



Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario

www.cwdo.ca

“Together We Are Stronger”

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Accomplishments Report, 2024

Land Acknowledgement

CWDO acknowledges that we are located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Mississauga peoples, whose presence and resilience continue to enrich this land. We recognize the history of colonization, forced removal, and ongoing injustices faced by Indigenous peoples, including those with disabilities, and we commit to working towards reconciliation and building a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Executive Summary

CWDO is pleased to share this report of our accomplishments for 2024.

CWDO has a [5-Year Strategic Plan](#) in place covering 2021-2025 subject to an annual review by CWDO board members and confirmation of the membership. During our 2024 annual general meeting, we reviewed our priorities to help focus our work as a board.

CWDO's priorities for 2024 were:

1. Action Groups
2. Public Profile
3. A New Public Profile: Creating a new website and membership
4. Financial Viability
5. Strategic Alliances

The CWDO board has continued to support persons with disabilities in Ontario. Through our priorities, we were able to continue making contributions on topics such as housing, attendant care, AODA standards, and supporting student lawyers, among others.

Our profile has increased and our organization is regularly invited to consultations. We provide input to all the consultations we can. While we look for some steady source of income, we have become adept at working with zero to a low budget. Our various strategic alliances help us to extend our reach and our impact. None of this could be possible without the hard work of our dedicated volunteer board of directors.

Our Accomplishments

1. Action Groups

Action Groups focus on issues (such as accessible transportation) or a common interest (such as photography). Action Groups work to identify barriers and possible actions to take on those issues. Priorities are decided by each Action Group, and CWDO approves any actions the group may wish to undertake such as creating a report, collecting information through surveys, meeting with key decision-makers, etc. Their actions must be consistent with CWDO's vision and mission and must not reinforce stereotyping or ableist attitudes. Action Groups require CWDO Board approval prior to taking any action involving our members or the public.

Attendant Service Action Group

A former CWDO board member, Sam Savona, shared a “proposal for the establishment of an association dedicated to empowering and protecting people with disabilities who are receiving attendant care and outreach services. The purpose of this body is to ensure that service provider organizations adhere to their own philosophy and policies, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of care and support provided to individuals with disabilities.”

Sam Savona's proposal was written shortly before his untimely death and sent to Tracy Odell by Sam's Executor. It was then shared with Dianne Wintermute who thought this would be a good fit for a pro bono student to work on. During earlier online discussions on proposed changes to the Health Care Act in 2021, hosted by ARCH and CWDO, a number of consumers in attendance raised concerns about getting conflicts resolved when disagreements arose around the duties that an attendant performs; the hours of services available; and having enough time allotted for services to be performed. There was significant interest in forming an Action Group to address the power imbalance between people with disabilities and service providers. Sam's proposal was the catalyst that got this new Action Group started.

Board members Tracy Odell and Dianne Wintermute are a part of the Attendant Service Action Group, **Alliance for Quality Attendant Services** which is continuing work as an alliance of people with physical disabilities who receive attendant services through SSLU and Outreach agencies. The alliance consists of Lew Boles, Mazin Aribi and Hazel Self, along with Tracy Odell as Chair for CWDO. The alliance developed Mission and Vision Statements and discussed several levels of actions to address well-known shortcomings in attendant service delivery. The Alliance is now prepared to go public to inform



members about the group, invite participation in a survey regarding attendant services, and expand membership.

This action group has been explored in a multidisciplinary approach as a Pro Bono Student has supported the Alliance's work by researching and writing a paper on consumer rights in the collective bargaining process.

To inquire about this group or to join, email Tracy Odell, chair of the Alliance for Quality Attendant Services at tracy@cwdo.ca.

Accessible Housing Network (AHN) Action Group

Tracy Odell attended meetings to discuss ways to connect with groups addressing different aspects of housing and some funding opportunities.

In 2024, the AHN met with the Federal Housing Minister's staff to ask that the Rapid Housing "Catalogue" program must require all the housing be built with [Universal Design](#).

The Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN) hosted a webinar where Sherry C recruited mothers to present about parenting / housing struggles when children have disabilities.

The AHN is also looking for articles needed for an AHN book. Sharing a personal story about one's struggle to find or create accessible housing can be a powerful tool to raise public awareness and spur change. The story need not be long. All will be edited for clarity. Send them to Carol at cdamioli@hotmail.com.

On May 31, 2025, along with Kate Chung and other AHN representatives, Tracy Odell met with MPP Andrea Hazell, (NDP Scarborough-Guildwood) regarding housing issues. Andrea Hazell was very engaged and offered several good suggestions for getting more attention on our issues, including attending advocacy days at Queen's Park. One of her staff is going to assist AHN in creating a newsletter.

Tracy Odell has represented AHN and CWDO at the City of Toronto's **Accessible Housing Advisory** Working Group, which prepared 4 sets of recommendations:

1. Recommendations for Universal Design measures across 100% of City build or funded housing units.
2. Recommendations for enhancements and improvements to build on the Ontario Building Code (OBC)'s minimum 15% barrier-free unit mandatory requirement.
3. Recommendations to increase the percentage of accessible units and units with universal design features across the City's existing rental housing stock:
 - a. increase accessible modifications and renovations

b. Improve access to existing accessible rental housing.

4. Recommendations on the ongoing objectives of the working group.

AODA Customer Service Standards Review

“The AODA Customer Service Standard requires organizations in Ontario to provide accessible customer service to individuals with disabilities, ensuring they can access goods, services, and facilities. This means identifying and removing barriers to accessibility, offering accessible formats of information, and training staff on interacting with customers with disabilities. The standard applies to organizations serving the public or providing goods/services to other businesses.”

Heather Willis, Cheryl Stacey, and Mah-E-Leqa Jadgal have reviewed and provided recommendations on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

2. Public Profile

CWDO aims to increase our public presence and collaborate with other groups as we continue to be recognized as a public information and advocacy organization that can provide leadership and support to persons with disability and the community.

Advocacy

Tracy Odell attended a screening of “[Unloved – Huronia’s Forgotten Children](#)” followed by a discussion. Tracy felt the screening and discussion were very powerful.

E-Scooters & Robotic Vehicles

Adam Cohoon takes leadership in advocating for pedestrian safety on behalf of CWDO. In this scope, Adam Cohoon looked into the use of e-scooters and accessibility around construction sites. The use of electric scooters poses significant risks to the safety and security of vulnerable people, including people with disabilities.

Adam continues to take the advocacy province-wide and has been helping other communities through the process. He is also raising awareness of the risks of robotic vehicles and using public transportation.

Student Internship

A law student from McGill University, Laurissa, was contracted to assist with board activities and reflect on learnings from CWDO. Laurissa worked on a project on Climate Change, its impact on persons with disabilities, and how we can drive policies, laws and programs that impact us.

Tracy Odell attended an inquest in July and was able to hear about the intersection of disability and the law.

3. Membership

Membership Secretary

Tracy Odell and Kirsten Doyle assisted Heather Willis to revamp our [Membership Application Form](#) and [Board Member Nomination Form](#). Heather reviewed the new Google forms that will streamline the application process for potential members and Board nominees.

Newsletters

Tracy Odell prepared a document of costs for hiring writers on contract to prepare newsletters for CWDO.

CWDO Website

Adam Chaboryk, a work colleague of Heather Willis at TMU, got us through the final steps needed for access to Google Suites. We can develop, share and store CWDO business with it, using Word, Presentation, Access and many more applications. CWDO has purchased a new domain. To visit our new website, visit: cwdo.ca.

4. Data Management and Storage: Moving to the Cloud

As a virtual board with directors from all across the province, it can be challenging to have files stored on various devices. Using cloud storage would help the board to share information and collaborate on work virtually in a manner that protects our data and allows us to share our work.

Mah-E-Leqa Jadgal, Tracy Odell, Kirsten Doyle, Linda Hunt, and Heather Willis have been working together this past year reviewing various cloud options that can serve the needs of our board and host our website.

CWDO's files are currently hosted on multiple board members' personal computers and backed up onto a hard drive.

Switching to Google Suites will help bring all of CWDO's services to one platform where we can develop and build our membership database as well.

5. Financial Viability

CWDO continues to scrape by without the benefit of any regular influx of funding. As a result, we are so good at operating on a shoestring, that other organizations have expressed an interest in learning how we have managed without having a physical office or paid staff.

- We use virtual meetings exclusively and keep our costs low by being part of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities' (CCD) Zoom plan.



- Our costs for board liability insurance have been held steady.
- The contributions of volunteers keep our costs low, and at times we can retain a portion of revenue obtained through any grants we receive.
- We are researching other options such as funding through foundations.
- We will now be able to involve our members better, using their talents to help CWDO achieve our priorities.

CWDO is grateful to Linda Hunt for managing all financial activity for the board.

6. Strategic Alliances

Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC)

Once again, CWDO spearheaded our initiative to work with pro bono law students on a variety of research projects. Board members met with the students regularly to monitor their progress and discuss the projects they were researching. This provided a phenomenal opportunity not only to CWDO and to the various disability communities, but also to the students who are embarking on their careers.

For the 2024/2025 school year, Dianne Wintermute assisted CWDO by being the lawyer supervisor for the law students in Toronto. Tracy Odell provided information and support regarding policy and practice on the various topics.

In 2024, the pro bono law students completed memoranda of law on the following three topics:

- Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities
- Substitute Decision Making
- Climate Change and its impact on persons with disabilities and their inclusion in policy design or practice

The students worked very hard on their individual memorandum. By the end of the year, a new cohort of four law students began to work on memorandum of law. [The completed legal memos](#) and other issues we are following, can be found on our website.

Grant to Create a National Indigenous and Disability Inclusive Climate Justice Network

Alexis Buettgen and Dianne Wintermute have continued to work together on a grant application for the Indigenous and disability inclusive climate action project. “This project will explicitly build relationships and connections within and between social movements to promote solidarity and cross-movement organizing for more effective climate justice and disability advocacy work.” Alexis Buettgen also followed up with a potential law student intern from McGill University and discussed their experiences and interests and availability as well as what they would need from CWDO to complete a part-time summer internship. The project was not funded unfortunately, however, efforts to submit applications for other grants were put in place.



“Enabling Accessible Healthcare Delivery”: Toronto Metropolitan University and Enabling Change Program

Heather Willis has been working with Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) on a project called “Enabling Accessible Healthcare Delivery.” Funded by the Enabling Change Program, this project will use perspectives from people with disabilities to deliver accessible healthcare.

Linda Hunt also attended the TMU Enabling Change project Advisory Committee meeting as the CWDO representative.

Council of Canadians with Disabilities

Tracy Odell represents CCD on the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), where she serves as 2nd Vice-Chair on the Executive. Bruce Drewett and Pat Seed served as Alternates.

With other members of CCD, Tracy Odell, participated in year 2 of the [CICP Project Survey](#). The project has a systems-oriented and purposeful approach to closing the information gap about registered charities in Canada through regular surveys, research and policy briefs, and capacity-building to promote free and accessible data.

NEADS

Dianne Wintermute, Heather Willis, Kirsten Doyle, and Julie Emied worked on a presentation for the NEADS Tour 2024.

Conferences, Meetings & Webinars

Alexis Buettgen coordinated a meeting with a strategic planning working group to discuss the next steps for CWDO's next strategic plan. The working group will meet on Monday, February 12 to discuss the potential of developing CWDO's theory of change and how to engage members in the next strategic plan.

On Nov. 4, Heather and Mah-E-Leqa (with the preparatory and planning support of Tracy) did a guest presentation on the meaning of "empowerment" for the Introduction to Community Psychology course I'm teaching at Wilfrid Laurier University. This was a class of 150 undergraduate students interested in topics related to psychology and social justice. We critically reflected on the meaning of empowerment and the experiences of disempowerment. At the end of the session, we had more questions from the students than we had time to answer! Many of these questions were about how to be an ally and work in solidarity with the disability movement. After our session ended, a few more students approached Alexis Buettgen wanting to learn more and eager to get involved in some initiatives. Heather, Mah-E-Leqa and Tracy (via video) shared information about their professional and advocacy work, knowledge, expertise and experience. It was a good opportunity to re-frame the thinking of 150 undergraduate students.

Conclusion

Thank you to our active board members and other volunteers who have dedicated their time and passion engaging in CWDO activities this year.

Thanks to our networks, we have been able to reach out and others have been able to reach in, so we can share advice and be as helpful as possible.

With the active involvement of more of our members, CWDO will have an increasingly positive impact on the accessibility of Ontario.

Together we are stronger.



About CWDO

Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario (CWDO) was incorporated as a provincial not-for-profit organization on May 10, 2005.

CWDO is non-partisan, with a cross-disability focus.

CWDO) is committed to the rights of all persons to participate fully in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social life of their communities.

CWDO is the Ontario representative for the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD). We participate in many CCD initiatives and support CCD's pan-Canadian efforts.

CWDO Board Members

Our thanks are due to the tireless efforts of our dedicated Board of Directors. During 2023, the board consisted of the following people:

- **Kirsten Doyle**, President
- **Heather Willis**, Vice President
- **Mah-E-Leqa Jadgal**, Past President
- **Kate Tutu**, Secretary
- **Linda Hunt**, Treasurer
- **Adam Cohoon**, Member-at-Large
- **Alexis Buettgen**
- **Bruce Drewett**
- **Julie Emeid**
- **Pat Seed**
- **Dianne Wintermute**

Contact CWDO



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Social Media

Facebook: www.facebook.com/cwdont/

Twitter: twitter.com/cwdo

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/citizenswithdisabilities_on