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Disabilities of the Standing Committee on Human
Resources, Skills Development, Social
Development and the Status of Persons with
Disabilities**

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Mr. Ken Boshcoff

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.)): Welcome. The hour being precisely 3:30, we will commence.

We're glad to have you here, and now that Peter has joined us, please begin.

Mrs. Susan Scotti (Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security Programs, Department of Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're delighted to be here today, and I hope this signals a long and close collaborative working relationship with the members of the committee.

We understand that you would like us today to provide some background information and data on persons with disabilities, as well as general information about the government programs and some of our current areas of focus. So we will do that.

[Translation]

I would like to introduce the members of my team who are with me today.

[English]

They are Cecilia Muir, who is the director general of the Office for Disability Issues; Georges Grujic, the director of programs with the Office for Disability Issues; Susan Williams, the director general of the disability benefits and appeals branch; and Nancy Lawand, the director of CPP disability policy.

We provided to the clerk some advance copies of material in both official languages, which I assume you all have. The presentation is a high-level one and I'll go through it fairly quickly to allow us to get on with some discussion and questions and answers.

If you turn to the deck called "Disability in Canada" and to the slide on page 2, it essentially provides an overview of some of the seminal legislation and major reports that have had a major impact on the advancement of disability issues in Canada. It's a pretty long history that dates back to the 1950s.

[Translation]

We note an evolution over the course of the second half of the 20th century, which has turned out to be a radical change. Today, services and policy are truly focused on integration.

[English]

We have a very strong legislative framework for building a Canada that is inclusive. We're the first country in the world that has included the question of persons with disabilities in the Constitution. Our legislative framework includes the Human Rights Act, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Employment Equity Act, which provide three fundamental cornerstones for a very strong legal framework that supports persons with disabilities.

On the international front in the 1980s, the UN International Year of Disabled Persons was followed by the UN Decade of Disabled Persons, from 1983 to 1992. This is notable in the sense that it reflects an important period in which disability issues and discussions around inclusion began to be first articulated in Canada.

Since that time there have been a number of key studies, which have identified the issues that need to be addressed and helped guide the way forward in terms of providing responses, both from a policy and program perspective, to support the objective of full inclusion. A key report was the *Obstacles* report in 1981, the parliamentary report that identified the key obstacles faced by Canadians, and two parliamentary committee reports since 2002 that have reflected the progress we have been making.

The third slide presents a picture essentially of the life cycle that we need to look at when we think of disability. Disability is a dynamic that requires a range of responses depending on where you sit in terms of demographics and the nature of your disability. There are 3.6 million Canadians who have a physical or mental disability. That's one in eight Canadians in our population.

There are significant differences between populations in terms of the rates of disabilities. For example, women are more likely than men to have a disability, regardless of age. For aboriginal adults, 31% have a disability. That's twice the national average. It's a group that has a greater susceptibility to diabetes among children. There's a high incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in this population group. We see differences in educational attainment, differences in employment, and differences in income. In all these areas, for persons with disabilities, the incidence is much lower than the general average for the rest of the population.

The category of family caregivers I think is a very important category to look at. The disability has an impact on more than just the person who has the disability. People need support in their homes. They need income assistance. They need flexible working arrangements. Family caregivers are experiencing fairly serious challenges. There's financial stress. There are physical and mental problems and in some instances some conflicts in terms of work and family life.

On page four, the slide is meant to reflect the fact that there are many players involved in the field of disability, and many provide disability services and supports. If you're a person with a disability looking at this system from the outside, you're presented with a very complex picture of where to access the necessary supports and services. It's a picture that suggests not all of this works well together.

It's one of the challenges that I think we, as government, have. It's a fundamental role that we have been asked to play in the Department of Social Development, in terms of leading both the horizontal and the vertical alignment of the various supports and services that are available for persons with disabilities. So it's necessary that we go beyond the jurisdictional barriers as well to try to work toward a coherent system of programs and services for our client group.

● (1535)

On slide five, while the picture of who is doing what and the varying roles and responsibilities is a complex one, there is a consensus that has emerged on areas of need and areas that need particular focus that have enabled us to move forward in terms of our policy work and our work with our provincial partners. The federal government worked with provinces to produce a seminal report called *In Unison*, which articulates the vision that essentially identifies the three critical areas that need work in order for us to move forward on our objective of full inclusion for persons with disability.

The first area, the first pillar, essentially is employment. Successful participation in the labour market is a key element of full inclusion, and one of the goals is very much to increase the labour market participation rate of persons with disabilities from the current 44% level.

The other area is income, which can help produce a source of financial resources in order, again, to promote inclusion and support the well-being of individuals with disability.

The last area is the whole area of disability supports, which is the question of access to the range of supports, aids, devices, personal assistance, and environmental accommodation that persons with disability need in their homes, in their workplaces, in their schools, and in their communities.

All of this is designed to promote access and inclusion, the two cornerstones of all the work we're engaged in.

Slide six provides a picture of the Government of Canada expenditures in the area of disability: \$7.5 billion in 2003-04. The federal disability report, which I think you have all received in your briefing packages, goes into more detail about all the various programs that the 26 departments are engaged in and is a key

accountability document for us in measuring the results that we are achieving over time through our investments. You'll see from the chart that the majority of federal activity is concentrated in income measures, including both earnings replacement and pensions through the Canada Pension Plan disability program and tax measures through the disability tax credit.

Investments in learning and employment are the other major investments. We have the labour market agreement for persons with disabilities and the opportunities fund that support the employment objectives of persons with disabilities and the social development partnerships program that is a key instrument in supporting capacity and inclusion. Canada study grants for students with permanent disabilities are also a major source of support targeted for students with disabilities.

The next slide focuses on Social Development Canada's work around developing information and knowledge for Canadians and for internal partners. You'll see that our work again is lined up around income support measures, work on employment and learning opportunities, the work that we do with community organizations in building capacity and promoting inclusion and the whole area of developing an adequate base of knowledge and data on the state of play of persons with disabilities.

The Office for Disability Issues is a focal point for the government in working with our key partners to develop that knowledge base and to promote the horizontal management of disability issues and to disseminate information.

In social development, the other focal point for our work is the CPP disability program, which is, on the income side, the largest long-term disability program, which provides a basic earning replacement. We'd be pleased to talk to you about some of the improvements we're making in that program to make it more client-centred and to support a return to work of our clients.

● (1540)

In terms of where do we go from here, the last slide suggests that there are a lot of opportunities to move forward and move forward in an active way.

An area that underlines a lot of our work is the consideration of trying to bring some coherence and coordination among all those different programs and services that were displayed in the chart, both at the federal level and in the federal-provincial-territorial arena.

We've advanced a fair bit, we think, in the area of employment supports for persons with disability, but there's still a fair distance to go in the area of income and in the area of disability supports. We're currently very engaged with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners in jointly looking at how we can identify some opportunities to move forward in both those areas.

There is a federal-provincial-territorial working group on benefits, which Cecilia co-chairs with Ontario, that has been tasked to do this work and will be reporting to ministers in the FPT social services ministers forum later this spring.

We very much welcome this interchange with the committee and I hope that this brief overview will have provided a bit of information to support a discussion. We're pleased to be here to answer the questions you will have.

• (1545)

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Chair, how much time do we have for questions? We didn't set a time.

The Chair: No, we didn't. Essentially, today's agenda is this presentation, for as long as we want, and then we'll set the work program for the coming term.

If you'd like to be first, please go ahead.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Okay.

I want to thank you very much for coming today. I hope you will take all my comments as a mother of a disabled child. I tend to be a mother bear about disability issues and I'm going to ask some very difficult things of you.

How many of you work at 15 Eddy Street? Do any of you work there?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: The Office for Disability Issues is located at 15 Eddy Street. Actually, it's located in four different locations, but it includes 15 Eddy Street.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I received a letter the other day, or my office did, talking about that office. To verify what that letter said to me, I have a bunch of pictures here that we will circulate to all members of the committee and to the chairperson.

I have some real problems with that building. It is not accessible as far as I'm concerned. The closest public parking is a pay lot one and a half blocks away from the building. It is a steep gravel lot that has no handicapped spots. There are only metered non-reserved spots that exist off Eddy Street. There are three on-site handicapped spots. They are not marked, impossible to see, and one of the three spots was accompanied by a non-stickered car. The three on-site spots are marked "permit parking only" and there are no public spots. The front door of that office has lots of buttons but no instructions, with nobody tending the call box for at least ten minutes. The call box button is very small and it's not accessible to anyone with difficulties. The large button for the wheelchair was full of bird droppings and it doesn't open the doors. Inside, the halls are very narrow. If a person had problems with a wheelchair, it would make it very difficult to pass two chairs in that hall. The elevator is small and only good for 550 pounds. Steven Fletcher, our critic for health, has a wheelchair that alone is 750 pounds. There's no emergency phone in that elevator and the second floor has a blocked door, no access, and no call box.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't think this says very much about the office of the director general of the Office for Disability Issues of this country. I would appreciate having something done about that office. I would like to have the other offices checked to make sure that those

problems are not evidenced there. We will distribute this if I can get everyone's e-mail address. We'll make sure that we have them. If the clerk will get that for us, we will send the pictures around to all the members of the committee and to yourselves. I have the pictures here. They are very small right now, but they are taken and they are of the building. That is my one request and I would like to have that done.

I want to know, do you have a working relationship with Canada Mortgage and Housing for people with disabilities?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Yes, we do. It is one of the agencies we deal with.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I have a young couple who bought a home before the one person was disabled. To get a mortgage with Canada Mortgage and Housing they had to take out life insurance and disability insurance. One member of the couple became disabled. Canada Mortgage and Housing says that after five years they will no longer negotiate a new loan with them. The institution they are dealing with is still charging them every month for both their life insurance and their disability insurance. Is that what happens to people who are dealing with Canada Mortgage and Housing?

• (1550)

Mrs. Susan Scotti: I can't answer that, Ms. Skelton. I'll have to—

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Will you get an answer for me, please? I would like to find out if it is normal that the financial institution is still charging them the premium every month on both their life insurance and their disability insurance. That's one question.

In response to the committee's report in raising adult literacy skills the government indicated that it would consider including the enhancement of literacy skills in the focus of the multilateral framework for labour market agreements for persons with disabilities. Has this been done?

Mr. Georges Grujic (Director, Programs, Department of Social Development): It's one of the priorities in the labour market agreement in terms of skill sets.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Has it been done?

Mr. Georges Grujic: In terms of literacy? Not specifically in literacy, per se, but in terms of providing support at the provincial level for skill sets. If people need help for job access they can get training for that.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: How are you working with the provinces on that? Are you working with the provinces on that?

Mr. Georges Grujic: Not directly on that, but it's part of the reporting. We'll see how they report on the baseline and see what areas they're focusing on so we have an idea what they're addressing in terms of the areas. They have five options they can work on with the labour market. Those are their programs; we have to see how their programs affecting—

Mrs. Carol Skelton: When will this report be done?

Mr. Georges Grujic: It will be December 2005.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: According to Social Development Canada's performance report 2003-04, your office committed to undertake a special review of federal labour market programming for persons with disabilities and to complete this review by fall 2004. Has this review been completed?

Ms. Cecilia Muir (Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Department of Social Development): Yes, it has been completed. As a result of that we were given some recommendations to look at for the potential of overlap between employment-related programs for persons with disabilities. One of the key outcomes of this is that we're looking at one of our programing instruments, the opportunities fund, and we are planning to reorient that away from employment likely towards a broader set of social interventions, because the potential did exist for overlap.

The findings did tell us that there is no actual overlap happening; it was the potential that was seen to be there. It was being managed by the actual administrators and managers of the program to prevent that from actually happening, but we do need to reorient the program in order to avoid that happening in the future.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Will the results be made public?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Yes, they will be.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Can you share those results with us right now?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Of the actual employment review?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Yes.

Ms. Cecilia Muir: What I just said is the high-level result. In terms of the reorientation of the program, which I mentioned, there's a plan that will take place over the next two years to actually reorient it completely.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I will quote the Library of Parliament brief:

Amendments to the Canada Pension Plan included in Bill C-30 (An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on 23 March 2004) were passed by the House of Commons in May 2004. These amendments provide for reinstatement of a disability pension if, within two years, the beneficiary becomes incapable again of working. For these amendments to come into force, the lieutenant governor in council of each of at least two thirds of the included provinces, having in the aggregate not less than two thirds of the population of all of the included provinces, must signify the consent of that province to the enactment. The Department is still awaiting provincial orders-in-council.

How many provinces have signified their consent to this?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: They all have right now. We have full consent and in fact the regulations have been passed.

• (1555)

Ms. Susan Williams (Director General, Disability Benefits and Appeals, Department of Social Development): The legislation came into force on Monday. It's now in force.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you very much, I appreciate that.

In response to the subcommittee's report, *A Common Vision*, the government completed a review of definitions of disability in use in federal disability programs with a view to harmonizing them. What were the key findings and conclusions of this review?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Can you repeat that, Ms. Skelton?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Sorry, I'm trying to go really fast here.

In response to the subcommittee's report, *A Common Vision*, the government completed a review of definitions of disability in use in federal disability programs with a view to harmonizing them. What were the key findings and conclusions of this review?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Actually you have in your package of material the report that summarizes the findings. We gave you a great deal of material, but I'd be very happy to come back with a much shorter summary of the key findings. I can't give you a lot of detail on it right now, but I can get that to you very quickly, before the end of the week.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: What actions have you taken to make sure everything is straight across the board in all departments?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: It's not a report; it's actually a product that is set out and shared interdepartmentally, federally and provincially. It actually talks about the definitions and gives general guidelines. What it does recognize is that it's very difficult to actually come to specific consensus across jurisdictions because different provinces handle things in different ways. But what it sets out are a set of principles and guidelines for what should govern the approach to various definitions of disability to create some order and coherence. It provides a touchstone that everybody can use across the government with FPTs, which creates greater coordination, basically.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Can we just add something? I think we can give you an example of where we are starting to take some action, where there are differences in definition but we are trying to work together so that there is a bit of harmonization in the way the different mechanisms work together.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I'd very much appreciate it.

Ms. Susan Williams: One area in particular, Ms. Skelton, as you are aware, is the issue of the same words having different meanings in the disability tax credit and the Canada Pension Plan disability. This came up a lot.

We've been working very closely with the Canada Revenue Agency to try to identify administrative means to clarify the processes and communicate more clearly the different meanings and to see if there are any options for trying to harmonize the administrative steps we go through. We're exploring with CRA, at this very moment, the possibility of some sort of pilot process that might allow the two agencies to look at trying to screen applicants for CPP disability, for both benefits at the same time, to see if there's some way we could work together.

So we are trying to explore ways that while not actually changing the definitions and legislation might have the same impact in terms of lessening the burden on clients.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, do you prefer that we ask one question at a time, or that we ask all of them at the same time and ask people not to answer until they have heard all of them?

[English]

The Chair: I think the approach Ms. Skelton took seems to be working for us, so let's continue with that. I would think so, unless the group has a better way.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I would like to make sure there is a clear understanding. Can we make sure in advance that everyone has a precise time limit? One person was entitled to a 15-minute presentation. Can we impose a limit so that we all get to have our turn? I said 15 minutes, but it may have been 13 minutes.

[English]

The Chair: Really, we were looking at ten minutes, and Ms. Skelton was slightly over, so by the time the response came—

• (1600)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Sorry.

The Chair: That's fine, and I think ten minutes is probably the ballpark we can all agree on. Then we'll start again after that, but I know there are lots of questions, so we will have a full agenda.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: That's for sure.

I have received the same letter as Ms. Skelton about the accessibility of the Gatineau offices. For offices to be inaccessible is not too impressive.

Here is my first question. How many offices are there? In the National Capital Region and centre of the country, how many of those offices are accessible? When I talk about accessibility, I am not just talking about physical accessibility, I am also talking about accessibility for people with visual impairment, the blind, the hard of hearing and the deaf. Is there a telephone system that meets their needs?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: The Office for Disability Issues currently has four locations. The main location, the original one, is at 25 Eddy

Street. That is a fully accessible site, equipped with accessible washrooms and doors. So that location is very well equipped for people with disabilities. That is where we hold all of our meetings with stakeholders and clients.

In the past three or four years, the office has grown. That is why it is now located in four different spots. However, it is a temporary situation. It is not a permanent arrangement. Our experts, who work with Public Works, tell us that there is a long-term plan to bring the different Office for Disability Issues premises together under one roof. We hope that this can be done sometime this year, or next year at least. So we are going to be bringing the whole division together at a single location.

It is true that our main location, 25 Eddy Street, is the most accessible site. However, the other sites meet federal government standards. That does not mean that they are excellent sites. The main location is still the best.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Are you talking about 15 rue Eddy?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: No, 25 rue Eddy is the main site. That is the original, central site. Because of growth in the Office for Disability Issues, it has taken up space at 15 Eddy. That is where the director general is; that is not where our meetings with stakeholders or the public are held. It also has some space in Vanier, and in Place du Portage.

Mr. Peter Julian: Has an accessibility audit been done on those four locations?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: The locations have been verified, and we have been told that they meet the acceptability standards of the Government of Canada. They were recently checked, and this has been verified by Public Works.

Our plan in the not too distant future—

Mr. Peter Julian: Sorry to interrupt, but was it an accessibility audit? You know what I mean by that.

Ms. Cecilia Muir: An accessibility audit, per se... I don't believe.

Georges, are you aware if one has been done?

Mr. Georges Grujic: The one at 25 Eddy has been audited and looked at. The others have not.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Are there provisions for TTY accessibility in all four of those offices?

• (1605)

Ms. Cecilia Muir: I believe so. That's a government standard.

Mr. Peter Julian: So the TTYs are functional; the personnel have been trained in the use of TTY technology.

Mr. Georges Grujic: We have TTY capability. I can speak about 25 Eddy because it's where my office is. We have a couple of officers who have access to TTY to provide that service for clients.

I cannot tell you about 15 Eddy or the other two spaces. We'll have to check to see if the capacity is there for that. But if we have to have a meeting, using that kind of technology or not, we would use the 25 Eddy office.

Mr. Peter Julian: But you will be able to come back to us and provide us with more information on the accessibility of those four offices.

Mr. Georges Grujic: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Are there locations outside of the national capital region as well?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: No.

Is that clear, Mr. Julian?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, it's clear. It's not the answer I wanted, but it's clear.

The second set of questions is around the staff for the Office for Disability Issues. What percentage of them are people with disabilities? How is that broken down in terms of type of disability?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: We don't have an exact number. I can get back to you with that number. We do have staff who have disabilities, but I can't give you an exact percentage. The majority are at 25 Eddy, but I can come back to you with an exact number in short order.

Mr. Peter Julian: The majority of the employees are at 25 Eddy, but how many employees are there overall, and what percentage are people with disabilities?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: There are 84 employees overall. The percentage of persons with disabilities I can't give you right now, but I can come back to you.

Mr. Peter Julian: As part of the role you undertake, do you do comparative studies of accessibility in other jurisdictions? I'll give you an example, of course, which is the standard in North America—unfortunately, the Americans With Disabilities Act. I say unfortunately because Canada is far behind in a number of different areas compared to the United States, which should be a source of shame for all Canadians.

Do you compare programs that exist in Canada and accessibility standards in provinces across the country to the American jurisdictions, or other foreign jurisdictions?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: We would not undertake that kind of research ourselves. We would engage in that research with something like the Canadian Council for Social Research, the Roeher Institute, or a comparable institute.

Mr. Peter Julian: Have you done that over the past few years?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: To my understanding, we haven't contracted a specific study of that type, but my colleague may be able to correct me.

Mr. Georges Grujic: There have been a number of studies by national disability organizations in this area. They wouldn't be done across the country, but they might be specific to a regional issue or a disability issue. For example, the Hard of Hearing Association might do a study looking at hard-of-hearing access in schools. So there are studies that have gone through that. Organizations do those kinds of reviews and provide that research for us.

Mr. Peter Julian: So organizations that want to do those sectoral studies could approach the office for funding to do that.

Would you be able to supply the committee with a list of studies that have been undertaken over the past five years?

Mr. Georges Grujic: Yes, I will provide you with that. Do you want all the studies, or just specifically those on accessibility?

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like all of the studies.

• (1610)

Mr. Georges Grujic: There are probably 175 of them.

Mr. Peter Julian: You would be able to provide us with the list, not the studies. We'd be able to cherry-pick the studies.

You're getting a bit of a grilling today because we've been waiting for a number of months to actually get into these important issues. As I'm sure you're aware, the issues for people with disabilities across the country are pretty substantial. Coming from British Columbia and a background of working with people with disabilities, I can tell you the quality of life for people, at least in our part of the country, is in serious decline. That's my next question, which I guess will have to wait until the next round.

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Is it because I'm not a regular member of the committee that I come after Mr. D'Amours?

[English]

The Chair: No. Both of you are guests today, replacements, so I just thought with two opposition members we'd give Mr. D'Amours a chance.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Boshcoff, I'll give you a chance to give Mr. D'Amours a chance, I am nice. But don't forget me.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd also like to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois.

Briefing sessions are for briefing. Perhaps you could brief me on certain things that we are less aware of. It's encouraging to see how the situation has evolved over the years, and that we are now heading toward integration. When you talk about improving quality of life, that also has an impact on integration into the work force and elsewhere.

But could you give me some details? Is there a downward or upward trend in the number of people with a physical or mental disability? I'm thinking, for example, of fetal alcohol syndrome and illnesses of that kind, which have an impact on newborns. Do the studies that have been done show any improvement in that area? Could the improvement be associated with greater education, and people being more careful about certain things? You can't control what happens 100 per cent, but can you target this kind of thing, in the expectation that fewer and fewer cases may occur? Can you identify what has an impact, positive or negative, on the situation?

[English]

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Maybe I can start and my colleagues can jump in.

I think you ask a very important and significant question, but it's a question to which there is not an immediately evident answer. The reason for that is we do not have longitudinal data on persons with disabilities in most areas; it's a real gap we have.

So from an anecdotal perspective we could probably say that in the employment area we're closing the gap a little bit more, but there's still quite a significant gap when you compare persons with disabilities to the general population.

Due to the fact that we're an aging society, the incidence of disability, as a result of that demographic, is probably going to continue; it's going to grow, particularly among seniors.

So to get at the picture we would like to be able to paint that would show evidence of progress, we need to establish some kind of baseline data, and we've been looking at how to do that. I'd like to think we're going to be able to make some progress in that area in the next short while.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You say that the number of people with disabilities is increasing with the increasing age of the population. Could we say that for ages 0 to 14, starting at birth, more awareness raising and education is being done to try to avoid certain situations that are risk factors and that we may have some control over? Could we say that attempts are being made along these lines to improve the situation?

• (1615)

[English]

Mrs. Susan Scotti: With prevention, for example, in the health sphere.... A lot has been done through scientific research and greater detection at the early stages of illnesses. Through those measures there are preventable illnesses, which in the past have caused long-term disability, that have made quite a difference. But as I indicated in the presentation, you also have to look at this from the perspective of different population groups. Among aboriginals there are particular issues that still need to be dealt with in terms of prevention, particularly around the fetal alcohol syndrome issue.

I don't know if others want to add anything.

[Translation]

Ms. Susan Williams: I don't know whether it's a general trend in the population, but when it comes to disability benefits, we have over the past 10 or 15 years seen a large increase in the number of

people with mental disabilities. For example, the number of people receiving benefits has gone from 12 per cent to 25 per cent roughly. It has doubled. The number of people with disabilities who are receiving benefits changes constantly. There are fewer conventional disabilities like those of the past. The disabilities are more complex, multiple, they are disabilities that are both physical and mental. For the population as a whole, it could be associated with stress and the pressures we encounter in life.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I'll come back to the CPP next round.

I'd like to come back to the issue of integrating people with disabilities. It's very important, because every citizen has his or her dignity. It's not always easy to enter the labour market, and your income depends on that. If you're not working, your income is lower. Also, in a lot of cases, your income is not very high either way. There's also the whole issue of integrating people into the community.

First, could you give me a few examples of programs or initiatives that help these people to supplement their income, that enable them to find a job, that facilitate their integration into the work force? Second, are there any initiatives to facilitate access to and integration into the community?

Mr. Georges Grujic: We have the \$30 million Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. That is used in the regions and with national organizations to help individuals who don't have a job and to provide them with access to employment insurance. They receive assistance, payments in the areas of employment and sports. Out of \$30 million, around \$20 million goes to the regions and around \$5 million goes to national organizations. That reaches roughly 4,000 people.

There is \$223 million in labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, and that is done in cooperation with the provinces. Through this program, approximately 200,000 people may find work and be integrated into the labour market.

Those are the two main programs under which we work together. One of the programs is the department's, the other is a program that is carried out in cooperation with the provinces to integrate those people.

The federal government itself could do programs. For example, if a person needs technology or assistance in order to find work, we provide funds to access those services. Those are the three things we work with.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That's for employment?

• (1620)

Mr. Georges Grujic: That's for employment.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: When it comes to the community, is there something to promote access to the community for these people?

Mr. Georges Grujic: We work with a list of 500 projects, in cooperation with national organizations. They bring forward their projects, their research, their partnerships, their contributions. We work together in the communities.

There is also a program called Community Inclusion, for people with mental disabilities. We have a project with two groups, People First and the Canadian Association for Community Living, which help people with mental disabilities in the community to integrate into both society and the labour market. That's one example. That represents \$3 million.

The Chair: Ms. Demers, please.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here.

I'd like to ask a few questions of Ms. Scotti, Ms. Williams and Mr. Grujic, and perhaps Ms. Muir too.

Ms. Muir, I was a bit worried when you said earlier that you were at 15 Eddy Street temporarily, and that people had to come to see you there. How long have you been, and how much longer will you be, there temporarily?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: I'm totally new and I'm not sure I can tell you how long the offices have been located there. Excuse me, but I have to ask my colleague here.

Mr. Georges Grujic: For around two and a half years. One of the problems at 25 Eddy Street is that there's room for 45 to 50 people. But as Ms. Muir explained, there are around 87 of us.

We have done some looking, and Public Works has designated 16 locations of the kind we currently occupy. The problem is that it's hard to find a place that can accommodate all 87 people and be accessible to everyone.

Ms. Nicole Demers: After what my colleague, Ms. Skelton, said, are you going to make representations in order to get, at the very least, parking spaces for people who need your services, and to enable people who wish to challenge or open a file to access your offices? Can we count on you to make representations on that?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: We will no doubt follow up with Public Works on these issues and see what we can do to fix or improve the situation.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Would you be so kind as to come back to us and tell us what decisions have been made?

• (1625)

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Yes. In addition, insofar as accessibility standards are concerned, I would suggest that the committee consider consulting the experts from Public Works. They are truly the federal government experts on that.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Okay.

Ms. Williams, I'd like to know how it is determined that a disability creates an entitlement to benefits, and who makes that decision.

The reason I ask is that recently, someone who had had a laryngectomy came to see me at my office. This person had taken part in a one-year pilot project in which 10 people who had had laryngectomies were given a filter of vastly superior quality to the filters normally used. Thanks to that filter, this person could go outside and walk and perhaps even go back to work. With the filters that are currently used, you can't breathe outside.

These people were told they weren't entitled to disability benefits because they could maintain a conversation for at least 15 minutes. I'm wondering how that kind of determination is made. If I cut one of my feet off, I would have a disability, but I could still walk. Would I be denied disability benefits because I could still walk? I have trouble understanding why a person who has had a laryngectomy, and therefore actually has a disability, couldn't get benefits, on the pretext that the person can hold a conversation with someone, however difficult it may be.

Ms. Susan Williams: I should perhaps point out that when a file is examined, no attempt is made to determine the severity of the disability. Our assessors attempt to determine an individual's ability to do a given job, not the individual's ability to do a job for a sustained period of time nor necessarily the individual's ability to do the job he or she was doing before the incident or illness that caused the disability.

The condition is significant, but it happens often enough that if two people have the same medical condition, one of them is able to continue working and the other is not. Accordingly, after the decision, one person would get disability benefits and the other wouldn't. It therefore cannot be said that such and such a condition automatically entitles you to disability benefits.

It's a very complicated program, and one that is very difficult to understand. I am the first to admit it. There is one thing that we try to get across and explain as well as possible, but that we could perhaps communicate even better. When we tell someone that we unfortunately cannot give him or her disability benefits, we don't say that he or she doesn't have a disability, we say that he or she does not meet the standards of our program, which are contribution standards, i.e., you have to have contributed for four of the last six years. In order to meet the standards, you also have to have a disability, a medical condition that makes you unable to do sustained work of some kind. I don't know if that answers your question.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Not entirely.

Ms. Susan Williams: I don't know the details of the case, but perhaps that wasn't explained properly to the person in question.

Ms. Nicole Demers: I can see that it's possible.

Ms. Nancy Lawand (Director, CPP Disability Policy, Department of Social Development): If there's a specific case you would like to look at with us, we could discuss that in person.

Ms. Susan Williams: Yes, give us the details, we can follow up. When we have to tell someone that he or she won't be getting benefits, we try to explain why we had to say no. If we haven't explained that properly, we are quite happy to try to answer questions, and your questions as well.

Ms. Nancy Lawand: I feel compelled to point out that turning somebody down on the basis that he can hold a 15 minute conversation is not consistent with our eligibility criteria. Something has gone wrong there, that is not how we deal with requests.

Ms. Susan Williams: If you would be willing to give us the details of the case, we could follow up on it and try to get in touch with the person concerned.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much.

Mr. Grujic, you said that there is a budget of only \$3 million for employment programs aiming to integrate people into the work force.

Mr. Georges Grujic: The Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities has a \$30 million budget.

Ms. Nicole Demers: But that amount is shared amongst different programs.

Mr. Georges Grujic: Yes, nationwide. The regions receive around \$21 million and there are around \$5 million for national programs and groups. We are serving some 4,000 people.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Are these programs which offer real employment opportunities or are they simply offering short-term employment? We all know that there are many short-term employment programs for persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, with the exception of the People First movement, there are no programs for integrating persons with disabilities to long-term jobs. The People First movement has proved to be very successful on this front, but it does not have enough money to continue with its good work. I wonder if we should be investing more money in programs with a proven track record of integrating persons with disabilities into long-term employment.

I have met with people who have been in employment for five, seven or eight years. Their employers are extremely satisfied. The employees gain a strong sense of self-worth through their work, and feel that they are fully part of society. That is very important. The other programs of which I am aware and which I have used are short-term programs. Unfortunately, they do not lead to full-term or long-term employment.

Could you explain why we invest more in short-term employment programs than in long-term employment programs? While these programs employ more people for a shorter length of time, they do not produce real results. When the job ends, people fall back into their apathetic ways, stuck at home and unable to work.

• (1630)

Mr. Georges Grujic: The Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities is not designed to meet a specific short or long-term objective. It is designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in order that they can become part of the work force. Its objective, therefore, is to provide training and other necessary support to help persons with disabilities find and keep a job.

[English]

The Chair: It's my turn, and we'll just get right down to it.

In terms of the national standard, which the questioning commenced with, do the National Capital Commission or the federal government attempt to exceed the provincial building codes of Ontario and Quebec, or those of the municipalities of Ottawa and Gatineau? Do we subscribe to a standard that exceeds those?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: That's a question that needs to be put to officials in Public Works.

The Chair: Could you?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: I don't know, but we could investigate that for you and get back to you.

The Chair: I think it would be very handy as a benchmark for where we start, because it all drifts back to 308 other elected representatives nationally in terms of what standard we should follow for our offices and our branch offices. For example, in Thunder Bay I was able to start from scratch using the municipal committee, and they designed the office so it incorporated everything needed, exceeding the national standard. But in my Fort Frances office I couldn't even find a ground floor in a building, so it means the staff have to go out to people. There's a pretty wide amplitude in service accessibility.

Our question then becomes, for the federal government nationally as we rent space in provincial and territorial buildings in different places and in commercial buildings, would we always be able to say, do you have this minimal requirement for accessibility? That's the third component of my question.

Then we talk about the technology for really accessing those facilities.

I'd like to concentrate, actually, on the members' offices themselves, because that gives us a chance among ourselves to measure what we have in terms of our budget. For example, if you were one of the 108 newcomers starting up, in nine months you would have to find it in your budget to make signs and equip your office, whereas someone with vast experience like Ms. Skelton could afford to go to the next level and perhaps do some tenant improvements or whatever.

We talked about telephone devices. Have we as a national government or has your organization designed standards for websites? Some websites for the blind are much easier to navigate if they're constructed with that in mind.

We mentioned parking at federal buildings in terms of ensuring the number of spots available. Really, at no time should anybody not be able to access a federal building.

Even the simple things.... We know we've met with CNIB in terms of the business cards, but we also know that 3% of the population or less can read Braille, which means that the other 50% who have trouble seeing, once you punch the Braille into this card.... I can barely read it—well, unless you have this. Even with those kinds of things, is it your office's responsibility...do you give advice or do you meet and consult with people to find a way? It's probably easier for us as MPs to have a certain number of blank cards, as it is for people in the public service, as opposed to cards that make it more difficult for them to read.

We talk about technology and availability in terms of each of our offices or government buildings. At this stage in our society we view an automatic door almost as a luxury, whereas for someone in a wheelchair, particularly in the winter months, who is trying to negotiate doors, it's a very interesting experience. In fact, many architects—and I would hope that this is where the national standard comes in—put the hand button in a place such that, by the time you get to the door, it's closed again.

Everybody is nodding because these experiences are so commonplace, yet it's absolutely bizarre that our society still perpetuates an error like that.

Even in terms of washrooms now.... And I think this is where it comes down to maybe an early recommendation from this committee to the House in terms of members' operating budgets. If you want to get a hearing device for people who need those kinds of things, it shouldn't take your whole budget, with us feeling bad then because we don't have pencils or something.

● (1635)

This brings us to something I would think your office could apply not only to members of Parliament but to members of the public service in terms of rules of behaviour, some kind of code to live by. I want to know, when we're invited to meetings or to receptions that aren't accessible, if we should accept the invitation or as a committee try to get Parliament and the public service to say, listen, you can't do that any more; we're trying to raise the bar here. We really want to set a standard that sends a message so it isn't part of duty and obligation but is part of our national fabric of understanding.

I think these are simple, basic practices that don't necessarily have to be antagonistic. Ten years ago people were still butting their cigarettes in their mashed potatoes inside restaurants. If they did that now, they'd pretty well be tarred.

It boils down to two things. How can this committee help you, as the working public servants charged with getting these things through, and second, just as important, how can you help us get these messages through to members of Parliament?

I talked about those rules of behaviour and that kind of thing. At a Christmas party Mr. Fletcher was left in the hallway at the British consulate because there was no way he could get to the breakfast reception with the rest of the people. To me that's absolutely unconscionable in this day and age. I don't want to start an international incident with the British High Commission. Nonetheless, I don't think it will happen again.

Still, it doesn't have to be a member of Parliament; it could be anyone. I think that once we understand that term, "it could be anyone", for any of these types of things, that's how you get to inclusion in a society.

Do you agree?

● (1640)

Mrs. Susan Scotti: I think you've raised some pretty fundamental and very important questions and observations, Mr. Chairman. You asked the question of how we can help the committee. One of the things we will do as a result of this conversation is to better inform ourselves on the standard and where we're at in the Government of Canada, including agencies, on issues of accessibility, working in close collaboration with our colleagues in Public Works and Government Services—and probably the Department of Transport as well in certain areas but more so Public Works and Government Services. I think the parliamentary precinct is where the question of accessible office space for parliamentarians and aids and devices comes into play.

There are some personal choices that need to be made in terms of calling cards and accepting invitations or not. You raised some important points about it in the committee. We might want to take a leadership role in terms of raising the bar on some of those practices and standards.

We can provide you with some information. We can provide some leadership on this issue too across the federal system. This is our responsibility as the focal point for disability issues. We need to engage our partners.

There are certain things government can do through mechanisms it has in procurement policies. I can think of infrastructure investments, for example. If there are some conditions that apply in the way infrastructure investments are made so accessibility becomes a consideration, I think we'll have moved the yardsticks quite a lot.

Those are the kinds of things the committee might want to think about, and we'd be willing and happy to work with you on that.

The Chair: I'm going to cut myself off.

We will start a second round of five-minute questions.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: To start with, do you have a facility manual for all the departments in the Government of Canada? Is there a facility manual for the disabled with requirements and everything that a department needs?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Public Works and Government Services would be setting that kind of a framework, so there would be some policies and guidelines and directives that would be provided through that department.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: But you yourselves don't have that?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: We don't have it with us today.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: But do you have one?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Yes, I'm sure that one would exist in our corporate services in our department.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Would we be able to see that manual, if you can find it?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Sure.

Ms. Cecilia Muir: I believe it's a fairly voluminous document, so I'm just warning you.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Even if we just brought one to the chairperson, so that we have it and can all look at it to see what it's like, because I think that every member of Parliament should have one of those. Not the large one—I'm assuming it's going to be like this—but a nice, small manual that a new member of Parliament could have that would tell people what they need in an office or anything else. It's just something that I would like to see done.

Do you meet regularly with other departments in the Government of Canada?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: We have an interdepartmental committee of the 26 departments, yes.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: So have you met with the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness lately to talk with Minister McLellan and her new department on emergency preparedness issues and the disabled, and all of the factors that are evolving out of that new department?

● (1645)

Mrs. Susan Scotti: The committee in fact has not met since that department was created.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: How often does this committee meet?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: The committee meets every three months, and it actually did meet in November.

This particular department was not able to join us at the last meeting, for reasons I'm not sure of. The answer is no, we haven't met with them recently; but I will personally ensure they're at our next meeting, which is scheduled for the beginning of March.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I have your promise on that?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: I will invite them, yes.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Will you let me know if they don't show up?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: You're going to be on my speed dial.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Good girl, good girl.

Have you talked to the Minister of Transport or the Department of Transport at all?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: The Department of Transport is on the interdepartmental committee as well.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Did they come to the last meeting?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Yes, they did, as I recall. I'm very interested in the committee's high and unanimous interest in this area, because I plan to table this as a discussion item.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: They don't know what they've got; we've got this committee together and I think that it's going to work very hard on behalf of disabled Canadians and we're going to hold very high standards for your offices, I'm sorry to say.

But I think that we really need to...The disabled are very worried about transportation. The railways, the bus lines, the airlines of this country are not properly suited for disabled people, and I think we have real problems and I think we have to work very on them. So I would like to see that done too.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Peter, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: After I was elected, I tried to get an accessible riding office. I had to fight with the House of Commons to get them to install a TTY, a telecommunications device for the hearing impaired. If I am not mistaken, my riding office is the first to have such a device. We all need to be aware of these issues. This subcommittee ought to ensure that persons with disabilities have full access to their member of Parliament.

[English]

I have three questions; I don't know if I'll get to all three of them. The first is following up on the interdepartmental committee. Is it possible to obtain minutes of the last couple of years of those meetings to know what is being discussed and what the issues are that come up?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: I'll go back and ensure that you have agendas and records of decision.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Would records of decision be separate from verbatim minutes?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Verbatim minutes aren't taken at the meetings. There is a record of decisions taken, and usually documents are distributed as well. We can see if it's feasible to share those with you. Many of them will be publications you already have, but we'll share everything we can.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. That will help facilitate the work of this subcommittee, to know what to do.

On provinces, I'd like to come to the specific example of British Columbia, having worked there with deaf individuals. Recently a provincial program was founded, the employment program for people with disabilities. This was put into place. I would be interested in knowing what role the Office for Disability Issues might have played in discussions with the federal government on the establishment of this particular program, for the simple reason that the program ended up duplicating a lot of what existed already through HRDC programs and ended up creating holes, particularly around disability supports, that were covered in previous programs provincially. What we've ended up with in British Columbia is the federal and provincial governments both addressing a part of the overall needs for employability with the spectrum of people with disabilities, and huge gaps that existed to a lesser extent before.

I'm interested in knowing what role might have been played—whether the office was involved, whether you were consulted—when there were discussions around the creation of the provincial program.

Mrs. Susan Scotti: I'll hazard a guess—because I don't know for sure—that we probably were not. I think what you're describing is really a patchwork of systems, of supports and services, that exists between the federal and provincial governments. It is an area of great concern to us and to provinces as well, and an area where we are trying to look together to see whether we can create a more coordinated, coherent system so that people don't fall through the cracks, and so that the net effect of one program does not nullify the benefits of another, which is what exists right now.

• (1650)

Mr. Peter Julian: Is there coordination? Do you endeavour to determine what programs exist at the provincial level? Is there discussion with HRDC, particularly when there are provincial and federal negotiations? What is your role? Do you find yourselves involved constantly, uniformly, across the country, or is it more *par hasard*?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: Right now, as Susan mentioned at the beginning, I co-chair a federal-provincial working group with all the provinces and territories on benefits and services for persons with disabilities. Our focus right now—and we were given this mandate just before Christmas—is developing a strategy, both in the short and the longer term, specifically around income and support. We are working in partnership with all the provinces, and B.C. is actually one of the key contributors on the content. We're developing a set of four options that we would like to present in the late spring to ministers responsible for social services. It is very collaborative; every two weeks we have teleconference meetings with the players. B.C. specifically is one that is working with us on this, so we do have a very regular working relationship with them. I hope that is clear.

In terms of working with HRSDC, they are close partners with us and they are key players on our interdepartmental committee as well. We report on our federal-provincial meeting in that forum as well, and endeavour to keep everybody on the same page about this.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Peter Julian: It answers the question, but begs another one. Are those minutes accessible to members of this committee?

Ms. Cecilia Muir: The frequency of our meetings on the federal-provincial work is very focused on actually producing a product, a paper, doing the scoping-out of options, so in fact we don't really have minutes. What we have is a successive series of drafts. That's not really appropriate for us to share, because it's a federal-provincial document. It's not the feds sharing that with our own.... It's not our decision to share that work, basically, because it's a draft, but also we don't own it; it belongs to the federal-provincial group that we work with.

I'm trying to think of what I can share with you to give you a sense of the nature of that work. I will make sure that I can pull something together, even if it's just a note, that describes to you the mandate we're working with, who's involved with it, the kind of deliverable we're working on, and the outline of what we believe the options paper will cover. I hope that might meet your needs.

The Chair: That would be useful.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, it would be.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could I have a final quick question?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: Very quickly.

The Chair: No, you're two minutes over.

Jean-Claude.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I mentioned earlier that I wanted to raise the issue of the Canada Pension Plan. I know that we would need a full week's worth of explanations before getting to grips with how the system works, and I am sure that you share that feeling too. It really seems to be fairly complicated. In numerous instances, the issue of the CPP poses a

problem. I know that there is an independent council and that in itself is very complicated.

I would like to know if the Canada Pension Plan recognizes a physician's letter describing an individual's physical state.

• (1655)

Ms. Susan Williams: Absolutely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Now I would like to know whether you consider a physician to be more experienced and qualified than a nurse when it comes to determining somebody's state of health. Allow me to put it another way. If a physician states that an individual is suffering from a serious long-term physical disability, can a nurse go against what the physician has recommended for that person?

Ms. Susan Williams: I get the feeling that you are wanting me to say that doctors are more qualified to determine eligibility to the Canada Pension Plan Disability program. In fact, the nurses that we employ are tasked with the administration of our benefits program. They have to compile all the evidence that they get, be it medical or other types of evidence, and determine whether the individual is any way capable of working. It is not a matter of accepting or refuting evidence provided by a doctor. We accept the evidence, and each of the 60,000 applications which we receive every year is accompanied by a physician's letter or a form completed by a physician.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Several cases have been brought to the attention of my office where a doctor had made a recommendation based on a person's situation, and this recommendation was then evaluated. I am sure we all agree that a doctor has specific responsibilities and has the right to do specific things. A nurse also has responsibilities, and, within certain boundaries, also has the right to do certain things. We are seeing situations where nurses have contested a doctor's position.

Ms. Susan Williams: I think that we are perhaps placing too much importance on this question of doctors and nurses. As I said earlier, we are not talking about a doctor who says one thing and a nurse who says another, but...

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Let me be clear on this. As we all know, a doctor has the right to make a diagnosis, to prescribe medication, and to define an individual's condition and situation. It therefore seems rather strange to me that a doctor's opinion is being challenged.

Ms. Susan Williams: It is not a case of nurses challenging doctors' opinions. A doctor establishes the medical facts; based on these facts, nurses—although we prefer not to use the word nurses as they are more correctly referred to in English as medical adjudicators—carry out an evaluation based on medical facts and other evidence that was submitted. They have to determine whether the individual is still able to be fully, gainfully employed. If the person cannot work, he will be granted benefits, and if he can work, he will not receive benefits.

As you said, the system is very complicated. If you would like a briefing on the subject, we could try to clarify some of the issues for you.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I think I understand, Mr. Chairman. I am out of time.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Madame, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a question for Ms. Scotti. Earlier, you eloquently underscored the important role played by the parents of children with difficulties, who assume the role of natural caregivers. They face enormous challenges on a daily basis. I would like to know if we can expect changes to the tax credit regime.

When children reach the age of 18, they start to receive social assistance cheques, yet their parents continue to do the same work for them. Parents are still looking after their children, they have to do the same things and face the same challenges. However, although they have had to support their child over the years, paying all the additional costs incurred by a child with a disability compared to a child who does not have a disability, they lose their tax credit on the grounds that their child is receiving a welfare cheque. But the problems do not stop when the child turns 18.

Can we expect changes to be made to the system? Are you planning to make representations on this subject? I understand that this is primarily a taxation issue. However, you seem very willing to help the Standing Committee on Health, as well as those people who have difficulties. Can we expect to see changes?

• (1700)

[English]

Mrs. Susan Scotti: You should be aware that we have a minister of state, Minister Tony Ianno, who is responsible for families and caregivers. He has undertaken to have a broad range of discussions with families and those involved in providing care in trying to scope out the issues. And the tax issue, obviously, is among those. That work is proceeding, and I think he wants to be in a position to make some recommendations within the next short while on an approach to support caregivers.

There are a series of amendments that have been made by the technical advisory committee on tax measures for persons with disabilities to support persons with disabilities, and I think one of them includes the medical expense deduction and a recommendation to double the amount of that deduction. It doesn't go quite as far as what you're looking for, but it is a possible beginning step, and the Department of Finance is looking at those recommendations in the context of the upcoming budget.

So I think that work is progressing and there's hope that the government will be in position to make some recommendations on this very important area in the not too distant future.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Ms. Scotti.

I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Peter, I will allow you 73 seconds from Ms. Demers if you want to finish up your quick question.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Ms. Demers, that was very kind of you. I owe you one.

[English]

The budget allocates all but about \$630 million of the \$7.5 billion to income support and to tax provisions. You talked about a global budget of \$7.5 billion, and it looks like about \$630 million of that aren't tax measures or income-support benefits. Could we have a more detailed accounting of that \$630 million, including provisions for learning and employment; what plans are supported and where; what disabilities are supported and where; and more details on the "other" category of community capacity and health and well-being, including what is supported and where, in some detail?

Since we understand the larger chunks of money, I'd certainly like to know more about that smaller bit, because it can make a real difference in employability and accessibility.

I think I came in under the 1.4 minutes.

Thanks.

The Chair: Do you just want to log it in, Ms. Scotti?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: The answer is yes, of course we'll provide that information.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: May I have a list of the 70 NGOs? We have listed here 70 NGOs for community development. Could I have a list of those, please?

And you mentioned \$21 million for regions. Could I have a breakdown by the regions of Canada and how much money each region got?

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Cecilia reminds me that some of the information you're looking for, Mr. Julian, is in the federal disability report, which lists all of the individual programs. There's an annex that has the name of the program and the amount of money attached to it. We'd be happy to compile it again, but it's in there.

• (1705)

The Chair: I think what we'd like to have for both questioners is if you could forward that so that at least we can find it. Remember when I asked, "How can you help us?" That would be one of those ways.

And when Ms. Skelton notes that we are looking for those lists, if you could send them to the clerk, she will distribute them so that we all have them.

Mr. Georges Grujic: You're looking for the breakdown by region?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Each region and how much each region gets. Thank you.

Mr. Georges Grujic: Okay, and you're not looking for the intervention by individual or study?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Well, no. That will be the next thing.

Mr. Georges Grujic: I can't provide that, but I just wanted to make sure I know what information you need.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, witnesses. We very much appreciate that. We look forward to working with you.

We have a really intense schedule from now until the end of June or middle of July, depending on when the House adjourns.

Mrs. Susan Scotti: May I ask a question?

The Chair: Please do.

Mrs. Susan Scotti: Will you be considering inviting as witnesses other departments? For example, we discussed a lot the Department of Public Works' responsibilities in this area, and perhaps the

Ministry of Transport. It would help us if they also became acquainted. We will do the necessary follow-up with them, but it would help us also perform our horizontal responsibilities if they were to be invited to the committee.

The Chair: We will now be discussing our work program, so we'll certainly take that as expert advice. Thank you.

We'll suspend this meeting for a few minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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