

Community Dispatch

An InfoFax of Community Development Halton

May 2004

Vol. 8, No. 7

CANADA VOTES 2004 – ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Participatory Democracy

A **HEALTHY DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM** is more than just the integrity and choices of our elected leaders. At Community Development Halton, we believe that our democracy functions best when citizens continually engage with elected representatives and parties to develop the society in which we all want to live. This participation certainly includes trying to make an informed vote in elections, but it is equally important to continuously engage with elected leaders and representatives about the issues that are important to our communities.

What do we suggest you do?

Canada Votes 2004 outlines some of the issues Community Development Halton sees as important to the communities and citizens of Ontario and Halton. Each of the Dispatches devoted to Canada Votes 2004 summarizes an issue, suggests questions to ask a candidate, and offers resources to learn more about the issue presented. If you agree that these issues are important, challenge candidates and elected representatives to develop positions on them, so you can make an informed vote in the election.

The Canada Votes Community Dispatches are designed to serve two purposes. First, they describe an important set of issues for discussion in the upcoming election. Second, they provide a background for continuous engagement in the political process of determining the direction and goals of our society. These Community Dispatches explore the following:

1. Accessibility and Inclusion
2. Cities and Social Infrastructure
3. Canadian Social Transfer
4. Federal Role on Social Policy
5. Population Health
6. Income Security
7. Taxation

These Community Dispatches are also valuable as they support the ongoing process of engagement in the

political process between elections. By continuing to ask questions and to demand answers from elected leaders and parties, a citizen can influence the directions that our society chooses to develop and grow.

We hope that you will take this opportunity to learn more about key issues important to communities and citizens of Ontario and Halton, and make your voice heard by voting in the upcoming federal election.

Community Development Halton wishes to acknowledge the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia, SPARC BC, for the development of the materials in Canada Votes 2004. Community Development Halton has made changes to this material in order to reflect the Ontario reality.

ISSUE 1: ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

How do you know if your community is accessible and inclusive for all its citizens? What does an accessible community look like?

Accessibility is about equal opportunity, and an accessible, inclusive community is one in which all community members are able to participate in the daily work, recreation and social life of their community. Such a community does not yet exist in Canada. However, in recent years many communities have made significant efforts to become more accessible.

To understand what accessibility and inclusiveness mean, it helps to look at what contributes to making a community inaccessible.

- **Physical inaccessibility:** If a person with a disability is unable to enter a building that restricts his ability to participate in activities inside that building.
- **Economic accessibility:** This includes accessible employment, education, and health care: If a person cannot access transportation to and from a job, he cannot work. If a person cannot access education, he cannot improve his employment choices and income opportunities.

While many of these are under provincial or municipal jurisdiction, many federal policy issues and discussions, such as taxation, health and social transfers, and income supplements, affect efforts to improve community accessibility. To achieve truly accessible communities requires a commitment from every level of government. There are many ways to promote accessibility at the federal level, and many different policy options. Examples include the disability tax credit and developing a national initiative to improve accessibility.

The upcoming federal election is a prime opportunity to discuss and explore issues of community inclusion and accessibility with candidates and parties.

Issues:

- An accessible community means that every citizen has the opportunity and capacity to participate in social, economic and recreational community life.
- Accessibility does not just mean physical accessibility, it includes economic and social accessibility as well

Questions for Candidates:

- What policies would you implement to improve the accessibility of our communities?
- What are your strategies to improve economic and social inclusion in our communities?
- How will you encourage junior levels of government to improve community accessibility in their jurisdictions?

To find out more:

- Government of Canada Persons with Disabilities Website:
www.pwd-online.ca/en/home.jsp
- Accessibility and Inclusion Website: A.R.C.H.:
http://www.archlegalclinic.ca/publications/archAlert/2002/01_oct31/01_odsp.asp
- Canadian Social Research Links:
www.canadiansocialresearch.net
- Elections Canada: www.elections.ca



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