

How navigators can help people with an intellectual disability find and use federal programs and services



The problem

Canada has programs and services for people with disabilities. But these programs and services are hard to access. The system is confusing. It is difficult to use.



The research



This research project looked at the barriers people with an intellectual disability face. It looked at navigation and how it can help. Navigation means having someone who will be a guide. That guide is sometimes called a **navigator**.



A navigator knows about different programs and services and what they offer. They know how the system works. Navigators help people find their way through programs and services.

In this project, we heard from **302 people** from across the country. This included people with an intellectual disability, family members, and service providers.

We also worked with a group of **advisors**. They helped guide our work and gave us advice. The group included two **people with an intellectual disability**. It also included **people who work for organizations that offer navigation**.

We got information from people through **focus groups** and **interviews**. We also used **surveys** and other kinds of research.

We found that navigation support is most helpful when it:

focuses on the person



respects the supported person's culture



is easy to access and is flexible



is based on each person's needs and their situation



The solution

Our research led us to make **11 recommendations**. These will help the federal government. They will show how we can improve access by using navigator programs.



1 Clear information that is easy to find and use

Information should be easy to find, understand and use.

Navigators should explain how different programs work. They should explain how programs connect to each other. They should help people fill out forms and solve problems.

All information should be in plain language. The information also needs to be useful in real life.



2 Fair access to support for everyone

People should be able to get help in many ways. They should be able to get help in person, on the phone or online.

All these options are important. They allow people to get help no matter where they live or what technology they have. Services should work with local groups. Services should be available in local languages. This is especially important in Indigenous and remote communities.

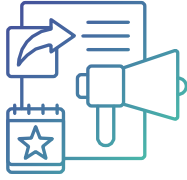


3 Support for all people

Navigation must work for everyone. This includes the following groups:

- People who speak different languages.
- People who need plain language.
- People who use assistive devices.
- People who need other supports.

Navigators must understand the different barriers that people face. Some barriers may come from their disability. But barriers may come from other things about the person. This can include things like low income or gender or immigration status. Services must be accessible from the start to the finish.



4 Sharing information through trusted groups

People need to know about the navigator program. The government needs to share information about it. The information should be shared in the following ways.

- through trusted community organizations
- on social media
- in letters
- at events
- through local media

Messages about navigator programs should use the local languages. Messages should also respect the culture and values of the community.



5 Person-centered and respectful support

Navigators should respect that people know their own lives best. They should support people to do the following.

- make their own choices
- look at all options
- stay in control

Families and communities should be included. This needs to be done in a way that is respectful to people and their culture.



6 Free and ongoing help

Navigation support should be free. People should be able to get help whenever they need it. People should be able to come back for support if their situation changes.



7 Support that respects differences

Navigators must understand the people they are supporting. They need to know the person's culture and values. They need to be aware of the person's life experiences.

Navigators should get training to help with this. They should be trained in the following areas.

- **Trauma:** being aware of the harms that people may experience.
- **Discrimination:** understanding the unfair treatment people may face and how it affects them.

Services must respect Indigenous cultures and values. Services must respect community values.

Training needs to be informed by people with lived experience of disability. They should help design and deliver training for navigators.



8 Help beyond federal programs

Navigators should help people find supports they need. These may be outside of federal programs. This includes support in the following areas.

- housing
- income supports
- education
- mental health services
- community supports

These supports may be provided elsewhere. They may be provided by the province, territory or community.



9 Stable and reliable support

People should not have to repeat their story again and again.

Navigators should keep secure records. They should stay involved until the goals are reached. Support should continue through every step. This includes appeals and follow-ups.



10 Skilled and caring navigators

Navigators should know a lot about government programs. They should be aware of other cultures. They should communicate clearly. They should be kind and respectful.

Navigators should have formal training. Navigators with lived experience can bring valuable skills to the role.



11 Strong training and learning

Navigators need to be trained. They should get good training in the following areas.

- communication
- disability awareness
- trauma-informed practice
- navigating different systems

Training should be created with people with disabilities. It should be updated often. People with lived experience should help teach and mentor navigators.

Learn more by reading the [full research report](#).

This resource is also available in French and Inuktitut.

