



## Transcript

Ep. 22: The State of Accessibility in Canada (1:02:13)

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You Can't spell inclusion Without a D. The podcast that explores the power of inclusion and why disability is an important part of the workplace diversity, equity and inclusion conversation produced by the Ontario Disability Employment Network with your hosts, Jeannette Campbell and Dean Askin.

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### **DEAN ASKIN**

Accessibility, one word that can have a lot of impact every day in Canada, indeed, across North America, and in countries around the world. Many people, especially people who have a disability face challenges in their daily lives, because the built environment we all live in, generally isn't all that accessible. Now, we're talking here about the accessibility of everything from public air and passenger rail transport to many buildings and businesses, to information to products on store shelves to customer service to post secondary education on university and college campuses. Hi, I'm Dean Askin, and this is episode 22 of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. Thanks for joining us as we mark National AccessAbility Week 2024. With this episode, that's part one in a two-part series on accessibility.

### **JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

Accessibility comes down to making sure everything from products to services to places are designed so everyone can use them. When things are accessible. Everyone benefits the emphasis on when. Hello, I'm Jeannette Campbell, back with you at the other mic. And thanks to my colleague Jennifer Crowson for filling in the past couple of episodes.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Jennifer did a great job filling in and we had fun co-hosting back-to-back episodes, Jeannette, but I have to say it's great to have you back. I mean, it's just not quite the same co hosting a podcast without your regular co host.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

Well, thanks, Dean. And you know, it's been almost five years since the Accessible Canada Act came into force with the goal of making this country totally barrier free by January 1 2040. And just what is the current state of accessibility and Canada of products, services of places? And will we truly become barrier free over the next 16 years?

**DEAN ASKIN**

That's what we're exploring in this episode. Think of it as a report card on the overall state of accessibility in Canada.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

To get that high level barometric reading, we've turned to three of the top voices on accessibility in Canada.

**DEAN ASKIN**

In fact, we went right to the top joining us from Ottawa, Canada's Chief Accessibility Officer, Stephanie Cadieux. She's in the third year of her appointed term as CAO. She has been a wheelchair user since the age of 18. So she's got a deep understanding of accessibility barriers and issues faced by people who have a disability.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

And that includes some recent personal accessibility failure experiences with air travel that's made national headlines.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Joining us from out west in Richmond BC is Brad McConnell. He's the vice president of access and inclusion at the Rick Hansen Foundation, Brad leads the foundation's accessibility certification program and supporting training.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

He's been a leader in accessibility for almost three decades. And Brad has extensive experience in the practical application of universal design across the whole built environment.

**DEAN ASKIN**

He's consulted globally on accessibility for airport authorities, the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the International Paralympic Committee. Brad's also a member of the Federal Accessibility Standards Canada board. By the way, Brad uses a wheelchair and his service dog every day.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

And joining us from here in Ontario, Toronto to be exact, Lauren McDonald. She's a human rights lawyer ranked one of Canada's top 25 Most Influential lawyers by Canadian Lawyer magazine. She's a disability and accessibility change maker, and an inclusion Diversity Equity and accessibility champion.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Lauren is recognized as one of Canada's disability leaders and she's highly regarded by the human rights legal community that disability champion recognition includes being a member of the Canadian disability Hall of Fame, and a recipient of the Order of Ontario.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

Lauren's passionate about and commitment to accessibility and disability awareness stems from her lifelong lived experience with profound hearing loss. So Stephanie, Cadieux, Brad McConnell and Lorin MacDonald, welcome to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. And thank you for joining us to share your perspectives.

05:00

**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

It's wonderful to be here and, and reflect on on some things during National AccessAbility Week.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

Well, in that case, then Stephanie, I'm going to start with you first. Where do you think we are on the accessibility barometer and 2024? So how would you describe the overall state of accessibility in Canada?

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**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

I would say, we're getting a passing grade. Which is to say we have a long way to go. We haven't yet made sure that people have access to accessible homes, for example, that's something we really need to move the needle on.

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And we still as a society, to easily slide into a mindset that accessibility is somehow something charitable, something that you do if you have the money, or if somebody requests it, we haven't yet fully accepted that it matters every time, all of the time, everywhere. And we definitely have not yet accepted that, or at least not broadly, that it means more than ramps and washrooms. But that it means

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Braille, it means access to interpreters, it means plain language,

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it means wayfinding

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we've got we've got a long way to go before we hit that 2040 mark and, and hopefully, have become barrier free.

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**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

And you know, you raised a lot of really good, good points there that I hope listeners will be able to get a little bit grounded in so thank you for that, that. That framing. And Lorin, what about you? What do you think about the overall state of accessibility right now?

**LORIN MACDONALD**

Pleased to hear that definitely worth candid in saying that we're getting a passing grade, because you're oftentimes when we talk about accessibility, at people with disability for almost gaslit into oh, we're like, totally going to make that deadline. And everything is just great. And it doesn't do us any favor, to have that gaslighting, almost disability micro aggression being aimed at us. And so, I appreciate your candor Stephanie.

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Undoubtedly, we've made progress, it has been commendable. When I think back to all of my years in disability advocacy. There's certainly conversations that are happening, but it needs to be beyond just happening and translate into action. And I don't see that happening, especially when you consider the state of accessibility. Yes, it looked very different in urban centers, such as Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto, but what does it look like in remote and rural communities,

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I daresay not much has changed at all. And so we need to recognize that the gaps are still present. When we think about public transportation, you made reference to Air Canada, and air transport in general, not just one specific airline, we don't want to pile on to one airline is across all of them. And, you know, education, employment, that we do need to engage in ongoing work in those areas, and even things such as digital content, which has become even more important coming out of COVID, but still has a long way to go could be fully accessible. And I'll expand on that further in the compensation. But that's my opening gambit. We were making progress,

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not as much as we should be making it. The compensation needs to be need to change from talking and move into action. Brad would really like your opinion on this. What are your thoughts? I think it's really important to keep a broad perspective on this, you know, the overall state of accessibility in Canada is so far ahead of the rest of the world and we sometimes lose focus on that. Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees. And we're guilty of that in our community to some extent.

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I think one of the most heartening things that's happening since the ACA was enacted though is it's expanded our understanding

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know who the user groups really are. The focus was on mobility, basically, well, it's coming from a wheelchair user, but the wheelchair users just dominated the discussion. And now we're looking at mine from the environments. We're looking at neurodiverse we're looking at much more into the sensory disabilities as well. So, in answering your question, I'd say the glass is half full. I'm just not sure what it's full of strong opening gambits, I have to say. So we still got a lot of things to do, and a long way to go. But what are we getting right today about accessibility, that maybe we weren't, you know, even 510 or 15 years ago? Lauren, what do you think we've got the accessible Canada Act. And we have standards that are in progress and have been created. So that definitely an improvement. infrastructure upgrades are happening with the more ramps with the elevators, accessible washroom, transit, we do see some developments in that regard.

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Coming out of COVID, we're seeing all of the virtual platform, which really wasn't used that much free COVID. and I were fortunate I had a doom account before COVID started, and with you do using them, but in the beginning, there were so many virtual platforms and hard to learn. But it was also a way to engage people. And new work format, which also came out of COVID, which was remote work. And so those are definitely some improvement. And if you remember, people with disability for many, many years, have been requesting the opportunity for flexible work, as it was more referred to being able to, to manage their work from home due to issues with accessible transit, and all of that. And we're consistently told, No, it can't happen. We need you in the office is non negotiable. But the minute that COVID hit, and the larger employment sector needed to transition to remote work, how fast did that happen? It turned on a dime. And also, the other thing is, though, that showed the the discrimination, if you will, and I'll talk further about exactly what that is towards people with disability. But also, what also came out of COVID was how nimble the federal government can be if they need to be, because look at all of the emergency support. That also happened, the financial support that also happened very, very quickly with the candidate emergency

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response benefit, and support for businesses. And so we've definitely got we have increased awareness and inclusion. But like I said, in the opening, people are talking, but it needs to move beyond talking. And so these are the right direction that we're going into, there needs to be more.

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And definitely now that I looked at a few copper mine, things we're getting right, I'm love to hear how you're going to add to that, because I'm sure you have a very different perspective, or maybe the same as me.

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**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

largely the same. But the but one

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that I'll I'll pick up on for sure. In the way of what are we doing right, is I think we have learned and and

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as it comes to what is flexibility and work mean, and and what is what are the opportunities and people with disabilities

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had been asking for a long time for the opportunity to work remotely. And I fully echo Lorin's comments about we figured it out as soon as COVID happened. I was in the legislature in British Columbia at the time.

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And, you know, while that had had always been an in person,

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in person job in the legislature in Parliament.

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We figured it out, you know, in two weeks, how we were going to continue to sit because we had to we had to be able to pass new legislation to get supports out to people and to manage the crisis.

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Imagine that, and then all of a sudden, well gee, we can also do these other things.

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that way, right?

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I think one of the challenges moving forward is ensuring that we don't lose that, that we don't lose that ability to be flexible and to to innovate, and include people as we move forward. And I think that is a real risk.

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But what are we what else are we doing right that we weren't maybe five or 10 years ago, even 15 years ago, I think we are more open to having difficult, vulnerable conversations about what accessibility means

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and what it doesn't, and what disability is, and what it's not.

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Those are, those are uncomfortable conversations, but I think we're getting better at having those. As Lorenzo we know, at the very outset, you know, being a, being a person with a disability, and sort of feeling like you always had to make other people feel comfortable around you, rather than showing up as yourself with your, your needs. And, and, and with the difficulties front and center.

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Instead, we are now more open to showing up as we are and saying yeah, and this isn't good enough, what we what we accepted as people with disabilities 10 or 15 years ago, because there was really no alternative. But to power through and be strong and be adaptable to an environment that wasn't friendly to us, has changed. And, and that's important, it's important that people with disabilities are able to show up and be honest about the barriers that are in front of them, and have others take responsibility for removing those barriers. That is a fundamental shift that we see now written into the legislation written into the accessible Canada Act, a definition of disability based on the social model of disability.

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That, that takes the onus off the individual to advocate for their needs in a system

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and around issues that are systemic, and and puts that onus on the systems to remove those barriers, that is fundamentally

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a culture shift at the at at the core that ultimately will lead

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lead to a different

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interaction for people with disabilities and our country. But we have to get it right. And we have to start acting and and I agree.

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Action beats intent every single time. And we have to we have to start doing more of it.

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**LORIN MACDONALD**

Yeah, if I can add to what Stephanie has said that possible.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Go ahead. jump right in.

**LORIN MACDONALD**

Yeah. And just because there were so many points that you were raising Stephanie, that reminded me some other thing. Lawyer, the legal profession, also had to very quickly shift the way that things have always been done. And but when they made that shift, for example, we used to have to pack you know, document, who back in the day.

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In this day and age lawyers still do and as well as the medical profession so quickly that when they eliminated and also in person, child and the teacher legal procedures were not happening, as we talked about COVID. So the transition moved to online with increased accessibility for people with disabilities. And it's really the concept of universal design, that it's not just for those people who live with LD, but it's good for everyone. And the Accessible Canada Act. Anthony at the human rights lawyer, I'm mindful of the fact that the broaden definition of what a disability is, as it appears in the accessible Canada Act is exceptional, need to be accepted by all of the government bodies being the definition because some areas of government have narrower or more restrictive definition. And with respect to

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people with disability and I did came up with a while I was listening to you, we have to move from compliance to defiance

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what

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do I mean by that?

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That is pretty good.

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But what does that mean? Is that because people with disabilities have always been

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taught or ingrained that we should accept what is offered, be grateful for, you know, whatever accessibility probe it may be offered. But now what we're seeing, and I thought of this technique that you were talking about air travel, we have moved away from compliance, this is no longer good enough, it is no longer acceptable, it is no longer dignified it like a human right, and have shifted all the way to defy him. And rightly so. And even though people say, Oh, you disabled people are always angry.

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There's a reason for that. It's a reason why we're angry. But also what we have seen is, think about it 1015 years ago, once a tick tock, how about Instagram? I remember, you know, Facebook was just starting out when I was in law school.

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The people with disabilities have learned how to leverage the power of social media. And we have all learned so much from the inequities of air travel with those stunning example videos of people with disabilities, how their rights are trampled on. And images are powerful. And that is moving things forward. So I would say that that is a big advantage that we have now that we did not have 15 years ago, because it's really creating a movement, pardon the pun, to make change happen.

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**DEAN ASKIN**

Brad, I want to get your perspective on this. You've heard what you've heard what Stephanie and Lorin have said, but I want to bring Brad into the conversation here.

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What do you think we're getting right today about accessibility, that maybe we weren't 510 or 15 years ago?

**BRAD MCCANNELL**

Again, it's that broad perspective that we're doing is something that's quite, quite different. But the other thing that we're doing right, is, we're really getting people with lived experience involved in the discussion. And we're respecting that the concept of lived experience isn't simply people with disabilities, caregivers have a very unique lived experience. And it's very important to bring that into the discussion as well. So being aware of of

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people with lived experience really are in broadening natto to include caregivers. And indeed, though, facility operators and owners, they have a lived experience, too, and not all of its positive. So broadening that out, I think it's one of the things that we're really getting right, is understanding that it's, it's not a very narrow focus, you know, the thing about disability is

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anyone access is access is everything. And everything is access. Access is a moving target. The more access you create, the more you're going to need, because that's the nature of inclusion. But I think what we're getting right is, is understanding that broader picture. One of the things that we've done really well, you know, the Battlecry, right? Nothing about us without us.

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The understanding, though, is, it doesn't mean go ask a wheelchair user, or go as someone who was minded, it means why it doesn't even mean forming a committee and having able bodied people dutifully taking notes and try to turn that into policy. Nothing about us without us means putting people

with disabilities and decision-making positions. And that's starting to happen. And that's what we're doing right.

**DEAN ASKIN**

There's those fundamental shifts that that you mentioned, and all these progressive things are happening, despite the fact that the legal and medical professions are still using fax machines. But out of all that progress, what do you think still needs to change the most? If there's one or two things what would come to mind.

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Whoever wants to jump in.

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**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

Attitudes. Attitudes around disability still have to change there's ways we still

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need for people to understand that that disability is just another way of experiencing the world.

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And and we need to build on the willingness to try new things and fail forward. There is a level of fear that keeps people from acting from keeps people from

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from doing what's necessary to become accessible and there's what if I get it wrong? What if I say the wrong thing what well

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You'll learn, but it's better to be doing something. And trying,

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then, than to than to sit, sit still and wait, wait for perfection, wait to be told exactly what you have to do by a law. We don't, we don't want that.

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This is about being open and changing and, and all of this is going to evolve.

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It's not going to happen in one fell swoop. So I think that's really important that we have to be, we have to be open and conscious of of what we're doing and what we're trying to do. So that we can learn.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Let's get Brad's perspective here for a minute. And then Lorin, I know you've got something you'd like to add to this.

## **BRAD MCCANNELL**

What needs to change the most is the built environment. The reason we've focused so much of the Rick Hansen foundation on adult environment, excuse me, is none of the other pillars of disability, whether it's employment, transportation, communication, WebEx, none of them can really thrive unless the built environment itself is accessible. Right? Even if you're working from home, you're working in a built environment. So for us, the focus had to be on getting that built environment, right? You know, cuz Conference Board of Canada did a terrific stir survey on this. And we just asked them, What if just office space and retail space, if those two alone were accessible on the Rick Hansen, excessively certification scale, at our base minimum, what would happen if those two jurisdictions were accessible, and what would happen would be \$16.8 billion will be added to the gross domestic product, because I can get into buildings because I can work there now. Because you're respecting people on both sides of the counter. So it's not we talked about the aging population all the time. But one of the things that gets forgotten is it needs the workforce is aging as well. So all these elements apply on both sides of the counter. So it's, it's a really important piece to understand all of these things go together, and we're doing really well in some things. But other things are lagging behind. And the built environment, is the key thing to make everything else work.

## **DEAN ASKIN**

You know, there's a real cross-section of perspectives coming out in this conversation. Well, that's why we wanted all three of you on the show for this episode. You know, Lauren, what did you want to add to this?

## **LORIN MACDONALD**

I've asked her to definitely point it that thumb, people organization get hung up on to set Stephanie, that perfection P we have to get that right. It's imperative, whereas people with disabilities are very candid about, let's go with progress over perfection, that that let's get the movement happening because you can become so paralyzed. But, again, bad veterans the word, but it can become

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unwilling to don't. Because you have that fear of not getting it right.

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You're absolutely right, definitely in the

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we get so hung up of people with our disability get hung up on what the proper term, you know, how do I engage one of the interaction and what it takes it stop and take a beat. And just like what I did, now, realizing that certain words are not respectful. Say, Oh, that was wrong, you know, I apologize, you learn from it and move on. And you do better moving forward. And we also need to teach ship to beyond compliance, because the minimum is exactly that the minimum and some baselines are very, very low. And so we're seeing examples of organizations and people that are going beyond the

minimum which is important. And so I have some thoughts about what needs to change most. And it's hard to pick one because there are so many things that need to shift.

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I think that there needs to be a holistic approach to accessibility and and disability inclusion. And for example, Nova Scotia, their accessibility directorate, put that in their justice department file,

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which automatically, you know, help coordinate policymaking. And take note that disability inclusion is a key government priority. But when you have a standard

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Long minister for a minute, the Ontario Minister for Seniors and Accessibility,

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you know, and how is that? Yes, we do have a designated Minister yay. But it's seniors and accessibility and accessibility, which is at the bottom of the social spectrum, in the view of providing support. So that holistic view needs to happen. And let's talk about poverty reduction, because that is critical. For so many people with disabilities who are living in poverty, they live below the poverty line, and they experience homelessness. And why is that because there are blood income support system across the country, across the country that

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does not make a dip not deport people with disabilities.

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Having a meaningful life, it's not even deporting them covering the rent, or the essential around their their disability need,

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is also tied to

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the federal disability tax credit, which can be problematic because of the very narrow definition of that credit. So it needs to be that

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of disability. Within that credit, though, there needs to be cohesion, there needs to be collaboration around all of the disability support. Because if you move from one province to another, and you are a person with a disability, you may be better, oftentimes worse off than you were before. And that is not affecting dignity for people in this country, people with disabilities. And it's also certainly not respecting intersectionality. Because if you are an indigenous person living with a disability, you have multiple layers of oppression that are extremely difficult to manage. And we need to recognize from a human rights perspective, the a person with a disability isn't just a person with a disability, they have other

identities, intersecting identity that make things more difficult. So it's not an easy question to answer with respect to what needs to change the most. Because there are competing priorities.

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They all need to happen at the same time, because they're devastating for people in the country.

### **JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

I'm gonna just gonna jump in and say, that kind of leads us to a question, a couple of questions down our list, but I feel like we've sort of unpacked a lot in that change the most question, lesson learned full podcast just on that topic in the future, which I think would make an amazing conversation and a great, great piece for people to learn from, but who has to lead the way? For this? Is it is it the disability community through advocacy? Is it government through legislation? Is it big business that needs to step up? Or is it? Is it a combination of things? What? Who has to lead? It's a combination.

### **STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

Yeah, I think that's the that's the challenge, right? It's

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accessibility, is everybody's business. Accessibility has to be a part of every conversation at the start, not at the end. Not when we're looking at how do we patch this, to make it work for someone with a disability, but instead, we're starting on this new policy, this new product, this new website, whatever it might be, how do we are how are we building accessibility? And how are we making sure that people with disabilities are included, and then you add on top of that, the complexity of, of a country and all of the pieces, the multi levels of government, the private sector, and so on, and how you can't We can't force everyone

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to harmonize their efforts and have have things work smoothly from place to place. But we can choose harmonization we can choose to, to do things

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together and with with the proper lens and to make sure that things work.

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across so that people regardless of their ability, and regardless of what programs, what services they might need, that they can accept, expect a level of consistency across the country. I think that's important.

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### **LORIN MACDONALD**

Of course, you know, our government needs to lead by example.

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They need to take a look around and see who is not at the table and create safe spaces. And they also need to ensure that the accessibility is there to provide and enable participation, because it was government, the federal government who was telling us Canadian, that, hey, the numbers of people who have reported that they live with one or more disability, they want a seven pick that up 5%, from the last survey on Canadians with disability, and that's reported, there is a number of those who choose not to report who do not want to disclose. So why did that 5% Jump happen? What what changed since the last report in 2017, we've had a global pandemic, we've had greater awareness and love thigma around mental wellness.

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And we have an increasing aging population. And so

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government is the one that got that data collection, government needs to do more with data collection, because data drive to datum and so government need to set the standard. I don't care if it's federal government, provincial, government, municipal government and government, they need to set the standard and model the behavior that will create change. But the thing is, if the political will is not there,

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across any government actors, I'm not

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pointing out any particular political party because it doesn't matter if the political will is not there, then no matter how much advocacy and grassroots mobilization is done by the disability community, not much it's going to happen. I think all we need to do is look at the recent Canada Disability Benefit, and the inclusion in the federal budget. That was disappointing. I think that's a mild word to use for many Canadians with disability to were consulted,

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for provided testimony and all of that feedback, only to see a less than satisfactory amount allocated in the federal blood budget. And that was that was heartbreaking for many.

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And so we move from government talk about people with disability to art advocating, but sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes it does. I point to the air transportation industry, we're seeing that change happening, because it all happened at the grassroot level.

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When the move to business, the business case for hiring people with disabilities in that knew it had been around for over a decade, it came out of the the Rethinking disability in the private sector report that was released in 2012. At the behest of the federal government, to, you know, point this out, but the thing is, it's questionable how much the dial has actually moved, and doesn't really support the spectrum of people with disability. And no matter what their disability may be, are they really receiving

meaningful employment? All level, not just entry level, but all level. So really, what it comes down to is, yeah, tone from the top of the thing from your leader to department, but also so in representation. You need to have people with disability in positions of power, who are part of the decision making process. And that is not happening to a great degree, from what I have seen across all government sector. So it's a combination of factors that you need to be involved to move, make train traffic.

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**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

It's a it's a combination. Absolutely. Because as I said, accessibility is everybody's business right?

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Uh, the accessible Canada Act puts the onus on government and federally regulated industries to look within themselves to remove and prevent barriers. And that's important, right again, because usually, in the past individuals, although the law said they couldn't be discriminated against, in order for them to get what they need, they were fighting the same battles over and over again, on an individual basis, which is not, which isn't moving the dial. So while the system, the onus now is on the system, whether that be government or private sector, industries that are regulated by the federal government, or, or whether it's at the community level,

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it's great that that that onus is on them. But we have to remember that it's also critical that people with disabilities are consulted, in those in those processes in the work that's being done, or they are no one's gonna get it right. There are people with disabilities, their feedback, it has to be factored in, they have to be asked, and because people with disabilities know what they need to thrive, and they're gonna be willing to have those conversations. Now there's, there's complexity around that, of course, as well. We don't want to burn people out in this in this process.

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But it's about that willingness of organizations to to be vulnerable, and ask, why do I need to do? And to their employees? You know, does everybody have what they need to be successful here? Those are the questions. But it's so so if it comes to that, then I guess ultimately, I would say the leadership has to come from a top.

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The leadership sets the tone, and the expectations for what is going to happen, whether that be in a government, or whether that be in a mom and pop coffee shop. The reality is, the leadership decides that accessibility is important.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

Brad, let's hear from you.

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**BRAD MCCANNELL**

It's all hands on deck. But part of the problem in the past is everybody's been trying to do this in isolation. And unless we all work together on this, it's it's gonna continue being blocking ourselves, really, that community of people with disability is fighting to get higher code requirements and stiffer penalties. And that's really good and really important. I mean, I believe in codes. I'm on the board of accessible standards, Canada, I believe in code. But I also understand it takes more than just cold codes to meet the kind of change we're looking for. We need a cultural shift. And the only way to get that is to bring industry to the table. We've been diligently pushing codes higher and pushing penalties higher. But nobody brought industry to the table. They're the ones paying for this after all. Yeah. So at the end of the day, if we don't bring them to the table to the discussion, then they just see it as more regulation more red tape. Oh, my gosh, now you got all the good parking space. What else do you want? It's that kind of thing. If we don't bring them to the table while we're having a discussion, then there's going to be more and more resistance.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Powerful insights. How I mean, 2040 is 16 years away, how optimistic are you that we are going to be barrier free? Under the accessible Canada Act by January 1 2040? Out of all the things you've said still have to change. How what's what's your level of optimism?

43:42

Brad, I'll turn to you first, on this one.

**BRAD MCCANNELL**

Optimistic Yes. But it's not a lot of time. People think 16 years is not in the in the world of construction. My focus is on the built environment. And in that world planning cycles are 20 year builders, typically we've got three projects right now, and it's one of your programs. And so the important thing is to get to them early, important thing is to stop letting them make new mistakes. We have to this code minimum access strategy is knocking us down because we can't keep up. It's a game of whack a mole right now. You miss Valley says okay, we're gonna build a new library. And everybody runs over there we go. Okay, here, it has to be accessible. Here's why. Here's who. We're gonna build a new rec center. Everybody runs over there. Okay, we've got to make it accessible. Here's why. And here's who, and nobody's doing any of the connective issues. It's

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16 years is not a very long period of time. But people have to recognize that industry gets on board with this. If they see the return on investment, then, yeah, we're in pretty good shape. But also recognizing that

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access by 2040

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There's an officer



45:00

think there is no end date on this. Now, when someone says I want my building to be accessible, the next thing out of my mouth is to who? To wheelchair users to people who are blind to people who are deaf. neurodiverse human?

45:14

I don't know what makes us think that by 2040 We've solved everything is a bunch of new things we're gonna come up, take the orange is gonna bring more and more people into the inclusion bracket. And so this idea that there's an end date to it, I find troubling.

### **LORIN MACDONALD**

Yeah, and I want to say that being an Ontario which is the most populous province in the country,

45:40

we've all seen what's happened with the accessible Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the AODA, when that was brought in, 2005 and 2005 the vision of an a barrier-free Ontario by 2025 20 years, no brainer, of course, we're gonna get there.

46:03

We're nowhere close. We've got eight months, less than that, before we hit 2025. And we're nowhere near reaching that level of attainment. And so the Accessible Canada Act came in five years ago. And so again, that was another 20 year projection. But people need to be aware and manage expectation that this only relate to the federal government and federally regulated agency, it is not a panacea to make the whole country accessible. It is not the same as the Americans with Disabilities Act, which people think is exactly the same, it is not, for good reason. We are not the United States of America, also a very good thing. And so we don't have the critical mass that the American path, we have a country that is large. That is it spread out, there is a lot of remote and rural community that you don't see as much in the in in the United States. And so right, then that's going to be different.

47:18

So it's all going to come down to, you know, how our timelines being set? What are the details around that? How are we measuring accessibility? How are they getting implemented in the first place? What about and the big downfall with a Oda has been accessible enforcement of the accessibility standard.

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Big argument, oh, we want the carrot or the stick approach, we'll go with the carrot. Well, the carrot means nothing. Because people are like,

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well, when taken under advisement, but then nothing happened. Why? Because they could continue in this way with impunity, because they're not going to hit any kind of enforcement. Like I said before, the business case for hiring people with disability, this is over a decade, and it with the candidate with the right thing to do, it's good for your business, that that that is the other thing.

48:20

People don't care, unless you hit them where I hurt with it in the pocketbook.

48:27

You know, there won't be in the there won't be the motivation to change. So is it possible? I highly doubt it. I love their the picture and how they set the timeline. How are they going to implement? How are they going to enforce you know, the standard that what needs to happen? Because you see with a Oda back in 2005, I was in the house in Queens Park when it was unanimously passed, we were all celebrating it. It going by in the blink of an eye.

**DEAN ASKIN**

And the last word on this question goes to you Stephanie, you're the Chief Accessibility Officer of this country. How optimistic are you that the goal is going to be achieved by January 1 2040.

**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

At this moment, it is still possible.

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But we have to we have to get to that action.

49:26

We cannot spend

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more time talking about it. We have to spend more time doing it.

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There is a there are there are pockets, I would say of a real progress places where there are big strides being made. And and I think we can learn from those and certainly I'll be watching those in my role and and trying to amplify them and share them

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but there is a

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There is much work to do to really embed

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a different way of thinking about accessibility and disability, if we're going to get there, right, and that's really what it comes down to, it comes down to it becoming the way we do things, right, designing for everyone, from the beginning, if we if we can't get that that mindset entrenched, then progress will be slow, if not impossible. And, and I end and I echo, Lorin, that comes with

50:38

an essential, an essential element of political will.

**JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

I think we need to do a three-part conversation. So we're going to be in touch with you again, so that so that we can do that. And so I think what I'm gonna do is we've covered so much, you've talked about so many things. I'm gonna throw this over to Dean for, for him to ask the final question of the podcast.

**DEAN ASKIN**

Yeah, I've just been, I've just been to these are such powerfully insightful answers. I mean, we talked about so much, you guys, you raise so many important points. Is there anything, you know that we haven't brought into this conversation and talked about that we should mention before we wrap it up here?

51:28

**STEPHANIE CADIEUX**

Probably lots. I guess, I would say I'd mentioned that I would encourage folks who are interested in this, whether they be people disabilities, whether they be people in the private sector, whether they be just Joe Average,

51:43

if you're interested in it, and interested in the progress, I would, I would lead you to, to our our website on the the Government of Canada page to my report, my first report is there.

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And I made four recommendations in the first report, they are around the need for more regulation, things that can be enforced

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data, better data, and what are we measuring

52:12

dedicated funding to make this happen and make it and so that it isn't the thing you do when you find money, but rather an acceptance that this is as important as the heat or the lights.

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And so accessibility has to have its own line in the budget and mandatory training because we have to get that culture shift, we have to embed into our decision making. What is this accessibility? When is it important? Every time? What does that mean? And so those are the things I recommended in in year one.

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The first report, I will follow up this year, we're going to look more specifically at at employment

52:56

and, and a little on transportation, because of the because of the focus in the media about air travel. But there's a there is a long way to go. And as long as the NCAA said they, you know, it is about the stick. It's about the timelines, we've got a long way to go. And there has to be commitment. Before if we're gonna get there.

### **LORIN MACDONALD**

I would just say that, again, from my human rights law background, I know that most people do not intend to exclude or discriminate. But the impact that matters, it doesn't matter if Well, I didn't know I didn't mean to I didn't the impact don't matter. mandatory training completely agree. But it cannot be performative has to be substantial. It has to integrate people with disability to provide the training.

53:51

We also need to be training our younger people with disabilities on how to be self-advocate and then how to be external advocate because it's a specific skill, the tracing era definitely being a former MLA, you will know that it's definitely an acquired skill, some are born with it and supplement it other most need to learn how to be effective because if you don't know how to be effective, you're just spinning your wheels and when I always tried to say is always be kind and lead with empathy because you don't know what anyone is really going through. It could be disability related it could be unrelated to disability. So the spend all assumption out the questions if it's appropriate. That's the only way we're gonna get through such a complex issue because

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changing centuries of disability oppression in

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not going to be undone within a decade, and give her grace for the progress that we do make. So that's what I always try to lead from in my own practice. But what a great conversation. Thank you so much.

### **DEAN ASKIN**

Brad? I'll give the last word to you. We've heard from Stephanie and Lorin, I'll give the last word to you. What are your final thoughts? Is there anything else that you think is important to mention, before we wrap things up?

### **BRAD MCCANNELL**

Oh, there's two things. The most important thing in my mind, is unless we have common language and common methodology, rooted in standardized training, to measure the accessibility, without we can't measure it. Right now, there's national codes and model codes and provincial codes and charter cities have their own codes and their disability committees and his personal preference, and it's all the stuff out there, everybody's doing their own thing. So it's not measurable.

55:59

One person calls accessible another person doesn't. And so without common language, common methodology, none of it's measurable, it's not measurable, it's not manageable. It's not manageable, it's not fun, simple as that. So until we get on that page together, we're always going to be struggling, which is the great advantage. So the recounts and foundation since we Certification Program is a level playing field, it takes you can be laid over any code anywhere and say this is what you got. And now we're all talking the same language. Now I can measure it within my portfolios within my province or right across the country. But the second thing is, I think it was, Stephanie, that mentioned compliance has changed to defiance.

56:49

I would agree with that. I think as a community, we need to demand more, it was so great to buy a brand new house, and I have to do major renovations just to move into it.

57:02

So as a community, I think we need to demand more and not let this kind of thing that building a house for an 18 to 55 year old male, which the current standard is just insanity.

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But at the same time, we have to be careful to we have to include it, we have to bring them along with this. Because if we don't if we keep keep putting these two poles, these opposing factions, we're not going to get anywhere.

## **JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

This this really has been such a great conversation. And it has been such an important conversation to have especially considering had this week in particular, as we mentioned, at the top of the show, we're in the midst of national accessibility, weak for 2024. There's so many things that you shared with us and so many points that I think we're gonna have to unpack. One thing I will say is that we're going to make sure that we put in the show notes have access to that report that you've referred to. So that listeners will be able to, to click on to that. And one of the things I'm going to leave with is that I've now met two more people who also obviously, quote Elvis without knowing you're quoting Elvis, and by saying a little less conversation, a little more action.

58:21

So, so thank you for coming on the show for sharing your insights and experiences I on you know, on the report card, for lack of a better term on the overall state of things with accessibility in this country. And I guess we could say, judging from comments at the beginning, that we've got a passing grade, it might be sort of that 50 With the Asterix next to it. And so there's definitely we knew this already, but you're confirming for us and giving us some concrete examples of room for improvement, and things that we need to do so that so that we do end up in Canada with this a plus by 2040. And hopefully this conversation is going to get people thinking more consciously

59:10

about accessibility and all of the reasons why it can't and it shouldn't. And it won't be an afterthought.

## **DEAN ASKIN**

I have to say thanks for me as well. Stephanie and Lorin and Brad out there in BC.

59:24

So many great insights. And you know, the population is aging and disability is on the rise. I mean, it's now 27% of the population. 8 million Canadians have a disability. So accessibility simply becoming more and more important. And as we said at the top of the show, I mean, accessibility just benefits everyone. I came across a LinkedIn post where the poster really summed up accessibility and, you know, here's what she said making things easy to use for everyone is up

1:00:00

treating everyone with respect.

## **JEANNETTE CAMPBELL**

And I think that that's a great insight for us to end on, and added to the incredible insights that you've shared with us.

1:00:12

And so thank you again, for coming and sharing and educating and informing and having this conversation. And so that's it for this episode of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. I'm Jeannette Campbell. And I hope that you'll join us next month for part two in our series on accessibility, where we'll be looking at the state of accessibility and business, and that is in branding, marketing, advertising, and social media. And that's coming on June 18.

## **DEAN ASKIN**

That's right, Jeanette. If you're listening to this right now and you're in marketing, or advertising, or you're a brand manager or a social media manager, Hey, be sure to tune in to that conversation next month. I'm Dean Askin, and thanks again for listening, wherever, whenever, and on whatever podcast app you're listening from. Join us each episode as we have insightful conversations like this one with Stephanie Cadieux and Lorin MacDonald and Brad McConnell, and explore disability inclusion in business and in our communities. From all the angles.

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