

Founding Member Statements of Support
December 19, 2022



Following are public statements of support for accessible housing from the 25 members of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition.

At AccessNow we focus on empowering people with disabilities to be independent and better connected to the places where we live, work, learn and play.

We do this by collecting and sharing information about the accessibility of places everywhere on the AccessNow app. We highlight both the successes and barriers present within hotels and hospitals, stores and schools, attractions, restaurants, parks, and so much more.

We hear far too often how Canadians with disabilities still face barriers to access safe, accessible, and affordable housing.

Every person should have equitable access to basics of daily living. As a collective and as a country, we can and must do better to ensure disabled people are treated equitably, and with dignity.

Leveraging The Accessibility Toolbox now is the time to address systemic barriers that hold disabled people back. In direct engagement with people with lived experience of disability, it's time to unlearn the practices that have established generations of inaccessible design and replace them with inclusive methodologies that reflect the authentic diversity of needs that people with and without disabilities require throughout life.

Maayan Ziv

Founder and CEO, AccessNow

The Accessible Housing Network is a collaboration of Canadian non- profit organizations, advocating in support of people of all ages to live as they wish, in housing which is fully accessible.

We invite other individuals and groups to support our campaign by contacting their elected representatives at all levels, municipal, provincial and federal, urging them to use all means at their disposal to bring about an end to housing discrimination against people with disabilities.

However, we cannot wait for politicians to take action. Change must come from everyone, including builders, developers, architects, designers and the general public.

Housing is a human right, recognized in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Human Rights Code, and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The need for accessible affordable housing is a crisis. A quarter of Canadians have a disability. Anyone can have been born with a disability, and we're all just a fall, accident or illness away from a disability - temporary or permanent.

Universal design will accommodate anyone of any age or ability, going beyond mere accessibility. We know that the cost of building an apartment, whether accessible or not, is the same, when planned from the design stage. It is renovations to existing housing which are extremely expensive. We must act on this knowledge now.

We look forward to working with all members of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition to continue pushing for an end to housing discrimination. Let's create more accessible homes and buildings today!

Kate Chung

Co-chair, Accessible Housing Network

Atlantic Accessibility Consulting is committed to being part of a positive process to create meaningful access wherever possible; refining spaces, experiences, and perspectives, so everyone can be included. Accessible housing is vitally important and has been overlooked too long; now is the time to bring transformation to our country.

We recognize that barriers have been unknowingly created in buildings over the years and we are committed to being part of the change. As we work together, we can provide detailed guidance to help others understand Universal Design principles; we can be part of eliminating barriers in the built environment, educating, and leading with the goal of increasing access for people of all abilities.

We believe that the only way we can effectively increase equitable access in every community here in Canada, will be through the process of collaboration; thus, we are honoured to join the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition in partnership with the organizations who are also committed to creating a more accessible future for all Canadians.

Kristen Habermehl

CEO, Atlantic Accessibility Consulting

Adults living with complex physical challenges need accessible and affordable housing along with the necessary service supports to enable them to enjoy independent living. The first prerequisite for achieving this goal is to help individuals secure an accessible home in the community. This is a difficult challenge that is further complicated by the prohibitive costs of retrofitting homes or apartment units.

The short supply of accessible and affordable housing is a serious problem that will require the commitment of a strong coalition vested in change. Efforts to resolve the housing challenges need to also consider the increasing difficulties being faced (and felt) by people who require stable support services to meet their needs and goals of independent living. These are long-term growing problems that require significant government action.

Supportive housing and attendant outreach services are an important part of addressing the current crisis in hospitals and an untapped alternative for some individuals who currently have no option but to transition to a long term care home.

Here is just one story among many. Jenn, 40, suffered a hit and run by a garbage truck that left her with a neurological disorder affecting her ability to coordinate her limbs. She was discharged to a shelter where she lived without adequate services and supports and with little privacy. Given these challenges, her health deteriorated resulting in re-hospitalization and eventual transition to a long-term care home living amongst older adults where she became depressed. Two years ago, she was offered a supportive housing unit at Bellwoods. Her health has improved, she has made friends and is now part of a vibrant community, realizing her full and independent potential.

Together with the members of the coalition and with support from government we can enhance the lives of many with safe, friendly, supportive opportunities to be part of the community.

Susan Jewell

Acting CEO, Bellwoods Centres

BentallGreenOak's firm-wide commitment to building and managing spaces that create equitable social environments for all stands to be strengthened through the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition (AAC) and its critical mission. The real estate industry is at its best when we work together to address common challenges through our collective experience and skill sets, and we are proud to extend our support to this initiative that meaningfully addresses an area of clear need with practical solutions that we can all abide by.

The communities where we live, work, and invest can only thrive with the full participation of society, and compassionate consideration for the life experiences of citizens with accessibility needs within and surrounding the built environments that we create.

This AAC serves an important purpose that BentallGreenOak is proud to support and actively draw learning from, and we look forward to broadening our understanding of the issues and becoming active participants in the solutions that we can deploy where they are most needed.

Ross Strowger

Managing Director, Portfolio Manager, BentallGreenOak

With 1,300 member companies, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) is the voice of the home building, land development and professional renovation industry in the Greater Toronto Area. We work diligently to promote the positions and perspectives of the industry, and on behalf of its customers (new home buyers), in the delivery of the complete communities required to accommodate the robust growth being experienced in the region.

Understanding accessibility barriers from the perspective of those that experience them is essential to creating inclusive, welcoming and complete communities. BILD is pleased to work with stakeholders and the industry to educate, promote awareness and find common ways to removing barriers in communities our members build.

Justin Sherwood

SVP, Communications and Stakeholder Relations, BILD (Building Industry and Land Development Association)

Cadillac Fairview (CF) is in the business of creating connected communities and this cannot be accomplished without accessibility and inclusivity being top of mind. CF serves millions of guests, partners, clients and employees with varying needs and we have a responsibility to continue to improve our offering in existing buildings and envision accessibility for the future.

CF has been on a deliberate accessibility journey since 2018 and this has only reinforced the importance of being more inclusive and the many benefits to our community.

Looking forward, through projects like East Harbour, CF will continue our journey with best in class partners like the Rick Hansen Foundation and now, the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition.

Wayne Barwise

EVP Development, Cadillac Fairview

The Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR), previously known as the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA), is Canada's leading non-profit organization working to advance the right to adequate housing. For 35 years, we have worked tirelessly at the intersection of human rights and housing, providing free services to renters facing evictions and human rights violations to remain housed, providing education and training about housing rights across Canada, and advancing rights-based housing policy through research, policy development, and litigation.

Advancing the right to adequate housing means securing many conditions, for example, that a home must be affordable, habitable and guarantee security of tenure for residents. Ensuring a home is accessible for everyone, including seniors and people with disabilities, is also a significant element in advancing the right to adequate housing for all. We believe that such conditions need to be met so that people can live with dignity and thrive in their communities.

We would like to offer our support for the newly formed Accelerating Accessibility Coalition to better achieve housing outcomes for residents of Canada, of all abilities. Our long-standing relationships with community groups across Canada have helped our organization understand the common and unique housing challenges faced by people across the country. We have also supported marginalized renters and people experiencing housing precarity, through our tenant services and training programs while also engaging with renters and housing organizations across the country. These experiences provide us with a unique perspective into the varied housing needs of Canadians.

Through our non-partisan policy work, we develop rights-based recommendations that are rooted in evidence and best practices, all of which can help the coalition explore the available levers to improve outcomes related to accessible housing. In addition, our relationships with all orders of government can help drive policy on matters related to accessible housing.

We support the AAC's efforts to work with homebuilders and service providers to make accessibility a greater priority in future development initiatives. We are looking forward to an opportunity to support the work of the coalition in any way possible and would welcome further discussions on this matter.

Bahar Shadpour

Director of Policy and Communications, Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR)

Now more than ever distrust and polarization are ripping our society apart. Cities need diverse leaders to bridge these widening divides and break this cycle in order to build better, more inclusive cities.

At CivicAction, we are committed to building an urban region that is more inclusive and prosperous for all. We believe that every sector, community and person needs to be part of the region's rebuilding. Catalyzing for a common purpose together will generate a more equitable and inclusive recovery. That is why neutral, trusted, and safe spaces where all work together, can turn ideas into impact.

It is important that communities of practice work together to provide more pathways to accessibility. Removing barriers in public and private spaces that exclude those with different abilities and replacing them with communities where everyone's unique qualities are valued, and where more of us feel a deeper sense of belonging.

Leslie Woo

CEO, CivicAction

At Choice Properties, building a sustainable and equitable future is integral to our purpose of creating enduring value. As one of Canada's largest landlords and a long-term owner of real estate, we recognize we have a great deal of influence over how our communities come together to live, work and connect.

We believe in creating spaces that are accessible to and provide a sense of belonging amongst the diverse communities we serve, and we are excited to participate in the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition ("AAC"). The AAC will help bring the voices of Canadians living with disabilities to the forefront of shaping our built environment. We are eager to learn from and exchange ideas with other organizations in our industry who share our values of diversity, equity and inclusion.

We look forward to leveraging the expertise of AAC members to evaluate and apply universal design concepts that support inclusion of people of all abilities in our properties. Together, we can help close the gap between building codes and the real needs of people with disabilities, all of whom deserve a welcoming environment that respects their dignity and independence.

Becoming an active member of the AAC will empower Choice Properties to further our ESG pillar of Advancing Social Equity. We are proud to deepen our commitment to embedding social sustainability practices in our business, and we encourage others to join the coalition in our collective mission of building a more accessible Canada.

Mario Fatica

SVP, Development & Construction Choice Properties REIT

Accessibility isn't just the right thing to do, it's a smart business decision.

More than 6.2 million people live with a disability in Canada, and they represent purchasing power of \$55 billion annually. Canadians with disabilities, along with their families and friends, frequent commercial buildings, financial institutions, hospitals, airports, and many other venues.

The ability to access and enjoy your community is essential for everyone. When places are inaccessible and lack inclusiveness, everyone misses out.

For many people who are living with disabilities, businesses and community spaces can be inaccessible because of the built environment, attitudes of customer service representatives, and discriminatory policies. These barriers have become even more evident since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At CNIB Frontier Accessibility, we advocate, consult, and provide innovative solutions for businesses and governmental organizations in a variety of sectors to make their built-environment accessible. Our Navigation & Wayfinding solutions integrate embedded digital technologies with existing infrastructure, to help people with disabilities navigate built environments safely and with confidence.

It starts with accessibility and doesn't end until everyone is included.

David Demer

President, CNIB Frontier Accessibility

Neighbours, friends, a place to belong and call home. These gifts of community, taken for granted by so many, are out-of-reach for too many of us.

Community Living Toronto has been a source of support for people with an intellectual disability and their families since 1948. Today, we continue to advocate for inclusive communities and support the rights and choices of people with an intellectual disability. Community Living looks different for everyone, with some requiring supports every day and others requiring much less support to live independently.

We need to work together to address the deepening housing crisis for people in Ontario living with intellectual disabilities. Closing the housing gap requires the necessary accessibility tools and guidance to go beyond current Building Code compliance.

We have seen first-hand how working with developers to address accessibility barriers from the planning stages makes all the difference in the lives of people we support. Our vision is a society where everyone belongs, a society where everyone is valued. Community Living Toronto is looking forward to working with the new Accelerating Accessibility Coalition on creating homes and communities that are accessible and inclusive for everyone.

Brad Saunders

CEO, Community Living Toronto

Accessibility is the key to inclusion, and inclusion is the key to creating a sense of belonging, which is what 'city building' is really all about. Yet accessibility remains a challenge for so many Canadians, whether for physical, psychological, socio-cultural or financial reasons, which means they are not able to participate fully in their communities.

The good news is that we actually have the knowledge and resources to build more accessible and more inclusive cities for everyone, of all ages and abilities, which is why initiatives like the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition are so important and inspiring.

Crosswalk Communities is a new, not-for-profit affordable housing development company with a fresh new approach to building rental apartments that are truly affordable for lower-income earning, hard working Canadians, including our essential workers, newcomers, single parent families, youth and seniors. By bringing together private, corporate, public, philanthropic and community partners in innovative new ways as our strategic collaborators, supporters and allies, we aim to build healthy communities that are welcoming and accessible for all.

Jeanhy Shim

Founder & CEO, Crosswalk Communities

Direct Access is a Disability Owned and Operated international accessibility consultancy that works with building developers to design wheelchair accessible homes and with governments to increase independence of people with disabilities at home. Our team of people with disabilities gives us a unique insight into how to improve accessibility.

When homes are accessible, people can be more independent and engage more in their communities. It is not just about individual homes, if you want to visit friends and families, accessible homes ensure people do not have to think or plan ahead for a visit.

Steven Mifsud, MBE

President and Founder, Direct Access Consultancy

At Human Space, we are a global collaborative of experts and specialists working with place makers and city builders to create spaces for all people. We believe in a human-centred approach that considers people first and incorporates the broadest perspectives to arrive at better solutions.

This means pursuing a comprehensive approach to community building and design that includes accessibility, wellness and inclusion as essential components to creating safe, equitable and resilient built environments.

As a consultancy of BDPQuadrangle, we work across various sectors and across the globe to collectively raise the bar for building a more inclusive and accessible environment. We recognize the privilege, and responsibility we have within the architectural and design community to shape the built environment. We all have a role to play in creating more accessible housing and within our various spheres of influence believe that we can all be part of the solution. What will your contribution be?

Lorene Casiez

Accessibility and Wellness Lead Senior Associate, Human Space a consultancy of BDP Quadrangle

The issue of accessible buildings is one that many people might think was addressed long ago in Canada by legislation and building codes, but the reality is that too many people with disabilities are still challenged by barriers both physical and systemic, especially when it comes to residential buildings. Through awareness and anticipation that not all users share the same capacities, these challenges could be mitigated at the building design stage for the construction of accessible housing.

The John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto has evolved from Canada's oldest school of architecture into a multidisciplinary Faculty that today uniquely hosts landscape architecture, urban design, visual studies, and forestry programs, as well as North America's largest program in architecture. As a public institution, we are committed to educating future generations in the principles of inclusion, equity, and social responsibility. The design of accessible, affordable, and sustainable housing is foundational to our educational mission of generating knowledge toward the creation of inclusive cities and resilient communities.

With housing recognized as a basic human right, the lack of quality accessible homes in our communities is unacceptable.

The goal of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition to champion the creation of healthy, barrier-free housing is an urgent one. Based on my past experience of working with resident stakeholders, community groups and advocacy organizations, as well as with scholars and practitioners, I believe that transformative industry and societal change can be possible through our sustained and collective efforts.

Juan Du

Dean and Professor, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design University of Toronto

For close to 50 years, L'Arche Toronto has brought to life the mission of L'Arche, where women and men, with and without intellectual disabilities, create mutually beneficial relationships in the community by engaging with a wide circle of family, friends, volunteers, and neighbors. Building relationships and sharing life are L'Arche cornerstones.

The necessity for fully accessible and affordable homes is at the heart of the current and ever-increasing housing crisis for people with intellectual disabilities. It is vital that key stakeholders come together— that people with intellectual disabilities, developers, and human service organizations share best practices, break down barriers, and generate innovative and effective strategies to address this crisis.

Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states in Article 19 that people with disabilities have an equal right to appropriate housing. It is paramount that people have access to accessible and affordable housing in neighborhoods that enhance individuals' feelings of belonging and safety.

"We are part of the community. There are a lot of things around -- homes, the bank, grocery stores, restaurants, drug stores -- we want to be where the community is." - Stephen Richardson, L'Arche Toronto, Core Member

Only if we all work together and all voices are represented in these conversations can we create a world where everyone belongs.

Raphael Arens

Executive Director/Community Leader, L'Arche Toronto Homes Inc.

Northcrest Developments is leading the redevelopment of the 370-acre Downsview Airport Lands into a series of vibrant mixed-use neighbourhoods connected by green space. Our vision is to create a place that is welcoming to all, regardless of age, ability or income. Over the last three years we have been engaging with local residents and businesses, community service agencies and non-profits, indigenous rights-holders, and stakeholders from across the city to ensure our plans are responsive to the diverse needs and priorities in our area.

To us, accessibility is an essential ingredient in building thriving neighbourhoods and it will closely guide our decision making as we develop a city-within-a-city in Toronto's north end over the next number of decades. We look forward to collaborating with the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition as we continue this important work.

Derek Goring

Executive Vice President, Development, Northcrest Developments

Percy Ellis (James Burton and Emery Daniels) has been in the business of building purpose built rental apartments for over 14 years. Through more than 40 projects we have learned how to identify what matters to us and our tenants the most: creating happy, healthy, and equitable communities.

We aim to be a force for good in our communities and accessibility is a critical factor in being that positive force.

From our experience over the last couple of years, we have identified that simply meeting the accessibility requirements in the building code is not enough to make spaces accessible and help get those in need into those spaces. Often these spaces just end up being built bigger in size but are not essentially equipped with the needed accessibility features. The process of finishing off the fit-out for full accessibility often then gets overlooked in favour of a speedy, less costly leasing process to a tenant that does not require accessibility.

The financial pressures of this business and other priorities often take over. Additionally, it can be difficult to reach those who are actually in need of these spaces, which is another reason that the path of least resistance is often taken; leading to the space being used just as any other non-accessible space and results in missing the opportunity to meet the originally intended need.

As developers, we feel that real estate can be used as a tool to create huge positive social impacts and tackling unaffordability and its effect on people with disabilities is part of what's needed right now in solving this housing crisis in an equitable way.

James Burton

Co-founder, Percy Ellis

The Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) was established in 1988 following Rick Hansen's epic two-year, two-month, and two-day Man In Motion World Tour. RHF is a registered Canadian charity with a mission focused on ensuring people with disabilities affecting their mobility, vision, and hearing are not left behind.

Now more than ever, we need to encourage decision makers such as building owners, operators, industry influencers, architects and designers to view their spaces through an accessibility lens to truly understand what people with disabilities experience. The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) is a national measurement and recognition tool that rates the meaningful accessibility of buildings and sites based on the perspective of persons with varying disabilities. RHFAC is meant to be used as a complement to help to fill the critical gaps that exist between codes and the real needs of users to give site owners and operators the opportunity to apply innovation to enhance accessibility beyond code compliance.

Accessibility and inclusion are not a fad; in fact, they're growing in importance. Working with partners is absolutely imperative to the success of the RHFAC program and to address the need for an accessible Canada. We are looking forward to working with the new Accelerating Accessibility Coalition to discuss the potential development of a toolbox to provide industry with tangible solutions to address the need for improved accessibility in their spaces.

Greatly improved accessibility will result in a Canada where everyone can contribute and participate. It's the sustainable, resilient, and equitable future we are all working towards.

Sarah McCarthy

Vice President Strategic Initiatives, Rick Hansen Foundation

There's a general lack of understanding about the importance of barrier free and inclusive spaces. StopGap has identified the need for elevating our collective awareness about our human right to equal access and the tremendous value associated with having a space that everyone can enjoy. Our programming is rooted in awareness raising, meeting people where they are at in their learning journey, and building community.

Disability is part of human nature. At some point in our lives we will all experience a shift in the way we navigate our homes, community, and beyond.

We all have unique and equally valuable lived experiences, therefore having as many voices contributing to the creation of a built environment is crucial. My own lived experience, gained from my adventures using a wheelchair, has led me to understand that many of the design features that help make my life easier generally make life easier for many others. I'm honoured to share my perspective and broaden it through our collaborative work together.

Luke Anderson

Executive Director, StopGap Foundation

We have been building homes and communities for over 38 years. Over those years we have invested significant resources into creating homes that are affordable for both our tenants and homeowners. These initiatives, implemented in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity, Woodgreen Community Services, Egale Canada, Peel Non-Profit Housing Corporation and a host of other partners, have made a significant impact.

Until recently, however, we have not put nearly enough effort into ensuring our homes and communities are accessible for people with mobility, visual, auditory and other accessibility challenges.

Our Accessibility Designed Program, launched in 2017 with input and support from StopGap Foundation and BDP Quadrangle, has been an important step in the right direction. Subsequently, our partnerships with StopGap, L'Arche Toronto, AccessNow, and the Rick Hansen Foundation have taken us further down the road to creating communities that are truly inclusive.

It is time, however, to challenge others within our industry to do the same...to step up on inclusion. Let's do the right thing today, rather than wait until we're required to do so. The Accessibility Toolbox makes it easy to take those important first steps, and the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition provides a broad based community within which knowledge and best practices can be shared.

Together we can create a world in which everyone is welcome everywhere.

Jake Cohen

Chief Operating Officer, The Daniels Corporation

ULI Toronto is a chapter of the global Urban Land Institute which has a mission "to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide."

We recognize that accessibility is a critical pillar to building equitable communities, and yet it has not always been a hallmark of the development industry. As a broad based, multi-disciplinary industry association with over 2500 members across the GTHA (private and public sectors), ULI Toronto is very pleased to be an active participant in the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition.

We look forward to defining ways that we can leverage our network of professionals and would anticipate playing a key role in disseminating the leadership ideas generated by this effort broadly across our many well subscribed communication channels.

Richard Joy

Executive Director, ULI Toronto

I am passionate about the built environment. As someone who loves beauty and admires great design, I feel that communities and individuals thrive when people live, work and play in great environments. As a person with a neuromuscular disorder, I have lived experience of feeling marginalized and excluded by the built environment.

My wish is that noone should feel unwelcome or that they do not belong. And I believe that it is time for the design, architecture, building, construction and development communities to step up and help create and re-create spaces and places that work for everyone.

Yazmine Laroche