PRINT PAGE 1

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CNIB Briefing Note for the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

## About CNIB Foundation

Celebrating 100 years in 2018, CNIB Foundation is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today. We deliver innovative programs and powerful advocacy that empowers people impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion. Now, as CNIB enters our second century of operation, we're going to be even bolder in tackling the issues before us.

## Background

CNIB surveyed Canadians with sight loss for their reactions to Bill C-81. We used the feedback from our survey to inform the recommendations we made to Members of Parliament and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA).

Among the recommendations made by CNIB were putting a time limit on exemptions, legislating the diversity of the CASDO board, and implementing timelines for the development of regulations and standards. We were pleased to see the HUMA Committee adopt these amendments at the Committee stage.

## Timely Passage, Powerful Regulations and Continued Consultation

Bill C-81 passed through the House of Commons with important amendments that strengthened the legislation. While CNIB believes there is room for improvement in Bill C-81, we also recognize that the passage of this legislation is time sensitive. CNIB believes the timely passage of Bill C-81 is of the utmost importance now that the legislation is in the Senate. This historic legislation will not break down barriers to inclusion for Canadians with disabilities if it dies on the Order Paper.

To ensure this legislation is as strong as possible, CNIB recommends powerful regulations be implemented soon after Bill C-81 receives Royal Assent. Powerful regulations and standards provide an opportunity to include specific guidelines to carry out the intent of the Act after Bill C-81 becomes law. CNIB recommends including detailed timelines within the regulations to ensure the legislation stays on track in achieving a barrier-free Canada. CNIB also recommends that the Government of Canada publish their expected timelines for implementation of the legislation over the summer. While CNIB recognizes that this is not standard procedure, publishing a detailed implementation plan that includes timelines would show the disability community the Government is committed to upholding the intent of the legislation.

PRINT PAGE 2

CNIB recommends that the Government of Canada allocate funding for disability organizations to fully review and analyze the implementation and results of the Accessible Canada Act. This would be similar to the work that disability organizations have done regarding Canada's implementation on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, through a shadow report. Ultimately a shadow report would help inform the five-year statutory review of the legislation.

As the Accessible Canada Act aims to legislate the principles of "nothing about us without us," CNIB recommends continued consultation with the disability community for specific regulations. During the drafting period of the regulations, CNIB recommends the government consult with the disability community to ensure regulations and standards are impactful, and reflective of barriers faced by Canadians with disabilities. To this end, CNIB recommends the Government of Canada publish all results of Bill C-81 as quickly as possible, so Canadians with disabilities can monitor the implementation of the legislation and hold the government to account.

## Unleashing the Power of Technology

New and emerging technologies are levelling the playing field for Canadians who are blind or partially sighted. Technology can enhance accessibility for people with sight loss in almost every activity of daily life. For example, smartphones can read the denomination of currencies, connect to live agents to help navigate a building or neighborhood, and Bluetooth enabled beacons help with independent wayfinding.

However, technology only works when it is accessible, available, and affordable. CNIB believes that new and emerging technologies should be a key tool used by the Government of Canada in implementing Bill C-81.

## Recommendations

1. CNIB recommends the Senate of Canada pass Bill C-81 as it is currently written.

2. CNIB recommends powerful regulations be implemented soon after Bill C-81 receives Royal Assent.

3. CNIB recommends including detailed timelines within the regulations to ensure the legislation stays on track in achieving a barrier-free Canada.

4. CNIB recommends that the Government of Canada publish their timelines for implementation of the legislation, and expected results, over the summer 2019.

5. CNIB recommends the Government of Canada allocate funding for disability organizations to monitor the implementation and results of the Accessible Canada Act, with the intended outcome of a shadow report that help shape the five-year statutory review of the legislation.

6. CNIB recommends continued consultation with the disability community for specific regulations.

PRINT PAGE 3

7. CNIB recommends the Government of Canada publish all results of Bill C-81 as quickly as possible.

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