

## ***Ensuring Accessibility for Persons with HMD*** Understanding Hidden Mobility Disabilities

People with hidden mobility disabilities (HMD) are independently mobile but can only walk a short distance (on average 35-50 feet) and can stand unsupported only for a brief time (1-2 minutes) without significant health consequences. One may begin walking across an open space and suddenly become immobilized by pain between one step and the next, with nowhere to sit down. Not knowing ahead of time the distance to be walked can prevent people from enjoying their everyday lives, even though it is important to keep walking in order to remain mobile.

Since those with HMD *can* walk, others often assume that they can always walk any distance necessary. It can be difficult to explain that the “short distance right over there” is actually too far to walk without severe pain. It can be embarrassing to have to ask for help or to refuse to engage in walking or standing when severe pain is likely to be the consequence

Individuals with HMD usually manage effectively within their home environment where they can arrange to minimize walking distances or time standing. Access barriers result from the interaction between their mobility limitations and the structure of the external environment, combined with the often unrealistic expectations of others regarding what constitutes a “short distance” or a “brief time.”

Concerns about the environment and quality of life have resulted in a focus on “walkable cities” that – unfortunately for those with HMD – has led to pedestrian-only streets, reduced on-street parking, and the placement of parking garages blocks away from offices and shopping venues. Each of these trends make everyday activities inaccessible to those with HMD.

The Accessible Canada Act states that Canada will be barrier-free by 2040. So we need to work together in order to remove distance to be walked and time standing as access barriers and change attitudes about those who find distance to be walked and time standing a challenge.