

SUBMISSION

TO THE

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ON POSSIBLE
CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN
RELATION TO THE NEW PROVINCIAL HEALTH PLAN**

PREPARED BY THE:

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PREMIER'S COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF DISABLED PERSONS

Who are we?

The Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons is a body for consultation, study and information sharing which was created to advise the provincial government on matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities. The Council reports directly to the Premier of the Province.

Responsibilities

The Act governing the Premier's Council states that the Council shall advise the Minister on matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities; shall bring before the government and the public matters of interest and concern to persons with disabilities; shall promote prevention of disabling conditions; shall promote employment opportunities of persons with disabilities; and shall promote access by persons with disabilities to all services offered to the citizens of New Brunswick.

Structure

The Council consists of a Chairperson and twelve other members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. Provisions in the Act guarantee representation by regions, agencies working on behalf of persons with disabilities and the public at large.

Activities

To carry out its functions, the Council will receive briefs and suggestions from individuals and groups concerning the status of persons with disabilities; undertake research on matters relating to persons with disabilities; recommend programs concerning the status of persons with disabilities; make referrals to and consult and collaborate with universities and individuals on matters which affect persons with disabilities; propose legislation, studies and recommendations as the Council considers necessary; appoint special committees when needed; maintain an information library on subjects related to persons with disabilities and on any services/programs likely to be of interest to persons with disabilities; and offer advice and/or intervention in cases where persons with disabilities are having difficulties in gaining access to needed services.

SOME HEALTH PLAN ISSUES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- The Department of Health needs to develop a specific provincial strategy in coordination with other stakeholders to better respond to the needs of survivors of serious brain injuries.
- The Department of Health needs to develop a specific provincial strategy to address the needs of persons who require ventilation equipment and also to respond to the housing and other support needs of persons who are ventilator dependent so they are not stuck unnecessarily in hospitals for long term care.
- The Department of Health needs to develop a comprehensive community based strategy to address the needs of persons dealing with chronic mental illnesses.
- The Department of Health should move as quickly as possible to design and build the promised new provincial mental health hospital facility in Campbellton.
- The government of New Brunswick should develop and implement a long term strategy to more vigorously and consistently promote wellness and prevention initiatives targeted to the population of New Brunswick. Examples would include the promotion of active living, further reduction of drinking and driving, proper nutrition habits, use of seatbelts, use of bicycle helmets and other safety gear for various activities and other healthy lifestyle choices and injury prevention options.
- The Department of Health should prepare and release a discussion paper to solicit public input on the topics of chemical and environmental sensitivities to identify how we should respond to these issues.
- The Department of Health should work closely with other departments and community partners to ensure that persons with different disabilities have timely access to specialized health care and appropriate rehabilitation services required due to their disability.

- The Department of Health must address the concern of citizens with chronic disabilities that they are unable to access required health services due to the operational priorities for meeting the needs of acute care patients first.
- There are some significant gaps in health services for such patients as mental health services for children and youth; brain injury survivors; fetal alcohol syndrome; autism spectrum disorders; spinal cord injuries; degenerative neurological conditions; Alzheimer's Disease; and others.
- Government must be more proactive in protecting the privacy of patient health records and to enforce penalties against those found to be abusing patient information. We are also concerned about the issue of insurance companies, lawyers and employers gaining access to patient records as a tool to denying financial benefits or health coverage or even being hired for a job. The move to electronic health records poses a risk to security and protection of privacy.
- Children who have been identified as having the need for speech language pathology or audiology services should be able to receive these services in both a timely and adequate manner.
- The Department of Health should resolve the long outstanding issue of who is responsible to fund the operating costs of the Driver Assessment and training Program at the Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation.
- The government of New Brunswick and the Department of Health must work with the various stakeholders to ensure that aboriginals with disabilities living in the province have timely and adequate access to required rehabilitation services and disability related supports whether they live on reserve or off reserve.
- The Department of Health should work with pharmacies and other stakeholders to ensure that public instructions, educational materials, food packaging and prescription drug containers etc. are labeled in a print size and vocabulary that is easier to read for the general public who may be experiencing low vision and/or low literacy skills.

- The Department of Health should work with other departments and community stakeholders to ensure that patients with disabilities will have timely and appropriate access to all of the disability related rehabilitation equipment and personal care services they will require due to their disability after they receive health care treatment and/or assessments with appropriate health professionals in hospitals, rehabilitation centres, community health clinics, doctors' offices or other settings.
- When we did our provincial disability stakeholders' survey last spring, we did note that we had feedback that the French speaking areas of the province felt that they did not have access to all of the health related information and services that were available in the English areas of the province. This is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed to improve the quality and quantity of health related information in French provided to the francophone public of New Brunswick.
- We invite the officials in the Department of Health to review the *Disability Action Plan Strategy – The Path to Self-Sufficiency and Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities in New Brunswick* which was a report released by the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons in December of 2007 that outlined an overall set of recommendations for the government of New Brunswick to improve services affecting persons with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted by the
Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons
March 10, 2008