



Access to Recovery

Substance Abuse and Independent Living

KEN IS A 35-YEAR-OLD quadriplegic. He was an alcoholic before his accident and in the 18 months since his accident, he has continued to drink, in addition to taking prescribed medication for pain. Recently Ken has begun to overuse his medication and has started visiting clinics more frequently to have his prescriptions renewed. Without adequate monitoring, Ken easily gets the pills whenever he needs them. He is obviously depressed, and in the last couple of weeks, Ken has come to realize that his lifestyle has a negative impact on his health, and he would like to make a change. However, with few friends, family or community ties, Ken is unsure of the next step in seeking help.

Ken's challenge is not just finding a treatment centre, but finding one that will be able to accommodate his needs and be sensitive to his situation. The primary issue is, of course, accessibility, but there also needs to be flexibility in the type of treatment option he enters. An abstinence program would not be ideal for Ken, as he will be unable to completely give up his prescription medication.

Ken is not alone; there are many people with disabilities in Canada who deal with substance abuse issues. In fact, studies have put the rate of substance abuse in Canadians with disabilities at the same level or higher as the population as a whole¹. Despite these statistics, as many as two-thirds of the substance abuse treatment centres in Canada self-identify as not being accessible².

Diminishing the large gaps between the supply of and demand for accessible and flexible substance abuse treatment options will require a coordinat-

ed national strategy involving stakeholders on many different levels.

We are pleased to announce the Access to Recovery project, a two-year, national initiative designed and led by the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC). Funded by Health Canada, CAILC will work with our network of Independent Living Resource Centres (ILRCs) and our partner, the Canadian Abilities Foundation (CAF), to train communities, create tools and resources necessary to address this issue, and equip mainstream addiction treatment organizations with the knowledge needed to support Canadians with disabilities who face substance abuse issues.

The goal of Access to Recovery is to design and implement a substance abuse awareness and prevention strategy that is led by persons with disabilities and informed, at all stages of the process, by their stated needs and expert knowledge. CAILC will begin the process by completing a national needs assessment. Through its unique national ILRC network, CAILC will use surveys and focus groups to identify the needs of persons with disabilities in relation to substance abuse recovery and perceived gaps in service.

Concurrently, a survey of local and provincial treatment centres will be undertaken to determine their level of accessibility and the types of programs and training that are geared towards treating individuals with disabilities. It will be critical to gain an understanding of what resources are needed to better inform both the consumers of substance abuse recovery programs and the organizations that provide them.

The second stage of this project is the development and release of tools

and resources for ILRCs, their consumers and substance abuse stakeholders (treatment centres and their consumers). The CAF will play a critical role throughout the project as it aids CAILC in the marketing and production of materials. The tools and training will be provided to ILRCs to ensure that their staff is prepared to handle requests from individuals seeking substance abuse recovery support. Substance abuse organizations will be given information on independent living principles and how they can be integrated into existing treatment options.

By the end of the Access to Recovery project, there will be a self-sustaining network of supports for persons with disabilities dealing with substance abuse issues. Ken, from the example above, would be able to access his local ILRC and connect with a trained staff person with a resource guide who can help him take steps to achieve his goal. As well, the treatment centres or service providers will know how to accommodate disability within their programs. Through CAILC and its partners, Ken will have the support he needs as he tries to accomplish his health goals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROJECT, PLEASE CONTACT:

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1 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Special Populations Section: People with Disabilities. Available at: <http://sano.camh.net/resource/pdis.htm>.

2 Disabled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada. Relief at What Cost. (1995)