

Disability in Focus

A Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities newsletter

June 2006

Hundreds celebrate International Day of Disabled Persons

On December 2nd and 3rd, approximately 1,500 people in six different towns and cities celebrated International Day of Disabled Persons (IDDP).

Events in Medicine Hat, Bow Island, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton and Fort McMurray drew public and media attention to the special day and its theme, "Nothing About Us Without Us." Many dignitaries were also in attendance including mayors and MLAs.

IDDP activities ranged from displays and luncheons to workshops and a wheelchair basketball game. Canadian recording artist and Juno award winner Jeff Healey was part of the Calgary festivities, and Nova Scotia singer/songwriter and motivational speaker Terry Kelly performed and spoke at Edmonton's City Hall. Both men are blind.

"The Premier's Council is a major sponsor of IDDP, but the work is all



Former Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan spoke at the Edmonton IDDP recognition event.

done at the local level. They deserve the credit for hosting and coordinating such wonderful events," emphasized Diane Bergeron, coordinator of the Premier's Council. 2006 IDDP Provincial Planning Committee members included Ms. Bergeron, Les Pearson and Deb Shaw (Medicine

Hat), Leanne Squair (Calgary), Betty Wood (Red Deer), Leanne Rosinski (Edmonton), Lynn Corcoran and Allison Parady (Fort McMurray) and Agnes St. Jean (Grande Prairie).

Planning for IDDP 2006 is already underway. Contact the Premier's Council if you would like to get involved this year. There are many free promotional and planning materials that can help you promote and recognize the day.



Minister's Message

Welcome to the second edition of the *Disability in Focus* newsletter. As the Minister of Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, responsible for supports for people with disabilities, I would like to thank Albertans with disabilities, their families and our community partners for your support of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The Premier's Council had a very productive year in 2005. In addition to welcoming 11 new members, the Premier's Council hosted the second annual Disability Symposium. This gave council members an opportunity to talk with disability groups about issues, concerns and priorities for action.

In December, communities across the province joined the Premier's Council in celebrating International Day of Disabled Persons. Each year, this day raises awareness of the challenges facing people with disabilities. This year's theme, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, speaks to how people with disabilities are influencing change in their communities through their involvement in the decisions that affect them.

International Day of Disabled Persons was also a great opportunity for the Premier's Council to present their annual Awards of Excellence. These awards recognize Albertans who have demonstrated leadership in making positive changes to include people with disabilities in our communities. I extend my warmest congratulations to the five award recipients and thank them for their dedication to supporting people with disabilities in their communities.

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is such an integral part of Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. It provides the ministry with important linkages with Alberta's disability community. This allows us to respond directly to the concerns of Albertans with disabilities and develop better ways of meeting their unique needs.

I thank the Premier's Council, and Chair Rob Lougheed, MLA for Strathcona, for their excellent work promoting the role Albertans with disabilities play in our communities. Together, we can ensure that they receive the support they need.

Yvonne Fritz
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports

Website Reports Community Accessibility

The Premier's Council has introduced *Community Accessibility*, a new Internet resource that provides information about the accessibility of businesses and services in Alberta communities.

The first community to be canvassed was Strathcona County, which includes Sherwood Park. Community volunteers Robert and Deanna Loewen and Robert Simpson spent hundreds of hours during the summer and fall of 2005 surveying more than 1,000 companies and organizations. The volunteers examined parking, curbs, washrooms, doors and other features that affect accessibility to stores, offices and public buildings by seniors and persons with disabilities. While participation in the survey was voluntary, canvassers found that businesses and organizations were cooperative. The results can be found at www.communityaccessibility.ca.

"It is important for businesses to be accessible, as persons with disabilities make up a consumer group that is

approximately two times larger and four times richer than the teen market," noted Rob Lougheed, MLA for Strathcona and Chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

"There is a need for information about accessibility to be readily available, particularly for those who want to visit, shop or participate in a particular community," said Mr. Lougheed. The Premier's Council hopes other communities and/or businesses will conduct their own community barrier free assessment and post the results.

Contact the Premier's Council for more information or to discuss an accessibility audit for your area.

Look for the new Internet resource Community Accessibility at www.communityaccessibility.ca

Plan Sets Direction to 2008

The Premier's Council is finalizing a three-year strategic plan, which will guide its actions to 2008. Extensive review and discussion of current and emerging issues led Premier's Council members to define four key goals and a number of initiatives for implementation.

Key goals centre on advocacy, communications, involvement and visibility. A synopsis of the planning document will be available soon on the Premier's Council website or by request.

Symposium Confirms Need for Action

More than 80 disability community leaders representing 43 organizations from across the province attended the Premier's Council's second annual Disability Community Symposium on October 27 and 28, 2005 in Edmonton. The symposium featured small group discussions on the topics of service delivery, program/service gaps, childhood to adult transitioning, employment and training, and housing.

Information that emerged from small group discussions confirmed a consensus

in many areas about what is needed to close gaps, improve services and build a more inclusive society. Many participants said more energy should be spent on taking action rather than revisiting issues. They noted the *Alberta Disability Strategy* and other planning documents already set out issues, needs and recommendations for change relating to persons with disabilities. Participants found networking to be the most beneficial aspect of the symposium.





Message from the Chair

The recent federal election provided a good opportunity to raise the visibility of persons with disabilities and disability issues. Unfortunately, we heard little or nothing about either one. I do not recall any mention of disability issues in any speech or during the televised debate. Just before the election, I asked my MP about his position on disability issues and was surprised to hear they had developed a position, and it was part of the party policy platform. After doing some searching, I found the main political parties did, to some degree, address persons with disabilities in their election platforms.

But what was the result? There was little or no coverage by the media, and the parties themselves placed disability lower on their priority list. We could blame the media or the parties for not trying harder to put disability issues in front of the public, but this may be unfair. Their actions were driven by what they thought voters and the public wanted to hear about. It seems disability has yet to find its place as a priority for discussion in the homes of most Canadians.

As an MLA, Chair of the Premier's Council, and member of the Alberta

government caucus, I believe there is a need to raise the political profile of disability issues – not just in Alberta but also across the country. If the political profile has not been elevated by our past actions and best efforts, I think we need to look at other mechanisms.

I have a few thoughts on what these other mechanisms might be, and I am interested in knowing what you think. How do we put disability issues on the political table and in the public arena? What can we do to put persons with disabilities on the political map – not as a satellite community but as a community of interest that politicians, decision-makers and all Albertans will sit up and pay attention to?

Your suggestions, thoughts and ideas are welcome. Please e-mail or write me. I'll share the feedback I receive in the next newsletter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Lougheed". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rob Lougheed, MLA

Strathcona

Chair, Premier's Council

(780) 415-0990

(toll free by first calling 310-0000)

Rob.Lougheed@assembly.ab.ca

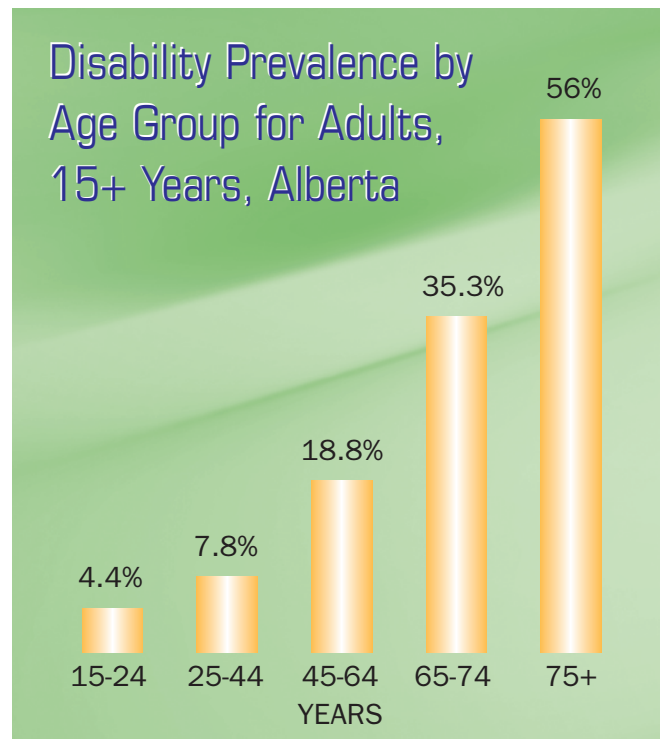
New Report Profiles Albertans with Disabilities

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) has developed an in-depth look at disability demographics in Alberta.

A Profile of Albertans with Disabilities pulls together data from existing national data sources and puts it into one report with a focus on Alberta. The document presents a wide spectrum of information, from the most common disabilities to the average income of Albertans with disabilities.

“We took the lead to consolidate this data so government and others would have a better picture of disability in Alberta. We believe the report will help us make policy and program decisions,” explained Mark Nicoll, Manager of Strategic Planning for the ODI. Some key findings include:

- Nearly 15% of Albertans aged 15 and over report having one or more disabilities.
- A majority of people with disabilities experience more than one disability at a time.
- Over half (55.6%) of people with disabilities aged 15 and over are actively seeking employment or are employed. People with disabilities have an employment rate 27% lower than their non-disabled counterparts.



- Albertans with disabilities have a higher average total income than persons with disabilities living in other provinces. Despite this, many persons with disabilities live in poverty or are at risk for living in poverty.

Mr. Nicoll noted that the key source of data for *A Profile of Albertans with Disabilities* was the national 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). *A Profile of Albertans with Disabilities* is available at www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/css/odi or by calling 1-800-272-8841.

Prevalence by Disability Type for Adults, 15+ Years, Alberta

Disability Type	Total Number of Adults Reporting this Disability	Percentage of Adults with Disability Reporting Type*	As a Percentage of the Total 15+ Years Population**	Age Group Reporting Most Cases
Pain	239,020	72%	10.7%	45 – 64 Years
Mobility	217,950	65.7%	9.7%	65+ Years
Agility	204,240	61.6%	9.1%	65+ Years
Hearing	95,440	28.8%	4.2%	65+ Years
Seeing	52,880	15.9%	2.3%	65+ Years
Psychological	47,780	14.4%	2.1%	45 – 64 Years
Memory	40,970	12.3%	1.8%	45 – 64 Years
Learning	39,270	11.8%	1.8%	25 – 44 Years
Speech	28,680	8.6%	1.3%	45 – 64 Years
Developmental	11,550	3.5%	0.5%	25 – 44 Years
Unknown	10,430	3.1%	0.5%	65+ Years

Source: Alberta Human Resources and Employment, *Alberta Profiles: Persons With Disabilities in the Labour Force*, 2006

* Note: Percentages are based on the total adult population with disabilities. The sum percentage is greater than 100% because people could report more than one type of disability.

** Note: Alberta's 2001 total population aged 15+ years is 2,243,970.



Albertans Honoured for Leadership Efforts

International Day of Disabled Persons celebrations on December 2 featured the presentation of five Awards of Excellence from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The awards recognize outstanding leadership or achievement in making positive change towards barrier free, inclusive environments.

In Edmonton, architect Ron Wickman was presented with the Gary McPherson Leadership Award. The Edmonton Employment Partnership Employer Advisory Board was recognized in the category of employment, and Camrose resident Theresa Mokry was honoured for

her work in raising public awareness of persons with disabilities.

In Calgary, Lethbridge Community College's Campus Connections program was honoured for its work in education, while a ceremony in Bow Island recognized the Bow Island Lions Club for its development of a barrier free playground and park facilities at Centennial Park.

Premier's Council Chair Rob Lougheed said recognizing the outstanding leadership efforts of people and organizations helps raise awareness among Albertans of what can be done to create a barrier free Alberta. "We all have a role to play in providing the support and understanding persons with disabilities need to be full citizens in our society," noted Mr. Lougheed.

For more information on the Awards of Excellence and the award recipients, visit the Premier's Council website or call the office.

Architect Ron Wickman was the 2005 recipient of the Gary McPherson Leadership Award.



Legal Rights of Blind Albertans Strengthened

Higher fines for violating the provincial *Blind Persons' Rights Act* and new identification cards will help Albertans who are blind receive equal opportunities and equal access to public services and facilities.

Amendments to the *Blind Persons' Rights Act* came into effect on November 1, 2005. Fines for violations range from \$250 for falsely using a white cane to \$3,000 for discrimination against a blind person accompanied by a guide dog.

"Many Albertans already fully include people with disabilities in our communities, but there is still more work to be done," said Yvonne Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. "Albertans who are blind can have confidence that their rights to access public services and facilities are protected."

The Act sets out clear standards for guide dogs. The Act also provides for identification cards for people who are blind and their guide dogs. Applying for a card is voluntary.

Applications for identification cards, a list of qualified guide dog training schools and a copy of the Act are available online at www.seniors.gov.ab.ca (click on Community Supports Systems and then *Blind Persons' Rights Act*.) For alternative formats, contact Laurel Wierstra in Edmonton at (780) 427-9157 (toll-free by first dialing 310-0000) or laurel.wierstra@gov.ab.ca

The Blind Persons' Rights Act sets our clear standards for guide dogs and provides for identification cards.

Premier's Council versus ODI Separate Roles, Common Goals

It is not unexpected that some people are confused about the roles of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI). After all, the ODI was created as a result of a recommendation within the Premier's

Council's *Alberta Disability Strategy* and both organizations work very closely together.

Despite this, they are two distinct organizations with separate roles. The following table charts these differences.

	Premier's Council	ODI
Created in	1988	2004
Created by	Legislation	Ministerial order
Mandate	Champion improvements in the status of Albertans with disabilities	Client centred, outcome focused provincial policy secretariat
Main activities	Bring issues to government; educate and raise awareness of persons with disabilities; advocate for a barrier free society	Work with other government departments to help them streamline services for persons with disabilities, eliminate duplication, fill needs; support the Premier's Council
Regular activities	Disability Community Symposium; International Day sponsorship; Awards of Excellence, community consultations	Research; policy advice and development; Disability Community Symposium
Structure	15-member Council appointed by Minister and headed by an MLA	Branch within a division of a government department
Report to	Premier by way of Minister of Seniors and Community Supports	Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Seniors and Community Supports
Head of organization	Rob Lougheed, MLA, Strathcona	Bob Barraclough, Executive Director
Staff members	Two	Four

Disability in Focus

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities produces **Disability in Focus** twice per year. It is available on request in alternative formats including large print, audiotape, text only and Braille. **Disability in Focus** is available electronically and is on-line at the Premier's Council website.

Editor: Diane Bergeron,
diane.bergeron@gov.ab.ca 422-2726

Editorial Assistant: Linda Millard,
Linda.P.Millard@gov.ab.ca 422-1095

Please send comments, inquiries, changes to contact information, or requests for reprints to Linda Millard.

The Premier's Council's vision is an inclusive, barrier free society where every Albertan has the opportunity and choice to participate in school, in the workplace and in the community.



The Premier's Council consists of:

Chair: Rob Lougheed, MLA, Strathcona

Members:

Shirley Dupmeier – Medicine Hat

Judy Hellevang – Calgary

Linette Kelly – Calgary

Mike Hambly – Calgary

Donna Lajeunesse – Grande Prairie

Greg McMeekin – Calgary

Austin Mardon – Edmonton

Pat Marshall – Red Deer

Lawrence Noel – Bonnyville

Diane Ridley – Thorsby

Robie Scholefield – Edmonton

Marlin Styner – Red Deer

Cheryl Taylor – Edmonton

For more information on the Premier's Council:

- Go to www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers_council
- E-mail to pcspd@gov.ab.ca
- Call toll free 1-800-272-8841 or 422-1095 in Edmonton
- Write to Suite 1110, 10055-106 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 2Y2



A number of cities in Alberta issued proclamations recognizing the 2005 International Day of Disabled Persons. Medicine Hat Mayor Garth Vallely is pictured here signing his city's proclamation while Byron Colbe, chair of Medicine Hat's Advisory Community on Disability Issues looks on.



Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel presented Edmonton event organizer Leanne Rosinski with a framed proclamation.

IDDP 2006

The provincial planning group for International Day of Disabled Persons celebrations in Alberta has decided to keep the same logo and theme for 2006. The group felt it was important for continuity and recognition to keep the same imagery. Although December 3 lands on a Sunday this year, many local organizers are planning to hold their events and activities on Friday,

December 1. This enables them to take advantage of services, facilities and support more readily available during the work week. Tentative plans have been made for events in Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Other communities are encouraged to get involved. Contact the Premier's Council for more information.