

VISION LOSS REHABILITATION™

CANADA

Connecting Communities, Living Confidently

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



Photo by Cassio Calaigian, Onward Media



Letter from Board Chair & CEO

As we reflect on the past year, there is much to celebrate at Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC). One of our most notable achievements has been our integral role in the passage of Bill C-284, the National Strategy for Eye Care Act. This act represents a significant advancement in VLRC's commitment to improving eye care and rehabilitation services across Canada, and we are proud to have been advocates for this crucial initiative.

Reflecting on this historic moment fills us with pride: our involvement in the National Strategy for Eye Care Act marks a major milestone for VLRC. It showcases our continuous dedication to advancing vision health for all Canadians.

Additionally, we achieved CARF accreditation at two locations, reinforcing our commitment to excellent rehabilitation services. By embracing the "Joy in Work" framework we are fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for our dedicated and hardworking team.

Putting our clients first, we aim to address the mental health needs of individuals experiencing vision loss and leverage innovative technologies to enhance orientation and mobility services. Our specialists and therapists regularly attend conferences and training sessions to explore new and innovative methods of addressing our

clients' needs. By actively listening to our clients and their families, we adjust to prioritize what is most important to them.

Last spring, we honoured Dr. Anu Mishra with the VLRC Distinguished Community Partner Award, recognizing her transformative work in Halifax, NS, which exemplifies the power of collaborative care.

Our strategic plan, *Aim Higher, Reach Further*, is anchored in the Four Cs: Communication, Consistency, Collaboration, and Connection. These principles guide our internal and external interactions, promoting transparency, equity, teamwork, and a supportive workplace. We've implemented initiatives like improved communications, enhanced accessibility, participation in industry events, and team-building activities to strengthen these areas.

We look forward to building on these achievements in the years to come.

Jennifer Urošević
President and CEO

Dr. Tanya Packer
Board Chair

HIGHLIGHTS

Partnerships, achievements and new initiatives from coast to coast

National Strategy for Eye Care Act

We were extremely proud that Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC) was an integral part of the Canadian Senate passing Bill C284, the National Strategy for Eye Care Act.

On October 30, Jennifer Urosevic, President & CEO, delivered an impassioned testimony before the Senate Social and Scientific Affairs Committee (SOCI) to champion Bill C-284. It later attained royal assent on November 11, 2024. This new legislation creates a plan to improve eye care and rehabilitation services across Canada.



With the National Strategy for Eye Care Act, the Government of Canada will:

- Develop a national strategy for better eye care and vision rehabilitation
- Invest in research for effective treatments and possible cures
- Make essential eye health services more accessible
- Educate the public about eye health nationwide

VLRC joined a dedicated team of Canada's Vision Health Partners to advocate for all Canadians, ensuring everyone can access the care they need and improve their quality of life. The Vision Health Partners are comprised of: Balance for Blind Adults, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, the Canadian Association of Optometrists, the Canadian Council of the Blind, CNIB, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, Diabetes Canada, Fighting Blindness Canada, the International Federation on Aging and the Opticians Association of Canada.



Photo by Benoit Debaix on Unsplash



CARF Accreditation: VLRC's Commitment to Excellence

In 2024, we proudly achieved CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) accreditation at two VLRC locations. Our Saskatoon, SK, office received a three-year accreditation in November, while our Halifax, NS, office earned the same distinction in April. This three-year accreditation represents the highest level of achievement and demonstrates our commitment to maintaining the highest standards in rehabilitation services for Canadians with vision loss.

Surveyors shared their positive experiences in their comments, recognizing VLRC's passion, professionalism, and competence across all our specialties.



Joy in Work

We are wholeheartedly embracing the “Joy in Work” framework. We recognize that a thriving, engaged workforce is the cornerstone of a successful and impactful organization. That’s why we seek ways for our VLRC team members to experience joy and meaning in their work, enabling them to feel resilient, innovative, and committed. This directly translates to enhanced outcomes for all those we engage with, including clients, doctors, families, students, and community partners.

Essentially, we are embarking on a journey to create a workplace where:

- Everyone feels valued and respected.
- Our team members understand how their contributions impact the people we serve.
- Systems and processes are streamlined; we will focus on removing unnecessary systems and processes that contribute to frustration and burnout.
- We invest in resources that promote a healthy work-life balance through physical and psychological well-being.
- Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility considerations are prioritized, ensuring everyone feels a sense of belonging and has the opportunity to thrive.

We look forward to sharing more about our journey as we progress.



Mental Health Focus

VLRC is committed to extending mental health and wellness support for all individuals affected by vision loss and blindness. This commitment is a key pillar of our four-year strategic plan, *Aim Higher, Reach Further*.

Beginning in 2025, VLRC will engage community partners, care providers and government entities to raise awareness about the mental health needs of those grappling with anxiety or depression stemming from changes in their vision.

The *Canadian Survey on Disability*, conducted by Statistics Canada, reveals a striking reality: nearly one-third of respondents who are blind or partially sighted report struggling with their mental health and wellness. Additionally, they are less likely to find services that cater specifically to their needs.

Recognizing this significant gap, VLRC has adopted a two-pronged approach: employing mental health counsellors, and advocating for community-based solutions alongside specialized services to address these unmet needs.

Our focus will encompass several key initiatives:

- **Raising Awareness:** We will create awareness and destigmatize conversations about mental health and vision loss, encouraging open dialogue and support.
- **Building Partnerships:** We will form alliances to improve access to mental health interventions from clinicians who are trained to understand the impacts of vision loss.
- **Increase Availability of Specialists:** Our goal is to broaden the availability of specialized mental health counsellors across Canada who can empathetically address the distinct experiences of individuals' vision loss journeys.

According to one of VLRC's certified clinical counsellors, many individuals have preconceived notions about having low vision or being blind. The most significant obstacle they face appears to be learning without sight.

As one VLRC client poignantly shared, "This discreditable secret failing that I had not revealed to too many people, now took on a different meaning." This sentiment captures the struggle many face as they navigate a world that often feels inaccessible, leading them to believe they are unable to integrate into society as it currently exists.



Through the dedicated efforts of our staff, VLRC is committed to dismantling these barriers and fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone impacted by vision loss. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter, healthier future.

New Technology

Emerging technologies in the field of orientation and mobility (O&M) are enhancing how individuals with vision loss interact with their environments. VLRC is dedicated to incorporating innovative tools like WeWalk Smart Cane 2.0 to improve our services.

This smart cane features a lighter and slimmer grip, along with intuitive tactile buttons to control the functions of the cane, enabling users to keep their Bluetooth-connected phone in their pocket. It also has enhanced detection technology to alert users with haptic and audible feedback of overhead obstacles such as signs and tree branches. Additionally, WeWalk is equipped with a voice assistant and turn-by-turn navigation, enabling users to simply speak to their cane to receive pertinent information about their surroundings.

By equipping all O&M specialists at VLRC with a WeWalk 2.0 cane, VLRC can educate clients and community partners, further demonstrating our commitment to *Aim Higher and Reach Further*.



Community Partnership Award

In May 2024, we went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to honour Dr. Anu Mishra with our Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC) Distinguished Community Partner Award. Well deserving of the honour, Dr. Mishra's impact spans three key roles within the Canadian eye care field. She is an ophthalmologist, the Assistant Dean of the Skilled Clinician Program & Interprofessional Education within the Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie University and the President of the Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Atlantic Canada.

Dr. Mishra has been collaborating with VLRC to improve access to vision rehabilitation services through the Marjorie Fountain Low Vision Clinic, an innovative initiative that is transforming patient care and drawing patients from across the Maritimes. The Clinic, located within the VLRC Halifax office, provides comprehensive ophthalmological exams and vision rehabilitation services on the same day. VLRC low vision specialists screen the clients, who are then seen by Dr. Mishra for a comprehensive ophthalmological exam. After the exam, VLRC low vision specialists complete the low vision assessment and make referrals to other rehabilitation specialists as needed. The result? Dr. Mishra's innovative approach not only saves time for clients but also facilitates real-time collaboration between ophthalmologists and vision rehabilitation specialists, ultimately enhancing the quality of care.

Inclusion at the Core: VLRC's Four C's

COMMUNICATION

We will communicate respectfully, openly, and clearly to ensure effective two-way communication between our peers and clients.

CONNECTION

We will seek opportunities to connect with colleagues while enhancing our work-life balance and mental health.

CONSISTENCY

We deeply value equity and diversity in our workplace and are committed to ensuring that all learning and career advancement opportunities are equitable, fair, and just.

COLLABORATION

We embrace diversity and the power of teamwork, knowing that by collaborating and learning, we can achieve extraordinary results for ourselves and our clients.

In September 2024, we shared our strategic plan, *Aim Higher, Reach Further*, with the world. Included within were the Four C's - our declaration of VLRC's intention to ensure that every voice is heard, every perspective is valued, and every interaction is delivered with understanding and empathy.



Communication:

Effective Communication is essential to our success. This year, we reaffirmed our commitment to prioritizing transparency and clarity through various internal and external initiatives to foster strong relationships and achieve our mission.

In addition to providing regular updates through email, newsletters, and virtual town halls, meeting notes from the Executive Leadership Team are now accessible to staff. This small step will significantly ensure that everyone within our organization remains informed.

We also launched a dedicated Veteran's webpage, providing detailed information on our specialized services. This resource supports veterans, their families, and health care practitioners, serving as a gateway to our services as an authorized service provider for Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

Consistency:

At VLRC, Consistency means upholding our commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. This year, we reinforced this through key initiatives.

We appointed an Accessibility Professional Practice Lead (PPL), leveraging their expertise to advance accessibility through our 2024-2028 VLRC Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan serves as a roadmap to accessibility and includes a new feedback tool for staff as well as the Champions Network, fostering continuous improvement.

To empower our team, we're launching a comprehensive Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) toolkit alongside targeted training programs. These resources will equip staff to champion inclusivity and ensure equitable opportunities for all.

By investing in accessibility, gathering feedback, and providing resources, we're consistently building a workplace where fairness and justice are lived realities.

Collaboration:

Through Collaboration and learning, embracing all forms of diversity and the power of teamwork, we are actively working towards exceptional results for ourselves and our clients. We were delighted to participate in the 3rd annual Blind Health Expo, which featured hundreds of exhibitors, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing within the disability community. Our participation underscores our commitment to engaging with diverse stakeholders to deliver improved health care solutions for our clients.

Connection:

This year, we prioritized Connection through various initiatives aimed at enhancing work-life balance and mental health, ensuring a supportive and interconnected workplace. We fostered camaraderie through team-building events such as chili-making, picnics, and lunch-and-learns. Staff nationwide organized charitable drives, which strengthened community ties and a shared sense of purpose.

Creative events to launch our strategic plan helped staff connect with *Aim Higher, Reach Further*. Additionally, our staff discovered innovative ways to understand the strategic plan and how to apply its principles in client interactions.



Photo by
Cassio Calaigian,
Onward Media

Leke, a nine-year-old who was featured in our winter 2025 “SnoWay” public awareness video, shared his thoughts on collaborating with VLRC to emphasize the importance of keeping pathways clear of snow. Here is what he had to say:

“I had an amazing time working on the video! It was such an excellent experience. I really loved the drone; it was so cool listening to it soar through the air! The sound of it moving gave me a sense of what the world must look like from above. It felt so exciting, like I was flying myself!”

By the Numbers

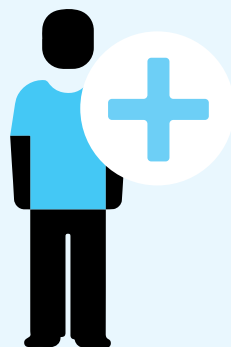
Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada proudly serves people with vision loss from coast to coast. Here's a snapshot of our impact last year:

Reach and Impact



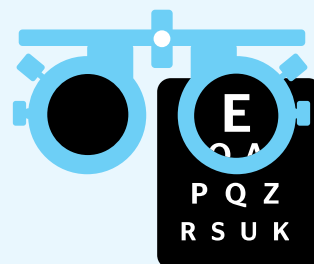
14,550

Total registered clients



9,077

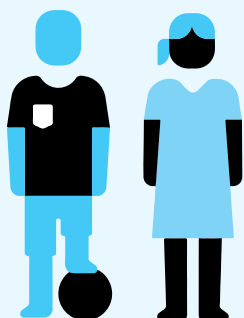
New clients registered
last year



72,183

Total service interventions
performed last year

Clients by age



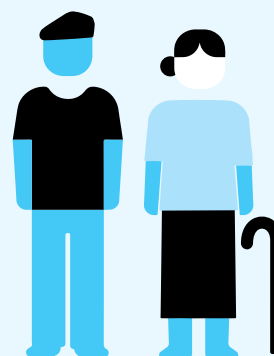
3%

Children and youth



22%

Working age



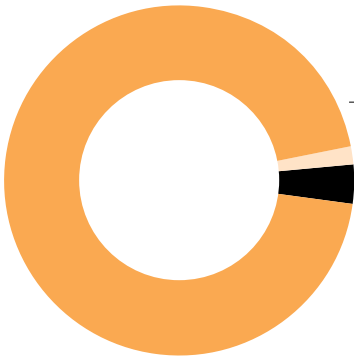
75%

Seniors

Financials

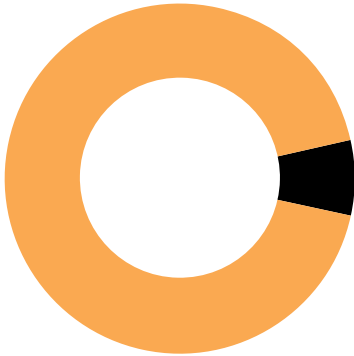
Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada takes pride in upholding the highest standard of ethics and accountability in stewarding the funding we receive from our provincial government partners.

Our financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, were prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations and were audited by Ernst & Young LLP.



Operating Revenue

- Government Funding: **94.9%**
- Contributions from CNIB: **1.5%**
- Third-Party Fees: **3.6%**



Operating Expenses

- Client Service: **93.2%**
- Administration: **6.8%**

Board Members 2024/25

Our Board of Directors is comprised of industry leaders in various fields across Canada, all of whom are dedicated to supporting our vital mission.

Board Chair

Dr. Tanya Packer

Finance Committee Chair

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Shelagh Maloney

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Betty Nobel

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Susan Scott Gabe

CNIB Member Representative

Jane Savidant

VISION LOSS REHABILITATION™

CANADA

Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC) is a not-for-profit national healthcare organization and the leading provider of rehabilitation therapy and healthcare services for individuals with vision loss.

Visit **visionlossrehab.ca**

Contact us **visionlossrehab.ca/contact**

Call **1-844-887-8572**

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Stronger Together



**Together, we support and stand by
Canadians who are blind, partially sighted,
or Deafblind.**