# **CNIB Foundation Ontario 2019 pre-budget submission**

## **Prepared for the Minister of Finance January 2019**

**Re-Vision ADP (Assistive Devices Program) Campaign Ontario PC Party Response – June 1, 2018**

“We understand the challenges for individuals who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind and believe they should have access to high-quality, timely and essential equipment. We understand the importance of ADP and recognize the good work done at CNIB. We will work with your organization and others who operate in this field and provide essential support to blind, partial blind, and Deafblind. A PC Government will work with you to address concerns and barriers facing your organization while ensuring respect for taxpayer dollars.”

**About CNIB** – To create powerful change for people with sight loss, CNIB is made up of three distinct organizations. Each one plays a unique role in serving our community and delivering on our strategic plan, but all are connected by an unwavering passion to change what it is to be blind today.

**Vision Loss Rehabilitation Ontario** provides training that enables people who are blind or partially sighted to develop or restore key daily living skills, helping enhance their independence, safety and mobility.

**CNIB Deafblind Community Services** is one of the leading providers of specialized support and emergency services for people who are Deafblind – enabling them to maximize their independence and engagement with the world around them.

The **CNIB Foundation Ontario** is a not-for-profit organization that empowers people impacted by blindness to live the lives they choose. Funded by charitable donations and enabled by the selfless contributions of volunteers, our innovative programs and powerful advocacy drive change in communities from coast to coast to coast.

**Our recommendations:**

1. Modernize the Assistive Devices Program to enhance service delivery and ensure Ontarians who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind have access to high-quality, timely and essential equipment.

2. Strengthen Ontario's workforce by ensuring Ontarians who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind have access to internship/returnship opportunities and technology programs that will remove barriers to employment.

**Modernize the Assistive Devices Program**

Technology levels the playing field for Ontarians who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind – but only when it is accessible, available, and affordable. The Government of Ontario should be proud of its Assistive Devices Program (ADP) – it is a lifeline for many Ontarians living with disabilities. Without ADP, many would be unable to afford an assistive device.

**1. Application Process**

Currently, the paper-based application process is inaccessible and inefficient. At best, applicants wait weeks to hear from the ADP, but they often wait months. The ADP began updating their computer systems to accept electronic submissions in 2018 – nine years after the recommendation was made – but it's not expected to be finished until 2020. Both authorizers and vendors must print the forms – this is not accessible to an authorizer, vendor or applicant who is blind, partially sighted or Deafblind.

According to the 2018 Auditor General Report, 10 of the 49 FTE staff who work in the ADP department are Data Entry Operators – their primary job function is to enter hardcopy claims into the system. This is an inefficient process that creates accessibility barriers for applicants, vendors and authorizers who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind.

**Through the Digital Government Action Plan, the government should prioritize updating the ADP's administrative process to ensure it is efficient while meeting the needs of Ontarians with disabilities.**

**2. Devices**

The visual aids category has not been significantly updated since 2001. The manual includes outdated technology (e.g. Pacmate Qx400, Pacmate Bx400 and Braille Note 18/32) that hasn't been manufactured in 10 years, and modern technology, such as smartphones, aren't included. Today, accessible smartphone apps make it possible for people with sight loss to do all kinds of things that may have seemed challenging before. Apps allow people who are blind to: read prescription labels and take medication safely; recognize the faces of loved ones; access emergency assistance from sighted volunteers and travel safely alone using GPS.

The current structure has made it impossible for the program to keep up with technological trends, including the rise in accessible mainstream technology such as smart devices, which could result in significant savings.

**The government should meet with CNIB and other experts to modernize the visual aids product list. This respects taxpayer dollars by ensuring the money is well-spent.**

**Strengthen Ontario's economy**

Ontario benefits when skilled Ontarians are active in the workforce. As the government creates the conditions to make it easier to secure employment, start a business, grow a business and invest in Ontario, job seekers with sight loss will be able to find a job right here at home and contribute to the economy. This will also ensure employers have a chance to discover the full potential of Ontario's talent.

The unemployment rate for Canadians with sight loss is triple the general unemployment rate. We recognize the government's commitment to disability employment through **"Access Talent: Ontario’s Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities"**.With your commitment, we will improve employment statistics, boost the economy and create good jobs for those who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind.

**1. Introduce funding opportunities to help businesses take part in internship or 'returnship' (ensure skilled job seekers return to work) programs for people with disabilities**, using a similar model to [Canada Summer Jobs](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/canada-summer-jobs.html). CNIB and partner organizations have been providing internships/returnships for job seekers with sight loss through our [Come to Work](http://www.cometowork.ca) program. This provides people with meaningful work and relevant work experience for a minimum of six months with project outcomes. The Government of Ontario should consider participating in this program to lower the jobless rate and strengthen Ontario's economy.