

Montreal, April 2, 2020

## **Open letter to our decision-makers: People with disabilities cannot be held on pause!**

M. Legault, Mme McCann and Dr Arruda,

For the past few weeks, we have all been systematically glued to our different media and information platforms to listen to the daily press briefings of our governments. In Quebec, we must recognize the media efficiency of its champion trio : Mr. Legault, Ms. McCann and Dr. Arruda, who have managed to reassure the general population so far.

The scale of the problem and the urgency to act undoubtedly call for substantial action. The adopted measures adopted are direct expressions of these decisions. However, this global response led by the public health for the “*good of all*” puts certain groups of the population at risk, including people with disabilities, who experience a flagrant lack of support and resources to meet their basic needs. They are rendered invisible, they are never specifically named in press conferences and their cry of alarm is growing on social network platforms.

People with disabilities constitute nearly 1 million people and represent the largest social minority in the Province of Quebec. At this moment, access to services in crisis situations is inequitable. According to Dr. Arruda, it is important to adapt the response to COVID-19 in the light of everyone's needs, this should also apply to the realities of people with disabilities. It is vital that they receive the human, technical and material support on which their survival and security depend.

Even if we can understand the intention behind our Prime Minister's injunction to put Quebec “on pause” for an indefinite period, people with disabilities cannot fully assume this pause without putting their health at risk, and jeopardize their survival.

Indeed, COVID-19 makes us realize that we are unequal in this physical confinement and this social catastrophe. Specifically, women with disabilities also face domestic violence, except that for them, the assistance resources often do not respond adequately to their needs in terms of care. Despite all their efforts, shelters and safe houses do not offer an adequate response to support them and their children. They do not put in place the necessary adaptation and equipment

either. We call for appropriate responses and resources accessible to all. Our organizations can be important channels for sharing information and referrals, but above all, support and accompaniment services.

We urge our decision-makers to take into account the real risks that people with disabilities are facing, either at home or in housing accommodations. To reduce or to cut the services which are essential to people with disabilities, as well as the appropriate information through media adapted to their mode of communication, and the support needs of their loved ones, is to put their lives in danger. It is in fact to systematically exclude them because as they are all too often invisible, inaudible or drowned in an indeterminate group of people called "vulnerable".

People with disabilities are people of all ages, all genders and from every ethnocultural backgrounds. They are parents with dependent children. It is essential to think of inclusive emergency plans in perfect adequacy with the human rights conventions that ensure the exercise of rights of people with disabilities and their access to the same resources as the rest of the population in an equitable and equal manner. They also demand the guarantee from our government that they will not be subjected to any form of discrimination in the event that their health condition requires the use of respiratory equipment or any other form of specialized care.

Public health plans respond to unprecedented socio-health crisis situations, but we have a duty to work together to make them truly inclusive. This unprecedented crisis is a great opportunity to think of emergency measures in a truly inclusive way. Let's grab this opportunity and leave no one behind!

To this end, the disability rights movement is mobilizing. We support demands made to Dr. Carmand by national organizations including the COPHAN, SQDI and FQA. Evidences of insecurity and risk exposure continue to increase. Concrete and urgent responses to people living at home or in accommodation housing services must provide better care and consider their specific requirements according to the types and severity of their disabilities.

People with disabilities cannot be held on pause.

Hélène Lépine, president of the board of directors (INEEI-PSH) [www.ineeipsh.org](http://www.ineeipsh.org)

Jean-Pierre Robin, president of the board of directors of the INDCP. [www.ripph.qc.ca](http://www.ripph.qc.ca)

***The International Network on the Disability Production Process (RIPPH) is an international organization, based in Quebec (Canada), aimed at ensuring the exercise of the right to equality of people with disabilities through the development and dissemination of knowledge, which contribute to an inclusive society. <https://ripph.qc.ca/>***

***The National Institute for Equity, Equality and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (INÉÉI-PSH) is a provincial organization which, through the provision of services and programs aims to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against people with disabilities and promote equity to achieve equality and inclusion, regardless of their age, their gender or ethnocultural origin. [www.ineeipsh.org](http://www.ineeipsh.org)***

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