October 16, 2024

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland

Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister

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The Honourable Kamal Khera

Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities

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The Honourable Marci Ien

Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

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*“Living well almost seems like a standard that's so far above what is available to people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. I don't even know, I barely even know what that means. We're just kind of surviving.”* [[1]](#footnote-0)

Ministers Freeland, Khera, and Ien,

**Re: Feminist Solidarity with the Disability Community on the Canada Disability Benefit**

We, the undersigned, a coalition of feminist and gender equality organizations, come to you in solidarity with the disability community and advocates who have been working tirelessly to end disability poverty in Canada.

We join them in expressing our profound disappointment with the proposed Canada Disability Benefit (CDB), which was introduced with the aim of reducing poverty among low-income disabled people. Yet, after four years of extensive consultation with the disability community, the government has ignored the recommendations of disabled people and proposed a benefit that excludes those most in need.

Canada has manufactured a crisis of disability poverty, and disabled women and gender-diverse people bear the brunt of it. As high as one in three women with disabilities lives in poverty. Disabled women are three times more likely to rely on government transfers than their non-disabled and male counterparts. The cost of disability poverty can indeed be deadly—in recent years, we’ve heard stories of disabled people considering or choosing MAiD because they could not access the financial and social supports necessary to live in dignity.

The Canada Disability Benefit has the potential to transform the lives of women and gender-diverse people with disabilities, but the proposed Benefit reveals it will be just as painfully inadequate as many other disability supports available in Canada.

We echo the concerns from the disability community that the proposed Canada Disability Benefit provides [**too little for too few:**](https://www.disabilitywithoutpoverty.ca/take-action/better-the-benefit)

* The $200 monthly benefit amount (maximum $2,400 per year) is barely one tenth of the amount recommended by numerous experts to lift people out of poverty, and that’s without accounting for the extraordinary costs of living with disability.
* Against the recommendations of advocates, the Disability Tax Credit—notorious for its stringent eligibility criteria and complicated application process—will be a gateway to the Benefit.
* Throughout consultations, disabled people stressed the utmost importance of ensuring no social assistance clawbacks with the introduction of the CDB. However, most provinces and territories still have not formally committed to maintaining the same level of social assistance to recipients once they start receiving the Benefit.

It’s time for Canada to step up and take urgent action to address the crisis. Disabled people simply cannot wait any longer. We implore the Government of Canada to:

1. Increase the **benefit amount to $1800 - $2000 per month** by the 2024 Fall Economic Statement.
2. Ensure **automatic benefit eligibility** for current recipients of federal, provincial, and territorial disability supports.
3. Negotiate with all provinces and territories to guarantee that the Canada Disability Benefit will be **exempt from clawbacks of social assistance**.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. As feminist advocates, we know that disability justice is inextricably tied to gender equality. The disability community has been loud and clear in their recommendations for a Canada Disability Benefit that could effectively lift disabled people out of poverty. Now, it’s time for Canada’s federal government—a proudly feminist government—to follow their lead and make it happen.

Sincerely,

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Action Femmes et handicap

Amnesty International Canada, English Speaking Section

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women)

Canadian Center for Woman Empowerment (CCFWE)

Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)

Canadian Women's Foundation

DAWN Canada

DisAbled Women's Network Canada (DAWN Canada)

Disability Justice Network of Ontario

National Association of Women and the Law

OCASI-Ontario Counciil of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Oxfam Canada

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

West Coast LEAF

Women's Centre for Social Justice, o/a WomenatthecentrE

Women's Legal Education & Action Fund (LEAF)

Women's Shelters Canada / Hebergement femmes Canada

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1. Decker, E., Grand’Maison, V. & Khan, N. (2024). *Feminist Recovery Final Report*. Unpublished manuscript. DAWN Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)