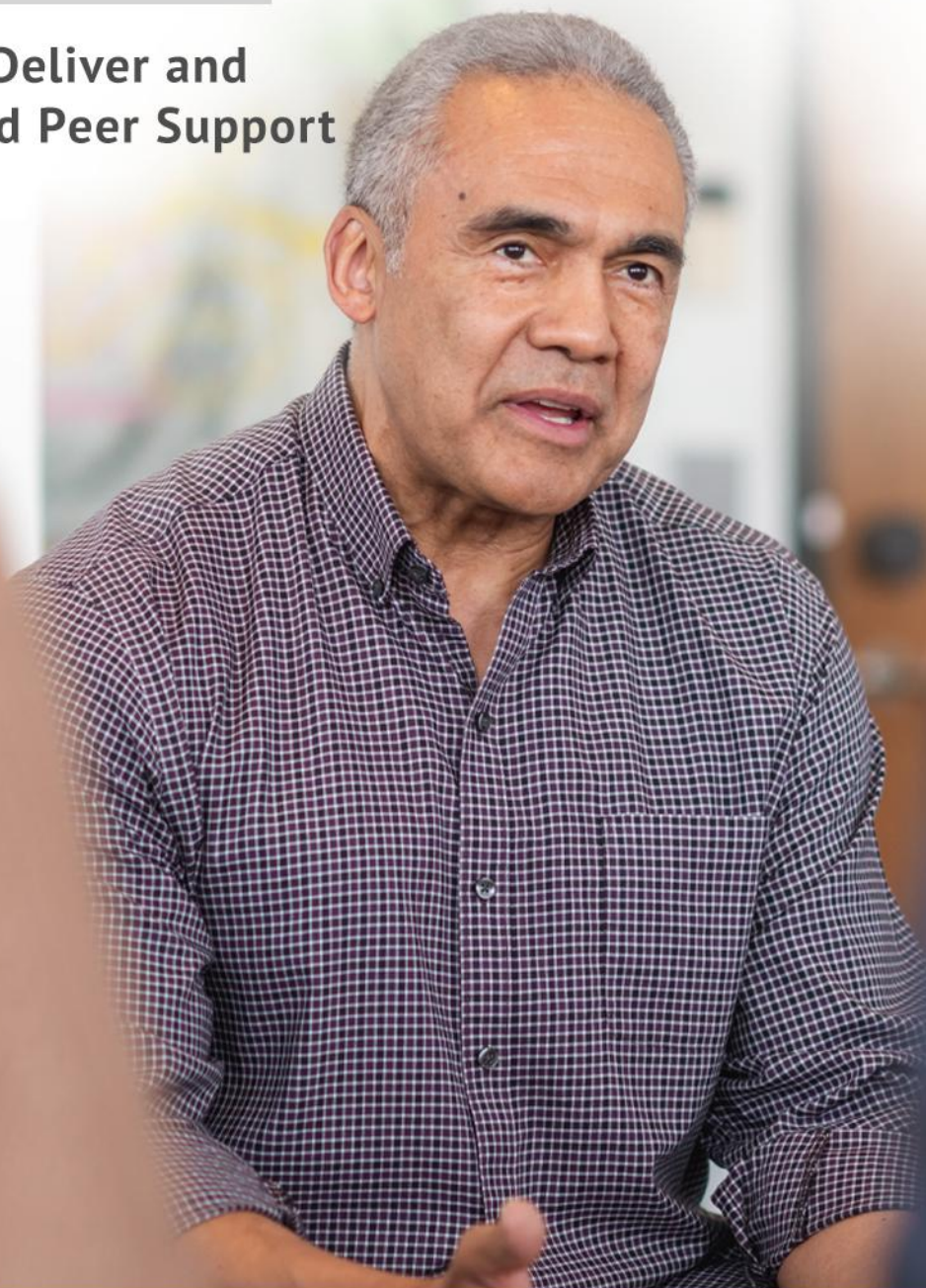


# After Stroke Peer Support Toolkit



A Guide to Develop, Deliver and  
Maintain Group-based Peer Support



SECTION **5**

Facilitator's Guide

# After Stroke Peer Support Toolkit

## A Guide to Develop, Deliver and Maintain Group-based Peer Support

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### Disclaimer

This toolkit is not designed to offer medical or health advice. This information is for reference and educational purposes only. The people and groups that developed, contributed to, funded, or were otherwise involved in the toolkit's creation are not responsible or liable for any damages, loss, or injuries that arise from or are related to the use of information in this toolkit. While reasonable efforts were made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information within the toolkit, we make no warranties, expressed or implied, regarding errors or omissions.

## Project Team

**Gayatri Aravind**, Program Lead, Innovations in Peer Support, March of Dimes Canada. Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Physical Therapy, University of Toronto

**Christina Sperling**, Director, After Stroke, March of Dimes Canada

**Michelle Nelson**, Principal Investigator, Science of Care Institute, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute, Sinai Health. Associate Professor (status), Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, Division of Clinical Public Health (cross-appointment), Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

## Co-Design Group

**Margaret Hansen**, Member

**Robert Mahony**, Member

**Tim McCleary**, Member

**John McGowan**, Member

**Christy Nich**, Member

**Paul Roberts**, Member

**Susan Robertson**, Member

**Amanda Nash**, Project Lead, Lived Experience Engagement Support, Heart & Stroke

**Sarah Munce**, *Scientist*, KITE-Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, University Health Network. Assistant Professor (status only), Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, Rehabilitation Science Institute, Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, University of Toronto

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## Contact

**March of Dimes Canada**

202-885 Don Mills Road

Toronto, ON, M3C 1V9

[peersupport@marchofdimes.ca](mailto:peersupport@marchofdimes.ca)

[www.marchofdimes.ca](http://www.marchofdimes.ca)

[www.afterstroke.ca](http://www.afterstroke.ca)



# Section Five | Facilitator Guide

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## Using The Facilitator's Guide

This section includes information on how to guide peer support group discussions and manage common challenges.

### It includes:

- Information on preparing for the role of a peer group facilitator.
- Tips to improve participation, deal with arguments and sensitive issues.
- Helping members with communication challenges.
- Resources on living with stroke, and peer support.

## What Is The Role Of A Facilitator?

The facilitator is someone who can engage members, manage difficult conversations, and keep discussions on track.

### A facilitator is responsible for:

- Creating a safe and welcoming space where members feel comfortable to share.
- Inspiring discussion by asking clarifying and follow-up questions.
- Keeping discussions on track
- Encouraging members to help and support each other.
- Modeling good group behaviour.
- Managing difficult members and conversations.



**Tip:** A facilitator is a guide, not a leader. Everyone in the group is equal. One or more persons can take on this role, or a group can rotate the role among the members.



## What Skills Should A Facilitator Have?

**To effectively guide a discussion, a facilitator should be:**

- A guide who supports group members.
  - Warm, empathetic, unbiased, and a good listener.
  - Should not impose their opinions on members.
  - May share own story where relevant to support discussions.
- Must be confident and assertive to keep discussions on track.
  - Accountable and dependable.
- Understand the value and importance of their role.
  - Dependable and consistent in their involvement (constant turnover can lead to low trust and poor group dynamics).

## How Can I Prepare to Be A Facilitator?

Training is important to prepare any facilitator for their role. Check if your partner organizations have their own or preferred peer support training course. They may also know other peer support facilitator training programs. Volunteers can also seek out accredited training or certification courses provided by external reputable organizations.

**You should have some basic understanding in three areas:**

- Understanding What Happens After a Stroke.
- Peer Support.
- Reflective Learning.



## Understanding What Happens After A Stroke

The following resources can help you get a basic understanding of what happens when someone experiences a stroke.

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Effects of Stroke</b> (American Stroke Association)	An 11-page resource about the effects of stroke.	<a href="https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/effects-of-stroke">https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/effects-of-stroke</a>
<b>Effects of Stroke</b> (Stroke Association UK)	A 10-page resource on emotional changes, memory, neuroplasticity, relationships and more after stroke.	<a href="https://www.stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke">https://www.stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke</a>
<b>Getting on With the Rest of your Life After Stroke</b> (Canadian Stroke Network)	A 36-page resource that covers goal setting, exercise, blood pressure, stress and more. Also includes activities to help with brain health.	<a href="https://www.strokebestpractices.ca/-/media/1-stroke-best-practices/mood-cognition-and-fatigue/getting-on-with-the-rest-of-your-life-after-stroke.ashx">https://www.strokebestpractices.ca/-/media/1-stroke-best-practices/mood-cognition-and-fatigue/getting-on-with-the-rest-of-your-life-after-stroke.ashx</a>



## What Is Peer Support?

A facilitator should know and understand the value of peer support, how it works, and what peer support looks like. These resources can help you understand more about peer support.

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>6 Ways Peer Support Can Improve your Health</b> (Heart and Stroke Canada)	A list of six reasons that peer support is a useful tool.	<a href="https://www.heartandstroke.ca/articles/6-ways-peer-support-can-improve-your-health">https://www.heartandstroke.ca/articles/6-ways-peer-support-can-improve-your-health</a>
<b>Value of Peer Support</b> (NESTA UK)	A case study about Steve, a peer support group leader since 2016.	<a href="https://www.nesta.org.uk/case-study/stroke-association-peer-support/">https://www.nesta.org.uk/case-study/stroke-association-peer-support/</a>
<b>Code of Conduct</b> (Peer Support Canada)	A one-page list of 'I will' statements that facilitators should agree to.	<a href="https://peersupportcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Peer_Support_Code_of_Conduct-ENG.pdf">https://peersupportcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Peer_Support_Code_of_Conduct-ENG.pdf</a>
<b>Values, Principles and Ethics of Peer Support</b> (Canadian Mental Health Association)	An overview of the core beliefs that peer support is based on.	<a href="https://cmhawwselfhelp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Values-principles-and-ethics-of-peer-support-v180926.pdf">https://cmhawwselfhelp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Values-principles-and-ethics-of-peer-support-v180926.pdf</a>





## What Is Reflective Learning?

Some meetings might not go as well as you planned, and others might go well. Once the session is done, think about what you did or would like to do differently.

**Some simple questions can help with reflective practice:**

- How did today's session go?
- What could have been better?
- What should we do next time?

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Reflective Practice</b> (Campus Mental Health)	Reflective journal questions and reading about reflective practice.	<a href="https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/campus-peer-support/supervision-support/reflective-practice/">https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/campus-peer-support/supervision-support/reflective-practice/</a>

## How Do I Keep Discussions On Topic?

When the discussion steers away from the topic at hand, the easiest way to redirect is to point out that the conversation is getting off-topic. Use gentle but firm language when communicating this. If there is time after the meeting for casual conversation, members can discuss it then. Creating a public 'parking lot' where off-topic ideas are listed can be helpful, so members can remember their important but off-topic items for the end of the meeting or future sessions.

A useful phrase is: "This is not within the topic for our meeting today. Let's write it down and come back to it in another session or discuss after the meeting."



## What Should I Do If I'm Worried About A Member's Wellness?

**Your approach will depend on the type of crisis you experience:**

- If there are red flags or concerning behaviour:
  - Speak to the member privately and recommend that they get in touch with their local healthcare professional. Share any appropriate resources you may have.
- If there is a medical emergency:
  - Call the local emergency service followed by the member's emergency contact. Complete an incident report.

## How Do I Manage Conflicts And Arguments?

Sometimes members may start arguing with no signs of coming to an agreement. Try to calm the situation and remind the group that members do not need to agree with each other and that everyone can have their own opinion or idea. If there is tension, try a grounding or breathing exercise to change the energy of the meeting. If helpful, review the core values and rules of peer support and remind participants to have a respectful discussion.

## How Do I Manage Disruptive Members?

If you have members who frequently speak over other members, interrupt, or side-track the discussion, the facilitator can step in. To avoid putting the member in an uncomfortable position, talk to them one-on-one.

Remind them to wait for their turn or raise their hand. Let them know that others need some time to talk too. You can also use tricks like – “the person with the blue stick speaks”, provide notepads to jot down thoughts and ideas while waiting for their turn, or saving time to highlight one member each session to give them time to share their thoughts.



## How Do I Manage Discussions About Sensitive Topics?

When guiding a peer support group, even the best facilitators encounter challenges. Here are some suggestions on how to prepare for and/or respond. Some group members will find certain topics emotional or sensitive. If you think that a topic may make some members upset, gently inform members ahead of time. Members may then choose not to attend or come mentally prepared. Reach out to these members separately to see if they need any assistance. You could also discuss with your groups on what topics they would like to avoid.

If a sensitive topic is brought up unexpectedly, the facilitator can call for a break. During this time, privately ask affected members if they would like to step out. The facilitator can also ask the group to move the topic to a future meeting. Remind members to feel free to step away at anytime if the discussions are making them uncomfortable.



**Tip:** Do not avoid topics that may be uncomfortable. As hard as they may be, some conversations are especially important. For many members, this group may be the only place they can talk about their fears and concerns openly. Approach these topics with empathy and sensitivity.

## How Can I Support Members With Communication Disorders (Like Aphasia)?

After a stroke, people may experience challenges with communication (like aphasia), and may have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding what other people say. This does not mean that they are less intelligent!

### **Help them feel respected.**

- Make eye contact and use an adult tone of voice.
- Speak to them directly, naturally, and kindly. Don't shout.
- If you need to speak on their behalf, ask them if it's okay first.
- Acknowledge their frustration and be patient.
- Say supportive phrases, like "I know you know".

### **Help them understand you.**

- Bring markers and paper or a portable whiteboard.
- Speak clearly and slowly. Pause frequently and use short sentences.
- Write large key words and draw or point to things.
- Use your hands and face to show what you mean.
- Focus on one topic at a time.
- Let them see your lips.

### **Help them communicate.**

- Ask yes and no questions, one at a time.
- Give them time to answer.
- Don't complete their sentences (unless asked).
- Give them choices to point to (yes, no, I don't know, etc.).
- See if their face or actions are saying something.
- If they say the wrong word, imagine what they may be trying to say.

### **Double-check.**

- Check what you think they have told you. Say it again or sum it up.
- Ask if they have more to tell you, before moving on.
- Sometimes, ask "Should we take a break? Can we try again later?"





**Tip:** Learning how to support people with aphasia in conversation is like learning a new language; it takes practice! We strongly encourage facilitators to take extra training.

March of Dimes Canada has also created a toolkit called: 'Making Peer Support Groups Accessible for Individuals with Communication Difficulties'. This resource is intended to provide information, tools and strategies for peer support group staff, volunteers and members to support members who may have communication difficulties.



Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Does Your Family Member Have Aphasia?”</b> (Aphasia Institute)	The above suggestions are adapted from this resource.	<a href="https://www.aphasia.ca/family-and-friends-of-people-with-aphasia/family-sca/">https://www.aphasia.ca/family-and-friends-of-people-with-aphasia/family-sca/</a>
<b>Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia</b> (Aphasia Institute)	A series of communication techniques to encourage conversation when working with someone with aphasia.	<a href="https://www.aphasia.ca/communication-tools-communicative-access-sca/">https://www.aphasia.ca/communication-tools-communicative-access-sca/</a>
<b>Aphasia - What a Difference Some Help Makes</b> (Dyscover)	A 5-minute video demo of supportive communication strategies.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWVogM9jmEM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWVogM9jmEM</a>
<b>Accessible Information Guidelines</b> (Stroke Association UK)	A 32-page resource on how to make information accessible for people with aphasia.	<a href="https://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/accessible_information_guidelines.pdf1_.pdf">https://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/accessible_information_guidelines.pdf1_.pdf</a>
<b>Making Space for Everyone</b> (Social Planning and Research Council of BC)	A toolkit on how to be more accessible to people with mobility, visibility, hearing and cognitive concerns.	<a href="https://www.sparc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/makingspaceforeveryonebookletweb.pdf">https://www.sparc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/makingspaceforeveryonebookletweb.pdf</a>





## How Can I Improve Member Engagement?

**As a facilitator you can improve member engagement by:**

- Asking questions to let your members know you are actively listening.
  - Use open ended questions like “Can you tell us more about...”
  - Use techniques like ‘person holding the ball speaks’ to bring attention to the speaker.
  - Ask members to face the speaker.
- Minimizing distractions.
  - Make sure people can see each other without needing to move.
  - Provide comfortable seating in a safe and private space.
- Allocating plenty of time for discussions, questions, and answers.
- Adding movement.
  - Include safe and fun physical activities, like seated ball throwing, feet tapping, drum circles, etc.
  - Music and body movements cause the release of endorphins.
- Discussing different topics.
  - Do not limit meetings to only stroke related topics. Include time for general topics about life, recent movies or books, hobbies, travels/adventures, etc.

## How Can I Get Participants To Trust Me?

**As a facilitator you can gain the trust of members by:**

- Asking appropriate questions – let members know you are listening and interested.
- Remaining calm and neutral but empathetic and understanding.
- Sharing your own experiences (selectively and with intention).
- Being patient, objective and fair.
- Staying committed and consistent – remain involved and committed to support the members. Sometimes developing trust just needs time.



## How Can I Improve Involvement And Attendance?

**You can improve involvement and attendance by:**

- Making it easier for them to attend.
  - Ask members what you can do to encourage attendance.
  - Regularly check if the meeting time and place works
  - Have a virtual meeting option if the weather is bad, if transportation is challenging, etc.
  - Offer reminder phone calls.
  - Make wellness check phone calls if members miss a few sessions.
- Involving members in decisions about peer support.
  - Encourage members to provide feedback about the group.
  - Discuss ways to improve how the group runs.
  - Involve members in discussing future topics, guest lectures, events, etc.
- Mixing things up.
  - Occasionally, have meetings where you do not discuss stroke or challenges.
  - Watch a movie or a play, play games, visit a gallery or museum.
  - Have a potluck, bingo night, go for a hike, etc.

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Make Buildings and Spaces Accessible</b> (AODA)	Details on how to make spaces more inviting and accessible.	<a href="https://www.aoda.ca/make-buildings-and-spaces-accessible/">https://www.aoda.ca/make-buildings-and-spaces-accessible/</a>



## How Can I Support Members To Advocate For Themselves?

Advocacy involves using your voice, words, actions, and choices to raise awareness or share information about causes that matter to you. When people with lived experience share their thoughts and experiences, it has the potential for greater impact and farther reach. Anyone who is willing to speak about their own needs, or the needs of someone else, and is passionate about making a difference can become stroke advocate.

Advocacy includes all acts- big or small- that help to raise and spread awareness of stroke, life after stroke, prevention, recovery, etc. This can be- connecting the local health authorities or local officials to request improved community support for people living with the impact of stroke becoming a part of the local stroke association, sitting on committees that discuss services/resources for people living with stroke, participating in fundraisers, making social media posts, etc.

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Self-Advocacy Toolkit</b> (March of Dimes)	A toolkit that allows individuals living with disabilities and their families to develop skills to advocate for themselves and others. It provides information and resources on advocacy, navigating systems, and developing personal and interpersonal skills to become an effective advocate.	<a href="https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/aboutus/govtrelations/dan/Pages/Self-Advocacy-Toolkit.aspx">https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/aboutus/govtrelations/dan/Pages/Self-Advocacy-Toolkit.aspx</a>



# How Can I Prepare For Virtual Peer Support Meetings

If you decide to host virtual meetings you will need to prepare for different challenges and opportunities.

- Technical issues.
  - Be prepared for technical issues (poor connectivity, bandwidth issues, device issues, etc.).
  - If needed teach members how to use chat, reactions, raise hands, enter, and exit breakout rooms.
  - Have a volunteer watch the chat and help members.
- Use the virtual features.
  - Offer members an option to remain anonymous by turning off their video or using a pseudonym.
  - Ask members to raise hands when they want to speak.
  - Encourage the use of chat. That way other members can share thoughts without interrupting the person speaking.
- Security and safety.
  - Request that participants attend the meeting through a secure and private internet connection.
  - Use waiting room or passcode features. The meeting link should be private and not shared with anyone else.
  - Reserve a session to talk about online safety.
  - Do not give participants permission to share their screen freely.
- Increased structure.
  - Virtual groups may need more structure to ensure that members get a turn to speak, discussions stay on-topic and stay engaged.
  - Include breaks to give facilitators a chance to debrief and discuss.
- Emergency planning.
  - Have a plan to manage crises and/or emergencies.
  - Keep a record of member contact information, and emergency contacts so you can send help if necessary.
  - Prepare an action plan for supporting members who are experiencing distress or need help.



## How Can I Help Members Connect With Each Other Online?

- Review values and group rules.
  - Remind members about confidentiality and respect.
- Spend more time getting to know each other.
  - Prepare introduction questions that aren't stroke related.
  - Try fun questions like favourite cookie, place to travel, and recently watched movies.
- Include team building and bonding activities.
  - Use polling or reactions to get a sense of likes and dislikes.
  - Do a show-and-tell of a unique object in their home.
  - Encourage members to turn on their videos (if comfortable).
- Retain some informality.
  - Invite people to bring their lunch, dinner, or drinks to the session.
  - Include breaks during and after the session for conversations.
  - Share fun information, or interesting stories during breaks.

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Step-by-Step Guide to a Zoom Meeting</b> (Seniors Guide)	A two-page, step by step guide to help you attend a Zoom meeting.	<a href="https://cdn.seniorsguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/02123145/Seniors-Guide-stepbystepguideto-Zoom-english0620.pdf">https://cdn.seniorsguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/02123145/Seniors-Guide-stepbystepguideto-Zoom-english0620.pdf</a>
<b>Remote and Online Peer Support</b> (National Survivor User Network)	A 19-page resource about virtual peer support, written during Covid-19.	<a href="https://www.nsun.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Remote_and_Online_Peer_Support_Resource.pdf">https://www.nsun.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Remote_and_Online_Peer_Support_Resource.pdf</a>



## Other Helpful Resources

These are additional resources for you to refer to or share with your group.

Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>After Stroke Program</b> (March of Dimes Canada)	Skill redevelopment, peer support, movement and communication support.	<a href="https://www.afterstroke.ca/">https://www.afterstroke.ca/</a>
<b>Your Stroke Journey</b> (Heart and Stroke Canada)	A 120-page resource that covers all parts of your stroke journey from understanding what happened, the first weeks, and moving forward into your new normal.	<a href="https://www.heartandstroke.ca/-/media/pdf-files/canada/your-stroke-journey/en-your-stroke-journey-v20.ashx">https://www.heartandstroke.ca/-/media/pdf-files/canada/your-stroke-journey/en-your-stroke-journey-v20.ashx</a>
<b>Guide for Stroke Recovery</b> (Toronto Stroke Networks)	What to expect, managing changes, improving your overall health, and reducing your risk of another stroke.	<a href="https://www.strokerecovery.guide/">https://www.strokerecovery.guide/</a>
<b>Stroke Recovery</b> (National Health Service UK)	Understanding difficulties after stroke, including swallowing, driving, paralysis, mental health and more.	<a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stroke/recovery/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stroke/recovery/</a>
<b>Life After Stroke</b> (American Stroke Association)	A 36-page resource about how to adapt to life after a stroke, including diagnosis, early treatment, and rehabilitation.	<a href="https://www.stroke.org/-/media/Stroke-Files/Life-After-stroke/Life-After-Stroke-Guide_7819.pdf">https://www.stroke.org/-/media/Stroke-Files/Life-After-stroke/Life-After-Stroke-Guide_7819.pdf</a>





Resource Name	Description	Link
<b>Peer Supporter Competencies</b> (Peer Support Canada)	A two-page list of competencies for peer support facilitators.	<a href="https://peersupportcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Peer_Supporter_Competencies-ENG.pdf">https://peersupportcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Peer_Supporter_Competencies-ENG.pdf</a>
<b>Guidelines for Practice and Training of Peer Support</b> (Mental Health Commission of Canada)	A 54-page toolkit that covers the guidelines for peer support and suggestions for training.	<a href="https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Guidelines-for-the-Practice-and-Training-of-Peer-Support.pdf">https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Guidelines-for-the-Practice-and-Training-of-Peer-Support.pdf</a>
<b>Planning Accessible Events</b> (Accessibility Services Canada)	A booklet with low-cost and no-cost things you can do to make your event more inclusive to people who live with disabilities.	<a href="https://accessibilitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Planning-Accessible-Events-May-2016.pdf">https://accessibilitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Planning-Accessible-Events-May-2016.pdf</a>
<b>Making Space for Everyone</b> (Social Planning and Research Council of BC)	A booklet on how to be more accessible to individuals with specific mobility, visibility, hearing, and cognitive concerns.	<a href="https://www.sparc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/makingspaceforever_yonebookletweb.pdf">https://www.sparc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/makingspaceforever_yonebookletweb.pdf</a>

