

Jannette Amini

Subject: FW: Disability Coalition Slams Trudeau Government Giving Millions to Rick Hansen Foundation's Seriously Deficient Building Accessibility Certification Training Program

From: Kurt Halliday [mailto:]

Sent: August 27, 2021 1:34 PM

To: Jannette Amini <jamini@FRONTENACCOUNTY.CA>

Subject: Fwd: Disability Coalition Slams Trudeau Government Giving Millions to Rick Hansen Foundation's Seriously Deficient Building Accessibility Certification Training Program

People might find this interesting, educational, etc.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: AODA Alliance Updates <updates@aodaalliance.org>

Date: Tue, Aug 24, 2021 at 10:04 AM

Subject: Disability Coalition Slams Trudeau Government Giving Millions to Rick Hansen Foundation's Seriously Deficient Building Accessibility Certification Training Program

To: thisiskurthalliday@gmail.com <thisiskurthalliday@gmail.com>

**ACCESSIBILITY FOR ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT ALLIANCE
NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Disability Coalition Slams Trudeau Government's Giving Millions to Rick Hansen Foundation's Seriously Deficient Building Accessibility Certification Training Program

August 24, 2021 Toronto: Just before calling a federal election, the Federal Government announced action that wastes public money, creates serious new problems for people with disabilities and lacks important due diligence needed before pouring millions of public dollars into an unaccountable private foundation. On August 13, 2021, the [Federal Government announced](#) up to 7.5 million dollars to the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) to help finance its problem-ridden private accessibility certification program for buildings. Entirely unhelpful for six million people with disabilities in Canada, this wasteful federal announcement took a page from Ontario Premier Doug Ford's troubling playbook, by using a wasteful diversion of public money to the RHF to deflect attention from protracted delays in implementing disability accessibility legislation. The [Federal Government claimed](#): "With this investment, the Foundation will establish a new standardized profession of "accessibility professionals," which will increase expertise and information on how to build accessible spaces in a way that includes people of all abilities."

1. RHF Program Does Not Accurately Measure a Building's Accessibility

The RHF program provides an unreliable accessibility "certification". It in reality certifies *nothing*. A building that the RHF says as accessible" is not assured to be accessible.

- a) A BC restaurant agreed to a human rights settlement due to its premises' lack of accessibility even though the RHF had "certified" it as accessible. See "[Human Rights Tribunal to hear disabled customer's complaint about Pat Quinn's](#)" and "[Disability advocate settles accessibility complaint against Pat Quinn's Restaurant & Bar](#)"
- b) The RHF proudly gave the Vancouver International Airport a gold rating for accessibility, even though it had "hang out steps", riddled with accessibility problems. See "[Who gets to decide what is accessible—and who does that leave behind?](#)"
- c) The Ontario Government is building a massive new courthouse in downtown Toronto replete with accessibility problems. Yet the Ontario Government told the AODA Alliance that the RHF program rated the building's design as accessible. The RHF assessor never contacted the AODA Alliance to investigate the Alliance's [detailed and publicly documented accessibility concerns with that building](#).

2. Deficient RHF Training Does Not Make a Person an Accessibility Professional

The Federal Government makes the highly misleading claim that the RHF training that the Government is underwriting will create a new standardized profession of accessibility professionals. Yet two years ago, [an AODA Alliance report](#) detailed massive problems with the RHF's seriously deficient training. A person completing that substandard training would mislead others if they claim to thereby be an "accessibility professional." Even the RHF conceded in an [August 19, 2021 report in the Burnaby Beacon](#):

“we agree that the 2-week RHFAC training course is not sufficient to provide students with enough knowledge to consider themselves experts in the application of universal design,” the foundation said.”

Far from being the gold standard for training accessibility professionals that the Federal Government should underwrite and that others should follow, the very short RHF training program is a model of how such training should not be done.

3. Ford Government Earlier Spending \$1.3 Million on RHF Program Yielded No Improvement in Accessibility

In 2015, the Kathleen Wynne Government flirted with buying into the RHF program, but wisely dropped that idea. In 2019, the Ford Government claimed it was improving the accessibility of buildings in Ontario by giving the RHF private accessibility certification program 1.3 million dollars. The AODA Alliance led criticism of that misuse of public money. See the [July 24, 2019 Toronto Star](#): "Advocates slam Ontario plan to rate accessibility of buildings."

On August 6, 2019, the Toronto Star [ran a strong editorial](#) blasting the Ford Government for this use of public money. Over two years after the Ford Government bought into the RHF program, there's no proof it led to the removal of *any* disability barriers.

4. Much Needed Federal Government Due Diligence is Strikingly Absent

Before pouring millions of public dollars into the RHF, an unaccountable private foundation, the Federal Government must not have undertaken obvious, rudimentary due diligence. A quick Google or social media search would quickly reveal serious concerns about the RHF program emanating from credible voices in the grass roots disability community that this federal spending supposedly is to benefit. For example, the Federal Government never contacted the AODA Alliance to explore its documented concerns with the RHF training and certification program. Two years ago, the AODA Alliance made public two detailed reports, dated [July 3, 2019](#) and [August 15, 2019](#). Those reports exhaustively proved in exquisite detail, based on RHF documentation, the many serious deficiencies with the RHF program. Since then, the RHF has not disproved these concerns.

5. RHF is not Expert in Training Accessibility Professionals or Assessing Building Accessibility

Mr. Hansen's name and personal notoriety do not give the RHF the expertise it lacks in this area. In contrast, Canada has real accessibility professionals, with far more than a couple of weeks of accessibility training, who can competently assess a building's accessibility and make recommendations where improvements are needed. "By buying into the Rick Hansen Foundation's problem-ridden program and misleadingly claiming to create a new profession of accessibility professionals, the Federal Government hurts people with disabilities. It's substantially lowering the training needed to competently work in this area, and putting it in the hands of an unaccountable private foundation with a record of focusing primarily on some disabilities to the potential exclusion of others," said David Lepofsky, chair of the non-partisan AODA Alliance that advocates for accessibility for people with all kinds of disabilities. "This public funding would have been far better used to develop a strong, effective, comprehensive, mandatory national standard for accessible design of buildings for all people with disabilities that could be enforced under the Accessible Canada Act."

In this close election race, the non-partisan AODA Alliance wrote the major political parties [on August 4, 2021](#), seeking specific election commitments to implement the Accessible Canada Act that was passed in 2019. In the 2019 federal election, the [Liberal party committed](#) "to the timely and ambitious implementation of the Accessible Canada Act so that it can fully benefit all Canadians." [It also pledged](#) to use a disability lens for all Government decisions.

The Accessible Canada Act requires Canada to become accessible to people with disabilities by 2040, at least within federal jurisdiction. In the two years since the Accessible Canada Act was passed, there has been some progress. However, we have to date not observed any appreciable improvement in accessibility for people with disabilities.

The Federal Government has still not even hired the national Accessibility Commissioner or the Chief Accessibility Officer to lead the Accessible Canada Act's implementation. No national accessibility standards have yet been enacted to require specific action to remove and prevent disability barriers.

Contact: [AODA Alliance](#) Chair David Lepofsky, aodafeedback@gmail.com Twitter: [@aodaalliance](#)
For more background:

1. The [AODA Alliance's July 3, 2019 report on the RHF program](#).
2. The AODA Alliance's [August 15, 2019 supplemental report](#) on the RHF program certification program.
3. The AODA Alliances widely viewed [online video](#) about accessibility problems with the new Ryerson University Student Learning Centre. That building included the very inaccessible "hang out steps" that are also present at the Vancouver International Airport, the latter building being the first to receive an RHF gold rating for accessibility.

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