



**Support. Connect. Inspire.**  
**CNIB's Peer Support and Mentorship Programs**





# Sight Loss: A Growing Issue

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In Ontario today, more than two million people are living with a sight-threatening eye disease (age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma) and are at serious risk of losing their sight. Among them, nearly 200,000 Ontarians have lost enough sight to be considered blind or partially sighted.

And over the next decade, the prevalence of sight loss across the province is projected to hit an all-time high – increasing by nearly 30 per cent, as our population ages and as rates of diabetes and obesity continue to rise.

As sight loss becomes an increasingly common and urgent concern, demand for blindness-related services in Ontario is expected to grow to an unprecedented level. With almost 100 years of history serving blind and partially sighted Ontarians, CNIB can help to meet these challenges and ensure Ontarians with sight loss have the support they need to live connected, rewarding and independent lives - but only with your support.

**Did you know  
that blindness  
and  
sight loss  
affect more  
Canadians  
than  
breast cancer,  
prostate  
cancer,  
Alzheimer's  
and  
Parkinson's  
combined?**



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# When Sight Loss Happens, Everything Changes

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For many, adjusting to life with sight loss is one of the most difficult experiences they'll ever face. The profound stigma of sight loss, compounded by the significant challenges of accommodating it in nearly every aspect of practical life, can create overwhelming feelings of fear, shame, despondency and isolation. The right support, at the right time, can make a world of difference. No one should have to face sight loss alone.

In comparison to their sighted peers, people with sight loss experience:



3X

**Triple the risk of clinical depression,** particularly among seniors.



65%

**Lower graduation rates,** with only 65% of blind and partially sighted youth graduating from high school.



84%

**Less independence in daily life,** with 84% needing practical assistance from family and friends for such things as mobility, personal care and household management.



26%

**Less physical activity,** with only 26% of blind and partially sighted children participating in sports..



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**Earlier admission** to long-term care facilities – three years, on average.



# A Light in the Darkness

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After “Pete” was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy, his sight rapidly declined. For this ‘free spirit’ who enjoyed long-distance motorcycle trips with a large social club and lived in a rural community without public transit, the loss of his driver’s license was a devastating blow to his independence and sense of self.

But a CNIB Adjustment to Sight Loss class turned his life around. Volunteer facilitators who themselves had sight loss understood just what Pete was going through, helped him connect with others in the same situation, and taught him how patience, planning and perseverance could rebuild his self-confidence.

Thanks to this program, Pete and his wife found the courage to move forward and find new ways of indulging his curiosity and passion for adventure. They decided to move to the city, where Pete now takes the bus to the astronomy club he’s joined – just one of the many ways he has regained a fulfilling life.

**What CNIB understands is that each person with sight loss has a different story, but shares similar challenges.**





# Why Peer Support and Mentorship Matters

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For people who have lost their sight, connecting with others who have experienced the same thing can make a world of difference toward rebuilding confidence, independence and a sense of hope. Research indicates that peer support reduces the incidence of depression and isolation associated with sight loss while helping people gain self-confidence and improve the quality of their lives.

**“I can’t tell you what it meant to me to have someone from CNIB put a hand on my hand and say, ‘It’s going to be okay. You’re going to be okay.’”**

-Betty Ann Baker, Welland ON



# The Challenges of Sight Loss at Every Age

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Across the province, our staff specialists and volunteer leaders with sight loss provide information and emotional support to blind and partially sighted people of all ages:

- **Children and youth** with sight loss are often isolated from their school's social scene because they are 'different'. Peer programs allow them to meet new friends who can relate to, and help them overcome, these challenges.
- **Young adults** often experience sight loss and its challenges at an age when they should be testing their independence and embarking on new experiences – such as leaving home for post-secondary education, entering the workforce or starting family life. They gain great value from connecting with successful equals.
- **Older adults** often find sight loss to be a journey of intense loneliness. For those in remote or rural communities, social isolation is experienced even more commonly. Having the opportunity to connect with other seniors who successfully made adjustments and mastered the new skills that put their life back on track is invaluable.
- **Parents of infants and children** with sight loss also express a deep sense of isolation and fear. Imagine what it means for these new parents to meet others who have already been through this journey and can provide the desperately-needed assurance that help is available and their blind child will be OK.



# Our Vision

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## Through our Peer Support and Mentorship programs, we will:

- Make sure every Ontarian who is experiencing sight loss has somewhere to turn for support and information.
- Give people confidence and practical skills so they can get back to enjoying life.
- Build a vibrant community of Ontarians with sight loss, where no one feels isolated or alone.
- Provide a positive, inclusive and safe support network of people who have lived experience of sight loss where they can share practical and emotional support strategies.
- Increase the sense of knowledge, skills and hope while motivating participants to make healthy and empowering choices for themselves.

**CNIB's  
programs give  
people with  
sight loss a  
sense of  
connection,  
belonging  
and hope  
for the future  
– where and  
when they  
need it most.**



# Programs That Connect, Support, Inspire

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Depending on their specific needs and interests, Ontarians who are blind or partially sighted can choose from several different Peer Support and Mentorship programs to help them build connections with others, get the practical and emotional support they need, and find the courage and inspiration to move forward and pursue their goals:

- **Adjustment to Sight Loss:** This six to eight-week structured course brings together participants who have newly lost their sight in an accessible, comfortable location where they can share their stories and feelings, give advice and learn about adjusting to their new reality.
- **One-to-One Peer Support & Mentorship:** This community program builds on CNIB's successful "Vision Mate" model to match participants with volunteer mentors of similar backgrounds, experiences and interests for friendship, support and advice.
- **Drop-in Groups:** Held monthly in the community, these groups connect participants on a variety of topics and issues, providing a chance for fun, friendship, sharing and learning.
- **Phone and Online Support:** Now in development, these programs will leverage the power of technology to extend the quality reach of our support programs. From telephone-based support groups to accessible online forums, e-learning videos and resources, these programs will virtually connect participants and help ensure we can improve the lives of Ontarians in the furthest corners of the province.





# Building Best-In-Class Programs

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CNIB is committed to delivering best-in-class, evidence-based programs for Ontarians with sight loss. Through an inclusive process of program development and delivery, we strive to make the greatest possible difference in their lives.

Our Peer Support and Mentorship programs are offered free of charge to all who need them, but the process of developing and delivering them is resource-intensive. In each program area, this ongoing work involves:

- **Consultation and Planning** – We review research, collaborate with experts and, most importantly, consult those we serve to gain a robust understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by people with sight loss, the needs they have, and the programs they want.
- **Program Development** – We work with our in-house experts, volunteer advisors and other leaders in the blindness field to develop innovative programs that respond to participant needs and reflect international best practices.
- **Program Implementation** – We recruit and train dynamic staff and volunteer leaders to roll out programs in selected locations across the province. As programs are launched and piloted, we seek to optimize all aspects of delivery and marketing and improve participant experiences.
- **Impact Reporting and Expansion** – We routinely monitor program effectiveness to ensure participants have the best possible outcomes and reaching their individual goals. We use the data we gather to continually evolve and expand our programs, and identify emerging needs for the future.



# Measuring Success

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When it comes to helping Ontarians cope with the challenges of sight loss, success is our only option. That's why it's vital that each of our Peer Support and Mentorship programs leads to proven, positive outcomes in the lives of those we serve.

CNIB is committed to measuring and maximizing the impact of each of our programs. Leveraging a range of methodologies, we examine the impact of our programs from a range of perspectives:

- **Uptake and Demand** – How many people are registered and participating actively in each of our programs? How many classes and groups can we fill, how many mentoring partnerships can we establish – and how many more are needed?
- **Participant Outcomes** – To what extent are participants meeting the goals and objectives of the program? How much more knowledgeable, independent, connected, optimistic do they feel?
- **Participant Experiences** – What do participants like most about the programs? What learnings have been the most helpful? Where do they see opportunities to enhance and expand the programs?
- **Online Engagement** – How engaged are participants with our phone and online resources? How do participants rate the quality of information and education provided?



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Confidence.  
Skills.  
Opportunities.

CNIB

Post Secondary Studies  
with Vision / 09

# We Need Your Support

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As we approach CNIB's centenary in 2018, we are proud to unveil a new path for the future – one that sees us working in partnership with those who we serve, as well as provincial governments, the medical community, volunteers and supporters, to create a future in which every Canadian has the opportunity to fully participate in life, regardless of sight loss.

CNIB is levelling the playing field for Canadians with sight loss by developing life-changing programs, imparting vital knowledge, enabling people to lead fuller, more independent lives, demanding societal reform and inspiring change. **But we cannot do it alone.**

It is critical that we work together to ensure that these programs are successful. We can only accomplish this with your support.

**Please consider making a donation to support Peer Support and Mentorship Programs in Ontario. Your gift will change lives and empower people who are blind or partially sighted to achieve their goals and reach their highest potential.**

**Join us today!**

# To Make a Donation or Learn More

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To make a donation or learn more:

[cnib.ca/Ontario](https://cnib.ca/Ontario)

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Contact Information:

Local contact information



## CNIB Mission

To change what it is to be blind through innovative programs and powerful advocacy that enable Canadians impacted by blindness to live the lives they choose.

## About CNIB

Celebrating 100 years in 2018, the CNIB Foundation is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today. We deliver innovative programs and powerful advocacy that empower people impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion. Our work as a blind foundation is powered by a network of volunteers, donors and partners from coast to coast to coast.

