



**Elections  
Ontario**

# **2017 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan**

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## 2017 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

# Message from the Chief Electoral Officer

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Elections Ontario is committed to identifying, removing and preventing barriers for people with disabilities. It is an important part of our accessibility planning, especially as we prepare for next year's election.

Going into the 2018 general election, we have undertaken many initiatives as outlined throughout this document, including:

- Meeting with community agencies representing people with disabilities for feedback on assistive voting and technology in the polls
- Training staff on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*
- Updating policies in accordance with legislative changes to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
- Allowing the use of personal technological devices (e.g. cell phones) for persons with disabilities in voting locations during an election
- Continuing to update our website and communications to be accessible
- Training for field staff on how to perform an accessibility audit of a facility
- Reviewing the accessibility of more than 8,000 voting locations

An exciting development is our new e-Registration technical partnership with community agencies representing people with disabilities. We worked with 15 agencies to develop an accessible online registration tool. The knowledge we acquired during this process will also help us in the future development of products and services, ensuring they are accessible to everyone.

Elections Ontario remains committed to removing barriers and ensuring accessibility is considered in all aspects of our work. We are proud of the accomplishments listed in our 2017 status update. Our new Multi-Year Accessibility Plan guides our staff and aligns with our mission to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process.



Greg Essensa  
Chief Electoral Officer

# Overview

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Elections Ontario is committed to implementing the legislated requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. In 2017, we published Elections Ontario's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2017-2021, a new five-year accessibility plan for the organization. This is Elections Ontario's 2017 status update on the first year of its five-year plan.

## Background and Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* establishes accessibility standards and requirements for customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces. The four applicable standards that Elections Ontario is required to implement under the Act are listed and explained below:

- **Customer service standard:** provide accessible customer service to people with disabilities so that they can access the same goods and services as everyone else.
- **Information and communications standard:** create, provide and receive information in ways that are accessible for people with disabilities.
- **Employment standard:** provide accessibility to employees across all stages of the employment life cycle.
- **Public spaces standard:** design public spaces to make it easier for everyone (people with disabilities, seniors and families) to use these areas. Public spaces can include: exterior paths of travel, accessible parking, service related elements, and the maintenance of public spaces.

Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, Elections Ontario has ongoing obligations to accommodate people with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. We incorporate the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* into all areas of our work and recognize that additional accommodation measures that go beyond the Act may be required in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

## Commitment to the Plan

Elections Ontario is committed to preventing and removing barriers. We have made significant progress towards improving the accessibility of all our work. Our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan demonstrates our commitment to continuing to identify and remove barriers to improve accessibility.

We continue to update policies, practices and procedures, provide staff training and ensure that staff follow specific guidelines across all departments so that we remain committed to incorporating accessibility into all areas of service provided to the public

## Update on 2017 Accessibility Initiatives

Elections Ontario undertakes and completes initiatives as part of its ongoing strategy to prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities. For each of the initiatives, we show the “deliverable” followed by the “status update.”

- **Deliverable:** what we are legislated to do under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* for each of the standards, and what we have committed to do in our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
- **Status Update:** what we have accomplished for the year 2017.

# General Requirements

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There are several general requirements that must be implemented in accordance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. They include:

- Developing a multi-year accessibility plan
- Implementing accessibility policies
- Training staff on accessible customer service
- Incorporating accessibility into procurement processes

## Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

A multi-year accessibility plan outlines an organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility while meeting the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. The "deliverable" and "status update" for Elections Ontario's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan are provided below:

### Deliverable

Establish, implement, maintain and document a multi-year accessibility plan that outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers in consultation with persons with disabilities. The plan must be reviewed on an annual basis, and updates provided on the progress made.

### Status Update on Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Elections Ontario's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2017-2021 (MYAP) outlines a phased-in strategy to prevent and remove barriers and addresses the current and future requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

We are also legislated to ensure that the MYAP is created in consultation with persons with disabilities. On November 15, 2016, Elections Ontario, as part of the development of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, held a full-day detailed consultation with representatives from organizations representing people with various disabilities. These individuals provided expert advice and recommendations for the creation of a five-year accessibility plan that will ensure that we are meeting the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and that voting continues to be accessible for all.

These agencies continue to provide periodic input, as required, and during various consultations held throughout the year:

- Accessibility Experts Ltd., Edie Forsyth
- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, Yin Brown
- Alzheimer Society of Toronto, Katie Doran and Shannon Knelsen



- Arthritis Society, Deanna Bowlby and Yannick Constant
- Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf, Christine Nelson
- Canadian Hearing Society, Gary Malkowski and JoAnn Bentley
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Kat Clarke, Ray Smith and Ramla Abukar
- Community Living Toronto, Yvonne Spicer and Gordon Kyle
- March of Dimes, Jackie Legge
- Ontario College of Art & Design, Jess Mitchell
- Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, Cindy DeGraaff
- Parkinson Canada, Justin Manuel and Lorena Araujo
- Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, Richard McCallum

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan helps direct and assist staff over the next five years as we implement the many deliverables required under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Elections Ontario reports annually on the progress and implementation of the plan through status reports. This information is posted on our website as an accessible PDF and is provided in alternative accessible formats upon request. The plan is reviewed and updated every five years.

## Accessibility Policies

Accessibility policies outline how an organization will meet their obligations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* as it refers to the *Integrated Accessibility Standards*. The “deliverable” and “status update” are listed below:

### Deliverable

Every organization shall develop, implement and maintain policies governing how the organization achieves accessibility and meets its requirements under the accessibility standards. The policies must be consistent with the core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

### Status Update on Accessibility Policies

Legislative changes to the customer service standard, which came into effect on July 1, 2016, were incorporated into the Elections Ontario Accessible Customer Service policy.

The updates to the policy included:

- Mandatory training for all members of Elections Ontario staff on accessible customer service
- Permission to ask for documentation from a regulated health professional to determine if an animal is a service animal when this cannot be readily identified

- Should a support person be requested for health or safety reasons, the following shall take place:
  - Consult with the person with a disability to understand their needs
  - Consider health or safety reasons based on evidence
  - Determine if there is no other reasonable way to protect the health and safety of individual
- Ensuring the feedback process is accessible
- Ensuring policies, practices and procedures are publicly available

The policy includes a statement of commitment to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and is available on the Elections Ontario website as an accessible PDF, or in alternative accessible formats upon request. The Accessible Customer Service Policy and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Policy were reformatted to be accessible.

This year, a review was done of all accessibility-related policies to ensure they reflected the 2016 legislative changes and that they were posted and available in accessible formats.

Next year, we will be consolidating the Customer Service Standard Policy and Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation Policy as one document. We will also review all related procedures and ensure that they are accessible.

## Staff Training

All organizations are required to provide accessible customer service training, as well as training on the *Integrated Accessibility Standards* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as it relates to people with disabilities. The “deliverable” and “status update” for staff training are provided below:

### Deliverable

All employees, volunteers and all others who provide goods or services on behalf of the organization must be provided with training on the requirements of the accessibility standards and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as it pertains to persons with disabilities.

Staff shall be trained as soon as practicable. Records will be maintained of the training provided, including dates and the number of individuals trained. Should there be any changes to the policy, staff shall be trained on the policy changes.

### Status Update on Staff Training

Elections Ontario employees (permanent and temporary) who are providing goods and services on Elections Ontario’s behalf receive training on:

- The accessible customer service standard
- The *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation*
- The *Ontario Human Rights Code*

As part of the orientation process for new employees, all staff are mandated to complete the online learning module “AccessForward.” The module covers the general requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* that organizations must meet.

Training takes place as soon as practicable after individuals are hired and records are maintained, including the names of those who completed the training and when the training took place.

All current Elections Ontario staff have completed online training for the accessible customer service standard and in-person training on the *Integrated Accessibility Standards* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

The in-person training also covered the importance of producing accessible information and communications, in line with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind’s Clear Print Guidelines.

Throughout 2017, we have been preparing for next year’s general election. The 124 Returning Officers were trained on providing accessible customer service. The training teaches Returning Officers to be respectful by demonstrating the four principles of accessible customer service: dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity. The importance of being patient when communicating with electors and being prepared to make accommodations for electors who need help were underscored during the training session. An Elections Ontario video was created for the purpose of training the more than 52,000 staff that will be employed for the 2018 general election.

## **Accessible Procurement**

For goods and services to be more accessible to people with disabilities, it is important that organizations incorporate accessibility into their procurement process. The “deliverable” and “status update” to ensure we incorporate an accessible procurement process are provided below:

### **Deliverable**

Accessibility criteria and features shall be incorporated when procuring or acquiring goods, services, facilities and self-service kiosks except where not practicable to do so. If not practicable to do so, an explanation will be provided upon request.

### **Status Update on Procurement**

Elections Ontario has a Procurement Policy for Goods and Services and a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. Both will be reviewed next year to incorporate the accessibility requirements related to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. The Procurement Policy and the original RFP process are based on the customer service standard and will now need to incorporate the requirements of the *Integrated Accessibility Standards*.

# Customer Service Standard

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The customer service standard applies to the provincial government, the Legislative Assembly, and all organizations and public, private and non-profits that provide goods or services either directly to the public or to other organizations in Ontario and that have one or more employees in Ontario.

Accessible customer service policies, practices and procedures must be in place and staff training provided. These are addressed under “general requirements” referred to earlier in this document. Below are three other legislative requirements under the customer service standard and the “deliverable” and “status update” for each:

- Assistive devices
- Service animals and support persons
- Notice of service disruption

## **Assistive Devices**

People with disabilities may need to use their own assistive devices in order to access an organization’s goods and services. The “deliverable” and “status update” for assistive devices is provided below:

### **Deliverable**

Develop a policy on allowing people to use their own personal assistive devices to access an organization’s goods and services, and any other measures offered.

### **Status Update on Assistive Devices**

Elections Ontario continues to follow its Customer Service Policy, which states that an individual is permitted to use their assistive device to obtain goods or services and that, if we provide an assistive device, staff know how to use them should a person require support or assistance.

A community consultation was held in June 2017 with individuals and organizations representing people with disabilities, including Accessibility Experts Ltd., the Alzheimer Society of Toronto, the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, the Arthritis Society, the Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf, the Canadian Hearing Society, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Community Living Toronto, the Ontario College of Art and Design, the Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson Canada and Spinal Cord Injury Ontario.

We received feedback from each agency on the importance of people with disabilities being able to use their own assistive devices during an election.

A roundtable discussion was held, and valuable information was received about the importance of assistive devices.

Some examples were given about how assistive devices could be used, including:

- Scanning or taking a picture of a document or item
- Using applications to convert text-to-speech
- Magnifying and illuminate information
- Searching for buildings or transit information
- Assisting with marking a ballot
- Researching candidate information and saving information
- Retrieving picture of stored ID information
- Reading the ballot
- Communicating with a friend or a communication clinic via Skype or FaceTime
- Calling or arranging for accessible transit
- Speaking tool (text or audibly)
- Recording (written or auditory) instructions, thoughts, notes, transportation arrangements, phone numbers
- Translating information

We have changed Elections Ontario's policies to reflect that assistive devices may be used in the polls by people with disabilities during voting. The examples given for the use of assistive devices will be used as part of the training for Returning Officers and election officials.

During the electoral process, Elections Ontario also offers assistive voting technology in all returning offices and satellite offices from the first day of advance voting through to the day before election day at 6 PM (Eastern Time).

Voters who choose to use the Assistive Voting Technology device will be able to listen to the ballot choices and make their selection using three controller options:

- Audio Tactile Interface: Features large raised buttons, bright colours and Braille inscriptions
- Paddles: Includes red and blue paddles that can be pressed using hands, feet or elbows
- Sip and Puff Technology: Sends signals to a device using air pressure by "sipping" (inhaling) or "puffing" (exhaling) into a straw

## **Guide Dogs, Service Animals and Support Persons**

People with disabilities may need to be accompanied by a service animal or a support person.

### **1. Guide Dogs and Service Animals**

Guide dogs and service animals assist a person with a disability in their daily lives. Regardless of whether they are providing physical or emotional support, they help the individual to access goods and services and are allowed anywhere the public is allowed. The “deliverable” and “status update” for service animals are provided below:

#### **Deliverable**

Under the customer service standard, organizations must allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in any areas that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by another law. If you cannot easily identify that the animal is a guide dog or service animal, you can ask the person to provide documentation from a regulated health professional. The previous requirement was to provide documentation from a physician or nurse.

#### **Status Update on Service Animals**

We have incorporated the change to the customer service standard regarding service animals, which came into effect on July 1, 2016. Originally, if you were not certain that an animal was a service animal, you could ask for a letter of verification signed by a doctor or a nurse. The change meant that any regulated health professional could sign a letter of verification. Our Accessible Customer Service Policies were updated to include a statement that “if it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, Elections Ontario staff may ask the customer with a disability for a letter from a regulated health professional confirming that the customer requires the service animal for reasons relating to their disability.”

A regulated health professional includes: audiologists, chiropodists, chiropractors, dental hygienists, dental technologists, dentists, denturists, dieticians, homeopaths, kinesiologists, massage therapists, medical laboratory technologists, medical radiation technologists, midwives, naturopaths, nurses, occupational therapists, opticians, optometrists, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, physicians, physiotherapists, podiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, respiratory therapists, speech-language pathologists, traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and acupuncturists. The Accessible Customer Service Policies were amended to reflect the changes.

The service animal must be under the care and control of the individual at all times. We provide training to all head office staff, Returning Officers and election officials on proper service animal etiquette.

If a guide dog or service animal is excluded by law, Elections Ontario ensures that there are measures in place so that those same services that the service animal provides to the individual with a disability are being provided by an Elections Ontario staff person or by some other means.

## **2. Support Persons**

A support person can be used by a person with a disability in order to help them with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or to help access goods or services. If an admission fee is being charged, the support person must know ahead of time so that they are prepared in advance. The “deliverable” and “status update” for support persons are provided below:

### **Deliverable**

Organizations must permit people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public or through third parties.

Where admission fees are charged for a support person of a person with a disability, notice must be provided ahead of time, and include what admission, if any, would be charged.

Changes to the Customer Service Standard under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* came into effect on July 1, 2016, which affects the steps an organization must take if a support person is required for health or safety reasons.

Before an organization decides if it is necessary for an individual to have a support person for health or safety reasons, they must ensure that they:

- Consult with the person with a disability to understand their needs
- Consider health or safety reasons based on available evidence
- Determine if there is no other reasonable way to protect the health or safety of the person or others on the premises

### **Status Update on Support Persons**

Elections Ontario has incorporated the legislative changes to include the steps an organization must take if a support person is required for health or safety reasons. The Accessible Customer Service Policy has been updated to include that, before Elections Ontario requests that a person with a disability be accompanied by a support person for health and safety reasons, it would consult with the person with



the disability to clearly understand their needs, consider the health and safety reasons based on available evidence, and determine if there are any other reasonable ways to protect the health and safety of the individual. People with disabilities who require or bring a support person are permitted to bring that person with them to access any goods or services that Elections Ontario provides, and no admission fee will be charged.

During an election period, a support person is permitted to assist an individual while they mark their ballot, providing the support person takes an “oath or affirmation of secrecy” stating that they will keep the name of the candidate for whom the ballot was marked secret.

## **Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions**

To use or benefit from a provider’s goods or services, people with disabilities usually use particular facilities or services. If there is a temporary disruption to those facilities or services, it is important that the individual is informed so that they can make plans accordingly. The “deliverable” and “status update” for providing notice of temporary service disruptions are provided below:

### **Deliverable**

Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access or use goods or services are temporarily disrupted. The notice must include the following three items:

- Reason for the disruption
- Anticipated duration of the disruption
- Alternative facilities or services

### **Status Update on Notice of Service Disruption**

Elections Ontario provides notice of service disruption to the public, including information about what service is being disrupted, the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that may be available. The notice is posted as soon as possible in visible places at the facility and/or on Elections Ontario’s website, or by any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances.

During the voting hours at polling stations, we are legislated under the *Election Act*, and the customer service standard to provide notice of service disruption. When there is a service disruption, remediation is immediately made where possible and signage provided accordingly.

# Information and Communications Standard

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To help people with disabilities access sources of information and communications, organizations are required to incorporate accessibility in the following four areas:

- Accessible feedback process
- Accessible formats and communication support
- Emergency procedures, plans or public safety information
- Accessible websites and web content

## **Accessible Feedback Process**

For persons with disabilities to be able to provide feedback on the services they are receiving, they must have a means to be able to do so and it must be in a manner that is accessible. The “deliverable” and “status update” to provide an accessible feedback process are listed below:

### **Deliverable**

Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how goods or services are provided to people with disabilities and how you will respond to any feedback and take action on any complaints. Organizations shall also ensure that the information about their feedback process is readily available to the public, and that the feedback process is accessible to persons with disabilities by providing or arranging for accessible formats and supports upon request.

### **Status Update on Feedback Process**

In previous years, Elections Ontario worked to ensure that we had feedback mechanisms in place. We offered multiple ways to provide feedback, including by phone, by TTY, by fax, in person, in writing, by email, or through various means on our website.

This year we concentrated on ensuring that the feedback mechanisms we provided were accessible in accordance with the regulated changes to the accessible customer service standard that took effect on July 1, 2016. The public can go to our accessible website to provide feedback through the forms that have been created, and access other contact information to provide feedback in a means that works for them.

We also asked for feedback from the public on the accessibility of our proposed voting locations. In December 2017, six months prior to election day, the 8,000-plus voting locations were listed on the website and the public was asked to provide

feedback on whether the voting locations present any accessibility barriers. Elections Ontario staff work hard to remediate locations, if possible, or find new sites so that there would be an accessible voting location for that area.

During the 2018 general election, there will be feedback forms at each polling location. Once feedback is received, staff will immediately analyze the options available to find a solution and remove the existing accessibility barrier.

Elections Ontario continues to identify barriers that exist for persons with disabilities and takes the necessary steps to address them. Through public opinion surveying and feedback provided by our stakeholders, we gather information pertaining to barriers that exist for persons with disabilities and remediate them.

## **Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

To help people with disabilities access sources of information and communications, it is important to ensure that they are created and available in accessible formats. The “deliverable” and “status update” to provide accessible formats and communication supports are listed below:

### **Deliverable**

Organizations must create, provide and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities. They must also notify the public that accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request.

When an individual requests an accessible format or communication support, organizations are required to consult with the person to determine their accessibility needs and the suitability of information they are providing. If it is not feasible to convert the information or communications, the organization must provide an explanation as to why it cannot be converted and a summary of the content.

The information or communication must be provided in a timely manner that considers the person’s accessibility needs and at a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons.

### **Status Update on Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

Elections Ontario continues to provide documents and communication supports in accessible formats in a manner that works for the individual, in a timely manner and at a cost no more than the regular cost to the general public.

If it is not feasible to convert the information or communications an individual is requesting, Elections Ontario will provide an explanation as to why it cannot be converted and a summary of the content.

We also have a comprehensive plan in place to ensure all existing documents on the Elections Ontario website are accessible, including reports, brochures and other information created as Word documents, PDFs and any other formats. This has been a significant undertaking. For all newly created documents, we ensure they are accessible before posting to our website.

## **Emergency Procedures, Plans or Public Safety Information**

A person with a disability may want to know and understand an organization's emergency procedures, plans or public safety information prior to attending or arriving at a location. It would be important for people with disabilities to have that information in an accessible format or with appropriate communication supports. The "deliverable" and "status update" to provide emergency procedures, plans or public safety information, and the action taken by Elections Ontario are listed below:

### **Deliverable**

If an organization prepares emergency procedures, plans or public safety information and makes the information available to the public, it must be available in accessible formats or with appropriate communication supports, as soon as practicable, and upon request.

### **Status Update on Emergency Procedure, Plans or Public Safety Information**

Elections Ontario has a number of emergency safety procedures and plans, including an emergency evacuation plan, an emergency procedures handbook, an emergency management plan, and an elections emergency plan.

All these documents have been created as internal processes for staff and are not generally made available to the public. Should a visitor or the public visit our head office facilities and request emergency safety information, we would provide relevant information in an accessible format that works for the individual.

## **Accessible Websites and Web Content**

Websites are often an easy and convenient way for persons with disabilities to access a company's goods or services without having to physically go to an office. Individuals can use their own assistive software and devices to navigate through a website, provided it has been designed to be accessible. When a website is properly designed in a logical and understandable way, it helps everyone and not just people with disabilities. The "deliverable" and "status update" to provide accessible websites and web content and the action taken by Elections Ontario are listed below:

## **Deliverable**

By January 1, 2012, **new internet and new intranet government websites**, and web content on those sites, must conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA, other than success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live) and 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

By January 1, 2016, **all internet** sites and web content on those sites must conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA, other than success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live) and 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

By January 1, 2020, **all intranet sites** must conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA, other than success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live) and 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

## **Status Update on Website and Web Content**

We continue to work on improving the accessibility of our website. Regular checks are performed to ensure compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level AA. Following these guidelines helps to make content accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities and users in general.

The website is scanned repeatedly throughout the year to ensure compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level AA. Through regular scans and feedback received from the public, we can continually identify and correct any errors, remove the barriers, and ensure information on our website is accessible to all.

We have launched a new e-Registration tool that allows individuals to go online to confirm, update or add their information to the voters list. Ensuring the process was accessible was important to us. The tool has enhanced accessibility features allowing people with disabilities who use assistive devices to easily look up information. Accessibility was incorporated into the design and complies with WCAG at Level AA compliance.

A consultation with 15 agencies that are familiar with the needs of people with disabilities or who use assistive devices themselves was held in June 2017. We tested the online registration tool with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the Canadian Hearing Society, Parkinson Canada, the Arthritis Society, the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, the Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, the Ontario College of Art and Design and Community Living Toronto.

They tested the e-Registration tool for accessibility and provided excellent comments and suggestions on the needs of individuals and how to prevent barriers to those with disabilities. The goal is to have a final tool ready in advance of the 2018 general election.

We also visited the Canadian National Institute for the Blind to have the tool tested by individuals who are blind, legally blind, or have low vision. Using computers and phones with various assistive software programs like JAWS, Dragon Naturally Speaking, screen magnifiers and other accessibility features, they were able to test the e-Registration tool for functionality, ease of use and overall accessibility. Watching and hearing directly from users who are people with disabilities proved to be a valuable learning process for Elections Ontario.

The knowledge we gained from both sets of testing will help us with accessible planning for future online tools, the design of other website materials and overall accessibility consideration for elections.

We continue to make certain that all documents housed on the website are also accessible. Any new documents that are created are formatted to be accessible and available in alternative formats upon request.

# Employment Standard

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The employment standard requires employers to provide for accessibility across all stages of the employment life cycle for an employee with a disability. By proactively removing barriers, employers can help to create workplaces that are accessible and that allow employees to reach their full potential. The employment standard applies to paid employees and covers the following seven categories:

- Recruitment, assessment and selection
- Accessible formats and communication supports for employees
- Workplace emergency response information
- Documented individual accommodation plans (IAPs)
- Return to work process
- Performance management
- Career development, advancement and redeployment

## **Recruitment, Assessment and Selection**

Notice must be given that accommodations are available upon request during all three stages of employment including recruitment, assessment and selection. The “deliverable” and “status update” for recruitment, assessment and selection are provided below.

### **Deliverable**

Every employer shall notify its internal and external job applicants that accommodations will be provided upon request to support employees’ participation in all aspects of the recruitment, assessment and selection process.

New and existing employees are informed of the organization’s policies for accommodating employees with disabilities. Once a person is hired, or a current employee discloses that they require accommodations, an IAP process begins.

Employers shall provide updated information to its employees whenever there is a change to existing policies on the provision of job accommodations that consider an employee’s accessibility needs due to a disability.

### **Status Update on Recruitment, Assessment and Selection**

Human Resources reviews recruitment, assessment and selection processes to ensure a consistent and accessible process is in place. Documents will be reviewed next year for content, accessibility, consistency and simplicity.

## **Documented Individual Accommodation Plan**

Employers will develop a written IAP for employees with disabilities so that employers will have a clear and consistent approach for accommodating people with disabilities. Below are the “deliverable” and “status update” to ensure we incorporate an IAP process.

### **Deliverable**

Employers shall develop and have in place a written process for the development of a documented IAP for employees with disabilities. The process for the development of an IAP shall include the following 12 elements:

1. An employee requesting accommodation participates in development of the IAP
2. Assessment is on an individual basis
3. Identification of accommodations to be provided
4. Timelines for the provision of accommodations
5. The request for an evaluation by outside medical or other expert, at the organizations' expense, to assist with determining accommodation and how to achieve accommodation
6. Employee may request the participation of a representative from their bargaining agent, where represented, or otherwise a representative from the workplace where the employee is not represented by a bargaining agent
7. Steps taken to protect the privacy of the employee's personal information
8. Frequency with which the IAP will be reviewed and updated and how it will be done
9. If denied, the reasons for denial are to be provided to the employee
10. A format that considers the employee's disability needs
11. If requested, any information regarding accessible formats and communication supports provided
12. Identification of any other accommodation that is to be provided

### **Status Update on Individual Accommodation Plan:**

Elections Ontario remains committed to ensuring that people with disabilities can be accommodated on the job and throughout their employment cycle.



Should an employee disclose that they have a disability, processes are followed to ensure timely accommodations are provided. The employee and Human Resources complete an IAP. Human Resources follows up with an individual accommodation response plan (IARP) to finalize the appropriate accommodations required for the individual and then, if approved, accommodations are provided.

Steps are taken to protect the privacy of the employee's personal information. Should the accommodation be denied, the reasons for denial are provided to the employee.

The plans are reviewed and updated regularly and follow up is provided to ensure accommodation needs continue to be met.

We are currently preparing to educate Returning Officers and the approximately 52,000 election officials required for next year's election so that they are aware of Elections Ontario's commitment to accommodate applicants and employees with disabilities.

## **Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees**

For people with disabilities to perform their jobs effectively, they must be provided with the accessible formats and communication supports they require. The "deliverable" and "status update" for providing accessible formats and communication supports to employees are provided below.

### **Deliverable**

Consult with the employee to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for information that is needed to perform the employee's job and information that is generally available to other employees in the workplace. The employer shall consult with the employee making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication support.

### **Status Update on Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees**

When an employee makes a request for an accessible format and/or communication support which they require to perform their job, Elections Ontario consults with the individual to determine the suitability of their request, and then provides it in a manner that works for them.

## **Workplace Emergency Response Information**

Employers must be informed and aware of the needs that an employee with a disability may have during an emergency situation. This will help employees with disabilities and their employers prepare for a range of potential emergencies. The "deliverable" and "status update" is provided below.

## **Deliverable**

Every employer must provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have disabilities, under the following conditions:

- When the employee's disability is such that the information is necessary
- The employer is aware of the need for accommodation due to the employee's disability

If an employee who receives individualized workplace emergency response information requires assistance, the employer shall, with the employee's consent, provide the workplace emergency response information to the person designated by the employer to provide assistance to the employee.

Employers shall provide information required under this section as soon as practicable after the employer becomes aware of the need for accommodation.

The individualized workplace emergency response information shall be reviewed when an employee moves to a different location, their overall accommodation needs or plans are reviewed, and when an employer reviews its general emergency response policies.

## **Status Update on Workplace Emergency Response Information**

Part of the orientation process for new employees includes a self-assessment for emergency situations. If an individual wants assistance provided during an emergency situation such as fire, power outages, severe weather, natural disasters and security incidents, they contact Human Resources. Human Resources will work with the individual to develop an individualized emergency response plan to meet their needs.

The plan is reviewed in the following instances:

- When the employee moves to a different location in the organization
- The overall accommodation needs, or plans are reviewed or changed
- Policies are changed

The individual emergency response plan helps Elections Ontario assist employees with disabilities prepare for a range of potential emergencies.

## **Return-to-Work Process**

The return-to-work process ensures that employers have in place a documented process for supporting employees who return to work after being away for reasons related to their disabilities. The "deliverable" and "status update" for the return-to-work process is listed below.

### **Deliverable**

Develop a return-to-work process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require disability-related accommodations in order to return to work. The process shall be documented, outline the steps the employer will take to facilitate the return-to-work, and will use the IAP as part of the process.

### **Status Update on Return-to-Work Process**

Elections Ontario continues to follow the return-to-work process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability. A return-to-work assessment form is provided to an employee with a disability who is absent from work for two weeks or longer. Any work modification, including information about the duration of the modification, is discussed with the employee's manager. An individual accommodation response plan is created and followed.

## **Performance Management**

It is important to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities when assessing performance management. The “deliverable” and “status update” for performance management are provided below.

### **Deliverable**

An employer that uses performance management for its employees shall take into account the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as IAPs, when using its performance management process.

### **Status Update on Performance Management**

Elections Ontario considers the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities when conducting performance management processes. Performance management includes activities related to assessing and improving employee performance, productivity and effectiveness with the goal of facilitating employee success. Performance reviews are conducted annually and at three and six-month intervals during the probationary period.

## **Career Development and Advancement**

When providing career development and advancement opportunities, employers are required to consider what accommodations employees with disabilities may need to succeed elsewhere in their organization or to take on new responsibilities in their current position. The “deliverable” and “status update” for career development and advancement are provided below.

### **Deliverable**

Employers that provide career development and advancement opportunities will take into account the accessibility needs of their employees as well as any IAPs,

when providing career development and advancement to its employees with disabilities. This can include:

- Providing additional responsibilities within an employee's current position
- The movement of an employee from one job to another that may be higher in pay
- Provide greater responsibility or be at a higher level in an organization
- Any combination of the above

### **Status Update on Career Development and Advancement**

When providing career development and advancement opportunities, Elections Ontario considers the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities. It is important to ensure accommodations are made so that the employee can continue to be successful in their employment for either a newly acquired position or when new responsibilities in their current role have been added.

### **Redeployment**

By considering the accessibility needs of individuals with disabilities when redeploying employees, employers may help individuals continue to contribute effectively. The “deliverable” and “status update” for redeployment are provided below.

#### **Deliverable**

Redeployment means the reassignment of employees to other departments or jobs within the organization as an alternative to layoff when a job or department has been eliminated by the organization.

An employer that uses redeployment shall consider the accessibility needs of its employees with disabilities, as well as IAPs, when redeploying employees with disabilities.

#### **Status Update on Redeployment**

Elections Ontario continues to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities when moving individuals to other positions. Information is gathered from the IAP and the IARP to ensure appropriate accommodations and communication supports are still being provided in the new position.

# Design of Public Spaces Standard

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Accessible public spaces include specific features that make it easier for everyone to use them, including people with disabilities, seniors and families. The requirements under the design of public spaces standard applies to new construction and the redevelopment of elements in public spaces.

## Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations

When creating new or renovating existing public spaces, Elections Ontario follows the design of public spaces standard. When creating accessible voting locations, we follow our Site Accessibility Standards, which were developed based on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, the City of London's Facilities Accessibility Design Standards, Elections Canada's Polling Locations Accessibility Checklist and the *Ontario Building Code*. The "deliverable" and "status update" to provide accessible design of public spaces are provided below:

### Deliverable

When designing newly constructed or redeveloped public spaces, specific accessibility criteria must be incorporated into the following:

- Recreational trails and beach access routes
- Outdoor public-use eating areas
- Outdoor play spaces
- Exterior paths of travel
- Accessible parking
- Obtaining services
- Maintenance

There are 44 sections under the design of public spaces standard with specific measurements and requirements. Sections 80.1 to 80.44 of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* relate to the guidelines for the design of public spaces, which Elections Ontario would use when it creates new spaces or is undertaking a major renovation.

### Status Update on Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations

Should Elections Ontario create any new public spaces or redevelop any existing spaces, we will ensure that we incorporate the accessibility requirements under the design of public spaces standard.

In 2017, Elections Ontario leased additional space at another building across the street from its head office. The exterior path of travel to the front entrance had a large step into the building and was not accessible. An accessible ramp was added so that employees could easily enter the building.

# Other Accessibility Initiatives

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Elections Ontario continues to incorporate accessibility into all areas of service provided to the public. In addition to the requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, Elections Ontario will also be working on the following initiatives:

## Accessible Voting Locations

Elections Ontario is committed to ensuring that electors can vote at an accessible voting location during an election or by-election. Elections Ontario has created its own accessibility criteria for choosing and selecting voting locations.

Upholding the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process is part of Elections Ontario's mission. It is imperative that, on election day, voting locations are accessible. We do this by ensuring our Site Accessibility Standards follow the requirements under the *Ontario Building Code* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, specifically the public spaces standard. Our criteria also incorporate the London Facility Accessibility Design Standards. Elections Ontario meets and, in many instances, exceeds the specific accessibility measurements legislated under the design of public spaces standard and the *Ontario Building Code*.

Our voting location inspection checklist, which is part of our Site Accessibility Standards, includes auditing each building for:

- Exterior signage (visibility and contrasting colours)
- Accessible parking, if applicable (number, size, surface and lighting)
- Exterior pathway (width, surface, slopes and appropriate ramps)
- Accessible entrance (lighting, door width, threshold, power assist and hardware)
- Internal path of travel to voting location (width, surface, slopes and ramps)
- Internal door of voting room (door width, threshold and hardware)
- Elevator (location, dimensions, length of time on door opening)

In 2017, we began training Returning Officers on how to perform accessibility audits on proposed voting locations. Over 8,000 buildings were audited. Once the final list of proposed voting locations was prepared, the names, addresses, and accessibility features of each voting location were posted on our website in December 2017 for the public to provide feedback about the accessibility of the locations. Feedback is gathered and evaluated and then retrofits are made, where possible, or new sites are found to replace those that do not meet the standards. Elections Ontario is committed to ensuring accessible voting for the 2018 general election.

## **Assistive Voting and Technology in the Polls**

In November 2016, a community consultation was held with agencies and individuals representing people with disabilities including the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the Canadian Hearing Society, Parkinson Canada, the Arthritis Society, the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, the Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, the Ontario College of Art and Design, and Community Living Toronto.

An important topic of discussion was assistive voting and technology in the polls. Below are key observations and recommendations identified by the group of agencies:

- Let Elections Ontario customize audio instructions on assistive voting technology (put in plain language and reflect Elections Ontario's processes)
- Seek other assistive voting technology devices, or other options like smart phone apps, that people with disabilities would be familiar with
- Address lack of awareness about assistive voting technology and other accessible voting options (outreach, advertising, social media and partnership models)
- More outreach to the community (open houses, videos, streaming information from head office)
- Instructional materials and videos (with closed captioning or American Sign Language) on voting processes, assistive voting technology, and ID requirements
- Additional signage at polls
- Allow people with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices in the polls
- Continue community consultations and outreach to agencies representing persons with disabilities for input

Elections Ontario will consider these observations and recommendations in determining future plans.

This community consultation was held at the head office for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in Toronto, and we were given a tour of their facility. It was very enlightening and helped all of us to better understand and learn ways to improve accessibility for those who have low vision or are legally blind or blind.



The CNIB hallways show excellent use of contrasting colours; the dark brown edging helps to outline the clear path of travel. The linear lighting in the ceiling creates a sight line and a well-lit area. They also use a different bright colour on the wall to depict each of the various departments and all the photos on the walls are tactile.

The floor in the cafeteria has a tactile path of travel that can be felt with a white cane.

We continue to learn from the community agencies and individuals. We are grateful for their willingness to share their knowledge, as well as test our products and services for accessibility. We will be meeting again in the fall of 2018.

## **Modernizing the Electoral Process**

In order to make elections more efficient, a more modern electronic process was developed. Elections Ontario has worked hard to create a new technology-enabled voting model.

Four pieces of technology were used to automate manual processes:

- e-Registration
- e-Poll books
- Vote tabulators
- Election Management System

### **e-Registration**

e-Registration is a newly designed online registration tool which allows a voter to confirm, update or add their information on the voters list. The online tool was designed to be accessible. Testing by individuals who use assistive devices was performed to ensure the system worked with other software programs like JAWS, Dragon Naturally Speaking and Zoomtext using either a computer or a phone.

### **e-Poll Books**

Election officials used new technology called e-Poll books to strike voters names from the voters list before providing them with their ballot. Election officials were also able to search the voters list for voters without a voter information card, and to add or update voter information. The technology was tested in both the 2016 by-election for Scarborough—Rouge River and Whitby-Oshawa with success.

### **Vote Tabulator**

Elections Ontario has been using vote tabulators in its returning offices and satellite offices for general elections since 2011. Voters are able to cast their ballot using vote tabulators operated by an election official, which then electronically counts each ballot, making results reporting much faster. The technology was used in the

2016 by-election for Scarborough—Rouge River and Whitby-Oshawa. In 2017, we continued to run simulations to ensure a faster and more efficient voting experience for the 2018 general election.

### **Election Management System**

Our new Election Management System was designed and implemented to more efficiently manage all aspects of election administration. Elections Ontario has also incorporated accessibility into the design of the system. The new Election Management System continues to be tested and will be used in the 2018 general election.

# A Final Word

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Elections Ontario, in all aspects of its work and services, reflects its mission to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process and to manage elections in an efficient, fair and impartial manner.

We continue to grow and learn as we more fully understand the true meaning of accessibility under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Accessibility has become an integral part of Elections Ontario planning and how we do business. From our staffing to our client service, everything that we produce, and all our services, encompass accessibility. As we take these proactive strides towards full accessibility, we are seeing that accessibility benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities.

Much work has been done this year as we prepare for the upcoming 2018 general election. We continue to ensure that we meet the accessibility criteria under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the provisions of the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as we design new systems and tools. We are excited to launch our suite of new technology, including the new e-Registration tool, e-Poll books, and tabulators.

We are passionate about working towards an increasingly accessible and modern election!