



Diversifying and Strengthening Canada's Public Company Boards

On a brisk 2022 fall day, the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) ventured to downtown Toronto for a meeting of the Seat at the Table Selection Board. The CFPDP team observed silently yet with keen interest as an esteemed group of top CEOs, executives and university Chancellors reviewed the backgrounds of highly qualified professionals with disabilities. It was an hours-long meeting. And from dozens of applications, 15 were chosen.

"The Selection Board believes these latest candidates deserve a seat at the table in Canada's corporate boardrooms," explains the Honourable Vim Kochhar, Founding Chair of CFPDP. "While there has been some progress in recent years, people with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented on public company boards. This is something that CFPDP is seeking to change."

Positive change is something that Hon. Kochhar has been working toward since he founded CFPDP in 1985. His high-level mission has always been to make Canada the best country in the world for people with disabilities. Creating an inclusive workforce plays an important role and should start, he says, in the boardroom.

Hon. Kochhar first took action to break the glass ceiling in 2018 after hearing The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney talk about the benefits of his decision to appoint (for the first time in Canada) a cabinet minister as "Minister Responsible for Disabled Persons."

Speaking at a CFPDP event, the former Prime Minister said the presence of a senior-level advocate for disability issues at the cabinet table was instrumental in guiding his government to

make numerous progressive policy and program decisions on behalf of the disability community.

Hon. Kochhar immediately saw the parallels with corporations appointing people with disabilities to their boards of directors. From there, CFPDP's Seat at the Table initiative was born.

Since that time, Hon. Kochhar has led numerous public awareness initiatives, educating companies about the many benefits of diverse experiences and voices and encouraging appointments to their boards.

Hon. Kochhar has written hundreds of letters to CEOs of Canadian corporations, urging the elevation of diverse talent and inclusive leadership at the board level. Hundreds more letters have been sent to the CEOs of numerous associations representing Chartered Accountants, lawyers, engineers, architects and doctors in every Canadian province. He has also written to non-profit organizations. These letters asked for support in encouraging qualified professionals with disabilities to apply to CFPDP for board positions.

Additionally, almost 50 full-page PSA ads have been published thanks to the generous support of the Globe and Mail.

These efforts have started moving the wheels of change. When the Seat at the Table initiative began, CFPDP could not identify a single public company director with a disability. Osler's 2022 report on diversity disclosure practices reveals that 10 board positions are now held by people with disabilities in companies governed by the Canada Business Corporations Act (CBCA). Furthermore, companies not subject to the CBCA diversity reporting requirement voluntarily disclosed five directors who are persons with disabilities.

Hundreds of applications have also been received by CFPDP. To date, a total of 30 candidates have been chosen in four sessions. All are being actively promoted for board positions.

"The latest group of candidates chosen by our Selection Board includes corporate executives, lawyers, investment bankers and senior leaders with backgrounds in finance, financial governance, marketing and more," says Kochhar. "Highly qualified professionals with disabilities can have a significant impact on corporate boards, bringing new perspectives and fresh insights. With 22% of Canadians living with a disability, CFPDP continues to encourage companies to recruit new directors from this vast, untapped pool of highly qualified professionals."



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