

LBS4E5- To be named

Transcript – February 2024

Naomi

Today, I'm joined by Len Baker. Len is the president and CEO of March of Dimes Canada, and previously was the Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and innovation among other roles at the CNIB, including being a Rehabilitation Specialist. Welcome to the show, Len.

Len

Thank you for having me, Naomi. It's nice to be here.

Naomi

So today, we're going to be focusing on Bill C 22, which is called the "Canada Disability Benefit Act." So my understanding is that this Act passed in Parliament in the summer, is that correct?

Len

It did, and has not been fully constituted into law yet, the government has a year to do that. And then another year to work on regulations if it needs that amount of time.

Naomi

So it sounds like this bill is in the works. It's not quite there yet, but we are making some progress on the legal front.

Len

We are. I mean, obviously, people with disabilities are anxious to see this new legislation enacted as quickly as possible. Obviously, we know that a quarter of working age people are living with disabilities in our country. Also over a million people are living below the poverty line. And when government introduced this important legislation, or the idea of it, in 2020, there was a lot of excitement, not only about what the Canada Disability Benefit can mean in terms of helping to correct the financial struggles that so many people in our country are dealing with, but also that the legislation was framework legislation, which meant that the government had a commitment to working with the community in the design of the regulations that would go in place. So things like who would be eligible? How much money would people receive? How can we reach people with disability so that they are aware of this? How can we ensure that their experience in connecting with the Canada Disability Benefit is respectful, and that they don't have to, you know, tell a story that many people have told many times to many different people over and over again, in order to access this potentially life changing opportunity. So there was a lot of excitement, we are now continuing to work with government to ensure that they are moving as quickly as possible with that principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us" guiding their their work on this, to ensure that the Canada Disability Benefit is enacted as quickly as it can. We're currently hoping that the government will make some provision for it or anticipate making some provision for it in the next budget. But we're still waiting to see where that may be and whether or not that will happen.

Naomi

I see. So it sounds like in terms of taking a step back from the moment, just to let listeners know, Bill C 22, will provide federal money to low income working age people with disabilities. And you make a good point, Len, that although there is progress in the fact that it passed in Parliament over the summer, that's really not something that can wait for long. This is an essential piece of legislation to raise the quality of life and to ease those financial burdens for Canadians with disabilities.

Len

Absolutely, and as I say, there was obviously a lot of excitement. A lot of work happened over the last three years. Engaging the community in roundtable discussions, a lot of input has been provided to government to assist them in their deliberations with regards to how the Canada Disability Benefit will be built and implemented and what the regulations around that will look like. We know that there was also considerable conversation with regards to this benefit, not being clawed back by other programs that may exist either federally or provincially. And we knew that there was some work, obviously, that would need to happen to support the government's ability to have those conversations at the provincial level, or even within current federally funded programming, to make sure that this benefit was a maximum to people with disabilities and would not be subject to clawbacks, that work has to progress as well. So no doubt there's a lot of work that I'm confident is happening behind the scenes, but the community is obviously anxiously awaiting the full implementation of this really important legislation.

Naomi

Len, can you tell me a little bit more about what your role has And is and will be with the bill.

Len

March of Dimes Canada, which is one of our nation's leading service providers for persons with disabilities and a strong advocate for people with disabilities has been involved in this since the announcement of the plan to have a Canada Disability Benefit. I'm working in collaboration with a number of different community organizations, all of whom, as you can appreciate, have an interest in ensuring that this program is as meaningful and impactful as it can be. We've been involved in numerous meetings, discussions to help idealize I guess, around what this benefit can be and who can help. But we've also taking a specific view, in collaboration with our friends at Prosper, Canada, to develop a guideline for government to use and we call it the "Benefits Without Barriers" report, which was presented to government just over a year ago, that articulates what we believe should be some guiding principles with regards to the implementation of the Canada Disability Benefit, to ensure that many people with disabilities are aware of it. So how will government actually bring this new benefit to the attention of Canadians with disabilities? How will we reach more marginalized individuals who may fall out of the typical sort of interactions that people with disabilities may have with organizations like March of Dimes Canada? How do we find people who may be addressing issues of homelessness, or severe poverty who may not have the access to the information that they need to be able to benefit from from this new program? And how can we make sure that their process of interacting with government applying for the benefit is respectful, and meets them where they are in their ability to articulate what their needs are and ensure that they can have an opportunity to benefit from this program. So we've we've really focused on that specific part of the Canada Disability implementation,

playing to our strength as an organization in terms of understanding the journey that people with disabilities in our country have been on, and how we can utilize that experience in that connection to our community, to make sure that this benefit is respectfully and appropriately implemented, for all who will benefit from it.

Naomi

I'm curious if you can give an example of something specific, a way in which the application the recipient... that whole process is done with disability and accessibility in mind. Do you have a specific example of a process piece that you are advocating for?

Len

Yeah, there's probably 10 sort of guiding principles in the document with a couple of the ones that I think are really important that need to be emphasized is the is the whole guiding principle of "Nothing About Us, Without Us." So that government has to ensure that it's continuing to receive input and information that it doesn't already have that can ensure that people with disabilities will have an appropriate means of accessing this... that the language that will be used will be understood across the disability spectrum... that the process for applying for it will be as simple and efficient for people to do so that that in itself does not become a burden, or an obstacle for people applying simply because it's too complicated to do so. A lot of people who will benefit from the Canada Disability Benefit, for instance, may already be receiving the Canada Disability Tax Credit. So therefore, if they've already applied and are eligible for that, why would they need to reapply for the Canada Disability Benefit? Could we not provide some shortcuts for people who've already gone through the process of identifying themselves as having a disability, and meeting the criteria for existing government programs to simply be fast tracked into the Canada Disability Benefit and not have to reapply for this program, among with other ones that they're that they're entitled to receive? For sure. I think that I one thing that I've heard from the people that I work with is how much work it is sometimes to have a disability. There's always paperwork to fill out. There's always documents to chase after. So that makes a lot of sense to me that it's an accessibility issue to be able to make it easier for Canadians to apply for the benefit once it becomes a reality. And I think that there's some guidance in the "Benefits Without Barriers" document that we worked on with Prosper Canada that could be applied across any government program area and not just the Canada Disability Benefit, but any program that's that's open to and available for persons with disabilities should be as seamless and easy to access as possible... should be accessible... should not force people to have to tell their story over and over and over again to different people, that once that information is known to government that should be applied to people's ability to benefit from programs that the government has put in place to support their needs.

Naomi

So I want to take another tangent for a moment here. As I mentioned earlier, Len, you're the CEO of March of Dimes. And you mentioned that March of Dimes, not just yourself is involved with advocating and developing this act. Can you tell us a little bit more about March of Dimes and what they do?

Len

March of Dimes Canada, is an organization that plays a vital role in the lives of many people with disabilities in our country. Whether that's through providing home support services, or employment

services, enabling people to access the technology that they need, supporting stroke survivors on their journey after stroke and allowing them to move on with their lives in a dignified and independent way within the community, to being a trusted advisor and advocate on behalf of and alongside people with disabilities in Canada. We have a 2,300 employees now, we work from about 100 different locations across Canada. We are a name, Naomi that many people may be familiar with, but not familiar with exactly the scope of our services and what we do. And so at this point, we are now really focused on how we can expand our programming in a way that ensures that what we're delivering is relevant and needed in our community that is sustainable and that can be replicated in communities across Canada so that we can expand the amazing work that we've done for 70 years to help more people living with disability or those impacted by disability, to live an independent and inclusive life. As an Occupational Therapist, I think my first interaction with March of Dimes was applying for home safety equipment for some of the people that I work with. So I was aware of March of Dimes being involved with funding. In terms of preparing for this show, it was very interesting for me to see that March of Dimes is also involved on that more governmental level. I'm curious, are there any other services that you think that listeners should know about in terms of what March of Dimes provides? Well, yes, I mean, we have a "Home and Vehicle Modification" program in Ontario that we've recently expanded into Manitoba, that assists people to be able to make modifications to their home, so that they can age in place and remain independent in their community. We do a lot of work in the area of peer support and programming to help people feel connected to their communities. You see that primarily in our "After Stroke" program, where we are the largest provider of services to stroke survivors in Canada, once they've left the hospital and are now living independently back in their communities again. Our "Peer Support and Technology" programs go a long way to supporting stroke survivors on their ongoing journey to independence. So yes, there's it's a rather broad palette that we are able to operate upon. And as I say, we're now looking to expand those programs our government funded, as well as our charitable programs, to more communities across Canada.

Naomi

Not only do I know that March of Dimes, and yourself, have been working to support Canadians with disabilities. For my understanding, Len you have your own personal relationship with disability, I was wondering if you could share a little bit about that for our listeners

Len

Happy to. I've worked in this field for just over 30 years now. It's hard to believe I actually started my career in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador, with the CNIB working in children's services. And I just loved that, that experience so much. The highlight of my career was was my ability to get to know and work alongside parents and children, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador, but right across Atlantic Canada eventually, to help them on their journey to independence. I held a number of different successive roles with CNIB in Atlantic Canada and then in 2011, my family and I moved to Toronto to take on, as you mentioned, a couple of new leadership roles with CNIB. Had a wonderful, wonderful career there. And then in 2018, when our March of Dimes Canada announced that it was looking for a new President and CEO, I thought that that would be an interesting opportunity for me to be able to utilize the skills that I had acquired through my career to help guide March of Dimes Canada forward in its journey, and seeing how we could, you know, working in collaboration with other organizations expand our impact, to help more people with disabilities across Canada. So it's been a an

incredible fulfilling career for three decades. And I'm really excited about the opportunities for our organization, and opportunities for people with disabilities in our country by organizations like March of Dimes, and others, working collaboratively together. We've all done a lot of really good work over the years. But we're still a rather, I would say, too siloed of a community. And I think that there's more that we could be doing collaboratively together, that would make the journey for people impacted by disabilities a little bit easier. There's so many organizations in our community, doing great work that if we could find a way to be able to harness what we all do well, and ensure that people with disabilities have an easier way of connecting with those services. I think people spend a lot of time just trying to figure out who's out there and "who does what... and am I eligible for those programs... and are they available in my community?" All those questions, I think if we can find a way to help people find an easier route to accessing the supports and services that they need, that would be a big enhancement to what we can do in our community.

Naomi

I'm certainly relating to what you're saying, as someone who watches my own clients try to navigate the healthcare system and their frustrations on a daily basis. What would that look like I guess from your perspective, what would it look like to harness all of these wonderful organizations, March of Dimes, Canada, CNIB, BALANCE... and beyond... and make care easier to understand and access for Canadians with disabilities?

Len

I think sometimes these ideas just start with a conversation. And it's what could we be doing together to have a bigger impact on those we want to help and support? When I started in March of Dimes Canada, one of the first conversations I had was with Doug Roth, who's the CEO at Heart and Stroke. He said, we have an after stroke program here, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, how can we work together to ensure that more stroke survivors in our country have access to the supports they need? A lot of people didn't know where to turn when they left the hospital. And I know for people who are blind or partially sighted, oftentimes, they get a diagnosis from their Ophthalmologist, or from their Optometrist, and they're not exactly sure where they should be going to receive the help that they need. And I know that cniv has done a lot of work over the last number of years to help make that journey a respectful one for people who are blind or partially sighted an easier one for people to navigate. But that's just one area. I think that there's a lot of different organizations out there that if we really harnessed our energies and our resources and our experience, I'm sure we could come up with some even more imaginative and impactful programming in our communities. So I throw that out there as an offer to anybody who's listening, to see how we could be working more collaboratively together to help more people. And that's, that should be our common goal.

Naomi

I like the theme that's running through our conversation. It always comes back to collaboration. You know, talking about your own journey with folks, children with disability who are blind and partially sighted and then moving all the way up into a leadership role along the way, it seems like it's the most important thing is that collaboration piece. Collaboration with your client, as you mentioned, "Nothing About Us Without Us", all the way up to collaborating in a sense with the government to say, "you know, this is this is a very important piece of legislation for Canadians with disabilities, but it needs to

be done in a certain way for the impact to be greater." And all the way to our conversation around, at the end of the day, there's many different organizations across Canada who all have a common goal, which is to help help people. How do we do that in an accessible way? So I think something that I'm really taking out of our conversation today is how essential it is for us to get out of our silos and to connect and collaborate with a goal of supporting Canadians with disabilities.

Len

We owe it to the community we serve to do just that. Right. And so, you know, your podcast has given me an opportunity to let more people know about who March of Dimes Canada is, and maybe inspire somebody to just say, "oh, they're doing something really interesting to help stroke survivors. We're struggling to try to do something to help stroke survivors in our community. What's March of Dimes doing that we could learn from or that we could emulate? Or what how can we provide step in and help provide additional services to people?" So awareness and taking the time to educate ourselves about first of all the needs of people with disabilities and making sure that we remain relevant and connected to their lives and their experience. We know that poverty among people with disabilities is still a key issue. Homelessness is key issue. The cost of living in major cities in Canada, and having a disability is a real struggle for people. Food insecurity is an issue for people with disabilities. Food banks traditionally have had somewhere around 40% of their users being persons with disabilities. So there's, you know, issues around food insecurity, climate change will be significant impact on marginalized populations, including people with disabilities. So if you're living in high rise apartment buildings and rely on an elevator, and with changes in weather patterns, and storms, and power outages, or floods, we have to be thinking about the future, in terms of what living safely and independently and respectfully means in our country. And no one organization can handle all those really important issues on their own. And collaboration and partnership, I think is incumbent upon all of us to be thinking about, as a way forward,

Naomi

You touched on a lot of things that I think about as well. With food insecurity, the housing crisis and climate change there, there absolutely are so many things, so many challenges for folks with disabilities, that one person, one therapist, one organization, can't tackle on their own. So I think that's really well put. And returning back to the Benefit Act, I know that it doesn't necessarily cover or address all of those issues, but it's a good start in the sense that I think that giving Canadians with disabilities, a higher income, something that could maybe meet the cost of living or well, maybe we can talk about that in a moment, but raise that income from where it is right now. Do you feel like we're on the right track? Do you think that more needs to be done at this point to address both the income disparity as well as some of these other bigger issues? I really appreciate the global outlook that you have. I mean, we came here to talk about this bill, which is an income top up, but at the end of the day, I think you're absolutely right. And that, you know, this is this is a short term solution, but let's look at the bigger picture. Let's think about getting Canadians with disabilities more involved in employment, because as you said, there's absolutely that ability. I think there's a maybe a bit of... well there of course there is... there's a stigma and there's a fear among employers because there's a lack of understanding. Same goes with even barriers to housing. Unfortunately, I've encountered that with clients before were landlords feel like they can't live independently. Or even like you said, just the something as simple as I'm not sure if I want someone to drill a grab bar into into the shower, and just again, that lack of

understanding of how, how a crucial difference that can make. And also, you know, sometimes, unfortunately, there's also a need to educate about the law, because we do have laws across Canada about accessibility.

Len

I think there's always more that needs to be done. And I think the world is evolving and changing around us. And as the world changes impacts all of us in different ways. For people with disabilities in our country is, you know, we have an aging population of individuals who are will at some point, probably experience a disability that will impact their ability to continue to live as independently as they've enjoyed throughout their life. How are we, as a country, helping to ensure that this aging population of "baby boomers" which I'm... they're my cohort, how, how are we preparing the future, to ensure that people can live independently? You know, March of Dimes Canada has done a lot in supportive housing, enabling people to live independently in their home, we've learned a lot and have great experiences to share. We can change the curve of people needing to go into long term care, and other supportive care environments if we make investments in helping people who live independently in their homes with sometimes very modest supports. You know, a ramp going into somebody's home could be the difference between somebody being able to live there or not. So we can look at how we can help discussions around infrastructure. The employment rate right now is pretty low in Canada. I mean, the unemployment rate. So you've got a workforce now where there's opportunities for people with disabilities. And employers need to be more aware of this labor market... skilled, hardworking individuals who have encountered barriers, attitudinal barriers, sometimes accommodation barriers in the workplace, but I think right now it's more attitudinal barriers where employers are really open minded about the abilities of people with disabilities to be able to contribute to the growth of their organizations and to their missions. So there's opportunities around economic prosperity for for more people in our country. And a disability benefit is, is certainly one means of of helping with that, but so is opening the labor market to more people with disabilities, and creating those opportunities for children in school to develop the skills that they need, and looking at other potential career paths, like skilled trades as viable opportunities for youth and children with disabilities to think about for the future. So I'm very optimistic about about what we can accomplish, because I know the spirit and the resourcefulness and the creativity within the disability community in Canada, and among Canadians, in general, that we always look for a way to support each other. As more people are impacted by disability in our country, I think it'll create, as I was talking with you about more opportunities for collaboration and conversations about what can be done to make Canada the leading country when it comes to innovation in supporting the needs of all people in our country.

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Naomi

Would you say that yourself and March of Dimes Canada is involved in advocating for these other pieces looking into the long term?

Len

Absolutely. You know, at every opportunity with governments across Canada, and with the federal government, even at the municipal level, you know, there's the issues that fall within different jurisdictions that impact people with disabilities. And if one city wants to try something that may have a negative impact on persons with disabilities, we want to make sure that those things aren't replicated in other jurisdictions. So we do our best to stay current with the key issues that governments are addressing. And through our colleagues and other organizations, keeping abreast of what they're working on and supporting those, you know, the whole issue right now with regards to transportation for persons with disabilities and the airlines... you know, that's an issue that has come up over the last year and it's certainly creating a big barrier for people with disabilities and their confidence in using airlines primarily as a means of transport. But we're also seeing it in the taxi and the rideshare industry where people are being discriminated against if they have a guide dog. We've got issues with regards to E-scooters in communities and how safe they are and what impediments they put in place for people with disabilities who may be trying to navigate down the sidewalk when E-scooters are whizzing by them at 30 kilometers an hour... right up to wishes around economic prosperity for Canadians with disabilities and, and being a voice to ensure that the labor market is more accessible and appreciative of the skills of people with disabilities. I think another key thing that employers need to be thinking about as their workforce ages the individuals who are working with them are experiencing different types of disability, whether it is a physical disability in terms of how long they can stay in the chair every day or stare at a screen, to cognitive disabilities that may accompany aging, or to sensory impairments like vision loss or hearing loss. Individuals who develop great skills and abilities will be challenged as we age. And as an Occupational Therapist, you know, this all too well. And all it requires is an accommodation, in many cases to allow a person to continue to do their career, and contribute. So it's really an opportunity for us as a community and as a country, to begin to think differently about disability as an "us and them," you know, there's people with, we're all, one doctor's appointment, or one accident, away from finding out that, hey, maybe March of Dimes Canada could help me with something, or maybe, you know, BALANCE could help me, or Canadian Hearing Society. People just need to know that there's support out there, that there's dignity in all of our lives. But at some point, the landscape around us changes and we need to make a decision ourselves as to how we're going to what level of resilience we have, and want to take in terms of preserving our independence. And the dignity we have in life in organizations, like March of Dimes, Canada and others, that's at the heart of what we do is... we see the opportunities and the joy in life for everybody and there's sometimes very simple solutions that can help somebody and in some cases that may be connecting somebody who feels alone, and lonely. We know mental health issues, obviously, are a key consideration right across our country right now. Coming out of the pandemic, we saw how loneliness and isolation affected people. Nobody felt that more than people with disabilities. But what we were able to do by using technology was reconnect people back to their communities. And so there's always solutions, we just need to be committed to finding them and working together to make it easier for people to navigate through the changes that happen to all of us in our lifetime, and make our society a little friendlier, and open and compassionate to the variances that we all bring to our communities.

Naomi

And on that note, I also want to add that I think when I started out in my career, I thought I had to come up with those answers and solutions. And you know, sometimes I do but at the same time, more often than not, answers and solutions are out there. It's just a matter of listening to the community that you're trying to serve.

Len

And helping people find those. You know, I talked to a lot of people who'd say "it took me months and months to find out that March of Dimes Canada had an After Stroke program, I didn't know you did that. And in the meantime, I've been struggling. My family's been struggling, I wish I had known about you earlier than I did." Right? And I know that BALANCE would hear the same things and CNIB and all the organizations that are out there doing their best to say, "hey, we're here, we want to help." But it's difficult for people to navigate through the myriad of programs and services that are out there. I think that is a real opportunity in our sector to be serious about that challenge. Because as I mentioned, as the population gets older, there's more and more people will be experiencing some type of a disability, or encountering some barriers to their independence and won't know where to turn. And they'll deal with all types of frustration, they may drop out of the labor market, they may leave their homes earlier than they needed to, simply because nobody told them, "hey, there's something out there. There's a Home and Vehicle Modification program that March of Dimes has, that could help you stay in your home." And they say "I had... I didn't know and nobody told me about that." So I just think that that's a really interesting challenge for us to think about how we can work together to change that.

Naomi

I like your call to action to organizations to start talking to each other that's coming through loud and clear throughout our conversation.

Len

Yeah.

Naomi

To the listeners of the show, so hopefully we have people listening in who are in leadership roles or involved in in these agencies. But I also know we have a lot of listeners with sight loss without sight loss.. maybe in a leadership role, maybe not. But to those who are listening at the moment and thinking "maybe I would like to get more involved in advocacy. I would like a seat at the table. And I have ideas about how to make services or legislation more accessible." What advice would you have for them?

Len

If you're interested in creating change in your community... so it could be within your neighborhood. It could be within your immediate community, it could be provincial, federal, it could be international. If you have an interest in helping to change something in the environment around you, you need to find the organizations out there that share your passion. Some of this work may have already started, others may share your interests, and have already started to make strides in addressing those issues. So educating ourselves about who's out there who's doing this work, reaching out to organizations like

March of Dimes, Canada, or CNIB, or our BALANCE whoever, whoever is in your community, Google the issue that you're interested in. If you're you're interested in, you know, "I think they're going to be bringing E-scooters to my community and I'm afraid that it may be a bit of a safety issue for me, who's working on that? Who's dealing with that?" Get in touch with organizations that are sharing their work in those areas. Talk with your government representatives, they also are connected, obviously, to the communities that they serve and would know about organizations that have talked to them about those issues that you're interested in and say "you should talk to so-and-so at March of Dimes Canada, because they were in to talk with me about this last week." So I think that, you know, it's if you have an interest and you want to make a difference, the first thing you need to do is "who do I need to be talking to about this? And how can I..." you know, if you don't feel you have the confidence and skills to do that effectively, then "where can I learn those skills?" And there's any number of resources, March of Dimes Canada, actually, we have a lot of information available and we've, we've developed an advocacy network. So and other organizations have done the same. So it's, it's just a matter of saying "I want to get involved." And I'd like to make that journey as easy for people as possible, to be able to find those resources. And then I think there's some work that we can do in that regard. But I think it takes a little bit of energy to say "yes, I am committed to this" and sticking with it, because you may encounter some barriers and obstacles, where you'll just want to give up, because it seems too frustrating to try to accomplish what you want to do. But I guarantee you, once you make that effort, and you get connected with the right people, and the right resources, it can be so very meaningful, for us to be a champion for good and a force for good in our communities. And I encourage people to follow that interest that they have in wanting to make a difference in their communities. So it's really important.

Naomi

And I know that you've given a lot of challenges over the conversation that we've had. If I can add one of my own, I challenge providers, and whether that's "helping professionals" or whether that's other people who provide services to Canadians with disabilities, is don't be afraid to support people in pursuing those goals around advocacy, because that is really such an essential way to move forward with change on many different levels.

Len

It is and you know, it is really about supporting individuals in their abilities. It's not about speaking for persons with disabilities. But there is a body of knowledge and experience that is out there. So somebody who has recently begun to experience a change in their life. And they're like, "I want to do something about this, I'm, you know, it's too difficult for me to get around my community transit isn't what I thought it was, I used to drive and I can't drive anymore. I had no idea that our public transit system was so poor in my community and I want to change that." You know, getting the information that you need connecting with other consumers who share that concern, learning how to advocate it is a skill, but it starts with passion. And from that passion, anything can be nurtured and flourish. And it's just about who you're talking with, the information that you're getting, to support those conversations that you want to have. Advocacy is an incredibly empowering skill to have, and one that we need to nurture more people in our country to be able to make the types of changes that we want. Which brings us right back to the Canada Disability Benefit, right? The more people know about that benefit, and who will be eligible and have a voice at the table and in designing it will help ensure that this benefit is actually does what it's intended to do. And that those voices are really important to a successful

implementation of this program and for it to reach as many people with disabilities as possible. So I think that there's, you know, all of us have an opportunity to contribute to that conversation. You can become educated about it. There's a lot of information about the Canada Disability Benefit on any number of organizations' websites, right now. Most of us are involved in some way, in helping to shape this legislation. Government obviously has information available about it. But we have an obligation to be current, and thoughtful with regards to what's happening around us, and those that we love and those in our communities. And we can only do that by wanting to stay informed and connected.

Naomi

So we're talking at the moment in November of 2023. Where is the bill right now? And what are next steps?

Len

Well, government has until June to actually say that the bill is, is moving forward. So they have to come back to government and say, "we're enacting this." And then they have a year to work on the all the regulations. So that's who's going to be eligible, you know, the clawback issues, all the details. So it could take until July 2025, for money to actually flow to Canadians with disabilities, we're hoping that the government can work more quickly than that. And we're currently advocating to the government to please, you know, continue to to move this forward. By 2025, it will be five years from the time the Prime Minister announced the Canada Disability Benefit, to it actually being enacted. Um, that seems like a very long time. So I know that there's a lot of anticipation in the community, that government will continue the progress it had made in bringing this legislation forward. But people need to to hold government accountable for its promises, and get involved in this and let their members of government know that this is important to them. And somewhere it is in the journey. And when can we expect this Canada disability benefit to be fully enacted, there's no time to lose and getting that done.

Naomi

Well, in all likelihood, this show should be out in 2024, so there still should be plenty of time for listeners of this show, or viewers of the show, to reach out to their local representative and ask the government to move forward and getting that money in Canadian's pockets.

Len

I agree. Thank you

Naomi

Len, it's been such a pleasure having you on the show. Before you go, can you let us know where listeners can reach out to get in touch with you or with March of Dimes Canada, they'd like to learn more?

Len

Certainly, well, you can find March of Dimes, or our website is MarchOfDimes.ca. I'm on LinkedIn, you can connect with me through March of Dimes Canada as well. I look forward to hearing from from your listeners and viewers with regards to their insights or thoughts on what we've talked about today. And if people are looking for more information, on March of Dimes, Canada, as well as many other

organizations, we have a wealth of good research and information that will be helpful to your listeners.

Naomi

Thanks. Again, thank you so much, Len, and all the best with your future advocacy efforts, both at March of Dimes and in collaboration with all of your partners.

Len

It was pleasure spending this time with you. Thanks for inviting me and here's to a bright future for all of us.

Deborah

Hello, I'm Debra Gould, CEO at BALANCE for Blind Adults. Wasn't that a terrific conversation? We were so pleased when Lynn Baker agreed to be interviewed about the Canada disability benefit. But we definitely got a lot of bonus material in this one, didn't we? Len's leadership in the disability space in Canada really shows in this interview. A career spanning over 30 years means he has had a great deal of time to learn, research and reflect not only on the needs of Canadians with disabilities, but on the need for organizations serving them to work together to strengthen the social safety net, and the fabric of our society. In 2023, BALANCE added the value of "collaboration" as a foundational value to the work we do. So we couldn't agree more with what Len has said in this interview. During our latest strategic review, we discovered that we had not articulated this most foundational value of "collaboration", one that we enact in all our relationships and have done so for the entire 40 years of our existence. Those are our relationships with staff, clients, donors, volunteers and our community partners. Collaboration underpins all of our work, and all of our other values. To read more, go to our website at www.BalanceFBA.org. We hope you've enjoyed this episode, and we'll see you next time. Thank you.