

# Canada Disability Benefit Report to the House of Commons: Engagement with the Disability Community



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## 1. Introduction

It is an honour to present Canada's report to the House of Commons outlining the activities and manner in which the Government of Canada engaged with the disability community throughout the development and design of the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB).

Persons with disabilities contribute to every aspect of our country. They contribute to the economy, to Canada's culture, and to the core of the nation. However, persons with disabilities also face many challenges and barriers, including financial security. They are less likely to experience financial security and more likely to live in poverty than persons without disabilities.

The CDB is intended to support the financial security of current and future generations of working-age Canadians with disabilities. The CDB is an income-tested benefit that aims to fill a gap in the social safety net between the Canada Child Benefit and Old Age Security by supplementing existing disability support programs. The CDB is a key commitment and is a cornerstone of [Canada's Disability Inclusion Action Plan \(DIAP\)](#). The DIAP is a blueprint for change to make Canada more inclusive for persons with disabilities.

On June 22, 2023, the *Canada Disability Benefit Act* received Royal Assent. The Act established the legislative framework for the CDB, with details to follow in regulations. The Act requires the Government to provide persons with disabilities from a range of backgrounds with meaningful and barrier-free opportunities to collaborate in the development and design of the regulations.

The Act came into force on June 22, 2024. Within six months of the Act coming into force, or by December 2024, the Government is to report to the House of Commons on how the disability community was engaged throughout the development of regulations. This publication fulfils the requirement under the Act. Of note, the report focuses on the engagement process and how the Government ensured that it was as meaningful and barrier-free as possible. While it does not present the views that were shared during the engagement process, a future report under the Act will provide more detail in that regard.

While the primary objective of this publication is to report on engagement and collaboration with the disability community, information on engagement with provincial and territorial governments as well as Indigenous governments and organizations is included later in the report.

*Canada Disability Benefit Act, section 11.2 (1)*

“Within six months after the day on which this Act comes into force, the Minister must table in the House of Commons a report that sets out the manner in which the obligation to engage and collaborate with the disability community in relation to the development of regulations has been implemented.”<sup>1</sup>

Budget 2024 proposed funding of \$6.1 billion over six years, beginning in 2024 to 2025, and \$1.4 billion per year ongoing, for the CDB including costs to deliver the benefit. CDB payments to eligible Canadians are expected to begin in July 2025, following successful completion of the regulatory process and consultations with persons with disabilities. <sup>2</sup>

Building on engagement activities that took place in 2021 and 2022, in summer 2023 the Government launched a two-phase engagement process to inform the development of the regulations and the implementation of the benefit. The first phase of the engagement process took place in fall 2023 and winter 2024 and included roundtables, bilateral meetings, information sessions, online engagement, and the ability to submit comments by a variety of methods. The second phase began when the proposed regulations were published for comment in the Canada Gazette, Part I on June 28, 2024, and ended on September 23, 2024. This phase of engagement also included a roundtable and information sessions, in addition to the ability to submit comments online, by video, email, or mail.

*Who has participated in engagement activities?*

Members of the disability community, including individuals with lived experience and caregivers, stakeholder organizations, Indigenous governments and organizations, academics, as well as provincial and territorial governments have participated in a variety of forms of engagement throughout the design and development of the CDB.

## **2. Background: By the numbers**

Persons with disabilities represent a diverse and significant portion of the Canadian population. In 2022, 27% of the Canadian population aged 15 years and over – or about 8.0 million individuals – had one or more disabilities. Of these, over 5.2 million

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<sup>1</sup> [Canada Disability Benefit Act](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Budget 2024](#)

(approximately two-thirds) were of working-age (18-64).<sup>3</sup> Rates of disability are higher among Indigenous persons than non-Indigenous persons. According to the 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey, 41% of First Nations people living off reserve, 40% of Métis and 26% of Inuit had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities.<sup>4</sup>

Persons with disabilities in Canada are less likely to experience financial security and more likely to live in poverty than persons without disabilities. In 2022, persons with disabilities aged 18-64 were nearly twice as likely as their peers without a disability to be living in poverty (14.9% or 883,000 individuals, compared to 8.1% respectively).<sup>5</sup> In addition, the employment rate of ‘core working-age’ persons with disabilities (i.e., those aged 25 to 54) was 73.4% in 2023, compared with 87.8% among those without disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. How we engaged the disability community**

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of both the act of engagement and the manner in which it is conducted. Engagement regarding the development of the CDB regulations was designed around the principle of “Nothing Without Us”, which emphasizes the importance of persons with disabilities being involved in the development and implementation of all government systems, policies, programs and services.

A variety of information products in a range of formats have been released by the federal government to help inform Canadians about the CDB, the regulatory process and issues that were addressed during engagement on the regulations. To ensure that information pertaining to the design and development of the CDB would be accessible, the Government of Canada developed:

- information guides;
- frequently asked questions and answers;
- videos in American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) with transcripts;
- the CDB website, which includes a ‘subscribe’ button where individuals can elect to be notified via email of new developments regarding the CDB; and,
- virtual roundtables and information sessions offering official language interpretation and captioning in English/French as well as ASL and LSQ.

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<sup>3</sup> 2022 [A demographic, employment and income profile of persons with disabilities aged 15 years and over.](#)

<sup>4</sup> 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey, calculated using [CODR Table: 41-10-0062-01.](#)

<sup>5</sup> 2022 Canadian Income Survey, Statistics Canada custom tabulation

<sup>6</sup> 2023 [Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities.](#)

For example, the Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement (RIAS), regulations, and the online engagement tool have been made available in many alternate formats, including ASL and LSQ. In addition, requests were met to provide the online engagement tool in large print, braille, e-text, Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY), MP3, VRS, telephone conversations, virtual/video calls, and PDF.

In turn, to ensure Canadians were provided with meaningful and barrier-free opportunities to share their opinions and collaborate in the development and design of the regulations, a variety of methods of engagement have been offered, including the ability to provide:

- written comments via mail, email, submitting briefs, the online engagement tool, and the Canada Gazette website;
- verbal comments by phone;
- video recorded comments in sign language; and/or,
- comments via participation in virtual roundtables and bilateral meetings.

*What were the topics of engagement?*

The disability community was invited to engage on all aspects of the CDB benefit parameters that are featured in the regulations, including:

- Eligibility criteria
- Amount of the benefit
- Calculating income
- Applications and Payments
- Administration of the benefit
- Reconsiderations and Appeals
- Compliance and Enforcement

Service Canada's Client Experience Office is also engaging with persons with disabilities to seek their feedback and insights on the client-facing products for the CDB (e.g., the online application, correspondence, Interactive Voice Response phone application, etc.). This is being done by conducting usability testing and collaborating with community organizations to recruit participants with disabilities. The usability tests seek to identify issues, particularly related to the accessibility of the products. By conducting these tests prior to launch, we can improve the client experience for all.

#### **4. Phase I: Engagement Prior to Publication of the proposed CDB Regulations in Canada Gazette, Part I**

The first phase of the engagement process took place between fall 2023 and winter 2024. In total, during this phase of engagement, the Government heard from over 8,000 Canadians and received over 5,000 pieces of input regarding the CDB.

**Table 1: Engagement activities regarding the CDB during Phase 1 (fall 2023 – winter 2024)**

#	Type of Engagement	Participants in the Engagement Activity	When
1.	Information session	Approximately 100 stakeholders attended an information session on the regulatory process.	August 2023
2.	Four ministerial roundtables	Key national disability organizations including the Pan-Canadian Disability Leadership Group and organizations representing women with disabilities, racialized persons with disabilities, and youth with disabilities. Approximately 60 individuals participated in these roundtables.	September – October 2023
3.	Four technical roundtables	The disability community, stakeholders, persons with disabilities, academics, and experts with an interest or expertise in the following areas: the extra costs of living for persons with disabilities; legal capacity; the barrier-free application process; and, technical aspects of the administration of the benefit. Approximately 60 individuals participated in these roundtables.	November – December 2023
4.	Online engagement tool	Over 4,500 responses were received from Canadians on key benefit design details, of which 113 responses were submitted on behalf of organizations. 73% of respondents identified themselves as persons with disabilities, and 36% as caregivers of persons with disabilities (the two groups have some overlap).	November 15, 2023 - January 4, 2024
5.	Bilateral meetings	11 stakeholder groups including organizations working in the private disability insurance sector, healthcare providers, and organizations representing intersectional populations.	January – February 2024
6.	COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group	Three meetings with members of the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group where the Canada Disability Benefit was discussed. <sup>7</sup>	Fall 2023 – Winter 2024
7.	Emails, videos, telephone messages and briefs	Individuals and organizations were also invited to reach out directly to the Government of Canada. 3,725 emails were sent to the CDB inbox between early October 2023 and January 5, 2024. 182 calls were received, of which 92 provided substantive input. An additional 54 briefs were submitted from stakeholders.	Fall 2023 – Winter 2024

<sup>7</sup> Members of the Advisory Group are experts from the disability community. The Advisory Group provides advice on a disability inclusive response to the pandemic. It also provides advice on disability inclusion and on implementing the Minister's mandate.

Some forms of engagement are more conducive to identifying socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals who participated, such as the online engagement tool.

Of the 3,743 responses that contained substantive input through the online engagement tool, 3,549 individuals opted to complete the demographic questions. These individuals self-identified as:

- Men: 1,000 (28%)
- Women: 2,202 (62%)
- Indigenous: 125 First Nations (3.5%), 7 Inuit (0.2%), 96 Métis (2.7%)
- 2SLGBTQI+: 708 (20%)
- Person with a disability: 2,587 (73%)
- Caregiver of person with a disability: 1,295 (36%)

Similarly, of the 113 respondents who provided substantive input and completed the demographic questions, the following identified themselves as belonging to organizations serving:

- Indigenous communities (First Nations, Métis, or Inuk (Inuit)): 58
- Immigrants: 56
- 2SLGBTQI+ individuals: 58
- Individuals with disabilities: 101
- Racialized groups/visible minorities: 57
- Older adults (65+): 56
- Youth/Children (under 18): 49
- Canadians experiencing homelessness: 52
- Women: 59
- Veterans: 34
- Other: 19

The first phase of engagement with the disability community was very informative and provided diverse perspectives on all aspects of CDB design, development, and administration. This substantial undertaking in community engagement laid a solid foundation for Phase 2 - the formal publication of the CDB regulations in Canada Gazette, Part I.

## **5. Phase 2: Engagement regarding the Regulatory Process, Publication of the proposed CDB Regulations in Canada Gazette, Part I**

On June 28, 2024, the proposed CDB Regulations as well as the RIAS for the proposed regulations were published in Part I of the Canada Gazette.<sup>8</sup> These proposed regulations, when finalized, will set out how the CDB will be administered and delivered.

The consultation period for the proposed regulations was extended from the standard 30 days to 86 days, to allow maximum opportunity for the public to comment. The consultation period closed on September 23, 2024, however an extension to October 31 was given to two Indigenous partners. The comments received during the consultation period were published in the Canada Gazette on November 6, 2024.

Engagement opportunities during this phase of the formal regulatory process included a Ministerial event, information sessions, and the opportunity to provide written comments through the Canada Gazette's Online Regulatory Consultation System (ORCS). Alternative methods to provide comments on the proposed regulations included by email, video or mail. Any comment received by one of these methods would be entered into ORCS pending acknowledgement of a Privacy Notification Statement.

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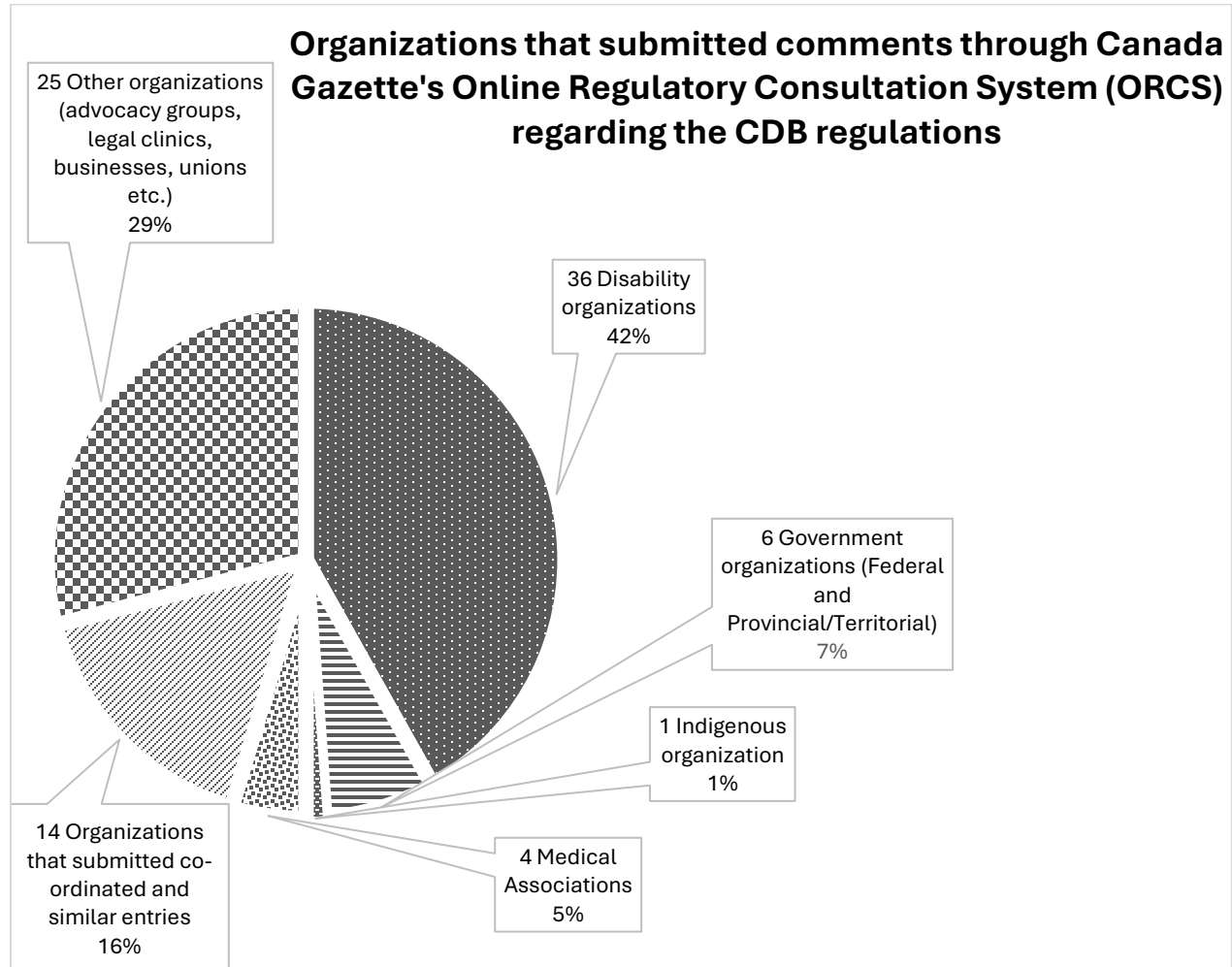
<sup>8</sup> [Overview of the Canada Disability Benefit](#)

**Table 2: Engagement activities regarding publication of the proposed CDB Regulations in Canada Gazette, Part I (June 28 – September 23, 2024)**

#	Type of Engagement	Participants in the Engagement Activity	When
1.	Two Information Sessions	Over 70 disability stakeholder participants attended each virtual information session. These information sessions addressed (1) the Canada Gazette’s online regulatory consultation system (ORCS), how to use it, and alternate ways to provide feedback; as well as, (2) an overview of the proposed regulations, CDB design parameters, and possible approaches to benefit application. Both information sessions included question and answer sessions.	June 24 and July 25, 2024
2.	Ministerial roundtable in Nova Scotia	Roundtable on the CDB with six stakeholder organizations.	August 28, 2024
3.	Meeting with the National Disability Network’s Government Relations Committee	Senior Associate Deputy Minister Tina Namiesniowski met with 15 member organizations of the National Disability Network’s Government Relations Committee to discuss the CDB, including the draft regulations and next steps to implementation. Participants also submitted a dozen questions in advance for discussion at the meeting.	September 4, 2024
4.	COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group	Three meetings with members of the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group where the Canada Disability Benefit was discussed. One additional meeting occurred on June 26, two days prior to publication of the draft regulations in Canada Gazette, Part I.	Summer 2024
5.	Email reminders	Four sets of email reminders were sent to individuals (who subscribed on the CDB website to receive updates about the benefit) and stakeholders about the opportunity to comment on the proposed regulations. Currently 6,275 individuals are subscribed to receive email updates.	June 28, August 14, September 9, and September 16, 2024

A total of 2,734 comments, from 916 commenters, were submitted on the proposed CDB Regulations mostly through the ORCS and approximately 20 by email (not including letter writing campaigns). In total, 85 commenters self-identified as representing an organization.

Between June 28 and September 23, 2024, there were two letter campaigns in which individuals sent the same letter via email to be added as a comment on the proposed Regulations. The first letter writing campaign resulted in 1,016 emails being submitted, and the second letter writing campaign led to the receipt of 5,887 emails.



Organizations that submitted comments through Canada Gazette's Online Regulatory Consultation System (ORCS) regarding the CDB regulations:

- 36 Disability organizations (42%) (one organization is double counted).
- 25 Other organizations (advocacy groups, legal clinics, businesses, unions etc.) (29%).
- 14 Organizations that submitted co-ordinated and similar entries (16%).
- 6 Government organizations (Federal and Provincial/Territorial) (7%).
- 4 Medical Associations (5%).
- 1 Indigenous organization (1%).

When submitting comments through the ORCS, individuals and organizations had the option to identify their province or territory. Input was received from all but one province or territory. Among the provinces/territories that commenters selected as their location, the highest were Ontario (35%), British Columbia (14%), Alberta (6%), and Quebec (4%). The remaining provinces and territories participation rates were 2% or less each. Of note, approximately 29% of commenters did not disclose their region.

## **6. Indigenous engagement and consultation**

The Government of Canada is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change. Indigenous engagement and consultation on the CDB mirrored the timeline and approach adopted with disability stakeholders. Engagement with National Indigenous Organizations (NIOs) and Modern Treaty and Self-Government agreement (MT/SGA) partners began early in the design and development of the benefit with the commencement of Phase 1 and continued through Phase 2. Communications with Indigenous governments and organizations provided information on the CDB, including detailed Indigenous-specific backgrounders. ESDC requested input and advice on the CDB either through email, online links provided to the online consultation tool and the Canada Gazette Part I consultation. As well, in its communications, ESDC consistently offered the opportunity to meet bilaterally.

In its approach to Indigenous engagement, ESDC respected its specific obligations under the Nunavut Agreement. Article 32 of the Nunavut Agreement obligates the Government of Canada to provide Inuit in the Nunavut Settlement Area with an opportunity to participate in the development and design of social and cultural policies. To honour this Agreement and respect government-to-government relations, the Government of Canada engaged with the Inuit of Nunavut as represented by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) since 2022.

In fall 2022, five NIOs signed amendments to Engagement Protocol Agreements (EPA) to support engagement on the design and implementation of the DIAP (led by Employment and Social Development Canada) and the National Autism Strategy (led by the Public Health Agency of Canada). While the engagement focused broadly on the DIAP, the CDB is part of its Financial Security pillar. Subsequently, in January and February 2024, the EPAs of the three remaining NIOs were signed.

In fall 2022, letters and discussion guides were sent to MT/SGA partners to request their input on issues respondents may wish to see considered in the design and delivery

of the Benefit. ESDC received two written responses.

Following the publication of the CDB regulations online engagement tool, in fall 2023, MT/SGA partners and NIOs were invited to participate and submit comments. In January 2024, an Indigenous-specific discussion guide on the regulatory process for the CDB Regulations was distributed and respondents were invited to submit responses in writing or through bilateral discussions with departmental officials. Bilateral discussions were held with four NIOs and one MT/SGA partner, and one written response to the discussion guide was received. In spring 2024, following the tabling of the federal Budget, a post-budget update on the Benefit was sent to MT/SGA partners and NIOs informing them of the CDB details. This was followed by subsequent communications in summer 2024, that notified them of the publication of the Proposed Regulations in the Canada Gazette and invited them to provide input online. The offer to meet bilaterally with ESDC officials on the Proposed Regulations was again extended. No bilateral meeting requests were received. One written response was submitted.

## **7. Engagement with Provincial and Territorial Governments**

Provincial and territorial governments are critical partners in supporting individuals with disabilities. The Government of Canada has engaged with provincial and territorial governments on the CDB, at all levels, both bilaterally and multilaterally, beginning with the July 2021 meeting of Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services Forum.

### *Bilateral engagement*

Throughout 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, provincial and territorial ministers were engaged through bilateral meetings to discuss the objectives and parameters of the proposed Benefit. From 2022 to June 2023, the then-Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Persons with Disabilities met bilaterally with her provincial and territorial (P/T) counterparts to discuss the CDB. Subsequently, between November 2023 and June 2024, the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities met bilaterally with all her P/T counterparts to discuss the CDB and solicit P/T feedback and input. Bilateral meetings have also been held by ESDC deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and working level officials. Individual bilateral discussions at the working level began as of July 30, 2024 to solicit P/T feedback, address technical issues, and identify potential interactions between the CDB and P/T income support programs, among other things.

### *Multilateral engagement*

Multilateral discussions with provincial and territorial governments have been organised at all levels including for the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial (FPT) Ministers Responsible for Social Services Forum, FPT Deputy Ministers Responsible for Social Services Forum, and the FPT Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee with participation of the Directors of Income Support Committee.

Following the September 12, 2024, meeting of Ministers Responsible for Social Services Forum, Ministers released a joint communiqué in which they welcomed the opportunity to discuss the CDB, agreed that the social and financial inclusion of persons with disabilities are top priorities, and highlighted the importance of respecting P/T programs and ensuring equitable and simple access for those most in need.

## **8. What we heard**

Throughout the engagement on the CDB regulations we heard about the following from the disability community, stakeholders, Indigenous organizations, academics, and P/T governments on a wide range of key themes pertaining to the design, implementation and administration of the CDB.

- Eligibility criteria: The use of the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) as an eligibility criterion and whether there should be many paths to eligibility regarding demonstrating disability status.
- Benefit amount: The amount of benefit needed to reduce poverty among persons with disabilities, the higher cost of living with a disability, and suggestions regarding income threshold and exemption levels.
- Calculation of income: Whether the income test for the CDB should be based on individual or family income.
- Applications and payments: Interest in automatic enrollment for those who possess a DTC, have filed their taxes, and have low income; alongside a stand-alone application process that is clear and accessible for those who are not able to use automatic enrollment.
- Administration of the benefit: The importance of administering the benefit in a way that is accessible, barrier free, and straight-forward, while upholding the independence, dignity, and well-being of the person with disabilities as its most central priority.
- Reconsiderations and appeals: The scope of issues for which reconsiderations and appeals should be allowed, the manner and vehicle by which these procedures should be conducted, and the support that should be available to CDB applicants to help them navigate each step and satisfy all requirements.
- Compliance and enforcement: Where the burden of proof should rest for the identification and substantiation of any potential error, the timeframe in which errors should be identified, and the importance of establishing a mutually agreed upon repayment schedule for individuals who have been overpaid that minimizes hardship.
- Benefit harmonization: The need for all levels of government, as well as insurance providers, to work together to ensure that the CDB isn't reduced because of receiving other benefits, and vice versa.
- Indigenous specific issues: The need for an inclusive and culturally appropriate approach to the design and delivery of the CDB, as well as the need for Indigenous-specific and community-based navigation services and an Indigenous understanding of disability.

## 9. Conclusion

The Government of Canada thanks all individuals and organizations who have participated in one or many CDB-related engagement opportunities throughout the past several years, including the most recent engagement surrounding the formal publication of the draft regulations in the Canada Gazette, Part I.

The federal government has listened closely to the opinions and preferences expressed by the disability community and will continue to analyze the comments received before finalizing the regulations that will be published in Part II of the Canada Gazette.

The CDB Act requires that regulations be made no later than June 2025, with a subsequent Report to Parliament due to be tabled at the same time (e.g. within one year after the CDB Act came into force) on the progress made in the regulatory process. In this second report there will be opportunity to further consider the outcomes of engagement with the disability community.

The Government of Canada looks forward to the first CDB benefit payments being issued in July 2025, marking the beginning of this historic new financial support for eligible working-age persons with disabilities.

*Canada Disability Benefit Act, section 11.2 (2)*

“Within one year after the day on which this Act comes into force, the Minister must cause to be tabled in each House of Parliament a report on the progress made in the regulatory process.”