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**Financial Literacy:  
Resources for People with Disabilities  
SEDI 2008**

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## Executive Summary

The ability to make informed financial decisions is essential for basic functioning in Canadian society. SEDI proposes, for the purposes of this and other research, that the set of skills, knowledge and confidence required to make informed financial decisions be described as financial literacy. Financial literacy is critical for the effective functioning of all consumers in a knowledge economy, but market structures may be creating groups of particularly vulnerable consumers.

At the first National Symposium on Financial Capability: *Canadians and Their Money* held in Ottawa in June 2005, several policy-makers and stakeholders signaled the need for Canada to develop an inclusive and comprehensive response to the national challenge of financial literacy.

A recent study of the supply of financial literacy products and services in Canada, conducted by SEDI, suggests a very small supply of resources is accessible to persons with disabilities. This current research therefore comes at a crucial juncture where attempts to equalize access to supports and services for people with disabilities are increasing and financial literacy is increasingly recognized as part of an essential knowledge and skill base for effective functioning in a knowledge economy. This report describes research undertaken in an effort to learn more about the supply of financial literacy supports to people with disabilities, gaps in resource provision and key causes of these gaps.

Using multiple and complimentary methods (including internet sampling, key informant interviews and a literature review) a national environmental scan of financial literacy products and services for people with disabilities and their caregivers was conducted. Demographic information about the providers of these supports was collected, as was information on the formats, modes of delivery and topics of the interventions. The audiences targeted and the design and modifications used to make the interventions accessible were also identified. A discussion of the key findings traces the gaps in delivery of financial literacy to this population, and key conclusions are drawn. These conclusions are outlined below.

- § The current supply of financial literacy resources for people with disabilities is dominated by actors from the non-profit sector. This is particularly true in the delivery of services as compared to products.
- § One of the main gaps in financial literacy resource provision found was the dearth of government support for financial literacy for people with disabilities. Key informants felt that, while governments are good at providing lists of benefits, improvement can be made in illustrating clear and accessible pathways to receive those benefits.
- § Currently, banks, financial planners and government services are particularly bad at providing clear, relevant and timely information to low-income earning people with disabilities, not to mention supporting opportunities for those people to receive education and advice in financial literacy.
- § Key informants largely agreed that individual-specific resources and supports need to be more adequately provided to people with disabilities. This stems from the complex nature of financial decisions when one is living with a disability, where planning for the future is destabilized by the constant presence of adversity or threat of returning or worsening adversity.
- § Many informants underscored the importance of targeted approaches to building financial literacy. Embedding modules, tools and assists into existing programs is one approach to

building financial literacy while targeting individuals, particularly when those programs work with individuals. Currently, such resources are rare in Canada.

- § Targeted approaches will need to be complemented by broader awareness-building among people with disabilities and caregivers. Focused marketing and awareness campaigns will help bolster the demand for financial literacy supports and interventions.
- § Where materials, resources and tools are developed for distribution, programs need to be crafted to facilitate the delivery of such resources. One key informant emphasized the importance of providing resources that can be facilitated or demonstrated. Often, people with disabilities, particularly those with cognitive disabilities and who are independent, will benefit from visualizing and practicing skills. Without the ability to demonstrate and repeat good practice, financial literacy programs will be lost on learners and fail to be effective in creating self-sufficiency.
- § One key area with a large financial literacy resource provision gap is among doubly-marginalized populations, for example women and the elderly who often face abuse, and newcomers where strong cultural and social networks can often stigmatize disabilities.
- § Many key informants felt that, while financial literacy is an important skill, particularly for people with disabilities who so often face financial difficulties as a direct result of being disabled, educational supports in financial literacy should not come at the expense of campaigns that push for improved benefits and supports, especially financial supports. By one informant's estimation 'the need to remove barriers is much more pressing than the need to learn to navigate around them'.
- § More needs to be done to ensure that resource providers are supported in their efforts to provide accessible financial literacy products and services to their clients. Key strategies to achieve this, as identified through key informant interviews, include building partnerships among different resource providers, including financial service providers, government service providers, accessibility support providers and practitioners who support people with disabilities on a daily basis.
- § Finally, without attention to accessibility, any attempt to help people with disabilities build their financial literacy will be in vain. The issue of access is not only about providing people with the disability supports they need to access a particular product or service at the supplier end, it is also about furnishing people with disabilities with choice as to where to go for information, how to consume and what to consume. The current supply of financial literacy resources for people with disabilities does not ensure access to *all* people with disabilities. The universal accessibility of many resources tends to be stymied by the continuing presence of certain barriers.

## Introduction

The ability to make informed financial decisions is essential for basic functioning in Canadian society. These decisions range from simple daily spending and budgeting, to choices of insurance, banking or investment products, to saving for retirement, home ownership, and post secondary education. They have profound implications on the financial security, well-being and the prosperity of individuals and families. Financial knowledge and confidence may also be linked to financial behaviors already identified as priorities for policy-makers including use of electronic funds transfers, credit and debt management, participating in disclosure processes, access to basic banking or use of fringe financial services, use of credit counseling services, and participating in public programs intended to increase financial security (such as education savings or retirement income supplements).

For the purpose of this and other research, SEDI proposes that this set of skills, knowledge and behaviors be understood as financial literacy. Financial literacy is a three-dimensional construct that includes:

Financial knowledge and understanding: The ability to make sense of and manipulate money in its different forms, uses, and functions, including the ability to deal with everyday financial matters and make the right choices for one's own needs.

Financial skills and competence: The ability to apply knowledge and understanding across a range of contexts including both predictable and unexpected situations and also including the ability to manage and resolve any financial problems or opportunities.

Financial responsibility: The ability to appreciate the wider impact of financial decisions on personal circumstances, the family, and the broader community and to understand rights, responsibilities, and sources of advice or guidance.

Although financial literacy is a continuum along which all consumers may move, market structures may be creating particularly vulnerable groups, including persons with physical or cognitive challenges that constitute a disability. At the same time, financial and government services are evolving quickly and in ways that place a greater burden of responsibility for informed decision-making on individuals. We should expect that financial skills, understanding and confidence will only continue to increase in importance for all Canadians.

A recent study of the supply of financial literacy products and services in Canada conducted by SEDI suggests a very small supply of resources are accessible to persons with disabilities<sup>1</sup>. Accessibility may be defined in terms of the removal of barriers related to disability (whether physical, sensory or cognitive). For example, resources may be made available in alternate formats to decrease the types of physical and/or sensory activity required by consumers. Alternatively, the complexity of resources may be adjusted for persons with cognitive difficulties. Through these and other mechanisms, resources may be made accessible to persons with disabilities. Some resources may also be aimed at the caregivers of persons with disabilities (e.g. information on disability-

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<sup>1</sup> SEDI, *Environmental Scan of Financial Capability Products and Services in Canada* (Toronto: SEDI, 2006).

related benefits and long-term financial planning for persons with disabilities and/or their caregivers). Specifically, for the purposes of this research, accessibility may be defined as offering people with disabilities opportunities (equal to those of other citizens) to participate in socio-economic life.

Rates of disability are projected to grow in Canada, particularly as our population ages. By best estimates, 14.3% of all Canadians currently live with some form of limitation to their health or activity due to disability<sup>2</sup>. Canada has made much progress in the inclusion and well-being of our citizens with disabilities. Canadians with disabilities are living better and longer than in past generations. That said, Canadians with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be living in poverty as other Canadians. Despite comparable levels of education, working age adults with disabilities face an unemployment rate 5 times that of other Canadians, and nearly 50% of this same population are out of the workforce altogether<sup>3</sup>. If these data weren't worrisome enough, an aging population should make the issue of disability relevant to all Canadians – by current trends, by age 65, 1 in 3 Canadians will have some form of disability.

This research therefore, comes at a crucial juncture where attempts to equalize access to supports and services for people with disabilities are increasing and where financial literacy is increasingly recognized as part of an essential knowledge and skill base for effective functioning in a knowledge economy. The federal government of Canada is moving forward to make the new Registered Disability Savings Plan, an account with a \$200,000 tax-free savings limit available to Canadian residents who already qualify for the Disability Tax Credit<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, the federal budget plans of 2007 and 2008 have both earmarked multi-year funding to develop and implement financial literacy programming across the country.

Working from this shifting environment, the objective of this research is to describe the current supply and gaps in delivery of financial literacy supports to people with disabilities. Using internet sampling and key informant interviews, as well as a literature review, an environmental scan of the financial literacy products and services that target people with disabilities and their caregivers was conducted. Demographic information about the providers of these supports was collected, as was information on the format, delivery and topics covered by the interventions, as well as the audiences targeted and the design and modifications used to make the interventions accessible. A discussion of the key findings traces the gaps in delivery of financial literacy to this population.

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Analytical Report*, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007), p. 9. Catalogue no. 89-628-XIE.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, *2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2002), Catalogue no 89-587-XIE.

<sup>4</sup> See PLAN, advocates for the RDSP, website, at [www.plan.ca](http://www.plan.ca) or blog [www.rdsp.com](http://www.rdsp.com) for additional details on the RDSP, such as incentives like a maximum Canada Disability Savings Grant, maximum 70,000 and Canada Disabilities Savings Bond maximum 20,000 (both income dependent) See also Gloria Galloway and Andre Pickard, "Plan for Disabled Children Gets Flaherty's Support," *The Globe and Mail*, December 14, 2006, A1.

## Literature Review

This literature review seeks to examine the following intersecting topics: a) experiences of disability; b) accessibility of services and c) the availability and appropriateness of existing financial literacy products and services for persons with disabilities. The review begins with a discussion of 'disability' and 'accessibility' and then turns its attention to a brief overview of the financial supports available to people with disabilities. Subsequently, the review considers perspectives from disability advocacy organizations on the socio-economic inclusion of people with disabilities. In addition, services and community-based supports are also examined using a framework for 'adequacy' developed by researchers at the University of Alberta. The availability, adequacy and challenges in providing services to people with different disabilities (which fall mainly into 4 broad categories: developmental, mental, physical and sensory), and in accommodating their needs and the needs of their caregivers, are examined. Studies from around the world provide evidence that there are many gaps in services and in meeting demands for services effectively. Finally, the development, implementation and environments of financial literacy interventions for people with disabilities are reviewed using global examples.

### ***Defining 'disability' and 'accessibility'***

Information, and access to it, is considered a form of empowerment or a means by which individuals can gain the opportunity "to choose a path from many alternatives instead of being limited to a few perhaps unwanted or unfeasible choices<sup>5</sup>". While many studies examine 'what' consumers with disabilities are most interested in receiving in terms of information, it is the 'how' that is most important in discussions of accessibility.

The literature reviewed described two broad approaches to defining disability. The individual/medical model which characterizes accessibility as a need attached to some impact or deficit, and the social/political characterization which considers that each member of society has a right to a livelihood and to the means by which to improve their lives.

The medical/individual model has been criticized for overly-focusing on individual deficits and placing the burden on the individual to find the solutions to those deficits, rather than on society where inaccessibility occurs. On the other hand, by some estimation, the political/social approach does not go far enough to recognize that people with disabilities do have particular and individual needs, and that erasing categorizations between them and able-bodied people does not go far enough to help meet those needs.

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<sup>5</sup> Williamson et al., "Information seeking by blind and sight impaired citizens: an ecological study", *Information Research* 5, no. 4 (2000), p. 3, <http://informationr.net/ir/5-4paper79.html>.

In the early 1990s, a 'third way' approach was adapted by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), the experience of disability is "mainstream..., a universal human experience<sup>6</sup>". As a result, disability is not something that "only happens to a minority of humanity<sup>7</sup>". Implicit in this definition is that there exists a responsibility at every level of society, whether in industry, government, or social services, to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. To achieve a functional society the United Nations World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, argues that it is not acceptable to simply enforce prevention against the occurrence of disability. Rather, an integral part of inclusion is recognizing that people with disabilities add value to society when offered equal opportunities to participate in it and its development<sup>8</sup>. This, offering equal opportunities to people with disabilities to participate in socio-economic life, is known as 'accessibility' and it is the definition used when undertaking this research.

While the above goes far to describe accessibility, it does not prescribe a 'way forward' through which to enforce the principles of accessibility. This task has largely been left to governments, in partnership with society. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, passed in 2005, is the first of its kind in Canada and requires that business and organizations providing services to people in Ontario comply with accessibility standards in 5 general areas:

- § Transportation – Refers to specific long-term objectives and technical requirements to prevent and remove barriers to persons with disabilities in the use of passenger transportation services in the Province of Ontario.
- § Customer service - Refers to delivering service to the public, and could include business practices and employee training.
- § Built environment - Refers to access to, from and within buildings and outdoor spaces, and could include counter heights, aisle/door widths, parking, and signs, as well as pedestrian access routes and signal systems.
- § Employment - Refers to hiring and retaining employees, and could include employment practices, policies and processes.
- § Information and Communications – Refers to, but is not limited to, information and communication provided to the consumer or end-user through print, telephone, electronics and in person<sup>9</sup>.

These criteria demonstrate some of the practical applications of the concept of building accessibility for all.

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<sup>6</sup> WHO, "Classifications: International Classification of Functioning, Health and Disability", World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>.

<sup>7</sup> Williamson et al., *Information Seeking by Blind and Sight Impaired Citizens*.

<sup>8</sup> UN Enable, *World Programme of Action Concerning People with Disabilities*, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=23>.

<sup>9</sup> Government of Ontario, *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Terms of Reference*, 2005, <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/accesson/business/information/reference.htm>

Moving further from what constitutes accessibility to a look at the tools and supports that help to ensure accessibility, the Roeher Institute (Canada's leading policy-research and development organization focusing on securing the inclusion, citizenship, human rights and equality of people with intellectual and other disabilities) describes disability supports as:

“any good, service or environmental adaptation that assists persons with disabilities and their families to overcome barriers they face in carrying out daily living activities at each stage of their lives and in participating and being recognized as full citizens, in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community<sup>10</sup>.”

While disability supports are located at the supply end of the consumption chain where providers of goods and services are those who invest in and offer these supports, accessibility supports are concentrated in the hands of the consumers. For example, a Braille publication, developed by a publisher, offers the blind some access to the product, however limits their decision-making about how to access the product. A web-based technology that offers a platform for reader devices offers increased access to websites and is a democratizing vehicle that gives consumers options and choice about what they consume.

Indeed, the discussion of accessibility is deeply rooted in the advancement of IT and the technology field where, as technologies advance, they serve more and more to concentrate control over service-use or product up-take in the hands of the user. Technological advancement alone can never be the sole provider of accessibility for all disabilities, social norms must also change to include the needs of those with disabilities and to value the contribution to society that those individuals make.

### ***Financial support***

The adequacy of disability supports often dominates discussions of access. In terms of this research, the adequacy of *financial supports* for people with disabilities specifically emerged as a key area of concern.

The Canadian government offers several programs to help people with disabilities reach financial self-sufficiency. The personal income tax system offers a number of credits and deductions for people with disabilities, their caregivers and their dependents, recognizing that disability-related expenses and foregone income and assets are often directly related to the individual's or dependent's disability.

In recent years, the Canadian government has increased financial supports in the form of tax credits, financial benefits and supplements in an effort to combat poverty among people with disabilities and their families. The government has also introduced a new savings tool targeting families with disabled children, designed to allow them to save, tax-free, towards their child's and family's well-being<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ccdonline.ca/publications/Building%20an%20Inclusive%20and%20Accessible%20Canada%20Flyer%20CCD-CACL.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Human Resources and Social Development Canada, *Advancing the Inclusion of People with Disabilities* (Ottawa: HRSDC, 2006), p. 68-69; Galloway and Pickard, *Plan for Disabled Children*

The report that helped to usher in the aforementioned new product recognizes, crucially, that people with disabilities and particularly those with severe disabilities, as well as their caregivers, will have diminished income. This is not to say that all individuals with disabilities live in poverty, but rather that caring for a person with a disability, or receiving care for a disability, requires foregone opportunities for productivity. This dynamic is described in the report:

“In many cases one member of the supporting family (most often a mother) absents herself or himself from the labour force to provide full time support to the person with a disability. The other spouse will often have a reduced attachment to the labour force or will find it necessary to forego promotions that carry greater responsibility because of their responsibilities to care for the person with a disability or to provide respite to their spouse who is the primary care giver<sup>12</sup>.”

In addition to the new Registered Disability Savings Program, the government’s Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, Seniors Program and Assisted Living Program for First Nations people all include initiatives to provide extra financial support to people with disabilities so that they might meet their basic needs<sup>13</sup>.

### ***Perspectives from disability organizations on the inclusion of disabled people***

While the Canadian Government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars annually in supports for people with disabilities, gaps in access to such supports and gaps in the ability of the system of available supports to fully meet the financial needs of individuals with disabilities and their caregivers are still prevalent. In 2005, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) and the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) called on the federal government to demonstrate leadership in the battle against the poverty and exclusion of Canadians with disabilities by investing in disability services<sup>14</sup>. The paper addresses the fact that people with disabilities are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as the rest of Canadians.

The paper identifies the first step in combating the poverty and exclusion of people with disabilities as ensuring that they have access to needed disability-related supports (i.e. aids and devices, personal assistance, and environmental accommodations). According to the paper, “[w]ith the right supports – that are flexible and responsive as people age and make transitions to new life stages – people with disabilities learn, become employed, raise families, contribute to their communities, and to the social and economic well-being of Canada.” However, as the report points out, a significant number of people with disabilities lack needed supports either because these supports are too costly or because they are unavailable.

The report concludes that public policy has failed to provide adequate foundations to ensure the full inclusion and quality of life (equal to that of other Canadians) of Canadians with disabilities. Thus, the paper provides a number of short- and medium-term recommendations for a National

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<sup>12</sup> Finance Canada, *A New Beginning: The Report of the Minister of Finance’s Expert Panel on Financial Security for Children with Severe Disabilities* (Ottawa: Finance Canada, 2006) p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> HRSDC, *Advancing the Inclusion*, p. 72.

<sup>14</sup> Council of Canadians with Disabilities and Canadian Association for Community Living, *A Call to Combat Poverty and Exclusion of Canadians with Disabilities by Investing in Disability Supports*, 2005, <http://www.ccdonline.ca/ccpe.htm>

Framework and Agenda to improve access to needed disability supports and, by extension, enable Canadians with disabilities to increase their incomes and improve their employment status.

In 2006, in a subsequent paper<sup>15</sup>, the CCD and the CACL consider how an effective Federal Disability Act might be crafted and what new mechanisms for advancing inclusion might be implemented through such an act. The paper was written in anticipation of action by the Government of Canada to introduce a National Disability Act promoting reasonable access to medical care, medical equipment, education, employment, transportation and housing for Canadians with disabilities. The goal of the CCD/CACL paper is to further the understanding of both the potentials and limitations of such legislation. Notably, the report acknowledges that a Federal Disability Act would not substantively address such priorities as disability supports and poverty alleviation.

In terms of the expected substantive effects of Federal legislation, the CCD/CACL report reviews the 'reach' of the federal government and discusses some of the areas where a national disability act may have significant impact on the lives of Canadians with disabilities. One such area – highly relevant to this literature review – is the banking industry.

According to the paper, "[t]he banking industry has not adequately addressed its obligation to ensure inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities" and could be improved if closer attention were paid to the principles of universal design at the design stage. The paper goes on to point out that, "[w]hile there are several agencies that deal with the banking industry, none of them explicitly addresses systemic barriers to persons with disabilities."

Four such agencies are specifically mentioned in the report. These agencies include: the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (OSFI), which is responsible for supervising federally regulated financial institutions to ensure that they are in sound financial condition and in compliance with applicable laws; the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments (OBSI), an independent organization that investigates and provides resolution of customer complaints against financial services providers; the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (FCAC), an independent body that works to protect and educate consumers of financial services and, lastly, the Canadian Bankers Association (CBA), the main representative body for banks in Canada and an important lobby group that undertakes research and policy development on behalf of the banking industry while building a greater understanding of the banking sector.

In terms of the actual and potential engagement of these organizations with issues of accessibility, the CCD/CACL report (published in 2006) notes the following: a) it may be possible to bring accessibility issues to the OBSI for settlement on a case-by-case basis; b) while the FCAC's objective is to strengthen oversight of consumer issues and expand consumer education in the financial sector, its written mandate does not identify accessibility as an issue and c) it is likely that any future development of systemic solutions to accessibility will require the involvement of the CBA.

Insofar as there has been little progress in the development of voluntary codes or standards relating to accessibility within the Canadian banking industry, the CCD/CACL report suggests that this is an area where a National Disability Act – obligating the public and private sectors (within

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<sup>15</sup> Council of Canadians with Disabilities and Canadian Association for Community Living, *Contributing to the Dialogue, A Federal Disability Act: Opportunities and Challenges*, 2006, p. 24, <http://www.ccdonline.ca/publications/FDA.html>

federal legislative jurisdiction) to remove barriers – could have significant impact. In support of this suggestion, the report cites an Australian example. In Australia, following an inquiry by a commission that oversees the application of federal legislation in the area of human rights, anti-discrimination, social justice and privacy, the banking industry adopted a range of accessibility standards on Internet Banking, Automatic Phone Banking, Electronic Funds Transfer at the Point of Sale and Automatic Teller Machines.

The report also focuses on specific high-risk populations such as Aboriginal people, given that the incidence of disability in some age groups of Aboriginal populations is almost twice that of the rest of Canadians. The Federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and their partners at the provincial and territorial levels are encouraged to address those people at-risk and in-need, both on-reserve and off, when devising a National Disability Act.

As laid out above, many approaches to achieving fuller economic and social inclusion of people with disabilities have been discussed in the advocacy literature. What follows is a discussion of literature that considers inclusion from the perspective of people with disabilities, specifically vis-à-vis their experiences accessing support products and services.

### ***The experience of accessibility among people with disabilities***

In *Navigating the Disability Process: Persons with Mental Disorders Applying for and Receiving Disability Benefits*, authors Bilder and Mechanic examine the determinants of the outcomes of applications for disability supports in the U.S. The authors seek to explain the differences between those who qualify for the supplement (Social Security Disability Benefit - SSDB) and those who do not. In recent years, the U.S. has witnessed an increase in successful applications for the SSDB from people with mental disorders, attributed to increased efforts from mental health programs to gain eligibility for clients, as well as increased detection in recent years and greater efforts to deinstitutionalize people with mental disorders and bring them into the community.

Nevertheless, those with mental disorders that most need the supplements are among those who, for varying reasons, fail to apply. The research suggests, therefore, that it is important for support workers to ensure that those who need the supplement know that they are entitled to it. In addition, it is also important that these support workers gain the skills needed in order to encourage clients to apply or to begin the application and/or referral process.

A key obstacle identified by the researchers, however, is that “the path to disability benefits is often a one-way street, that few who enter the rolls ever leave them” and, therefore, it is important to “be able to distinguish between those who are unlikely ever to be able to work, from unemployed persons whose prospects for employment in the future might be derailed by their entry into the disability system<sup>16</sup>.”

As such, financial literacy for people with disabilities might also encompass programs that seek to educate providers of information and advice to people with disabilities about the benefits they are entitled to. As this study shows, getting the right benefits to the right people at the right time is an

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<sup>16</sup> Scott Bilder and David Mechanic, “Navigating the Disability Process: Persons with Mental Disorders Applying for and Receiving Disability Benefits”, *The Milbank Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2003):99

important factor in the overall self-sufficiency of people with disabilities.

Viewed from a different angle, Butterworth, Crosier and Rodgers, in their 2004 study of income support recipients with mental health disorders in Australia<sup>17</sup>, observe that those who do manage to receive the disability supports they are entitled to are at increased risk of exhibiting mental health disorders in relation to financial hardship. This study illustrates that, while the system of supports currently available to people with disabilities is extensive, it perhaps does not go far enough to recognize the relationship between income support and mental health disorders.

There are few measures taken by government that address the correlation between mental health and financial difficulty. Failing to recognize this correlation renders the disability support system of any government incomplete. This report also signals the important and not uncommon incidence of multiple disabilities within the population of people with disabilities. This incidence further complicates appropriateness and adequacy of disability supports as people can be juggling a vast spectrum of needs.

In addition to the gaps in providing for the financial needs of people with disabilities and their families are the gaps in supports needed by these individuals in order to lead self-sufficient lifestyles. Increasingly, the literature suggests that institutionalization and segregation is a thing of the past and that, more and more, services to people with disabilities must be inclusive and located in the community.

### ***Closing gaps in services to people with disabilities***

Sobsey and Calder<sup>18</sup> review works that examine effective supports to families of children with disabilities. According to the authors, there are a number of key tenets to these supports.

Early intervention, particularly on behalf of young children with developmental disabilities such as autism, is identified as key to helping families and people with disabilities integrate into the community from an early stage, as well as educating the community about the need for appropriate services.

Services that recognize behavioural issues in people with disabilities and help manage those issues need to be supported by the government. These services are also crucial to helping people with disabilities integrate into the community.

More intervention through services is generally seen as more effective than less, although insufficient research has been done to determine a benchmark number of hours for different interventions. Reaching a 'sufficient number of hours' or acceptable benchmark of intervention also depends on the kind of support being offered, whether in family settings or in institutions, and to whom, specifically. Services provided in family settings are considered to be more cost-effective by administrators and governments, as well as more effective in creating social inclusion for the

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<sup>17</sup> P. Butterworth, T. Crosier and B. Rodgers, "Mental Health Problems, Disability and Income Support Receipt: A Replication and Extension Using the HILDA Survey", *Australian Journal of Labour Economics* 7, no. 2 (2004): 151-174.

<sup>18</sup> D. Sobsey and P. Calder, "Family Supports for Children with Disabilities: State of the Evidence Review", *Report to the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research*, 2006.

primary care recipient. Therefore, in-home and in-community services should be developed as a part of a larger community-based services approach.

The demands a child places on its families are unique and not necessarily related to a diagnostic category. Sometimes, cultural considerations will also influence the effectiveness of support services. Families living on low incomes, in remote areas and Aboriginal families are among those who might benefit highly from family-oriented and family-specific services. The individualized approach is seen to be the most effective.

In addition to increased supports, families need better guidance to decide on the kinds of support mechanisms they will need in order to better provide for their child(ren) with disabilities. Some cope well while making few adjustments to their lifestyles and others make adjustments and have a difficult time coping. It is important that the services and resources made available are also sensitive to the needs of the particular family unit.

In general, Sobesey and Carter's review found that more information is needed about services and their effectiveness. Most research has been descriptive of services rather than prescriptive. Parents are demanding that more be done, particularly around older children at later stages in life, to explore appropriate services and ways to increase their availability.

Several studies attempt to document the patterns of service use by different segments within the larger population of people with disabilities and their caregivers. This addresses the fact that 'disabilities' is a vast and deep category, encompassing people at different ages, with different levels of care and different cognitive abilities. Looking closely at smaller sub-groups to assess appropriate services is, therefore, an important part of building a comprehensive service system.

In Pruchno and McMullen<sup>19</sup>, the authors look specifically at the utilization of services by people with developmental disabilities. The study surveyed the mothers of children with developmental disabilities to learn about factors contributing to receipt of information by this particular population. The research found that there were different predictors of service use and unmet services according to the particular service.

The study also reveals that utilization of a service by a client with developmental disabilities relies on a mix of factors, including the characteristics of both the individual receiving the service and the caregiver and environmental conditions (i.e. whether the service is offered in the home or in the community). Those who tend to not fit the criteria receive fewer services as do those who require services in the home<sup>20</sup>.

A key factor in the determination of service up-take is the "predisposing, enabling and need characteristics of the primary family caregiver as well as the care recipient<sup>21</sup>". Among these many factors are the age and gender of the caregiver which differs according to their relationship to the primary care recipient. Mothers, particularly of those with severe impairments, often care for

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<sup>19</sup> R.A. Pruchno and W. F. McMullen, "Patterns of service utilization by adults with a developmental disability: type of service makes a difference", *American Journal on Mental Retardation* 109, no. 5 (2004): 362-378.

<sup>20</sup> Pruchno and McMullen, *Patterns of service utilization*, p.374.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p. 363.

children into adulthood if necessary while spouses tend to care for disabled spouses in old age<sup>22</sup>. Other factors, classified as 'enabling factors', refer to resources that inhibit or promote service use including the employment status of the caregiver and income level, the caregiver's perception of support services available, and whether other secondary and tertiary caregivers are available to provide additional care for the primary care recipient<sup>23</sup>. 'Need factors' are classified as those related to the illness or disability. It is not uncommon that primary caregivers also have need factors (i.e. a disability of their own) which impact upon their ability to provide primary care and support to another person in need.

In a study focused on older parent caregivers of people with developmental disabilities, the concern raised was that older caregivers tend to be isolated from the support system<sup>24</sup>. In this study, the authors speculate that contributing factors to this were attitudinal. Older parent caregivers were thought to have: 1) a generational culture of personal responsibility for their child, 2) a desire to keep 'one's troubles to oneself' and embarrassment at revealing difficulties, 3) a lack of services available when the children were young, resulting in highly developed coping strategies negating the need and/or desire to seek outside support, and 4) a strong sense of satisfaction and achievement after a lifetime of caregiving<sup>25</sup>. Through the general caregiving literature, it is also found that low engagement with services might be the result of negative experiences, such as lack of respect for the caregiver, unsuitability of the services offered and perceived inattention to the caregiver's needs<sup>26</sup>.

An important point highlighted through the narrative life histories methodology used in this study is that the category of 'caregiver' is extremely broad and difficult to characterize. 'Caregiver' might refer to those next of kin related to the primary care recipient, yet on the other hand it might also refer to professionals with no relation to the patient whatsoever. It could be someone who looks after another in the home, assisting them to become ambulatory, whether on a daily or more intermittent basis, or it might be someone living outside the home who assists them once they are ambulatory (for those who are self-sufficient and living on their own). Caregivers also have varying abilities, and are at various points in their lives. Some provide short-term, while others provide life-long care.

With caregivers occupying such a broad social strata, it has become a well-established tradition in the general caregiving literature to "examine individual variation among caregivers in their responses to the experiences of caregiving<sup>27</sup>". Alongside this, as seen above, many caregivers criticize the support systems for people with disabilities for failing to meet the needs of caregivers.

A common difficulty in determining barriers to access among all of these studies and reviews is the difficulty of proving causality between predictors and outcome. Many studies, therefore, avoid discussions of causal factors of access and uptake by focusing on patterns of response rather than determining their cause or prescribing solutions to such barriers.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid; David E Biegel et al., "Predictors of In-home and Out-of-Home Service Use by Family Caregivers of Alzheimer's Disease Patients", *Journal of Ageing and Health*, 5, no. 4 (1993): 419-438.

<sup>23</sup> Biegel et al., *Predictors of In-home and Out-of-Home Service*, p. 423.

<sup>24</sup> Gwynnyth Llewellyn, et al., "Older Parent Caregivers' Engagement With the Service System", *American Journal on Mental Retardation* 109, no. 5 (2004): 379-396.

<sup>25</sup> Llewellyn et al., *Older Parent Caregivers*, p. 379.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p. 380.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

In one such descriptive or expository study, Williamson et al.<sup>28</sup> discuss the experiences of sight-impaired Australians in obtaining information. They reveal that the blind cite that health, income and financial information are most sought after. Many individuals obtain this information through friends and families, however the majority of people use the internet. The internet offers a high amount of independence for sight-impaired information seekers and is therefore recognized as a major portal of access to information. When utilizing other modes, such as radio services and Braille information and literature, sight-impaired people must rely on third parties to read on their behalf and information transfer may cause time delays. In contrast to this, the internet is real-time, promotes self-directed information gathering and is interactive. With reader devices, a blind person can easily scan the internet for information and send electronic messages. The internet, therefore, offers the blind a certain level of anonymity as well as autonomy in seeking access, and is, when all other factors are controlled for, considered to be one of the best tools for accessing information among the blind and other disabled populations (see above *Defining Accessibility*).

The most often-cited pitfall of using the internet as a portal for information is limited availability, seen as a factor of cost and technical skill. The latter most affects the elderly, who account for 9 out of 10 of the population of 300,000 Australians with sight impairments<sup>29</sup>. Cost and the high price of internet access most affects those individuals who are living independently, don't share accommodations and rely on their own income, which is often made up of income supports and pension plans. Poor web design was also cited as a major obstacle to effective use of the internet.

The study also notes that the majority of sight impaired individuals who live with caregivers rely largely on those support people to access information, and that this method is considered tremendously important.

Disability information services – those that offer information about disabilities rather than strictly for people with disabilities – are also important complements to information for people with disabilities. Particularly useful to the caregivers of people with disabilities, this kind of service can provide a resource to the community and a portal for greater educational opportunities. According to Laura Molino, author of *Disability information: from knowledge to power*<sup>30</sup>, specialized, co-operative and autonomous centers of information, separated by geography, population served, or topic covered, can form a link in a network of information transfer to end-users. Social investments in such systems are important as they create solid webs of information, knowledge-building opportunities and community empowerment, helping to make better decisions based on greater choice. Molino emphasizes that even information in its simplest form – data – cannot be effective without 'enhancement with human understanding'. Therefore, information professionals or service-assisted information transfer add a knowledge dimension to data that cannot be obtained from electronic, print or multi-media means.

### ***Filling gaps in need for financial literacy among people with disabilities***

Examples of advocacy and programming that offer financial literacy to people with disabilities can be found around the globe. In Canada, the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN), a not-for profit social enterprise, serves families who have a relative with a disability. PLAN works to ensure

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<sup>28</sup> Williamson et al., *Information Seeking by Blind and Sight Impaired Citizens*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Molino, "Disability information: from knowledge to power", *The Australian Library Journal* 50, no. 1 (2001): 3.

a safe and secure future for people with disabilities and does so by tailoring programs to suit and serve families of people with disabilities. As such, PLAN goes beyond the work of the traditional community living or workshop facility that seeks to help people with disabilities integrate into the community. PLAN runs programs for the non-disabled, as well, to help them learn to plan for the future of their child and to know what to expect. PLAN also works hard to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and has gone far to advise the government on new measures that encourage asset-building for families supporting people with disabilities. Financial literacy is seen as an integral part of any such program and PLAN has begun providing some opportunities to build financial literacy via telelearning and online courses, publications, seminars and services dealing with topics on wealth, taxes, will and estate planning specific to people with disabilities. PLAN has translated materials into Chinese, is offering courses in Cantonese and Mandarin and is in the early stages of developing a distribution network to keep Canadian families informed and up-to-date<sup>31</sup>.

In the UK, strides have been made to ensure financial capability programs are more accessible and relevant to people with disabilities. In 2005, the Financial Services Authority's Innovation Fund awarded 3 separate disability-focused financial capability initiatives including programs promoting understanding of the financial system to those with learning disabilities; programs targeting careers and families of those in hospices with a particular focus on younger families and, finally, programs working with people with autism and Asperger syndrome.

The U.S., however, remains at the forefront of exploring the needs of people with disabilities, improving the availability and suitability of financial literacy products and services and developing a policy framework in which these supports are made available. Recognizing that many young people with disabilities do not seek work out of a concern that their benefits would be clawed back, governments in the U.S. have enacted legislation to support individuals with disabilities and their families to become more self-sufficient. Among these is the Tax and Financial Education Campaign (Tax Facts), launched in 2004 that seeks to expand knowledge and use of favourable tax benefits and financial literacy services in 36 communities through a large, multi-year campaign. Key results have been an increased up-take of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) by persons with disabilities and expanded opportunities and options through financial education services and technical assistance.

The National Disability Institute in the U.S. examined the effects of the campaign and found that the demographic of people with disabilities seeking help with their finances sometimes varies from that of service-seekers without disabilities<sup>32</sup>. Specifically, more women are likely to access such services among non-disabled populations while those with disabilities are more likely to start seeking help at a later age. Most importantly, almost all those with a disability who presented at the clinics for help expressed a concern about losing their benefits and entitlements if they performed certain financial procedures or accessed certain supports such as benefits and, more specifically, the EITC (for which the majority were eligible). This is a common theme among people with disabilities across the country and demonstrates a particular area of relevance to this population that needs to be elaborated upon by programs seeking to provide relevant financial literacy resources to people with disabilities.

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<sup>31</sup> The Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, *Plan for a Good Life: Wealth*, [www.plan.ca](http://www.plan.ca).

<sup>32</sup> *Educating Democracy: Tax and Financial Service Needs of Working Americans with Disabilities*.

<http://www.ncbcapitalimpact.org/default.aspx?id=116>

The World Institute on Disability (WID), also in the U.S., is a leading advocacy network for the rights and needs of people with disabilities as well as a hub of practical information on financial literacy programs for people with disabilities. The WID points out that problems facing people with disabilities can be broad and don't always relate directly to disability. For example, people with disabilities may need to develop money management skills or need to allay fears about using online banking due to concerns about internet security. The problems they face can also be very specific, such as needing advice on filing for the EITC while also receiving Supplemental Social Income and working part time<sup>33</sup>.

Regardless of increased interest in financial education for low-income earners in the U.S., supportive legislation and a broad range of programs and funding, the WID suggests that much work still needs to be done if financial education resources are to reach people with disabilities. Some suggestions include: offering individuals with disabilities and their families a framework for building financial relationships with non-traditional partners in the community<sup>34</sup>; broadening the existing accepted definition of financial education (offered by the National Endowment for Financial Education) to be inclusive of the needs of people with disabilities; improving accessibility and accommodation of existing programs and, finally, making information available to instructors about working with people with different physical and cognitive abilities.

## **Conclusion**

People with disabilities deserve to have the same opportunities to thrive as all other Canadians. However, current support systems provided by public and private institutions have major gaps to fill in adequately meeting the needs of people with disabilities and their caregivers. As a result, people with disabilities often experience marginalization and frustration.

Financial literacy has been recognized as an essential resource for people with disabilities for whom self-sufficiency is extremely difficult to achieve and, when achieved, can be easily undermined by ineffective support systems. Effective financial literacy programming, therefore, must recognize the right of the individual and their caregiver to independence, which can only be offered through improved access.

As discussed above, there are problematic gaps in accessibility to different resources for different populations of people with disabilities. For those with physical and sensory disabilities, support systems do not go far enough to provide timely interventions to help access services. For those with cognitive and mental disabilities, gaps exist in the adequacy of the resources provided and the flexibility of these resources to accommodate families seeking to support relatives with disabilities in their own unique way. It is not uncommon for people with disabilities and their caregivers to disengage from support networks altogether, which does not bode well for any financial literacy program that seeks to meet the needs of this population. Therefore, much work needs to be done to make these resources more relevant and accessible to the populations that have most to gain from them.

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<sup>33</sup> Johnette Hartnett, "New Century Workers with Disabilities: Why Financial Education Matters for Americans with Disabilities", *Equity Newsletter*, 2006, <http://www.wid.org/programs/access-to-assets/equity/equity-e-newsletter-summer-2006/new-century-workers-with-disabilities-why-financial-education-matters-for-americans-with-disabilities>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## **Methodology**

Multiple complimentary methods were employed including 1) a literature review of peer-reviewed articles and other secondary research that addressed issues in design and delivery of financial literacy interventions to people with disabilities; 2) an environmental scan based in a web search that served to populate a database with current and relevant interventions supplying people with disabilities with financial literacy; and, 3) key informant interviews that served to fill in gaps in the scan and validate assumptions or patterns found in the research.

### ***Literature review***

A review of the primary and secondary literature on financial literacy for people with disabilities was conducted using academic research databases such as ERIC, CSA Francis and Social Services Abstracts. Terms searched included 'financial literacy', 'financial education', 'financial capability', 'financial orientation', 'disability', 'accessibility', 'blind', 'deaf', 'paraplegic', 'mental illness', 'developmental disability', 'financial consumer education' and 'consumer education'. Websites of relevance and those known to SEDI were also browsed.

### ***Data collection***

An internet search was conducted of financial literacy products and services provided by organizations in Canada, and information gathered about organizations that offer these resources to people with disabilities. Their websites and grey publications (i.e. annual reports, Canada Revenue Agency financial information for charities, program evaluation reports, course offerings, web-based documents, and seminar guides) were reviewed. Data was catalogued in a customized database according to supplier demographic information (i.e. geographic location, organizational reach, industry type, organizational size and/or type). Follow-up phone calls and emails were attempted to verify that assumptions about the accuracy of information collected from web-based sources were correct.

Financial literacy products and services offered by the suppliers were also catalogued. A resource's accessibility to people with disabilities was assessed using a framework that examines a resource's design and/or modifications that were made to it that bridge limited activity gaps.

The database captured data into fields that yielded approximately 20 relevant queries. These queries serve to illustrate the shape and dimension of the existing supply of financial literacy to people with disabilities in Canada and are detailed below in the *Results* section.

### ***Key informant interviews***

Seventeen key informants from across the country and across sectors were chosen to validate the findings in the database as well as fill in gaps in knowledge and understanding of the supply of financial literacy to people with disabilities. Key informants were those with a deep understanding of issues surrounding people with disabilities, familiar with providing supports to people with disabilities and/or familiarity with the field of financial literacy.

A balanced representation among the informants was sought to reflect Canada's various regions, languages and sectors working in this field. Informants were also carefully selected to help validate the organizational sample, the list of topics for which interventions were screened and the delivery methods used. Informants were also selected who were knowledgeable about ways to improve the current supply of financial literacy products and/or services to people with disabilities. Results from key informant interviews were included based on the frequency with which comments were made and the relevance of comments to issues raised in the database queries and literature reviews. The matrix of key informants consulted in this research is included in Appendix A while a template of the interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

### ***Methodological limitations***

There are many providers of financial literacy to people with disabilities who may not post information about these interventions on-line. Indeed, the visibility of financial literacy resources on-line might be a factor of a provider's ability to post and update data, an ability that many smaller organizations with low communications budgets do not have. In this case, the internet creates bias by overemphasizing the supports offered by some organizations while under-emphasizing the supports offered by those who may not maintain websites or update them frequently.

Bias is a common drawback of sampling via the internet, therefore key informants were drawn upon to validate the sample and fill any gaps. Key informants identified interventions not captured by internet sampling 35% of the time.

Securing key informants for research is often time-consuming and difficult. In this study, the response rate from key informants was both lower and more regionally concentrated in central and western Canada than anticipated. Seventeen of the 27 informants that were approached agreed to participate in the interviews, while 3 of the 10 individuals that did not respond initially cancelled at the last minute. This lower-than-anticipated response can only be attributed to the busy schedules of those approached. Several of the respondents preferred to complete a questionnaire rather than participate in an interview. Nevertheless, the sample of key informants met the parameters of the research design.

The research team was also at a disadvantage in sampling across Quebec given the language barrier – no Anglophone informants were available or willing to participate. Respondents from the east coast, while home to some of the largest concentrations of people who identify as having disabilities<sup>35</sup>, were also non-responsive, leading to a key informant sample heavily skewed towards central and western Canada. While from the internet scan the east coast and Quebec factored among some of the most visible deliverers of financial literacy interventions, interviews were not able to identify supply gaps in these areas.

While accessibility was one of two key criteria that interventions were required to meet in rounding out the sample, this is a difficult characteristic to glean when sampling on-line for two key reasons. First, whether they fail to perceive the relevance to their audience or clientele or whether it's an oversight, not all providers of financial literacy advertise the accessibility of their interventions.

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<sup>35</sup> Statistics Canada, 2007, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Analytical Report, Catalogue no. 89-628-XIE, p. 16.

Second, as seen from the *Literature Review* section, above, creating accessibility for some people (i.e. large font on websites, low-complexity in documents) does not necessarily make the intervention universally accessible. The limits to the universality of interventions within the sample is discussed in the *Results* section below. For the purposes of this research, a broad framework was chosen to assess an intervention’s accessibility and the possible drawbacks of having a broad-based sample were counter-balanced with the benefits of generating a picture of the supply of financial literacy to people with disabilities and the gaps that need to be filled. The framework is outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Accessibility Framework**

By Design	Physical	Cognitive	Technological	Sensory
Disability Support				

Interventions were considered accessible if they offered a support that would bridge access limitations. The support was assessed for its ability to bridge physical, cognitive, technological or sensory access limitations. It also had to be supportive from its original design or through some augmentation or modification to its original design. A web module, although accessible to those with activity limitations, was not considered ‘accessible’ if it did not make an attempt to build considerations for people with disabilities into its delivery format or if it failed to modify its delivery format to address the needs of people with at least some form of disability.

An intervention was considered ‘accessible’ even if it only addressed one kind of activity limitation through its design or through modification. As hypothesized at the outset of this research, and as confirmed through key informant interviews, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to create an intervention that is completely accessible and impervious against all forms of access limitation. Therefore, for the purposes of advancing research and discussion in this field, a broad net was used in sampling an intervention’s accessibility.

# Results

## Organizational demographics

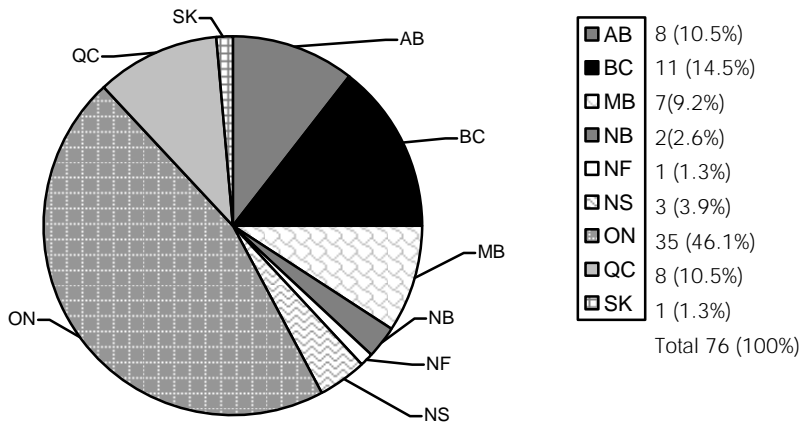
A total of 76 organizations were sampled through this research, each of them providing one or more product(s) and/or service(s) to people with disabilities. Figure 2 reveals that almost half of those organizations sampled are located in Ontario (46.1%). British Columbia has the next highest percentage of organizations sampled (14.5%), followed by Alberta and Quebec (both at 10.5%). This distribution closely matches the distribution of people across the country who identify as having disabilities. Ontario is the province with the highest concentration of the country's population with disabilities at 42.0%, followed by Quebec (17.4%), British Columbia (14.5%) and Alberta (9.9%)<sup>36</sup>.

These numbers, however, are driven by provincial population; when adjusted for population, the provinces with the highest rates of disability are Nova Scotia (20%), New Brunswick (17.2%), Prince Edward Island (16.3%) and British Columbia (16.0%). Ontario has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest rate at 15.5%. On the other end of the spectrum, Alberta (14.3%) and Quebec (13.6%) – ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> respectively – have rates below the national average of 14.3%<sup>37</sup>.

Whether or not the providers sampled in this research provide resources that are commensurate with the particular disabilities and needs of Canadians is touched upon below in *Accessibility of products and services*.

Figure 2:

Number of organizations by province



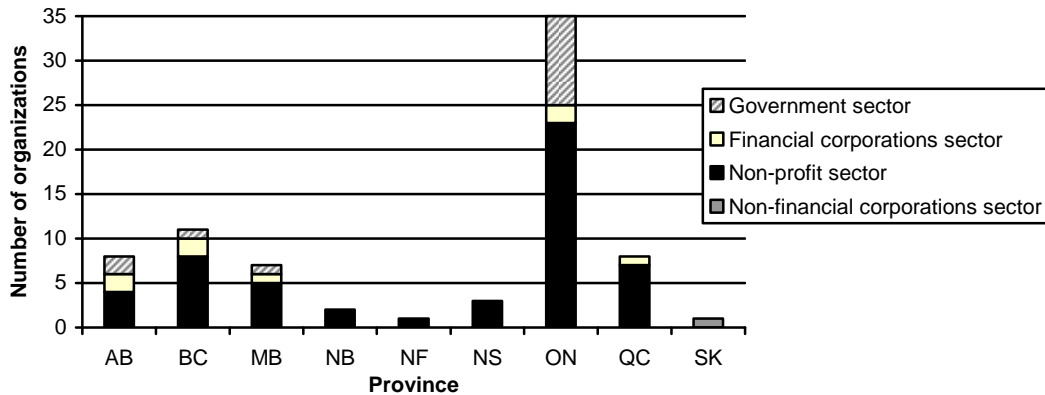
<sup>36</sup> Adapted from: Statistics Canada, *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Analytical Report*, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007) Catalogue no. 89-628-XIE, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

The total number of products sampled in this research is 42 while the total number of services sampled is 77. Across the country, the distribution of products versus services varies province by province. However, the non-profit sector generally provides more financial literacy interventions to people with disabilities than the government sector. Indeed, when the provincial distribution of sampled organizations is charted against delivery sectors (Figure 3), it is revealed that the majority of organizations are from the non-profit sector.

Figure 3:

**Number of organizations by province by sector**



When the interventions offered by sampled organizations are classified as either products or services we see that the non-profit sector leads in the supply of *both* products *and* services. That said, it also becomes evident that the government sector tends to supply more products than services.

In terms of products, Figure 4 shows that the non-profit sector supplied just over half of sampled products (59.5%) and that the government sector supplied 33.3%. Conversely, in terms of services, Figure 5 shows that the non-profit sector supplied the vast majority of sampled services (80.5%) while the government sector supplied only 6.5%. In fact, the financial corporations sector supplied more financial literacy services to people with disabilities than the government sector.

Interestingly, key informant interviews revealed that government products are often referred to and used by service providers. The relationship between the delivery of products and services is discussed below in *Issues and topics that are top of mind among people with disabilities*.

Figure 4:

Supply of products by sector

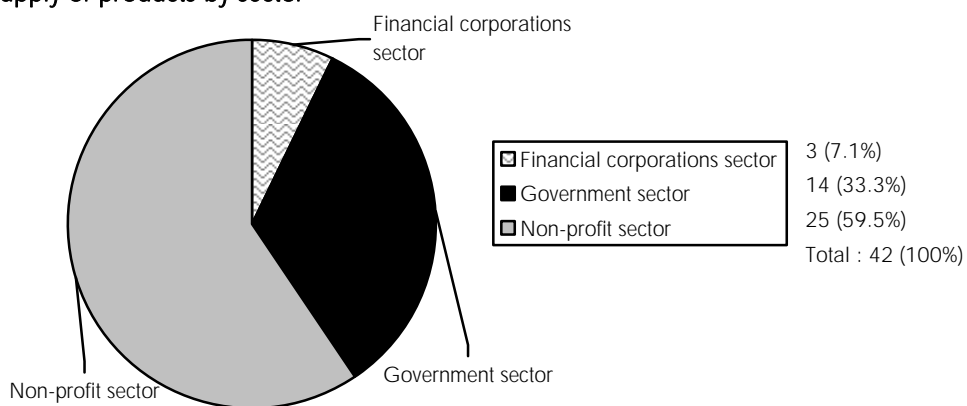
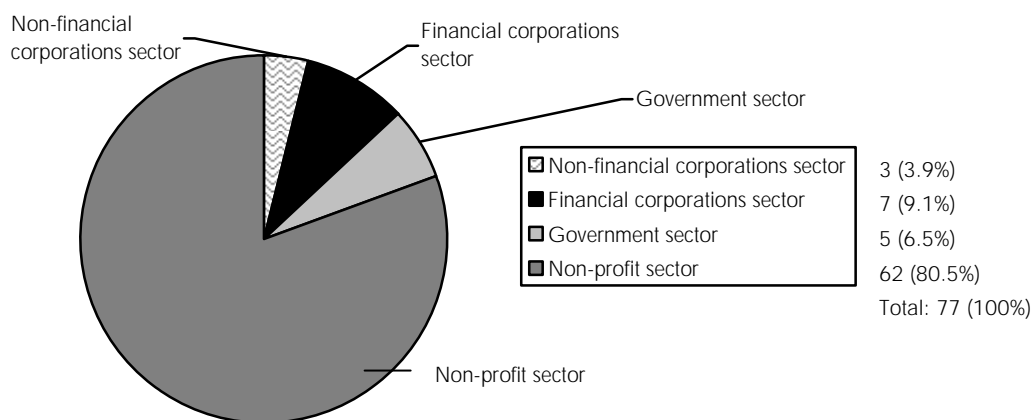


Figure 5:

Supply of services by sector



**Delivery methods**

All of the financial literacy interventions sampled in this research are classified as either products or services.

Products are tangible items consumable in units. The product category may include: print material (i.e. newspapers, magazines, brochures, CD Roms, etc.); online material (i.e. informational websites); interactive online material (i.e. web portals, calculators, quizzes, on-line CD Roms as well as any items that allow a client to interact with the material); broadcast media (i.e. television and radio shows) and interactive broadcast media (i.e. call-in television or radio shows).

Services, on the other hand, are interventions that require the animation of material by a professional or practitioner. The service category includes: small group courses (with up to 20 learners); large group courses (with more than 20 learners); self-directed learning that may occur

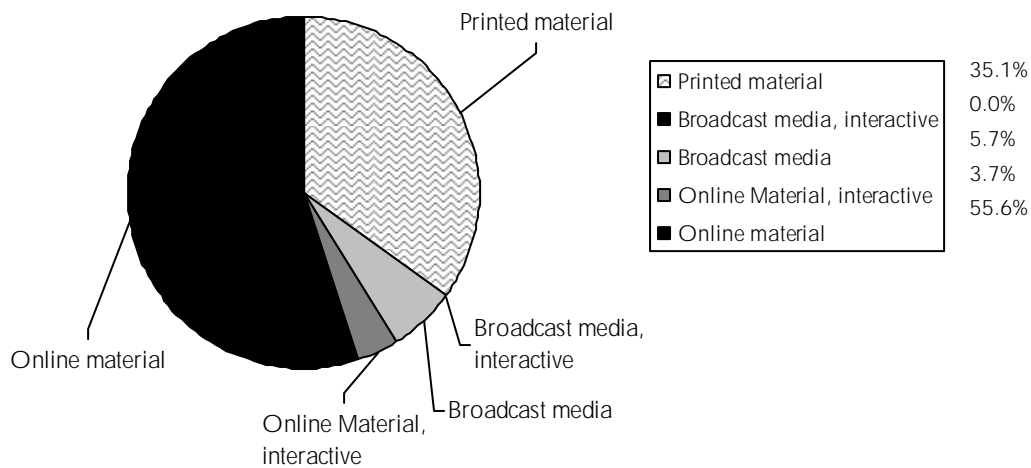
in drop-in centres or storefronts where no appointment is necessary and one-on-one learning through appointment-based, client-focused sessions.

Sampled organizations used a variety of methods to deliver financial literacy products and services to people with disabilities. Note that some organizations offered more than one product and/or service.

In terms of products, online material was the most common delivery method. Indeed, 55.6% of all sampled product deliveries had on-line material as at least one of their delivery methods (Figure 6). Some providers delivered their products in multiple formats. On-line delivery was found to be the most prominent format where multiple delivery methods were used in the delivery of a product. Print material was the second most-offered delivery method, used in 35.1% of sampled product deliveries. Conversely, online interactive materials were used relatively rarely as a method of product delivery. Finally, those products delivered through broadcast media were also delivered through a range of alternative methods.

Figure 6:

Product delivery method

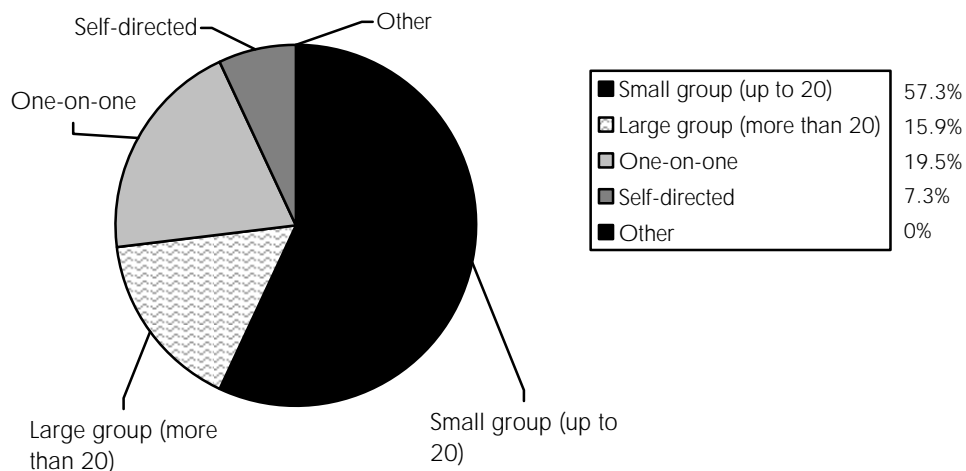


In terms of services, the most common delivery method was small group courses (with less than 20 people). Small group courses accounted for 57.3% of all sampled service deliveries (Figure 7). Those services delivered in multiple formats were few. In stark contrast to products – where 23.8% were delivered in multiple formats – only 7.8% of services were delivered by more than one method. This distinction might be attributed to the different nature of products versus services.

Products are more easily replicated and molded into different formats, whereas a service, for example a course, is less effective when cut down or molded to fit different timeframes and audience sizes. Thus, at least in terms of their versatility, products may be considered as effective tools for transferring information, education and advice.

Figure 7:

### Service delivery method



Following small group courses, one-on-one sessions constituted the second most-common method of delivering services. 19.5% of service deliveries involved one-on-one sessions. The third most-common method of delivery was large group sessions (involved in 15.9% of deliveries). Finally, the fourth most-common method of delivery was self-directed learning (involved in 7.3% of deliveries). Key informant interviews reinforced the finding that services are most often offered in small groups or in a one-on-one, client-focused session. According to key informant responses, the assistance that people with disabilities need is usually highly specific and individual-focused, especially when it comes to money matters. Disabilities too often complicate the earning and securing of finances as well as, ironically, access to government programs intended to support people in these situations. This is discussed further in the *Discussion* section below.

While most of the products sampled in this research were offered free of charge, with only 9.5% requiring some form of payment, services were found to be far more costly to consumers and end-clients. 27.2% of services required some form of payment (i.e. a fee, subscription or fee with subscription). Services requiring some form of payment ranged from disability tax clinics to credit counselors to training programs for professionals working with people with disabilities. In general, costly fees decrease the accessibility of an intervention, particularly for low-income consumers.

### **Intervention purpose**

The purpose of each intervention sampled was assessed according to its fulfillment of one or more of the following three functions: providing information, providing education and providing advice to consumers with disabilities. Interventions with an informational purpose had a wide range of applications and required minimal intercession. This type of intervention seeks to transfer facts and data to consumers. Interventions seeking to educate consumers – a process which involves the facilitation of knowledge transfer – required a deeper level of intercession. Such interventions often incorporated facilitators, learning modules and other illustrative devices that strove to animate facts and build the capacities of consumers in a rather general way. Those interventions with an advisory

purpose sought to offer information transfer based on an individual client's particular profile or specific circumstance.

Products sampled in this research were found to mostly offer consumer information (57.1%). 23.2% of products sampled provided consumers with advice. However, of that 23.2%, only 1 out of the 13 products offering advice offered it with no other educational or informational objectives. This might stem from the fact that advice-giving is highly personal and is tailored to the individual client whereas products are infrequently able to transfer any individual-specific service without also benefiting from a facilitator's animation or that of some other vehicle such as a web portal. Consumer education or training was the purpose of 14.3% of the products sampled.

The primary purpose of services was found to be providing consumers with education or training (41.5%), followed by the provision of information (38.1%) and, finally, the provision of advice (19.5%).

The relatively low number of services providing advice contrasts with the hypothesis that advice provision would be a primary objective of financial literacy service interventions. Recall that advice provision is highly client-driven. Furthermore, services are often required to animate products in order to increase their relevance to – and up-take by – individual consumers. When the issue of service interventions and advice provision was explored through key informant interviews, informants offered suggestions that help us to make sense of the low incidence of sampled services providing advice. Namely, it was suggested that the financial advice industry does not market its services towards people with disabilities. Moreover, outside this industry, there are few organizations willing to risk the liability involved in providing advice to clients without being properly licensed or accredited to do so. Therefore, there is a tremendous lack of advice available to the majority of people with disabilities – often moderate- to low-income earners – who do not have the wealth or income to be courted by the financial advice industry.

### ***Audiences served by interventions***

The interventions sampled in this research were either accessible to people with disabilities or 'targeted' towards people with disabilities. Products and services were categorized according to their availability to either a general or specific audience. In order to satisfy the criteria of serving people with disabilities, interventions targeting a general audience had to meet accessibility criteria, as discussed in the *Methodology* section as in *Accessibility*. Of the 119 interventions sampled in this study, 26 were targeted towards a general audience.

Primary audiences targeted by financial literacy interventions sampled in this research were most often people with disabilities (41 products and services out of a total of 119 interventions), however they were not necessarily the exclusive audience towards which interventions were targeted. Many products and services were marketed towards multiple audiences.

A handful of products (14) and services (31) were targeted towards primary audiences *other than* people with disabilities or their caregivers such as women, seniors and students. While this might seem to contaminate the sample, each product or service was carefully screened in order to include those interventions that were adapted or modified in order not to exclude people with disabilities, even though their primary objective may not have been to reach these audiences.

The process for screening for accessibility is described in the *Methodology* section and requires the modification of some aspect of a product or service to meet the needs of at least some people with disabilities. It is not enough that such interventions were accessible by default (i.e. online presence is not enough to be considered 'accessible', an active attempt must be made to modify the content and delivery to better serve people with some disabilities).

A list of the primary audiences sampled can be found in Appendix C. The most common audience targeted by accessible financial literacy interventions – after people with disabilities – was low income-earners.

Fully 24.9% of services targeted low-income earners as at least one of their primary audiences. Low-income earners, therefore, do not trail too far behind people with disabilities and their caregivers who constituted the most common audience targeted by services. 46.8% of services targeted this audience as at least one of their primary markets. Public income assistance recipients were a far third among audiences targeted by services (13%)

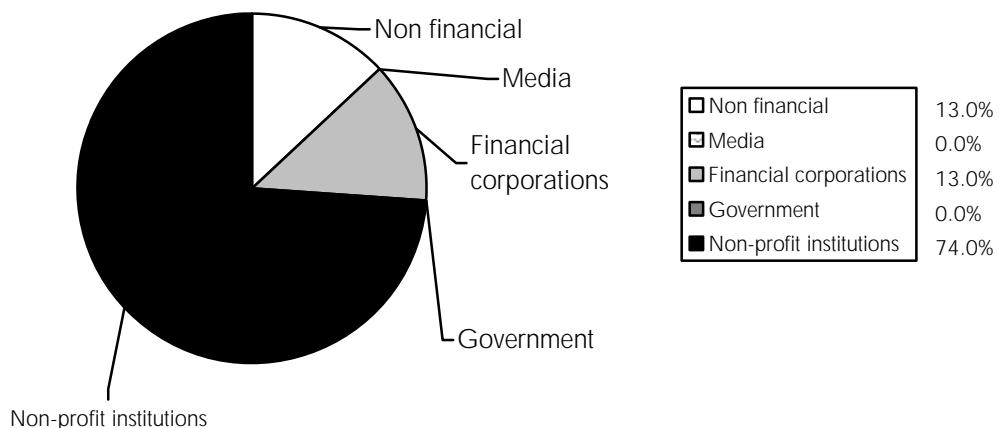
Products, on the other hand, tended to target people with disabilities and their caregivers more often than services did with 66.7% of products having these audiences as at least one target market. Trainers, educators and facilitators were a distant second, targeted by only 19.0% of products, while seniors were the third most-targeted at 16.7%. Low income earners were targeted by only 11.9% of products, compared to the 24.9% of services that target this group.

Discussions with key informants suggested that the focus of services on helping people with disabilities deal with low-income is not surprising and can be seen as directly correlated to the chronic poverty that is experienced by many people with disabilities.

Complex social assistance schemes, low employment rates and the low availability of assistive devices or other accessibility supports that might help people with disabilities take up financial services and products and/or gain the advice they need in order to make effective decisions leads to constant struggles with money, questions and a need for support. Zooming in to learn more about the sectors offering financial literacy support to low-income people as well as accessibility supports, Figure 8 reveals that this area is dominated by the non-profit sector. Quite surprisingly, Figure 8 also shows that the government sector offers strikingly little support to low-income earners with disabilities. This trend was also discussed in interviews and is elaborated upon below in the *Discussion* section of this report.

Figure 8:

Sectors providing accessible financial literacy products and services to low income earners



In order to gain a deeper understanding of who, among people with disabilities, is being served by financial literacy interventions, this study further divided the category of audiences with disabilities and their caregivers (see Appendix D)

Interestingly, sampled products served more different sub-categories of people with disabilities than services. Products were delivered to 40 sub-groups. Conversely, services were delivered to 33 different sub-groups. The sub-categories of people with disabilities most served by products are those with cognitive, developmental and/or intellectual disabilities (32.5%), followed by those with sensory disabilities (22.5%) and those with physical disabilities (20.0%). The sub-categories of people with disabilities most served by services are those with sensory disabilities (27.2%), those with cognitive, developmental and/or intellectual disabilities (24.2%) and those with mental health disorders (24.2%).

The sub-category of caregivers most served is relatives of the primary care recipient. This includes parents, spouses, children and siblings. Much fewer, almost negligible, offerings were made to community-based caregivers and those in special institutions and facilities such as respite care, designed to assist people with disabilities who are not housed in the community.

**Topics covered by interventions**

Financial literacy interventions sampled through this research reveal that certain topics are offered much more often than others. The top topics offered by services are budgeting and money management (74.0%), saving (67.5%), credit/ debt (62.3%), financial planning (54.5%) and consumption (53.2%). The majority of these were offered alongside other topics.

The top topics offered by products are not dissimilar - government benefits were covered by 40.5% of products, credit and debt by 35.7%, financial planning by 35.7%, borrowing by 33.3%, consumer rights and redress by 33.3%, and saving by 31.0%. As in the case of services, many of these were offered alongside other topics.

Interesting and worth mention is the fact that neither of the top topics delivered by services or products factored among the top topics delivered by the other type of intervention. Where government benefits were most covered by products, they ranked 11<sup>th</sup> among those covered by services; conversely, among products, the topic of budgeting/money management ranked 9<sup>th</sup>.

Those topics less available through the interventions sampled here include some of those that were expected to be of high relevance to people with disabilities including managing disability supports and respite. While a topic such as respite would only be applicable to a very small part of the population of people with disabilities, which might account for its low presence among topics on offer, it was expected that topics specific to the broad population of people with disabilities such as 'managing disability supports' would be more available. The availability of topics in the field of financial literacy building, however, does not necessarily reflect the need, and the low offering of topics specifically relevant to people with disabilities might be an indication that the market has not yet caught up with the demand. Informants offered feedback on this possibility and a discussion follows in the *Discussion* section.

A topic that was not included in the sampling field but came up often as a topic offered by both products and services is 'decision-making'. The possibility that topics of relevance to people with disabilities might include life skills more than topics specific to finances is discussed below in the *Discussion*.

Under the broad topic area of "Accessing public benefits related to disability", sub-categories were created to gain a better understanding of the specific information, education or advice that people with disabilities might be receiving in these areas. The sub-categories include tax benefits, social assistance, income support and assistance for primary care recipients (dependents) and for caregivers. Information, education and advice on taxes and tax benefits related to disability were most offered by both products and services (76.5% of interventions). 52% percent of interventions dealing with 'accessing public benefits related to disability' were offered to caregivers.

In absolute terms, as well as percentage, more products covered 'accessing public benefits related to disability' and particularly outnumbered services in offering supports around the sub-category of 'social assistance'. Why such a disproportionately large amount of products offer financial literacy on access to public benefits related to disability was not determined through this study. It might be that this particular topic is best-offered through products, given the number of people that such information needs to reach. Nonetheless, many informants felt strongly that there is a dearth of good information and supports relating to access to public benefits. Moreover, they suggested that many services must be provided in order to offer accurate and complete information to people with disabilities seeking to access public benefits. In this case, it is possible that products covering this topic were more visible to the research team given the research methodology employed to collect the sample.

### ***Accessibility of products and services***

The accessibility of an intervention proved difficult to confirm as per the discussion in the *Methodology* section of this report. For the purposes of advancing research and discussion in this field, a broad net was used in sampling an intervention's accessibility. Please see the approach, illustrated in the accessibility framework (Figure 1) in the *Methodology* section of this report.

The vast majority of products and services sampled were accessible as, indeed, this was the key criteria by which an intervention was deemed to be intended for audiences with disabilities. Where they were not accessible, they were intended for caregivers of people with disabilities or, albeit rarely, they offered financial literacy supports specifically tailored to the needs of people with disabilities without taking into consideration the accessibility limitations of many such individuals.

93% of products and 98.7% of services were found to be accessible in this sample. Access by design (found to be offered exclusively through services) was the most common type of accessible intervention. 41.7% of all accessible interventions were of this type. Technological supports incorporated by design into an intervention's delivery were offered by 24.3% of accessible interventions. The majority of such interventions (71.4%) were products. Sensory supports incorporated by design into an intervention accounted for 15.7% of all accessible interventions.

Those interventions that offered disability support by adding supportive devices and other supports to financial literacy products and services made up less of the pool of accessible interventions. Eleven percent of all interventions outfitted with assistive devices offered them to people with sensory disabilities, 7.8% to people with physical disabilities and 5.2% to people needing technological assistance.

According to this study, people with physical disabilities seem to constitute the sub-group that is best served by financial literacy interventions, followed by those that make use of technological devices and, thirdly, those with sensory disabilities. When comparing this to the overall population of Canadians with different types of disabilities, the availability of financial literacy to people with different disability types seems to be on par with the need from Canadians with disabilities. Thirty-four percent of the Canadian population over 15 years of age experiences some form of physical disability including mobility, agility and pain. Those with sensory disabilities such as those with hearing and sight impairments comprise 8.2% of the population and those with developmental or cognitive disabilities factor among 5.9% of the Canadian population<sup>38</sup>.

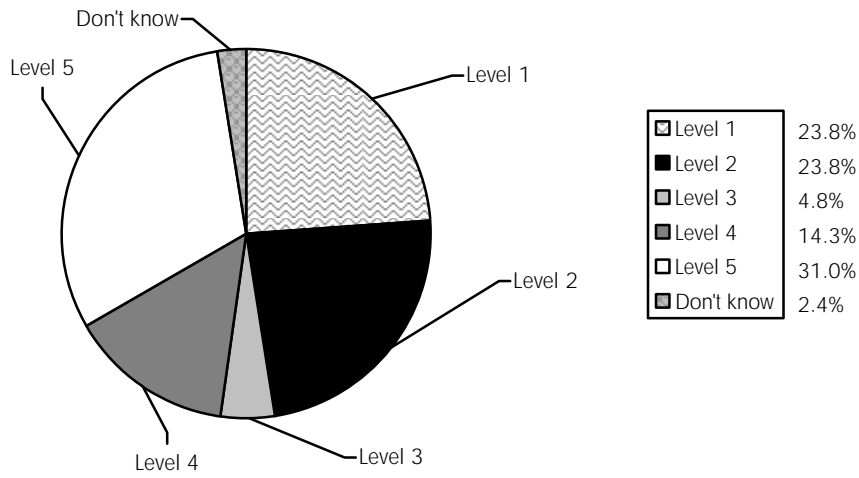
An index of document complexity was used to assess the plain language value of products sampled in this research. The Manitoba Literacy Stages was used to assess the readability of a document where Level 1 = non-readers, Level 2/3 = developing readers (grade 6/7 literacy level) and level 4/5 = high literacy level. The majority of documents sampled here were at the low levels of the complexity scale, where Level 1 and Level 2 readers were served by 47.6% of products (Figure 9). Interestingly, however, the next most served population were those with a high level of literacy who function at a Level 5 (31.0%). Clearly, not all people with disabilities struggle with literacy, however effective practice principles do suggest that lower literacy levels in documents offer more accessibility to the general public. A key informant from the Canadian Learning Disability Association suggested that cognitive disabilities such as learning disabilities and others that cause low literacy are only beginning to gain recognition among disability types and many who live with these disabilities fail to identify as being in need of less complex literature. This complicates the issue of simplification as there remains a small demand for it from the consumer. In addition, other key informants intimated that interventions dealing with financial literacy topics can not help but be complex, as financial management can be a complex task, with some tasks requiring higher literacy levels.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

Figure 9:

Number of products by complexity



## Discussion

### *What constitutes 'disability'?*

In order to better serve people with disabilities, it is important to examine what is meant by a person with disabilities or what constitutes disabilities. This is a theme touched on in the *Literature Review* above that was explored further with key informants in this research. While 'accessibility' was used as a proxy by which to identify an intervention as being intended for a certain audience, it is important to examine what is meant by 'disability'.

The literature review for this research revealed that disability can be thought of in many ways. Statistics Canada employs the WHO definition, where both medical and environmental constraints are taken into consideration. According to Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), persons with disabilities are "those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical or mental condition or health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do<sup>39</sup>". Important to note is that this definition, because it "relies heavily on the (individual's)... perception of the situation", makes disability subjective.

Although subjective and, therefore, indefinable in a general sense, this approach was largely favoured by key informants, particularly those who worked to provide services to people with disabilities. Many informants felt it was important that an individual use their own criteria to establish their ability level: it allows them discretion, personal choice and does not impose limitations by pigeonholing them into a category. According to informants, too often individuals find themselves not fitting into a pre-determined category of disability, yet still needing some guidance or support around disability issues. For example, a person with diabetes, although stable, needs to prepare for the possibility that they will experience progression in their illness which could lead to activity limitation. Current medical and clinical definitions of disability do not go far enough to embrace what this definition allows for - the admissibility of an 'invisible disability' into the fold of 'disability'. By failing to address these latent disabilities, providers of services would be undermining the goal of creating a completely accessible and inclusive society.

It is therefore not uncommon for services for people with disabilities to not be advertised as such, or to not be approached by individuals looking for information on disability supports. A financial literacy curriculum for 'people with disabilities' would not readily be taken up by the example case of the diabetic person discussed above who does not necessarily identify as disabled. People with disabilities are, therefore, those who need to plan for the future around factors that do limit or may limit their activity. This, of course, is a wide and all-encompassing definition that does not go far to identify the particular needs of people with disabilities when it comes to financial literacy services. Indeed, many informants still felt that the medical/ individual approach allows for specific needs to be addressed.

Many organizations work with individuals with very specific disabilities or support needs. For example, one key informant worked exclusively with people with developmental disabilities who have a limited IQ level and who developed their disability in childhood. Many of these providers admit that this excludes those who might need the services but fall outside the qualifications and,

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<sup>39</sup> Statistics Canada, *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006*

more importantly, does not go far to offer clients anonymity or choice in self-identification. However at the same time the needs of these highly specific populations are often so extreme that providers feel justified in dedicating their resources to specific sub-sets of clients. Through this, providers and practitioners also develop expertise and skills specific to their clientele which allows for quality service. These providers are driven by the needs of their clientele of whom they have an intense understanding. It is also among these providers that many effective financial literacy services have been delivered, as specific cohorts allows for highly-specific interventions.

As touched upon above, however, there are many disabilities that are not readily recognizable (like the stable diabetic) and others that are not readily recognized. Learning disabilities, despite the efforts of advocacy groups to build awareness, are still little-understood and little-recognized by the general public, government benefit systems as well as those individuals who are living with the disability. According to one key informant, many living with learning disabilities might prefer to ignore, or live in denial of the disability. In addition, there are very few tools to help people with learning disabilities cope and accessibility supports are also limited and under-utilized. While awareness-building, outreach and support are extremely important in this particular situation, the success of interventions that might target this population will rely on the population's ability to self-identify as being in need.

Similarly, the elderly occupy a unique space in the discussion of disabilities. Two informants felt strongly that the elderly are among those who will not necessarily identify as 'disabled', yet will experience a significant amount of activity limitation when compared to the general population. Therefore, while the subjective approach is advantageous as it helps individuals identify as disabled when other systems don't offer that opportunity, on the other hand it can fail to account for those individuals with skewed perception of their current or future activity limitations.

### ***Issues and topics that are top of mind among people with disabilities***

The topics most offered by providers in this sample included many that are typically touched-upon by financial literacy practitioners: taxes, government benefits, budgeting and debt/credit. The question remains, however, whether the current market meets the demand or the need currently felt by people with disabilities.

While none of the key informants suggested that the aforementioned topics are unimportant, some suggested that there are other topics perhaps equally as important if not more so. The need for certain topics might be driven by local issues. For example, an informant in Alberta cites the recent downsizing of housing allowances under the provincial Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) as having ushered in a need for information on housing strategies.

Context was identified by several informants to be the driver of topics in financial literacy programming for people with disabilities. Currently, many supports in the field operate on a case-by-case, individual-by-individual basis and the popularity of this approach might reflect its suitability. This approach is particularly used among people with cognitive deficits. According to one informant, cognitive deficits make it difficult for individuals to learn if lessons are not properly contextualized as individuals with cognitive disabilities tend to 'over-generalize' topics and fail to understand the relevance of lessons not directly related to their own activities. In sum, the relevance of topics will be closely related to the disability or disabilities in question. This, of course, makes the task of identifying a set list of topics to offer people with disabilities challenging.

That said, some topics were seen to be missing among those sampled, namely decision-making and the ability to respond to change and instability. While not exactly financial literacy topics in the classic sense, these skill areas are key for people with disabilities. Almost all people with disabilities share the common experience of being at higher risk of adversity than the general public due to their disability. For the population of people with psychological or cognitive deficits, many of whom develop these in relation to one or any number of other disabilities, the need for these skills is particularly great.

Other topics may not be driven by the end-goal of financial literacy (to help consumers build their financial decision-making capability), but nonetheless feature prominently in the lives of many people with disabilities. These issues – which may need to be addressed in order to effectively build self-sufficiency – include financial dependency and abuse among other struggles related to ageing, ailing, as well as the management of large expenses related to life support and assistive devices.

For some informants, accessibility was the only issue of particular relevance to people with disabilities. That is to say, any financial literacy topics would be of relevance to people with disabilities as long as they allowed for the effective participation of all people with disabilities. There are many issues in accessibility that currently keep people with disabilities from participating in services or taking up products.

Institutional environments, such as schools, often do not provide adequate resources for people with disabilities. One key informant illustrated the importance of supportive institutions by giving the example of wait times for assessments of learning abilities in public schools. In 2007, the Ottawa District School Board had a back-log of almost 2000 children waiting for assessments; such institutional deficits only serve to frustrate a learner's access to supports. Moreover, while children wait to be assessed, teachers are not receiving pre-service training to deal with the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Assistive supports such as American Sign Language (ASL) are only useful insofar as the hearing impaired individual in need is also proficient in ASL. The opposite example is of a person who is firmly imbedded in deaf culture, who was born deaf, and who may not have strong English skills and low English reading literacy. One cannot rely on a brochure or website to necessarily serve this population.

The Canada Revenue Agency offers information on the Disability Tax Credit as well as a Medical Expense Tax Credit through its publications and call centres. These, however, are offered in high-level English where people with cognitive and learning deficits cannot penetrate the wall of technical language. Clarifying this kind of information is often the work of practitioners and support staff.

Many caregivers and support staff who work with people with disabilities feel that there is a lack of cooperation among government and industry support providers. Without adequate partnerships and the cooperation of support staff, practitioners and caregivers, the activities of those who work with people with disabilities on a daily basis will continue to focus on clarifying otherwise inaccessible resources rather than building meaningful and important skills, such as financial literacy.

## ***Gaps and effective interventions in financial literacy resource provision***

One of the main gaps in financial literacy resource provision as identified through interviews as well as through the environmental scan is the dearth of government support for financial literacy for people with disabilities. While informants acknowledged that governments are good at providing lists of benefits, they agreed that the government sector needs to improve in terms of its illustration of clear and accessible pathways to receive those benefits. Currently, banks, financial planners and government services are particularly bad at providing clear, relevant and timely information to low-income earners with disabilities, not to mention supporting opportunities for those people to receive education and advice in financial literacy.

In part, this can be attributed to the fact that the assistance people with disabilities need is often highly specific and individual-based. Two factors in particular tend to play a large role in creating this need. First, cognitive disabilities tend to cause people to require direct interpretive support. Second, having any disability means that financial responsibilities and decisions are inherently complex because of the added dimension of adversity, especially when that adversity is created or compounded by a lack of accessibility to supportive devices.

Many informants, therefore, underscored the importance of targeted approaches to building financial literacy. Embedding modules, tools and assists into existing programs is one approach to building financial literacy while targeting individuals, particularly when those programs work with individuals. Currently, financial literacy is found in some programs such as Independent Living Education programs. The Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres is also in the process of developing material for distribution to its chapter sites across the country. The intention of these materials is to provide a resource to practitioners that they can then modify and tailor to suit the needs of their clients. At present, such resources are rare in Canada.

Targeted approaches will need to be complemented by broader awareness-building among people with disabilities, and – for those who are not independent – among caregivers. Targeted marketing and awareness campaigns directed towards these individuals will help bolster the demand for financial literacy supports and interventions.

Where materials, resources and tools are developed for distribution, programs need to be crafted to facilitate their delivery. One key informant emphasized the importance of providing resources that can be facilitated or demonstrated. Often, people with disabilities, particularly those with cognitive disabilities and those who are independent, will benefit from visualizing and practicing skills. Without the ability to demonstrate and repeat good practice, financial literacy programs will be lost on learners and fail to be effective in creating self-sufficiency.

One key area characterized by large gaps in resource provision is among doubly-marginalized populations, for example women and the elderly who often face abuse, and also among new Canadians where strong cultural and social networks can often stigmatize disabilities.

Finally, many key informants felt that, while financial literacy is an important skill, particularly for people with disabilities who so often face financial difficulties as a direct result of being disabled, educational supports in financial literacy should not come at the expense of campaigns that push for improved benefits and supports, especially financial supports. By one informant's estimation,

'the need to remove barriers is much more pressing than the need to learn to navigate around them'.

It should not be the case that low-income earners and people with disabilities (two groups that regularly overlap) often *also* struggle with low levels of education due to its inaccessibility and/or to their cognitive disabilities. People facing such challenges must be more adequately supported by an improved system of tools and supports. Otherwise, financial literacy resources are likely to be lost on them.

## Conclusions

The current supply of financial literacy resources for people with disabilities is dominated by actors from the non-profit sector. This is particularly true in the delivery of services when compared to products. Recall that there is a need for financial literacy to be delivered through facilitated and individual-specific resources. In interviews, key informants largely agreed that individual-specific resources and supports need to be more adequately provided to people with disabilities. This stems from the complex nature of financial decisions when one is living with a disability and the fact that one's capacity to plan for the future is destabilized by the constant presence of adversity and the threat of returning and/or worsening adversity.

Key informants felt strongly that financial literacy is an area of great relevance to people with disabilities and that it should not be the case that chronic poverty and activity limitations severely reduce the positive effects of such resources. Thus, while key informants agree that finance-specific topics are of relevance, they also believe that building knowledge, confidence and skills in the area of financial decision making should begin with attention to those learning and accessibility barriers faced by people with disabilities. Often, such recognition would entail a pedagogical approach that prioritizes resource delivery methods featuring hands-on, context-specific and demonstrable learning elements. When it comes to an issue as personal as financial literacy, this attention to individualizing the learning experience is all the more important. That said, given the current supply of interventions, namely the role that different sectors play in providing products and/or services, it should be noted that the government sector *can* continue to play an important part by making sure there is a supply of *accessible* information products that service providers can use with clients.

Additionally, accessible financial literacy products and services designed to build financial decision-making skills, might be a good vehicle through which people with disabilities are able to gain expertise in such crucial topics as 'decision making' and 'dealing with complexity.' These broader life skills seem to be highly relevant to a wide range of people with different disabilities.

In sum, without attention to accessibility, any attempt to help people with disabilities build their financial literacy will be risking failure. It is also important to note that the issue of accessibility is not only about providing people with the disability supports they need to access a particular product or service at the supplier end. Accessibility is also about furnishing people with disabilities with choices as to *which* resources they want, *where* they get them and *how* they access them. Currently, however, the supply of financial literacy resources for people with disabilities is not universally accessible. Rather, for many people with disabilities, access to resources continues to be stymied by the persistence of numerous well documented barriers. Indeed, more needs to be done to ensure that organizations are supported in their efforts to provide accessible financial literacy products and services to their clients. One important strategy to achieve this, as identified through key informant interviews, is building partnerships between and among the different organizations and sectors that support people with disabilities on a daily basis. In other words, the efforts of financial service providers, government agencies, accessibility support providers and non-profit organizations to provide financial literacy resources to people with disabilities should be better coordinated.

