



Champion **Equity**  
Empower **Ability**  
**Strategic Plan 2021–2024**



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*“There’s more to me than meets the eye.”*

# Who We Are

## About March of Dimes Canada

March of Dimes Canada is a leading national charity committed to championing equity, empowering ability, and creating real change that will help the more than six million people living with disabilities across the country unlock the richness of their lives.

We serve, connect, and empower people living with disabilities to participate fully in life—on their own terms. Our work is grounded in the voices of the people we serve, built on a foundation of service, and backed by a 70-year history of success.

We've proven time and again our dedication to addressing the ongoing and urgent needs of people living with disabilities, as well as their families and caregivers. Born in the last great public health epidemic, we know that seemingly-impossible goals can be achieved and barriers can be broken. In the 1950s, March of Dimes Canada helped in the global effort to find a cure for polio. We've since evolved to become a recognized leader in disability service design and delivery, supporting people at home, work, and in their communities with unparalleled reach and impact.

Now, inspired and guided by our community, we're expanding our horizons even further. Together with our clients, partners, supporters, and allies, we are working to create communities in which people living with disabilities can not only live, but thrive in all they aspire to do.





## Purpose

**Champion Equity. Empower Ability.**



## Vision

**An inclusive, barrier-free society for people with disabilities.**



## Mission

**To be Canada's leading service provider, resource, and advocate, empowering people living with disabilities to live and thrive in communities nationwide.**

## Values

### ▶ **Client Focus**

People living with disabilities and their families are at the heart of everything we do and every decision we make. Their voices and lived experiences inform and guide our work.

### ▶ **Collaboration**

We believe that when we work together as one connected team, we are a powerful force for good. Our team includes the dedicated donors, supporters, partners, and allies who work with us to make change happen.

### ▶ **Accountability**

We are accountable to ourselves, to each other, and to our community—operating with the highest integrity and following through on the commitments we make.

### ▶ **Innovation**

We challenge conventions and embrace curiosity and creativity, always seeking to deliver the greatest impact for people living with disabilities and the community at large.

# A Vision for Change

## Message from the President & CEO



March of Dimes Canada has a proud history as a leading service provider, resource, and advocate for people living with disabilities. Throughout our 70-year history, we've proven our commitment to serving the needs of our community time and again. But key challenges, barriers, and inequalities persist—and we have an important role to play in creating a better future for people living with all forms of disability, in every part of Canada.

We know our country's disability service system is complex. Through listening and engagement, our community has told us they feel frustrated, isolated, and discouraged. And they've told us they want change—real change that will help them achieve their goals and do the things in their lives that matter most to them. Change that will transform how people living with disabilities are understood and included in society, and that will expand equity and opportunity for everyone.

Catalyzing that change is what March of Dimes Canada's new strategy is about. We are committed to improving the lives of people living with disabilities across the country; to delivering on the changes that matter most to those we serve. Their lived experiences are the driving force behind this plan. We are grateful for their participation and their unwavering belief in our organization. As we work towards our goals, their voices will continue to guide us.

To create real change, we will unravel our country's complex disability system, close gaps, and remove the constraints imposed on our community. We will evolve our services to empower more people in more places than ever before. We will use our influence as a leading charity to bring others together to fight for understanding, respect, and inclusion in all aspects of society.

We know the road ahead is not easy, but we will walk alongside people living with disabilities, supporting them to overcome personal and systemic challenges along the way. And with your support, we won't stop until we get there.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "L Baker". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**Leonard Baker**  
President & CEO  
March of Dimes Canada

# Message from the Board of Directors

The development of this plan began at a time of great uncertainty, when COVID-19 threatened the health and safety of those we care about. Thanks to the tremendous effort of our staff and volunteers, March of Dimes Canada will emerge from this historical global event with renewed commitment to our cause and focus to fulfill our mission.

As a national leader in the disability service sector, March of Dimes Canada has been a trusted resource for more than seven decades. In that time, our organization has adapted to meet the ongoing needs of people living with disabilities. It is evolving once more. In this plan, we chart a course for the future of our organization that is relevant, responsive, and impactful for this growing segment of Canada's population.

Our sincere thanks to March of Dimes Canada clients and their families for generously sharing their insights and experiences; staff for their hard work and dedication to developing this plan; members of the Board of Directors and Board Committees for their guidance, insight, and support; and our volunteer Strategic Plan Advisory Committee for their expertise and experience.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we look forward to the journey that is to follow, and the legacy of impact this plan will leave for the organization and the community we serve.

Yours sincerely,



**Catherine Sherrard**  
Chair  
Board of Directors



**Jay R. Hira**  
Chair Elect  
Board of Directors



# The Way Forward

## Our New Strategy

We believe in a future that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of Canada's growing population of more than six million people living with disabilities.

To guide us in the development of this plan, we consulted with nearly 1,000 people impacted by disability. They told us their needs, ambitions, dreams, and expectations of our organization. And they shared the challenges they face—from accessing care in a disjointed system, to feeling underestimated and excluded by a world that doesn't understand, to the devastating reality of unemployment and poverty.

At March of Dimes Canada, we're not afraid of a challenge. Our organization was born in one of the 20th century's greatest public health epidemics to find a cure for the polio virus. This history has taught us that ambitious goals can be achieved, but it takes a community to spark change.

Our new strategy boldly reimagines what our organization can be and what we can do to transform the lives of people living with disabilities across the country. It focuses our work on the following four areas, which we know are the things people living with disabilities need, want, and expect out of life.



# Our Strategic Focus Areas



**The best start for children, youth and families.**



**Independence at home and in the community.**



**Active, healthy, connected lives.**



**Financial security.**



# Focus Area 1



## The best start for children, youth and families.

**“ Our daughter is showing the world, that one is not defined by their diagnosis. We are proud of her ability to navigate the complexity of her world with such beauty and grace. Each and every milestone is a blessing for our family. ”**

– Mary Ann Merchant,  
parent of a March of Dimes  
Canada client

The start of life is a significant, formative time for children. It’s when their vision of themselves, their world, and their ability is forged; when they see the possibilities and set the expectations for what they can become. We believe childhood with a disability can and should be beautiful, but we know it’s not always easy. As children grow and develop, the practical, emotional, and financial challenges are profound. Their journey can be a turbulent one that affects the whole family. We’re here to change that.

March of Dimes Canada has long played a valued role in supporting people and families living with disabilities at every stage of life, including the early years. As we head into our next chapter, we’re committed to doing more to understand the needs of this group, amplifying their voices, and creating responsive programs and resources to give them a good beginning.



# By the numbers



of parents who participated in our consultation strongly agreed there are **gaps in services** available for people living with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>



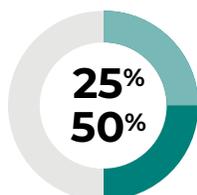
Fewer than half agreed that it is easy to provide their children with **necessary supports**.<sup>1</sup>



highlighted **social barriers and isolation** as key issues.<sup>1</sup>



of parents reported a **decrease in life satisfaction** due to their caregiving role, evidencing the strain on families.<sup>1</sup>



A quarter of youth and nearly half of parents reported feeling discouraged all or most of the time by **society's tendency to underestimate and exclude people with disabilities**.<sup>1</sup>

## Our goal

We will ensure children and youth living with disabilities can achieve their full potential, thriving at every stage of their development.

### How we'll do it:

- ▶ Conduct research and engage the community to understand the challenges of growing up with disability in Canada, and develop evidence-based response plans.
- ▶ Support children, youth, and families to overcome challenges and make positive transitions through the early years and into adulthood.

# Focus Area 2



## Independence at home and in the community.

**“Independence looks like having accessibility everywhere. It feels like I’m free to go where I want, when I want, however I want.”**

– Valerie DeLong,  
March of Dimes Canada client

The experience of living with a disability is different for everyone. But many people share the desire for practical, everyday independence, with choice and control over how they live their lives. They ask for better access to services, adequately funded service levels, appropriate and affordable housing, and home and vehicle modifications.

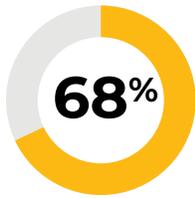
March of Dimes Canada is widely recognized as a leader in disability service design and delivery. Building on our strengths, we will expand key programs and services in communities across the country so people living with disabilities can access the tools and support they need to be independent, regardless of where they live.



**“People with disabilities have strong voices, so listen to what we’re telling you... We need more access to places, services, and technology. It’s getting better, but there’s still work to do.”**

– Marissa Blake,  
March of Dimes Canada client

# By the numbers



of participants in our consultation felt their disability has a significant negative effect on their **ability to carry out day-to-day activities**.<sup>1</sup>



agreed there are **gaps in services and resources** for people living with disabilities that must be addressed.<sup>1</sup>



indicated that **transportation barriers** impact them in their everyday lives.<sup>1</sup>



More than half of Canadian adults and seniors cited the **cost of home modifications** as a barrier to remaining in their homes as they age.<sup>2</sup>

## Our goal

We will ensure people living with disabilities can live safely and independently, where and how they choose – and can fully participate in all aspects of community life that matter to them.

### How we'll do it:

- ▶ Widen access to essential home and community support services so people have the personalized support they need, when and where they need it.
- ▶ Promote increased access to appropriate, affordable housing and home and vehicle modification solutions that give people more choice and control in where they live.

# Focus Area 3



**“ Ideally, people with disabilities are living life to the fullest with opportunities to grow and develop while demonstrating to the world that living with a disability does not have to hold a person back in life. ”**

– Valerie Arbeau,  
mother of March of Dimes  
Canada client

## Active, healthy, connected lives.

Life with disability can be profoundly isolating. Whether from social stigma, discrimination, or the challenges of navigating a fragmented system, people living with disabilities feel disconnected from society, the supports they need, and each other. Inclusion and a sense of true belonging are too often out of reach, which can have detrimental impacts on their physical and mental wellness.

March of Dimes Canada believes that no person living with disability should struggle alone; that life with disability can be as rich and engaging as anyone dares to dream. As we listen and learn from our community, we will use our influence in service of better, more inclusive experiences for people living with disabilities. We will help our clients and their families access the resources they need to live healthy and meaningful lives, while providing enriching opportunities for learning, growth, and connection through signature programs like After Stroke.



**“ Research shows that community organizations have a unique and vital role in supporting people to pursue their goals and build meaningful lives with disability. The time is now for March of Dimes Canada to lead the way in showing what’s possible. ”**

– Dr. Michelle Nelson, Chief Knowledge and Innovation Officer,  
March of Dimes Canada

# By the numbers



Almost a third of participants in our consultation said they feel **anxious or depressed** always or most of the time.<sup>1</sup>



said they **feel discouraged** by people's tendency to underestimate and exclude persons with disabilities at least some of the time.<sup>1</sup>



One-half said they often or occasionally experience **negative stigma** or discrimination based on their disability.<sup>1</sup>



called on **March of Dimes Canada** to play a greater role in helping people living with disabilities access resources, and navigate available services and supports.<sup>1</sup>

## Our goal

We will ensure people living with disabilities can have the best possible physical and mental health, and enjoy strong, supportive relationships and a sense of community belonging.

### How we'll do it:

- ▶ Advance the integration of health care, community, and social services to improve quality of life for people living with disabilities.
- ▶ Improve people's awareness and ability to navigate the full array of disability supports and services available where they live.
- ▶ Enable people to connect to one another and to social, cultural, and recreational opportunities in their communities.

# Focus Area 4



## Financial security.

**“ Living with a disability means being marginalized. Being poor also equates to marginalization. To have both disability and poverty is too much to bear. ”**

– March of Dimes Canada client

People living with disabilities represent one of Canada’s most economically disadvantaged groups. They experience strikingly low employment rates in comparison to the general population and lower personal incomes, which decline as the severity of disability increases.

The cause is systemic discrimination, characterized by a fundamental lack of opportunity and understanding in the workforce, and inadequate, fragmented benefit systems that fail to cover the high costs of living with disability. For some, it’s a matter of life or death.

At March of Dimes Canada, we understand the gravity of situations faced by many people living with disabilities, and we take our role in solving them seriously. We will build on our extensive current work supporting the employment ambitions of people living with disability, and advocate forcefully for a livable income that eliminates disability poverty.



**“ My son is so hardworking, outgoing, and personable. If he was given a chance, he would be one of the best employees ever. All he wants to do is help and he has shown himself to be an outstanding volunteer. I just wish someone would give him a chance. ”**

– March of Dimes Canada client

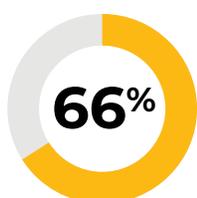
# By the numbers



of working-age Canadians with severe disabilities live **below Canada's official poverty line**, according to Statistics Canada.<sup>3</sup>



of working-age Canadians with disabilities are **employed**, compared to 80% of the general population.<sup>3</sup>



of participants in our consultation agreed **financial concerns** are somewhat of a barrier or a significant barrier when it comes to living with a disability.<sup>1</sup>



agreed **employment barriers** such as difficulty finding a job and/or a work environment that properly accommodates people living with disabilities are prevalent.<sup>1</sup>

## Our goal

We will ensure people can have the financial means to avoid or escape poverty, and live well with disability.

### How we'll do it:

- ▶ Support people to develop the skills they need to find, maintain, and advance in employment.
- ▶ Engage and equip employers to promote disability inclusion in the workplace through inclusive policies, practices, and cultures.
- ▶ Champion disability support benefits that provide a living income and don't disincentivize paid employment.

# Foundations for Success

## Strategic Enablers

To achieve our mission, March of Dimes Canada must rise to the challenge and become the modern, diverse, and impactful organization our community needs. Guided by our purpose to champion equity and empower ability, we will embrace leading practices in the following critical areas so we can pave the way for people living with disabilities to experience full and meaningful lives.



## **People**

Achieving our strategy requires a skilled, diverse, and inclusive team that is empowered to create remarkable change. To achieve our goals, we will recruit, retain, and develop top-level staff and volunteer talent, and increase the representation of people living with disabilities and other diverse perspectives in every part of our organization. We will build our culture based on our mission and our shared values.

## **Knowledge**

We are thoughtful and strategic in our approach to service design and delivery, resource development and advocacy. Our work is grounded in the voices of the community we serve, and guided by the best available evidence and stakeholder insights. We will invest in world-class research that advances our knowledge of disability and translate that knowledge into meaningful action, advocacy, and outcomes for our community.

## **Technology**

We know technology holds tremendous potential to extend our reach and impact in communities across Canada. We will harness the power of innovative technologies to connect and empower people living with disabilities, and expand access to information and support. We also will develop and apply business intelligence to improve the experience and quality of our services, and drive operational efficiency and effectiveness.

## **Financial Health**

Funding our ambition now and in the future will require boldness, creativity, and innovation. We will drive financial growth and sustainability by optimizing existing activities, emphasizing high-impact strategies, and diversifying our approach to include commercial, social enterprise, and new philanthropic revenue generation models.

## **Brand**

To build our profile and engage new communities, we need to share a clear, compelling story about who we are, what we do, and why it matters. We will increase the reach and impact of our marketing efforts so that new generations of Canadians can understand our work, celebrate our impact, and become connected to our mission.

# Understanding our Impact

## Success Measures

To ensure we're maximizing our impact and effectiveness, every step we take towards implementing our new strategy will be underpinned by robust evidence, business intelligence, and insights from those we serve. We will routinely measure our progress and performance in a range of ways to gain a regular snapshot of how we are driving the changes that matter for our community, and within our organization.



**“ March of Dimes Canada gave me hope, life, and a second chance for being useful and active. ”**

– March of Dimes Canada client

**“ I am who I am because of my disability and March of Dimes Canada. ”**

– March of Dimes Canada client

# In measuring our success, we will look at:



## **Understanding our impact for individuals and society**

Developing evaluation frameworks that demonstrate how our work creates positive outcomes for the people who access our services and the larger community of people living with disabilities that we serve, with the goal of continuous quality improvement and innovation.



## **Monitoring our financial health and sustainability**

Creating sound, long-term revenue development and expense management strategies to build organizational capacity and ensure March of Dimes Canada is both financially secure and impactful, now and in the future.



## **Assessing the efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation of our operations**

Maximizing our impact by integrating and enhancing our operations and leveraging research, data, and technology where possible to drive innovation in our programs and services.



## **Assessing our workforce and ensuring we have incredible talent with diverse perspectives and skills to help drive the mission forward**

Walking the talk when it comes to being an employer of choice and a demonstrated leader in the employment of people living with disabilities, with best-in-class inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in the workplace.

# Become part of something big and bold.

## Ways to Get Involved

March of Dimes Canada is on a mission to create an inclusive, barrier-free society for all Canadians living with disabilities—and we need your help.



### Donate

There are many ways to support March of Dimes Canada, from becoming a monthly donor to leaving a legacy gift in your will. Whichever you choose, give generously.



### Fundraise

Support a better future for people living with disabilities by organizing a corporate or community fundraiser, or attending one of our inspiring annual events.



### Advocate

Add your voice to a growing movement to create lasting change for people living with disabilities. Join and spread the word about our advocacy actions and campaigns.



### Volunteer

Share your time and talent to help us and our clients. With options for in-person and virtual volunteering available, you'll get back as much as you give.



### Partner

Join a growing community of partners who work together to expand and connect the network of services and supports that people living with disabilities need.

Visit [marchofdimes.ca](https://marchofdimes.ca) to learn more about the many ways you can make a difference.



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# Champion **Equity**. Empower **Ability**.

*That's the bold purpose behind our new strategic plan. We're on a mission to create an inclusive, barrier-free society for all Canadians living with disabilities, and we hope you'll join us.*



Read this plan online with added multimedia features! [marchofdimes.ca/strategy](https://marchofdimes.ca/strategy)



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