

2024 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Accessible Formats and Feedback

Accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request. If you require an accessible format or communication support, or if you wish to provide feedback, please contact us in any of the following ways:

- **Email:** info@elections.on.ca
- **Phone:** 1-888-668-8683
- **TTY:** 1-888-292-2312
- **Fax:** 1-866-714-2809
- **Mail:** Elections Ontario, 26 Prince Andrew Place, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 2H4
- **In Person** at 26 Prince Andrew Place, Toronto

Your feedback is important to us. Elections Ontario recognizes that feedback is critical to identifying and removing barriers to participation, as well as improving how we deliver our services to persons with disabilities.

All questions and feedback will be processed in a timely manner.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plans and Annual Status Reports

Current and past Multi-Year Accessibility Plans and annual status reports are available on the [Elections Ontario website](#).

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Message from the CEO

I am pleased to present the Elections Ontario 2024 Status Update to our 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP). This report highlights the activities and developments from January 1 to December 31, 2024, to promote elector accessibility and inclusion in the electoral process during the third year of our MYAP.

At Elections Ontario, our mission is to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process by administering provincial elections in an efficient, fair and impartial manner. We place great importance on dignity, independence and equal opportunity for all Ontario electors, and we are fully compliant with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

In 2024, Elections Ontario delivered three accessible by-elections, ensuring all eligible Ontarians could exercise their democratic right to vote in an inclusive and barrier-free environment.

To help support local electoral events, we implemented the new provincial Register on January 1, 2024, meeting the legislative requirement to make the preliminary list of electors available to all 444 municipalities in Ontario. Through the election portal, municipal clerks, district social services administration board members, and school board administrators can request elector information to plan and run their elections, suggest changes to addresses and elector data, and communicate directly with the Register team.

On January 15, 2024, Elections Ontario launched the [Register to Vote website](#) making it easier and more convenient for electors to register for provincial and local elections, all in one place. The website provides information on eligibility, registration and how to confirm, update or add yourself to the Register.

Elections Ontario continually strives to improve services and remove barriers to accessibility. We collaborate with community organizations that represent persons with disabilities and consider the feedback we receive from the public to help achieve the goals outlined in our MYAP. Working together, we make voting accessible and easy for all electors.

Greg Essensa

Chief Electoral Officer

Overview

Elections Ontario (EO) is a non-partisan office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that administers provincial elections, by-elections and referenda while taking into consideration the legislative accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities.

Our [2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#) (MYAP) is EO's strategic five-year roadmap to identifying, removing, and preventing accessibility barriers for people with disabilities. It is based on the following key objectives:

- Enhancing the voting experience by modernizing Ontario's electoral processes and offering accessible tools and services that meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Eliminating barriers to participation by identifying, preventing, and removing obstacles to ensure that individuals with disabilities can engage in the democratic process in a fully accessible and inclusive manner.

This annual status report outlines the initiatives undertaken by EO and the progress achieved in the third year of implementing our MYAP. It also reports on the accessibility measures undertaken during the three by-elections that EO successfully delivered in 2024 in the following electoral districts (EDs):

- Bay of Quinte, ED 006 (September 19)
- Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, ED 050 (May 2)
- Milton, ED 059 (May 2)

Background and Legislation

To develop and implement EO's overall strategic direction for providing accessibility supports to Ontarians with disabilities, we must comply with the requirements under the following legislation:

- ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)***: enacted to create accessibility standards that ensure Ontarians with disabilities can access goods, services, spaces and employment opportunities.
- **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), Ontario Regulation 191/11 under the AODA**: establishes accessibility requirements for the five legislative standards: customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation and the design of public spaces (EO is not required to comply with the transportation standard as it is not applicable).

- ***Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC)***: ongoing obligations to accommodate persons with disabilities and to ensure they are not subject to undue hardships.
- ***Election Act, 1990***: requires Returning Officers to ensure that voting locations are accessible to voters with disabilities.

While the AODA and its requirements are incorporated into our election administration policies and procedures, we recognize that additional accommodation measures beyond the AODA may be required in accordance with the OHRC.

Commitment to our MYAP

To better serve our communities, staff, and more than 10.8 million eligible Ontario electors, EO has embedded the core principles of the AODA and the IASR accessibility standards into all areas of our work, including our policies, practices and procedures which aim to provide:

- goods, services and facilities in an integrated manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities;
- equal opportunities to obtain, use, and benefit from the goods and services or facilities;
- information and communications in accessible ways; and
- equal opportunity and diversity in employment and an accessible work environment.

Accessibility Committee

EO's internal Accessibility Committee meets regularly to consider accessibility in every aspect of our service delivery, including products, policies, practices and procedures. It also focuses on our MYAP objectives while exploring new opportunities for accessible voting and preventing barriers.

In 2024, the Accessibility Committee continued to examine the following topics:

- Employment opportunities at EO for persons with disabilities.
- Using data from Emergency Management Ontario to select voting locations in at-risk areas and to conduct mitigation planning.
- Use of robot information assistants to enhance services and the associated security risks.
- Creating public awareness and collaborating with social media platforms regarding misinformation and disinformation.
- Digital solutions and security to improve efficiency and enhance accuracy.

The Accessibility Committee also recognizes that the following barriers to voting may exist and could be further explored:

- using paper materials to vote;
- physically getting to a voting location or not feeling safe to vote in person;
- accessing voting or candidate information;
- voting independently and privately;
- uploading and showing identification or not having acceptable identification; and
- the influence of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) on democratic processes and the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

The Accessibility Committee continues to provide strategic advice on the implementation and effectiveness of the MYAP and the removal of barriers for people with disabilities.

Community Organizations and Individuals Representing Persons with Disabilities

We recognize and appreciate the input and continued support from individuals and community organizations representing persons with disabilities across the province, some of which have helped us create our MYAP. Their expertise has helped guide EO as we continually identify, prevent, and eliminate barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

The following organizations have provided or continue to provide support:

- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Arthritis Society Canada
- Autism Ontario
- Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- CNIB Foundation, Toronto & Ottawa
- Community Living Ontario
- DeafBlind Ontario Services
- March of Dimes Canada
- Ontario Disability Employment Network
- Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy
- Parkinson Canada
- Spinal Cord Injury Ontario

In November 2024, EO met with many of these organizations to provide an update on our MYAP and to discuss employment barriers and strategies for persons with disabilities.

EO is committed to sharing job opportunities with partner organizations, reviewing our recruitment processes, and continuing to work with organizations to leverage expertise on best practices for hiring persons with disabilities.

General Requirements

There are several deliverables that EO must implement in accordance with the general requirements of the AODA, such as creating and maintaining accessibility and procurement policies, developing multi-year accessibility plans, publishing biennial accessibility compliance reports and annual MYAP status reports, and providing staff training.

Accessibility and Procurement Policies

EO's [Integrated Accessibility Standards Policy](#) outlines the requirements and service standards for providing goods, services and facilities for voters with disabilities. Our [Site Accessibility Standards](#) policy sets the accessibility standards for voting locations and local election offices. Both policies are provided to our staff and are available to the public in an accessible format on our website.

EO has also developed a procurement policy for procuring goods and services that incorporates accessibility design, criteria and features. Our request for proposals (RFP) process requires that all vendors working on our behalf understand and can recommend or deliver, as appropriate, accessible and inclusive services consistent with the AODA requirements.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Our MYAP was developed in consultation with community organizations and individuals representing persons with disabilities to meet the legislative requirements of the AODA. It demonstrates EO's commitment to accessibility and outlines our strategy to ensure our services are accessible to all Ontarians, including EO staff and members of the public with disabilities. It is an accessible document posted on our website and is available in alternative formats upon request.

MYAP Compliance and Status Reports

Under the AODA, EO must file an accessibility compliance report with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility every two years to confirm that we have met our accessibility requirements under the AODA. Our most recent report was filed in October 2023, and the next one will be filed in the fall of 2025.

EO is also required to prepare an annual status report documenting the progress made in the MYAP. These reports are posted on our website as accessible PDF documents. Alternative formats are available upon request.

Headquarter and Election Staff Training

EO ensures that training is provided to all headquarter and election staff on the IASR customer service standard, the OHRC (as it pertains to persons with disabilities), and each of the AODA standards (as applicable to the duties of the position).

We continue to review and revise our staff training materials to include more information about interacting with, and accommodating persons with, lesser known and understood disabilities, including those that are invisible or less visible.

Headquarter Staff Training

New headquarter staff are trained on accessibility during their first week of employment and are provided with guidelines, best practices, policies and procedures to ensure incorporation of our accessibility principles across the organization. The materials are available in an accessible format.

Election Staff Training

Training election staff on how to provide accessible customer service to an elector is extremely important. All poll officials and staff in each electoral district are trained prior to the beginning of an election or by-election to ensure responsiveness to electors with disabilities, in accordance with the requirements of the AODA.

Manuals and poll kits are provided to poll officials, including instructions on how to assist electors with disabilities, specifically at voting locations. Topics include assisting individuals with voting, accommodating the use of an interpreter or intervenor services, supporting electors with a variety of disabilities and using assistive devices. These training materials can be provided to election staff as electronic versions or converted to accessible documents if required or upon request.

In addition to in-person training, we use our award-winning training video to show staff how they can better serve electors with disabilities.

Training and Onboarding for Political Party Stakeholders

Virtual training and onboarding sessions on the *Election Finances Act* and Political Entity Portal (PEP) are provided to political party stakeholders regarding election finances, how to use PEP for filing required financial statements and supporting schedules. Since most of our stakeholders are volunteers who have full-time jobs, we offer day and evening sessions and tailor the frequency based on key filing periods.

Information and Communications Standard

The Information and Communications Standard under the IASR requires service providers to create, provide and receive information and communications that persons with disabilities can access.

To help persons with disabilities access sources of information and communications, we continually make enhancements to our websites, advertising and marketing plans, media relations, and outreach and public education initiatives to improve the user experience.

Accessible Formats and Communication Support

When EO receives a request for a copy of a document in an accessible format or communication support, the request is fulfilled as soon as practicable at a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons. EO consults with the person making the request to determine the suitability of an accessible format or communication support based on their accessibility needs. The availability of accessible formats and communication support is posted on our website.

By-Elections – Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

During the three by-elections that were held in 2024, all public-facing products and materials were accessible and complied in accordance with the requirements of the AODA. Accessible documents in both English and French were posted on EO's website and were made available in alternative formats upon request.

The following is a list of EO initiatives that were carried out for the 2024 by-elections:

- We continued to update and enhance outreach initiatives for electors facing barriers (e.g. electors with accessibility needs, incarcerated electors and electors without a permanent address).
- We redesigned and updated the *Guide to Accessible Voting in Provincial Elections* handout to make it more visually appealing, up to date, and easier for electors to learn about our accessibility services.
- We provided general information on elections and the voting process in a range of formats to ensure that all Ontarians could understand when, where and how to vote.
- We drafted all communication materials (including advertising and public education) in plain language.
- Electors could arrange for registered ASL and LSQ interpreters or intervenors at our expense.

- A voter information card (VIC) was sent to each elector on the voters list to provide personalized information on when and where to vote.
- TTY was available at our headquarters leading up to and during each by-election. This audio service enabled people with hearing loss to access information by telephone.
- Tools and services were available at voting locations during the by-elections and on each election day, including magnifiers, braille ballot templates with raised numbers and cut-outs to assist electors with reduced visibility or vision loss, and writing pads and pens for communicating with electors with hearing loss.
- Assistive voting technology (AVT) was available at all returning offices and satellite offices, where applicable.
- High-contrast directional arrows were used to direct electors to accessible pathways and entrances at voting locations.
- Electors could use their mobile phones as assistive devices.
- By-election-specific information on when, where and how to vote was available on the EO mobile app.

Voter Feedback, QR Codes and Accessibility

EO has been exploring ways to increase the accessibility of its collection of feedback from electors who have cast their ballots.

During the Bay of Quinte by-election, EO piloted a QR code approach, which allowed voters to use their personal devices to provide feedback.

QR codes provide easy access to digital content. However, they can pose challenges for users with disabilities, particularly in locating and scanning them. EO's approach includes providing easy-to-follow scanning instructions, using high-contrast QR codes for better visibility, using well-considered physical placement to accommodate every elector, and consistently maintaining the appearance of the QR code poster to foster familiarity and ease of use over time.

EO is committed to implementing ongoing improvements to our feedback process, and we continue to work with community organizations and accessibility experts to make it more accessible and user friendly.

Accessible Websites and Web Content

Pursuant to the Information and Communications Standard of the IASR, EO's websites are compliant with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#), Level AA, enabling users of computers or mobile devices to browse without looking at the screen or clicking a mouse.

The videos on our public websites have ASL and LSQ interpretation embedded within them. Additionally, audio descriptions will be embedded in all new videos or a separate audio track will be provided.

Our public websites are continually checked and tested for accessibility. All new features and enhancements are designed to be accessible to enhance the user experience. We are also researching possible future requirements of WCAG 2.2 and its impact.

By-Elections – Accessible Websites and Web Content

For the three by-elections in 2024, the following initiatives were undertaken to ensure the accessibility of EO's website and its content:

- EO's website and all materials were AODA compliant, and enhancements were continually made to improve the user experience.
- Election materials such as the *Ontario Voting Guide*, Identification Requirements and voting instructions were made available for download from our website in English and French.
- EO's Voter Information Service (VIS) and related applications underwent ongoing testing to meet AODA compliance.
- A new Register to Vote website was created and the voter registration web application was updated to allow electors to register once for both provincial and local elections, all in one place.
- An Ontario photo card automated flow was added to the voter registration process to accommodate electors without a driver's license.

Provincial Register and Register to Vote Website

To help support local electoral events, we implemented the new provincial Register on January 1, 2024, meeting the legislative requirement to make the preliminary list of electors available to all 444 municipalities in Ontario. Through the election portal, municipal clerks, district social services administration board members and school board administrators can request elector information to plan and run their elections, suggest changes to addresses and elector data, and communicate directly with the Register team.

On January 15, 2024, Elections Ontario launched the [Register to Vote website](#) making it easier and more convenient for electors to register for provincial and local elections. The website provides information on eligibility, registration and how to confirm, update or add your information to the Register.

Employment Standard

The Employment Standard of the IASR requires employers to provide accessible accommodation 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.

EO is an equal-opportunity employer committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable and accessible environment where all employees feel valued, respected and supported. To help support existing and potential new staff, we:

- provide accommodations during the recruitment, assessment and selection process;
- provide individual accommodation plans and related accommodations required for an employee to perform their job;
- provide a return-to-work process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability;
- consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities for performance management, career development and redeployment;
- consult with employees who have disabilities to ensure the individualized workplace emergency response information meets their needs;
- review all new and revised job advertisements and job descriptions for content, language and accessibility; and
- ensure all external human resources documents are accessible and that staff follow EO's Employment Standard procedures to create an accessible work experience for persons with disabilities.

EO is also committed to increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities at headquarters and in positions that become available during elections. To do this, we plan to strengthen our connections with organizations that help increase employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities.

Individuals who require a disability-related accommodation to participate in the recruitment process or during their employment can contact us by:

- **Email:** hr@elections.on.ca
- **Phone:** 1-888-668-8683
- **TTY:** 1-888-292-2312
- **Fax:** 1-866-714-2809
- **Mail:** Elections Ontario, 26 Prince Andrew Place, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 2H4
- **In Person** at 26 Prince Andrew Place, Toronto

By-Elections – Employment

EO is an equal-opportunity employer, and we provide accommodations as necessary. We encourage people with disabilities to disclose and request accommodations should they need them so that they can perform their jobs with the tools and/or support they require.

In the three by-elections held in 2024, we employed 23 individuals who self-identified as having a disability.

EO is committed to sharing job opportunities with partner organizations, reviewing our recruitment processes, and continuing to work with organizations to leverage expertise on best practices for hiring persons with disabilities.

Design of Public Spaces

The Design of Public Spaces Standard in the IASR provides requirements to make public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped, easier for everyone to access. This includes outdoor spaces such as accessible parking spaces, outdoor paths of travel, sidewalks, ramps, stairs, curb ramps and rest areas. It also includes service-related elements such as service counters, fixed queuing lines and waiting areas with fixed seating. For all other spaces, the accessibility requirements of the Ontario Building Code are followed.

Headquarters

EO follows the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard and the Ontario Building Code for the physical location of its headquarters.

Voting Locations & Local Election Offices

When EO holds an election or by-election, all voting locations are inspected using EO's voting location inspection checklist to ensure they meet the accessibility standards stipulated in the *Election Act*, which are consistent with AODA requirements. Voting locations include returning offices, advance poll and election day voting locations.

EO's checklist has stringent requirements to ensure that a proposed voting location meets optimal accessibility before being approved. Pursuant to EO's Site Accessibility Standards, a voting location is considered accessible if it meets the following mandatory accessibility criteria:

- Accessible parking availability and parking space width (only if parking is available at the location)
- Width, surface and slope of pathway
- Entrance door width, threshold level and hardware
- Slope and ramp of hallway
- Hallway and door width
- Ground floor location or elevator

If a proposed voting location does not meet the mandatory criteria, temporary remediations can be applied so that the voting location can become accessible.

For a fixed date general election, the final list of approximately 7,000 proposed voting locations is posted on EO's website six months prior to the election, and the public is encouraged to provide feedback on the accessibility of the site selection.

Once deemed accessible, a proposed site can be used as an accessible voting location.

By-Elections – Accessible Voting Locations

EO ensures that all voting locations meet our [Site Accessibility Standards](#) and comply with the AODA. In some cases, facilities that meet these standards cannot be found within a geographical location and exemptions or remediations are necessary.

During the three by-elections held in 2024, each potential voting location was inspected for accessibility using the checklist. Below is a summary of the accessibility of the voting locations.

Bay of Quinte, Electoral District 006

Of the 80 voting locations (three advance voting locations and 77 on polling day), 57 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and 19 sites were remediated to become accessible. Four sites required exemptions.

Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Electoral District 050

Of the 66 voting locations (five advance voting locations and 65 on polling day), 60 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and six sites were remediated to become accessible.

Milton, Electoral District 059

Of the 44 polling stations (three advance voting locations and 42 on polling day), 22 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and 22 sites were remediated to become accessible.

By-Elections – Home Visits

Not all electors are physically able or capable of voting at a voting location. Should an individual find it impossible or unreasonably difficult to personally go to the returning office or a voting location to vote, or they require assistance due to a disability or an inability to read or write, they can request a home visit.

During a home visit, a team of two Special Ballot Officers visit the elector at their place of residence or another location within the electoral district. They assist the elector in completing an application and a voting kit.

During the three by-elections in 2024, a total of 41 home visits were conducted: 22 home visits in the Bay of Quinte, 14 in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and five in Milton.

Customer Service Standard

EO continues to ensure that all headquarters and election staff are trained and understand how to provide accessible customer service to persons with disabilities.

Below are legislated requirements that EO continues to implement under the Customer Service Standard of the IASR.

Use of Service Animals and Support Persons

Service animals are permitted to enter all EO premises including voting locations during elections. If a service animal is excluded by law from the premises, alternative access to EO's goods, services or facilities are provided, such as curbside voting.

EO also permits support persons to accompany persons with disabilities and to enter EO premises and voting locations to assist with communication, mobility or personal care for medical needs. Staff are trained on proper etiquette surrounding service animals and support persons.

Pursuant to the *Election Act*, a support person or a friend of a person with a disability can also accompany that person with a disability to the voting screen at the voting location to help them mark their ballot, provided the friend takes an oath to keep the name of the candidate for whom the ballot was marked secret.

Notice of Temporary Disruptions

It is important that persons with disabilities are informed when services are being disrupted so that they can make alternative plans. Our policies instruct staff to provide a notice of disruption to the public whenever there is a temporary disruption in service, including posting an alert on our website and sending a notification through our mobile app. Such notices include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, if possible, and a description of any alternative access that may be available.

By-Elections – Notice of Temporary Disruptions

Should there be a disruption in services during an election or by-election, physical notices are posted at all major entrances to the voting locations. The service disruption is also communicated to the electors via our website and the mobile application. In the three by-elections that took place in 2024, there were no service disruptions.

In Closing

Elections Ontario remains committed to removing barriers for persons with disabilities and making voting easier. We look forward to continuing to implement our MYAP with continued support from community organizations, individuals representing persons with disabilities and voters across Ontario.