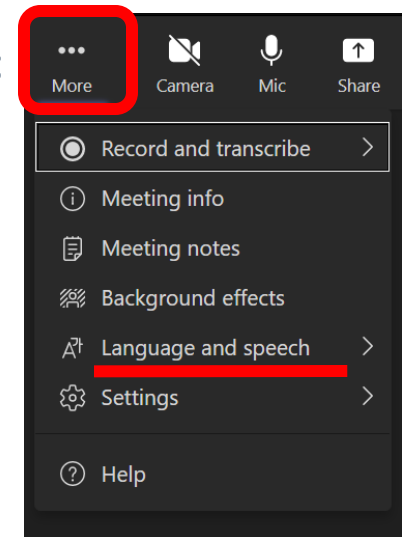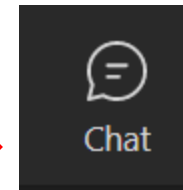# Prosper Canada

Increasing Access to Benefits for People with Disabilities project: Insights and Recommendations

October 17, 2023

Webinar logistics

- **Audience members have all been put on "mute"** for this webinar.

- Please **share any questions you have using the "chat box"** (located in the menu bar at the top of your screen).

- If you are using a screen reader, we suggest you disable the chat so you do not get simultaneous reading.

- If you would like to ask a **question that is not visible to the attendees** or for follow-up after the session, please **email us at** events@prospercanada.org.

- For **closed captioning**, on the top right menu bar, click the three dots with the word 'More' under it, then select '**Language and Speech**' and then '**Turn on Live Captions**'.

- **We will share webinar slides with all participants and post a recording** of the session within a few days.

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Who we are

Prosper Canada

Prosper Canada is a national charity dedicated to expanding opportunities for people living in poverty through program and policy innovation. As Canada's leading national champion of financial empowerment, we work with governments, businesses, and community groups to develop and promote financial policies, programs, and resources that transform lives and foster the prosperity of all Canadians.

Disability Alliance BC

Since 1977, Disability Alliance BC (DABC) has been a cross-disability voice in British Columbia. As a provincial non-profit organization and registered charity, our mission is to support people, with all disabilities, to live with dignity, independence and as equal and full participants in the community. We champion issues impacting the lives of people with disabilities through our direct services, community partnerships, advocacy, research and publications.

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC)

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

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Our speakers

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Land acknowledgement

Art by Simon Brascoupé and digital illustration by Mairi Brascoupé

Our goals for today

- Introduce you to the Disability Benefits Compass to help increase access to benefits for people with disabilities.

- Share outcomes and learnings in the evaluation of the Increasing Access to Benefits for People with Disabilities project.

- Call to action, what is next, and what can you do to help increase access to benefits for peoples with disabilities.

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Today's presentation

1. Welcome, introduction and warm up

2. Advancing benefits for people with disabilities
   a) Access to benefits project overview and barriers to access
   b) Live demo of the **Disability Benefits Compass** tool
   c) Evaluation: what is it and project outcomes and learnings
   d) What's next? What is possible? Call to action!

3. Activity: Poll

4. Questions?

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The project team

The Increasing Access to Benefits for people with disabilities project
is a three-year pilot project funded by the Government of Canada's
Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability.

Warm up: Poll

For those that provide access to benefits or other types of roles, we invite you to share in the chat what type of support you provide.

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Project overview: Increasing access to benefits for peoples with disabilities

The problem

Due to the many barriers people face in access, billions in benefits remain unclaimed.

The objective

Develop a service to help people living with disabilities access benefits.

Our project

Document process, test a service, evaluate and share results.

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Project objectives

Develop an effective Access to Benefits service that could support people with disabilities to access government benefits for which they were eligible but not receiving, by:

1. Documenting benefit journeys to generate insights on strengths and weaknesses of current processes.

2. Developing and sharing insights on effective and promising approaches to remove barriers and increase access to benefit income.

3. Co-designing, developing, piloting, and evaluating a new Access to Benefits Service in BC.

4. Sharing resulting project insights, tools, and resources with interested stakeholders.

Financial empowerment for people with disabilities - Prosper Canada

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Barriers to access to benefits

Four main barriers generally underlie disability benefit application processes and manifest in different ways along the applicant's journey:

1. Benefit application processes are complex and unclear.

2. The burden placed on healthcare providers gets passed on to people with disabilities.

3. Every step requires time, energy, connections, and access to resources that many applicants lack.

4. Benefit application processes are dehumanizing.

Knowledge product:
Roadblocks and Resilience - Insights from the Access to Benefits for Persons with Disabilities project (prospercanada.org)

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Solution design principles

The **key principles** identified by project participants based on their experiences, in designing an access to benefit service model for people with disabilities are:

- Provide a consistent human relationship throughout this process
- Build a roadmap to follow
- Humanize the experience with straight talk
- Activate new advocates and navigators (providing long-term support to clients by offering connections and referrals to other organizations for assistance on a wider variety of matters.)
- Communicate effectively to the most disconnected people
- Make it accessible to everyone.

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The access to benefits service model

The **co-designed service model** incorporates the elements identified by the people with disabilities and frontline staff:

1. Self-serve disability benefit navigation and advocacy – using the **Disability Benefits Compass** tool.

2. Online broader benefits navigation – **Benefits Wayfinder** tool.

3. Direct 1-on-1 benefit navigation advocacy – provided by organizations supporting access to benefits navigation for people living with a disability.

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The Access to Benefits service model blueprint

- A program manual titled **Clearing the way: A guide to providing access to benefits supports for peoples with disabilities**
- A step-by-step companion service model graphic titled: **Service model – Increasing access to benefits with the Disability Benefits Compass**
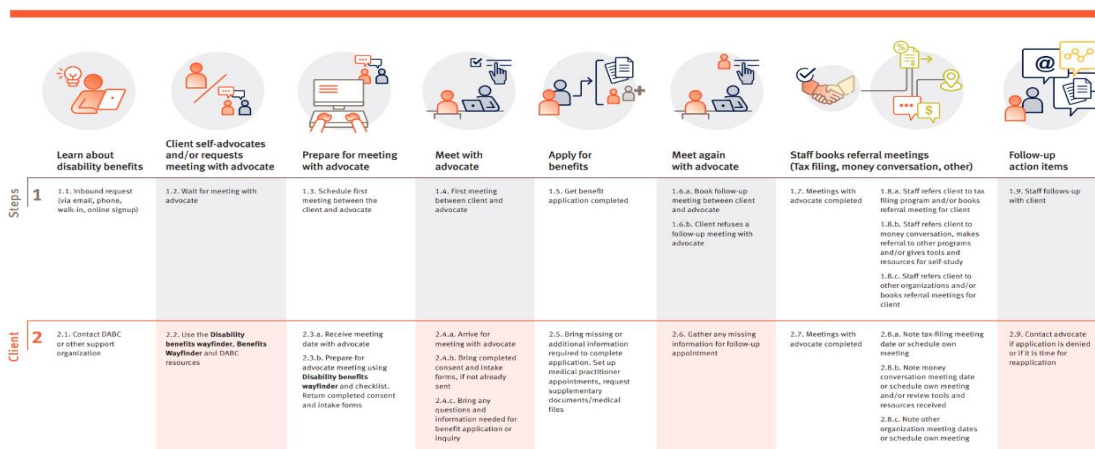
Disability Benefits Compass

disability.benefitswayfinder.org

What is evaluation?

- The process of determining the merit, worth or value of something.

  - (Scriven M. Evaluation thesaurus. Sage Publications, 1991)

- A process undertaken for purposes of improvement, decision making, enlightenment, persuasion.   (Shadish W, Cook T, Leviton L. Foundations of program evaluation, 1990)

- Using systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.   (American Evaluation Association (www.eval.org), 2004)

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Evaluation helps us learn - and share - how we're doing…

- ….to answer typical evaluation questions:

  - *What are the key elements of the service? How does it work?*
  - *Who are the users and what have their experiences been?*
  - *What impact has it had on their ability to access benefits? How has it impacted their lives?*
  - *What works well? What needs improvement?*

- …to share lessons learned across different groups or locations:

  - *What elements of the tool could be scaled up and how?*

- …to avoid erroneous, expensive conclusions and decisions.

- …to justify funding.

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For this project the evaluation approach was *developmental*

Developmental evaluation is intended to:

- Be flexible and focused on learning – to provide feedback throughout;

- Provide timely and relevant information to conceptualize, design and test new approaches;

- Ensure decision-makers can adjust the program/ initiative to achieve intended objectives.

We have a board meeting coming up and could use a little input from the evaluation team.

Sorry, we're not scheduled to provide input until year 3.

freshspectrum.com

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Data gathered for the evaluation

SRDC collected, gathered from others, and analyzed:

Data about the development of the tool and service
- Observations at meetings
- Review of project documents
- Key informant interviews
- Observations at workshops

Data about the use of the tool and service
- External SRDC survey
- Built-in Hotjar survey
- Website Analytics
- In depth interviews with website users, repeated over time, with new users and with frontline staff

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Evidence from the evaluation

Report published in August sets out:

- Step by step documentation of how the project unfolded
- Insights gained and how they were used
- Challenges and solutions found
- Who used the tool and how
- Levels of satisfaction
- Changes attributable to use of the tool
- Improvements users recommended
- What else is needed to support people with disabilities access benefits?

Increasing Access to Benefits for Peoples with Disabilities

Developmental Evaluation of the Benefit Screening Tool Project Final Report

AUGUST 2023

SRDC · SRSA
INNOVATION · EXPERIMENTATION · EVALUATION

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Evidence from the evaluation: What?

Visitors who accessed specific disability benefit landing pages (June 2022 through May 2023)

Benefit landing page	#	%
Persons with Disabilities Designation	1,731	52%
Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Disability Benefit	613	18%
Disability Tax Credit (DTC)	606	19%
Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP)	366	11%

Case managers indicated they could now say to clients "Go through this tool and see what fits your situation best" rather than having to provide multiple links.

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Evidence from the evaluation: Who?

What brings you to this site?
Select the option that best describes who you are (n=113)

Category	Percentage
I am a person with a disability looking for information about benefits	65%
I am a family member/advocate for a person with a disability	22%
I am a staff member at a community-based organization supporting people with disabilities	6%
Other	7%
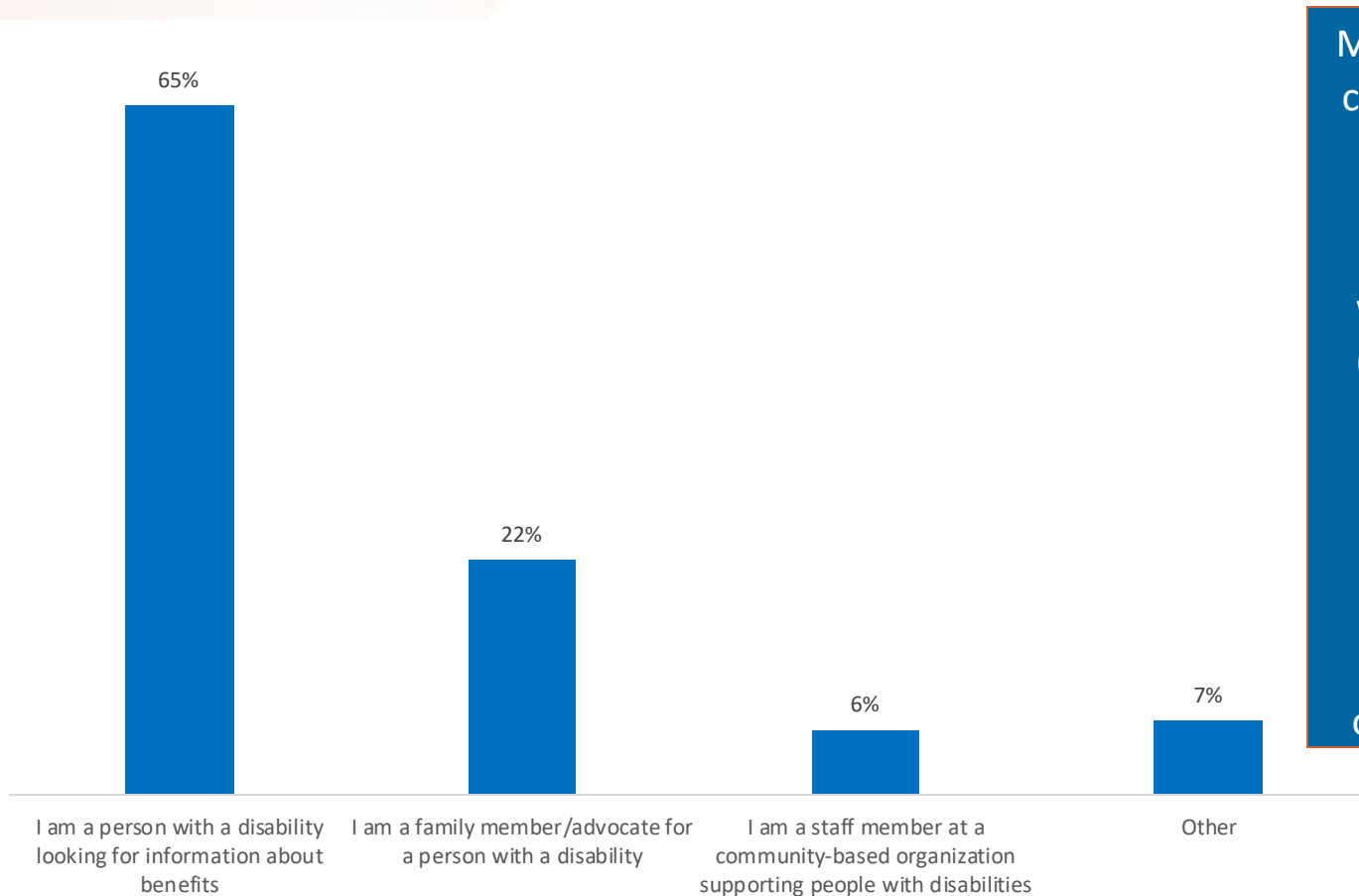
Most common link click sources were the "DABC website" and "Direct to website/Google" (38 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively).

No more than three per cent came from any other single click

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Evidence from the evaluation: How?

Question	n	Range	Mean
How easy is it to use the website?	40	1 to 10	6.98
How easy is it to understand the information on the website?	38	2 to 10	6.74
How helpful is this website to you?	28	0 to 10	6.54

"I still find myself going back every month and seeing if there's any new information out there. So even for a person like me who's kind of used to the services … from the government, I still go back for a refresher and for more information." – User interviewee

Evidence from the evaluation: Where?

Outbound clicks

Key site pages (not exhaustive list)	# page views
Impact on daily living activities	404
I need help with my application – various	389
How to find a doctor or nurse practitioner	338
Resources – all other pages	317
How to use the Disability Benefits Compass	297
Definitions of Arthritis and Depression	216
DABC – Sample letter for your doctor	214
How do I set up My SelfServe account	200
After you apply approved or denied	183
How you can help your doctor complete the DTC medical form	137
There are 3 ways to file income taxes	55
Glossary	47

Repeat users interviewed added that the more familiar they became with the website, the easier it became to navigate to the information they were seeking on subsequent visits.

Evidence from the evaluation: Why?

Repeat users interviewed felt the website:
- Had made a positive difference in their lives
- Was a "game changer" that helped them understand how to qualify
- Helped with the success of their benefit applications (for three)
- Supported their applications but were still waiting to hear the outcome (for the remaining two)

"[Government] website was not very user friendly at all. It's more government lingo. It was after I went to the [Compass] website that I was able to understand what the DTC is, what are grants and bonds, and how I can qualify. So for me, it was huge, kind of a game changer." – User interviewee

"The website helped me be successful in my application. I have previously worked with Disability Alliance where I had gone in person down to their office. Part of my disability is I have social anxiety and mobility issues, so it was a challenge to even go down there. But the website provided me all that same information, plus more, because I didn't have to leave the house, so it included everything that Disability Alliance did and the extra benefit of not having to leave my home." – User interviewee
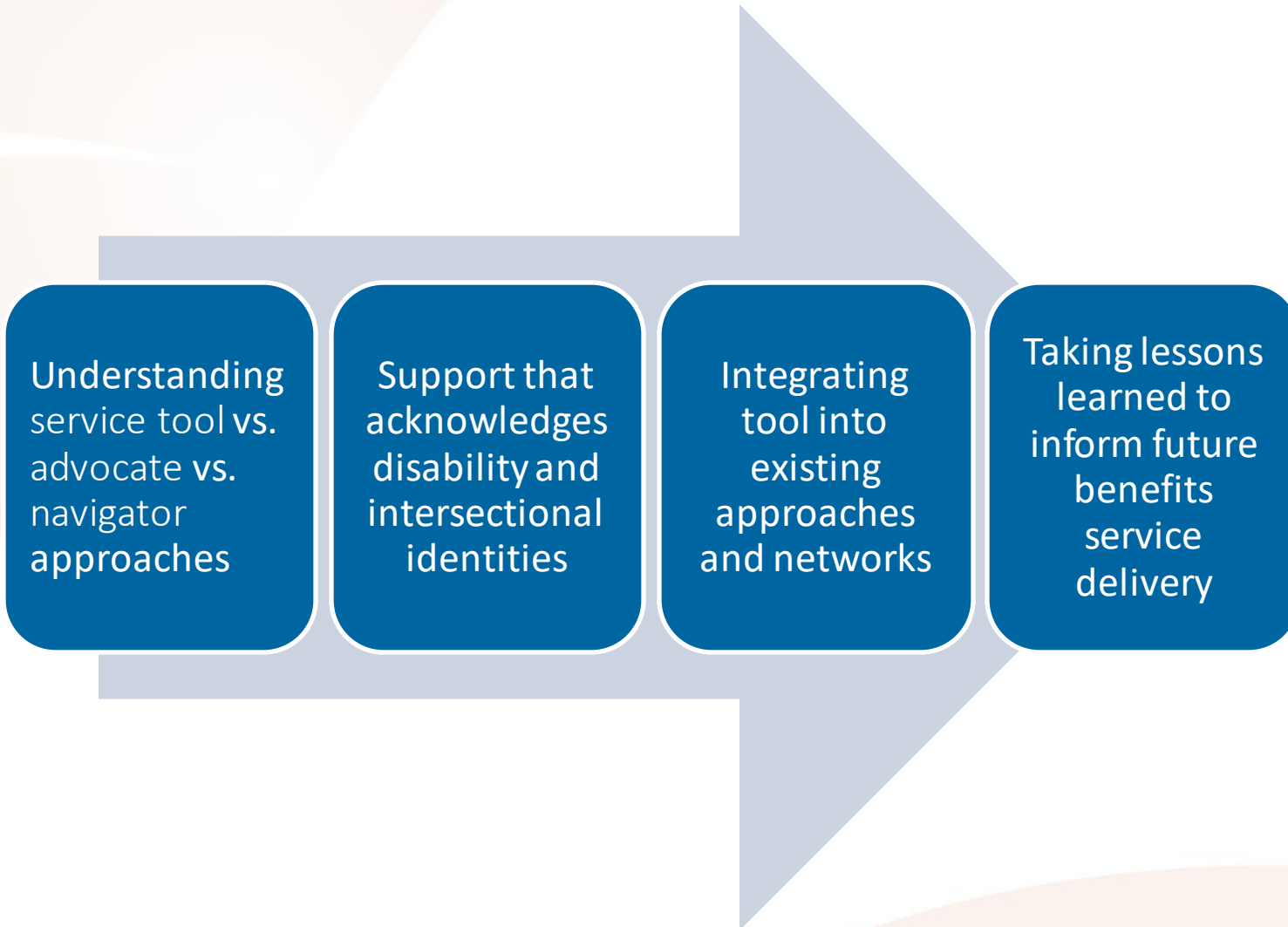
Evidence from the evaluation: What else?

What else is needed to support people with disabilities to access benefits?

- Application processes obscure and difficult to navigate;

- Eligibility requirements are too complicated;

- Wait times for application outcomes too long.

Suggested improvements to the benefits system as a whole included:

- Make the benefit application process more straightforward overall;

- Add information on Bill C-22;

- Provide more resources for mental health support; and

- Better promote the Registered Disability Savings Plan specifically (benefits are under-used when people don't know they exist).

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What's next? What is possible?

| Understanding service tool vs. advocate vs. navigator approaches | Support that acknowledges disability and intersectional identities | Integrating tool into existing approaches and networks | Taking lessons learned to inform future benefits service delivery |

Cool down: Poll

Please put your name and organization in the chat if you would like Prosper Canada to contact you in the future to discuss.

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Thank you for joining us!

- We will be sending you an email soon with:
  - **Slides** from today's webinar
  - Link to **webinar recording**
  - Link to post webinar **survey**

- We will also post the recorded webinar on our Learning Hub:
  - https://learninghub.prospercanada.org/webinars/

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Upcoming webinars for frontline practitioners

November 9

Ability to manage: Supportive tools to help community members manage their expenses, saving and debt

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (EDT)

Register

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NEW! Bridge to Benefits: Implementing benefits access in social services

The **Bridge to Benefits tool** provides information
for **organizations** considering starting, refining or expanding their work in access
to benefits services.

Contains **information and resources** on how to provide services for:

1. Learning about benefits
2. Applying for benefits
3. Getting benefits
4. Maintaining benefits

Also includes:

☐ Why benefits matter

☐ Other ways to support clients

☐ Best practices

☐ Related supports

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Visit our Learning Hub to view our past webinars

https://learninghub.prospercanada.org/
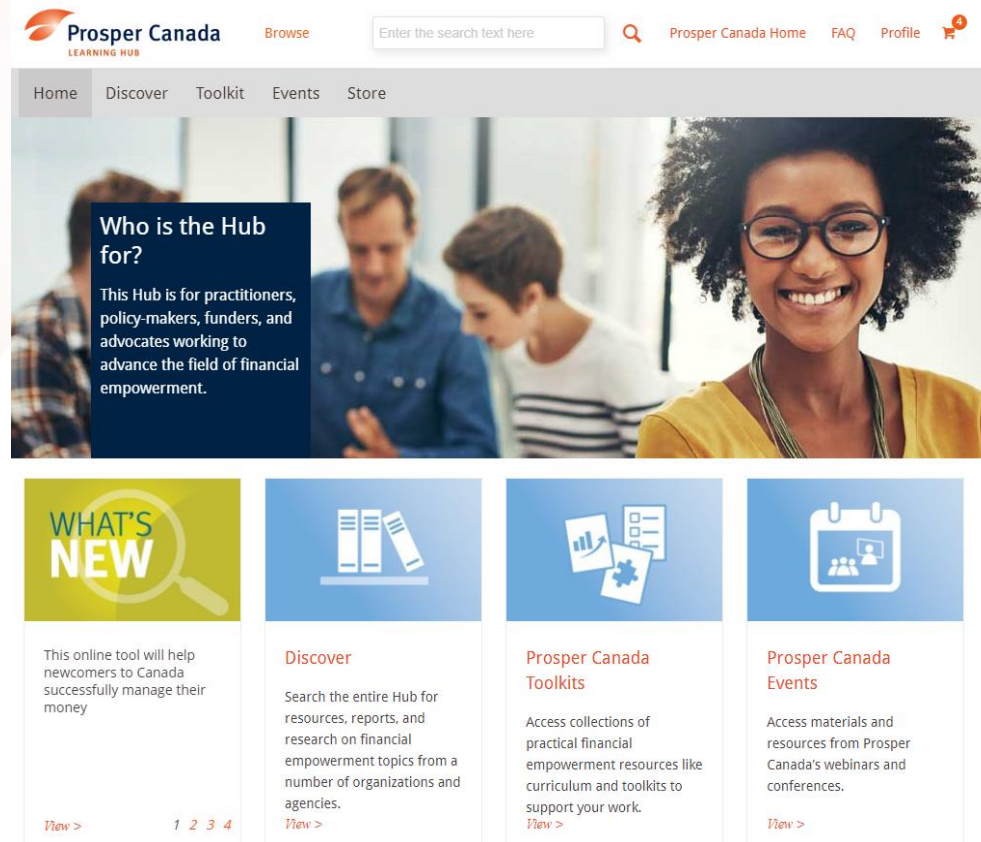
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