

disabilities? For example, this Committee received no concrete assurances that the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program⁵ has effectively eliminated barriers for people with disabilities.

The Department of the Secretary of State also demonstrated that its activities with regard to Aboriginal people with—and without—disabilities are not necessarily ‘plugged in’ to the work of other government departments. For example, departmental officials did not understand the implications of a recent agreement between DIAND and the province of Alberta to equalize services provided to Aboriginal people on and off reserve. Although this Department has responsibility for co-ordinating the National Strategy, and all issues relating to disability, Georges Proulx, Assistant Under Secretary of State, Social Development and Regional Operations, tried to explain why his Department did not have any input into this unique initiative. He told us that:

They (DIAND) probably felt that it was within their department and their authority, and did not see fit to consult us on this...

I suppose that the part of that agreement that touched on disabled persons was only a small part of the agreement, and that probably explains why they did not consult us. We try to monitor and keep a watch on disabled persons issues. Obviously, some things escape us.

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5. Friendship centres, run by and designed for, Aboriginal people provide vital information to those who have newly arrived in, or are simply passing through, an urban area. Without the centres, migrating Aboriginal people would otherwise face a number of barriers in gaining access to services or information.