

Backgrounder: Expanding D/deaf and Deafblind Services in Saskatchewan

A re-elected Saskatchewan Party government will provide increased support for persons with a disability in Saskatchewan by enhancing funding over the next three years for Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada and Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to address service gaps for the D/deaf and Deafblind population in Saskatchewan.

Background:

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Saskatchewan Party government funded the first year of a four-year joint proposal between the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to enhance Deafblind community intervenor services and American Sign Language (ASL) Deaf interpreter services in Saskatchewan.

Funding in the 2020-21 Budget for the first year of the program included:

- Providing \$96,500 to Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada to establish Deafblind Community Services here in Saskatchewan and providing professional support services to Deafblind persons by:
 - Hiring one Deafblind intervenor, and;
 - Providing daily one-to-one intervenor services to four people who are Deafblind.
- Providing \$253,000 to Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to expand their delivery of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services for persons who are D/deaf or hard of hearing in accessing services to participate in their community. Expanded services include:
 - Hiring one additional ASL interpreter;
 - Hiring two sign support professionals, and;
 - Enhancing their 24-hour interpreter line to include access to intervener services.

Saskatchewan Party Platform Commitment:

- Over the next three years, a Saskatchewan Party government will provide additional funding between the two organizations to hire:
 - Three additional Deafblind intervenors;
 - Three new ASL interpreters;
 - One additional sign support professional, and;
 - One new case manager.
- The total cost of the program when fully developed will be \$1M annually.

Further Background:

- Deafblindness is a combined loss of hearing and vision that causes significant isolation.
- According to CNIB, there are an estimated 149 Deafblind persons in Saskatchewan.

- Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing currently provides ASL services to approximately 1,200 citizens in Saskatchewan.
- An intervenor is a professional with specialized training to help Deafblind people by facilitating access to information about their environment that would otherwise be gained through hearing and vision. The intervenor helps persons who are Deafblind to gather information that they are unable to gather on their own, learn concepts and skills, develop communication and language and establish relationships that lead to greater independence.
- An ASL interpreter interprets between people who use a signed language and a spoken language.
- Sign support professionals facilitate communication between a deaf person and a hearing person.
- In 2020/21, the Ministry of Social Services provided:
 - \$1.9M to Canadian Deafblind Association-Saskatchewan Chapter to provide support to eleven Deafblind individuals (ten adults and one child) in three Community Living group homes and, day programming to nine Deafblind individuals.
 - \$627,300 to Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to provide interpreting services for persons requiring the same dealing with the courts, police, medical, educational and employment sectors.
- Supporting the enhancement of D/deaf and Deafblind services in Saskatchewan supports the Saskatchewan Party government's goal of making Saskatchewan the best place in Canada for persons with disabilities.
- The enhancement of D/deaf and Deafblind services builds on the Saskatchewan Disability Strategy and the future Saskatchewan Accessibility Act, which is intended to remove and prevent accessibility barriers that restrict people with disabilities from enjoying full access and participation in their communities.

Cost:

- **2021-22: \$600K**
- **2022-23: \$870K**
- **2023-24 and annually: \$1M**