



2023-2028 Strategic Plan

The Way Forward

Removing Barriers
Today. Tomorrow. Together.





Mission

To change what it is to be blind through innovative programs and powerful advocacy that enable Canadians impacted by blindness to live the lives they choose.

Values

- Empowerment
- Inclusiveness
- Innovation
- Passion
- Collaboration
- Integrity

Demanding Change

Message from the Board Chair and CEO

“The time for change is now.”

That’s what people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind from coast to coast are saying, loud and clear. We will not accept the status quo. We can’t keep expecting that “doing the right thing” will be reason enough for society to become accessible, inclusive, and equitable for the 1.5 million Canadians in our community.

We will no longer accept our needs being treated as an afterthought to the design process of programs, products, or services. We must be included from the beginning.

No longer will we wait for change. Now, we demand it.

This is The Way Forward.

Built on the direction and feedback of people with sight loss and their supporters across Canada, we’re proud to introduce The Way Forward, a new, five-year strategic plan that we believe will once again revolutionize the way we serve and support our community nationwide.

For over a hundred years, CNIB has worked alongside our community to move the needle on issues that affect them - inch by inch, day by day. Now we’re ready to be louder, more focused, and bolder than ever before.

And although we know the world can’t be wholly transformed in just five years, it can be shifted. In half a decade, we can and will make a powerful impact that sets a course for lasting change. Instead of an inch, we can move the needle a mile at a time.

This is the time to find our most powerful voices and be relentless in smashing through the barriers people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind face. Our participants deserve to have limitless opportunities in life, and we’ll accept nothing less.



Bob Fenton
Chair, Board of
Directors



John M. Rafferty
President
and CEO

Go online for more.

Visit cnibthewayforward.ca to hear more from our Board Chair and CEO.



Welcome to the Future

A barrier-free world

The Way Forward is so much more than a strategic plan. It is a manifesto for the future that CNIB and the people we serve are working to create together. Although this plan will span five years, it's just the beginning. It's a glimpse into a much larger vision - with an ultimate goal of creating a completely barrier-free society for our community in the decades ahead.

We demand a future in which Canadians who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind...

- live in a world that feels fully inclusive and accessible to them.
- have equitable opportunities in all areas of life, from education to work to social inclusion.
- have affordable access to the cutting-edge assistive technologies they need to live, work, and play independently.
- feel that their level of sight is not a struggle or a hardship, but a part of their lives that can sometimes pose minor inconveniences at most.
- have easy and affordable access to barrier-free transportation, whether they're travelling across town or across the country.
- feel that they're part of a thriving and welcoming community of people who are blind, low vision, or Deafblind nationwide.

We demand a future in which the average Canadian...

- understands how to interact with someone who is blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind in a respectful, inclusive, and welcoming way.
- recognizes that blindness is a spectrum, and every person is unique; each has different experiences, different challenges, and different abilities.
- would hire a qualified person who is blind or partially sighted without hesitation, if given the opportunity.
- understands that members of our community have unique challenges that can require support and accommodations, but also understands they can do just about anything with the right support and accommodations.



**Go online
for more.**

Visit **cnib.ca/future** to read our “**The Future We Demand**” manifesto.



Introducing the CNIB tactile brand

The CNIB tactile brand was part of a collaboration between members of the sight loss community and Zerotrillion, a global creative agency, with the idea of making our brand more inclusive. Together, they explored what CNIB represents - empowerment, inclusiveness, innovation, passion, collaboration, and integrity - and created a brand that tells a story that you can feel, touch, and engage with.





What We Heard



From coast to coast to coast, thousands of people with sight loss are saying the same things: We need the public to respect our abilities and invest in our inclusion, we need safe and accessible transportation options, and we need better support for our children who are blind, low vision, or Deafblind.

Here's a small portion of what we've heard about these issues from our community...

“For me, as an engineering professional, one of the challenges that I encounter daily is access to accessible digital content. I work in the built environment, but my biggest struggle is accessing digital information. When I think of the future, I hope for more awareness. More advocacy. We need to continue to work with businesses, organizations, governments, and the public to ensure that barriers like these are a thing of the past.”

- **Kelly Waldal** | Regina, Saskatchewan

“I think one of the biggest challenges is the lack of understanding by the general public of the mental health impact of sight loss. It's the mental effort required to memorize all the intersections, along every route you take and the stress of having to decide if you're going to take the time to go to the safer, more accessible crossing - because it's inevitably out of the way. And the catch-22 of it all is that the more mental effort and planning and time and energy that we spend, the better we are at overcoming those barriers. But it also means that the challenges of living with sight loss become more invisible to the general public.”

- **Tara Niekamp** | Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

“I’ve been a guide dog handler for 23 years and it’s still shocking when I’m refused service. Lots of people can just jump into a car and drive themselves, but I don’t have that option. I rely on things like [ride share services] and public transportation - and so to be refused service by two drivers in a row, it’s degrading. I shouldn’t have to worry about something as simple as getting to my destination.”

- **Veronika Kanya** | Winnipeg, Manitoba

“In the future, I want to see public awareness and education around what it’s like for people to get around their communities with sight loss. When I venture out on my own, I don’t want to feel dependent on others or feel confined to my home. Technology like autonomous cars opens up a world of possibilities for people with disabilities - and I’m hopeful that the future might include more choice when it comes to getting around. That’s what transportation is for people. It’s choice. It’s freedom. It’s autonomy.”

- **Masood Qazilbash** | Surrey, British Columbia

“I got involved in the [Access to Education Advocacy] group because it was a way for me to improve things in a real and tangible way. Being a part of something that’s actually going to help make change and impact people’s lives - it’s a cool feeling. We visited the Alberta legislature to advocate for more funds and resources in schools, and because we had the chance to talk to the right people, we were able to see a real change in the education system and move the needle for kids with sight loss.”

- **Zach Abdalla**, 15 | Calgary, Alberta

“In the future, I’m hoping for more advanced technology. Maybe it could tell you things like ‘a car is coming’, or maybe a version of [a high-tech] cane that is more advanced or accessible for kids. I hope we can make our communities more accessible, and I know CNIB can help with that.”

- **Abby Walz**, 11 | Kitchener, Ontario



Discovering the Way Forward

Taking direction from our community nationwide

CNIB is an extension of the people we serve, and our strategies are a direct result of the needs and wants of our participants. That's why we've built this strategic plan entirely on the direction and feedback of Canadians who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind.

In 2021, we embarked on the largest consultation process in our history, reaching out to thousands of people with sight loss and their families across Canada - of all ages and from all walks of life.

We travelled from coast to coast to coast and held 45 meetings with our community members, delivered digital surveys to thousands of people, and made thousands of phone calls - all to ensure our plan reflects the needs and goals of the people we serve.

Community consultations

Through community meetings nationwide and thousands of surveys delivered in nine languages, we gathered as much information as possible on the needs, goals, and barriers faced by people with sight loss in daily life and participating in society.

Our goal? To better understand what our community wants and needs from us, now and in the years to come, and to create a strategic plan that drives us to meet those needs.

- Hosted **45** community consultations (in-person and virtual), with **1,300+** participants nationwide
- Deployed three surveys in nine languages that were completed online and over the phone by **4,800+** respondents
- Executed 6-week text message campaign, with **6,400+** responses
- Held focus groups (in-person and virtual), with **125** participants

Our commitments

From this key feedback, we established our three commitments for this strategic plan:

- **Attitude Is Everything:** Increase understanding of blindness and dispel misconceptions about people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind
- **Safe and Accessible Journeys:** Remove barriers and create safe, accessible door-to-door journeys for all
- **Our Kids Will Thrive:** Give parents and children the support they need to excel in and out of the classroom

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

To change attitudes **today**, we must work to remove the largest barriers our community members face in their daily lives, including those created by inaccessible public transportation.

To change attitudes **tomorrow**, we must work harder to help break down barriers for the next generation of Canadians with sight loss, and provide them with the support they need to thrive in and out of the classroom.

To change attitudes **together**, we will amplify the voices of people who are blind and share their stories, loudly and proudly. Our community's stories will engage people across the country - setting us on a path toward real change.

Throughout the pages that follow, you'll learn more about each of our commitments, as well as the innovative plans we have in place to achieve them.



Attitude Is Everything

Increase understanding of blindness and dispel misconceptions about people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind

We'll be bold and unapologetic in increasing understanding, respect, and inclusion in our society for the community of people with sight loss by raising awareness of the barriers and challenges facing our community, as well as their limitless abilities and talents.

Why it matters

Lack of awareness about the realities of life with blindness and sight loss is the

underlying barrier that creates most of the issues for the people we serve, across all parts of their lives - issues from lack of employment opportunities to accessibility barriers to unequal education experiences to social exclusion. Time and again, our community members have told us their greatest challenge isn't what they can or can't do, but what the rest of the world **believes** they can or can't do.

Our efforts

In order to change attitudes, we'll use every tool in our arsenal - from mobilizing our community to pursuing legal action if we need to. Here are just a few of the tactics we'll employ...



- Through large-scale, omnichannel marketing campaigns, increase awareness of the issues facing our community to promote a sense of societal investment in inclusion and equity, and to catalyze the dismantlement of longstanding barriers.
- “Influence the influencers” by establishing national guidelines for positive representation and inclusive language related to people with low vision, and promoting those guidelines among media, government, medical leaders, educators, and content creators.
- Implement a legal defense program to seek damages from businesses and corporations on behalf of people whose rights have been violated because of their sight loss, and support individuals in making human rights complaints themselves.

Intended impact

Our goal is a shift in the mindset in Canada - where inclusivity is the norm, prejudice is a thing of the past, and accessibility is built into every part of our society.

- The average Canadian understands the importance of accessibility for people who are living with blindness or a loss of sight.
- Positive, inclusive language related to sight loss is embraced by the Canadian public, and is particularly embedded in key sectors such as education, health care, media, and government.
- Canadians with sight loss feel seen, heard, and represented in society in a more positive and fulsome way than ever before.



“Most people who have some understanding of blindness have either a family member or a friend or someone in their life who is blind. I’d like to see people who have no connection to blindness have a better understanding of what it is to be blind.”

- **Eitel Houedakor** | Montréal, Québec



**Go online
for more.**

Visit **cnib.ca/attitudes** to learn more about our “Attitude Is Everything” commitment.



Safe and Accessible Journeys

Remove barriers and create safe, accessible door-to-door journeys for all

We'll help create accessible transit options and make travel safer for the community of people with sight loss to get where they need to go, when they need to get there - from the first to the last kilometre.

Why it matters

People with sight loss continue to loudly voice that transportation barriers are among the greatest they face, whether they live in rural or urban environments.

The issue? Inaccessible transportation systems and built environment barriers that put Canadians who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind in dangerous and stressful situations when travelling.

Our efforts

We'll target Canada's decision-makers, political representatives, and transit leaders to remove barriers to travel and create safe, accessible transportation options. Here are just a few of the tactics we'll employ..

- Insist that people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind have a seat at the table in their communities, influencing governments to make local public transit systems accessible and inclusive.

- Recruit and train a new workforce of user testing professionals with diversified lived experience to test and provide recommendations on making our public spaces accessible and usable.
- Develop and utilize technology solutions to provide real-time assistance and support during difficult aspects of an individual’s journey, including when their rights are being infringed upon.

Intended impact

Our goal is to secure smooth and accessible transportation systems, inclusive from the first to the last kilometre, and to remove the cognitive load that comes along with planning and preparing for transit for every trip. This cognitive load creates questions like “What if I miss a bus?”, “What if my crosswalk doesn’t have an accessible pedestrian signal?”, “What if my taxi passes me and I can’t see them?” and many others.

- When taking mass public transit like their sighted peers, people with sight loss are confident about being able to get where they need to go when they need to.
- Innovative solutions are in place for accessible ride share options in rural and remote communities.
- Accountability is in place to ensure people are travelling in a safe, accessible way, free from discrimination.

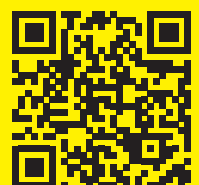


“ In the future, I want people who are blind to be able to travel without thinking about it. I would just be able to go where I want to go, when I want to go, and it wouldn’t be governed by transit stops and trip planning. ”

- **Debbie Gillespie** | Toronto, Ontario

Go online for more

Visit cnib.ca/journeys to learn more about our “Safe and Accessible Journeys” commitment.





Our Kids Will Thrive



Give parents and children the support they need to excel in and out of the classroom

We'll influence change within the education and health care community and enhance supports to children, youth, and their families so that children who are blind or low vision have the same opportunities as their sighted peers.

Why it matters

Parents are saying it loud and clear: they want better support and outcomes for their kids, both in and out of school. Kids who are blind or have low vision aren't receiving the classroom support they need to excel,

while parents who are blind are often unable to participate in their children's education, as assignments, report cards, and other critical communications aren't provided in accessible formats. At the same time, parents report a distinct lack of awareness about living with sight loss among medical professionals, which leads to a lack of information, resources, and guidance.

Our efforts

Ensuring children and families have the support and resources they need to thrive means taking a multipronged approach targeting not only educational barriers, but social and medical barriers as well. Here are just a few of the tactics we'll employ...

- Implement a kids and family program, offering comprehensive supports for youth and families affected by sight loss that expand programs for learning, playing, and living.
- Create a charter of rights for children who are blind or low vision that establishes their educational rights and includes the development of curriculum to increase understanding of blindness early in life and prevent children from learning misconceptions about blindness.
- Establish medical rights that include the need for mandatory comprehensive vision health screenings before a child's first day of school to ensure any potential sight issues are identified and supported as early as possible.

Intended impact

Our goal is to create a future in which children with sight loss and their families feel supported, nurtured, and included through every stage of life, and have access to the tools, opportunities, and resources they need to thrive.

- Parents have improved access to information about the resources available to them and their children, and children have improved access to opportunities, equal to their sighted peers.
- Canadian children universally have their eyes screened before entering school.
- All provinces adopt National Standards of Education for students with sight loss, and all students nationwide are actively learning about sight loss in school.



“ As a parent of a child with sight loss, all I want is for them to have the same access to education as their sighted peers... It can become a financial burden to facilitate an equitable education...that burden should not be falling on families. ”

- **Chris Abdalla** | mother of 15-year-old Zach (pictured) Calgary, Alberta



**Go online
for more.**

Visit **cnib.ca/kids** to learn more about our “Our Kids Will Thrive” commitment.



Working Together for Change



Be the change

Although the world has changed dramatically for people who are blind, partially sighted, and Deafblind over the last few decades, our community continues to face significant barriers in every part of their lives - from work to education to the accessibility of built environments to social inclusion, and on and on.

An integral part of this plan involves engaging passionate allies who are ready and willing to join us in this work.

CNIB cannot tear down these barriers alone. We need support. We need to shout our message from the rooftops and engage everyone we can - including parents of children with low vision, like-minded organizations, political representatives, our community advocates, and the general public - to stand with us.

Our partners

As part of our “Stronger Together” commitment, CNIB works collaboratively with Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada and CNIB Deafblind Community Services to provide holistic support to our shared community - and join forces on the issues that matter most.

VISION LOSS REHABILITATION™

CANADA

CNIB

DEAFBLIND COMMUNITY SERVICES

We're also proud to work in cooperation with many other organizations dedicated to serving people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind worldwide.

You, too, can have an impact

To help us drive this ambitious strategic plan forward, we're asking you and everyone who believes in a limitless future for people with sight loss to work with us today.

- **Volunteer:** Active at every level of our organization, volunteers are key agents in moving CNIB's mission forward. From exciting community programs to national initiatives and leadership roles, there are so many ways to help change what it is to be blind. For volunteer opportunities where you live, visit cnib.ca/volunteer.
- **Advocate:** To create a truly inclusive world where people with sight loss have unlimited opportunities, we need to raise our voices and bring down barriers once and for all. By learning about the issues and joining our advocacy campaigns, you can help make tangible change in your community. To get involved and raise your voice, visit cnib.ca/advocate.
- **Give:** Our work is powered by the generosity of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. CNIB donors help ensure we have the resources to achieve our goals and make real, lasting change. To learn about the many ways you can support CNIB, visit cnib.ca/donate.

Go online for more.

Visit cnib.ca/actionforward to learn more about how you can get involved.



Our Ongoing Impact

Nurturing and expanding our flagship programs

Although the heart of The Way Forward is in public awareness, transportation, and support for children and families, we will continue to proudly nurture our flagship programs, available to people who are impacted by sight loss right across Canada...



CNIB Guide Dogs

We believe everyone in our community who wants a guide dog should have that opportunity. At CNIB Guide Dogs, we raise, train, and match guide dogs with Canadians who are blind or low vision, as well as Buddy Dogs for children who may one day have a guide dog of their own. We also raise our voices to ensure the rights of guide dog handlers are upheld within communities nationwide.

CNIB Mobile Hub

The newly launched CNIB Mobile Hub expands the opportunity to bring our innovative programs to life, right in our participants' backyards. Our Mobile Hub team travels to communities large and small, offering a range of programs from technology training to employment skills workshops to recreational programs like adaptive yoga.



CNIB Come to Work

Our Come to Work program connects job seekers who are blind or low vision with employers who want to discover the full potential of Canada's talent. Through this innovative program, we offer job-readiness workshops and technology training, we partner with employers to create career opportunities, and we foster professional development through mentorships.

CNIB Phone It Forward

Many people don't realize the impact modern smartphones have in the lives of individuals who are blind. Through CNIB Phone It Forward, we collect gently used smartphones; wipe and refurbish them; and give them to people with sight loss who need them - along with training on how to use their new smartphones with confidence.





CNIB Vision Mate

CNIB Vision Mate is our flagship initiative for one-on-one, personal support. The program matches people who are blind or partially sighted with sighted volunteers who provide companionship and assistance with everyday tasks and errands - from labelling and organizing household items to grocery shopping and appointments.

CNIB Scholarships

An investment in learning is an investment in life itself. We're proud to offer a wide range of annual scholarships, bursaries, and other educational awards to people who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind in recognition of their educational aspirations and achievements.



CNIB SmartLife

CNIB SmartLife is an interactive retail experience that gives people who are blind, partially sighted, and Deafblind hands-on access to the latest breakthroughs in assistive technologies, as well as tried-and-true favourites. Our number one goal isn't to sell products; it's to give our participants the skills and confidence they need to make the most out of assistive tools that can help them lead fuller, more independent lives.

CNIB Lake Joe

Located in the heart of Muskoka, Ontario, CNIB Lake Joe is a one-of-a-kind accessible camp that stretches over 12.5 acres on the northwest corner of beautiful Lake Joseph. For over 60 years, CNIB Lake Joe has been providing enriching camp experiences for Canadians with sight loss - where children are encouraged to shine, youth are empowered to thrive, and 'kids of all ages' enjoy recreational pursuits.



There's more where that came from

CNIB offers many other virtual and in-person local programs for people with blindness or low vision of all ages, across all provinces and territories. Discover them all at cnib.ca/programs.



Founded in 1918, CNIB is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today. We deliver innovative programs and powerful advocacy that empower people impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion. Our work is powered by a network of volunteers, donors, and partners from coast to coast to coast.

Stronger Together



Together, we support and stand by Canadians who are blind, partially sighted, or Deafblind.



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