehicular access;
- Exterior approach and entrance;
- Interior circulation;
- Interior services and environment;
- Sanitary facilities;
- Signage, wayfinding and communications;
- Emergency systems, and;
- Additional use of space.

But without incentives or grants, builders are less likely to adopt universal design without increasing prices. The Provincial and Federal governments should ensure that there are incentives disseminated through appropriate organizations for builders and building owners to build and retrofit universality.

To lift those with a disability out of poverty, we must have them participating fully in the workforce. That requires many adjustments that the local, provincial, and federal governments are undertaking. We also need to ensure that the building codes in BC reflect the needs of not only the physically disabled, but those with other non-visible disabilities.

#### THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Work with foundations such as the Rick Hansen Foundation to amend the BC Building Code to ensure that all buildings are required to be built to a universally accessible standard; and,
  - a. Higher subsidies for housing so that people of varying abilities can rent new units at market rental price; and,
  - b. Provide incentives in the form of grants to builders and building owners to be dispersed through non-profit organizations to build universally.

**Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade**