

# Anti-ableist city

Modern Western Ableism is a creation of colonialism, white supremacy, eugenics and capitalism, and serves as the rebar supporting the old and newly poured foundation of Canadian cities. As such, it is at the root of the harm, exclusion, isolation and violence experienced by disabled people particularly but not exclusively.

Modern Western Ableism is also a mouldable, highly adaptable and thus far highly resilient building block for creating and defining “Other.” It forms the basis and provides the rhetoric for constructing the hierarchy defining ‘lesser’ as well as delineating arbitrary lines between “deserving’ and non.

**Modern Western Ableism defines what is normal not just in a human but in human design. It determines which humans will be designed for in the built environment, the organization and allocation of space, funds, policy and practice. In this way, it allows for the intentional construction of marginalization and rationalizes the inequitable distribution of, and access to, resources and power.**

Modern Western Ableism via eugenics established ‘normal’ as a white, non-disabled, wealthy adult man of English (‘Anglo-Saxon’) ancestry. Everyone else was ranked and classified in relation to this largely mythologized standard of body, thought, behaviour, culture and mannerism. This ‘normal’ became the standard for and established the

standards of design. It also became the basis for standards and enforcement of social control and definitions of health, criminality and conceptions of safety and danger.

Modern Western Ableism informs our understanding of health and therefore 'healthy cities' are often ableist in their application and design. If you fall outside the definition of 'healthy' then you are excluded or marginalized. Ironically, intentionally or otherwise, this creates more barriers to achieving optimal health.

Ableism has been and is used to create the perimeters for belonging. This is reflected in how we design and define a city and everything within it. Further, when we speak of inclusion, we are speaking of including those who were deliberately excluded into the system and framework which deliberately excluded them. As a result 'inclusion' poses no threat to the actual system of oppression and hierarchical ranking of humans, it simply allows some to prove they can 'overcome' their disability sufficiently and will willingly work to forcefit themselves into a 'normal' space/place/policy/practice. Even where some measure is provided, such as a ramp, it typically is interpreted as a credit to the superior generosity of those who provided it and as a deterrent for requesting additional accessibility.

Cities were created for capitalism. Transit, streets and sidewalks prioritized people 'commuting' to and from work and participating in consumerism. The fight for accessible public parks, public accessible toilets, accessible and free recreation opportunities is an outgrowth of

who cities were designed for and what they were expected to create space for.

For these and other reasons, Vancouver needs to become an actively anti-ableist city. This involves far more than aspiring to greater levels of accessibility, which as it is currently defined and approached, can serve to reify the very things that need dismantling. A new direction must be taken now.

### **Overarching principles**

1. Ableism and racism not only intersect, they are interwoven and ableism is used to support racism as well as the oppression of 2SLGBTQ+ folks, women, poor and working class people and others. As well, there is a racist bias that ignores the existence of racialized disabled people. Whiteness defines the discourse and approach to accessibility and inclusion, and as a result it is essential that an anti-ableist city is actively supporting of decolonization, land rights of Indigenous peoples and First Nations, and is actively anti-racist, addressing the legacy and ongoing harm to Black and South and East Asian communities in particular.

2. Accessibility must be:

- a. Holistic. Disabled people are not body parts, they are human beings and accessibility is built from and supports wholeness.

- b. Understood as a corrective component to long-standing and ongoing historical injustice and oppression of disabled people that included/includes restrictions on our freedom and autonomy.
- c. A necessary precondition for discussions about, and the work of creating justice.
- d. A celebration of and testament to our shared humanity and care for other humans.
- e. Not a consumer product. It will not be improved by better advertising or marketing.
- f. Public. There is no such thing as privatized accessibility standards because the former cancels the latter out. All accessibility knowledge, measures and adaptations are publicly owned, transparent and accountable.
- g. inclusive of, but not limited to; harm reduction, trauma-informed practice and design, applying an intersectional analysis, understood to exist within the equity and diversity framework.
- h. Understood to aim beyond plausible participation or use and reach for pleasant, easy and comfortable.
- i. A source of inspiration not just adaptation in design.
- j. A human right. A trump card that is not subject to being out-prioritized, voted down by majority rule or discussed or measured by economic costs and benefits.
- k. Understood to have the eventual end goal of working itself out of discourse because in a just city accessibility and human design will be one in the same.
- l. Inclusive of all body sizes and shapes.

3. No new tech, program, event, product, design or policy will be introduced and/or supported and/or endorsed by City council that reduces accessibility.
4. *An End to Eugenics Task Force* be created whose mandate will be to examine bylaws, practice, policy, design standards, and other historical and current documents to document fully the role of eugenics in the formation and form of Vancouver. The purpose of this Task Force will be to create annual reports and public information in order to prevent us from continuing to recreate the structures of eugenics unknowingly. In essence, to prevent us from the current norm of talking about inclusion while building exclusion.
5. Policy and practice is informed by disability justice.
6. Space and time are allocated inequitably in cities and this creates unnecessary barriers for disabled and non-disabled people alike. An equity and accessibility lens be applied to decisions about space and time - for example, the timing of lights or the size of seating.

**Policy Direction #1: Anti-ableist support for health and well-being: Public safety means everyone is safe, especially those who have been traditionally excluded.**

7. Every human in a city must be understood to be a member of the public and therefore discussions about public safety must not engage in or support an artificially created ranking of rights and needs based on social and economic status, let alone property ownership. This means safe supply is part of public safety. Lack of or insufficient or unsuitable housing is part of public safety. Elimination of poverty is part of public safety.

8. Practice the precautionary principle in approaching COVID-19 public health policy. Masks be mandated and provided free inside the City of Vancouver.
9. Ban hostile architecture from the City of Vancouver.
10. City must do everything necessary and possible to put an immediate end to the deaths resulting from an unregulated supply. The war on drugs is a war on people who use drugs. Further, its harm has spread to those who love and care for people who use drugs, the children of people who use drugs, as well as to people who use prescribed drugs. The perpetrating of state violence on the public, in the name of protecting the well-being of the public, is a long-standing tradition which is supported by ableism. It is time for it to end.
11. Health not healthism. The City will focus on social and political determinants of health not individual behaviour.
12. Emergency evacuation in fires and larger emergency policy be reviewed to ensure that disabled people have equitable access to escape and rescue in all situations.
13. Revoke the straw ban. Ensure bendable plastic straws are available wherever drinks are sold. The City's decision to create the ban came with a promise there would be no loss of accessibility. This has proven not to be the case and it is now nearly impossible to get a plastic bendable straw with a drink in the City of Vancouver.
14. Scent-free enforced in all city buildings.
15. City review its current practices to ensure products being used in building and maintaining its sites and structures does not create barriers for people with multiple chemical sensitivities.

16. Distribution of funds and/or equipment such as cooling/air conditioning and air purifiers to those for whom financial resources are a barrier to this equipment.

17. Work with Vancouver Coastal Health and the Province to re-open community nursing stations.

**Policy Direction #2: Specific and clear commitments and list of measures should be undertaken to create alternatives to carceral systems.**

18. These measures would include:

a. Development of a plan to reduce the use of jails, prisons as well as nursing and group homes.

b. Specific and immediate steps to finally uphold Article 19 and the rest of UNCRPD by building and funding homes and care in the community as an alternative to Long Term Care, group homes, long psychiatric hospitalizations and other institutional models.

c. Reducing and defunding the reliance on policing as a means for enforcement of social control in lieu of social support.

d. An end to the criminalization of poor and disabled people.

e. No displacement of the unhoused. People move off the street when provided with permanent, suitable and accessible housing and support.

f. A City initiated task force with the province and federal government to examine immediate alternatives to criminal justice intervention in crimes of desperation.

- g. There will be no Riverview 2.0 (Psychiatric institution).
- 19. Vancouver become a full sanctuary city. The labour of migrants was exploited historically to create wealth and remains so today. No one should be deported or denied services or care in Vancouver due to their immigration status. People whose status is not legally recognized must be able to access safe healthcare, housing, financial support and other services in Vancouver.

**Policy Direction #3: Build housing justice not housing ‘stock’  
Disabled people are disproportionately represented below the  
poverty line and among the unhoused. Even when housed the  
housing is often hostile to our bodies.**

- 20. Prioritization of human life over private property or profit. Budget allocation, policies such as building code and design standards, and all practice and public engagement must reflect this principle.
- 21. This means that no one should be unhoused if there is empty housing.
- 22. Renter protections.
- 23. Accessible housing as a human right. In instances where squatters occupy a vacant building, city will work to mediate a tenancy agreement, investigate possible purchase of the property, or find alternate accessible housing for those living in the space.
- 24. All housing must be maintained at accessible and habitable temperatures. This means heat when it is cold outside and cooling when it is hot outside. Because not all bodies thermoregulate the same, the



tenant must have control and be able to turn on cooling once it is warmer than 22 degrees inside.

25. Ban poor doors.

**Policy Direction #4: Public Engagement Reshaping public engagement process**

26. The introduction of a poverty council. Membership criteria requires members must be living in poverty and have lived in poverty for a minimum of five consecutive years. The membership will aim towards a 50-50 split of those receiving social assistance and those who are working poor. As well, membership should include single parents and a wide array of ages. At least 50 percent of members will identify as being disabled. No more than 45 percent of membership may be white. This council will receive payments, as well as have all expenses covered, be provided meal vouchers and funding for child care on days in which it meets. One city council meeting a month will have one hour minimum set aside for presentations by the poverty council. They will make direct recommendations and in addition to council voting on accepting the reports, city council will be required to provide updates and write follow-up reports to the poverty council. Council, park board and school board members may sit as liaisons but they will not represent or speak for or about the decisions of this council to council or members of the public. They are there to listen and share pertinent information, not to represent or argue with the views of the poverty council. When the poverty council presents to the City council it will not be subject to the traditional time limits.

27. An accessibility council be created with similar guidelines as stated above, but in this case 66 percent of the membership of the accessibility council must be disabled people living in poverty, a minimum of 55 percent of the membership being on provincial disability benefits, Affordability of access will be understood to be a component of any future projects, initiatives and spending by city on accessibility. Accessibility is a component of equity but also requires an equity lens applied to its decision-making. A sub-committee of this council will be charged with reviewing and creating climate change adaptation strategies.

28. Community information hubs be established throughout the city to act as both distributors and collectors of community data. Further, the City undertake to work with the Law Society to seek provincial funding for neighbourhood community legal clinics in every neighbourhood in Vancouver.

29. Any disabled advisory council must be made up entirely of disabled people with 60 percent living in poverty and white people constituting no more than 50 percent of members. 60 percent of members must live alone or be single parents.

30. The option to attend virtually for all meetings and presentations, with accessibility supports (e.g. closed captioning, ASL interpretation, visual description).

**Policy Direction #5: Public space owned by, designed and operated for, the public.**

31. A demonstrable commitment to the protection and expansion of fully accessible public space and a policy of not allowing public space to be privatized or engaging in public private partnerships for public space.

32. Vancouver policy, practice and design of space and built environment reflect the interdependence and diversity of humans. Policy and practice must actively push back against the myths of independence and individualism and reject offloading of responsibility for climate change or other social or political concerns onto private individuals, particularly those who are already most affected by the harmful impacts of these and bear the least responsibility for the decisions that have created these crises and concerns. Design for people, and consider the intersections between health, air quality, climate change, and the design of public space.

33. Walkability is a discriminatory term and concept that leads unintentionally or otherwise to the ongoing exclusion of some of the most marginalized people in cities. It is also now largely a marketing tool by developers. City of Vancouver will cease its use of the walkable and create accessible, affordable, liveable, connected communities.

34. All corners in Vancouver will have curb ramps or raised crosswalks that meet or exceed best practice accessibility standards within the next 10 years.

35. No right turns on red.

36. Reduce speed limit to 30 km/hr inside city.

37. Minimum sidewalk width for arterial streets set for 6 meters.

Minimum width for interior residential streets raised to 4 meters.

38. Seating in every block. Places to recline and rest throughout the city. Create temporary outdoor places to sleep during heat waves.

39. Accessible public washrooms mapped out to ensure they are placed equitably throughout the city and meet changing places standards of accessibility (include lift and adult sized change table, larger dimensions) in every park and city building.

40. Free booking of rooms in community centers and libraries that allow for group events to be planned in advance at no cost.

41. Ensuring community centres, pools (indoor and outdoor), and ice rinks are accessible, and have accessible changerooms and washrooms.

42. Longer hours for libraries. No fines.

43. An increase in accessible parking and improvement of the design of accessible parking spaces to ensure easy and safe access to sidewalks, including mid-block cuts with direct access to accessible parking and/or drop-off zones and zebra crossings across bike lanes.

44. Increasing the number of accessibility parking spots on City streets and City-owned properties and schools.

45. Free transit that is truly accessible.

a. If the only person expected to sit facing backwards on a bus is a wheelchair user then the design is clearly not equitable. As well, motion sickness is known to be common in the general population and is likely much higher in the disabled population.

b. Accessible transit means that getting on, off and to and from transit must also be accessible.

c. Accessible transit means that disabled people should be able to safely reach their seat and exit without risk of falling.

- d. Accessible transit means all information and wayfinding is provided in non-visual as well as visual form.
  - e. Accessible transit must be easily navigated including by those who current design creates language and cognitive barriers for.
  - f. Accessible transit must be fragrance free.
  - g. Accessible transit mandates the wearing of masks.
46. Address the very serious issue of lack of accessible taxis and other barriers disabled people face in transportation, including the wait windows and advance booking requirements of HandyDart.
47. Adaptation measures for climate change for public space and setting of standards for all new built environments and landscaping. Including but not limited to green roofs, planting of trees, overhangs, public space that is outdoors but has a roof and sources of heat. An equity lens will be applied to funding to ensure areas that have been historically lacking in green space and trees are prioritized.
48. The School Board will adopt and work to enforce a policy where no child is denied the ability to attend their local school due to inaccessibility of the premises, policies or practices.
49. A Vancouver street artist be chosen to reimagine and alter the spinning chandelier to reflect the lived experiences of the people who live on our streets.
50. An annual civic event dedicated to the Move Together, a Canadian children's book about the various ways people move through space and the relationships we create.

