

Member Statements of Support October 2024



Following are public statements of support for accessible housing from the 64 members of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition. The * indicates the organization is a founding member.

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*

Aequum is Latin for equal footing and equity. Aequum Global Access Inc. is led by Pina D'Intino, M.Des., PMP, CPACC with 29 years of experience in the financial industry plus 20+ years as the founder of a cross-institutional hub for accessibility and inclusion.

Aequum assists organizations with training and awareness, digital and mobile best practices, building collaboration among users and consumers, developers, and implementers; and implementing current research and practices.

The firm's partners and affiliates include the Disability Inclusion Business Council, G3ict, IDRC at OCAD, the Canadian Accessibility Network and Standard Accessibility Reporting Inc. Aequum believes that accessible housing is fundamental to supporting those with disabilities. It is among the first priorities in creating disability inclusive and safe communities.

Pina is joined by occupational therapist David Wysocki, M.Sc., OT Reg. (ON.) and urban planner, Barbara Myers, MCIP, RPP. This team works with private and public service organizations, not-for-profits, and federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

We are confident that through expert design and on-site education and training, we can contribute to systemic and economic change resulting in inclusive housing for all. We look forward to joining and supporting the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition.

Barbara Myers

Associate, Aequum Global Access Inc.

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 honored 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*

ARISTA Homes proudly reaffirms our unwavering commitment to the principles and objectives outlined by the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition. Accessibility and inclusivity are not only fundamental Canadian values but also integral to ARISTA's "Life-Friendly" sustainability and inclusion initiative.

As a sponsor and significant supporter of the Peaceful Hearts Georgina Foundation, ARISTA Homes is deeply committed to championing fundraising initiatives that provide essential services for families and individuals with special needs. We acknowledge the crucial role housing availability plays in facilitating access to day and weekend programs, overnight respite, and reducing service wait lists. Our enduring dedication to fostering inclusive communities is underscored by our three-decade legacy as innovators in residential home construction.

Acknowledging the pressing need to address the deficit in accessible housing, ARISTA Homes embraces its responsibility to contribute actively to creating a built environment that celebrates diversity. We firmly assert that housing should transcend regulatory standards and function as a catalyst for enabling fulfilling lives, encouraging community engagement, and nurturing both physical and mental well-being.

As we position ARISTA Homes as a catalyst for positive transformation in the residential development industry, we embrace the profound responsibility to shape a more accessible Canada. Our vision foresees a world where every individual experiences the "Life-Friendly" benefits of meticulously designed, innovative and inclusive housing, embodying the principles of accessibility, inclusion, and vibrant community living.

Adrian DeGasperis
Director of Operations, ARISTA Homes Ltd.

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)*

The Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network (CLELN) is a collective of diverse people with lived experience of homelessness and expertise in grassroots organizing, advocacy, mentorship and peer support. CLELN works to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience are in the forefront of all matters regarding homelessness—and to eliminate homelessness and housing insecurity through research, policy, advocacy, training, and collaboration.

We have multiple intersectional identities tied to disability advocacy and transformative solutions for addressing homelessness and housing insecurity. We collaborate, educate and provide educational support for advocates, power holders, and organizations including the development sector and Canadian Standards Association.

We applaud and support the actions of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and acknowledge that unaffordable housing, insecurity and the homelessness crisis will largely impact all of us living with various disabilities.

We need a coalition of stakeholders to advise and inform our power holders, including all public and private sector decision makers, to understand that changes are needed to ensure everyone has access to a place to call home that is appropriate, accessible and affordable.

Michelle Bilek

Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network

On behalf of Vaughan Council, I am delighted that the City of Vaughan will be the first municipal government to join the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition (AAC).

The City of Vaughan is committed to fostering an inclusive community where people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can thrive. Accessibility is an essential feature of such inclusive societies, which requires built form to meet residents' needs for their day-to-day lives across all life stages. Almost one in seven residents of Vaughan has a form of disability.

Consequently, the availability of accessible housing options is critical for building a diverse, welcoming, and prosperous city. We can and must do better to ensure that people with disabilities are treated equitably and with dignity.

I applaud the work of the AAC and believe your mandate complements Vaughan's commitment to championing accessibility, empowering people with disabilities, and building inclusive and diverse communities in alignment with our [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan](#), the [Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#), and the [Age-Friendly Community Action Plan](#).

Understanding barriers to accessibility from the perspective of those who experience them is essential to creating a complete community. When homes are accessible, people can be more independent and active in their communities. Accessible homes ensure people can comfortably visit family and friends.

Accessing and enjoying one's community, like participating in recreational activities in an accessible and inclusive environment is essential for everybody.

Many people with disabilities – including seniors – face significant accessibility barriers. The ability to age in place in the community will become an increasingly important issue as our population ages. Accessible housing options that facilitate independent living are critical for the health and well-being of seniors and those who have experienced a life-altering injury or disease.

When a person with a disability has access to affordable and accessible housing, it can be transformative, unlock opportunities, and enable dignity. As we move forward with getting more homes built across the city, accessibility must be a priority.

Disability is part of being a human. At some point in our lives, we all end up experiencing a shift in the way we navigate our homes, community, and beyond. We all have unique and valuable lived experiences. Therefore, improved accessibility results in a society where everyone can contribute and participate equitably. Accessibility planning is essential to Vaughan's future, and we remain dedicated to working with our valued partners to foster a barrier-free community.

Collaboration is the only way through which we can build neighborhoods where people can thrive and belong. We are, therefore, honoured to join the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and encourage other municipalities to do so to create a more accessible future for all of us.

I would also like to acknowledge and appreciate the strong advocacy of the members of the City of Vaughan's Accessibility Advisory Committee, led by Ward 5 City Councillor Gila Martow, in driving transformational changes to help Vaughan become a place where people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can live comfortably, and with dignity.

Steven Del Duca
Mayor, City of Vaughan

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 Access Labs, 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 Access Labs*

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*

Planning for Equity, Accessibility, and Community Health (PEACH) Research Unit is part of Dalhousie University's School of Planning in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We are a team of dedicated faculty members, students, and partners who lead and support projects exploring how planning can better achieve more equitable, accessible, and healthy communities. Our work aims to inform urban design and planning practices that shape the places in which we live, work, and play through the PEACH lens.

We believe in learning through collaboration and first-hand experience. A big part of our research is learning from those who have personal knowledge of the barriers that exist in the built environment. Being part of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition will allow us to connect with, and learn from, other member organizations spearheading great initiatives on accessibility.

Mikiko Terashima, Ph.D., LPP, MCIP (Pronouns: she/her)

Associate Professor/Associate Dean, Research and Global Relations
School of Planning, Faculty of Architecture & Planning; Lead: Planning for Equity, Accessibility, & Community Health (PEACH) Research Unit,
Dalhousie University

The Design Industry Advisory Committee (DIAC) is a think tank and cross-disciplinary research group established by the City of Toronto in 2001. DIAC is a separate not-for-profit organization funded by its

members – the professional design organizations of Ontario and the City of Toronto. DIAC's purpose is to leverage Ontario's design capability to address economic, social and environmental priorities.

As an organization tasked with promoting the economic and social value of Design and Designers, the Design Industry Advisory Committee (DIAC) appreciates the critical importance of inclusion in all design activities, including housing. DIAC is strongly aligned with the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition's goal to create a more accessible Canada by challenging home designers and builders to make physical accessibility a greater priority.

Kevin Stolarick

Strategic Director, Design Industry Advisory Committee (DIAC)

At Devron, our mission is to create sustainable developments and homes that enhance the lives of residents. We have recently realized that meeting only the minimum code requirements is insufficient to address today's accessibility challenges. This approach is not sustainable, as it limits the future use of our buildings as residents age. We are committed to understanding these challenges better to create improved living conditions for people with diverse needs.

Safa Safapour

President, Devron

DiamondCorp prides itself as a leader in progressive city building with an eye to developing high-quality, innovative and award-winning residential and mixed-use projects.

Whether it's a large-scale master planned community or a single infill building, we always look to enhance the local community with new housing opportunities, open spaces and public realm improvements that can be enjoyed by everyone of all abilities. We look forward to working with the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and learning how we can design and build our communities with better accessibility in mind.

Stephen Diamond

CEO, DiamondCorp

At Diamond Schmitt, we design buildings that elevate and enrich communities. We believe architecture can and should inspire and empower people to realize their full potential.

The status quo in the contemporary built environment requires people with disabilities to adapt to buildings. In order to create inclusive spaces, our design approach embraces a broad range of experiences and instead adapts to the diversity of people that use them.

Rather than limiting ourselves to code minimums or regulatory requirements, we employ this design ethos into our projects from the beginning, to make certain that accessibility is incorporated into every aspect of our design process; and remains a core consideration rather than an afterthought.

We are proud to have a team of certified professionals under the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification, offering expertise that benefits all our clients. Our firm collectively creates innovative design solutions for leading cultural, academic, research, healthcare, residential, and civic spaces worldwide, prioritizing environments that provide meaningful access to everyone and where all are welcome.

Nigel Tai

Principal, Diamond Schmitt Architects

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*

EllisDon is proud to be one of the most trusted builders to deliver on projects that are vital to our communities. With a wide variety of professionals across many disciplines, we have a history of coming together to build something greater. We are drivers of change.

As progress is fought for on the front of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access, we must continue to innovate and build relationships that create and promote the inclusion of those with disabilities.

EllisDon believes in partnering collaboratively so that together we can innovate beyond the boundaries traditionally associated with construction.

Our teams approach design as a complete experience, and we are supportive of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition's important work of educating and creating an Accessibility Toolkit to enable the design and building of more housing that is accessible.

Ashwin Vadivelu, CFA

Director, Strategy & Origination, EllisDon Community Builders*

Giannone Petricone Architects is founded on a commitment to design excellence at every scale of occupation. Critical to its measure is the universality of its reach, its inclusion, and its durability for lasting impact on future generations.

We resist a 'one-size-fits-all' approach in favour of a design specificity that is tailored to urban opportunities, project objectives, and a multivalent public made of diverse individuals with diverse needs. At the centre of this work is acknowledging the power of removing barriers for an integrated accessibility that is inseparable from all aspects of a project. In this way, accessibility cannot be designed as an accommodation; rather, it must be seminal and central to the spatial experience.

Whether designing furnishings or interiors, buildings, or new urban communities, we take-on the responsibility to shape the city at every scale and understand that quality design is essential for the wellbeing and inclusion of every citizen. Designing for diversity, equity, inclusion, and durability are at the core of this mandate. A seamless, universal accessibility that creatively exceeds legislated standards, makes it possible.

Ralph Giannone & Pina Petricone
Founding Partners, Giannone Petricone Associates

Greenwin is proud to support the ULI Toronto-supported Accelerating Accessibility Coalition because we understand that accessible housing is not only a moral imperative but also a smart investment in our collective future. When we prioritize accessibility in housing, we create communities where everyone can thrive.

This not only enhances the quality of life for individuals with disabilities but also fosters a more vibrant and diverse society for all.

Since our establishment in 1948, Greenwin has been committed to providing quality rental communities for all individuals across Ontario. Our firm belief is that everyone, regardless of ability, deserves to experience inclusivity within our organization and at our properties. We are committed to upholding equal rights and opportunities for every individual, ensuring that our buildings, facilities, and services are designed to accommodate diverse needs. We recognize that achieving true accessibility requires ongoing dedication and collaboration, and we are proud to stand alongside the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition in advancing this crucial mission.

Accessible housing isn't just a necessity for some; it's a fundamental right that benefits everyone. A truly inclusive society is one where individuals of all ages and abilities can fully participate, including having access to homes that are barrier-free.

Jenn Green

Director, Affordable Housing & Corporate Social Responsibility, Greenwin

GWL Realty Advisors is driven by our core values: integrity, ambition, empathy, and creativity. We believe that these values define who we are and guide our interactions with partners, clients, residents, and employees. Our commitment to empathy underscores our understanding of the diverse needs and concerns of those we serve.

By recognizing and prioritizing what matters to others, we establish a foundation for fostering meaningful connections, reaching mutually beneficial agreements, and ultimately delivering results that matter.

We acknowledge the responsibility to continually enhance our offerings within existing structures while envisioning a future where accessibility is paramount. This commitment and joining the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition (AAC) aligns with our Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and serves as a testament to our dedication to fostering a more inclusive and accessible environment.

We take pride in deepening our commitment to accessibility through our collaboration with the AAC and encourage others to unite with us in our collective mission of building a more accessible Canada. Together, we can make a lasting impact and contribute to a society where inclusivity is not just a goal but a reality for all.

Glenn Way

President, GWL Realty Advisors

Habitat for Humanity Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is deeply committed to its mission of helping working families build strength, stability, and self-reliance through affordable homeownership. We focus on creative solutions to address the housing affordability crisis in Toronto, Brampton, Caledon, York Region, and Durham Region. Since 1988, Habitat GTA has built over 25 new communities, providing a hand up to more than 500 families so parents and children can have a safe, decent, and affordable place to call home.

Recognizing that equitable access to housing, specifically through the lens of accessibility, is a core building block of inclusive communities, Habitat for Humanity GTA collaborates with various stakeholders, including government bodies, builders, developers, and the public, to address systemic barriers. In collaboration with our government partners, such as CMHC, we actively seek to create homes that are accessible to all.

Through providing accessible housing options, Habitat for Humanity GTA aspires to contribute to the overall well-being and dignity of its partner families.

As an example, our Old Weston Road development in Toronto includes 4 fully accessible units out of 20. We are very conscious of the fact that we have much to learn, and we are eager to both endorse and be a signatory of this incredibly important coalition.

As a member of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition, Habitat for Humanity GTA looks forward to collaborating with like-minded organizations and advocating to accelerate progress toward a more accessible and inclusive future for all Canadians. We very much look forward to being part of this important organization and movement.

Ene Underwood, CEO
Emily Rossini, Director of Planning
Habitat for Humanity GTA

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*

New findings from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) showed that 27% of Canadians aged 15 years and older, or 8.0 million people, had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities. We know disability is also more prevalent as people age and a majority of older adults in Canada are sharing their desire to stay living in their homes as they age.

The existing housing stock falls short of meeting the accessibility needs of our current population, and the basic human right to adequate housing is not being met for many equity-deserving groups.

It is through collective action such as demonstrated by the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition, that will undoubtedly address this Accessible Housing Crisis, with measurable and collaborative actions.

Incluzia's vision is to reach and maintain a sustainable state in Canada where accessible housing options are equitable and available to all Canadians who need or desire them and all systemic barriers are removed. Our mission is to collaborate with stakeholders and engage older adults and people with disabilities to inform the development of technology-based innovations and training aimed at creating equitable and accessible housing options for all Canadians who need or desire them.

Incluzia is committed to engaging in collective action with the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and its stakeholders as well as learning from and contributing to the Accessibility Toolbox to share knowledge, resources and move forward the shared priorities of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition.

Marnie Courage

Accessibility & Inclusion Strategist, Incluzia Inc.

The Intentional Community Consortium (ICC) is a collective of organizations dedicated to pioneering inclusive housing solutions for individuals with developmental disabilities. Our united mission is to ensure that everyone who needs it can live in a supportive and inclusive community that values their contributions and meets their unique needs. Since our coalition was established, we have been at the forefront of advocating for and implementing innovative housing models that promote inclusivity and independence.

Ontario's current housing crisis for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities demands immediate and focused action. The ICC is committed to bridging this housing gap by fostering partnerships with all levels of government, agencies, and community organizations to create housing solutions that not only meet but exceed the minimum accessibility standards mandated by the current Building Code.

Our collaborative efforts have underscored the critical importance of community engagement early in the planning process to address and remove accessibility barriers. This approach has consistently resulted in meaningful improvements in the living conditions of those we aim to serve, reinforcing our belief in a society that embraces everyone, regardless of ability.

We are enthusiastic about the opportunities for collaboration with the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition. By working together, we can accelerate the development of accessible, inclusive homes and communities that welcome everyone.

The ICC and its member organizations are ready to lead the way towards a future where inclusive living is not just an ideal, but a reality for all.

Gary Gladstone

Chair, Intentional Community Consortium

I am a Barrier Free Real Estate Specialist, and my focus is helping people with disabilities buy and sell accessible homes.

I work with people of all ages to help them find a home where they can live safely and independently. And I help home owners sell their accessible homes to the right buyers.

One of the biggest challenges in my business is finding accessible rental units. Demand far exceeds supply and I've seen first hand the impact that a shortage of rental housing options have on my clients. I've had clients in their 30's living in a retirement home because that was the only accessible accommodation option available. I've had many clients living in a hotel because that was the only location with a roll in shower. In all of these instances, a suitable accessible rental apartment was not available.

We need more accessible housing. I support the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and its mission to significantly increase the supply of accessible housing.

Jeffrey Kerr, Broker*

Barrier Free Real Estate Specialist, RE/MAX Prime Properties Unique Group www.AccessibleHomeFinder.com

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.

Cassie Willson

Executive Director, L'Arche Toronto Homes Inc.*

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*

Founded over 70 years ago, March of Dimes Canada is a national charity committed to championing equity, empowering ability, and creating real change that will help people living with disabilities across the country unlock the richness of their lives. As a leading service provider, resource, and advocate, we have a long history of delivering supportive housing services and accessible home modifications.

In our 2021-24 Strategic Plan, we further committed to ensure people with disabilities can live safely and independently, by promoting increased access to appropriate, affordable housing solutions that give people more choice and control in where they live.

Through our many decades of experience, we have seen firsthand the life-changing impact that accessible, supportive housing can have for individuals and families. When a person with a disability has access to affordable, accessible housing and the in-home supports to live independently, it is truly transformative: it opens up opportunity, enables dignity, and unlocks participation and joy.

Unfortunately, far too many people with disabilities continue to wait years for a home that meets their needs, in the meantime struggling to make ends meet or living in unsafe conditions. In this way, we have a front row seat as to how the deepening housing crisis in Toronto, Ontario and Canada is impacting some of our society's most vulnerable people.

As a major supportive housing provider, we often work in partnership with developers and others who share the goal of increasing accessible housing stock for all who need it, now and in the future.

We are pleased to be joining the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and are looking forward to continuing to work with advocates and community organizations, builders and government to develop creative, practical, and thoughtful solutions to truly accelerate accessibility in housing.

Len Baker

President and CEO, March of Dimes Canada*

At National Homes, we're committed to changing the way people think about homes. We believe the needs of the customer should be the driving force behind every home we build. We think about how people are actually going to live in their homes. Then we design them from the inside out. It's a different way of thinking. But then, we don't measure ourselves against what other builders have always done. Because, at National, YOU ARE THE BLUEPRINT, our commitment to creating inclusive, vibrant communities aligns seamlessly with the mission of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition (AAC).

We believe that the true value of our developments is measured by their ability to serve all members of society equitably. By joining the AAC, we would be proud to contribute to a collective effort that addresses accessibility challenges with innovative and practical solutions.

The importance of accessibility in the built environment cannot be overstated. Ensuring that our homes and communities are accessible to everyone is not just a responsibility but a vital component of our vision for a more inclusive society. Through the AAC, we aim to enhance our understanding and implementation of accessibility standards, ensuring our projects reflect the diverse needs of our residents.

We look forward to collaborating with industry peers within the AAC, sharing knowledge, and fostering advancements that make our communities more inclusive and welcoming. National Homes is dedicated to integrating these principles into our designs, creating spaces where everyone can thrive.

Deena Pantalone

Managing Partner | Chief Innovation Officer, Venturon | National Homes

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

Chief Executive Officer, Northcrest Developments*

Pedesting is a mobile app that helps people with a disability find accessible routes through our cities and buildings. We are committed to assisting the community of people with a disability as they navigate around the built environment while gaining an education, becoming employed, enjoying a meal in a restaurant, and visiting a sports or cultural venue.

Accessible housing is very top of mind to our company because one's residence should be a safe harbour to return to after a day in school or at work.

Since about 15% of the Canadian population has a mobility or visual limitation, we specifically maintain that the same ratio of new housing developments should provide accessible units (15%). Pedesting believes that accessible housing should be significantly increased in our Canadian cities.

The Pedesting team is also interested in working towards some accessible housing development in transit-oriented developments and near the downtown cores of cities as these are typically pedestrian focused areas.

Our goal with Pedesting is to provide a tool that persons with disabilities can use to navigate through the built environment. As the disabled community becomes better represented in the day-to-day activities in which we all partake, it seems reasonable to create accessible housing options that are available to this important segment of the housing market.

Erin Shilliday, Architect, AAA
Chief Creative Officer - Pedesting Corporation

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*

At Reena, we are committed to creating inclusive communities for people with developmental disabilities, providing much-needed support services and advocacy to enhance the quality of life of individuals and their families. Since our inception in 1973, our mission has been to advocate for the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in every aspect of community life.

The housing crisis in Ontario for individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities is an issue that requires our collective attention and action. It is crucial that we come together to bridge the housing gap with accessible solutions and comprehensive support that surpass the minimum standards set by the current Building Code.

Our successful previous experiences have taught us the importance of collaborating with developers from the outset to eliminate accessibility barriers. Such proactive measures have proven to significantly improve the quality of life for the people we serve. At Reena, we envision a world where inclusivity is the norm, and every individual is valued and belongs.

I am excited about the potential of working alongside the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition. Together, we can make significant strides in creating homes and communities that are truly accessible and welcoming for all.

Reena is dedicated to this cause and looks forward to contributing to a future where everyone, regardless of their abilities, can live independently and with dignity.

Bryan Keshen

CEO, Reena

The Regroupement des organismes pour aînés et aînées du sud-ouest de Montréal (ROPASOM) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life of seniors in the South-West. Its objectives are to help seniors improve their living conditions by offering them services such as support, referral, information, counselling and education.

We are aware that over the next 25 years, the population aged 85+ is expected to triple (Source: StatsCanada). In the 65+ age group, falls are the cause of 87% of injury-related hospitalizations, 95% of hip fractures and cost more than \$5.6 billion a year. (Source: Public Health Agency of Canada).

The design of one's home can have an impact on physical and mental health: a step or threshold at the shower entrance, a slippery floor covering, a toilet that's too low... These are all unnecessary obstacles incorporated during traditional construction. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of people have no choice but to live in homes that don't meet their needs and where they can't live safely. A universally accessible (UA) dwelling, designed without obstacles, will adapt to meet the evolving needs of the person over the years.

Federal Housing Advocate Marie-Josée Houle sounded the alarm in her open letter of May 22, 2024, saying that "Swift action is needed if Canada is to meet its obligations under the National Housing Strategy Act and achieve its goal of becoming a barrier-free society."

The Accelerating Accessibility Coalition is a much-needed opportunity to bring together architects, developers, industry experts interested in accessibility to work with disability and seniors' advocates. It is an opportunity to innovate together and to create beautiful home environments that will appeal to the mainstream public while accommodating the needs of as wide a spectrum of users as possible, regardless of age or level of mobility/disability. We look forward to working with the AAC towards this goal.

Jody Negley

Founding member, Comité des influenceurs et influenceuses du design universel en habitation du Regroupement des organismes pour aînés et aînées du sud-ouest de Montréal (ROPASOM)

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*

The Responsible Personal Accessibility in Toronto Housing (R-PATH) Committee is a group of Toronto Community Housing tenants who live with physical disabilities that advocate for accessible housing. We recognize there is insufficient fully accessible housing with adequate build standards to accommodate currently used mobility devices and meet the needs of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities need the support of organizations who can/will initiate change so they have choices in places to live and can age in place longer. We want to continue to be a part of the change.

We have co-authored the Toronto Community Housing Accessibility Build Standards for new and existing builds. You can download the standards at: <https://www.torontohousing.ca/accessibility-in-built-environment-policy>.

Cathy Birch, founder and chair of R-PATH, is a recipient of the David C. Onley Award for Leadership in Accessibility from the Province of Ontario in December 2022.

We support all work with AAC that will provide equal opportunity for people with all kinds of disabilities to live anywhere, not in just a few isolated communities. The lived experience expertise is critical to effective usable change and we believe the ACC will help move this change forward so people with disabilities can age in place longer and have safer homes.

Cathy Birch

Founder and Chair, R-PATH Committee*

Safehaven emerged 30 years ago to provide exceptional care to children with complex care needs in a home-like setting. We have 6 locations in the GTA, with more on the horizon, that support over 200 clients per year. We have now expanded to meet the growing need of supporting youth and adults with disabilities. We are dedicated to creating an inclusive environment for our clients, where they can live with dignity and respect.

As an advocate for inclusivity, Safehaven recognizes the importance of collaborative efforts in driving meaningful change.

The Accelerating Accessibility Coalition's dedication to fostering partnerships among industry leaders, service providers, innovators, and advocates to build more accessible housing aligns seamlessly with our values. By working together, we can harness collective expertise to break down barriers and pave the way for a more accessible future.

Susan Bisailon, RN, BN, MSc (Nursing), ICD.D, CHE
President & Chief Executive Officer, Safehaven

A critical component of Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG), accessibility initiatives are embedded within each of RioCan's ESG pillars: resilient business, purposeful impact, and strategic partnerships. We constantly strive to create positive impact for our environment, people and communities by supporting the way in which we operate through purposeful design and economic and social growth initiatives, as well as monitoring and improving our standing portfolio's accessibility to ensure that our assets meet the diverse needs of Canada's population.

RioCan's developments are strategically designed to contribute to the growth of complete communities – places where homes, jobs, schools, community services, parks and recreation facilities are accessible to all. To increase our community impact, we leverage partnerships such as our connection to the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition. By working with and learning from the Coalition's members, together, we can build more accessible and inclusive communities.

Anton Katipunan

Vice President, Development, RioCan REIT

At SHS Consulting, we are a team of urbanists and strategists creating solutions to foster community inclusion and housing opportunities for all. Accessibility is at the core of our work and begins with understanding and listening to lived experience and translating that into solutions. Accessibility must be intentional and permeate throughout the design process from early project conception through to construction, and to occupancy where its impact can be felt as soon as tenants interact with their new home.

Tristina Sinopoli

Principal, Real Estate Development, SHS Consulting

Spinal Cord Injury Ontario (SCIO) supports people with spinal cord injury (SCI) and other disabilities, assisting with service, support, and advocacy throughout all life transitions. Among everything, accessible and affordable housing is one of our communities' largest barriers. SCIO is pleased to be a founding member of the coalition to bring forward meaningful opportunity to improve accessible housing in Ontario and beyond.

Peter Athanasopoulos

Director, Public Policy, Spinal Cord Injury Ontario*

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*

Sunnybrook Research Institute (SRI), the research arm of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, is developing innovations in care for the more than 1.3 million patients the hospital cares for annually. Housing is a health issue and a human right.

For patients who are older adults or who have experienced a life-changing injury or disease, the need for accessible and affordable housing solutions that link them to the right services to let them live independently is critical for their health and wellbeing.

As the population ages, and the demand for housing increases, accessible housing will be critical to enable people to participate in their community and to age in place.

Researchers at SRI are committed to identifying ways to generate evidence to co-create housing solutions so that everyone can have a home that respects their dignity and independence.

SRI is pleased to support the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition to achieve its goals of making physical accessibility in new housing a greater priority, which will lead to a housing landscape that values diversity, equity and inclusion.

Sander L. Hitzig

Program Research Director & Senior Scientist, St. John's Rehab Research Program, Sunnybrook Research Institute*

The people and organizations that shape our built environment play a huge role in determining who can actively and comfortably participate in society and who is left behind. At TAS, we recognize that real estate can be used as a tool to deliver transformative positive outcomes for communities. We want to build neighbourhoods where people thrive and belong – and designing projects that are healthy, safe, and inclusive is a big part of that.

We're committed to using inclusive design principles that accommodate a range of mental and physical health and accessibility needs. And we recognize that it's not simply about removing or alleviating barriers for people. It's also about prioritizing their health and wellbeing, providing opportunities for social connection, and making sure they feel welcome.

We're in the early days of our accessibility and inclusion journey, and we know that we can't do it alone. We admire the work of so many in the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition, and look forward to tackling this urgent challenge together.

Liza Stiff

VP, Impact Implementation and Innovation, TAS*

Tenblock builds sustainable communities people proudly call home, and our residents enjoy sustainable and healthy living, family-friendly amenities, and a generous public realm. We also work to fulfill our responsibility to build communities that are accessible for residents of all abilities and life stages.

The design and program decisions made during new community development present a unique opportunity, with lasting decisions that will impact residents for decades and beyond. Tenblock seizes this opportunity, working with designers and stakeholders to ensure our communities are free of barriers, supporting residents' abilities to participate fully in society.

Stephen Job

Vice President, Tenblock

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*

The Right Fit originated as a multi-agency partnership that provides a community-wide response to the critical shortage of wheelchair accessible housing. The Program connects wheelchair users to affordable, accessible housing along with independent living supports in the Vancouver region of British Columbia. Led by Disability Alliance BC (DABC) in partnership with the Individualized Funding Resource Centre Society (IFRC), the program provides peer-led navigation to wheelchair users and their families, which includes a holistic assessment and the coordination of all their disability support needs (home support, equipment, and assistive technology).

The Right Fit maintains a detailed inventory of accessible units through a standardized Accessibility Checklist. The program supports housing providers by matching vacant accessible units with wheelchair users in a manner that ensures each match is a “right fit” for the diverse accessibility needs of the tenant(s), thus assuring the effective use of accessible housing stock.

The Right Fit advances accessibility and inclusion by ensuring that construction industry professionals and housing providers understand the impact of accessible housing. The program promotes a steady future supply of accessible, affordable housing through the development of partnerships with local governments and other stakeholders.

Fully wheelchair accessible housing, which is the highest bar of physical accessibility, is a scarce resource that must be accurately identified and quickly filled before housing providers surrender it to the first available, likely able-bodied, tenant. The Right Fit Program provides a person-centered approach focused on finding homes that are affordable, accessible and safe for wheelchair users. The Right Fit aims to be a centre for excellence and a knowledge hub that combines expertise with an understanding that accessibility for people with disabilities requires a holistic approach involving not only design but also addresses all the barriers that impede full inclusion.

The Right Fit recognizes and profiles the fact that the inability to acquire safe, secure, accessible housing constitutes homelessness. Wheelchair users often face intersecting forms of discrimination when trying to navigate the housing market, and The Right Fit Program works to create a more equitable housing situation.

DABC operates on the principle of “Nothing About Us, Without Us” and strives to involve people with lived experience of disability in all steps of decision-making processes.

Isabelle Groc

The Right Fit Program Manager, Disability Alliance BC

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 2200 members across the GTHA (private and public sectors), ULI Toronto is very pleased to serve as the secretariat and be an active participant in the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition.

We look forward to defining ways that we can leverage our network of professionals and 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 (Urban Land Institute) Toronto*

The KITE Research Institute is a leading rehabilitation health-research facility with more than 100 scientists dedicated to seeking solutions for those in our community who are living with the effects of disability, illness, injury and aging.

KITE provides validation and testing of assistive devices, mobility products and technologies for health, rehab and aging. This includes neuroprosthetics, rehab robotics, AI for robotics, human-centred design and smart garments for health care.

Our research teams are actively engaged in gathering evidence that guides changes to policy and public opinion with the goal of addressing accessibility challenges. This work has been used to inform changes to the National Building Code of Canada and develop new accessibility standards for outdoor spaces nationwide.

Organizations like the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition are critical to ensuring that everyone has access to inclusive, barrier-free spaces. We are proud to support the ACC and look forward to leveraging our expertise to assist with the development of homes, communities and public spaces that allow everyone, regardless of ability, to live with autonomy and dignity.

Dr. Milos R. Popovic

KITE Research Institute at UHN

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*

Every Canadian deserves access to a safe, comfortable, and functional home that meets their needs and supports their independence. I have witnessed firsthand the struggles faced by individuals whose living spaces did not cater to their physical needs, and I have also seen how eliminating accessibility barriers have led to a better quality of life and allowed them to contribute positively to their communities. In addition to upholding a person's dignity, well-being and independence, accessible housing is also fundamental to fostering a diverse and inclusive society where everyone has equal opportunity to contribute meaningfully to and be part of a community.

The progress towards a more accessible and inclusive Canada requires substantive action and collective effort, and I am proud to join the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition in the mission to turn this vision into reality. I look forward to collaborating with the Coalition members to advocate for meaningful change in delivering accessible housing and continue building a city where everyone can thrive.

Jennevieve Virata

Waterfront Toronto was established by the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto in 2001 to oversee and lead the renewal of the city's waterfront. We work with many different partners, from property developers to conservationists and community groups, to create complete communities, parks and other public spaces.

Our goal is to build an inclusive waterfront for everyone, and we know that this vision is only possible through a strong commitment to accessibility in everything we make and do.

We are committed to the principles outlined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (“AODA”) and to meeting the needs of people with disabilities, in a timely manner, through the implementation of the requirements of the AODA.

In 2020 we published our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2020-2025), which outlines our specific commitments with regards to AODA and Section 4 of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (“IASR”).

Building on these commitments, in 2023, we published the Waterfront Accessibility Design Guidelines, which help guide our work designing public spaces, and we formed the Waterfront Accessibility Advisory Committee to apply the guidelines based on lived experience.

Waterfront Toronto is committed to addressing the needs of persons of all ages and abilities by allowing them to maintain their dignity and independence. We’re pleased to have the opportunity to join the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition and work with our colleagues and neighbours to learn, share resources, and build a better city for everyone.

Christopher Glaisek

Chief Planning and Design Officer, Waterfront Toronto

I am an Architect, Author and Activist who specializes in Accessible Architecture. I set up my own Edmonton based practice in 1995, and I specialize in providing consulting services for persons with disabilities and for projects focused on affording individuals with disabilities greater choices for independent movement. I have firsthand experience with creating accessible environments because I grew up with a father who used a wheelchair. I have written many articles and two books on accessible design and have been a guest speaker and participant in sessions involving accessibility, innovative housing and urban and community planning. I have also won numerous awards for my work.

For Architects, affordable and accessible housing can only effectively work when we want to learn more and get better at our craft in this area of design.

I spend every day communicating and working with at least one person who has a disability. My practice generally focuses on small projects with practical hands-on “lived” experience. Most importantly, I work very closely with my clients who are the end users. The beauty in this architecture comes from addressing the needs of as many people as possible. This desire to work with the experiential design process leads to a better architecture that produces more than a building form to be visually admired. Fundamentally, a well-designed built environment must create a framework for people to live their best lives.

Accessible Architecture is Just Good Design. Therefore, we must never rely on accessibility guides, standards and codes, rather we must focus on actions to create an Architecture that is more Accessible and Inclusive for All. This is not just a technical issue but one that offers us the choice to invest ourselves emotionally. This design philosophy considers the needs of as many people as possible and focuses on the toughest populations which are typically persons with physical disabilities. In this way we can create the most accessible built environment possible.

Architecture and design quality is at the heart of accessible living which takes its form from the specific everyday users, site conditions and the cultural context of a particular region. The human context is central, and we must understand the history and unique characteristics of Accessible Architecture to help us move from the medical model of disability to fix individuals with disabilities to become “normal”, to a social model that better tailors the built environment to meets everyone’s needs, including persons with physical, visual, hearing and sensory limitations. Curb ramps, no-step building entrances, better interior lighting, acoustics and wayfinding strategies are some examples of this.

Architects are trained to be problem solvers and to think outside the box. We can come up with practical and beautiful solutions no matter what the design issue is. For this to happen, especially when it comes to affordable and accessible housing, we need to understand culture and society and not just science and technology. We can start by encouraging such thinking in schools of architecture and other design disciplines. Education is the key. We need to educate ourselves and others to bring about change in a positive direction. Frankly, we must emotionally invest more of ourselves into the issue of creating truly affordable and accessible housing that benefits us all.

The best design projects start with great collaborations. This also means that the decision makers, who control the design project, must be willing to take on the “leap of faith” design journey with the Architects and other designers who are committed to producing a beautiful building or space that accommodates the largest community possible. Hope and energy are at the core of this design philosophy.

Ron Wickman, BA, BEDS, M. Arch., Architect, AAA, MRAIC
Ron Wickman Architect

At Woodbourne, we understand that the design and development of our built environment profoundly impact who can actively and comfortably participate in society. We believe that real estate can be a powerful tool for creating transformative, positive outcomes within communities. Our goal is to build neighborhoods where people not only live but thrive and feel a strong sense of belonging.

To achieve this, we are dedicated to incorporating accessibility and inclusive design principles into our buildings. We aim to create spaces that are healthy, safe, and welcoming for everyone, accommodating a wide range of mental and physical health needs. It is not just about removing barriers; it is about fostering environments that prioritize health, wellbeing, and social connection.

At Woodbourne, we recognize that we are early on in our journey towards greater accessibility and inclusion. We cannot accomplish this alone and are inspired by the efforts of many within the community. We are committed to working collaboratively with others to tackle this urgent challenge, ensuring that our developments contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Frank Vinodolac

Head of Development, Woodbourne Capital Management International, LP

WoodGreen is proud to support the ULI Toronto-supported Accelerating Accessibility Coalition (AAC) because we understand that accessible housing is both a necessary and smart investment in ensuring inclusive and healthy communities. Accessible housing isn't just a necessity for some; it's a fundamental right that benefits everyone.

A truly inclusive society is one where individuals of all ages and abilities can fully participate, including having access to homes that are barrier-free.

WoodGreen is one of the largest social service agencies in Toronto with a mission to achieve a Toronto where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. WoodGreen aims to enhance self-sufficiency, promote well-being and reduce poverty through innovative solutions to critical social needs, serving 37,000 people each year, from over 40 locations across Toronto.

WoodGreen offers services and expertise on the following areas: Youth, Child Care, Community Programs, Community Health, Senior Care and Housing and is the second largest housing provider in the city of Toronto. Supportive housing and attendant outreach services are an important part of WoodGreen's services to address 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.

The AAC serves an important purpose that WoodGreen 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.

I applaud the work of the AAC for championing accessibility, empowering people with disabilities, and building inclusive and diverse communities in alignment with our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan and multi-year investment in accessibility and age friendly communities.

Mwarigha, MSC, MA and CIH

Vice President, Housing Growth, Development & Asset Sustainability,
WoodGreen Community Services

The Centre for Feminist Research at York University is deeply committed to equity, locally and around the world. We are strongly in support of the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition, since we understand that accessible housing is necessary in Toronto, across the country, and globally, if we are to live in ways that include each of us and all of us.

Accessible homes and neighbourhoods are vital to vibrant communities in which everyone can participate fully and contribute their talents and energies.

Disabilities affect more women than men – nearly one in four women over our lifetimes, according to Statistics Canada -- making accessibility an especially important concern for feminists who seek to support women's agency.

Let us act, now, in Toronto, across the province and nationally, to ensure that homes are fully accessible. This means getting creative in design, progressive in our legislation and working together across sectors to make our homes and communities accessible today.

This is not only important for all those living with disability, but for all of us committed to ensuring that our communities and cities are welcoming spaces where each of us and all of us can flourish.

Elaine Coburn

Director of the Centre for Feminist Research, York University*