



**We know British Columbia is beautiful.
Together, we are making it accessible.**

A summary of how Access BC (a program of Spinal Cord Injury BC) is helping to improve accessible outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities for people with disabilities and their families in BC.

About Spinal Cord Injury BC

The Spinal Cord Injury Organization of British Columbia (Spinal Cord Injury BC) helps people with spinal cord injuries (and related disabilities) and their families adjust, adapt, and thrive as they deal with a new injury or struggle with the ongoing challenges of living and aging with a physical disability.

Since 1957, Spinal Cord Injury BC has been helping to break down barriers to access and inclusion for British Columbians with disabilities and their families. From removing driving speed restrictions for drivers with physical disabilities to making Vancouver's buses accessible, from informing the development of accessible building standards to improving the accessibility of our province's outdoor recreation spaces, Spinal Cord Injury BC has and continues to be a constructive partner in making BC accessible to and inclusive of all.

Access BC: A Spinal Cord Injury BC program focussed on making BC accessible for all

We believe in the principles of Universal Design and the benefits it brings to all citizens. In 2007, SCI BC was a driving force behind the Measuring Up The North project that engaged 41 local governments, disability and seniors' organizations, businesses, and citizens in northern BC in active dialogue, assessment, and planning for their communities to develop age-friendly, universally designed and inclusive communities for all residents and visitors. This three-year initiative gave us valuable experience in working with communities and organizations in the region.

In order to maintain the momentum of the Measuring Up the North initiative and to help share with the public information on all of progressive accessibility projects that were undertaken through it, we launched a new Access North program. The success of the program in northern BC provided the impetus for us to broaden the scope of the program to cover the rest of the province and to rename the program Access BC.

Recognizing that accessible tourism and accessible communities go hand in hand, we have developed key partnerships with regional tourism associations, governments, and other public and private sector stakeholders to further our objectives. Going forward, we will look to leverage these partnerships in order to advance opportunities of mutual interest that will build stronger, more inclusive communities that support accessible tourism and sustainable economic development. Working together, we can help make BC the best place for people with disabilities and their families to live, work, and be active.

What follows is a list of Access BC program highlights over the past three years.

ACCESS BC PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS 2016-19

Improving the accessibility of BC's outdoor recreation spaces

- **Accessibility audits of northern BC outdoor recreation spaces and Universal Design training:** In 2016, through a partnership with the Province of BC's Job Creation Partnership program, we audited the accessibility over 450 parks and other outdoor recreation spaces, and provided recommendations for priority accessibility improvements. We shared this information through a publicly-accessible website so that everyone can see which parks have the amenities they need to make use of our outdoor spaces. We were pleased to work with BC Parks and other stakeholders to create the tablet-based accessibility audit toolkit we used for the audits, and to provide our partners and stakeholders access to the database we created to house the audit data. Further, we have provided universal design training for staff from various levels of government across BC to help them better understand why universal design is so important and how to implement it in their facilities.
- **Accessible roadside rest stops.** Working with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Access BC performed staff training and accessibility audits of all roadside rest stops along 3,200km of the Great Northern Circle Route.
- **Universal Design Training for Rec Sites and Trails BC.** Building on a longstanding relationship with Rec Sites and Trails BC, our Access BC team provided Universal Design and accessibility training for staff in workshops held in Prince George, Penticton, and Kamloops.
- **BC Parks unveils its first universally accessible playground.** Working with BC Parks, SCI BC's Access BC team provided input and guidance in the construction of an accessible playground at Purden Lake Provincial Park. Access BC continues to work with BC Parks to help with further accessibility-related improvements to the playground.
 - Media Release: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018ENV0043-001139>
- **City of Prince George.** SCI BC's Access BC team conducted audits of civic facilities and parks spaces in Prince George, and prioritized recommendations for accessibility improvements to City staff. Consultation with city staff on new projects is ongoing.
- **Accessibility training and resources for the Okanagan.** In summer 2018, the Access BC team provided training and resources to/with the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA), including product and content development for The Quaaoutlodge Lodge, Tourist Information Centres and wineries in the Okanagan Region.
- **Bringing accessibility to the Okanagan's Kettle Valley Rail (KVR) Trail.** In May 2018, SCI BC's Access BC team initiated accessibility audits of the KVR Rail Trail. Our work focused on a 40 Km section between Little Tunnel and Penticton, including the Kettle River Heritage Museum and Midway Area Trail systems. In addition to cataloguing the accessible opportunities for the trail section, the Access BC team is providing recommendations for key, short- and long-term accessibility improvements. We also

supported a TOTA-led federal Enabling Accessibility grant bid that, if successful, will help fund accessibility improvements for the region.

- **Championing Access and Inclusion at the 2019 Para Nordic World Championships.** SCI BC's Access BC team led Universal Design and accessibility education and recommendations for the 2019 Para Nordic World Championship staff, volunteers, and the hospitality industry in Prince George. This work ensured this world-class event was accessible and inclusive of all.
- **Supporting New Accessibility Legislation for Canada and BC.** In partnership with SCI Canada, SCI BC (Chris McBride is the Chair of SCI Canada's Executive Directors Council) has been a lead partner on the Canadian Access and Inclusion Project and member of the SCI Canada-led Federal Accessibility Legislation Alliance, a national alliance of 90 disability sector non-profit organizations that is informing the federal government on the development of Canada's historic new accessibility legislation. Now introduced as Bill C-81, the Federal Accessibility Legislation Alliance is working with government to help strengthen the Bill and move it through to Royal assent. In BC, SCI BC has recently been invited to participate in the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction's Roundtable on accessibility legislation for the province.

Making information resources about accessible outdoor recreation and tourism in BC available to all

- **AccessibleBC.ca website:** Locals and tourists with disabilities and their families alike need access to information about accessible outdoor recreation, travel, and accommodation options. Questions relating to these topics are consistently amongst the most frequently posed to our toll-free and online InfoLine services. This is why we recently launched AccessibleBC.ca, a new website that allows people with disabilities and their families to explore and plan outdoor recreation and other tourism-related adventures in BC. Presently focused on northern BC, the AccessibleBC.ca website features:
 - In-depth accessibility specifications for municipal, provincial and federal parks, recreation sites, and visitors' centres in northern and northcentral BC
 - 3-D virtual reality tours of 11 parks that allow people to plan and experience an immersive outdoor experience online (<http://sci-bc.ca/resource-centre/accessible-recreation-leisure/accessible-bc-virtual-tours/>)
 - Videos highlighting accessible outdoor tourism opportunities in BC for people with disabilities
 - Suggested driving routes and maps, accessible tourism tips, and more
- **Accessible travel guide, videos, and experiences.** In partnership with YVR Airport, we have recently updated *Your Accessible Travel Guide*, an invaluable resource designed to help travelers with disabilities get the most out of their travel experience, regardless of their level of mobility.
 - The guide, available online and in print, was created by and for people with disabilities.
 - The guide is accompanied by a series of instructional videos that demystify the process of air travel, as well as travel stories told by people with physical disabilities.

- With YVR Airport, we host annual YVR Peer Experience Days, through which people with disabilities and their families are led through the process of navigating the airport and boarding an airplane.
- **Tourism video with Rec Sites and Trails.** A short video describing how Spinal Cord Injury BC's Access North initiative is cataloguing and showcasing accessible parks and outdoor recreation opportunities in Northern BC.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSQ7vUlr8wg>
- **Access North (Access BC) promotional video:** Imagine a world where the beauty of nature is accessible for everyone to experience and enjoy. See some of SCI BC's favourite accessible northern locations and begin planning your next outdoor adventure. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RR8ni7Yjix4>
- **Access BC Days.** To celebrate and raise awareness about accessible recreation and tourism opportunities in communities throughout BC, we are working with our regional tourism association partners and other stakeholders to host Access BC Days. The first Access BC Day was held in February 2018 in Prince George. Despite the bitter cold and snowy conditions, over one hundred community members, school kids, and representatives of local, provincial and federal governments came out to celebrate advances in access and inclusion in communities throughout the north.
- **Partnering with University of Northern BC Researchers.** SCI BC is the community partner on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Engage Grant held by the University of Northern BC's Dr. Mark Groulx. The objectives of the project, entitled *Advancing accessible and inclusive nature access in British Columbia through interdisciplinary partnerships*, are to (i) evolve and expand SCI BC's current accessibility evaluation protocol through a review of global best practice, and (ii) support greater evidence-based decision-making by mobilizing results from accessibility research within relevant policy, planning and management communities in BC. We recently presented and facilitated a workshop of this work at the 2018 BC Protected Area Research Forum. This project is of direct relevance to the current BC Parks Accessibility Audits project, our partners and community stakeholders with learning's being applied to our work. In addition, students working on this project will be given the opportunity to partner with our peer staff or trained volunteers for the ongoing accessibility audits.

Accessible communities make for accessible tourism opportunities, and accessible tourism makes for stronger communities: Partnering with BC's tourism and hospitality sector

- SCI BC has established MOUs with BC's five regional tourism associations, the Tourism Industry Association of BC, the North Central Local Governments Association, and other local government and associations.
 - Through these MOUs, SCI BC's Access BC team is working with tourism and community partners and stakeholders to establish a coordinated approach to the development of accessible travel and tourism products and services in the associations' regions of BC.
 - This work helps to promote the adoption, development, and promotion of accessible tourism industry practices to stakeholders through audits and assessments of relevant regional sites, products and services; universal design

and accessibility education and awareness; and resource development processes implemented through our partnership. Our Regional Development Liaison is on planning and working groups in several areas for the Destination Development Strategy, providing a constant lens for accessibility for this provincial strategy.

- The first MOU was established with the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) in 2018. Through this relationship, SCI BC supported TOTA's successful bid for the region's Biosphere designation, which includes accessibility as a component of sustainability, and their nomination for the World Travel and Tourism Council's 2018 Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, for which they received the Destination Award.
- This work directly supports the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture's *Strategic Framework Framework for Tourism In British Columbia 2019-2021*.
- **Creation of a Regional Universal Access Tourism Specialist for the Okanagan.** In the summer of 2018, TOTA and SCI BC have extended their MOU to include a new, jointly funded Regional Universal Access Tourism Specialist position, the first of its kind. The role, filled by SCI BC Peer Support Specialist and three-time Paralympic Wheelchair Curling Champion, Sonja Gaudet of Vernon, BC, is centered out of the TOTA office and serves as a dedicated resource for the Thompson Okanagan region that will be responsible for advancing the following:
 - Building a comprehensive Thompson Okanagan Universal Access Strategy that is in alignment with national, provincial, and regional strategic plans and engages the regional Communities, Indigenous Communities, special interest groups and stakeholders.
 - Planning and activating Universal Access awareness at key events in the Thompson Okanagan Region.
 - Assisting TOTA and Spinal Cord Injury BC in the acquisition of accessibility content for marketing and social media activities.
 - Providing assistance to Thompson Okanagan stakeholders in becoming aware of and implementing their own accessibility programs and training in their businesses
 - Identifying best practices to bring forward to regional stakeholders for implementation
 - Regional coordination focusing on implementation of universal accessibility under the sustainability focus outlined in the Thompson Okanagan Regional Strategy, *"Embracing Our Potential"* and Spinal Cord Injury BC's Access BC program.
- **Access and inclusion training for BC's tourism and hospitality industry.** SCI BC's Access BC team has established a collaboration with Go2HR, through which we provide recommendations, resources, and expertise to their "Service for All" program modules that serve British Columbia's tourism and hospitality industry. The training will be essential for developing inclusive customers and employment for people with disabilities. Training modules will be available on the go2HR website. Our Regional Development Liaison is an active mentor of the teams participating in the "Winning Pitch" Competition

What's next and what's needed to get there

As a provincial, non-profit, community service organization that has worked tirelessly over the past six decades to improve access and inclusion for British Columbians with disabilities and their families, Spinal Cord Injury BC is genuinely excited by the province's commitment to increase accessibility and inclusion for all British Columbians. In this context, we are excited and motivated to continue expanding our Access BC initiatives to all regions of the province as we help make BC the best place for people with disabilities and their families to live, work, and be active.

To date, we have achieved our impact with minimal support, but further advances will require additional, dedicated funding that will allow us to expand the scope of our impact and leverage the invaluable partnerships we have developed.

We believe a base investment of \$300,000 per year over the next five years will enable us, with our partners, to significantly move accessibility and inclusion of outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities forward in the province, bringing with it a broad spectrum of psychosocial, health, and tourism benefits (accessible tourism contributes a \$81.7 billion to the global economy). Priority initiatives to be undertaken with this funding include:

- **Regional Universal Access Tourism Specialist positions.** Following the lead of the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, we are working with our regional tourism association partners to create accessibility specialist positions within each regional association. These roles will be filled by qualified individuals with disabilities.
- **Leveraging additional opportunities and funding through partnerships** with our tourism association, government, non-profit, and private sector partners to develop and deliver (these items have been included in a federal multi-sectoral partnership grant that is currently being developed):
 - Accessible tourism products/experiences and promotional materials
 - Universal Design and accessibility education and training for all stakeholders
 - Best practice models and evaluation for accessible tourism-related practices (eg, with Hotel Association)
 - Accessible employment and customer service resources (eg, with Go2HR)
 - Will position BC as a global leader in accessible tourism
- **Access BC days and related events.** Annual events in each region will highlight and celebrate accessible outdoor recreation opportunities, accessible tourism, and accessible communities.
- **Online information services and resources development for accessible outdoor recreation and tourism.** Planning holidays and trips to the outdoors requires detailed accessibility information for people with disabilities and their families to get the most of their experiences. It also requires knowledge of what is available. Furthermore, trusted sources of valid information are essential to providing confidence in the information provided. We will work with our partners to increase the amount of accessibility-related information provided through our AccessibleBC.ca website, and provide more topic-specific resources such as those on accessible cycling/mountain biking, fishing, and more. These information resources will compliment our toll-free InfoLine (also available via email) and online information services.