



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
Newfoundland and Labrador

James Dinn, M.H.A.
District of St. John's Centre

June 11, 2026

Dear Panel Members,

I am writing in response to your call for submissions from the public regarding the lack of accessible housing stock in Canada. In my capacity as a Member of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador and as leader of the provincial NDP, I have gained a great deal of knowledge and experience on the issue of housing, through work with my constituents. I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my concerns with you, especially regarding the lack of accessible and affordable stock, in the hope that it will guide your work and the calls for change that will ultimately come about as a result.

According to Statistics Canada, nearly 31 percent of our population lives with at least one disability, four percent higher than the national average. In addition, our province saw one of the fastest increases in the number of those living with a disability between 2017 and 2022. This is unsurprising, because Newfoundland and Labrador is also home to the greatest proportion of seniors, as one out of every four of us is aged 65 or more. As disability rates increase with the age of the population, it comes as no surprise that our province is in great need of accessible and affordable housing, along with a host of other programs and services that would help those with disabilities live independently in their own homes and communities with dignity.

Sadly, investment in the necessary infrastructure and services has not kept pace with demand, either from the provincial or federal governments. Moreover, demographic projections repeatedly show that the number of seniors and those living with disabilities is set to grow even more in Newfoundland and Labrador in the years to come. Despite the repeated warnings, successive governments have shown little interest in planning for the anticipated need.

Any housing policy focused on accessibility should be guided by the principle of “nothing about us without us.” Voices of those living with disabilities must be incorporated into all aspects of planning and implementation. The goal of any individual project should be to uphold the dignity and independence of those whom it is designed to help.

With those goals in mind, I believe that a community-first approach is necessary. Those living with disabilities are more content, healthier, and contribute more to their communities when they face fewer obstacles to living independently and are able to stay

in their homes as long as possible. In my experience, there are significant gaps in services that prevent those with disabilities from living the fullest lives possible. There needs to be investment in four areas with a lens focused on accessibility: transportation, home repair and modification, home care, and housing infrastructure.

Much of the St. John's area is serviced by Metrobus, as well as the GoBus, an accessible paratransit system. However, this service does not extend to the entire metropolitan region, tending to serve only the denser-populated areas. The reliability of service also continues to be an issue, including waitlists and trip cancellations. This causes untold stress and chaos in the lives of those who depend on the GoBus for transit, meaning difficulties in keeping doctor appointments or scheduling other basic services. Outside St. John's and Corner Brook, accessible transit options are extremely limited and those with disabilities have no other option than to rely on taxis where available.

Many individuals are not born with disabilities but develop them either through age, accident, or other circumstances. In such cases, these individuals suddenly discover that their house or apartment needs renovations to make it more accessible. For those who own their own homes, the financial burden of making even modest alterations can be daunting. Although the provincial government is in the process of increasing the income thresholds and amounts available for those in these circumstances, the proposed rates still might not be enough in some circumstances. The provincial Home Modification Program also has a five-year ineligibility period between applications, meaning that some individuals might have to wait that long to make all the necessary changes to make their homes accessible.

In our province, home care and home support services are provided either by agencies who send workers to assist their clients or by independent providers who work individually for one or several individuals. While the agency workers are unionized, they still receive low pay for the services they provide, and independent providers are paid even less. Given the anticipated growth in demand for home care, as well as the goal of independent living in the community, our province must retain the workforce we have and expand it.

However, we cannot do that alone. Much of the pay for home care workers currently comes from the federal government. Our party also believes that home care would be provided more cheaply and effectively were it a public service within the healthcare system. Rather than paying for the profit margins of agencies, we could take that money and provide workers with the higher wages they deserve. Nonetheless, we would still likely need an increase in funding from the federal government to expand the supply of home care workers and transition to a public system. I note that in addition to improving the quality of life for those needing these services, a greater investment would save resources in other parts of the healthcare system, since it would lead to fewer hospitalizations and keep people out of even-costlier personal care and long-term care homes.

Across Canada, those with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty than others. Seniors also make up a significant portion of this group, and most of them live on fixed incomes that are being eaten away by inflation. As a result, those requiring accessible housing are also more likely to face challenges finding such units within their price range. They tend to rely more on non-market options like co-operative facilities, non-profit providers, and public housing. Those living with disabilities might also rely on government-funded rent supplements to find shelter on the market.

Our province needs more non-market and community-based housing stock that is accessible. Currently, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) owns over 5,000 rental units that it provides at rates far below market prices. However, only 95 of these are fully accessible. Although the NLHC plans to incorporate universal design principles in the units it repairs and in a portion of those it builds, demand still vastly outstrips supply. Given the anticipated demographic changes, our province will require greater financial support from the federal government to ramp up construction and unit modification. All future funding for housing construction projects should make extra money available as an incentive to build accessible units according to universal design principles. Financial incentives would also help cash-strapped community groups and non-profits scale up and meet the demand.

Finally, I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the state of accessible housing in Newfoundland and Labrador as you seek input for your report on this matter. I also commend you all for the work you have done to advance the causes of accessibility and inclusion. We cannot have a democratic and functional society if so many of our friends and neighbours face insurmountable barriers to participation in it.

Sincerely,



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