

Election Tool Kit



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
What is DISC?	5
DISC Members	7
SAID Backgrounder	8
Questions to Ask Your Candidates	9
Advocacy Tips	10
Questioning Tips	11
One-on-One Meetings	13
Suggested Letter Formats	14
Post Election Strategies	15

INTRODUCTION

Provincial elections provide an opportunity for us to work together and ensure key issues impacting people with disabilities are addressed with leaders and candidates of provincial parties. As citizens, together we need to help candidates become aware of the issues affecting our community. The more people let the candidates know about the issues facing people with disabilities, the more notice will be taken of these issues throughout the province.

Many of you will be active at the local level in events such as individual meetings with candidates and all-candidate debates. To assist you with your advocacy efforts, the Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) has prepared this Election Tool Kit. This document will provide you with valuable resources to use when meeting with party candidates to raise awareness of the importance of the issues facing people with disabilities and convey your concerns.

This tool kit contains:

- **DISC Overview**
The Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) was formed by a large cross section of disability advocates, consumers and organizations from across Saskatchewan who are committed to advocating for a respectful, dignified and adequate income support system. As partners in a non-partisan coalition, DISC members have joined together to speak as one voice, working towards a distinct (or separate) income system for people with disabilities that is built on our common vision and principles.
- **SAID Background**
The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) program was launched by the Government of Saskatchewan in 2009 to assist people with disabilities. DISC is calling for the government to increase the number of people to be assisted by SAID and to increase benefit rates for people who live independently.
- **Questions to ask your candidates**
Suggested questions to ask candidates who campaign at your doorstep.
- **Advocacy Tips**
Your voice is critical to ensuring people with disabilities receive support and recognition from the provincial government. This section contains tips on how you can develop an effective advocacy campaign.

- **Questioning Tips**
Communicating effectively is the key to having your concerns heard. This section offers tips on how to ask questions and convey your concerns effectively to candidates at all-candidate events.
- **Face-to-Face Meetings**
Sometimes organizations hold special meetings with candidates during an election to discuss public policy issues affecting you. This section provides tips on how to make your meeting a success.
- **Post Election Strategies**
Advocating for people with disabilities doesn't stop after the election. Advocating is a year-round activity. In this section you will find strategies to ensure your issues and concerns remain on the government radar throughout the year.

WHAT IS DISC?

The Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) was formed by a large cross section of disability advocates, consumers and organizations from across Saskatchewan who are committed to advocating for a respectful, dignified and adequate income support system. As partners in a non-partisan coalition, DISC members have joined together to speak as one voice, working towards a distinct (or separate) income system for people with disabilities that is built on our common vision and principles.

Our Vision

Our primary vision is to see an income system that offers both an adequate baseline income for people with disabilities and a user-friendly mechanism to address individual financial needs based on the impact of disability.

We believe that developing a distinct income program for people with disabilities must be a truly joint venture between all stakeholders, each contributing equally to the process. Together with the Government of Saskatchewan, we bring our rich experience and contribute our expertise to the development of a new income policy for people with disabilities.

As members of DISC we have laid out key principles for an improved system:

Adequacy - People with disabilities should have an adequate income that truly meets their needs without the indignity of having to justify their needs. Lifelong disability and subsequent economic insecurity needs to be a consideration. What does DISC consider adequate? A disability income should be enough financial support to meet individual needs, not just basic needs. Our primary aim is to see an income system that offers both an *adequate baseline income for people with disabilities and a user-friendly mechanism to address individual financial needs based on the impact of disability.*

Hope and Security - People with disabilities must have financial accommodations so that they can live their lives with hope, respect and dignity instead of a system of disincentives.

Person-Centered and User Friendly - People with disabilities should be able to expect a dignified service that focuses on their individual financial needs as its reason for being. Financial accommodation should be easily accessible with consistent, respectful income workers who have the mandate and power to respond quickly to individual discretionary needs.

Higher Income Exemptions - People with disabilities must be adequately accommodated as they move into training or employment. Income exemptions need to be increased to eliminate disincentives to employment and independence. Rapid reinstatement needs to be a working principle that allows people with disabilities to feel secure as they move in and out of employment opportunities.

Consistent Implementation - People with disabilities should be able to expect a portable and flexible income system that meets their individual needs no matter where they choose to live in the province.

These principles describe a respectful system that truly accommodates disability. It moves away from a welfare-based system that is insufficient, disrespectful and degrading and was never meant to meet the needs of people who may rely on it long-term. Living with a disability should not guarantee a life of financial, emotional or spiritual poverty.

What Progress Has Been Achieved?

- October 2008 – the Government of Saskatchewan announced that they would create a separate, dignified program for people with disabilities: ‘SAID’ (*Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability*)
- December 2008 – DISC joined the joint Government – Community Task Team to develop recommended design options for the new income program.
- May 2009 – *the Government accepted all 50 recommendations of the Task Team and announced that the new income program will be launched on December 1, 2009* with an estimated initial enrollment of up to 3000 individuals. Ultimately, the Government anticipates that between 8,000 and 10,000 individuals will be enrolled on the new income program.
- December 2009 – a limited number of individuals, living in residential care, were enrolled at the launch of the new program.
- December 2010 – the earnings exemption for SAID (and people with disabilities on SAP) was increased. A \$100,000 inheritance exemption for SAID was implemented.
- March 2011 – the budget included funding to develop the assessment tool for SAID, to begin assessing individuals for the next phase of SAID enrollment, as well as a \$50/month increase to SAID clients in residential care settings beginning in January 2012.
- May 2011 – the first SAID office is opened in Saskatoon.

More work is needed before SAID is fully operational. DISC continues to have a role on the Program Implementation Advisory Team (PIAT) and will continue to work towards an adequate income and fair assessment process.

DISC MEMBERS

Arthritis Society -- Saskatchewan Division
Autism Resource Centre
Autism Services
Canadian Association for Williams Syndrome
Canadian Deafblind Association – Saskatchewan Chapter Inc. (CDBA)
Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc.
Canadian Parapelegic Association (Saskatchewan) Inc.
CNIB
DAWN Saskatoon
Epilepsy Saskatoon
Equal Justice for All-Saskatoon
FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan Inc.
Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) Disability Working Group
Gary Tinker Federation for the Disabled Inc.
Grassroots Alliance
IDEA Regina
Metis Family and Community Justice Services of Saskatchewan
Métis Nation Saskatchewan
MS Society of Canada Saskatchewan Division
Muscular Dystrophy Canada (SK)
Neil Squire Society
North Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre (NSILC)
People First of Saskatchewan
People with disabilities
Phoenix Residential Society
Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (RAPM)
Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL)
Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC)
Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association (SBIA)
Saskatchewan Cerebral Palsy Association
Saskatchewan Down Syndrome Society
Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services
Saskatchewan Families for Effective Autism Treatment
(SASKFEAT)
Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities
Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition
Saskatoon Housing Coalition
Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan
South Saskatchewan Independent Living Centres (SSILC)
Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Assoc of Saskatchewan North (SBHASN)



Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) Program

Could you manage on \$26 a day? What kind of life would you have if you had to live on less than \$800 a month? If you had to make the choice between your rent, food and medication, which would you choose? Unfortunately, decisions like these are routine for many people with disabilities in Saskatchewan, who live in poverty. A disability of any kind can eliminate or reduce an individual's capacity to work, and for this reason people with disabilities often require financial support from government. People with disabilities struggle with the barriers imposed by their disability every day, and poverty is an added obstacle they should not need to face.

The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) Program was launched by the Government of Saskatchewan in the fall of 2009. At that time only a limited number of individuals with disabilities were enrolled on the program and there was no increase to the benefit rates for those individuals. SAID operates independently from social assistance and is meant to be responsive to the unique needs of people with disabilities. With SAID, people with disabilities do not need to reconfirm their disability every year, and they are free from the stigma of receiving welfare. SAID shows promise as a program that will give people with disabilities more dignity. However, the program needs to be expanded to provide support for more people with disabilities. The government has projected a total enrolment of 8,000 to 10,000 individuals on SAID, but present enrolment is under 3,000.

The Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) and its 38 member organizations are pleased with the long-term plans for the program, and the improvements that have been made since its inception. The Government of Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Social Services have taken important and significant steps to improving living conditions in Saskatchewan for people with disabilities. These improvements, however, have not dealt with the root of the problem for the people intended to be in the SAID program, i.e. increasing benefits to a meaningful and realistic level.

DISC representatives have been working with government in an effort to develop, expand and improve support for people with disabilities through the SAID program. DISC values its relationship with government, and anticipates a productive future relationship that will benefit people with disabilities in Saskatchewan. With this spirit of cooperation, DISC would like to encourage the provincial government to expand the reach of the SAID program by enrolling a greater number of eligible recipients into the program, and committing to increase benefit rates for everyone who will be enrolled on SAID.

Although DISC realizes that it takes time to develop programs, each passing day is a period of struggle and deprivation for people with disabilities in Saskatchewan waiting to be enrolled in SAID.

With the election taking place on Nov. 7, 2011. DISC encourages all candidates, no matter their political affiliation, to put a priority on moving the SAID program forward and to provide a meaningful, socially acceptable level of income for those on the SAID program. Further to this, members of the public are encouraged to voice their support for the expansion of SAID. For more information, visit DISC at www.saskdisc.ca, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/saskdisc or on Twitter, @DISCsk.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CANDIDATE

What supports is your party offering to assist with people with disabilities?

What do you know about the SAID program?

If the candidate doesn't know about the program, provide him/her with a copy of the one-pager and discuss it with that person.

If elected, would you increase the number of individuals who are supported by the SAID program? Would you increase funding to all SAID recipients? ?

People have been waiting for more than two years for SAID to be expanded. If your party is elected, how quickly will you act on this issue?

How important is this issue to you?

Many people with disabilities are living on less than \$26 per day. That includes all their basic needs including food and shelter. Do you think that is adequate support?

We are asking for a \$200 per month increase for people living independently as a first step towards an adequate income. What is your response to this position?

ADVOCACY TIPS

A provincial election provides individuals with the opportunity to implement an advocacy strategy and to re-affirm to the candidates how important it is to support people with disabilities. Included are some tips on starting an effective advocacy campaign in your community.

1. Get to know your candidates

Some candidates will have ties to the disability community and will understand the Impact living with a disability has on day-to-day life, while others may not be familiar with the issues. It is important for you to become a helpful contact for providing useful information on disability issues to the candidates in your riding.

2. Look for opportunities to send local candidates information

When sending a letter to a candidate, introduce yourself as a constituent and state your reason for writing in the first paragraph. A sample letter is included in this tool kit.

3. Participate in candidate forums, town hall meetings and “meet and greet” events

Attend political events and introduce yourself to the candidates as a member of the people with disabilities community.

4. Provide opinion pieces or “letters to the editor” in local papers

Raise issues in a way that will be positive and visible to candidates and the community. Send a copy of your printed editorial or letter to all candidates and other influential policy-makers.

5. Participate in larger provincial and national advocacy campaigns.

Send information to candidates in your constituency. The more people involved in advocating on this issue, the more likely your issues and concerns will be heard.

6. Focus on ways to improve SAID

Bring your SAID Backgrounder along to leave with candidates as a reminder of the value of improving the program.

QUESTIONING TIPS

For questioning your provincial candidates at all-candidate meetings:

General Tips

Be absolutely clear about what you are asking. There are sample questions in this tool kit to ask your MLA candidates at All- Candidate meetings or forums.

1. Remember, response of any kind is useful. By posing the question at a public meeting, you are transmitting a clear signal of your interest and concern on this issue.
2. Do not be discouraged if candidates are not immediately supportive. Hearing their views and justification of a position is valuable and a fundamental part of the democratic process.

Steps to Take:

1. Find your MLA incumbent and candidates

- Visit http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/members/members/mla_list.htm or the Elections Saskatchewan website at www.elections.sk.ca for a list of MLAs.
- Visit the websites of party candidates in your riding. Here are the links to the major parties - be sure to also visit the websites of any other party that has a candidate in your riding:
Saskatchewan Green Party: www.greenpartysask.ca
Saskatchewan Liberal Party: www.saskliberals.ca
Saskatchewan New Democratic Party: www.saskndp.ca
Saskatchewan Party: www.saskparty.com
- Familiarize yourself with the main components of each party's platform. Look particularly for references to people with disabilities.

2. Prepare for the All-Candidate meeting

- Know your candidate: Check out their websites and latest printed materials.
- Find out if they have met with local groups before on related issues. If so, what was the outcome? Have they ever spoken publicly or via the media about people with disabilities in Saskatchewan?
- Prepare your question. Decide what follow-up questions you will pose if necessary.
- Record each candidate's response to your question.

3. The Meeting or Forum

A typical all-candidates meeting lasts for a pre-determined period of time, usually one to two hours. Prepare to do a lot of listening, as the candidates will do the majority of the

talking. The question period could be open-mike or could require pre-registration on a speaker's list. You will need to research this prior to the meeting to ensure you have the opportunity to address the candidate.

- Get to the microphone quickly. Those at the end of the line may not be heard due to time limitations.
- State your question concisely, clearly and in everyday language.
- Keep a positive tone: listen actively, show interest in and understanding of their point of view.
- Thank the candidates for their answers.
- Record who has said what before leaving.

4. Follow-up

- Write a letter thanking each candidate for answering your question(s), reiterating what changes you would like made affecting the SAID program.
- If they were supportive, thank them and make it clear that you expect their continued support in the Saskatchewan Legislature.

5. How to Ask Questions at an All-Candidate Meeting

The speaker should begin by introducing themselves and pose a question to all candidates, seeking a commitment to the issue at hand.

Refer to this tool kit for specific questions to ask your candidates.

ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

General Tips

It is possible to have private meetings with candidates (one on one), during an election, to discuss your issues or to request support for your particular argument/issue. You can even request a candidate's support to retain, oppose or change a law, policy or decision if he or she is elected by any level of government in Saskatchewan.

During an election campaign, the key to holding successful meetings is to be strictly non-partisan (without an affiliation or designation that would create a representation or special interest). To do so:

1. Try to meet with every candidate in your riding
2. Follow the same agenda with each candidate
3. Keep all meetings to the same length of time
4. Ask the candidate to retain, oppose or change legislation or policy if they are elected
6. Take copies of the SAID Backgrounder as a leave-behind for the candidate
7. Lead with education, follow with a call for action. Some candidates will not be familiar with your issues.
8. Help them understand the current situation (in non-technical terms). Personify the issue by telling a story about yourself, another individual or family. Then tell the candidate how you would like to see the situation improved.

SUGGESTED LETTERS

This is a sample letter that you can send to the Premier, local candidates or to your local newspaper:

{Date}

The Hon. Brad Wall
Premier of Saskatchewan
Room 226,
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S0B3}

Dear Premier Wall,

Could you manage on \$26 a day? What kind of life would you have if you had to live on less than \$800 a month? If you had to make the choice between your medication and food, which would you choose? As you are aware, decisions like these are routine for people with disabilities in Saskatchewan, who live in poverty. A disability of any kind can eliminate or reduce a person's capacity to work, and for this reason people with disabilities often require financial support from government. People with disabilities struggle with the barriers imposed by their disability every day, and poverty is an added obstacle they should not need to face.

{Insert your story}

In the fall of 2009 the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) Program began to operate independently from social assistance. When fully implemented SAID will be responsive to the unique needs of people with disabilities. People with disabilities will not need to reconfirm their disability every year, and they will be free from the stigma of receiving welfare. However, SAID must be developed and expanded. There are currently as many as 6500 people who have been waiting for more than two years to be enrolled on SAID.

People with disabilities who live independently in their community have been waiting patiently to be enrolled in SAID, but their patience is wearing thin. Those currently on SAID have been waiting too long for the program to be fully developed so they will achieve the dignity and support that SAID promises. With a spirit of cooperation and respect, I urge the government to expand the reach of the SAID program by enrolling a greater number of eligible recipients, and to increase benefit rates for everyone who will eventually be enrolled on SAID as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,
{Name}
{Title}
{Address}
{Phone number}

POST ELECTION STRATEGIES

1. Establish a relationship with your Member of the Legislative Assembly – send a letter of congratulations and indicate your willingness to work and support him/her in common areas of interest.
2. Put your elected representative on your mailing list.
3. Provide year-round information to politicians and government officials about your activities and interests. Remind them of the significant role you play in the community.
4. Send posters and other items from special events to politicians and government officials, if appropriate. These materials serve as a constant reminder of your organization and of the issues.