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Economic Impacts of COVID-19 - CNIB Consultation Response

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
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August 24, 2020

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs,

Thank you for your efforts to formulate a plan to get the economy up and running and get people back to work in Ontario as our society recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. People with disabilities must be included in the economic recovery plan, given the challenges that they face in securing employment and re-employment, more so now than ever when unemployment rates are high for the general population, including people with disabilities.

Ontarians want to work. Ontarians with sight loss are no different. However, for more than 681,000 Ontarians with sight loss, getting access to a job or re-integrating into the workforce is difficult at the best of times. The unemployment rate for Canadians with sight loss is triple the general unemployment rate. Prior to COVID-19, 1 in 5 Ontarians with sight loss were living on social assistance and we expect that number to have risen in the current economic climate. People do not want to be living on social assistance – they want to be employed.

People with disabilities, including those with sight loss, must be included as part of the economic recovery plan. With your commitment, CNIB will help boost the economy through better employment outcomes people with disabilities, including those who are blind, partially sighted or Deafblind.

Ontario's COVID-19 economic recovery plan must include the following:

Access to adaptive technology for people with disabilities.

Technology opens up the world for people who are blind or partially sighted – but only when it's accessible, available and affordable. When people who are blind or partially sighted have access to adaptive equipment, they can overcome barriers to accessibility and inclusion. The CNIB Foundation urges the province to make permanent the pandemic measures taken for the Assistive Devices Program (ADP), such as virtual assessments, accepting applications by email and fax, and improved processing times for applications due to enhanced resources. The province must build on these positive

momentum and further modernize the program, reduce red-tape and barriers caused by inefficient and overly bureaucratic processes, and carry out a long overdue update to the list of devices to ensure value for money and greatest impact to the end user. A renewed and updated ADP will help people with disabilities receive access to necessary assistive devices that will help them participate in society and in the economy.

Access to jobs for people with disabilities

In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for our career and employment programs has increased significantly as the pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities – vulnerable groups and those living on low-incomes have experienced the most job losses, reduction in hours worked, and restricted access to community services and supports¹. As the Government of Ontario focuses on restarting the economy after the pandemic, CNIB Foundation urges that the government prioritize opportunities for economic growth and labour market engagement that includes people who are blind or partially sighted.

To get Ontario's economy up and running, many employers, including small and medium size businesses, will need to look at re-hiring staff. They should look no further than CNIB's Talent Pool – Ontarians with sight loss who are ready, willing and able to work. By funding CNIB's Come to Work program, we can train the sight loss community to compete for jobs and train employers on how to create diverse and inclusive workplaces. We can connect our Talent Pool with partner employers who are seeking hard working employees, just like Ontarians with sight loss. During COVID-19, CNIB Foundation has ramped up our virtual career and employment programs to ensure Canadians with sight loss are ready to enter the job market when the economy reopens. We offer virtual employment bootcamp, one-on-one career support, goal setting workshops, and peer support groups. Let's work together to get Ontarians with sight loss off of social assistance and into the world of work.

The CNIB Foundation Ontario has long been a trusted partner of the Ontario government. During over 100 years of service, as an organization we have persevered through many historical challenges and are ready to help during this difficult time. Together, we will create good jobs and boost the economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Angela Bonfanti
Senior Vice President
CNIB Foundation

¹ *Economic and Fiscal Snapshot 2020*. Department of Finance Canada, July 8, 2020.