



Elections  
Ontario

# 2018 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan



# Table of Contents

Message from CEO.....	6
Overview .....	7
Background and Legislation .....	7
Commitment to the Plan.....	7
Update on 2018 Accessibility Initiatives .....	8
General Requirements .....	9
Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.....	9
Deliverable.....	9
Status Update on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan .....	9
Accessibility Policies.....	10
Deliverable.....	10
Status Update on Accessibility Policies .....	10
Staff Training .....	11
Deliverable.....	11
Status Update on Staff Training .....	11
Accessible Procurement.....	12
Deliverable.....	12
Status Update on Procurement .....	12
Customer Service Standard .....	13
Assistive Devices.....	13
Deliverable.....	13
Status Update on Assistive Devices .....	13
Guide Dogs, Service Animals and Support Persons.....	14
1. Guide Dogs and Service Animals.....	14
Deliverable.....	14
Status Update on Service Animals .....	15
2. Support Persons.....	15
Deliverable.....	15
Status Update on Support Persons .....	15

Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions .....	16
Deliverable.....	16
Status Update on Notice of Service Disruptions .....	16
Information and Communications Standard.....	17
Accessible Feedback Process .....	17
Deliverable.....	17
Status Update on the Feedback Process.....	17
Accessible Formats and Communication Supports.....	18
Deliverable.....	18
Status Update on Accessible Formats and Communication Supports .....	18
Emergency Procedure, Plans or Public Safety Information .....	19
Deliverable.....	20
Status Update on Emergency Procedure, Plans or Public Safety Information ...	20
Accessible Websites and Web Content .....	20
Deliverable.....	20
Status Update on Website and Web Content .....	20
Employment Standard .....	22
Recruitment, Assessment and Selection .....	22
Deliverable.....	22
Status Update on Recruitment, Assessment and Selection.....	22
Documented Individual Accommodation Plan.....	24
Deliverable.....	24
Status Update on Individual Accommodation Plans: .....	25
Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees .....	25
Deliverable.....	25
Status Update on Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees .....	25
Workplace Emergency Response Information.....	25
Deliverable.....	25
Status Update on Workplace Emergency Response Information .....	26
Return to Work Process .....	26
Deliverable.....	26

Status Update on the Return to Work Process.....	27
Performance Management .....	27
Deliverable.....	27
Status Update on Performance Management.....	27
Career Development and Advancement .....	27
Deliverable.....	27
Status Update on Career Development and Advancement.....	28
Redeployment .....	28
Deliverable.....	28
Status Update on Redeployment.....	28
Design of Public Spaces Standard .....	29
Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations.....	29
Deliverable.....	29
Status Update on Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations .....	29
Other Accessibility Initiatives – 2018 General Election .....	31
Specialized Voting Services and Tools - 2018 General Election.....	31
Vote by home visit .....	31
Vote at alternative voting location.....	31
Vote while in hospital.....	31
Vote by mail .....	31
Assistive devices at voting locations .....	31
Assistive voting technology .....	32
Sign language interpreters and intervenors.....	32
Voting assistance from a friend or support person .....	32
Voting instructions in other languages .....	32
Feedback process.....	32
Modernizing the Electoral Process - 2018 General Election .....	32
Electronic Poll Books .....	32
Vote Tabulators.....	33
Election Management .....	33
eRegistration .....	33
Voter Information Service.....	33

# 2018 Status Update to Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

## Message from CEO

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Accessibility is incorporated into all facets of Elections Ontario's day-to-day operations. We continuously work to implement the deliverables outlined in our 2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan as per the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), and we remain committed to preventing and removing barriers to voting as part of our vision to build modern services that put the needs of voters first.

The second year of our five-year accessibility plan was a significant one for Elections Ontario as we administered a general election across the province and introduced technology in the polls—all while maintaining the integrity and security of the vote and protecting the personal information of over 10.2 million voters.

Electronic poll books (ePoll books) allowed us to serve voters faster as election officials could search for a voter by scanning their voter information card. Vote tabulators allowed us to deliver election results quickly by automating the ballot count after the close of polls.

As part of this transformative election, we also secured and audited over 8,000 voting locations to ensure they were accessible and enhanced our materials so that people with disabilities could easily find their voting location and information about the many accessible voting options available to them.

We are proud of our achievements for 2018 and will continue to provide accessible voting options for people with disabilities that are consistent with the four principles of the AODA; dignity, respect, integration and equal opportunity.

Greg Essensa  
Chief Electoral Officer

## Overview

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Elections Ontario continues to identify and remove barriers to improve accessibility, as outlined in our 2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Each year, Elections Ontario is mandated to prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement its multi-year accessibility plan. This is Elections Ontario's 2018 status report on the important progress that has been made in the second year of the 2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

### Background and Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) establishes accessibility standards and requirements for customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces. Of these, 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 and accommodations 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. The AODA is incorporated into all areas of our work and we recognize 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 implementing all requirements of the AODA in our day-to-day operations. We also incorporate the AODA when conducting elections, in alignment with Elections Ontario's mission statement "to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process and to manage elections in an efficient, fair and impartial manner".

The five-year accessibility plan is a strategy that assists staff and gives direction on how to prevent and remove barriers, as mandated by the AODA. Staff also follow policies, practices and procedures, participate in staff training and follow specific guidelines across all divisions so that we remain committed to incorporating accessibility.

During an election, such as the 2018 general election, the administration of the electoral process must be accessible so that voters with disabilities can exercise their right to vote privately and independently. In 2018, more than 8,000 voting locations were chosen, secured, and remediated, where necessary, to ensure every voting location was accessible. In addition, more than 51,000 individuals were hired and trained to assist with the electoral process and provide accessible customer service to Ontario's 10.2 million voters.

### **Update on 2018 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 listed throughout this document, we show the “deliverable” followed by the “status update”.

- **Deliverable:** what we are legislated to do under the AODA for each of the standards, and what we have committed to do in our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan; and
- **Status Update:** what we have accomplished for the year 2018.



## 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* (AODA). They include:

- Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
- Accessibility policies
- Staff training
- Accessible procurement

A report on each of the requirements is listed below:

### Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

A multi-year accessibility plan outlines an organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility while meeting its requirements under the AODA. The "deliverable" and "status update" for Election Ontario's 2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan are provided below:

#### Deliverable

Establish, implement, maintain, and document a five-year accessibility plan which outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers in consultation with persons with disabilities. Organizations are required to provide an annual status report on the measures and steps taken.

#### Status Update on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Elections Ontario's 2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) outlines our commitment to identify and remove barriers to improve accessibility. The five-year plan demonstrates how we will accomplish the following:

- Meet the accessibility requirements within required timelines specified in the Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation
- Address any current accessibility barriers
- Prevent and remove future barriers

The MYAP was created in consultation with community agencies and individuals representing people with various disabilities. We continually leverage their expertise as we move forward with the implementation of the MYAP and our goal to increase levels of services, reduce barriers to voting, and make voting easy for voters with disabilities.

We are extremely grateful to the community agencies and individuals representing people with various disabilities that are listed below, for their expertise, advice, and recommendations:

- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Arthritis Society
- Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf
- Canadian Hearing Society
- CNIB Foundation
- Community Living Ontario
- March of Dimes
- Ontario College of Art & Design University (OCAD)
- Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy
- Parkinson Canada
- Spinal Cord Injury Ontario

We continue to implement the MYAP and we are reporting on the progress of the second year of the accessibility plan. This report is posted on our website in an accessible PDF and provided in alternative accessible formats upon request.

Elections Ontario also filed an accessibility compliance report with the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario in December 2018, in compliance with the regulation.

## **Accessibility Policies**

Accessibility policies outline how an organization will meet its obligations under the AODA, as it refers to the Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation. 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**

Elections Ontario has an Accessibility Policy and an Integrated Accessibility Standards Policy, both of which cover the AODA standards that are applicable to our organization, including customer service, employment, information and communications and public spaces. The policies outline how we will meet and implement the required deliverables and serve as a guide for staff to follow. Copies of the accessibility policies are provided to new employees as part of the orientation process. It is important that staff remain committed to incorporating accessibility into all areas of service provided to the public, especially during an election.

The policies include a statement of commitment to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and are available on the Elections Ontario website as an accessible PDF, or in an alternative accessible format upon request. The policies are consistent with the four core principles of the AODA: independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity.

## **Staff Training**

All organizations are required to provide training on the accessible Customer Service Standard, the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, 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 and volunteers must be trained on the Customer Service Standard. They must also be trained on the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as appropriate to the employee’s duties.

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**

All existing head office employees completed mandatory training on the requirements of the Customer Service Standard to enable them to provide goods and services to the public in an accessible manner. Training was also provided on the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation as appropriate to each individual employee’s duties, and on the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as it pertains to people with disabilities.

All new internal staff automatically received training on the Customer Service Standard, Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. Training for head office staff and field staff takes place shortly after individuals are hired. Records are maintained of who has completed training and when, as per the legislative requirements.

Ontario’s 42<sup>nd</sup> general election was held on June 7, 2018. Elections Ontario hired over 51,000 field staff for the election. Even though most of the field staff only worked for a single day, every individual received training on the following:

- How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animals, or the assistance of a support person

- How to use equipment or devices available on Election Ontario’s premises or that may help with the provision of goods or services to a person with a disability
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing goods or services
- How to provide a notice of service disruption when goods or services are interrupted
- How to deliver accessible customer service

Elections Ontario trained frontline personnel, including poll officials, to ensure responsiveness to voters with disabilities. In addition to in-person training, we used our award-winning training video to inform poll officials and returning office staff on ways to better serve voters with disabilities. Online training modules were provided on the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. Each member of frontline staff who received training signed a certificate confirming that they completed their training and were prepared to deliver excellent customer service.

## **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 to incorporate the accessibility requirements related to the AODA. The Procurement Policy and the original RFP process are based on the Customer Service Standard and will need to incorporate the requirements of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation.

## Customer Service Standard

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The Customer Service Standard applies to all organizations, including the government, the Legislative Assembly and public, private and non-profit organizations, that provide goods or services either directly to the public or to other organizations in Ontario (third parties), and that have one or more employees in Ontario.

Below are the legislated requirements under the Customer Service Standard and the “deliverable” and “status update” for each:

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

### 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

As per Elections Ontario’s Accessible Customer Service Policy, people with disabilities are permitted to use their own assistive devices to access Elections Ontario’s goods or services. For any assistive device that Elections Ontario provides, staff are trained on how to use those devices so that they can assist an individual or a voter appropriately.

For the first time in Ontario, voters with disabilities were permitted to use their own personal devices and/or phones during the 2018 general election as an aide to help them throughout the voting process. Ahead of the election, we received feedback from community agencies representing people with disabilities on the importance of permitting the use of personal assistive devices. Elections Ontario proactively pursued this option and changed our policies to permit people with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices during an election (phone, tablet, wristwatch, FM listening devices, etc.). These assistive devices support independent voting. For example, a voter who is blind could take a picture of the candidates’ list and use an application on their device to convert the text to speech for them. Other uses could be to record (written or auditory) voting information and instructions, thoughts, notes, transportation arrangements or phone numbers for easy retrieval

during the voting process, or to use their phone or device to map the voting location, call for accessible transit, research voting information and processes, or provide appropriate proof of identification.

The use of personal assistive devices by people with disabilities during the 2018 general election was successfully implemented. An outreach campaign through community agencies that represent people with disabilities helped provide information about the use of personal devices at the polls. Those that did use their own devices found it helpful to be able to use their every-day tools during an election.

Elections Ontario also provided a number of assistive tools at the voting locations to help voters with disabilities to vote independently and secretly. Devices included magnifiers, braille ballot templates, raised numbers and cut-outs to assist voters with vision loss, notepads for communicating with voters with hearing loss, and easy-grip pencils for individuals who have manual dexterity challenges.

Assistive voting technology (AVT) was also available in every returning office and satellite office from the start of advance voting until 6 PM the day before election day. This technology processes hand-marked paper ballots in addition to ballots marked by voters via integrated ballot-marking devices that have audio, sip and puff, and tactile interfaces. Staff were trained on how to use the AVT equipment to provide support to voters using the technology. However, the number of AVT users continues to decline—in 2011, there were 161 users, and in 2018, only 80. Out of Ontario’s approximate 10.2 million voters, less than one percent of voters used the AVT.

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

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

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

Guide dogs and service animals can assist people with disabilities 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**

As legislated under the Customer Service Standard, organizations must allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of the premises you own or operate 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. Previously, the requirement was to provide documentation from a physician or nurse.

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

Elections Ontario permits people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal as per our Accessible Customer Service Policy. Employees were notified that documentation could now be provided by any regulated health professional through an internal newsletter. The newsletter also had an article on service animals and guide dog etiquette.

If a person with a disability is accompanied by their guide dog or service animal, Elections Ontario ensures that the person is permitted to enter any of our premises and to keep the animal with him or her, unless excluded by law from the premises. If an animal is excluded by law, Elections Ontario ensures that we provide the assistance the individual requires. As per Elections Ontario's Accessible Customer Service Policy, the guide dog or service animal must always remain under the care and control of the individual.

## **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 for medical needs or access to goods or services. If a 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 third parties.

Where admission fees are charged for a support person of a person with a disability you must provide notice ahead of time on what fees, if any, would be charged.

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

People with disabilities are permitted to enter Elections Ontario's premises together with their support person and remain together so that they can access our goods and services.

During the 2018 general election, support persons were permitted to assist an individual while voting. These persons could be a legally trained support person or family member or friend. Support persons take an oath or affirmation of secrecy and assist a voter while they mark a ballot.

If a voter required the use of a sign language interpreter during an election, the costs were covered by Elections Ontario. For the 2018 general election, we also covered the costs of intervenors based on feedback from community agencies representing people with disabilities. We worked with the Canadian Hearing Society, CNIB Foundation and Deaf-Blind Community Services to ensure voters could arrange for their preferred interpreting services, and that the costs would be covered by Elections Ontario.

## **Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions**

In order 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 in 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 your goods or services are temporarily disrupted. The notice must include the following three pieces of information: reason for the disruption, anticipated duration of the disruption and alternative facilities or services.

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

Providing notice of service disruptions is a legislated requirement during an election under both the AODA and the *Election Act*. Elections Ontario provides notice of service disruptions to the public by posting a notice at the particular location and on the website, if necessary. The notice includes information about the reason for the disruption, the anticipated duration and what the alternative facilities or services will be.

During an election, temporary disruptions in services at voting locations may interfere with the ability of voters to cast their ballots. For the 2018 general election, 20 notices of disruption throughout the elector calendar occurred, 13 of which were posted on election day. Of the 13 disruptions, nine required voting hour extensions as they impacted the ability of electors to vote. Most disruptions in service were related to malfunctioning elevators, intermittent power outages or fire alarms which were quickly remediated. Before the remediation occurred, a notice of service disruption was posted on our website and physically at the impacted voting location so that voters knew in advance what was happening and could make other arrangements, if necessary.



## 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 supports
- Emergency procedure, plans or public safety information
- Accessible websites and web content

### Accessible Feedback Process

Persons with disabilities must be able to provide feedback on the services they receive in an accessible manner. The “deliverable” and “status update” for providing an accessible feedback process are listed below:

#### Deliverable

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

#### Status Update on the Feedback Process

Elections Ontario has a feedback process in place to allow people with disabilities to provide comments and/or suggestions so that we continually improve the service that we provide and do not create any new barriers.

Elections Ontario welcomes and appreciates feedback from our stakeholders, especially those facing barriers to voting. Stakeholders can offer feedback in a variety of ways:

- Email: [info@elections.on.ca](mailto:info@elections.on.ca)
- Phone: 1-888-668-8683
- TTY: 1-888-292-2312
- Fax: 1-866-714-2809
- Mail
- In person at head office
- Website feedback forms

All feedback is generally processed within one business day. Should a request require additional time to assess or process, the requester is notified that a review is underway to address their inquiry. The request is then sent to the appropriate

division for review and investigation. The request is logged and tracked until the request is resolved.

At Elections Ontario, we value the comments we receive and take them into consideration as part of our strategic planning to support our ongoing efforts to reduce and remove barriers for people with disabilities.

During the 2018 general election, customer service feedback forms were available at voting locations, satellite offices and returning offices across the province. We received 31,008 customer service feedback forms with comments or suggestions, 707 of which were accessibility-related comments about the services provided.

Feedback was also received from the 124 Returning Officers (ROs). Each RO completed a Returning Officer's Accessibility Report on the overall accessibility of the voting process. This information is used by the Chief Electoral Officer, who is mandated under the *Election Act* to provide a report that includes a summary of all actions, services, feedback and responses related to accessibility during the election process.

## **Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

To help people with disabilities source information and other 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 be 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 worked diligently to ensure that any information or communication supports that we provided to the public were accessible. It has become common

practice for all staff to ensure public information being published on the website or being communicated to the public is created and provided in an accessible manner. In addition, if we receive a request for an alternative format other than the accessible format we already provided, we work with the individual to provide it in a means that works for them.

During the 2018 general election, information on the election and voting process was provided in a range of formats to ensure that all Ontarians could understand when, where and how to vote. Communication materials, such as advertising and public education materials, were drafted in plain language and in an accessible format so that the reader could understand the information as quickly, easily, and completely as possible.

In response to community consultations held with agencies representing people with disabilities, Elections Ontario created a targeted handout on accessible voting options that community agencies could distribute to their clients in advance of the 2018 general election. The document provided information about when, where and how to vote.

We also conducted outreach campaigns and delivered presentations about accessible voting options offered by Elections Ontario. Election information was also promoted through radio advertising and social media. We partnered with accessibility influencers and bloggers to promote Provincial Voter Registration Month and the use of our online registration tool, eRegistration. Campus registration drives, CEO media tours, and targeted presentation and information sessions were also part of the outreach campaign to help voters become more aware of accessible voting options.

A voter information card (VIC) was sent to every registered voter in Ontario, and provided information about when, where and how to vote. Alternative formats of the VIC and any other voter information were available upon request.

TTY, an audio service that enables people with hearing loss to access information by telephone, is always available at Elections Ontario headquarters during regular business hours.

Elections Ontario continues to create and provide information and communications in ways that are accessible for people with disabilities.

## **Emergency Procedure, 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**

Should a visitor or the public visit our head office facilities and request in advance any Elections Ontario emergency safety information that would be helpful to them, we would provide the 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 maneuver 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, 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** sites, and 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, 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 websites** 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**

Elections Ontario has worked diligently to ensure our website is accessible and remains so on an ongoing basis. We follow and are compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), 2.0, Level AA, as per the requirements of the

*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* legislation. We also frequently test and evaluate the accessibility of the website using various assistive software programs like JAWS and NVDA to ensure people with disabilities can access the information properly. Anytime a new feature or fix is implemented on the website, WCAG testing is completed to ensure continued compliance.

Elections Ontario ensured that all new content and tools that were developed and posted to the website in 2018 were designed to be accessible and in full compliance with the WCAG 2.0, Level AA requirements. Old and new file attachments were posted in an accessible PDF version. In addition to the accessible PDF version, we continued to offer alternative formats of public documents upon request.

Extensive testing was done on the website prior to the 2018 general election to ensure voters with disabilities could easily find and obtain information about the voting process. Important voter information was added to the homepage and made accessible through a single click or entry point. Accessible voting information about the options to vote were displayed on the website so individuals could prepare themselves in advance of the polls. Contact information was made available at the footer of each page and on the Contact Us page so that if people with disabilities were having difficulty obtaining or locating information, they could contact an individual either by phone, email, fax, TTY or in person.

## 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. Below are the seven legislated requirements for the Employment Standard and the “deliverable” and “status update” for each:

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

### **Recruitment, Assessment and Selection**

Notification must be provided 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 participation in all aspects of the recruitment, assessment and selection process.

New and existing employees are informed of the organizations policies for accommodating employees with disabilities. Once a person is hired or a current employee discloses that they require accommodations, an individual accommodation plan process begins.

Employers shall provide updated information to its employees whenever there is a change to existing policies on the provision of job accommodations to employees with accessibility needs due to a disability.

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

Elections Ontario is committed to providing an accessible workplace for all employees across all stages of the employment life cycle. Elections Ontario has integrated accessibility into its regular workplace process in order to achieve a workplace that is accessible and allows employees to reach their full potential. Our

Accessible Employment Standards Procedures outlines the details for each process including recruitment, assessment and selection.

Elections Ontario notified its employees and the public throughout the year about the availability of accommodation during the recruitment process for applicants with disabilities. Information was also included in any job posting and on the Elections Ontario website in the careers section.

If an invited applicant requested an accommodation during the assessment stage, Elections Ontario consulted with the applicant and provided or arranged for the provision of suitable accommodation in a manner that considered the applicant's accessibility needs.

Once an individual was selected, Elections Ontario informed the employee of its policies to support people with disabilities. If an individual disclosed that they required accommodations, an individual accommodation plan was developed.

Any new staff that were hired were also trained on the Accessible Customer Service Standard, the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as it pertains to people with disabilities, as part of their orientation process.

We continue to provide education and training to staff. During the month of October, Elections Ontario's focus was to create mental health awareness and wellness in the workplace. Information and resources were shared on a weekly basis that highlighted different aspects of mental health and wellness. Links to resources and supports were provided to help employees be more aware of mental health at work and how we can reach out to those who may be struggling with mental health challenges.

A general election was held in 2018, and Elections Ontario set out to hire over 51,000 field staff to work in the election. In response to feedback from community agencies representing people with disabilities that voters with disabilities would feel more comfortable voting if they were served by individuals with disabilities, Elections Ontario ensured Returning Officers knew, and were able, to accommodate staff with accessibility needs.

More than 90% of all Returning Officers successfully employed persons with disabilities to work as poll officials; more than half reported employing persons with disabilities within their key office staff. Katie McMillan, who was hired as an Information Officer, provided this feedback:

*"As a job seeker with a disability, I have had to become very vocal with my needs concerning accessibility. For example, I had requested for longer break times to*

*accommodate my needs throughout the long work day, my polling station was equipped with extra staff so that, I wouldn't stress about my absence and they wouldn't struggle with coverage while I was gone. Elections Ontario was very accommodating and responsive to those needs so that I could comfortably and successfully fulfill my role as information officer on Election Day." - Katie McMillan*

Once the more than 51,000 field staff were hired, Elections Ontario had to ensure that staff were informed and comfortable with delivering services to people with disabilities in an accessible manner. Every single person received training on how to interact with people with various disabilities, how to provide accessible customer service and how to provide an accessible voting experience.

## **Documented Individual Accommodation Plan**

Employers will develop a written individual accommodation plan (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” for then individual accommodation plan process.

### **Deliverable**

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

1. An employee requesting accommodations participates in development of the IAP
2. Assessment 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 the manner in which it will be done
9. If denied, the reasons for denial are to be provided to the employee
10. A format that takes into account 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 Plans:**

If an individual disclosed that they required accommodations, Elections Ontario followed its written process for the development of an individual accommodation plan. The employee completed the individual accommodation form. Discussions then took place to determine what options and accommodations were required for the individual to perform their job. HR then developed an individual accommodation response plan, identifying accommodations required, steps to protect privacy, and accommodation to be provided.

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

In order 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 in order 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 required 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. This will help employees with disabilities, and the employers they work for, 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 aid the employee.

Employers shall provide information required under this section as soon as practicable after becoming 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**

Elections Ontario is committed to employee safety. If a person has a disability (whether permanent or temporary) and it is determined that they may need assistance during a workplace emergency, Human Resources works with the individual to develop an individualized workplace emergency response plan to meet their needs. The employee completes a Workplace Emergency Form. The information collected on the form is used by Human Resources to create an individualized workplace emergency response for the individual with the disability to determine the assistance needed, any devices required, evacuation route, alternate evacuation route, and the identified emergency support employees who will assist.

### **Return to Work Process**

The Return to Work Process ensures that employers have 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 individual accommodation plan as part of the process.

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

Elections Ontario has a documented process for supporting return to work for employees who have been absent due to a disability and who require disability-related accommodations to return to work. Once an employee who has been absent for two weeks or longer advises Elections Ontario verbally or in writing that they are preparing to return to work, a Return to Work Assessment form is provided. Work modifications are discussed, and HR initiates the individual accommodation plan process to assist the employee and provide the tools required so that the employee can perform their job duties.

### **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 consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as individual accommodation plans, when undertaking its performance management process with employees with disabilities.

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

Elections Ontario continued to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as an employee’s individual accommodation response plan, when providing performance management opportunities for employees.

### **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 consider the accessibility needs of their employees, as well as any individual accommodation plans, 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 aforementioned

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

Elections Ontario continues to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as an employee's individual accommodation response plan, when providing career development and advancement opportunities to employees.

### **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 particular 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 individual accommodation plans, when redeploying employees with disabilities.

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

Elections Ontario continues to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities when moving and redeploying individuals to other positions. It is important that employees have their accommodation needs met so that they can continue to contribute effectively in their 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 public spaces, 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 Elections Ontario Voting Location Site Accessibility Inspection Checklist. The “deliverable” and “status update” for the 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, which Elections Ontario would follow should we create any new spaces or undertake any major renovations.

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

Elections Ontario did not create or redevelop any new public spaces in 2018. However, for the 2018 general election we ensured that all voting locations across the province of Ontario met Election Ontario’s high accessibility criteria.

#### Accessible Voting Spaces for the 2018 General Election

Upholding the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process is part of Elections Ontario’s mission. It was imperative during the 2018 general election that all voting locations were accessible. This was achieved by ensuring our checklist for accessibility followed the requirements under the Ontario Building Code (OBC) and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), specifically the Public Spaces Standard. Our criteria also incorporate the London Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS). Elections Ontario meets and, in many instances, exceeds

the specific accessibility measurements legislated under the Public Spaces Standard and the Ontario Building Code.

Potential voting locations were audited for accessibility as per Elections Ontario's Site Accessibility Standards. Our Voting Location Checklist included auditing each building for accessibility in the following areas:

- Exterior signage (visibility and contrasting colours)
- Accessible parking (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 to voting room (door width, threshold and hardware)
- Elevator (location, dimensions, length of time on door opening)

Those sites that required remediation were identified and various tools were used to ensure the accessibility of each voting location. In total, 40% of proposed voting locations were remediated using various tools to ensure they were accessible. Remediation included the employment of additional information assistants to direct voters to accessible pathways, or to help voters with doors, ramps or elevators. There were 2,497 information assistants used for accessibility remediations in the 2018 general election. Directional signage was used to show an alternate or accessible pathway (2,359 directional signs were posted), parking cones were used to define accessible parking spaces (7,580 cones were used throughout Ontario), and mats and beveled threshold spaces were used to smooth out thresholds (149 ramps and 555 beveled thresholds).

Once it was determined which sites passed our criteria, the proposed accessible voting locations were posted six months prior to election day to allow the public's input on whether the locations presented any barriers. From the feedback we received, the voting locations were remediated where possible, new accessible sites were found, if needed, and the final list was approved. Leases were then arranged for the more than 8,000 voting locations in preparation for the 2018 general election.

## **Other Accessibility Initiatives – 2018 General Election**

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Elections Ontario continued to incorporate accessibility into all areas of service provided to the public daily, and especially during an election period. In 2018, Elections Ontario administered a general election that modernized the voting process and several accessibility initiatives were undertaken, including providing specialized voting services and tools.

### **Specialized Voting Services and Tools - 2018 General Election**

During the 2018 general election, the following specialized voting services and tools were available for people with disabilities:

#### **Vote by home visit**

If a voter found it impossible or unreasonably difficult to go to their voting location or needed assistance because of a disability or an inability to read or write, they had the option to request a home visit. Special Ballot Officers visited the individual and assisted them in casting a write-in special ballot so that they could vote.

#### **Vote at alternative voting location**

Voters with restricted mobility or other disabilities who could vote more conveniently at another voting location were able to apply to transfer to another voting location at a returning office.

#### **Vote while in hospital**

An eligible voter who was temporarily in an Ontario hospital during a general election would have been able to vote as part of the three-day hospital program.

#### **Vote by mail**

If a voter found it difficult to vote by one of the other means available, they were able to apply to vote by mail. Once the application was approved, the voter was sent a special ballot kit to complete, which they then returned to Elections Ontario.

#### **Assistive devices at voting locations**

Assistive devices were provided at voting locations to help voters with disabilities vote independently and in secrecy. Devices included magnifiers, braille ballot templates and tactile numbers and cut-outs to assist voters with vision loss to mark their ballot, pens and notepads for communicating with voters with hearing loss, and easy-grip pencils for those with decreased manual dexterity. In 2018, personal phones and assistive devices were permitted at the polls for assistance purposes.

### **Assistive voting technology**

The assistive voting technology (AVT) device is a voting machine that can assist people with disabilities to vote using one of the three options available: audio tactile interface, hand or foot operated paddles and/or sip and puff technology. The AVT was available in every returning office and satellite office from the start of advance voting until 6 PM the day before election day.

### **Sign language interpreters and intervenors**

Elections Ontario partnered with community agencies to book the services of sign language interpreters or intervenors, if required by a voter. Elections Ontario covered the cost of the service when used at a returning office, satellite office or voting location.

### **Voting assistance from a friend or support person**

An voter who required the assistance of another individual to vote could be accompanied by a friend or support person to the voting screen. This person could mark the ballot for the voter after fulfilling various requirements under the *Election Act*, such as making a declaration to maintain the secrecy of the vote.

### **Voting instructions in other languages**

Voting instructions were made available in 28 different languages.

### **Feedback process**

If a voter wanted to provide general feedback to Elections Ontario or specific feedback on a particular situation, each voting location, returning office and satellite office offered feedback forms that the voter could complete and place in the feedback box. General feedback could also be provided through Elections Ontario's website, by mail, email, phone or TTY.

## **Modernizing the Electoral Process - 2018 General Election**

For the 2018 general election, a more efficient and modern electronic process was implemented into the voting process. Poll officials used electronic poll books and vote tabulators to serve voters. The new efficiencies enabled us to serve more voters faster at a single polling location and reduced the overall number of staff required to administer an election.

### **Electronic Poll Books**

Electronic poll books (ePoll books) were introduced to replace the paper voters list. Each ePoll book contained an electronic voters list for the entire electoral district. Election officials could scan voter information cards (VIC) to look up voters and strike them off the voters faster than ever before.



## **Vote Tabulators**

Vote tabulators automated the counting of the ballots after the close of polls. This automatic counting reduced human error while increasing process integrity. Automatic counting also reduced the end-of-day reporting time from hours to minutes, giving voters, political participants, and members of the media almost immediate unofficial results. In the event of a recount, the paper ballots, which were fed into the vote tabulator after being marked by voters, could be recounted by hand to maintain the integrity of the process.

## **Election Management**

A new election management system (EMS) was designed to efficiently manage all aspects of the election. The EMS created a common, secure, web-based platform to store information needed for the election. The new integrated system replaced seven aging, stand-alone legacy systems that we previously used to manage and administer elections in the field.

## **eRegistration**

Elections Ontario introduced the eRegistration tool to simplify the voter registration process. The new application allowed voters to confirm, update, add or remove their information on the voters list online. The online tool was designed and tested for WCAG 2.0, Level AA compliance. Various community agencies representing people with disabilities provided input and assisted us in ensuring the overall accessibility of the tool. Elections Ontario also worked with the CNIB Foundation to complete additional testing by individuals who use various assistive devices to ensure that the eRegistration tool was compatible when using various accessibility apps and software programs such as JAWS, NVDA, Dragon Naturally Speaking and Zoomtext. Over 1.2 million individuals have used the tool since its launch. Having correct voter information helped to speed up the process for the voter once they arrived at the polls.

## **Voter Information Service**

Another new tool added to the website was the Voter Information Service, which assisted voters in finding the information they required to vote. Outside of an election, the tool provides information on each of the 124 electoral districts in the province of Ontario. During the election, voters could enter their postal code to find their voting locations, a list of candidates, and access a voter checklist to ensure they were ready to vote before going to the polls.

In 2018, Elections Ontario took significant steps towards modernizing elections in Ontario to better serve voters, while preserving the integrity of the vote. Following the election, we received six awards from the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies and the International Centre for Electoral Psychology in January 2019. The awards were:

- The Electoral Commissioner of the Year Award
- The Election Management Award
- The Electoral Commission of the Year
- The Minority Participation Award
- The First Time Voter Award
- The Electoral Ergonomy Award

It is an honour to have our achievements, and the collaborative efforts of our partners, recognized by the international community. These awards, and the success of the 2018 general election, reflect Elections Ontario's ongoing commitment to putting the needs of voters first.