

## Summary of ARCH's Report on the *Accessible Canada Act*

### **The *Accessible Canada Act* is an idea for a new law to help Canadians with disabilities**

The Canadian government is working on a new law to help people with disabilities. The government has released a “Bill”, which is a written idea for a new law. If the Bill becomes a law, the law will be called the *Accessible Canada Act*. In this plain language summary of our Report, we will call it the *Act*. We have written a Report about the *Accessible Canada Act* to help Canadians with disabilities understand what the *Act* says and what changes they may want to ask for.

The *Act* only applies to things that the federal government takes care of. For example, the federal government controls transportation on trains and airplanes. It controls broadcasting on television and radio. It also controls the military, voting, and immigration. These are just some examples of where the *Act* could apply.

### **What the *Accessible Canada Act* will do**

The *Act* will help to get rid of barriers that make life harder for people with disabilities.

Many different kinds of barriers affect Canadians with disabilities. Barriers can be physical. An example of a physical barrier is a building that has stairs and no ramp or elevator. Barriers can be technological. An example of a technological barrier is not having closed captioning for a television show. Barriers can also include negative attitudes that people have about people with disabilities. Negative thoughts or stereotypes about people with disabilities can make other people treat them badly.

The *Act* will work with current laws protecting people with disabilities against discrimination. Laws that protect against discrimination include the

*Charter* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. The *Accessible Canada Act* will not replace these other laws. The *Act* is being made to give more protection to people with disabilities.

## **How the *Accessible Canada Act* will work**

The *Act* will work to get rid of barriers that make life harder for people with disabilities by doing three things:

1. Requiring organizations to make accessibility plans. These organizations will also have to submit progress reports. That way, the government can make sure the organizations are following their plans.

Plans and progress reports will have to be made public. Organizations will also have to get feedback on their plans and progress reports from people with disabilities.

2. Making accessibility standards that organizations have to follow.

The *Act* creates a new group called the Canadian Accessibility Standards Development Organization (CASDO). CASDO will make the standards for most organizations.

Some organizations will make their own standards. These organizations include the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Transportation Agency.

3. Creating a system to monitor the *Act* and make sure that it is working to help Canadians with disabilities.

People can make complaints to a special human rights commissioner, called the Accessibility Commissioner. The Accessibility Commissioner will hear complaints about most organizations.

If a person has a complaint about certain organizations, including the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and

the Canadian Transportation Agency, the person would have to complain directly to those organizations.

### **How the *Accessible Canada Act* could be made better**

The *Act* could be made better by:

- Putting a deadline on when changes need to be made and reported. Without deadlines, people may try to get out of doing what the law says. Deadlines can also help the government to enforce the *Act* and make sure that it is working.
- Using the word “shall” instead of the word “may”. “Shall” means that a person has to do something. “May” means that a person can do something, but they don’t have to. Using “shall” will make the law stronger and give better protection to people with disabilities.
- Including specific rights that people with disabilities say are important. Important issues will be better protected if they are specifically included in the *Act*.
- Making sure that the law is the same in all areas. A few organizations are being given the power to make their own rules. This may be confusing.
- The *Act* creates different ways to make complaints based on the organization a person is complaining about. This means that there would be more than one place to make complaints when a rule is not followed and this can be confusing.

### **How you can help**

ARCH is consulting with people with disabilities to get feedback about what they think the *Accessible Canada Act* should say. ARCH has a survey with questions that you can answer about what you think about the *Accessible Canada Act*. You can answer the survey or get more information about how to provide us with your feedback by visiting ARCH’s website at

[www.archdisabilitylaw.ca](http://www.archdisabilitylaw.ca)