

## **Snow Removal as an Equity Issue**

As Toronto crews continue clearing snow from recent storms and with more winter weather in the forecast, disability advocates are once again raising concerns about how inaccessible the city becomes during snow events. For many people, snow is an inconvenience. For people with disabilities, it can be a complete barrier to daily life.

Snowstorms create both natural and human-made obstacles that significantly affect how people with disabilities move through the city. Snow piled on sidewalks, at curb cuts, around bus stops, and along road edges can make it impossible for wheelchair users, people using walkers, or those with other mobility aids to travel safely.

“These are barriers that are often overlooked,” says disability advocate David Lepofsky, chair of the AODA Alliance. While stepping over a snowbank may be manageable for some, it can completely block access for others.

Social worker Emily Chan points to public transit as a clear example. When snow builds up at the edge of the road or bus stop, bus ramps often cannot deploy properly. “That form of transportation becomes inaccessible,” she explains, leaving people stranded.

The impact goes far beyond inconvenience. Snow and ice can prevent people from getting to work, school, medical appointments, and essential services. In many cases, people are not choosing to stay home, rather they are forced to.

“It’s one thing for someone to decide to stay in,” Chan says. “It’s another when someone is excluded because the environment is inaccessible.”

Safety is another major concern. As snow compacts and turns icy, the risk of falls increases. Falls can lead to serious injuries, hospitalizations, and long-term health consequences.

Lepofsky argues that cities must plan ahead rather than respond after harm occurs. One proposal is the creation of a voluntary registry of people with disabilities, allowing municipalities to better anticipate needs during severe weather and respond quickly when barriers appear.

Currently, residents can contact 311 to request snow clearance, but advocates say responses can be slow or incomplete, especially during large storms.

The City of Toronto says sidewalk snow clearing is a priority this year, with more than 1,300 workers clearing roads, sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit stops in a set sequence. City officials say urgent 311 requests will be addressed as quickly as possible and that crews are focusing on high-priority areas such as hospitals.

As winter continues, disability advocates are urging both the city and the province to move from reactive responses to proactive planning, ensuring that everyone can participate safely and fully in their communities, no matter the weather.

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**Source:**

1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/snow-accessibility-people-with-disabilities-9.7050031>
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