CREATING ART WITH SCI | BC TECH | PEER PARALYMPIC ATHLETES

thespin

SPINAL CORD INJURY BC

SUMMER 2026

Navigating SCI Care

A new province-wide navigation service is helping people with SCI and clinicians across BC find answers faster and connect to real-time expertise

SpeediCath® *Soft*

Easy to use. Easy to grip.

Introducing ***SpeediCath*® *Soft*** for men, the newest member to the ***SpeediCath*® *Family***.

Designed with **Triple Action Coating Technology** a smooth and uniform hydrophilic coating to minimize the risk of damaging the urethra[1]* and reducing the risk of UTIs[2]*. Plus, it's instantly ready to use right out of the packaging.

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Smooth &
gentle

Easy
to use

Scan the QR Code to try a **FREE****
SpeediCath Soft sample or visit the link:
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*Compared to uncoated catheters

1. De Ridder, D. J. M. K., Everaert, K., Fernández, L. G., Valero, J. F., Durán, A. B., Abrisqueta, M. J., ... & Sotillo, A. R. (2005). Intermittent catheterisation with hydrophilic-coated catheters (SpeediCath) reduces the risk of clinical urinary tract infection in spinal cord injured patients: a prospective randomised parallel comparative trial. European urology, 48(6), 991-995.

2. Cardenas, D. D., Moore, K. N., Dannels-McClure, A., Scelza, W. M., Graves, D. E., Brooks, M., & Busch, A. K. (2011). Intermittent catheterization with a hydrophilic-coated catheter delays urinary tract infections in acute spinal cord injury: a prospective, randomized, multicenter trial. PM&R, 3(5), 408-417.

SpeediCath Soft is indicated for use by patients with urine retention and patients with post void residual volume (PVR) due to neurogenic and non-neurogenic voiding dysfunction. The catheter is inserted into the urethra to reach the bladder allowing urine to drain. The product is for adult male patients only. SpeediCath catheters are available by prescription only. Patients performing self-catheterization should follow the advice of, and direct questions about use of the product to, their medical professional. Before using the device, carefully read the product labels and information accompanying the device including the instructions for use which contain additional safety information. The SpeediCath product is for single-use only; discard it after use. If you experience symptoms of a urinary tract infection, or are unable to pass the catheter into the bladder, contact your healthcare professional. The risk information provided here is not comprehensive. To learn more, talk to your healthcare provider. For further information, call Coloplast Corp. at **1 (866) 293-6349** and/or consult the company website at **www.coloplast.ca**.

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contents

SUMMER 2026

features

departments

COVER PHOTO: A person with SCI exits the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre

editor's message

AI in Health Care

I'll start with a disclosure: I did not use AI (artificial intelligence) to write this editorial. Or did I?

While I did not use ChatGPT or any other generative AI platform, I did use the spellcheck and grammar suggestions MS Word offered and the predictive word feature on my smartphone when working on this piece. So, I guess I actually did use AI.

The term AI covers a wide variety of different technologies and uses, and is already so ingrained in our daily lives, we often don't even realize we are using it. AI in health care is a great example of the many ways AI is being deployed and developed and of how important it is for all its users—health care professionals and the people who receive health care—to inform how its role in health evolves.

The Artificial Intelligence and Technology-Enhanced Care Collaboration Centre (AiTECCC) is a broad-based network of health systems leaders, clinicians, researchers, industry, community organizations, and more who are working together to provide evidence and information to guide the use and implementation of AI in health.

The initiative is led by Dr. Kendall Ho and his UBC Digital Emergency Medicine Unit. Earlier this year, Dr. Ho invited SCI BC to join the collaborative and we collaborated on two focus groups that explored the experiences and thoughts of people with SCI on AI in their health. We will cover the results of this study soon but in the meantime, here's a brief summary of AiTECCC's annual forum, which I recently attended.

Featuring a broad representation of clinicians, researchers, Indigenous leaders, industry representatives, individuals with lived experience as users of the healthcare system, and others, the forum explored themes that must guide our health system's ongoing adoption of AI. Key amongst them are safeguarding the sovereignty of our data; establishing trust in the system and the trustworthiness of the AI tools it uses; ensuring the increasing use of AI does not have a negative impact on the environment because the environment is directly linked with our health; building AI based on Canadian guidelines and data; ensuring human oversight, connection, and empathy continue to be central to the care we receive; and making sure the data that AI depends on includes the diversity of all who engage in the health system, including small patient populations like those with SCI.

From notetaking to accessing data to diagnostics, AI is already being used within our health system. As AI technologies advance, its use will increase to support a more efficient and effective health system. If we build our AI infrastructure within Canada and on Canadian data, we can have more effective AI tools that require smaller data centres with lower environmental impact.

The reality is clear: it doesn't matter whether we are for or against AI, it's here and it will only get more widespread. The key is to make sure it works for all of us and not just for AI company shareholders.

—Chris McBride, PhD, Executive Director, SCI BC

thespin

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SCI BC is grateful for the financial support of the BC Gaming Commission and the BC Paraplegic Foundation.

We acknowledge that *The Spin* is created on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Coast Salish peoples—Squamish, Musqueam, and Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Our provincial work takes place on the territories of Indigenous peoples who have lived on and cared for the land for time immemorial. We are grateful to work, share stories, and connect in these spaces.

SCI BC InfoLine: 1.800.689.2477

FREEDOM BED

Rest easy with ProBed's Freedom Bed, a computer-controlled bed that turns the user to different sleeping positions without the help of caregivers. The Freedom Bed can mimic the body's natural motions at night by mechanically repositioning to reduce the risk of developing pressure sores or other complications from immobility. Its user-friendly control panel allows you to adjust the bed for automatic or manual use with sensors that monitor movements to ensure safety. Voice control options are available and are compatible with Alexa or Google Home. The dynamic siderails provide an additional level of security and confidence for the bed user. Each turning mechanism is smooth, quiet, and accurate to allow a better sleep. Wake up feeling better with The Freedom Bed at pro-bed.com.

Left Rotation

Right Rotation

BOWHEAD NANO TRAVEL CHAIR

The Bowhead Nano is a travel chair that will help support your independence navigating flights, hotel showers, and tight spaces. The lightweight travel chair can be easily folded to fit under a seat or inside a backpack, which makes it easy to bring along. The wheels are adjustable to allow flexibility in the transfer height of the chair, which can even lay flat for a lower transfer height or turned outward for extra stability. The materials of the chair are water safe and fast drying which makes using it in bathrooms a breeze. The Bowhead Nano is available for pre-order at bowheadcorp.com/nano.

Innovations

New products, devices, and aids to daily living that might make a difference in your life...

SWITCHBOT LOCK ULTRA

Discover a new way of unlocking your door with the SwitchBot Lock Ultra. There are 17 unlocking methods, including voice control, fingerprint, auto unlock, and smartwatch to make leaving and entering your home easier. The Lock Ultra is compatible with most single deadbolts, jimmy proof locks, and mortise locks, and allows your door to be opened within 0.3 seconds. The six layer security system provides tamper alerts, encryption, and real-time status to keep your home safe. The triple battery feature (main power, backup, and emergency) will ensure that the device is always working. Lock in your door upgrade with the SwitchBot Lock Ultra at ca.switch-bot.com.

PAN BUDDY

Cook like a pro with Active Hand's Pan Buddy. The Pan Buddy slides onto any pot, skillet, or frying pan handle to create a vertical handle for you to hold onto. The vertical handle adds more leverage support while keeping your wrist in a natural position. It's easy to secure and safe as it's heat-resistant up to 148 °C. Its lightweight, universal design makes it suitable for both left- and right-handed people. Serve up your favourite meals with the Pan Buddy at activehands.com.


Gentle protection,
from the start

Catch the greatest sailing race.

The Mobility Cup is Canada's largest regatta for sailors with disabilities. This year, the Mobility Cup will be coming to Vancouver from September 8-12 to celebrate the regatta's 35th anniversary. Expect to watch sailors from all over the country compete in Martin 16 adaptive sailboats with sip-and-puffs, joysticks, and other custom support, and partake in community celebrations at the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club. For more details, chart a course to asabc.org/mobility-cup-2026.

Wheel you be there?

Come check out and ride Northern BC's newest adaptive trails at Tabor Mountain from August 8-9 with SCI BC, Tourism PG, and Adaptive Adventures. You'll have a chance to try adaptive mountain biking with experienced coaches and enjoy a BBQ lunch. All abilities and experience levels are welcome, whether it's your first time or you've been riding for years. Reach out to Chantelle at chantelle.grafton@gmail.com for more details or help with planning your trip.

Unwind with our yoga classes.

Our new seated yoga classes are run by SCI peer, Diane Rakiecki, who will guide you through gentle stretching to increase your range of motion from your wheelchair. Join us online every Sunday from 9:30-10:30 AM to add some movement to your life. You are also welcome to stay longer for some upper body resistance workouts. No equipment is needed but you may use a yoga block or yoga strap for more of a challenge. Visit sci-bc.ca/events for more information.

Spinal Cord Injury BC

Peer Health Coaching Program

sci-bc.ca/coaching

- One-on-one Zoom sessions with your coach
- FREE + bonus sessions with health professionals
- Actionable steps you can start right away

The SCI BC Peer Health Coaching Program supports participants in developing and achieving personalized goals to help prevent secondary complications, enhance self-management and self-efficacy skills, and improve overall health and quality of life.

> **[Peer Health Coaching] is about becoming more aligned with oneself. It helps people move from vague longing to purposeful action. It transforms dreams into plans, ideas into commitments, and aspirations into lived experience.**
>
> **—Mary-Jo, Peer Health Coach**

A round of applause for SCI BC's very own Service Delivery Coordinator, **AGASHA MUTESASIRA**, for appearing in CBC's four-episode video series, *The Feelings of Music*. Having sustained an SCI at 12 years old, Mutesasira uses music and content creation to share her story as she navigates living with an SCI. She is currently based in Vancouver as a singer-songwriter and has released original music like EXPECTATIONS, WAIT 4 ME, Lost, and more. In *The Feelings of Music*, Mutesasira sits down with neuroscientists, producers, sound engineers, and artists to explore music's unique role in experiencing happiness, fear, sadness, and anger through sound. Press play on *The Feelings of Music* at sci-bc.ca/the-feelings-of-music or follow Mutesasira's journey on Instagram @agasha.nm.

Peer Shoutouts

SUSAN BAINS is on a roll—figuratively and literally! Over the past few months, Bains, an SCI BC board member and peer, was elected to White Rock City Council, appeared as a TEDx speaker on TEDxWhite Rock, and organized BC's first Walk and Roll Accessibility Parade with Equal Access Collective to celebrate National AccessAbility Week.

In Bains' TED Talk, *Persistence—Moving Through Uncertainty*, she reflects on how resilience and a solutions-focused mindset can help navigate life's challenges. As a City Councillor, community leader, entrepreneur, and accessibility advocate, Bains uses her experience to create inclusive spaces for everyone.

The Walk and Roll Accessibility Parade took place in Surrey this past May, bringing together community, organizations, politicians, and advocates to celebrate and bring awareness to accessibility. The event also included live music, food trucks, and a sensory tent. "The vision for this event is simple but powerful," explains Bains. "We want this to become a signature and annual community event, one that brings people together while championing accessibility, inclusion, and belonging for years to come."

With Bains' passion and experience, she's sure to inspire and build more inclusive spaces in the future!

It's time to bookmark a special moment for **CODI DARNELL**, whose postpartum story was included in *Beyond Blue: Stories of Heartbreak, Healing, and Hope in Postpartum Depression*. After a bad fall that left her paralyzed, Darnell shares her experience as a full-time wheelchair user dealing with postpartum anxiety and depression after her second son was born. "I wrote 'The Highlight Reel' for every woman who has scrolled through the picture perfect magic of someone else's motherhood while experiencing a darkness to their own that nobody ever warned them about—and feeling like they are broken," says Darnell. *Beyond Blue* is available for purchase at indigo.ca or caitlinpress.com.

The first ever Women's Wheelchair Rugby National Championships took place in Montreal and a team of BC peers rolled through the competition to grab first place! The victorious Western Lights team included SCI peers **MARTA PAWLIK**, **JESSICA KRUGER**, **BROOKE PEREPELUK**, **JULIA HANES**, and **TIANA HESMERT**. The tournament featured three regional teams that included 20 athletes across Canada. More wheelchair rugby action takes place this December as the first Women's World Championship is held in Paris. Congratulations ladies!

THE MAKING OF A NEIL SQUIRE SOCIETY MILESTONE

Our BC SCI Network partner organization the Neil Squire Society has achieved a new milestone with their Makers Making Change program: 25,000 assistive devices have been made and delivered to people with disabilities across the world. This program helps people with disabilities work, play, and live more independently with a resource library of over 200 assistive devices and a team of volunteers who help make the devices for little or no cost. Makers Making Change devices have been delivered to six continents, with the most requested device being the Interact Switch, a device for users who struggle with using small buttons or switches. Head over to makersmakingchange.com to browse the library of assistive technology devices that can improve your quality of life.

Community Highlights

AWARD-WINNING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT ICORD

Recognition couldn't have found a better subject—PhD Candidate Rebekah Lee from Dr. Victoria Claydon's lab at SFU received the ICORD Meaningful Engagement Committee (MEC) Award for her work in the Sleep after SCI survey. SCI BC is a community partner on this project, which investigated the sleep routines, disturbances, and impacts of sleep problems on daily life as shared by SCI peers. We look forward to reporting on Lee's findings when the study is complete. SCI BC is represented on the MEC, which was created in September 2025 to create impactful research and strengthen the relationship between ICORD researchers, people with SCI, and community partners, and we are already seeing examples like Lee make great changes!

Canada's wheelchair curling team. Photo credit: Anil Mungal

THE ONE RESEARCH PAPER TURNING HEADS

Archives of
Physical Medicine
and Rehabilitation

ACRM

Congratulations to the Integrated Knowledge Translation (IKT) Guiding Principles Partnership team for making headlines with their research paper! Published in the *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* in 2021, *IKT Guiding Principles for Conducting and Disseminating Spinal Cord Injury Research in Partnership* has received the 2026 American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine Most Cited Original Research Award. The IKT partnership unites many researchers and community partners, including SCI BC, SCI Alberta, SCI Ontario, and the Praxis Spinal Cord Institute. Several familiar names are involved in this paper, including SCI BC's Executive Director, Chris McBride and Associate Director of Service Delivery, Jocelyn Maffin, along with our research partners Dr. Heather Gainforth, Dr. Femke Hoekstra, Dr. Kathleen Ginis, Dr. Ben Mortenson, and John Chernesky. Now that's what we call a well-cited success!

BREAKTHROUGH MOMENTS AT THE 2026 PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES

The Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games not only broke many records on the Olympic stage, they also saw engagement levels reach an all-time high. YouTube views clocked in at 493.4M, which translates to more than 1M hours of content consumed. A total of 0.65B video views occurred in 12 days across the Paralympics social media channels, which is a 2,144% increase from Beijing 2022. 611 athletes participated in the Paralympics, which counts for the highest participation. The biggest para ice hockey crowd of 11,500 people showed up for the gold medal game (USA vs Canada). Setting another record, Canada's wheelchair curling team became the first wheelchair curling team ever to emerge undefeated at the Paralympics. We are so proud of all the Canadian para athletes, including BC peers Ina Forrest (wheelchair curling) and Leo Sammarelli (sit-ski Nordic cross-country). Flip to page 30 for an inside look of their experiences as para athletes.


Hollister
Infyna Chic

Navigating SCI Care

A new province-wide navigation service is helping people with SCI and clinicians across BC find answers faster and connect to real-time expertise.

You've told us over coffee and through years of surveys that you want better ways to navigate the healthcare system and better access to knowledgeable healthcare providers no matter where you live. Now, a clearer route is starting to take shape.

In the Summer 2023 issue of *The Spin*, we shared "Rehab for Rehab," highlighting the BC Rehabilitation & Recovery Strategy and the SCI Care Strategy. Together, they asked hundreds of people with SCI, families, providers, and advocates a simple question: What would make care and rehab really work?

Two priorities consistently rose to the top: patient navigation and real-time support for healthcare providers. Similarly, in the Rick Hansen Foundation-led SCI Care Strategy Survey, two-thirds of respondents said they would value a navigation survey, and improved knowledge among healthcare providers ranked just behind financial support.

Healthcare providers across BC are already doing incredible work, often under pressure and with limited resources. But challenges remain, creating opportunities to better support people with SCI as they chart their journey through complex care pathways.

For years, teams at Vancouver Coastal Health's G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre and SCI BC have helped address these challenges informally. As G.F. Strong physiatrist Dr. Viet Vu explains, "In the past, we did our best to answer questions from people and physicians across the province, while supporting our patients." Similarly, SCI BC's InfoLine fields thousands of requests every year, with 11% of requests coming from healthcare professionals seeking resources. Over the past five years, housing and health-related requests have been the top two most common inquiries.

To help meet this need, the Spinal Cord Injury Navigation Service (SCI Nav) was created.

"Too many people living with spinal cord injury have had to navigate a com-

How to Access SCI Nav

- Email: SCINav@vch.ca
- Phone: 672-965-1702
- Hours: Monday–Friday, 8 am–4 pm
- Website: vch.ca/sci-nav

Here's what some providers have said about SCI Nav:

- "Access to [SCI Nav] saved me and my program's physiatrist hours of work."
- "Within healthcare I find it very difficult to navigate policies and resources to find current, best practice support, especially for complex issues like SCI management. This is an invaluable resource for hospital staff, as well as anyone else needing to support SCI care!"
- "This service was MORE than extremely valuable. It was completely top notch. Fast response time. Excellent communication and ability to connect by email and by phone. Excellent at supporting the patients and providing resources. We do not have a regular caseload of SCI patients and this support for such a complex population is so essential!"

plex health system largely on their own," says Doramy Ehling, Chief Executive Officer at the Rick Hansen Foundation. "SCI Nav changes that and ensures that every person affected by SCI in British Columbia, no matter where they live, has access to the expert guidance and care they need."

Introducing SCI Nav

SCI Nav is a new province-wide service led by an experienced team at G.F. Strong. Think of it as a GPS for SCI care: a single point of contact to help you and your healthcare providers get the support you need, when you need it.

The service is starting as a three-year pilot project (June 2025–June 2028) that is led by a navigation coordinator who has a nursing background in SCI and a clinical consulting team based at G.F. Strong. The pilot project has been made possible through generous funding from the Rick Hansen Foundation, and support from key partners, including SCI BC and the VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation.

"I've heard from patients how difficult things can be once they leave the hospital or inpatient rehab. The transition back into the community can feel overwhelming, and many people end up trying to figure out complex medical issues, funding systems, and community resources mostly on their own," says Rachel Hendry, SCI Nav nurse navigator. "I really believe SCI Nav has huge potential to help meet the needs of patients, their families and caregivers. It can take some of the pressure off by offering timely, specialized support when questions or challenges come up."

SCI Nav first launched for healthcare providers in rural, remote, and First Nations communities in Fall 2025. The service expanded to healthcare providers across BC in Winter 2026, and in May 2026, SCI Nav opened to people with SCI and their families in BC and the Yukon.

You can think of SCI Nav as your first call when you need support—either as a person with SCI (or family member) trying to navigate the health system or as a healthcare provider seeking information or expert advice about a patient with SCI. The nurse navigator (Hendry) is the main point of contact, working with an interdisciplinary team at G.F. Strong that includes a physiatrist, nurse, occupational therapist (OT), physical therapist (PT), and social worker. The nurse navigator receives calls and emails, gathers information to share with the SCI Nav team, and coordinates next steps, aiming to respond to inquiries within 48 hours.

For people with SCI and their families, the service provides real-time, compassionate support from a knowledgeable healthcare professional as a complement to your existing care team. And no referral is required! Anyone seeking support, information, or guidance related to an SCI can contact the SCI Nav team.

For healthcare providers, SCI Nav provides free, peer-to-peer clinical support from experts at G.F. Strong. Providers get advice and targeted training and can even bring SCI Nav into a three-way call with their patient anywhere in BC and the Yukon.


Dr. Viet Vu


Rachel Hendry, RN

SCI Nav in Action

Early examples show how SCI Nav is already helping people with SCI.

In one case, a healthcare provider called SCI Nav during an appointment to confirm whether a treatment would interfere with the patient's bowel and bladder care. "The GP would have had to refer them to me, and then the patient goes on my waitlist to be seen in clinic. Instead, the GP called SCI Nav and their concerns were forwarded to me. I called the GP back and discussed the bowel care issues. It can be that efficient and easy," Vu explains. In another case, an SCI peer in a remote community received guidance on pressure injuries and was connected with a local OT with SCI expertise for a home visit, meaning no travel to Vancouver was required!

For Kelowna resident Anand Kannan, SCI Nav helped him get answers after months of uncertainty. Last fall, he suspected a UTI and started antibiotics, a routine that had worked for him over 17 years living with SCI. While symptoms initially improved, his incontinence quickly worsened. Over the following months, he visited the emergency room seven times, trying multiple antibiotics, including IV treatment. Tests came back negative, while new symptoms, such as increased spasticity, emerged. A urologist later admitted him to the hospital for several days.

Self-Refer Criteria

To self-refer, you or the family member with SCI you are calling on behalf of must meet the following:

- ✓ Must have a diagnosed SCI (diagnosed by a physician)
- ✓ Injury must be chronic (not newly diagnosed within past three months)
- ✓ Injury must have significant functional impact (e.g., bowel/bladder involvement and/or primary use of a wheelchair)

Anand Kannan

A friend eventually pointed him to SCI Nav. "I reached out not knowing what information I would get," says Kannan. "It was very quick. I was surprised. I first left a voicemail with Rachel [Hendry] and then she contacted me back the next day. She had the ability to pull up all my information from Interior Health. She took all that information to the group for their meetings… the next week she contacted me saying this is what they would like you to do."

Following the SCI Nav team's recommendation, Kannan's GP ordered a spine MRI, which revealed a syrinx (a fluid-filled cavity within the spinal cord). With that information, Kannan was later able to see a local physiatrist, while his care team consulted with the SCI Nav team for additional guidance. "I'm really happy with [the timeline] to have all of this done that quickly with the right guidance," says Kannan.

Thanks to SCI Nav, Kannan's path to answers was a short one that didn't require travel to Vancouver.

In its first three months, the SCI Nav service received approximately 50 calls from healthcare providers. "Early in the pilot, we've received overwhelmingly positive feedback," says Hendry. "A consistent theme has been our quick response time and the value of having direct access to SCI-specific expertise. We've heard from clinicians that the service has helped to prevent possible hospital visits related to autonomic dysreflexia and supported safer bowel and bladder retraining in the community."

You Can Now Self-Refer

SCI Nav is now open to people with SCI and their families.

SCI Nav is not a replacement for primary or emergency care. It's also not for medication refills or chronic pain management. The team can provide consultations and SCI-specific guidance to help you and your healthcare provider chart the next step. Ongoing care and follow-up visits will still be managed by your primary care provider.

No family doctor? You can still access SCI Nav. Vu explains, "If you don't have a primary care doctor, we would ask you to go to an urgent care center, or whatever their local walk-in clinic looks like, in order to communicate with that clinician."

SCI Nav: Peers

We recommend adding SCI Nav as a contact in your phone. We have also created an SCI Nav wallet card you can carry with you! Contact your local SCI BC Peer Program Coordinator for a copy or download the wallet card online: sci-bc.ca/scinav-walletcard.

And for non-medical questions (housing, equipment, funding, and more) or if you are unsure whether or not you should contact SCI Nav, SCI BC's InfoLine is here for you! If we don't know the answer, our goal is to find out and respond within one working day. Contact the SCI BC InfoLine Monday to Friday from 9 am–5 pm by calling 1-800-689-2477 (toll-free), texting 778-247-2477, or emailing info@sci-bc.ca.

SCI Nav: Healthcare Providers

Rural and remote healthcare providers can connect with the SCI Nav team through the Real-Time Virtual Support (RTVS) Quick Reply SCI Nav pathway. Connect with the nurse navigator by adding RTVS SCI Nav as a Zoom contact (scinav@rtvs-bc.ca). You can message them in Zoom for an appointment.

For more information on RTVS, please visit: rccbc.ca/sci-nav.

SCI Nav is also building a provincial database of clinicians with experience working with individuals with SCI, including physicians, nurses, OTs, PTs, and other allied health professionals. This will allow the team to more easily connect patients and providers with knowledge professionals within their region when SCI-related questions or care needs arise. Add yourself or your team to the provincial database: sci-bc.ca/scinav-database.

Help Keep SCI Nav in Your Community

SCI Nav is currently funded as a three year pilot. What happens after that will depend on the evidence showing that the service is making a meaningful impact on the SCI community.

A steering committee is tracking the usage and impact of SCI Nav, drawing on advice and guidance from the Praxis Spinal Cord Institute about what data and user feedback is most interesting and important. The team is also sharing early results at research conferences and looking to the rehabilitation community for feedback.

This is where you can help, too. If you use SCI Nav, take a few minutes to complete the post encounter survey. You can share the service with all of your care providers and also with your local elected officials to strengthen awareness of the service. Combined with the usage data, feedback from users will help guide the program in future.

Charting the Future of SCI Care

SCI Nav marks an important step toward a more connected, province-wide approach to SCI care—one that helps peers and providers find the right path, faster.

"Having this service that focuses solely on SCI province-wide is incredible. We hope SCI Nav will help increase capacity in expertise and access, particularly for rural and smaller centres, and improve coordination between acute, rehabilitation, and community care," Hendry says. "Overall, SCI Nav is demonstrating that a coordinated, responsive, interdisciplinary navigation team can meaningfully strengthen SCI care across the province and therefore, hopefully improve confidence for providers and outcomes for patients."

Since 1957, SCI BC has seen many shifts in how care is delivered across the province. But services like SCI Nav are helping connect the dots, especially for peers in rural communities. Here at *The Spin*, we'll keep you updated on the future of SCI Nav and advancements in SCI care. ■

The Art of Resilience

Five SCI BC peers reflect on their creative journeys and the meaningful role art plays in their lives.

While art may be in the eye of the beholder, it is undeniably woven into the lives of these five talented SCI BC peers. Working across a range of mediums—including painting, woodburning, drawing, ceramics, and sculpture—each artist brings creativity not only to their work, but also to the unique ways in which they approach and adapt their craft. Read on to learn more about their journeys with creativity and SCI, and how making art has positively impacted their lives.

ROB SHAW

What type(s) of art do you create?

Over the years I have dabbled in many different art forms. I used to weave mitts and head scarves using a hand loom, I've made custom cards using pressed flowers, and I even made mosaics at one point using broken tile/glass. However, my main form of art that I now engage with is abstract painting using acrylics (although sometimes I use mixed mediums).

What themes or experiences most influence your artwork?

Art became a part of my life out of necessity post injury. I was never good at art growing up, but I was a recreational musician (acoustic guitar). Post injury, I was unable to play guitar anymore because of my hand function but I still needed a creative outlet, so I began trying different forms of "art" and landed on painting.

Has art always been part of your life?

I always was a creative person but not in the conventional artistic sort of way. I was more creative with music and with creating games or activities in nature (e.g., building wilderness forts, creating frisbee golf courses, etc). Post injury a lot of those creative outlets were no longer available to me and thus I needed to direct my creative energy elsewhere.

Shaw's art formerly displayed at The Innovation Centre in Kelowna

How did your artistic practice change after your SCI?

I am heavily influenced by both of my brothers (who are far better at art and painting than I am!). As a teenager, I used to watch them paint and I think I learned a lot of my techniques from watching them. Personally, I have always gravitated towards abstract, pop art, and surrealism as I appreciate the freedom you have as the creator to imagine colours, shapes, and forms in your own way. Those styles also help mask the fact that I am completely inept at drawing!

What challenges do you face as an artist with SCI, and how do you navigate them?

The main challenges I face as someone with an SCI who enjoys painting are the physical difficulties of holding paint brushes, manipulating large canvases, and keeping a steady hand (because of tremors and spasms). I am a sucker for large canvases but those are also the hardest to work on, given my physical limitations (e.g., reaching across a big canvas can be difficult).

Shaw's abstract painting, 36 × 12 inches

Thankfully, I've learned over the years how to navigate these challenges by using grip aids or sometimes even taping devices to my hands. As a quadriplegic I also move slower, so sometimes the paint can dry too quickly before I get a chance to get my other materials that I need. I've learned now how to use water and other paint mediums to prevent the paint from drying too quickly before I can blend and work with it.

Do you use any adaptive tools, materials, equipment, or techniques in your creative process?

Sometimes I use Active Hands to hold the paintbrush or other tools. Otherwise, I don't really use any specific adaptive equipment. I do incorporate a lot of random materials into my painting process though. Some of the materials are painting specific tools like palette knives and silicone wedges, while other things [like] feathers, buttons, and masking tape create texture.

What role does creating art play in your life?

Painting provides an outlet to explore my creativity while also acting as a non-screen time activity. I think the thing I love most about abstract painting is you never really know what the end result is going to be. I've had lots of paintings start out looking horrible, that then turned beautiful, and vice versa. The somewhat unpredictability of abstract painting is very appealing.

What advice would you give to other people with SCI who are interested in exploring art or creativity?

It probably sounds super cliche but just throw yourself into it and see what happens. There are so many resources available on YouTube and through SCI BC to help you get started in whatever creative outlet you want to explore. Keep trying different activities until you find one that sticks. It might take time (I didn't start painting until 10 years post-injury) but there is tremendous value and a lot of fun going through the process of trying different activities and learning how you can adapt to engage in them.

How can people learn more about your work or connect with you?

I don't know how much "learning" will occur but you can definitely stop by my Instagram @robshawart and say hello. If you see anything you like just let me know!

CHARLIE WAINMAN

What type(s) of art do you create?

Before my SCI, I made concrete garden sculptures. [After my] SCI I got into painting and eventually ended up using coloured pastels and charcoal to do portraits of people and pets.

What themes or experiences most influence your artwork?

I find inspiration from all over; a person, a circumstance, a picture. Inspiration can be found in anything.

Has art always been part of your life?

Yes, early on in school I found that I struggled with grades but I was always better than most kids in art class. After school, I worked hard labour jobs but eventually decided they were too tough with my arthritis and I needed to do something else. I used my knowledge in concrete to start making concrete garden sculptures. I had little recourse to do much else to earn money other than what I'm best at—and that's art. Plus, art is where my love and passion is.

How did your artistic practice change after your SCI?

I had to switch from making sculptures to painting, and eventually to portraits of people and pets because I no longer could mix, pour, and carry concrete.

What challenges do you face as an artist with SCI, and how do you navigate them?

The biggest challenge has been the nerve pain, leg spasms, and spasticity that I have daily from my SCI. It's very hard to focus through all that. Currently, I'm battling through a lot of nerve pain and that's impacted the time I've been able to dedicate to my art.

Do you use any adaptive tools, materials, equipment, or techniques in your creative process?

Because I paint and draw, I didn't have to do too much pivoting to continue making art!

What role does creating art play in your life?

Art gives me a sense of purpose and focus. Plus, it tends to pull people closer to me and as a sociable person I enjoy those moments of interaction. Doing portraits for people is very rewarding. To be able to give them an artistic, custom version of a special subject or loved one and then watch them have an emotional reaction from the portrait I created is very meaningful.

What advice would you give to other people with SCI who are interested in exploring art or creativity?

I would tell them to jump in with both feet and watch the time fly while they have fun. Also, to not worry so much about the results, just keep doing it. Practice makes perfect.

How can people learn more about your work or connect with you?

They can visit my Instagram @charleswainman or my website www.wainmanstudios.ca.

Left to Right: Wainman's paintings and portrait of a cat

Photo credit: Rita Taylor, Banff Centre 2025

EMILY DE BOER

What type(s) of art do you create?

I'm an interdisciplinary artist. I am currently working on a series of photographs, ceramics, and paintings but I also make collages, prints, and sculptures.

What themes or experiences most influence your artwork?

Play and worldbuilding are central to my artwork. Inaccessibility and barriers are so common in my day to day, that an active rejection of this is crucial to my work. I am constantly seeking spaces where care does not have to be begged for, where spaces have considered my body without question or hesitancy. In my ceramic practice I have begun appropriating the idea of barriers, making "Blocks" as a way of caring for an object that doesn't care for me… These objects that typically obstruct, are used to create a space instead … Barriers, whether physical or social, halt my ease but solidify my resolve… For a while I was making work that had nothing to do with my body or my injury but I never felt a catharsis or a strong connection to it. Now, in responding to the way I am treated, I can experience a sense of relief through the construction of my art and my own world.

Has art always been part of your life?

For as long as I can remember I have been creative. It has always been what gets me up in the morning. Whether it be writing, making something, even a meal or putting an outfit together, any sort of personal expression has always thrilled me. I try to surround myself with creativity at all times.

How did you first get started?

It's hard to say exactly when I got started. I remember in elementary school I would draw title pages for each subject duotang and I would get so excited to immerse myself in whatever world I was building for that subject. I also look back on how enamoured I was by Lego; my friend and I would build entire cities for our characters to play within. This onus on construction and limitless imagination is intrinsically linked to the work I am making now.

How did your artistic practice change after your SCI?

I was injured when I was 11, so I don't think I can say it changed after my injury, but I do think it motivated my practice. It gave me a subject to discuss [and] a perspective from which to look at the world… I am always grateful for my injury, without it I would not have the life I do today, nor the ideas that I get to play with in my practice… If I want to build something that seems impossible, I'll come up with a plan that allows me to create what I envision as independently as I can.

What challenges do you face as an artist with SCI, and how do you navigate them?

The inaccessibility of facilities, galleries, and residencies continue to limit my practice and growth as an artist. There are so many facilities that have not made accessibility accommodations [and] it's the simplicity of the solutions that makes it feel so cruel. A simple ramp or a few pieces of plywood is all that keeps me excluded from opportunities. I think people often overestimate what is needed, and so they forgo any modifications at all. [Disabled people] make artwork worthy of these spaces and yet something completely out of our control hinders us from advancing our skills, knowledge, and the public's understanding of disability.

Do you use any adaptive tools, materials, equipment, or techniques in your creative process?

I discover new ways of doing things to accomplish my vision, whether it be using hand tools instead of machines for woodworking, lower tables that my knees can get underneath, or alternative installation techniques that allow for more independence. It's all about making it work. Disabled people have learned to accomplish our goals by whatever means available to us [and] this creative thinking translates into my practice.

What role does creating art play in your life?

My whole life revolves around creativity. I rely on it to process my body's exclusion, to create an alternative place for uninhibited exploration, and to articulate the hostility ableism perpetuates. Making art and demystifying representations of people with disabilities is what I want to do with my life. I love that I am constantly pursuing something, learning, processing discomfort, and proving that there's an alternative way of looking at the world—one that prioritizes access over exclusion. I love sharing my work with others. I love seeing other people's artwork and learning about how they see the world. I constantly surround myself with creativity, it is my sustenance.

What advice would you give to other people with SCI who are interested in exploring art or creativity?

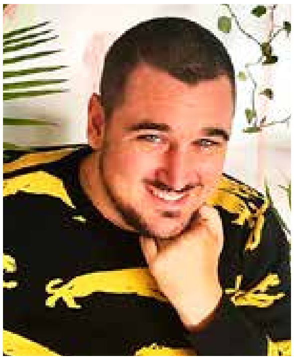
Have fun with it. Follow your impulses. Learn what interests you, and pursue it wholeheartedly. There are no rules worth paying attention to, especially since they've already counted

A selection of De Boer's art

us out. Your mistakes are your style. The only thing that is important is the expansion and exploration of your ideas, not what other people think. Don't let other people tell you what you are capable of, what you are able to do, you know yourself and your capabilities better than anyone else. Trust that and make what you like. If you're excited about it, that's the only thing that matters.

How can people learn more about your work or connect with you?

People can learn more about my work on my website www.emilydeboer.com or my Instagram @ladys_playground. I'd love to talk about art so please do reach out.



ROBIN HODGSON

What type(s) of art do you create?

I'm a painter first. I work with acrylic on canvas or wood panels… I make figurative paintings in a style that's naive and expressive. My paintings are constructed in layers, I'll paint several different images at a time, then erase and paint over the parts I don't like, while keeping the ones I find successful.

I also enjoy printmaking and sculpture, sometimes I'll create a sculpture to accompany a body of painted works. When exhibiting my work I like the look of a 3D object placed with a group of paintings… and I feel like the placement of a 3D object has the ability to converse with the paintings in a room. At least that's my goal when combining the two.

What themes or experiences most influence your artwork?

My work explores the physical, emotional, and psychological nature of post-able-body life. Certain signs and motives [in] my art practice explore the ways in which men with disabilities use masculinity to interface with society. For instance, the image of a race helmet often shows up in my work. I use this symbol as an abstract representation of myself. I see it as a tongue and cheek reference to the motor vehicle accident I was in that caused my SCI.

Has art always been part of your life?

I've always been creative, but I didn't start painting until I was around 14. I was really into skateboarding… [and] it was through skateboarding that I fell in love with art. I really liked the art of pro skater Ed Templeton, and his graphics on Toy Machine skateboards. Growing up in Kamloops with train tracks running through my backyard also exposed me to graffiti from all over North America. Freight trains would pass by my house nearly every hour, providing a rolling gallery for me to watch through my bedroom window [and] this left an impression on me from an early age. My mom also worked at a museum and volunteered at the local theater company, so I was fortunate to have the support to pursue an education in the arts.

Sailing Pretty Close To The Wind, 2021, 60 × 60 inches, acrylic, latex, spray paint; purchased by the Kamloops Art Gallery

How did your artistic practice change after your SCI?

Prior to my SCI I was in trade school, and had just finished my second year in the residential carpentry program. At 19 years old I obtained a complete break between my C5/C6 vertebraes as the result of a motor vehicle accident. After my SCI I lost the ability to do many of the activities I loved [like] skateboarding, BMX dirt jumping, and snowboarding… but drawing and painting were things that I could still do. Art helped strengthen my dexterity and proved to be a meditative outlet that allowed me to forget about the new challenges I faced for a while. After moving back home from G.F. Strong I went back to school to study fine art and, in this sense, my disability has always been a part of my art practice. After my SCI I started to take an invested interest in art and pursue it as a viable career, [whereas before] it was more of a self taught hobby.

What challenges do you face as an artist with SCI, and how do you navigate them?

While working on large scale canvases or sculptures I depend on the support of my studio assistants. Similar to working with care aides, learning how to communicate clearly and efficiently is key. When I'm painting on a large canvas, I sketch out the main images first, then my assistants help scale them up by digitally projecting them onto the surface and tracing them in charcoal.This allows me to work on sections that would otherwise be out of my reach, by spinning the canvas upside down or on its side.

Do you use any adaptive tools, materials, equipment, or techniques in your creative process?

I made my first adaptive tool back when I was still in G.F. Strong… I adapted a hand splint by adding velcro hooks to the underside of it [and] velcro loops to my markers and brushes so they could adhere together. Prior to my SCI, I did a lot of graffiti and mural art [using] spray paint but after my injury I didn't have the hand function necessary to press and hold down the cap on a spray can… I developed a second adaptive device that uses a bicycle brake to press down the paint cap [and] attach it to a pole that extends my reach.

[My] most recent adaptation was developed in response to a shoulder injury that took several weeks to heal and is called the Wheelchair Painting Device (WPD). The WPD attaches to the base of my power chair and has a wand that projects out in front of my foot plate. A paint brush is attached at the end of the wand and I use a joystick (fitted with limit switches and an electric motor) to raise the wand and paint brush up and down. This allows me to dip the brush into paint, then raise it up, and drive into position over a canvas that's laid flat on the studio floor. Once in position, I paint my images by driving on top of the canvas in the desired direction.

Hodgson's adaptive art equipment:
Top: Spray gun with bicycle brake
Bottom: Wheelchair Painting Device

What role does creating art play in your life?

Currently, I'm finishing an MFA degree at UBC Okanagan. I feel blessed to be able to turn something that I'm passionate about into a career. Despite the challenges that come with disabilities, had it not been for my SCI, I wouldn't have a career doing what I love!

What advice would you give to other people with SCI who are interested in exploring art or creativity?

Everyone has the capacity to creatively express themselves and the world around them through art. Don't worry about the outcome, just try to enjoy the process and have fun with it. Some of my favorite work is that of children, because they don't have any preconceived notions of what something should look like, and they haven't placed restraints on themselves.

How can people learn more about your work or connect with you?

People can visit my website www.robinhodgson.ca or email me at contact@robinhodgson.ca. You can also find me on instagram @reallyreallyrobin.

* * *

MUJTABAA SALOOJEE

What type(s) of art do you create?

My love for art started when I was a kid. I couldn't sit still, so I would either run around causing chaos or I would draw, mostly in pencil. There's something about the impermanence of using a pencil that I love… [it is] typically my go-to medium for starting any art project.

I resisted going digital for many years, even after my injury. But eventually, the convenience of changing the brush, colour, and texture at the click of a button was too tempting. Once I gave in, there was no going back… This opened up a whole new world of how my art could be produced. It wasn't confined to just the screen. I could print whatever I created onto anything I wanted, from t-shirts to skateboards.

What themes or experiences most influence your artwork?

Growing up, I loved skateboarding and the culture that surrounded it, which included graffiti and highly stylized characters. But now my work has ongoing themes of understanding my own situation. You'll see self-expression in a lot of my recent work, especially pieces related to the human body… Using my art to educate and instigate positive change in the world has been far more rewarding than I could have ever anticipated. My most recent focus has been advocacy for people with disabilities and designing more inclusive and accessible tools.

Has art always been part of your life?

Absolutely. Being a hyperactive kid, art was one of those things that held my attention for my entire life. It wasn't necessarily

Close-up shot of Saloojee's art on a skateboard

Digital illustration of a Dragon Ball character

the thing I was best at, but [I loved it]. I had to be careful not to decorate everything, including public walls, neighbours' houses, and even my own skin. Art school in South Africa [where I previously lived] was an obvious path for me. By the time I moved to Canada and broke my neck from a falling tree in 2012, I had accumulated a wide variety of artistic skills; poetry, painting, and even balloon sculpting!

How did your artistic practice change after your SCI?

Initially, I was devastated by the loss of function in my hands [and] I gave up on art for a time. I had a pretty positive attitude toward my injury overall, but it was too frustrating when my intended movements didn't match the outcome my body would allow. It was my family's relentless nagging, encouragement, and gifts that pushed me to get back into making art.

What challenges do you face as an artist with SCI, and how do you navigate them?

I have a complete C4 [SCI]. I lost the function of my hands completely, but I was able to use a wrist extension to grab things like a pen or a brush, even though I had lost all [of my] fine motor function. Because of the nature of my injury, my hands spasm a lot. Sometimes my spasms would even cause me to smash my face into the painting I was working on. I learned to lean into the spasms [and] use the mistakes to add a more dynamic form to my work. I went back to art school and created some of my best work, relying heavily on my passion, my drive, and my adaptability… Even when a new neurological challenge caused me to lose more function in 2018 and I was barely able to hold a pen, I was able to adapt to my situation and learn how to draw for the third time… Through adversity, I grow and learn far more than I otherwise would.

Do you use any adaptive tools, materials, equipment, or techniques in your creative process?

Most of the adaptive tools I use help me with physical [supplies]… such as opening and closing paint containers, washing brushes, or setting up my environment. I've also created my own adaptive tricks here and there, like a wrist strap that holds my paint, or pen holders that make objects easier to grip. One of my favourite things are Sharpie markers that click so I can open and close them independently. [When I create] digital art, I have a lot more freedom and rely less on assistive adaptations and basically do whatever I want within the software.

I'm also currently working on a very exciting project involving transcutaneous spinal cord stimulation, which allows me to create movement in my legs. The idea is to use movements that I don't typically have in my legs to create brush strokes. This is not only a different way of making art, but something deeply symbolic for me.

What role does creating art play in your life?

Art is my escape. It's very easy for me to enter a flow state when I'm drawing, and that's my truest form of peace. I can lose myself completely in that state, and it's where I solve problems, come up with ideas, rid myself of stress, and feel truly free to express whatever is inside me.

It's also given me the opportunity to advocate for positive change, break down barriers, [and] educate people. I'm currently working on a project called the PleasureABLE 2.0 which is a resource for people with SCI to help them navigate life as a sexual person. It includes illustrations by me.

What advice would you give to other people with SCI who are interested in exploring art or creativity?

Art is the most accessible thing in the world. It can be whatever you decide it to be… It can be symbolic, significant, or completely meaningless. You can use your hands, your feet, your eyes, your tongue, your voice, or even just your presence. Whether your mind is full or completely empty, there is still something you can create. The limitlessness of art is unmatched. So go make something! NOW! GO!

How can people learn more about your work or connect with you?

People can connect through Instagram @muj.saloojee or by email at mujaccessible@gmail.com.

TAYLOR PARKER

What type(s) of art do you create?

I mostly woodburn, sketch, and sometimes paint.

What themes or experiences most influence your artwork?

The outdoors, animals, or whatever I'm feeling in the moment.

How did your artistic practice change after your SCI?

After [my SCI], I changed my focus from painting and tattooing to wood-burning.

What challenges do you face as an artist with SCI, and how do you navigate them?

It's challenging to feel motivated since it's a lot more difficult than it used to be, but [art] gives me so much joy, and the more I [create], the more I see how much I've improved, and that gives me motivation.

Do you use any adaptive tools, materials, equipment, or techniques in your creative process?

I use a generic cuff [also known as a universal cuff].

What role does creating art play in your life?

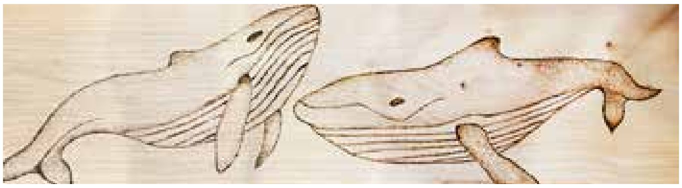
[Art] has a huge role in my life. It gives me a sense of normalcy and it's one of the only hobbies I can still do from pre-injury.

What advice would you give to other people with SCI who are interested in exploring art or creativity?

My one piece of advice would probably be to just keep trying, because it gets a lot easier. You just have to figure out what works for you.

How can people learn more about your work or connect with you?

People can connect through Instagram on my art account @crippledcanvas. ■



Parker's art on wood

Built in BC

From community-built devices to robotic mobility tech, BC-based innovation is reshaping access and independence for people with SCI.

At *The Spin*, we know assistive technology can be both essential and frustrating. Over the years, we've covered everything from smart home tools and adaptive recreation equipment to the latest in wheelchair design—all with the goal of sharing ideas and innovations that might make life with SCI a little easier, safer, or more accessible. And if you follow the world of SCI research and assistive technology like we do, you'll notice BC's fingerprints are on a lot of it.

BC is home to internationally recognized SCI research centres like ICORD and the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre, alongside a growing network of engineers, clinicians, startups, and community organizations focused on assistive technology and accessibility. For example, researchers like Dr. Jaimie Borisoff at the BC Institute of Technology are exploring how robotics and advanced mobility systems could reshape wheelchair access in the future. A Vancouver-based robotics company developed the XoMotion Exoskeleton, a self-balancing rehabilitation device now approved for clinical use in Canada. And community-led programs like Neil Squire Society's Makers Making Change program have distributed thousands of low-cost assistive devices through volunteer maker networks.

From high-tech rehabilitation equipment to grassroots community solutions, innovation in BC isn't confined to research labs—it's increasingly showing up in clinics, communities, and everyday life for people living with SCI.

To highlight some of the work happening close to home, this feature profiles three BC-based assistive technology initiatives. Some are already supporting people in their homes and communities, while others are still being engineered and tested. Together, they show how people with SCI are helping drive a new generation of technologies designed around real-world access, mobility, and independence.

Built by the Community: Makers Making Change

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of Neil Squire Society's Makers Making Change (MMC) program, a BC-headquartered initiative that has helped deliver more than 30,000 assistive devices to people with disabilities around the world. What began as an effort to build an affordable, open-source sip-and-puff device has grown into a national network of volunteers, makers, educators, clinicians, and community members working together to address one of the biggest barriers in assistive technology: cost.

"For many Canadians with disabilities, cost is the main barrier to assistive technology," says Shanelle Gilman, Community Manager for Makers Making Change. "Even simple commercial switches can cost hundreds of dollars, and many people need multiple devices further amplifying the cost."

Neil Squire's MMC program connects people who need assistive devices with volunteer makers who can build them at a fraction of the commercial cost. Its online library now includes more than 200 open-source designs, ranging from adaptive gaming devices and communication tools to switches, adapted toys, and aids for daily living.

The roots of the program went back much further than its official launch. The organization itself was inspired by Neil Squire, a University of Victoria student who became tetraplegic after a car accident in 1980. During rehabilitation at G.F. Strong, engineer Bill Cameron developed a sip-and-puff communication device that allowed Squire to communicate using Morse code.

Decades later, that same spirit of community problem-solving helped shape MMC. In 2016, the organization received funding from Google.org to develop the LipSync, an open-source sip-and-puff joystick that could be built by volunteer makers instead of manufactured commercially at a much higher cost. "It soon became apparent that this model could apply beyond the LipSync," Gilman explains, "and our Makers Making Change program was formed to ensure access to affordable assistive technology."

Today, much of that work happens outside traditional research and clinical settings—in schools, community centres, libraries, and volunteer build events across the country. Programs like STEM With Purpose and Clubs That Care engage youth in building assistive devices while learning hands-on STEM skills.

MMC's annual "Hacking for the Holidays" campaign has become one of its most visible examples of community-driven innovation. During the 2025 campaign alone, more than 7,000 volunteers built over 4,200 adapted toys and switches across 256 events. In BC, devices were distributed through organizations including BC Centre for Ability, G.F. Strong, and the Cerebral Palsy Association of BC.

For many families, the impact is immediate and deeply personal. "This toy

Volunteers making assistive devices

Neil Squire

LipSync

isn't about limits—it's about access," shared Jennifer, the mother of a child who received an adapted toy through the program. "Access to play. Access to joy. Access to childhood. And watching [my child] be a kid is everything."

Gilman says that community participation remains central to MMC's future. "We're seeing an increase of open-source assistive technology made by community contributors," she said, including devices for adaptive gaming, recreation, and daily life. "MMC is always looking to expand the device library and continue to engage volunteer makers while making an impact."

Engineering Access: The MAKE+ Team

At the BC Institute for Technology, the Director of the MAKE+ Lab, Dr. Jaimie Borisoff, is used to thinking beyond the limits of conventional wheelchair design. His current Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI)-funded research is geared toward making wheelchairs designed for snow, trails, curbs, and other challenging environments. But some of the most experimental work happening in his lab right now looks less like a wheelchair—and more like a robot dog.

The research is still early-stage and firmly "in the lab," but Borisoff, an SCI peer himself, sees significant potential in emerging robotics platforms like the Unitree Go2-W, a four-legged robot equipped with wheels that can navigate terrain in ways traditional mobility devices cannot.

"These things are amazingly capable, which is why we find them so interesting," Borisoff says. "One of the things we're exploring is: can these things be assistive devices for people with mobility impairments?"

From Borisoff's perspective, the possibilities are endless. His team has already begun experimenting with adding robotic arms to the devices to explore how they might support

Borisoff and his team at MAKE+ Lab work on building a robot dog to help people with mobility impairments

everyday tasks, like opening doors or fetching items out of the fridge. "The devices could operate kind of like a service animal—but perhaps a lot different too, in terms of having that arm and manipulator that can grab things," he explains.

The project builds on broader CFI-funded work led by Borisoff and Dr. Jacquie Ripat at the University of Manitoba focused on improving wheelchair mobility in environments that remain difficult or inaccessible for many users. "We're interested in wheelchair capabilities—improving them, increasing them, and thinking about areas like outdoor terrains, trails, beaches, nature, and the built environment too, like staircases and curbs," says Borisoff.

The robotics work pushes those ideas even further. Borisoff and his team are now exploring whether larger robotic platforms could eventually become mobility devices themselves. "If you scale it up in the right way, it could be a platform for a wheelchair itself," he explains.

For now, that vision remains speculative. Current robots are too small to carry a person safely, and significant engineering, programming, and regulatory hurdles remain. Borisoff is careful not to overstate how close the technology is to becoming commercially available.

"We can program them, but can we make them safe enough to become a market-ready product?" he said. "That'll be a long path."

Still, he believes robotics could eventually transform assistive technology in much the same way smartphones transformed computing: by becoming flexible, affordable platforms that others can build on. "These robots in the future could be platforms as well—for tasks or activities," he said. "We hope that they become cheap and plentiful and available."

Reinventing Rehabilitation: The XoMotion Exoskeleton

For people living with SCI, exoskeleton technology has long been associated more with future possibilities than everyday rehabilitation. But BC-developed systems like the XoMotion Exoskeleton are beginning to change that reality.

Vancouver fashion designer and SCI peer Chloe Angus has become one of the public faces of XoMotion, a wearable rehabilitation device designed for people living with SCI and other neurological conditions. Angus has spoken publicly about how a sudden bleed in a benign tumour in her spinal cord left her paralyzed from the waist down, and how she never expected walk again—until she tried the XoMotion Exoskeleton.

"The first time I walked with the exoskeleton was a jaw-dropping experience," Angus said in a 2023 interview with Simon Fraser University. "After all these years, the exoskeleton let me stand up and walk on my own without falling. I felt like myself again."

Today, Angus works as Director of Lived Experience with Human in Motion Robotics, the company behind the XoMotion. Co-founders Dr. Siamak Arzanpour and Dr. Edward Park, professors at Simon Fraser University, began developing the technology in 2014 after identifying limitations in existing rehabilitation robotics. While earlier exoskeletons required walkers, crutches, or therapist support, the XoMotion is self-balancing and hands-free. In other words, it's designed to move more like the human body itself.

The system uses onboard sensors and control systems to continuously monitor balance and movement, allowing users to sidestep, crouch, climb stairs, and shift directions more naturally than earlier devices. For people living with SCI, that design philosophy reflects a broader shift in rehabilitation technology: away from devices that simply support standing, and toward systems intended to create more dynamic, functional movement experiences.

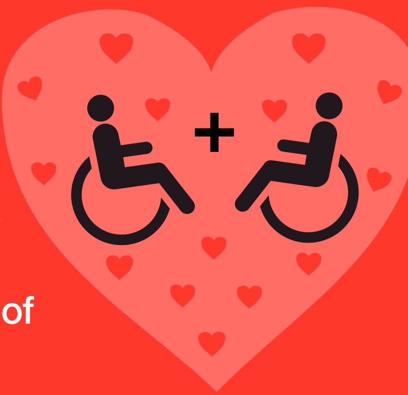
In 2024, XoMotion received regulatory approval for use in Canada, clearing the way for the system to be marketed and sold for rehabilitation settings. Still, the technology is far from mainstream. Exoskeletons remain expensive, highly specialized, and largely limited to rehabilitation centres and research settings. While companies like Human in Motion Robotics envision broader future use, access remains limited for most people with SCI.

For Angus, however, the technology represents something larger than engineering alone. “Ten years ago, I laid in a hospital bed wishing for something like XoMotion,” she said in a 2025 interview with *Design Engineering*. “To now see it not only developed, but being used by others—it’s everything I hoped for and more.”

Innovation Meets Everyday Life

From experimental robotics labs to volunteer maker networks, the projects featured here may look very different on the surface. But they all reflect the same idea: assistive technology works best when it’s designed around the real experiences of the people who use it. Some of these innovations are already changing daily life for people with SCI. Others may still be years away from widespread use. Either way, BC continues to prove that some of the most interesting work in assistive technology isn’t happening somewhere else—thanks to the innovative minds of our province’s SCI peers, it’s happening here, close to home. ■

Angus wearing the XoMotion Exoskeleton



Online Dating with a Disability

Swipe smart and stay safe with peer advice on the pros and cons of online dating for people with disabilities.

Online dating has changed the way we meet people, and for many people with disabilities, it has opened doors that might have once felt closed. Whether it's the ability to control how and when we disclose our disability, or simply the convenience of skipping inaccessible venues, online dating offers real benefits. But like anyone, people with disabilities also navigate rejection and misunderstanding in the dating world. Here's a closer look at the pros and cons of online dating:

PROS

1. Greater Accessibility

"I've never been to clubs," shares one person with SCI who began dating since university. "Part of that is our height difference. It's tough to converse with our height differences and it's hard getting around in crowds."

Online dating bypasses many of these barriers. You can connect with others from the comfort of your own home, with no need to find an accessible venue or coordinate transportation.

2. Broader Reach and New Opportunities

One peer says moving to a new city for school after injury meant starting from scratch. "I left all my old friends behind. I met a great peer group of people in school, adaptive sports, and work." Online dating can give you access to a whole new circle you wouldn't have met otherwise.

Popular dating apps like Hinge, Bumble and Tinder (the most downloaded dating apps in Canada), and niche sites like Glimmer or DisabilityMatch help expand our reach far beyond our usual circles. If you're part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, dating can come with extra challenges due to less visibility and smaller dating pools, especially in smaller towns. That's why apps like Her, Grindr, and Taimi, which are designed with these communities in mind, can be really useful.

3. Disclosing Disability on Your Own Terms

For many, one of the biggest perks is deciding when and how to bring up their disability. A peer says, "Online provides me a way to market myself without someone seeing my chair first. I get to that at the end of my profile and never leave that out. I'm up front with anything and everything. That said I also don't show obvious pictures either though, again trying to stop that immediate judgement from the chair."

On the other hand, peer Brad Skeats prefers to be upfront by also including an everyday photo of himself in a wheelchair and as an athlete in a sport chair because he has learned how beneficial it has been for others to know. This control over your narrative helps foster more genuine conversations and connection.

4. Increased Confidence and Comfort

Online interactions can alleviate the anxiety of in-person dating by allowing individuals to build connections gradually. This is particularly beneficial for those who may struggle with social anxiety or self-esteem concerns related to their disability.

At the same time, it's valuable to reflect on what you bring to a relationship as you rebuild your identity. Confidence and a positive approach can help others see and appreciate the real you.

5. Communication at Your Own Pace

Online dating lets you take time. One peer shares, "I tend to like to chat a while and get to know someone, and then meet. Give them the opportunity to ask questions and have me ask what their knowledge of my situation might be."

It's a safer, lower-pressure way to gauge interest and compatibility—especially helpful for those who experience fatigue, speech differences, or social anxiety.

6. Real Relationships Happen

People with disabilities can find meaningful relationships online. For example, Johanna Johnson, who has an SCI, met her partner Greg through an online dating platform. Despite initial reservations and past negative experiences, Johnson found a genuine connection that led to a fulfilling relationship. Another peer says, "I've been in three long relationships, five to 10 years long, that started from an online meeting."

CONS

1. Potential for Discrimination or Bias

Unfortunately, ableism exists in online dating. Some people may be unwilling to date someone with a disability, while others may fetishize disability, seeing it as a curiosity rather than embracing the individual as a whole person.

2. Misrepresentation, Catfishing, and Pretender 'Trolls'

Fake profiles aren't just annoying, they can be dangerous. Some people pretend to have disabilities to gain trust or access to private information and images. This practice is known as 'pretender trolling.' Trust your gut. If it feels weird, it probably is.

3. Inaccessible Platforms

Many dating apps or platforms aren't designed with accessibility in mind. From hard-to-read fonts to lack of screen reader compatibility, navigating apps can be a challenge. It's an area where the tech world still has catching up to do.

STAYING SAFE WHILE ONLINE DATING

1. Choose a Reputable Dating Platform

Look for platforms with good security measures, such as profile verification, reporting features, and strong privacy settings. Disability-inclusive dating sites may offer a more understanding environment. Also, paid platforms may draw more serious people.

2. Be Cautious with Personal Information

Avoid sharing too many personal details (such as your home address, financial details, or medical history) until you have built trust with the person you're communicating with.

3. Watch for Red Flags

If someone asks for money, refuses to video chat, or tries to rush the relationship, these could be signs of a scam. Be wary of individuals who pressure you into sharing personal photos or medical information under the guise of 'seeking advice' (a tactic used by disability trolls). Take note of the profile photos. If they seem too professional, do a reverse image Google search to check. Find their social media profiles to verify what they say about themselves is consistent.

4. Arrange First Meetings in Public Places

If you decide to meet in person, choose a public location and let a trusted friend or family member know where you're going. Have a backup plan to enhance safety, such as a friend making a pretend call to you so that it can be an excuse to leave for a family emergency.

5. Use Video Calls Before Meeting in Person

Video calls help confirm the person's identity and allow you to gauge their personality before meeting face-to-face. This can be a helpful step in assessing whether they are genuine.

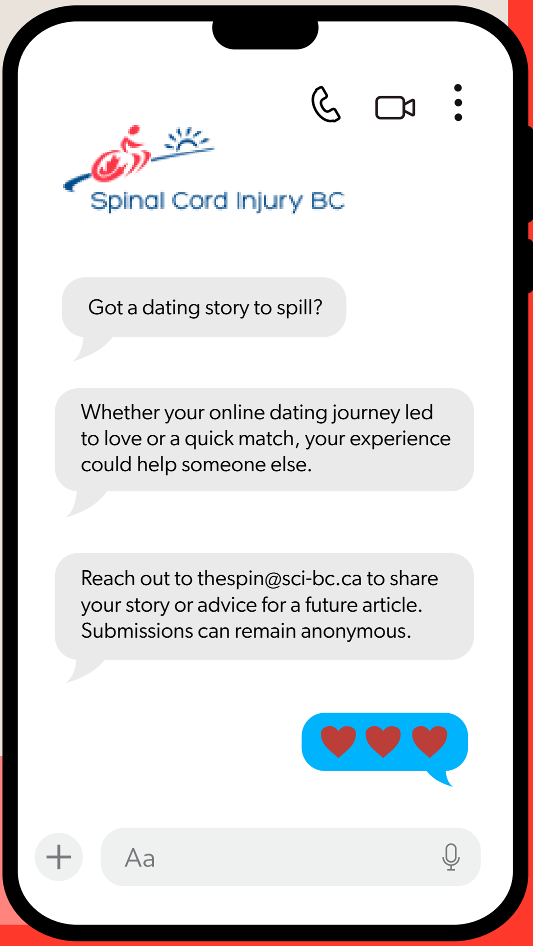
6. Advocate for Your Own Needs

Don't be afraid to communicate your accessibility needs. If someone is unwilling to meet your needs, it's a sign they may not be the right match.

7. Don't Just Settle But Also Allow for Adjustments

Make sure whoever you are with is worthy of you while giving them a chance to learn about your disability and for a spark to grow. For Johnson, "The spark came eventually and gets brighter every day... After we had been dating for a couple of years, we started to talk about marriage. I was scared (of course). Was I worthy? I had all those insecurities that are often attached to a disability. The one thing I didn't doubt was Greg's devotion."

Online dating can feel like a minefield, but also like a window into possibility. Your experience is valid, and your story matters. Whether you're looking for love, companionship, or just a conversation, online dating is what you make of it. And with the right tools and mindset, it can work!



Spinal Cord Injury BC

Got a dating story to spill?

Whether your online dating journey led to love or a quick match, your experience could help someone else.

Reach out to thespin@sci-bc.ca to share your story or advice for a future article. Submissions can remain anonymous.

❤❤❤

The Road to Milano Cortina

Debuting Paralympic athlete Leo Sammarelli and five-time Paralympian and medalist Ina Forrest share how different paths led them to the same Paralympic dream.

Fifty-five nations, 612 athletes, 79 events, six sports, four years of hard work, and one chance to be the best. For athletes who competed at the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games, these numbers represent the daunting, high-pressure reality of the moment. What they don't fully capture, however, is the 5 am wake up calls for practice in the dead of winter, weekends spent away from home, the complicated balancing act of managing responsibilities, and the grueling impact on the body in pursuit of being exceptional.

SCI BC peers Ina Forrest and Leo Sammarelli know first-hand the countless unseen moments of sacrifice and dedication that it takes to compete on the world stage. Forrest, a five-time medalist in wheelchair curling began her Paralympic pursuit in 2004, while Sammarelli, a first-time Paralympic athlete in cross country skiing, started his Para sport career in 2017. Despite the vast differences in their Paralympic journeys, Forrest and Sammarelli's unwavering commitment and joy for sport remains the same.

"Sports have always been a part of my life from a very young age," Forrest says. Growing up in Fort St. John, she played volleyball and built her community through sports. "I always thought of myself as an athlete and figured I would always be doing something athletic for the rest of my life." At 21, she was struck by an impaired driver while travelling to a volleyball tournament and sustained a T12 SCI. "After my accident, I couldn't separate what I used to do from what I could do now and it took a long time for that to change."

She stopped playing sports entirely and went on to graduate from university, get married, and start a family. It wasn't until she moved to Spallumcheen, BC a rural township near Vernon, BC in 1998 that the possibility of being involved in sports entered her life again. "I was in Costco and this man came up to me and asked if I'd be interested in trying curling… Besides two experiences at a local bonspiel when I was a kid, I didn't know anything about curling. It had never crossed my mind."

Curious, Forrest probed for more information and learned that the man, Eric Eales, was an avid curler in the Okanagan who was trying to expand the relatively new sport of wheelchair curling in BC. As circumstances would have it, there was a curling Try-It day in Vernon shortly after their serendipitous meeting, and the stars aligned for Forrest to attend. "My son, the youngest of my three children, was just going into kindergarten and it felt like the right time. I was in a place in my life where I had some free time

Top: Forrest celebrating a gold medal win at the Paralympics with her sons
Bottom: Forrest at a wheelchair curling match

again and I had finally come around to the understanding that [sport] might be a little different now, but… feeling strong, capable, and being with people who share the same interests; that's a very important thing."

Forrest advanced quickly. She learned the sport under the guidance of Sharon Morrison (a lifelong curler who still coaches and plays with Forrest today) and went to Team BC tryouts just weeks after first rolling onto the pebbled ice sheets that would soon become her second home. Forrest made the Provincial team, then the National team, and was soon competing at a very high level on the Canadian four-person mixed team. "At the time, wheelchair curling was pretty new to Canada so you had the perfect mix of people who were really excited and interested in getting better, really good coaching, and a team to play on instantly. Everything kind of just fell into place," she says.

Of course, there were setbacks. As a mother of three young children, a business owner with her husband, and a new Para athlete, the learning curve was steep—both in terms of the sport and personal experiences. "I hadn't done anything remotely like this since having kids. It was a lot of time management and I was nervous about adjusting… when you're a mom and you have to go away for a tournament and your little guy is crying at the door because you're leaving, you start to feel bad about taking time for yourself. It was really hard," Forrest recalls. On top of these concerns were the ongoing challenges of travelling with a disability, inaccessible curling rinks, outdated facilities, a busy training schedule, and an ever-evolving strategic game to adapt to. "All the coaches that came into wheelchair curling came to the sport with an able-bodied strategy of how to curl. But because our game doesn't have sweeping, because we're in chairs and we don't always throw big weights… their strategy need[ed] to change to suit our abilities. [At the same time], our abilities are getting better and the more we play, the more we can read the ice and there's more shots available to us. The skill level worldwide is so much higher, and growing all the time. You have to make sure you keep up and that can be tough."

Still, the happiness and friendship cultivated from curling motivated Forrest to keep coming back to the rink. Her hard work culminated in her first Paralympic appearance in 2010 in Vancouver. "I was so excited. My home country, my home province. I didn't have any idea what to expect and I was really apprehensive about how I'd react," she remembers. "We normally don't have large crowds for our games and I was worried about stage fright. What if I get out there and can't curl?" As it turns out, Forrest's training and her team's preparedness led them to a gold-winning performance in front of family and friends, and set the trajectory for a string of successful reappearances at the Sochi 2014 Games, where the four-person mixed wheelchair curling team captured gold again, and PyeongChang 2018 and Beijing 2022 where the team secured bronze.

As Forrest fulfilled her Paralympic dream, another one was just beginning. "Basically right out of rehab at G.F. Strong, I wanted to get back into sports," Leo Sammarelli recounts. Growing up in Vancouver, Sammarelli was always active and pursued boxing from an early age, reaching national competition levels and training in Italy, where his father grew up. In 2017, he was a victim of gun violence that resulted in a T8 SCI and the direction of his athletic career—and his life—changed in a profound way. "My injuries were very extensive and I needed a lot of time to rebuild my body [but] training has always been a part of life so for me, it was about finding different ways to move and using sport as a tool for rehab."


Sammarelli climbing the Grouse Grind in Vancouver using only his hands

Sammarelli's background in high-performance athletics naturally led to an interest in Para sport, and during the first year of his SCI recovery, he attended the Canadian Paralympic Committee's Paralympian Search event at the Richmond Olympic Oval. The event was an open call for aspiring athletes to participate in a series of physical, agility, and strength-based tests with the prospect of being recruited by coaches for the Paralympics. "That's where I met my coach and was first introduced into the Nordic Racers Club in North Vancouver," Sammarelli says. "I had never skied before. Ever. The first time I went up I was very humbled... It's not like a lot of sports where you can just grab a ball or paddle and play around. It requires a massive aerobic base to even get started."

Determined to improve, he threw himself into the sport and went from not being able to finish a sprint distance to competing and medaling in the Canada Games. His training schedule increased to up to 20 hours of conditioning per week and two practices a day. Vancouver's mild winters limited access to reliable training conditions, so most mornings, Sammarelli packed his car and drove to the North Shore mountains or Whistler, where good snow conditions were still never guar-

Left: Sammarelli crossing the finish line at the Vancouver Marathon; Right: SCI BC's online adaptive boxing class, led by Sammarelli

anteed. “Can you imagine [skiing] 20 kilometres and everything’s changing? The whole course is melting right under your skis as you go,” he laments. “Every race is a test within yourself, but it’s also a test within Mother Nature. It could be negative 30 outside one day and plus two the next. You’re dealing with the weather and your equipment and every course is different. You need to wax your skis for the conditions and rely on your pit crew and coaches. It’s a lot about the details. There’s no short cuts.”

For Sammarelli, this all or nothing approach is a strategy he also applied off the mountain. While pursuing skiing excellence, he returned to boxing and learned how to adapt his previous expertise to his SCI. He began teaching other people with SCI in his community and established weekly online adaptive boxing classes hosted by SCI BC. With a new, unique perspective on the sport, he helped create the first wheelchair adaptive boxing council in BC and now serves as a Director of Diversity and Inclusion for Boxing BC. He also currently coaches at the Rain City Boxing Club and Westcoast Wheelchair Adaptive Boxing in Vancouver.

“I’m the type of guy where I set goals and I make them happen. They’re not always realistic but that’s what I love about it,” he says. Beyond spearheading adaptive boxing, Sammarelli also became the first person to complete the Vancouver Marathon in a wheelchair, handcycled the Gran Fondo, and climbed the Grouse Grind on his hands. “Seeing how far I can go with the limitations of being in a wheelchair. I want to reach my full potential in this body and this new life. I like to push myself.”

Sammarelli at the Paralympic Games in Italy

In the 2025-26 season, Sammarelli set his sights on the Paralympics and entered the first eight races on the Para cross country skiing World Cup circuit to build his competitive ranking. Para nordic skiers compete in one of two classes: standing or sit-skiing, with a range of classifications (LW 2 to LW 12) within the two groups based on the athlete’s activity limitation and physical impairment.

Sammarelli is in the sit-skiing class with a classification of LW 10, which recognizes his SCI. “I’m racing against other people who have a lot more ability in terms of how they can move, how they can balance, and how they can maneuver the course on skis,” he explains. Moreover, many of his World Cup competitors lived in places where winter was at their doorsteps and training was easily accessible. As he got closer to making his Paralympic dream a reality, Sammarelli had to contend with imposter syndrome. “I was the underdog,” he says. “There were a lot of ups and downs and thinking to myself, ‘Should I continue or not? Am I capable of competing and being faster than some of these guys?’” At the 2025 World Cup in Canmore, Alberta Sammarelli quieted these thoughts with a performance that would earn him the last spot on the Canadian men’s Para Nordic skiing team and solidify his appearance at the upcoming Paralympics.

In March 2026, Forrest and Sammarelli both arrived in Italy to compete in the Milano Cortina Winter Paralympics. Forrest chasing gold in mixed wheelchair curling and Sammarelli racing in sit-ski cross-country events. “It was almost like you had the same excitement for your first Games all over again,” says Forrest, whose most recent Paralympic appearance prior to Milano Cortina was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Beijing. “I was so happy to have family and friends there again and it makes you realize how much they are part of the experience. At [my first] Paralympics in 2010 my kids were early teens or preteens and now they’re adults… it was really special having them [in Italy].” Supported by her family and friends, Forrest and her team went on to make history by completing an undefeated tournament run and winning gold. “You work so hard for four years and it’s pretty amazing to even have a chance at achieving something like this.”

Sammarelli’s experience in Milano Cortina also carried the weight of a full circle moment, despite it being his first time at the Games. “I’m Italian and I started my boxing career here. I can speak the language and I lived here so, in a way, it was like coming home. Everything felt like it lined up in some kind of destiny so that I was able to make it to the Games in Italy,” he says. While there, Sammarelli learned that his former boxing coach, who he trained with in Italy, had passed away. The emotion felt from his coach’s passing, coupled with the overwhelming atmosphere and expectations made for a very emotional experience. “We focus so much on our goal and arriving there… you put all your eggs in one basket that you’ve worked so hard for, but the journey there is just as special,” he says. “Being able to travel, meeting people, hearing their stories and learning about their experiences… I’m on a team with multiple-time Paralympians and it’s an honour and a blessing to be surrounded with such decorated people like that and take it all in.”

When asked about what comes next, Forrest and Sammarelli’s Paralympic paths diverge. Sammarelli is more determined than ever to make it to the podium. “Will you see me in sport? 100%. I would like to medal in something. There’s a lot of stuff that needs to be processed after years of basically dedicating all your time, all your effort, all your resources into this one thing, but a medal is in my future… I’m always going to be pushing the boundaries and sharing my story. I love opening people’s minds to things.”

In comparison, Forrest is contemplating what life might look like beyond sport. For now, she’s enjoying the summer and time spent with family on her property in the Okanagan while reflecting on all that curling has given her. “When you spend most of your time in the able-bodied world, you might have to say no to things or bow out of opportunities… but when you join Para sports, suddenly, it’s a totally different view of yourself. You’re with people who have the same abilities and the same experiences as you and it gives you a feeling of being competent because you’re with your peers. It’s about so much more than sports.” Whatever they decide to pursue next, one thing is for sure, Forrest and Sammarelli are bringing the same Paralympic drive to whatever comes next. ■

WE ARE
BESPOKE

NOUS SOMMES
SUR MESURE

WHEELCHAIRS

BATEC MOBILITY

PAWS

TRACK WHEEL

VARILITE CUSHIONS & BACK

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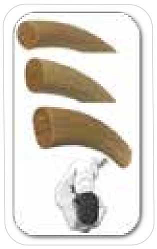

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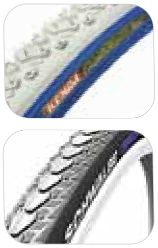

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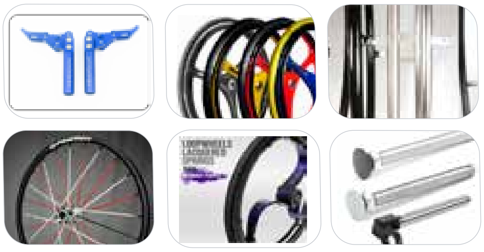

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ask INFOLINE

“I catch games at the pub with guys in my hockey pool each week, but the food’s getting expensive. Now one of the organizers wants to host at their new place with a huge TV, except there are 20 stairs and no way for me and my power chair to get in. I don’t want to lose this group or piss anyone off. What do I do here?”
—Cal in Chilliwack

For this question, we turned to Heather Lamb, MSW, RSW, SCI BC’s InfoLine Service Lead. InfoLine provides information and support by phone, text, or email on any topic related to living with physical disabilities in BC.

This issue comes up for a lot of SCI peers. First, it’s okay to acknowledge that it hurts when you feel excluded, whether your friends meant to exclude you or not. Recognizing the hurt but not dwelling on it is part of adapting after SCI. Second, it’s likely that your friends didn’t even consider you would be excluded by this. Your friends probably see you as the same person you’ve always been, so they don’t automatically think about your access needs. Consider the following:

1. Speak up early: We all want our friends to consider our needs at times like this, but it isn’t always automatic for them, especially if you’re new to the group or your injury is recent. This is where I suggest you speak up and let them know what you need. No one can ever understand your access needs better than you do, but with practice and time, true friends will learn what you need, and see it as just a part of being your friend.

Asking for what we need can be hard at the best of times. People want to be included without having to ask for it, and don’t want to be perceived as different or a burden. Learning to communicate what you need is something that most peers learn how to navigate with time and experience.

2. Consider if help could make it work: Offering help to carry you in is a common first suggestion by non-disabled people wanting to make it work for you but they don’t usually know what’s involved. Some power chair users might be comfortable being carried up the stairs once, but doing it regularly is something else entirely. Whether this will work for you depends on your body, your comfort, and safety not sitting in your chair in your friend’s home, your risk tolerance, and your friends’ ability to carry you. Please don’t ever feel pressured to choose what feels unsafe or uncomfortable. There is no right or wrong answer here, as long as it works for you. Being carried comes with risk of injury to both you and those carrying you, especially if it’s on a regular basis.

3. Share some alternatives: I suggest putting something in the group chat, not as a confrontation but as a reminder and to offer solutions. Focus on the barrier, not your friends’ motives. Try something like this:

“Congratulations on your new place, it sounds great! I just remembered it has stairs, so I can’t get in with my power chair. I don’t want to miss games with the guys. We could try (name of pubs/restaurants) that also show the games on a big screen and have deals on appetizers during the games. How about we rotate through them to see which one we like? This way you don’t have to clean up after us!”

Many people just don’t know what’s possible for you or consider beyond the place and time. While it can be a drag always being the person finding solutions, suggestions can help get the group unstuck and past any awkwardness.

4. Be firm! You may run into someone who isn’t interested in making it work for you. If that happens despite the steps mentioned here, you may have to accept that not everyone will get it. Treat it as a boundary, not a negotiation, and avoid the temptation to keep explaining. Keep coming out to the pub you enjoy and invite some other friends to join. Friends may not always know what to say or how to accommodate you but as you learn to share your needs, your true friends will learn and adapt with you.

Connecting with SCI peers, whether at meetups and events or online, is a good way to find out how others have worked through this process with their family and friends. Find out more about our peer events at sci-bc.ca/events.

Has this ever happened to you? How do you approach it? Share your stories us. You can call toll-free (1-800-689-2477), text (778-247-2477), or email (info@sci-bc.ca) SCI BC’s InfoLine from 9 am–5 pm, Monday to Friday. ■

Participate in Research

SCI research is about much more than test tubes, stem cells, and a far-off cure.

At ICORD (International Collaboration On Repair Discoveries), SCI research is also about improving bladder, bowel, and cardiovascular health; taming pain and autonomic dysreflexia; enhancing sexual health and fertility; new assistive technologies; wheelchair design and ergonomics; and much more. In other words, it's about maximizing recovery, independence, health, and quality of life. But it doesn't happen without you. That's why SCI BC and ICORD are partnering to help raise awareness and increase participation in world-leading research. Working together, we can make SCI research more meaningful and move it along at a faster pace, and we invite you to be a part of it.

Potential Benefits of Passive Heating (Hot Tub) on Your Health

Overview: Led by ICORD researchers Dr. Jaimie Borisoff and Dr. Victoria Claydon, the goal of this pilot study is to demonstrate the safety, tolerance, and effectiveness of a 45-minute passive heating session providing a mild/moderate exercise response (warm up and 20-25 min activity equivalent) from full-body hot-water immersion in individuals with higher-level SCI (T7-C4).

What to expect: Participants will come to Dr. Victoria Claydon's lab at SFU for a single hot tub immersion session. The session will take about 3 to 4 hours. Transfers to and from the hot tub will use a Hoyer style lift. The research team will be non-invasively monitoring a variety of measurements to see how your body responds to the passive heating and if there is an exercise response. Measurements include heart rate, blood pressure, core temperature, respiration rate, oxygen consumption, and photographs of finger and toe pads.

Who can participate: You may be eligible to participate in this study if you are 19 years of age or older, have an injury level of T7 to C4, engage in a regular bowel/bladder management program, are able to perform a level transfer with minimal assistance, have received full immunization against COVID-19. More information about eligibility can be found at icord.org/hottubpilot.

Why participate: The results from this study will be used as the basis of developing a longer-term study that will allow exploration of potential passive heating to provide a mild to moderate exercise response and provide a mode of cardiovascular exercise for those who have difficulty in engaging in a regular exercise program. At the end of your study visit to the lab, you will receive an honorarium of $100 for your participation. In addition, a free parking pass at SFU will be provided and reimbursement for a taxi is available.

Location: Simon Fraser University (8888 University Dr, Burnaby)

For more information or to sign up: Please contact study coordinator James Laskin by email (james.laskin@gmail.com) or phone at (604) 200-3426.

Can Regular Use of a Standing Frame Combined with Nerve Stimulation Improve Bladder Function?

Overview: Bladder dysfunction significantly impacts quality of life in people with SCI, but rehabilitation options for managing bladder symptoms in SCI have been scarcely considered. In this study, Dr. Tania Lam will continue to explore these relationships by evaluating the potential effects of combining electrical leg stimulation and standing therapy on bladder symptoms.

What to expect: This study involves a 3-month intervention of 3 sessions per week with the EasyStand standing frame. There are two lab visits (before and after the intervention) and follow-up phone call surveys 1, 2, and 3 months after the intervention. If you decide to participate, you will receive an honorarium.

Who can participate: You may be eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 19 years of age, have an SCI that occurred at least 12 months ago, have symptoms of urinary dysfunction from your SCI, and are able to use a standing frame. You may not be eligible to participate if you have received Botulinum toxin-A on the bladder in the past two weeks or intend to receive it within the next 3 months, have a progressive or non-stable SCI (e.g. spinal tumor), have a condition that limits exercise or electrical stimulation, are able to walk as your main mode of daily mobility.

Why participate: By participating, you will help researchers understand the neural links between the legs and bladder control after SCI, and contribute to the development of future therapies for bladder dysfunction after SCI. Some participants may experience improvements in their bladder function, although the extent and duration of any change are neither known nor guaranteed.

Location: This study will take place at the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre (818 West 10th Avenue, Vancouver).

For more information or to sign up: Please contact study coordinator Yao Sun by email (lamlab@icord.org) or phone at 604-675-8815.

Learn more about what makes ICORD one of the biggest and best SCI research centres in the world, and the research they are doing, by visiting **icord.org/research/participate-in-a-study.**

A New Way to Get the Message

Stay connected and get important updates that matter to you directly to your phone with new texting options from SCI BC.

Does keeping up with everything ever feel like… a lot? You open your inbox and there are dozens of emails. Maybe you meant to attend an SCI BC event, but it already passed. You're not alone. In a world where information is everywhere, staying connected can start to feel complicated.

At SCI BC, we know communication is at the heart of connection and community. From our website and newsletters to social media and *The Spin*, we share updates in many ways. But more and more, we've heard that many of you are looking for quicker and simpler ways to hear from us, so you don't miss what matters.

Say hello to SCI BC text updates! Our texting service is a new, optional way for you to get timely information sent directly to your phone. We've set up three dedicated numbers, so you subscribe only to the types of messages that matter to you. You can opt in to one, two, or all three.

1. Emergency & Climate-Related Alerts: For urgent notifications related to emergencies, climate impacts, service disruptions, and safety information. Messages are sent only when needed.

2. Peer Member Event Updates (by Region/City): Stay in the loop with event announcements, reminders, and last-minute changes for SCI BC events in your community. Expect about 1-3 messages per month depending on your region.

3. Philanthropy & Donation Updates: Occasional updates (7-10 times a year) on fundraising campaigns, opportunities to support SCI BC, and stories that highlight the impact of donor generosity.

Texting isn't here to replace any of SCI BC's other communication channels; it's just another option. If you're someone who prefers fewer emails or doesn't want to rely on social media to stay informed, texting may be the right choice.

The numbers are intended for one-way communication (from us to you). In urgent situations, we may monitor replies to the Emergency & Climate-Related Alerts number (if you are actively experiencing an emergency, please call 911). Otherwise, replies are not monitored, and you won't receive a response.

We've also made privacy and trust a priority. We'll never sell or share your information, and we'll only send messages you've signed up to receive. Sometimes, a text may include a link for more details. These will always lead to official SCI BC webpages. We'll never ask for sensitive information like passwords or banking details. Texts from our Philanthropy & Donation Updates number may occasionally include a donation link. And if you're unsure, you can always double check with the SCI BC InfoLine.

We'll be rolling out text updates throughout June and July. If we have a mobile number on file for you, you may receive a quick invitation text, but you're not subscribed unless you decide to opt in to our texting service.

If you'd like to make sure you're ready, now is a great time to update your contact information. Even if you're already an SCI BC member, take 10 minutes to fill out our membership form with your updated contact information at sci-bc.ca/membership.

At the end of the day, we want to make sure you feel part of a community that's always within reach. With text updates, your SCI BC community is never more than a quick buzz away.

For more information, check out the FAQ on our website: sci-bc.ca/texting. If you have questions or want help updating your information, SCI BC's InfoLine can help! You can call, text, or email us from 9 am–5 pm, Monday to Friday. Call: 1-800-689-2477 (toll-free). Text: 778-247-2477. Email: info@sci-bc.ca. ■


EF-250 · Leg Therapy

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>
> **— Crystle**

> *I switched over to Chair Stuff from one of the bigger companies, which was more expensive.* ***I like dealing with Steve because he's a dude in a chair who's got his own business. Anytime I need supplies, they're delivered to my door.***
>
> **— Kevin**

SAM DANNIELS
Owner

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When you support Chair Stuff, you support SCI BC.

Chair Stuff is proud to continue our long-term sponsorship with SCI BC.

Spinal Cord Injury BC