



Accessible Housing Network

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Are they forgotten by every candidate? They want action now.

Toronto - Maddy Dever, lives in a small Ontario town. “We are the forgotten. I'm on ODSP, and there is nothing affordable let alone accessible in our county. I am in a precarious housing situation. There are others who have ended up homeless or staying with family.”

“Maddy is only one example of why government must require all new and refurbished housing to be 100% accessible”, says Accessible Housing Network co-chair, Kate Chung. “The need for **accessible** housing is a crisis. The simple solution is for the National and provincial Building Codes to require that all new housing be universal design (fully accessible to all ages and abilities).”



Anthony Frisina

Anthony Frisina lives in a Hamilton condo he owns. When he applied to March of Dimes for funding to do renovations to make it accessible, “I was denied because I was living comfortably at home.” Calling on all election candidates to listen, he says, “The lives of those living with disabilities cannot hang in the balance of ableism and discrimination. We are the ones that must be in control of our lives, and through our voices accessibility and inclusion will be achieved.”

When Judy Kerr couldn’t find an accessible apartment in Toronto, she was forced to move to a small town where she knew nobody, in order to get an accessible apartment. As a result she had to give up her job.

Children need accessible housing, and their parents lives are made difficult by lack of accessibility. Pamela Andrews struggled to get her son in or out of their downtown Toronto co-op rental apartment. “The small lip on the threshold is very difficult to navigate in the power wheelchair”, she says. “It doesn’t look big, but it makes it very difficult to enter, and Aidan couldn’t get into the apartment by himself. I had to turn him backwards and push the chair in while the power is on full throttle.” Aidan, who has cerebral palsy and is unable to speak or walk, became too heavy for Pamela to lift into the bathtub. An accessible bathroom designed with a support beam in the ceiling for installing a lift might have helped to delay placing Aidan in a group home, which she reluctantly had to do when he was 14. Life would have been much easier if their apartment had been barrier-free from the time Aidan was younger. She worries: “ When Aidan is older, he will need his own universal design place. - But where can he go?”



Pamela Andrews and Aidan

Canadian housing legislation contravenes the **Canadian Human Rights Act**, the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**, and the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which all prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and which take precedence over all other laws.

22% of Canadians have a disability (Stats Can 2017), and millions of seniors also have one or more disabilities. The Accessible Housing Network points out to election candidates that we are all voters.

"The cost of building a new apartment is the same whether accessible or not - if it is planned from the design stage. It is renovations to conventional housing which are expensive. This is why making 100% of new housing accessible is practical and affordable", says Minnette Samaroo, President of the Toronto chapter of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC).

"There will be **huge healthcare savings** if people are not needlessly stuck in acute care hospitals or forced into long-term care."

Accessible housing prevents burn-out among care-givers, reduces the need for personal care attendants, and reduces the need for household help.

Anyone can have been born with a disability, and anyone of any age can experience illness or accident which creates a temporary or lasting injury.

Accessible housing enhances dignity, freedom, social inclusion, health and well-being. Ottawa accessibility activist, Roger Gervais comments, "Universal Design of new housing is the right thing to do for human rights, for sustainability, for health and safety, for aging in place. The status quo in the building code (barriers in housing) is no longer acceptable. Our next prime minister and MPs need to clearly understand this and act promptly."

The Accessible Housing Network calls on all federal government candidates to take action to make housing 100% accessible:

“1. The **National Building Code** must be amended to make universal design mandatory in every unit in all new multi-unit residential buildings.

2. Provinces follow the lead of the National Building Code. To harmonize all provincial Building Codes, the National Building Code must be updated so that all Canadians have access to the housing they need. There is currently no provincial law requiring that housing be accessible.

3. The promised **Federal Housing Advocate** must be appointed promptly. The **Accessible Canada Act** requires this, and the **Accessibility Commissioner** must enforce it. The appointment of the **Accessibility Commissioner** must be no longer delayed.

4. **The National Housing Strategy (2017)** should guide the leveraging of federal spending on housing to promote accessibility across Canada **by requiring recipients of federal public money to not perpetuate existing barriers or create new ones.**

No tax dollars should ever create accessibility barriers!”

The **Accessible Housing Network (AHN)** is a non-partisan network working to support the human rights of persons with disabilities to end the extreme lack of accessible housing.

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Members of the Accessible Housing Network include:

Older Women's Network, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC), Centre for Independent Living Toronto (CILT), Unitarian Commons Cohousing Corporation, Toronto Raging Grannies, TRAILBLAZERS Tandem Cycling Club, Citizens with Disabilities - Ontario, CERA, Inclusion Canada, Community Living Ontario, Canadian Council of the Blind Toronto Visionaries Chapter, CNIB, LiveWorkPlay, Canadians with Disabilities – Sub Committee of B'nai Brith Canada's League for Human Rights, Ontario Disability Coalition, Open Architecture Collaborative Canada