



The VOICE of Albertans with Disabilities

January 1, 2026

Welcome Back and Happy New Year!

As we begin 2026, all of us at Voice of Albertans with Disabilities want to take a moment to thank you for being part of our community. Your support, participation, and shared commitment to accessibility continue to inspire the work we do every day.

A new year brings fresh opportunities, and at VAD we are excited to build on the momentum created in 2025. This year, our focus remains firmly on empowerment, accessibility, and meaningful community connection. Together, we will continue strengthening pathways for Albertans with disabilities to access the services, supports, and advocacy they deserve.

Our Priorities for 2026

- **Community Inclusion Project: Navigation Supports**
Demand for one-on-one support continues to grow, and we are committed to ensuring individuals and families have clear guidance through provincial and federal benefits, appeals, housing supports, and more. In 2026, our Navigation program will expand its capacity and refine its tools to better meet the complex needs of communities across Alberta.
- **Indigenous & Multicultural Community Connections**
Building culturally responsive and welcoming spaces remains one of our key priorities. This year, we will continue strengthening relationships, developing inclusive outreach, and offering presentations that reflect the diverse identities and experiences within our province.
- **Disability Awareness Presentations**
Education is empowerment. Our team will be delivering more workshops, Lunch & Learns, and community presentations to schools, organizations, and workplaces, helping to create environments where accessibility and inclusion are understood, valued, and practiced.



Looking Ahead

As we embark on this new year, we are reminded that meaningful change happens when we work together. Whether you engage with VAD as a participant, partner, volunteer, or supporter, your

involvement strengthens the disability community across Alberta.

Thank you for walking alongside us. Here's to a year filled with growth, resilience, and new possibilities.

How to Set Up a Henson Trust for Someone on AISH

A Henson Trust (also called an Absolute Discretionary Trust) is a special type of trust used in Alberta to protect a person's AISH eligibility while still allowing them to benefit from money left by family.

Here's how it works and how to set one up:

What a Henson Trust Does

A Henson Trust keeps the person on AISH safe because:

- The trust belongs to the trustee, NOT the person on AISH
- The trustee has full discretion about when to pay money out
- The AISH recipient can't demand money, so it doesn't count as their asset
- This means large inheritances do not remove AISH eligibility

How to Set One Up

Step 1 — Choose Someone to Be the Trustee

This is the person who handles all money in the trust.

Usually a:

- Parent
- Sibling
- Trusted family friend
- Or a trust company (like ATB or RBC Trust)

The trustee must understand:

- They control all spending
- They must act in the beneficiary's best interests
- They cannot give large cash gifts that might affect AISH

Step 2 — Have a Lawyer Draft the Henson Trust

A lawyer is required because it must be written correctly. The document can be created as part of:

- A Will (most common), or
- A Stand-alone trust agreement

The document needs to state:

- It is an absolute discretionary trust
- The beneficiary has no control over the funds
- The trustee has full decision-making power
- The purpose is to support the beneficiary without jeopardizing AISH.

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Step 3 — Fund the Trust

Money can be added when:

- A parent passes away → inheritance placed into the trust
- Family adds money while alive
- Insurance payouts go into the trust
- Property or investments are transferred into it

Common assets in a Henson Trust:

- Cash
- RRSPs/RRIFs
- Life insurance
- Real estate
- GICs or investment



What you need to know about

HENSON TRUSTS

Step 4 — Trustee Manages the Funds

The trustee uses the money to help with things AISH doesn't fully cover, such as:

- Clothing
- Transportation
- Medical/dental not covered
- Accessible equipment
- Recreation and social activities
- Education
- Travel

The trustee should avoid:

- Giving the beneficiary cash
- Giving "income" that might be counted by AISH. Paying bills directly on behalf of the beneficiary is usually safer.

Step 5 — AISH Notification

When the trust becomes active (usually after someone passes away), the trustee must tell AISH:

- That a Henson Trust exists
- Provide a copy of the trust document if requested

AISH reviews it to confirm:

- The beneficiary does not control the trust
- The trustee has full discretion
- Payments are not guaranteed, If set up correctly, AISH does NOT count it as an asset.

Step 6 - Do You Need a Lawyer?

Yes. A Henson Trust must be drafted by a lawyer familiar with:

- Alberta estate law
- Disability benefits rules
- AISH asset regulations

Using the wrong wording can result in AISH treating the trust as an asset, which risks benefits.

Key Takeaways

- A Henson Trust protects AISH benefits
- Must be discretionary (beneficiary has no control)
- Lawyer drafting is required
- Trustee manages spending on behalf of the beneficiary
- AISH must be notified when the trust becomes active

Member Renewal Time!

It's the final countdown! VAD memberships expire at the end of March, which means it's time to renew and stay connected. Renewing your membership helps us continue advocating, offering programs, and building a more accessible Alberta. Start your renewal today so there's no interruption to your member benefits. Renew now to keep accessing resources, support, and community all year long.

www.vadsociety.ca/login-signup

Winter Accessibility & Safety

Winter in Alberta can create real challenges for many individuals with disabilities. From heavy snowfall to icy surfaces and reduced visibility, staying safe and mobile takes planning, awareness,



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and community support. Here are some key reminders to help make this season safer and more accessible for everyone.

Snow & Ice Safety

- Keep walkways, ramps, and driveways clear and well-salted to prevent slips and falls.
- Consider traction aids (ice cleats) for mobility devices like canes or walkers.
- When possible, avoid travelling during heavy snowfall or extreme cold.
- Use brightly coloured outerwear or reflective accessories in low-visibility conditions.
- **Accessible Transit Reminders**
Check ETS, DATS, and regional transit alerts before heading out—weather may cause delays or detours.
- Plan extra travel time and pack essentials: phone charger, medication, and warm layers.
- Ensure pick-up and drop-off areas are cleared of snow so operators can safely assist.
- Call transit providers early if you need to adjust rides due to weather.

Home Winterizing for Mobility & Sensory Needs

- Install slip-resistant mats at entrances and ensure handrails are secure.
- Improve lighting both indoors and outdoors to help with visibility during shorter days.
- Consider sound-based cues or contrasting tape for individuals with visual or sensory impairments.



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- Check heating systems and emergency kits—winter storms can cause power outages.

Assistive Device Winter Maintenance

- Use a small brush to remove snow and ice from wheelchair or walker wheels regularly.
- Keep batteries for power chairs fully charged; cold weather drains power faster.
- Apply a light lubricant to moving parts to reduce stiffness from freezing temperatures.
- Carry a small repair kit with tools, gloves, and a cloth for quick adjustments.

Advocacy Tip: Reporting Dangerous Sidewalks or Barriers

Cities rely on resident reporting—don't hesitate to report unsafe conditions. In Edmonton:

- 311 or the 311 app can be used to report icy sidewalks, snow-blocked curb cuts, or dangerous pathways.

When reporting, include:

- Exact location (address or intersection)
- Nature of the hazard
- Photos if safe to take

Encourage neighbours, landlords, and businesses to keep areas accessible—it benefits the whole community.



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Winter Wellness & Mental Health Supports

Cold weather, shorter days, and limited mobility can make winter a difficult season for many Albertans. Staying connected and supported is essential—especially during months when isolation and stress can increase. Here are some gentle reminders and resources to help you maintain wellness and reach out if you need support.

Coping with Isolation During the Colder Months

- Stay connected in small ways: Phone calls, video chats, or short check-ins with friends, family, or community groups can make a big difference.
- Create daily routines: Consistent sleep, meals, and movement help reduce stress and maintain balance.
- Get light when you can: Natural daylight or a light therapy lamp can help boost mood.
- Engage in meaningful activities: Hobbies, crafts, reading, or volunteer work can offer purpose and structure.
- Reach out early: If you're feeling overwhelmed, talking to someone you trust or a support service can help.

Provincial Mental Health Resources

These Alberta-wide supports can help with stress, anxiety, emotional support, or community referrals:

- Alberta 211 – Free 24/7 information and referral for mental health, housing, food security, and community programs.
- Alberta Mental Health Help Line: 1-877-303-2642 – 24/7 support, advice, and information from trained professionals.
- AHS Addiction & Mental Health Services – Local clinics and programs offering counselling and treatment options.
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 – Support for youth, 24/7
- Hope for Wellness Help Line (Indigenous Support): 1-855-242-3310 or online chat – Available 24/7 with culturally grounded support.

Crisis & Immediate Support Lines

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, help is available anytime from trained responders:

- 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline (Canada) – Call or text 24/7 for immediate, confidential support.
- Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357) – 24/7 emotional support, crisis intervention, and referrals.
- Crisis Services Canada (Chat & Text): 9-8-8 – Safe, non-judgmental support when you're struggling.

These services are here to listen, support, and help you stay safe.

Understanding ADAP in 2026: What We Know So Far

As Alberta prepares for changes under the new Alberta Disability Assistance Program (ADAP), many individuals and families are asking what this will mean for their benefits, supports, and long-term stability. While the government continues to release information gradually, here is what VAD knows so far.

What We Know So Far

ADAP is being introduced to modernize disability supports and streamline provincial programs. The intention is to simplify processes, reduce administrative barriers, and align services more closely with individual needs. The transition will happen gradually throughout 2025–2026, with more updates expected in phases.

Current benefits such as AISH or Income Support for Persons with Disabilities will not disappear overnight; they will shift into the ADAP structure over time as details are finalized. VAD will continue to update the community as official information becomes available.



Common Questions We're Hearing

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Will my benefits stop suddenly?

No. All changes will be phased in. Individuals will receive information about what applies to them before anything changes.

Will eligibility rules change?

The full guidelines have not been released. Early information suggests the government intends to streamline access, but exact criteria are still being finalized.

Will ADAP affect other federal benefits?

It is too early to know how provincial changes will interact with federal programs. VAD's Community Support Workers are monitoring this closely.

Do I need to reapply for everything?

There is no indication that everyone will need to fully reapply. More clarity will be provided by the province as implementation moves forward.

How can I prepare?

Keep all your current documents organized, and notify AISH of any changes in your situation. Staying informed is your best tool.

How VAD Is Supporting You

Our VAD Community Support Workers are staying on top of every ADAP announcement, policy release, and government update. We are:

- Tracking changes in real time
- Connecting directly with government contacts and community partners
- Updating service pathways for clients as information becomes available
- Helping individuals understand how ADAP may affect their specific situation
- Providing clear, accessible explanations—without speculation or fear

You are not navigating this alone. If you have questions about how ADAP could impact you or your family, our team is here to help provide clarity, support, and advocacy.



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FREE TAXES



What to bring:

- Government ID
- Social Insurance Number
- Tax Slips
- Charitable Donation Receipts
- Medical/Dental Receipts
- DTC Approval letter

Call for appointment



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Are you Eligible?

1 person	\$35,000
2 persons	\$45,000
3 persons	\$47,500
4 persons	\$50,000
5 persons	\$52,500

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**TAX APPOINTMENTS
START IN
MARCH 2026.**



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Community Inclusion Project - Indigenous & Multicultural Outreach

Over the past year, VAD's Indigenous and Multicultural Outreach work has continued to grow, helping us build stronger relationships and more inclusive pathways to support for communities across Alberta.

Thank You to Our Pop-Up Partners

We were grateful for the opportunity to host several community pop-up sessions with partners such as SAGE, Jewish Family Services, and other local organizations. These sessions provided valuable opportunities to meet individuals where they are, offer on-the-spot navigation support, and learn more about the diverse needs within our community.

While the pop-up model is continuing across the province, we are deeply appreciative of the collaboration, openness, and community engagement our partners are sharing with us. Their support helps us better understand barriers faced by Indigenous, newcomer, and multicultural communities—and those learnings continue to guide our work.

Our Ongoing Commitment

VAD remains dedicated to delivering accessible, culturally informed supports throughout Alberta. This includes:

- Strengthening relationships with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders
- Expanding outreach through presentations, workshops, and community events
- Ensuring our Navigation services recognize cultural context, language needs, and diverse lived experiences
- Developing accessible education materials that reflect the voices and identities of the communities we serve
- Continuing to listen, learn, and adapt our services to meet evolving needs

Building Inclusive Pathways Forward

Our commitment to Indigenous and multicultural

communities is long-term and rooted in respect, collaboration, and meaningful connection. By working closely with community partners and listening directly to individuals, we continue to shape supports that honour cultural identity, promote accessibility, and strengthen belonging.

VAD has visited various locations across the province including:

- Bonnyville
- Gibbons
- Edmonton & Calgary
- Red Deer
- Airdrie
- Lethbridge
- Fort McMurray
- Grande Prairie
- Medicine Hat
- and many more locations.

VAD looks forward to carrying this work into 2026-2027 with intention, humility, and gratitude.

Upcoming VAD Activities:

- Membership Renewal - January to March
- Free Tax Clinic - March & April
- Volunteer Appreciation Lunch - April
- National AccessAbility Week - May
- VAD Board Recruitment - May
- VAD Annual General Meeting - June
- VAD BBQ - August
- Annual Driver Appreciation Week - November

IDPD Resource Fair Recap!

We are still energized from the success of our IDPD Resource Fair on December 3rd. With 29 participating organizations and hundreds of attendees, the event highlighted the power of collaboration within the disability sector. In 2026, we aim to build on this success and continue creating opportunities for connection, information-sharing, and community engagement.



**International Day of
Persons with Disabilities
Alberta**

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DATS & ETS



Alberta Health Advocates



Congdons



PCS



AUPSA



Qualicare



Red Plaid Developments



AdaptAbilities



Goodwill



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The Career Foundation



Centre for Autism Services



ReYu



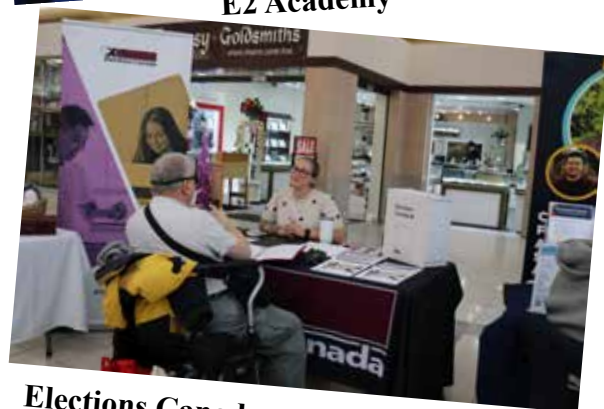
Friends of Medicare



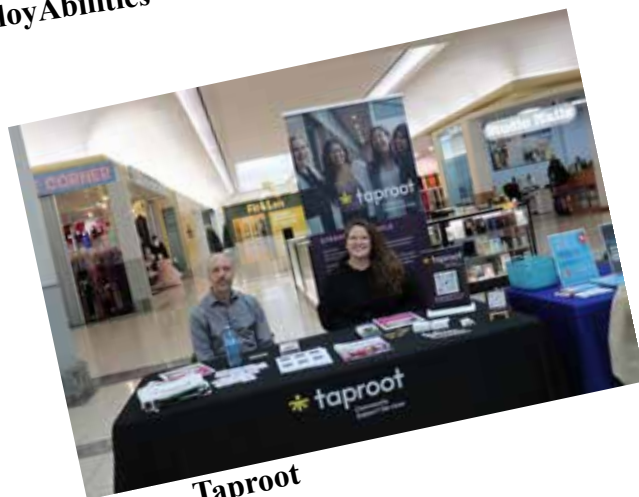
E2 Academy



EmployAbilities



Elections Canada



Taproot



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Edmonton**



Hello Seniors



Cornerstone Counselling



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Other IDPD Resource Fairs

Voice of Albertans with Disabilities is pleased to thank Koryn Dyer, Acting President for hosting an IDPD table for VAD in Fort McMurray on December 3, 2025.

We also want to thank Norquest College for hosting an IDPD resource fair that VAD participated in. Great job to all the organizations that hosted events acknowledging International Day of Persons with Disabilities across Alberta.

Building an Accessible Alberta: What Community Connection Really Means in 2026

Accessibility is more than ramps, policies, and programs—it is also belonging. As we move into 2026, Voice of Albertans with Disabilities is expanding our understanding of accessibility to include something just as essential as any physical or systemic support: community connection.

Social connection is often overlooked as a disability rights issue, yet it profoundly shapes quality of life. Isolation remains one of the most common concerns we hear from individuals across Alberta. Barriers in transportation, communication, mobility, and socio-economic conditions can make everyday participation difficult. When people cannot meaningfully connect with their communities, their voices, choices, and opportunities shrink.

At VAD, we've seen firsthand how connection creates change. In 2025, our outreach and education efforts

grew significantly, reaching new communities and strengthening relationships across the province. Through disability awareness presentations, we supported schools, non profits, workplaces, and community groups in expanding their understanding of accessibility and inclusion. These sessions didn't just share information—they sparked conversations, challenged assumptions, and invited people to imagine a more inclusive Alberta.

Our Indigenous and Multicultural Outreach work deepened those connections even further. By meeting people where they are—culturally, geographically, and socially—we heard stories of resilience, systemic barriers, and the ways disability and culture intersect. Pop-up sessions with partners like SAGE and Jewish Family Services helped us learn what supports are most meaningful, and the relationships and insights from those conversations continue to guide our work. Community connection isn't a program; it's a practice.

Events like National AccessAbility Week and our IDPD Community Resource Fair also showed the power of gathering. Hundreds of community members—families, service providers, advocates, and allies—came together to exchange resources, share experiences, and celebrate disability pride. These moments remind us that accessible Alberta is built not only through systems, but through people coming together with a shared purpose.

We also continue to hear from our members, whose voices shape every aspect of our work. Many have told us that what they value most is not just information, but connection—opportunities to meet others, learn together, and feel part of something larger. Their feedback is helping us imagine new ways to support ongoing engagement and meaningful provincial community building.



Looking ahead, VAD is exploring ways to expand province-wide connection opportunities. One of the emerging ideas is a weekly online gathering space—VAD Community Connect—designed to bring people with disabilities across Alberta together for conversation,

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peer support, guest speakers, activities, and social connection. While planning is still in the early stages, the vision is clear: a welcoming, accessible space where people can show up as they are and feel a sense of community no matter where they live.

As we move into 2026, our commitment is simple but powerful: to strengthen connection, amplify voices, and build a more accessible, inclusive Alberta—together.

Community is not a bonus—it is a foundation. And every conversation, partnership, and shared experience brings us one step closer to the accessible province we all deserve.

Behind the Scenes at VAD: How Navigation Supports Change Lives Every Day

Every day, Albertans reach out to Voice of Albertans with Disabilities looking for clarity, support, and someone to walk beside them as they navigate complex systems. For many, disability navigation isn't just about paperwork—it's about stability, independence, and dignity. At VAD, our Navigation Program has become one of the province's most relied-upon supports, helping people access the benefits, services, and resources they need to thrive.

While every person's journey is unique, a "day in the life" of a VAD Community Support Worker reveals the patterns, challenges, and small victories that shape our work. A typical morning might open with a call from someone struggling to understand their AISH application—unsure which medical documents they need, worried about timelines, or overwhelmed by the process. Community Support Workers help break down requirements, explain next steps, and connect individuals with resources that make the application feel manageable rather than impossible.

Housing is another major concern. Many Albertans with disabilities face long waiting lists, inaccessible units, or unclear expectations from housing providers. VAD often helps clients

understand their rights, communicate with property managers, and explore options that fit their needs and budgets. These steps may seem small, but for someone experiencing housing insecurity, they can be life-changing.

Throughout each day, VAD also assists with forms, referrals, and system explanations. Whether it's CPP-D medical reports, or disability tax benefit forms the work is deeply varied—but the goal remains constant: reduce barriers and increase access.

Many of the people we support feel stuck or unheard before they reach out. They may have been redirected through multiple departments, misunderstood because of communication differences, or overwhelmed by bureaucracy. Having someone who listens, explains clearly, and celebrates every small step forward makes the process feel less isolating.

And those small victories matter. The moment a client receives their first AISH payment after months of uncertainty. The relief when a housing approval finally comes through. The empowerment when someone learns to self-advocate and successfully navigate a system on their own. Each of these wins creates stability—not just for individuals, but for families and communities.

As Alberta heads into 2026, navigation support continues to be a provincial priority. System complexity is increasing, legislation is shifting, and more Albertans are seeking accessible, person-centred guidance. VAD's Navigation Program fills a critical gap by offering clear information, emotional support, and practical help that respects each person's lived experience. At VAD, we are honoured to walk alongside individuals as they move toward greater independence, confidence, and connection.



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Charity Awards
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