



Factsheet #7

Literacy and Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities affect at least 10% of Canadians. More than 80% of these experience difficulty in learning to read.

📖 Learning disabilities (LD) are now recognized as a lifelong neurological disorder that is the result of a difference in brain structure and function. Learning disabilities impact the learning process, including language learning and the acquisition of literacy skills. LD's can be divided into five types.

- Visual problems: poor visual memory, reversals in writing;
- Auditory problems: poor auditory memory, speech problems;
- Motor problems: poor hand-eye coordination;
- Organizational problems: poor ability in organizing time or space;
- Conceptual problems: poor social skills and peer relations, difficulty in correctly interpreting non-verbal language.

For the newly revised, full definition of learning disabilities consult the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada at www.ldac-taac.ca

📖 People with learning disabilities CAN learn with the appropriate supports.

Learning disabilities need not prevent an individual from leading a productive and happy life. LDs are not due to a lack of intelligence but rather to deficiencies in acquiring and processing information. In fact people with LDs often have average or above-average intelligence but the LD affects their ability to interpret what they see or hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. They can learn but the learning process may be inefficient as a result of differences in brain structure and function. The right learning strategies, techniques, supports and interventions can impact the learning process in significant and positive ways.

📖 It is estimated that 30 – 80% of students in literacy and basic education programs have learning disabilities. Learning disabilities affect at least 30% of the less literate population. Researchers have found that if LD intervention is not provided before the age of 8, then there is a 75% probability of reading difficulties continuing into high school. At that point, 35% of students who are identified with

learning disabilities drop out of high school. This is twice the rate of non-LD peers. This drop out rate does not include students who drop out but are not identified with learning disabilities. As adults many arrive in literacy and basic skills programs, however the majority drop out as programs are still not funded to be able to meet their special needs.

Learning and literacy difficulties limit participation in all aspects of society.

Many adults are not aware that the problems they had in school, jobs or relationships are due to “hidden” or undiagnosed LDs. These difficulties are often compounded by, or result in, literacy problems. Disproportionate numbers of adults with LDs can be found in prisons (30 - 70%), on welfare (25 - 40%) and in job training programs (15 - 30%).

What can be done?

- Accessible assessment and diagnosis of LD must be available for people of all ages.
- Effective and efficient learning and teaching methods, resources and programs must be funded and developed to meet the specific needs of individuals with LD.
- Policy-makers, school board administrators, teachers colleges, educators and medical personnel must recognize and accept the scientific evidence, establish policies, and match the instructional goals, content and pace of teaching to the learning needs of those with LDs so that individuals can achieve maximum success.
- Federal and provincial governments need to understand the implications of policy decisions, services and programs in the Canadian educational, legal, health, finance environmental and justice systems, for people with LDs.
- We all need to understand, recognize and support the unique learning challenges and needs of others in our communities, workplaces and families.

Suggested *Literacy and Learning Disabilities* Resources

- ✓ **The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)** The national support organization for all the provincial and territorial Learning Disabilities Associations (LDAs). Each provincial/territorial LDA in turn supports member chapters at the community level. All these organizations have created innovative projects and produced resources in a variety of formats. To check your local, provincial or national LD contacts, call 613-238-5721 or visit LDAC’s website at www.ldac-taac.ca
- ✓ **Adult Learning Development Association (ALDA)** is a BC-based non-profit association in support of adults who have learning disabilities. They provide both direct service programs and public education. For information contact ALDA in Vancouver at tel: 604-683- 5554 or www.alda-bc.org
- ✓ **The Canadian Dyslexia Association.** Find out more about dyslexia which is estimated to affect 1 in 6 Canadians at www.dyslexiaassociation.ca

- ✓ **The Centre of Literacy of Quebec** has a large collection of LD resources available for borrowing at www.nald.ca/litcent.htm
- ✓ **Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD)** works to improve the lives of people with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder through education, advocacy and support. Tel: 613-731-1209 or online at www.chadd.org
- ✓ **LD Online** An excellent US-based informative website at www.ldonline.org
- ✓ **Learning Disabilities Resources** A constantly updated website where people exchange useful resources and information. Check it out at www.ldresources.com
- ✓ **National Adult Literacy Database (NALD)** The National Adult Literacy Database has a large collection of online resources and links for learning disabilities information at www.nald.ca
- ✓ **National Coalition for Learning Disabilities** This website is a US information and referral service that provides the latest information on LD and relevant resources that are available to parents, teachers and LD adults. Go to www.nclld.org
- ✓ **The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)** has a Literacy and Learning Disabilities Special Collection at <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/collections.html>
- ✓ **University of Toronto's Adaptive Technology Resource Centre** University of Toronto's website for their Adaptive Technology Resource Centre at <http://www.utoronto.ca/atrc/> (Click on Web Resources for the learning disabilities section)