

# Rethinking the Role of Disability in Philanthropy



## Context

The second part of [a study on philanthropy and disability](#) shows that persons with disabilities\* are a group that is systematically underfunded by Canadian philanthropy. Despite the fact that 27% of the Canadian population lives with at least one disability, disability remains a marginalized cause in philanthropic priorities.

The analysis presented here demonstrates that the exclusion of persons with disabilities is the result of philanthropic structures, criteria, and decision-making processes. Transformation therefore requires changes within philanthropy itself, not merely better “communication” with disability organizations or better “education” on disability issues. These recommendations address philanthropic practices, governance, and accountability mechanisms.

## Barriers preventing the inclusion of persons with disabilities

01

The perception of disability as the sole responsibility of the government

Support for persons with disabilities is widely viewed as primarily the responsibility of the government, particularly because of its close ties to social and health policies. This view tends to limit philanthropic engagement, out of fear of substituting for public action, thereby positioning philanthropy as a complement rather than a central player.

02

The fragmentation of the non-profit sector, which is itself caused by a lack of resources

The disability sector has developed according to a “by and for” model, driven by the people directly affected and rooted in their lived experiences, which is a strength in terms of commitment and expertise. However, this model also has its limitations, particularly due to a lack of resources and organizational capacity to meet the requirements of funders.

03

The absence of disability in the practical implementation of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies

EDI has become a central framework for philanthropic action and has led to some progress. However, despite its widespread use, this framework often remains vague, unevenly structured, and difficult to translate into concrete actions regarding disability. Thus, despite inclusive rhetoric, disability remains largely excluded from EDI initiatives, revealing the limitations of this framework when it comes to producing effective change in this area.

\* The term “persons with disabilities” is used in accordance with the terminology recommended by the Government of Canada. [A way with words and images: guide for communicating with and about persons with disabilities](#)

# From Exclusion to Accountability: Rethinking the Role of Foundations in 11 Recommendations

01

## Establish quantitative targets

Canadian foundations should collectively commit to devoting a minimum of 10% of their intervention budgets to disability-related causes within ten years.

02

## Create a dedicated Canada-wide fund

This fund should be managed by persons with disabilities to ensure that its strategic direction, funding criteria, and priorities for action directly reflect the needs and perspectives of the communities involved.

03

## Abolish unsolicited proposal policies

Foundations must streamline their processes, open application windows, and, at a minimum, establish proactive mechanisms to identify and support emerging organizations.

04

## Funding for organizational strengthening

To support the creation of key coordination and management positions, provide training in philanthropy development, and fund the technological and communications infrastructures necessary for the organizations to operate.

05

## Intentional and proactive approach

Foundations should actively seek out stakeholders in this field, build lasting relationships before making any formal requests, support organizations in their fundraising efforts, and ensure a regional presence that is truly grounded in local realities.

06

## (Re)formulation of EDI

Foundations that rely on EDI frameworks must make disability one of their top priorities, rather than treating it as a secondary or “additional” factor that is only recognized when it intersects with other identities.

07

## Transparency and monitoring

Foundations should publish detailed data each year on the share of their budget allocated to disability-related causes.

08

## Inclusive governance

For their commitment to be credible, foundations that wish to work in the field of disability must include persons with disabilities on their boards of directors and decision-making committees.

09

## Improving the collection of disaggregated data

Foundations should collectively invest in the development of monitoring tools that can identify the populations reached by their interventions, including persons with disabilities.

10

## Public awareness campaign

Foundations should support the development of large-scale public campaigns aimed at increasing the visibility of disability in the media and the political arena.

11

## Consistency between domestic and international action

Canadian foundations that fund international projects should systematically assess how disability is addressed in their programs and apply the same standards of accessibility and inclusion abroad as they do in their domestic initiatives.