



Eye-AHAs! Shining a light for Northern Ontarian children with sight loss: A toolkit to help Vision Loss Rehabilitation Specialists and CNIB staff advocate for home accommodations in rental housing

PRESENTING AUTHOR:

Margaret G. French (1)

AUTHOR(S):

French, MG (1), Yantzi, N (2), Peacock, B (3)

AFFILIATIONS:

(1) Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research, Sudbury, ON (2) School of the Environment, Laurentian University, Sudbury, ON (3) Vision Loss Rehabilitation, CNIB Foundation, Sudbury, ON

ABSTRACT:

Attendees will learn about a community-based tool to assist their pediatric patients/clients with sight loss as well as other services provided by Vision Loss Rehabilitation (VLR) Ontario such as home and school environmental assessments.

Children who are blind or partially sighted require individualized accessible home accommodations (IAHAs) such as handrails, flashing alarms, or tactile warning surface indicators to navigate their home environments to support their safety and autonomy. Parents living in rental housing face greater challenges with this process as they may concurrently experience socio-economic and tenancy insecurities and bureaucratic red tape.

The objective of this community-based research project, funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario, was to develop an advocacy toolkit for VLR and CNIB staff in supporting their young clients and families. VLR staff were contacted across Ontario to participate in a semi-structured interview about their experiences in advocating for IAHAs for their clients. Four in-depth interviews were conducted between May to October 2019. Key themes included that: IAHA challenges are complex and varied depending on geographic context; accessibility is more than just getting into a building; guide dogs have legal rights; and, housing providers are ill-informed of their legal duty to accommodate.

The Staff Toolkit will include: clear explanations about the roles that multiple policies and legislation play in IAHA requests; staff best practices, a list of resources; and, resources to encourage parents not to give up on their IAHAs accommodation requests. Funds from Laurentian University' SSHRC Knowledge Dissemination Fund are being used to ensure the toolkit will be available in multiple accessible formats as per the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) communications compliance guidelines.