

III. OUR AGENDA

The hearings we have held during recent months have persuaded us that long standing systemic impediments continue to reduce the effectiveness of individual initiatives and programs. This problem should, however, be viewed as an opportunity. Its resolution promises increased results from many of our existing programs, as well as a greater likelihood that future initiatives will not be, in effect, sabotaged by the context in which they are implemented. We have been convinced, by insightful presentations from several consumers' groups as well as our own independent findings, that a comprehensive approach to economic integration, which pays special attention to the linkages between disability issues and programs, is now an indispensable precondition for significant progress. As one of our witnesses argued with respect to poverty:

The Canadian Disability Rights Council submits that the structural poverty of persons with disabilities will not be changed without a comprehensive approach to income security programs, education and training, and employment. These issues cannot be looked at in isolation from each other, nor can existing programs be merely tinkered with if a real change to the lives of persons with disabilities is to be made. In addition to developing a strategy to deal with these key issues which affect the incomes of persons with disabilities, measures must be taken which will correct the many contributing problems in areas such as access, information, rights, immigration, taxation, transportation, institutionalization, and others. Without a comprehensive approach to the problem, persons with disabilities in Canada will stay poor.

(Issues 27, Appendix "HUDI-14" pp 2-3)

During the remaining life of this Parliament, we intend to contribute to a comprehensive approach to economic integration by building on the foundation established in this report. We hope that our future work can help strengthen political will, increase the accountability of government departments, and spur action that gets results.

We will be continuing the work begun this Spring with a series of hearings and reports, starting in the Fall. The initial phase of this work will be an investigation of the two problems, mentioned at the outset of this report, which we have come to see as central to the economic integration of people with disabilities. Poverty and employment issues are consequences of a range of shortcomings at all levels of our system, and progress in their resolution will only be achieved when the system, as a whole, is managed to produce it. An exploration of these problems, and of practical solutions, is thus the logical starting point for a comprehensive approach to economic integration.

A. Potential Unfulfilled: Poverty and People With Disabilities

Although we confronted many paradoxes during our hearings on economic integration, none has proven as intractable as breaking the lockstep that exists between poverty and disability. Mr. Adrian Battcock stated the problem bluntly when he pointed out that: