

For Immediate Release

New Campaign from VML Canada and the Rick Hansen Foundation shines a light on the critical importance of accessibility in Canada

Overcoming barriers is an all too familiar situation for people with disabilities

May 24, 2024, Traditional territory of the xʷməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam) First Nation / Richmond, B.C. – In honour of National AccessAbility Week starting May 26, VML Canada, in partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF), have launched a new national campaign to raise awareness of the urgent need for improved accessibility in Canada. One in four Canadians with a disability in Canada continue to face accessibility barriers daily, an issue that needs to be urgently addressed if Canada is going to meet its goal of a barrier-free country by January 1, 2040.

The campaign creative idea “Just because we can, doesn’t mean we should have to” explores the notion that just because people with disabilities can overcome multiple barriers throughout their day, they shouldn’t have to. One of the PSA executions features local Burnaby B.C. resident, Leo Sammarelli, who sustained a spinal cord injury and subsequently taught himself how to climb stairs in his wheelchair to get to his girlfriend’s apartment. Another features Paralympian Tara Llanes who also often finds herself figuring out how to navigate barriers when there is no other option.

Beyond the barriers faced by wheelchair users, the campaign uses digital, animated outdoor, print and radio to highlight other examples of inaccessibility - such as lip reading without proper lighting, navigating intersections without audio cues, and maintaining focus in chaotic environments with neurodivergence. “Through working with the Rick Hansen Foundation, we learned that all too often people are left on their own devices to overcome accessibility barriers. This not only inspired the creative execution, it also gave us a new appreciation for what the foundation fights for.” says Jake Hope, Creative Director at VML Canada.

A national charity dedicated to removing barriers through accessibility education, training, and certification programs, RHF is committed to helping change design culture and remove barriers to accessibility in our communities, schools and workplaces. Its programs help people with varying disabilities affecting their mobility, vision and hearing and include considerations for neurodiversity.

“Getting the importance of accessibility on the radar of Canadians continues to be a challenge even though 64% of Canadians have a disability or live with/take care of someone with a disability,” says Sarah McCarthy, VP Strategic Initiatives at RHF. “We’re incredibly grateful to our long-time pro-bono partners at VML Canada for helping find ways to break through the noise and bring this critically important conversation to the forefront.”

The integrated campaign launches today and includes Public Service Announcements in television, radio, outdoor, print, and digital, thanks to the generosity of national in-kind media partners Corus Entertainment, OUTEDGE Media, and The Globe and Mail. The campaign will also air in Chinese,

thanks to support of the Fairchild Group.

About the Rick Hansen Foundation

The Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) was established in 1988, following the completion of Rick Hansen’s Man In Motion World Tour. For over 35 years, RHF has worked to raise awareness, change attitudes, and remove barriers for people with disabilities. Visit www.RickHansen.com to learn more.

About VML

VML is a leading creative company that combines brand experience, customer experience, and commerce, creating connected brands to drive growth. VML is celebrated for its innovative and award-winning work for blue chip client partners including AstraZeneca, Colgate-Palmolive, Dell, Ford, Intel, Microsoft, Nestlé, The Coca-Cola Company, and Wendy’s. The agency is recognized by the Forrester Wave™ Reports, which name WPP as a “Leader” in Commerce Services, Global Digital Experience Services, Global Marketing Services and, most recently, Marketing Measurement & Optimization. In addition, VML’s specialist health network, VML Health, is one of the world’s largest and most awarded health agencies. VML’s global network is powered by 30,000 talented people across 60-plus markets, with principal offices in Kansas City, New York, Detroit, London, São Paulo, Shanghai, Singapore, and Sydney. VML is a WPP agency (NYSE: WPP). For more information, please visit www.vml.com, and follow along on [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [X](#). #WeAreVML

RHF Media Contact:

Cynnamon Schreinert, Hartley PR

Cynnamon@hartleypr.com

604-802-2733