



LEO

**Nova Scotia
League for
Equal
Opportunities**

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Board of Directors

**Annual Presentation
& Recommendations
to Caucus**

Introduction

The Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities (NS LEO) is a disability community-led organization whose primary work and core values focus on promoting and protecting the human rights of Nova Scotians with disabilities. For over thirty-three years, we have helped governments and communities to recognize that Nova Scotia requires significant transformation if it is to become a province where people with disabilities can live, learn, and work with dignity in their communities. Our rights-based approach strategically shapes disability community-driven organizational activities that aim to identify and dismantle barriers to dignified community living. We take seriously our commitment to making disability issues a central consideration in all government and community initiatives and to offering meaningful and workable solutions to identified concerns. Most importantly, we strongly urge you to include the voices of people with disabilities, who comprise more than twenty percent of Nova Scotia's population, as an integral part of your consultation and planning so our communities can become welcoming and accessible for all.

The Issues in Review

NS LEO is proud of our contribution to the government and community-based initiatives that have moved Nova Scotia toward becoming a more accessible place to live. Our voices have made a difference, and we want to ensure the established momentum continues. Our work with successive governments has yielded tangible improvements in the lives of many people with disabilities; but daily revelations of exclusion, institutionalization, and even criminalization of people with disabilities tells us our work is far from finished. We have championed, supported, and realized significant growth in accessible community-based transportation, and we played an

active role in making certain that those who need wheelchairs have greater access than ever before. We have taken part in important strategic initiatives to expand employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities, and we supported the efforts of disability groups in Nova Scotia to research and implement self-managed care.

The disability community demonstrated tremendous political will in urging Nova Scotia to support Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and this long sought-after goal was realized in April of 2010. This ratification was a landmark accomplishment for Canadians who identify as having a disability, and we want to stress the importance of adopting the Convention as an essential framework for all government decisions and program planning. Its guiding principles have formed the foundation of the newly released Road Map for the transformation of the Services to Persons with Disabilities, a forward-thinking plan entitled *Choice, Equality and Good Lives in Inclusive Communities*. However, in order to realize "good lives in inclusive communities", the principles of the UNCRPD and the Road Map must be extended into strategic plans that span all government departments and inspire the vision for every community in Nova Scotia. Therefore, we ask that you consider carefully the following priority areas and specific recommendations as you continue to craft party agendas, propose legislative and program transformation, and formulate a long-term vision for Nova Scotia.

Priority Areas

The UN Convention

The UNCRPD emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies for sustainable development. Failure to do so results in the

perpetuation of disabling communities. In disabling environments, people with disabilities continually encounter the attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full participation in and equitable access to every aspect of modern society. Never before has this principle been more important to Nova Scotians with disabilities. At a time when sustainable community and economic development have become central to all future planning, failure to examine every initiative from the standpoint of one who will experience it with a disability will create increasingly inaccessible communities and exclusionary provincial systems. Thus, we encourage the mainstreaming of disability issues in all strategic planning for sustainable development, and we stress that the disability-related knowledge that informs such planning must come primarily from the disability community itself.

Choice, Equality and Good Lives in Inclusive Communities

Following on the principles of mainstreaming disability issues and centring the voices of people with disabilities, we feel the Road Map for transforming Services to Persons with Disabilities can serve as an effective foundation for defining and creating inclusive communities in all regions of our province. Choice, equality, and good lives in inclusive communities involves far more than reforming one specific government program. As this forward-thinking plan so aptly states, achieving greater self-direction, choice, and control for people with disabilities and their families requires both modernized program delivery structures and greater inclusive capacity in generic community systems. This level of inclusion involves a significant, yet logical, step beyond mainstreaming disability issues. It is the practical application of that principle in which community systems, services, and organizations become accessible to and welcoming of all residents.

Recommendations

Based on the strong foundation laid out by the UNCRPD and the progressive path articulated by the Road Map, NSLEO makes the following recommendations to all parties of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. We believe they represent important pillars in a comprehensive strategic direction for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities.

- **Road Map** – We recommend that the road map to transform Services to Persons with Disabilities be officially tabled by government, that all parties continue to draw on the expertise of those who were involved in its’ development, and that timelines for implementation be adhered to and carefully monitored.
- **Inclusive Communities** – We recommend that each MLA commit to engaging the expertise of their constituents with disabilities to comprehensively assess the accessibility of their constituency. We believe it is vitally important for all MLAS, particularly those who might be new to disability issues, to be able to ask and answer the following questions:
 - Do all my constituents have access to accessible, affordable, and safe housing?
 - Do all my constituents have access to accessible and affordable transportation when and where they need it?
 - Are all children in my constituency receiving appropriate and meaningful support in their community schools?
 - Are all public venues within my constituency fully accessible?

- **Housing** – We recommend that government commit to utilizing the unspent Federal-Provincial housing dollars to substantively address the chronic shortage in community-based small options homes and supported living choices, in the availability of subsidized housing, and of affordable and accessible housing in all communities.
- **Housing** – We recommend that government commit to updating the section of the NS building code that exempts new housing from rules governing disability access in order to ensure a level of accessibility and visit-ability in all new housing.
- **Nova Scotians with Disabilities Act** – We recommend that the principles of choice and dignity in inclusive communities be carried beyond the transformation of Services to Persons with Disabilities and be utilized to begin the development of a Nova Scotians with Disabilities Act.
- **Nova Scotians with Disabilities Act** – We recommend that a process of public consultation be opened in order to determine the measures that such an Act should include.
- **Fostering Community-Based Research and Development** – Increase the fiscal resources available to provincial and community-based disability organizations. These groups have solid roots in the disability community and are therefore best positioned to incorporate the vital voices of Nova Scotians with disabilities in designing meaningful research and engaging in responsive program development.

- **Increasing Political Participation** – We recommend that each MLA commit to including people with disabilities in their riding association leadership teams in order to increase the political participation of Nova Scotians with Disabilities and to enhance the diversity of voices contributing to public and political decision making.
- **Educational Support** – We recommend that government ensure that Nova Scotia public schools are adequately resourced to provide learning support to all students with disabilities.