

**VISION LOSS
REHABILITATION™**
CANADA

**Every Voice,
Every Vision**

ANNUAL REPORT



**2025 /
26**

Letter From Board Chair & CEO



As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with pride and gratitude for the remarkable work happening across Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC) – work that is transforming lives, strengthening communities, and advancing a more equitable future for all Canadians living with vision loss.

This has been a year of meaningful milestones as we continued to advance the priorities of *Aim Higher, Reach Further* through our focus on Client First, Broader Reach, and Organizational Sustainability.

Inside this 2025-26 Annual Report, you will find stories and results that reflect the breadth of our impact. Honouring our Client First pillar, we achieved significant milestones with the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and partnered with Vision Health Canada on a landmark national survey of more than 1,000 Canadians living with vision loss, ensuring our advocacy and programs remain grounded in lived experience.

Through Broader Reach, we launched the GAIN Program (Guidance & Assistance in Navigating Disability Support) to help Canadians navigate disability benefits, expanded services to veterans, and deepened our commitment to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities as we work to extend this impact nationwide.

Following the passage of the National Strategy for Eye Care Act, I am honoured, as CEO of VLRC, to serve as the convenor of the Vision Health Partners Coalition – a national coalition that brings together leading organizations from across the vision health sector. This work reflects our commitment to Organizational Sustainability by strengthening partnerships, aligning shared priorities, and advancing a coordinated National Eye Care Strategy to improve outcomes for Canadians living with vision loss.

VLRC is not only growing, but also thriving as a stronger, more resilient organization positioned to meet the evolving needs of Canadians living with vision loss. Our people were recognized for workplace excellence, and we are connecting with more Canadians than ever before.

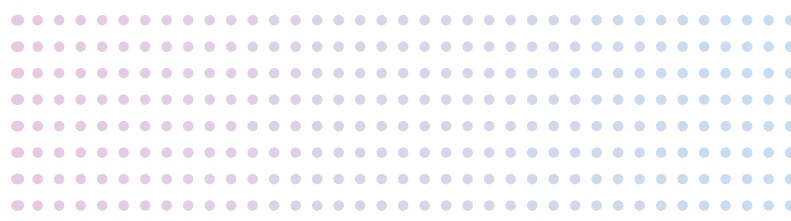
Throughout it all, *Aim Higher, Reach Further* continues to guide our work, and we are grateful to every client, partner, staff member, and supporter who helps bring this mission to life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Urosevic".

Jennifer Urosevic
President and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Penny Hartin".

Penny Hartin
Board Chair



National Strategy for Eye Care Act

Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada continues to take great pride in our contributions to Bill C-284, which received Royal Assent in November 2024. We are playing a crucial part in defining the practical implications of this landmark legislation for Canadians living with low vision and blindness.

Together, the Coalition has identified four top priority areas to guide the implementation of the National Strategy for Eye Care Act:

Federal Leadership and Coordination:

The Coalition is calling for the coordination of Canadian research investments, centralized data collection, and public awareness.

National Data and Accountability

Infrastructure: The Coalition is advocating for the federal government to develop and implement a national data infrastructure that tracks prevalence, system performance, and access to care – enabling evidence-based policy, equitable planning, and consistent accountability across the country.

Person-Centred, Coordinated Care

Pathways: The Coalition is calling for collaboration among federal, provincial, and territorial governments to promote coordinated, person-centred care that covers the entire spectrum – from prevention to rehabilitation and habilitation. This includes ensuring equitable and consistent access to vision health services, rehabilitation supports, and medical



devices for all Canadians, and making vision health a continued priority within primary and chronic care frameworks.

National Public Awareness and Prevention:

The Coalition is calling for a national public awareness campaign focused on prevention, early detection, role clarity, and reducing the stigma associated with vision loss – empowering Canadians to take proactive steps in protecting their eye health.

VLRC remains committed to working alongside Coalition partners and all levels of government to ensure the National Strategy for Eye Care Act delivers meaningful, lasting change for 2.2 million Canadians affected by vision loss and blindness.

Vision Health Partners Coalition

Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada is proud to be a founding member of the Vision Health Partners Coalition – eight national organizations working together to advance eye care and vision rehabilitation for all Canadians.



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES



FIGHTING
BLINDNESS
CANADA



CANADIAN COUNCIL
OF THE BLIND



LE CONSEIL CANADIEN
DES AVEUGLES



VISION LOSS
REHABILITATION™
CANADA

**Michael
Baillargeon,**
Special Advisor

***Together, we are building a healthier
future for vision care in Canada.***



CARF Accreditation: VLRC's Commitment to Excellence

In 2025, we achieved three-year CARF accreditation status for two Ontario offices, Kitchener and Mississauga; additionally, a review of Board Governance also garnered a three-year accreditation. In British Columbia, our Victoria and New Westminster offices completed their first resurvey and received a verbal review with the surveyor reporting zero recommendations in March 2026.

In fact, CARF's feedback from the British Columbia surveys stated, "VLRC-BC is innovative. It identifies gaps in services and works with partners to create strategies to address those gaps". They also praised us, noting that "Community partners spoke highly of VLRC-BC, using phrases like *'transparent'*, *'people focused'*, *'focused on clients' best outcomes'*, *'strategic'*, *'always looking at ways to fill gaps'*, and *'amazing experience'* to describe the organization."

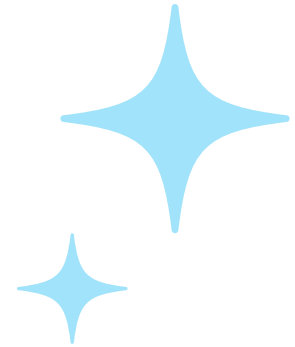


From left to right: Dr. Judith Renaud, Dr. Natalina Martiniello, Dr. Tanya Packer, Dan Zbacnik. Back row: Dr. Joe Nemargut and Dr. Walter Wittich.



Dr. Walter Wittich celebrates the win!

VLRC Distinguished Community Partner Award Winner



In May 2025, VLRC was honoured to present the Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada Distinguished Community Partner Award to Dr. Walter Wittich and the Vision Science team at the School of Optometry, Université de Montréal.

Since 2018, VLRC has maintained a meaningful partnership with the University's Master of Vision Science program – a collaboration that has made a lasting impact on the professional landscape of vision rehabilitation, both across Canada and internationally. Dr. Wittich's exceptional leadership has been instrumental in the growth and success of this partnership,

helping to shape a new generation of vision rehabilitation specialists equipped to serve Canadians living with partial vision or blindness.

VLRC was represented at the May 21 award ceremony by the former Board Chair and Finance Committee Chair, Dr. Tanya Packer and Dan Zbacnik.

This recognition reflects VLRC's deep commitment to building partnerships that strengthen the rehabilitation workforce and expand access to high-quality services for those who need them most.



GAIN

**Guidance & Assistance
in Navigating
Disability Supports**

GAIN PROGRAM:

Navigating Benefits, Removing Barriers for Canadians

Launched on October 1, 2025, the GAIN Program – Guidance and Assistance in Navigating Disability Supports – represents a significant new initiative in VLRC's commitment to supporting Canadians living with vision loss and disability.

Applying for disability tax credits and benefits can be challenging and overwhelming. The GAIN Program helps by offering free, personalized assistance to determine eligibility for federal, provincial, and territorial benefits – such as the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) and the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) – and guiding them through each stage of the application process.

Our Disability Benefit Navigators provide one-on-one help to applicants at any stage of the process. Whether you are just starting or

need assistance with a denied application, they are here to support individuals with disabilities or their caregivers. Importantly, the GAIN Program is available to all Canadians living with a disability, reflecting VLRC's broader mission of inclusive, accessible support.

In a heartfelt thank you message, a caregiver expressed that the GAIN Program served a dual purpose for her family – providing her with the necessary space to breathe while also supporting her mother.

By the close of its first three months, 57 clients had successfully completed the Program, and 150 were actively engaged with navigators. Partnerships with CNIB and DBCS have further expanded access, with their staff trained to seamlessly refer clients and broaden program awareness across the country.

**“ This program is giving my mom things
we didn't think were possible. ”**

FROM CLIENT TO CULINARY
ENTREPRENEUR:

Dave's Story

For Dave, a long-term VLRC client in rural New Brunswick, vision loss has never been a barrier to pursuing a meaningful career – it has been part of the story they choose to tell.

Dave's journey with VLRC began with pre-employment training, which eventually led them back to the same program – this time as a presenter. VLRC's Career & Employment Services offer clinical and specialized training, worksite assessments, and assistive technology skills to support individuals with vision loss in navigating and functioning independently in the workplace. VLRC provides these services at no cost, thanks to the generous support from our partner organizations in participating provinces.

Driven by a passion for cooking and baking, Dave began preparing and selling baked goods at local weekend markets under the brand "Blind Man Cooking." With an expanding social media following and a clear entrepreneurial vision, they collaborated closely with a VLRC Employment and Transition Specialist and a network of partner agencies to develop their venture into a sustainable business. Along the way, Dave completed a provincial food safety course and secured access to a community kitchen to support larger-scale food preparation.

In January 2025, Dave took a significant step forward by enrolling in the Culinary Arts



Dave stands next to a shelf displaying their salsa that is for sale at Kingsbrae Garden gift shop in Saint Andrew's, NB.

program at New Brunswick Community College (NBCC). The transition required careful coordination between Dave, the college, and the VLRC team. Their first year was a resounding success, recognized through formal performance.

Through campus networking, Dave developed their own brand of salsa, now sold at Kingsbrae Garden in Saint Andrews, NB – alongside fresh bread, pastries, and hamburger seasoning at local farmers' markets.

Patient, knowledgeable, and a confident self-advocate, Dave has become a mentor to fellow VLRC clients. Their journey exemplifies what can be achieved when perseverance is combined with the appropriate support.

“ Patient, knowledgeable, and a confident self-advocate – Dave has become a mentor to fellow VLRC clients, offering guidance that comes only from lived experience. ”



Mark Shaver

VLRC's Growing Commitment to Veterans

At VLRC, we are dedicated to providing veterans with access to the specialized rehabilitation services they require, ensuring that no one faces this journey alone. In close collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada, we make sure that eligible assistive devices and services are covered, alleviating the financial strain on those we serve. Through VLRC, Veterans receive comprehensive support across a full spectrum of care.

Winnipeg-based Mark Shaver served 25 years in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. After retiring, he was diagnosed with glaucoma; in 2024, he lost vision in his left eye and was left with less than 20 per cent of his visual field in his right. He could no longer drive or work.

Referred to VLRC by his ophthalmologist, Mark was introduced to a team of specialists. His occupational therapist helped him reorganize and adapt daily routines. While his independent living skills specialist – herself totally blind – guided him through kitchen tasks, teaching safe cutting, tactile markers on appliances, and confident cooking. His mobility sessions enabled him to navigate his community with a cane, and his assistive technology specialist supplied tools to help him stay connected and independent.

As Mark put it: *"The biggest change has been getting my independence back – being able to get around, access things, connect with people."*

Alex Itenson served in the Canadian Army for nearly a decade, and going on to become one of Canada's earliest square parachute pioneers. At 85, living in Woodstock, ON, he experienced a sudden and massive hemorrhage in his right eye.

He describes it simply: *"I lost my freedom."*

Initially, Alex was unaware of vision rehabilitation services; fortunately, his ophthalmologist referred him to VLRC. Working with an O&M specialist at VLRC, Alex learned to use a white cane, cross intersections safely, and regain confidence in walking familiar routes independently. A VLRC assistive technology specialist provided a CCTV device and trained him in phone accessibility tools. Small

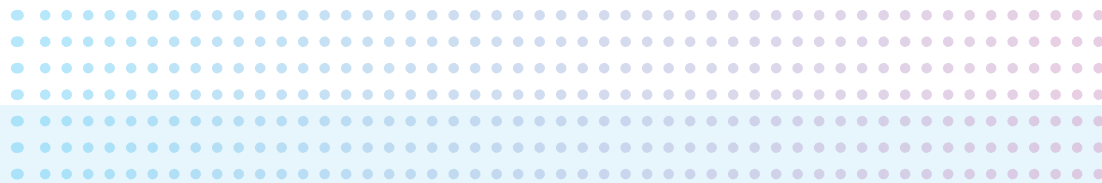


Alex Itenson

modifications, like tactile markers on his microwave and oven, significantly enhanced his daily independence.

He reflects: *“I had no idea these organizations existed. Reach out for help immediately – it makes a difference.”*

As more veterans are choosing to use VLRC services, we’ve seen a remarkable 64 per cent jump in participation from 2024-25 to 2025-26. We’re truly proud to be here, supporting those who bravely served Canada.



People and Culture

Investing in Our People, Strengthening Our Organization

A strong, supported workforce is the foundation of exceptional client care. Under the third aim of VLRC’s strategic plan, *Aim Higher, Reach Further* – which focuses on building an engaged, healthy, and high-performing team – our People and Culture team has made meaningful strides in 2025.

We are proud to share that VLRC was recognized by two respected organizations for our commitment to workplace excellence this year.

In November, we were recognized with the Excellence Canada Great Employer Award for 2025, affirming that our efforts to create a workplace where people feel valued, supported, and empowered are being felt – and noticed. VLRC was also named a semi-finalist



for the CharityVillage Best Employer Workplace Wellness Award – an honour that reflects our ongoing investment in employee wellbeing and the positive, inclusive culture we are building across the organization.

These recognitions do not happen by accident. They are the result of deliberate, sustained effort by our People and Culture team and the leaders and staff across VLRC who bring our values to life every day.

Building Meaningful Connections with Indigenous Communities



VLRC attending the Atlantic First Nations Health Conference in Halifax

Expanding access to vision rehabilitation and habilitation services for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities is a core commitment under Aim #1 of our strategic plan, *Aim Higher, Reach Further*. Indigenous peoples experience higher rates of vision loss, and VLRC is dedicated to addressing this by actively engaging through partnership, maintaining a presence, and building trust.

Throughout 2025, VLRC's Atlantic Region made significant progress towards this aim. In March, VLRC was both an exhibitor and a presenter at the Atlantic First Nations Health Conference in Halifax, which brought together Mi'kmaq health care providers and leaders from the region. Our knowledgeable staff shared details about our rehabilitation services and the Eye Health Screening Initiative, building relationships with providers who are often the first to connect community members with vision loss.

Building on that momentum, VLRC Nova Scotia was invited to present at a First Nation Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) "Let's Talk" Community Health session in April 2025 – part of a monthly education series dedicated to sharing health information with First Nation communities. The 90-minute presentation reached individuals from all four Atlantic provinces, further broadening awareness of VLRC's services across the region.

These engagements reflect VLRC's belief that reaching Indigenous communities requires genuine relationship-building – showing up, listening, and earning trust over time. VLRC looks forward to deepening these partnerships in the years ahead.



EHSI's Impact and Expansions

The Eye Health Screening Initiative's (EHSI) impact grew this past year by expanding access to diabetic retinopathy screening in communities where geography, service gaps, and systemic barriers often delay care.

Across British Columbia, the Yukon, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Ontario, the EHSI advanced its goal of bringing culturally safe, community-based screening closer to home through trusted partnerships, local capacity-building, and innovative technology.

Our 2025 expansion into British Columbia enabled the EHSI to reach remote communities via partnerships such as the Sq'ewqel (Seabird Island Band) Mobile Diabetes Team and Helicopters Without Borders. During our first year in BC, the EHSI successfully screened nearly 300 individuals.

The EHSI moved into Prince Edward Island for the first time and further expanded its Nova Scotia operations through screening clinics, health fairs, and strengthened collaborations. Over 250 individuals were screened across Atlantic Canada.

Looking north toward the Yukon, the EHSI held its inaugural screening clinic in Whitehorse, opening valuable educational opportunities and expanding services in the region.

In Ontario, the EHSI continued to demonstrate the strength and scalability of its model.



Conducting a diabetic retinopathy screening

Building on a strong foundation of community partnership and health system integration, the program has now screened over 2,300 individuals and partnered with more than 50 community organizations.

A significant milestone in Ontario this year was achieving ISO certification in collaboration with the Indigenous Diabetes Health Circle (IDHC). This milestone helps guarantee standardized training and consistent program delivery as the EHSI expands. It underscores the program's dedication to quality, accountability, and sustainable growth.

Together, these accomplishments position the EHSI as a leading example of how culturally grounded, technology-enabled screening can advance health equity, strengthen chronic disease care, and prevent avoidable vision loss for people living with diabetes.



VLRC partner Helicopters Without Borders (HMB)

Vision Loss Survey Results

In 2025, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (VLRC) partnered with Vision Health Canada to conduct one of the most comprehensive national surveys of its kind — capturing the lived experiences of over 1,000 Canadians who are blind, partially sighted, or deafblind. What they shared paints a detailed and at times sobering picture of life with vision loss in Canada today.

Who Responded

Responses came from every province and territory. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were 65 or older, while 39 per cent were of working age, and more than 40 per cent held a university degree.

The Everyday Reality

Vision loss touches every aspect of daily life. More than 60 per cent of respondents reported that their vision loss often or always limited their daily activities. Transportation was among the most significant barriers — more than half relied

on friends or family to get to appointments. Smartphones were the most widely used assistive tool, relied on by 65 per cent of respondents, yet 38 per cent cited cost as a barrier to accessing the technology they needed.

Across the survey's open-ended responses, emotional and psychological impact was the most prominent theme — with persistent anxiety, depression, grief, and social isolation reported by nearly half of respondents. These findings reinforce VLRC's commitment to integrating mental health support as a core component of vision rehabilitation.

“**Vision loss has been a rollercoaster. There have been times when the psychosocial aspects of my experience were extremely difficult and I felt very alone... Through it all, I have found tenacity and courage within that I didn’t know I had.**”

— Survey respondent and VLRC client

Employment: Capable, But Underserved

Despite their educational backgrounds, only 24 per cent of respondents were working full-time. Workplace barriers were pervasive: nearly three-quarters of employed respondents required accommodations, and more than half had to source or fund those accommodations themselves. Two-thirds of those who left work due to vision loss said they could have continued in their field with the right support – a significant and preventable loss of talent and livelihood.

Benefits: Awareness Gaps Persist

Despite widespread financial hardship, 81.2 per cent of respondents reported receiving no government assistance. Nearly 44 per cent were unsure whether they were even eligible for the Canada Disability Benefit. This is precisely the gap VLRC’s GAIN Program – Guidance and Assistance in Navigating Disability Supports – was designed to address.

What Needs to Change

The survey points to clear priorities: expanding eye exam coverage for working-age adults, increasing rehabilitation funding, simplifying access to disability and income supports (such as the Disability Tax Credit), and coordinating a



national approach to equitable service delivery. Employers have a critical role to play as well – proactively providing accommodations and investing in disability inclusion training, rather than placing that burden on employees.

Looking Forward

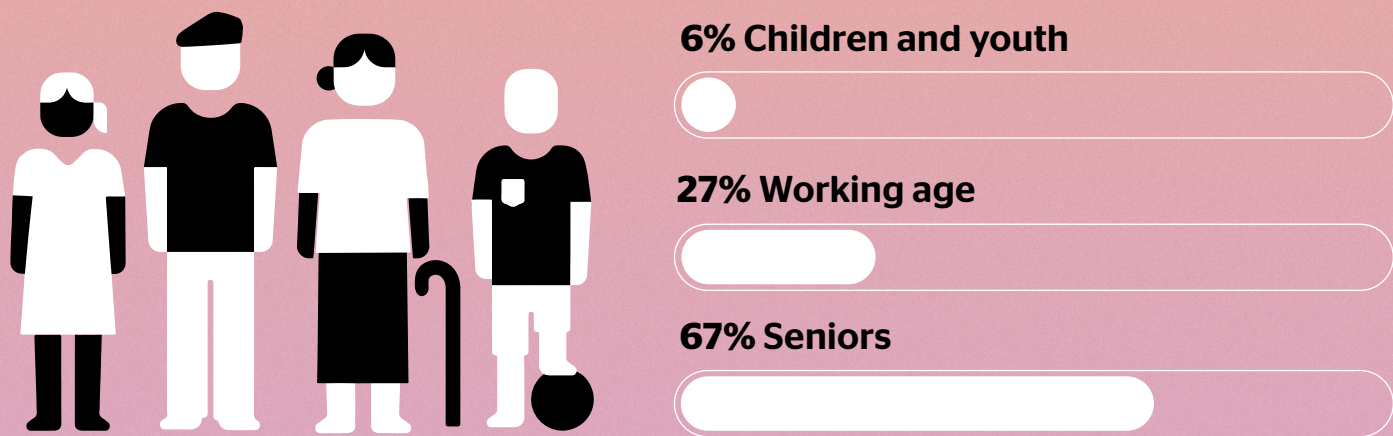
The 2025 survey is more than a collection of statistics – it is a call to action. It reflects the resilience of a community navigating significant systemic barriers, and makes clear that better outcomes are within reach. VLRC is committed to using these findings to strengthen our programs, deepen our advocacy, and ensure that every Canadian living with vision loss has access to the support they deserve.

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



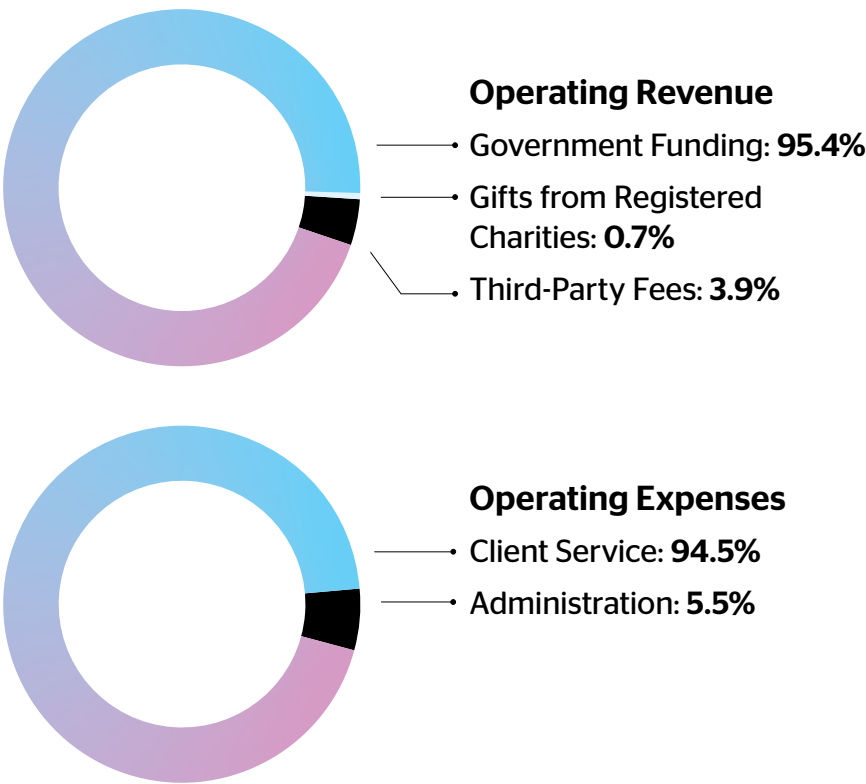
Clients by age



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, 2026, were prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations and were audited by Ernst & Young LLP.



Board Members 2025/26

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

Penny Hartin

Treasurer and Chair of Finance

Kyle Niekamp

Chair of Governance

Aloke Chatterjee

Chair of Service Quality and People & Culture

Penny Rae

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Charles Mossop

Garry Nenson

Robert Fenton

Stephanie Fry

CNIB Foundation 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**

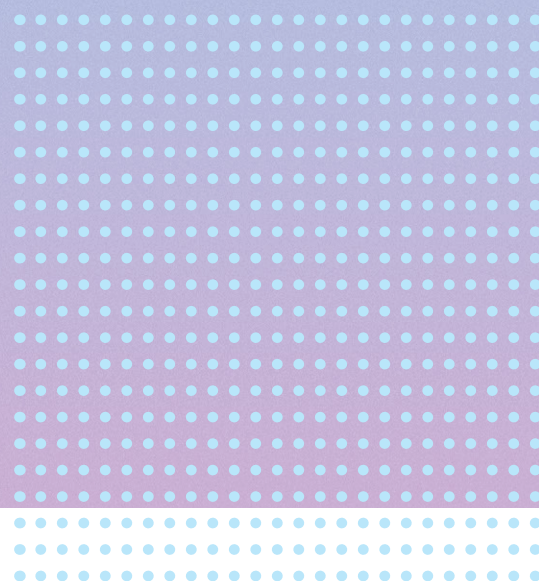
Contact us **visionlossrehab.ca/contact**

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

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Stronger Together



Your Journey. One Network. Seamless Support.

Together, we support and stand by Canadians who have low vision, are blind, or Deafblind.