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CNIB
DEAFBLIND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES

A Year of Impact & Advocacy

A Year of Impact
and Advocacy: ASL

Annual Report
2024-2025



Letter from the President & CEO and Board Chair

Letter from the President
& CEO and Board Chair: ASL

Every step forward begins with a shift in perspective.

At CNIB Deafblind Community Services, this past year was defined by one powerful idea: access to communication, connection, and independence isn't a luxury, it's a human right. That belief shaped our actions, our advocacy, and our conversations, as we explored new opportunities to expand services into communities that have long gone without support.

This past year marked an important turning point in our journey. Across the country, we embraced a new way of talking about our work, one rooted firmly in human rights and dignity. We are reshaping conversations, shifting from framing intervenor services as life enhancing, to declaring them essential rights that must be upheld.

This year also brought a significant leadership milestone, as our Board appointed a new President and CEO. Together with a dynamic leadership team, this new chapter of leadership brings fresh perspectives and a shared passion for our mission, working to strengthen relationships and drive meaningful change for people who are Deafblind across Canada.

“ My first year as CEO has deepened my understanding of what true inclusion and accessibility mean. I’ve immersed myself in conversations with our Deafblind community, continued my journey learning ASL, and gained an even greater appreciation for the passion and resilience that drives this community forward. I’m more committed than ever to our goal, a Canada where no person who is Deafblind has to fight for essential support, no matter where they live. ”

- Angela Bonfanti, President & CEO

In British Columbia, this renewed clarity fueled a successful advocacy campaign, led by the Deafblind community and its allies. This resulted in renewed government investment, ensuring the continuation of critical intervenor services. It was a powerful validation of our collective voice and an affirmation that the rights of Canadians who are Deafblind matter, today and always.

We also saw profound growth and impact across the country. In Saskatchewan, our community expanded meaningfully, connecting more individuals with the intervenor services they deserve. In Ontario, we strengthened emergency services, creating safer pathways for communication and independence in moments when it matters most.

Behind every milestone this year were our dedicated staff, skills development specialists, and intervenors.

Their expertise, lived experience, and advocacy shaped every step forward. We listened deeply through our employee engagement initiatives, celebrated our remarkable staff through new recognition programs, and continued to invest in training and cultural learning.

As we look ahead, we’re exploring bold innovations that could transform our services, like assistive technology and new digital communication tools. But we know technology is just one part of the solution; true inclusion will always depend on human connection.

To our community members, staff, volunteers, and supporters: thank you. Your courage, resilience, and relentless commitment move our mission forward.

To governments, organizations, and leaders across Canada: join us. Let’s build a future where intervenor services aren’t up for negotiation, they’re guaranteed, because every Canadian deserves the right to communicate, connect, and live with dignity.

With gratitude,



Maryann Everett



Angela Bonfanti

Highlights

Highlights: ASL

A Shift in Language

This year, we began a powerful shift in how we talk about our work, and why it matters. Across the country, our team embraced a human rights-based approach to Deafblind services. That means naming intervenor services for what they are: not just helpful supports, but essential tools for communication, safety, and autonomy. When we frame access as a right, not a luxury, we not only shift language, we shift mindsets. This evolving narrative is now embedded in our advocacy, programs, and partnerships, setting a new tone for the future of DBCS.



Welcoming New Leadership

This year marked an exciting chapter for CNIB Deafblind Community Services as we welcomed Angela Bonfanti as our new President and CEO. Bringing more than 13 years of leadership experience within CNIB and DBCS and a deep personal connection to our mission,

Angela's first year has been spent listening, learning, and building relationships with our Deafblind community across Canada.

Her leadership, alongside our dedicated executive team, is shaping a bold vision for the future: a Canada where no one who is Deafblind has to fight for essential support, no matter where they live. Her leadership, alongside our dedicated executive team, is shaping a bold vision for the future: a Canada where no one who is Deafblind has to fight for essential support, no matter where they live.

Technology That Listens

At DBCS, we believe the future of accessibility will be shaped by people with lived experience, not just engineers. This year, we continued to support development of a robotic arm designed to support communication for people who are Deafblind. Created by Samantha Johnson, this early-stage innovation holds enormous promise. What makes it truly exciting is the co-design approach, shaped by community feedback and built on lived experience. By connecting technology creators with the people they aim to serve, we're laying the groundwork for more inclusive, impactful innovation in the years ahead.





Planting Seeds of Inclusion

Deafblind Awareness Month has always been about visibility. But this year, it became something more. In June, we introduced the Growing Understanding campaign: a nationwide initiative aimed at planting the seeds of empathy and education, starting with the next generation. Through interactive

digital learning kits and hands-on gardening activities, students across more than 40 schools in Ontario explored what it means to be Deafblind, how people communicate, and why access matters. With colourful planters, classroom discussions, and the support of passionate educators, we made Deafblind pride a living, growing symbol of inclusion. It's a campaign we plan to grow, year over year, classroom by classroom.

United Voices, Shared Impact

What started as a working group quickly grew into something bigger. This year, DBCS, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC) and CNIB formalized the Stronger Together committee, a collaborative space for community leaders, staff, and clients from across the country to align on key issues and work toward collective solutions. From joint government advocacy efforts to shared storytelling and awareness campaigns, this collaboration has helped build consistency, strengthen our voice, and create space for dialogue across regions. It's a reminder that when we move together, we move further.

Celebrating Excellence

Recognition is a vital part of our culture at DBCS. When team members feel seen and valued, it fosters stronger teams, and even stronger outcomes for the people we serve.

This year, we received 43 nominations for the Kerry G. Wadman Award, including a record 15 from clients, a testament to the deep impact our staff have in the community.

We're proud to congratulate Kelli-Ann Joyce as this year's recipient. With nearly 19 years of service, she's led with professionalism, warmth, and dedication in every role, from intervenor to project lead. Her contributions have shaped programs, supported staff, and improved lives.



Advocacy

Advocacy: ASL

How Community Advocacy Secured Lifeline Services in British Columbia

In 2024, Deafblind Community Services (DBCS) faced a critical juncture. Funding for intervenor services in British Columbia, services that are essential to communication, autonomy, and safety, was suddenly at risk. For hundreds of British Columbians who are Deafblind, the uncertainty was more than bureaucratic: it threatened their independence, connection, and quality of life.

In response, we mobilized. What followed was a powerful grassroots campaign that spanned the province and the country. Through letters, media stories, community outreach, and a digital campaign powered by lived experience, our community came together with one clear message: access to intervenor services is not a “nice to have.” It’s a human right.

From Advocacy to Action

The Government of British Columbia recommitted to and increased its investment in Deafblind intervenor services, ensuring continued support for those who need it most.



This wasn’t just a policy success; it was a moment of validation for a community that has spent years fighting for recognition. We are deeply grateful to every individual, family member, ally, and elected official who listened, advocated, and acted.



“ We feel that it’s just wrong that we have to continuously make this fight... because it’s our human right to be part of the community. ”

- Brenda Macalister, advocate and DBCS client

By the Numbers

1,067

letters sent to candidates
from **437 individual
contributors**

1,000+

visits to the
campaign
webpage



11,300+

social media
impressions

Media impact

across B.C. from local papers
to provincial news outlets

Stronger Together and Still Rising

This advocacy success was only possible because of the strength of our shared voice. CNIB, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC), and DBCS, alongside countless client advocates, families, and supporters, rallied together in an extraordinary show of unity and resolve.

The impact was undeniable. But the work is far from over.

We are still advocating for a permanent, sustainable future for Deafblind services in British Columbia, and for equitable access across Canada. From coast to coast to coast, too many communities still face barriers to basic communication and inclusion.

Together, we've proven what's possible. Next, we'll finish what we started.





Brenda was born Deaf and later diagnosed with Usher syndrome, a rare genetic condition that gradually robs people of their sight. Over the years, her vision narrowed to the point where she could no longer see. Without support, she found herself increasingly isolated, unable to navigate the world safely, communicate effectively, or participate in community life.

“I had no opportunities to go out,” she explains, describing the challenges she faced without access to intervenor services. “I couldn’t do things on my own.”

Voices for Change

Voices for Change: ASL

Brenda Macalister’s Story: Advocacy, Autonomy, and the Power of Intervenor Services

In a quiet corner of McLeese Lake, British Columbia, Brenda Macalister sits beside her intervenor, Pamela Goertz, fingers intertwined in tactile sign language. Through touch, Pamela helps communicate the layout of a room, the presence of others, and details that many people take for granted. For Brenda, who is Deafblind, these interactions aren’t just about exchanging information, they’re about connection.

That changed in 2022 when the Government of British Columbia provided funding to CNIB Deafblind Community Services (DBCS), enabling Brenda to receive professional intervenor support. Working with Pamela, she began to re-engage with her community, regain her independence, and reimagine what life could look like.

One of the turning points came when she joined the Williams Lake Fibre Artists Guild. With Pamela’s support, Brenda could fully participate, weaving, creating, and building friendships with others in the group. She described the experience as giving her “a real sense of purpose,” helping her feel connected, curious, and included.

But in late 2024, the future of DBCS's intervenor program was thrown into doubt as provincial funding neared its expiration. Brenda, along with many other advocates who are Deafblind, feared the return of isolation and dependence.

"Are we... going to be stuck at home, unable to access the world like we can when we have intervenors?" she asks.

Rather than retreat, Brenda stepped into action. She met with members of the legislative assembly in her region, shared her story with local media outlets, and partnered with DBCS leadership to make the case for continued funding. For Brenda, this was about more than her own experience; it was about equity.

"My goal... has been to advocate for equal access so that people who are Deafblind can access information and participate in their communities," she says.

In March 2025, the campaign saw success: the Government of British Columbia renewed and increased its investment in Deafblind intervenor services. Brenda's story, and the collective efforts of the Deafblind community, played a key role in this outcome.

Still, Brenda is clear that the fight isn't over.

"There are so many people on a waiting list who need services to live their lives fully," she says.

She dreams of a day when Deafblind Canadians across the country have access to the supports they need, without having to fight for them year after year.

Intervenor services, she believes, are essential to mental health, independence, and dignity.

"I want to have intervening service until the day I die," she said. "I don't want to be just left wasting away in my own mind... We have perfectly good minds, we have intelligence; we just can't access a lot of the information that everyone else can."

Brenda's story reminds us what's possible when people have access to the right supports, and what's at risk when they don't. Her advocacy has been a beacon for many, and her voice continues to push Canada closer to a future where no one who is Deafblind is left behind.



Our Impact at a Glance

Our Impact at a Glance: ASL

Total Clients
Served

200+



Total Direct
Service Hours

69,700+



Regional Impact

British Columbia

5,800+

direct service hours

Saskatchewan

4,400+

direct service hours

Ontario

59,500+

direct service
hours

45+

emergency
service
requests
delivered

83 learners

registered
in the Skills
Development
Program

Operating Revenue

Government funding • **98.7%**

Other • **1.3%**

Operating Expenses

Service • **94.2%**

Administration • **5.8%**

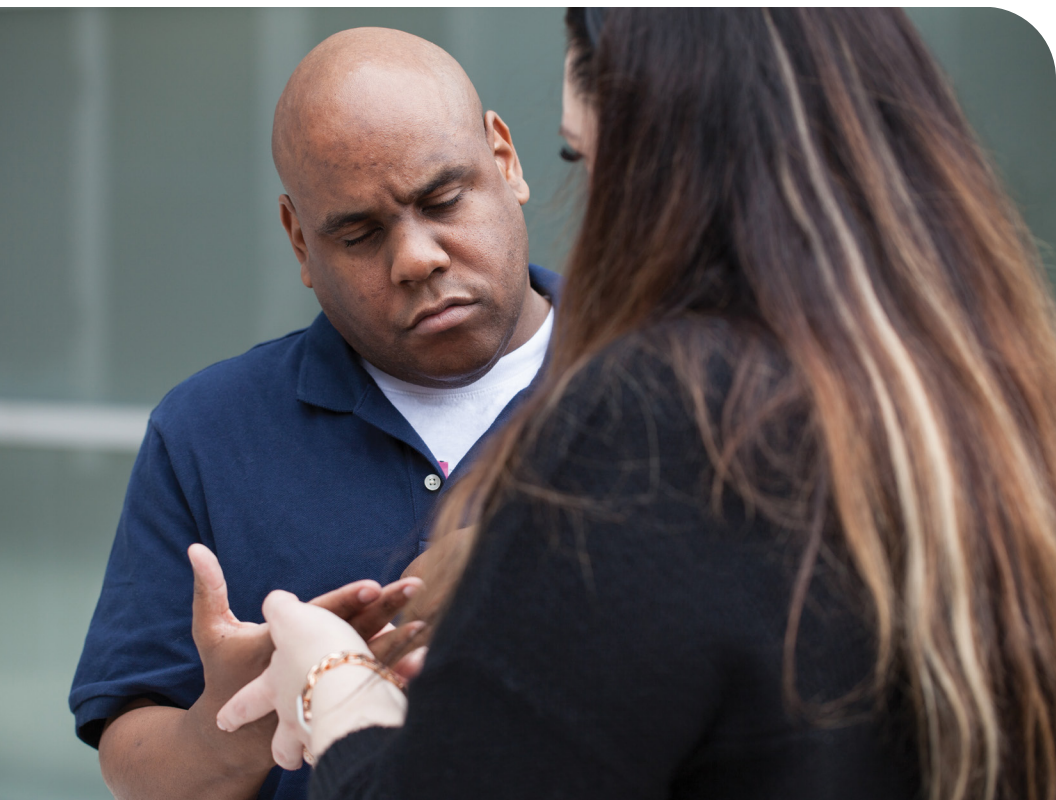
CNIB Deafblind Community Services takes pride in upholding the highest standard of ethics and accountability in stewarding the funding we receive from our provincial government partners. Our financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, were prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations and were audited by Ernst & Young LLP. Visit deafblindservices.ca for more information.

Board of Directors and Executive Leadership

Board of Directors and Executive Leadership: ASL

Leading the Way to Service Excellence

CNIB Deafblind Community Services is made up of a diverse team of passionate and enthusiastic professionals. We are proud to be governed by a board of directors comprised of leaders in the field of Deafblind services and advocacy, including individuals who are living with a loss of both hearing and sight, as well as a talented executive leadership team.



Board of Directors

Maryann Everett • **Chair**

Ronald J. Kruzeniski, K.C. • **Vice Chair**

Jane Ashford • **Treasurer**

Denise Beaumont

Penny Bennett

Nora Conostas

Katherine Hesson-Bolton

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Kathryn Jung

Arvind Mohandoss

Charlie Thompson

Sousie Weston

Executive Leadership Team

Angela Bonfanti • **President and CEO**

Sherry Grabowski • **Vice President**

Stronger Together



Together, we support and stand by Canadians who are blind, Deafblind, or have low vision.

CNIB Deafblind Community Services is one of Canada's leading providers of specialized support and emergency services for people who are Deafblind. Our services enable people who are Deafblind to maximize their independence and engagement with the world around them.

- Visit **deafblindservices.ca**
- Email **infoweb@deafblindservices.ca**
- Call **1-855-862-6001**



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