

10 Things You Need To Know About Barrier-Free BC

- Did you know that British Columbia does not have a Disabilities Act which would serve to remove and prevent the creation of barriers for persons with disabilities?
- Barrier-Free BC is a non-partisan, grass roots movement calling for the enactment of a strong, effective and enforceable British Columbians with Disabilities Act.
- Approximately 604,000 British Columbians with disabilities face unfair accessibility barriers in areas that the Provincial Government can regulate.
- A British Columbians with Disabilities Act would apply to all regardless of whether their disability was visible or invisible to others, permanent or episodic, physical, sensory, cognitive, communication- or mental health-related.
- A significant number of British Columbians with disabilities still cannot access services and facilities that others in their communities can take for granted. A British Columbians with Disabilities Act would help ensure an equal playing field and enable everyone to fully participate in and enjoy community life.
- The Federal Government recently launched Canada-wide public consultations with the aim of introducing a Canadians with Disabilities Act that would ensure goods, services and facilities under federal jurisdiction are fully accessible to everyone.
- Ontario and Manitoba have already enacted disability legislation and Nova Scotia is working on introducing similar legislation this year.
- In June 2014, the BC Government announced an initiative entitled “Accessibility 2024” aimed at “Making BC the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities by 2024”. Unfortunately, this initiative is neither mandated nor legislated.
- Barrier-Free BC has developed 13 principles upon which a strong, effective and enforceable British Columbians with Disabilities Act should be based.
- We cannot do this alone... we need your help! Please “Add Your Voice” at www.barrierfreebc.org to show your support for this movement and to get more information and updates on our progress!

Barrier-Free BC Background Information

Barrier-Free BC is a non-partisan, grass roots movement calling on the BC Legislative Assembly to enact a strong, effective and enforceable British Columbians with Disabilities Act – legislation that will not only benefit persons who have disabilities now but will likely have a positive impact on all British Columbians at some point in their lives.

Approximately 604,000 British Columbians with disabilities face unfair accessibility barriers in areas that the Provincial Government can regulate. These include barriers in areas such as public transit, education, playgrounds, provincial parks, library services, health care, retail outlets, restaurants, recreation facilities, entertainment venues and workplaces, to name but a few.

A significant number of our fellow British Columbians with disabilities still cannot access all aspects of these areas that others in their community can take for granted. We face too many accessibility barriers. We should not have to individually fight these barriers one at a time through endless human rights complaints. We need the Legislative Assembly to enact a British Columbians with Disabilities Act, providing authority for the Provincial Government to do all it can to ensure that persons with disabilities can live in a British Columbia that is accessible and barrier-free.

The Federal Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities recently launched Canada-wide public consultations with the aim of introducing a Canadians with Disabilities Act that ensures goods, services and facilities that fall within federal jurisdiction are fully accessible to all Canadians. Both Ontario and Manitoba have already enacted disability legislation and Nova Scotia is poised to introduce similar legislation sometime later this year. Now, even more than before, is the time for British Columbians to seize the opportunity to move forward on the road to a barrier-free BC for persons with physical, sensory, cognitive, communication or mental health disabilities, regardless of whether they are visible, invisible, permanent or episodic.

In June 2014, the BC Government announced Accessibility 2024, an initiative with the goal of “making BC the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities by the year 2024”. While we acknowledge this as a step in the right direction, the shortcoming of this initiative is that it is neither mandated nor legislated. We need to convince the BC Government to just say “YES!” to the enactment of disability legislation.

We have developed (and included) 13 principles upon which we believe a strong, effective and enforceable British Columbians with Disabilities Act should be based. Obtaining your support for these principles and for the call to enact disability legislation will make even stronger the voice of the growing list of individuals, businesses and organizations that are already backing our campaign.

As a non-partisan, province-wide organization, Barrier-Free BC neither endorses nor opposes any political party or candidate. Barrier-Free BC is seeking to have all parties commit to the enactment of disability legislation. We are ready and eager to work with the Government of BC, with all MLAs, and all parties in the BC Legislature on the development of a strong, effective and enforceable British Columbians with Disabilities Act.

Barrier Free BC was officially launched at the Legislature in Victoria on April 6th 2016 and publicly acknowledged in the House by The Honourable Michelle Stillwell (Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation) and by Opposition Critic Michelle Mungall. Now that we are on the radar of the Legislative Assembly, you can help us build momentum and increase awareness by adding your voice to the growing list of supporters. Visit our website at www.barrierfreebc.org for more information, updates and ideas on how you can let the Party Leaders and/or your local MLA know that you support the call for a British Columbians with Disabilities Act.

13 PRINCIPLES FOR A BRITISH COLUMBIANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

1) **The Act sets a timeline:**

The goal of the British Columbians with Disabilities Act is to achieve a Barrier-Free province within a specific and clearly defined deadline set by the legislation; a timeline which begins immediately upon proclamation and will include checkpoints at regular intervals until existing and on-going barriers are removed.

2) **The Act applies to all:**

The Act will apply to all persons with disabilities whether their disability is considered physical, sensory, cognitive, communication or mental health related and will include visible, invisible, permanent or episodic conditions. The Act will apply to all government departments, crown corporations, companies, organizations and any other entity that is regulated under provincial jurisdiction.

3) **The Act sets the bar:**

A British Columbians with Disabilities Act will supersede all other legislation, regulations or policies which provide lesser protections or entitlements but will protect any rights which persons with disabilities have already earned and currently enjoy.

4) **The Act removes barriers:**

The Act will require the Government, including provincial and municipal regulated organizations, to be made fully accessible to all persons with disabilities by the removal of existing barriers and the prevention or creation of new barriers. These barriers may include but are not limited to physical, legal, information, communication, attitudinal, technological or other barriers.

5) **The Act champions barrier-free goods, services and facilities:**

The Act will require all provincially regulated service providers to ensure that their services and facilities are fully usable by persons with disabilities based on principles of universal design. Service providers will be required to develop and implement detailed plans to remove existing and to prevent the creation of new barriers.

6) **The Act champions barrier-free workplaces and employment:**

The British Columbians with Disabilities Act will require organizations to take proactive steps to achieve a barrier-free workplace and employment opportunities. Employers will be required to develop and implement plans for the removal of existing and prevention of new workplace and employment barriers.

7) **The Act charges Government with the responsibility to lead, educate, train, inform and review:**

The British Columbians with Disabilities Act will require Government to lead the province toward achieving the goals of the Act and fulfilling its mandate. It will further require Government to provide education, information and resources for provincially regulated businesses and organizations which must comply with the Act. The BC Government will be required to appoint an independent person to

periodically review and publicly report (at regular intervals) on progress towards the goal of full accessibility.

8) The Act is enforceable:

The Act will provide for a prompt, independent and effective process for enforcement. This will include a comprehensive and clearly defined avenue for persons with disabilities who encounter barriers which are in violation of the legislation to raise and submit complaints to enforcement officials.

9) The Act is made real through regulations:

The BC Government will be required to make regulations that clearly define the steps needed for full compliance under the Act and that said regulations be independently reviewed a minimum of every four years. It will be open to recommendations made on an industry-by-industry or sector-by-sector basis. This will include a requirement that input be obtained from persons with disabilities and disability-related organizations prior to enactment.

10) The Act will ensure public monies are not used to create or perpetuate barriers:

The Act will require that the BC Government ensures that no public money is used to create or perpetuate barriers against persons with disabilities. Government departments, agencies, and crown corporations should be required to make it a strict condition of funding programs, transfer payments, subsidies, loans, grants, capital or infrastructure projects that no such funds may be used to create or perpetuate barriers. There should also be a requirement that procurement of goods, services or facilities be fully accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. The BC Government should be required to monitor and enforce these requirements and to periodically report to the public on their compliance.

11) The Act is a lens through which to vet legislation:

The Act will require the BC Government to review existing legislation and regulations identifying possible accessibility barriers and develop timelines to address the shortcomings. Government will review all future proposed legislation and regulations before they are enacted to ensure accessibility barriers are not about to be created.

12) The Act sets policy:

The British Columbians with Disabilities Act will influence and affect the development and implementation of provincial policy thereby enhancing and improving access to a full range of goods, services and programs not currently available to persons with disabilities in BC.

13) The Act has real force and real effect:

The Act must be more than mere window dressing. It should contribute meaningfully to the improvement of the position of persons with disabilities in British Columbia enabling them to fully participate and enjoy community life. It must have real force through effective enforcement mechanisms which lead to real effect.