

[HOME](#)[WHAT'S NEW](#)[CALENDAR](#)[PRODUCTS](#)[NEWS RELEASES](#)

Accessibility Plan 2006-2007

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)[Message from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs](#)[Report on Achievements](#)[Commitments - Measures to Prevent New Barriers](#)[Commitments - Barriers to be Addressed](#)[For More Information](#)

Introduction

In June 2005, the Ontario government took a strong stand on accessibility when it passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) into law.

The AODA lays out a comprehensive road map to make Ontario accessible to all people through the development, implementation and enforcement of new, mandatory accessibility standards for some of the most important aspects of people's lives.

The first two standards that are currently being developed cover the areas of transportation and customer service. On June 13, the first anniversary of the passage of the AODA, the government announced the development of three new standards that will address information and communications, the built environment, and employment.

While the government is moving forward to implement the AODA, there will be a transition period where government and the broader public sector will continue to meet their obligations under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA). These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.

Under the ODA, Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and public transportation organizations are required to develop annual accessibility plans to make policies, practices, programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. These plans must be made available to the public.

Accessibility planning efforts to date have developed a strong foundation for the development of accessibility standards that will mean real and effective change.

This document is the fourth annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It highlights the achievements of the 2005-06 plan and outlines the commitments for 2006-07 so that no new barriers are created and, over time, existing ones are removed.

This ministry intends to build on its achievements by implementing initiatives that support the government's commitment to continue to make Ontario an inclusive and accessible province where people of all abilities have a chance to fully achieve their potential.

| [Top of Page](#) |

Message from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs



I am pleased to present the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Accessibility Plan for 2006-2007.

All public sector and broader public sector organizations are required by law to have an annual accessibility plan and to make it available to the public. This is the fourth year in which plans have been written and are being implemented by organizations such as ours across the province.

This year marks the first anniversary of the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, (AODA) - legislation that will foster the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards in key areas of daily living.

To commemorate this milestone, three new accessibility standards to be developed in the areas of communications and information, the built environment, and employment were recently announced. This is in addition to two standards already being developed, which deal with customer service and transportation.

My ministry is committed to improving accessibility through identifying, removing and preventing barriers, working together within our ministry, across government and with our stakeholders in key areas of customer service, employment, communications and information, and the built environment.

Here at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we are building on the success of our previous three plans and continuing to look for ways to better meet the needs of people with disabilities who come into contact with this ministry, regardless of whether they are staff, members of the general public or ministry stakeholders.

This ministry continues to work to better educate staff on accessibility. Examples of this work in the past year include training to raise awareness among front line employees regarding the needs of persons with disabilities, and the co-operation of ministries at our head office location to create a regional facility that incorporates many features removing accessibility barriers. More examples are provided in the pages that follow.

If you have any comments or concerns, I encourage you to send them using the contact information located at the end of this document.

Sincerely,

Leona Dombrowsky
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

| [Top of Page](#) |

Report on Achievements

2005 - 2006 Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

In 2005-2006, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs built upon its previous efforts to reduce barriers to accessibility by undertaking a number of initiatives in the areas of customer service, employment, communications and information, built environment, and acts and regulations. A brief summary of the results of these initiatives this year is found below.

Customer Service

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to supporting ongoing compliance with the ODA and improving accessibility for people with disabilities through the work of the accessibility planning work group (APWG).

Status: Completed

Action: The APWG met to review action plans and timeframes to support the commitments outlined in the accessibility plan. The intranet website Ontarians with Disabilities Act - ODA for OMAFRA was maintained with current information for staff including membership roll, meeting minutes, suggestion box - barriers to accessibility, as well as helpful links. The provision of relevant education and awareness sessions through the Lunch and Learn program was also promoted on the ministry's Wellness intranet page. A Deputy Minister's communication was sent to all staff to remind them of ministry obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Members of the work group toured the Kitchener location of Kidsability Centre for Child Development. The tour heightened awareness of the measures that can be taken to promote a barrier-free physical environment and the need for holistic planning to address barriers. New managers were reminded of their commitment to review e-training modules available to provide a general overview of accessibility issues and ministry legislative obligations, as well as provide an overview of obligations regarding the procurement of goods and services. Finally, new membership to represent two ministry divisions was secured this past year.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continue to provide advice and direction to staff to help them consider accessibility issues when procuring goods and services.

Status: Completed

Action: The need to consider accessibility issues when procuring goods and services was communicated to all managers. Internal procurement checklists were amended and guidelines shared. Managers are now required to sign off that consideration has been given to accessibility issues when procuring goods and services, according to the guideline.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

3. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its practice of considering accessibility issues in its collaborations with other ministries.

Status: Completed

Action: The resource centre operated out of the ministry's Guelph headquarters at 1 Stone Road saw the opening of the Service Ontario counter in 2005-2006. The counter is the focal point in this multi-ministry building for customer contact services that range over several co-operating ministries, but predominantly those services offered by OMAFRA. All cooperating ministries worked through a Ministry of Government Services (MGS)-led project design committee with architecture and interior design professionals using the Barrier-free Design Guidelines document prepared by MGS. The result is a "flagship" regional facility that incorporates many features removing accessibility barriers. OMAFRA has also consulted with the Ontario Realty Corporation concerning an appropriate assessment methodology for accessibility improvements to other public areas of the Guelph headquarters

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

4. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to ensuring that public meetings and stakeholder consultations are accessible to members of the public with disabilities.

Status: Completed

Action: The ministry holds typically over 1000 regional meetings and workshops annually. Most of these meeting would be held at meeting rooms in ministry offices, community centres, hotels, etc. that are accessible to persons with physical disabilities. No specific requests for accommodation were received through regional offices, the Agricultural Information Contact Centre, or program areas; however, persons with disabilities have participated as members of local organizations and have attended many local meetings. The procedural guideline developed in 2004-2005 was used, for example, as a planning tool for the successful HACCP Advantage Expo held in February 2006, which had over 400 attendees.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

5. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to ensuring that persons with disabilities who come to ministry locations are provided with the same level of customer service as persons without disabilities receiving customer service.

Status: Completed

Action: The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario supported the ministry's commitment to raise awareness among its front line employees regarding the needs of persons with disabilities. A workshop entitled "Client Service Excellence" was held in March for client service representatives from central and west regions of the ministry. A second workshop entitled "May I Help You?" was held in April for employees in eastern Ontario. Both workshops included tips and techniques for serving persons with vision impairments, deaf or hard of hearing, physical, mental health and learning disabilities. A total of about 40 staff received training and resources. In addition, three "Lunch and Learn" sessions were held for employees at the Guelph location under the banner of the ministry's Wellness program. These sessions focused more broadly on understanding the issues facing persons with disabilities.

Timeframe: Spring 2006

| [Top of Page](#) |

Employment

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to ensuring that hiring practices include consideration for persons with disabilities. The ministry will continue to ensure that all interviews for job competitions are held in accessible locations, and that accommodation is made for candidates with a disability who request it.

Status: Completed

Action: Over the course of the year, 100 competitions for positions at the ministry were held. All job opportunities advertised identify the provision of accommodation for persons with disabilities with examples provided such as wheelchair access or sign-language interpretation.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to removing barriers to enable individual employees to function to their potential in the workplace environment.

Status: Completed

Action: A total of 20 ergonomic assessments took place this past year resulting in the provision of workstation equipment and or accessories including voice activated software, specifically sized and/or outfitted chairs, footrests and an adjustable desk.

Ergonomics is the science which studies the relationship of the worker and the workplace; fitting workplace tasks and workplace to the worker resulting in worker comfort, efficiency and productivity. In order to help promote ergonomics in the ministry, our website provides staff with information on ergonomics including Ergonomic Workstation Checklist, Office Ergonomics Resource Sheets, Stretch Break information, linkages to associated website, articles on Video Display Terminal Eye Examinations and Repetitive Strain Injuries, Guide to Preventing Repetitive Strain Injury in the Workplace and tips for healthy handling.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Communication and Information

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintaining its practices of providing publications in accessible formats.

Status: Completed

Action: No requests for publications in alternative format were received over the course of the year. New and revised publications continue to include a commitment to be made available in an alternative format if requested.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing the practice of clearly identifying TTY numbers on publications.

Status: Completed

Action: Nine new or revised titles were released over the course of the year. All titles included a TTY number.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

3. **Commitment** The ministry commits to maintain its compliance with ODA requirements for public facing Internet sites and internal staff Intranet sites.

Status: Ongoing

Action: The ministry continues to actively ensure content is compliant on our internet site.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Rationale: Implementation of new software, an Enterprise Content Management System, to maintain our Internet and intranet websites continues to be a goal. A delay in the project was necessary to allow us to participate in the new service being provided by Ministry of Government Services. This will keep us in step with the government's e-Government and e-Ontario strategies for improved seamless, simple, accountable and accessible service delivery.

| [Top of Page](#) |

Built Environment

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing to identify barriers to accessibility in locations across the province. The ministry will build on its review of office locations with a list of follow-up issues to be inspected by facilities staff to identify specific priorities for inclusion within the ministry's 2006-07 infrastructure plan, as well as for future years.

Status: Completed

Action: The ministry had compiled a series of assessments of the barriers to accessibility at each of its 12 resource centres across Ontario at the outset of 2005-2006. Based on a review of the physical barriers identified in these assessments, it was determined that a capital program to overcome the barriers should be proposed within the ministry's 2006-2007 Infrastructure Plan. A proposal was prepared and included in the Plan, citing criteria for prioritizing projects and recommending an annual allotment of capital funds over a five year period. Work continues to further identify and prioritize specific projects for inclusion in the 2007-2008 Infrastructure Plan. Ministry evacuation protocol at its 1 Stone Road location includes specific provisions for persons with disabilities.

Timeframe: September 2005 - January 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its work with its agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs) to assist them in becoming compliant with the ODA.

Status: Ongoing

Action: Improving accessibility remains a key criterion used to evaluate all minor capital projects that are submitted for consideration and approval in support of the delivery of agency programs such as those offered through the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario.

It should also be noted that any current or proposed new capital project has to be designed to meet current barrier free standards.

The ministry will continue to provide support and advice as needed with regard to changes under the new legislation to enable ABCs to consider accessibility issues within their respective organizations.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Rationale: The ministry will continue to work with agencies as standards are develop to identify specific commitments they will need to make to foster compliance with the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Acts and Regulations

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to reviewing all new legislation, regulations and policies for ODA and compliance.

Status: Completed

Action: At this time, no new or revised legislation or regulation has been introduced that required review for ODA compliance.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continue the practice of considering accessibility issues in the review/ approval of proposals for the funding for transfer payment organizations and capital programs.

Status: Completed

Action: Accessibility is currently a category eligible for project funding under the Ontario Small Town and Rural Development (OSTAR) initiative, which the ministry administers in partnership with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Grants were provided to a municipality to eliminate barriers to a municipal building and fire hall, and to a county to perform renovations to ensure and administrative centre and county council chambers were barrier-free to persons with disabilities. The ministry will continue to monitor all relevant funding requests to identify and address accessibility issues.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

| [Top of Page](#) |

Commitments - Measures to Prevent New Barriers

In the coming year, the ministry commits to assess relevant acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services as needed to determine their effect on accessibility for persons with disabilities. This section summarizes these commitments.

Customer Service

- Education and awareness will continue to be a priority to build employee awareness of the types of disabilities and how to respond to persons with disabilities. A variety of formats will be used including e-modules, workshops, and lunch and learn sessions. Specific training will be directed to staff who provide service over the phone and via the Internet

Employment

- Training will be provided to managers on accommodating employees as well as accommodating job applicants who have disabilities.
- Tools will be made available and promoted as a mechanism to identify any potential new barriers employees may face (barriers that are attitudinal, physical, or in the areas of communications, information, and policy).

Communications and Information

- The ministry will ensure that design and delivery and administration of ministry-funded programs do not create barriers for people with disabilities.
- The ministry will work to implement new software, an Enterprise Content Management System, to maintain the compliance of its Internet and intranet websites.

Built Environment

- Work will continue to identify and set priorities for specific projects to include in the ministry's 2007-2008 Infrastructure Plan.
- The ministry will continue to work with agencies to identify any specific commitments they will need to make to foster compliance with the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Acts and Regulations

- Legal Services will ensure that AODA requirements are appropriately addressed in proposed OMAFRA legislation.

| [Top of Page](#) |

Commitments - Barriers to be Addressed

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs commits to identify, remove and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities in the coming year. This section summarizes these commitments.

Customer Service

1. **Barrier:** Persons with disabilities who obtain ministry services in person, over the telephone, or through the Internet may not receive the same level of access as the general public.

Commitment: Front line employees need to be aware of, and formally trained in, service to persons with disabilities. The ministry will continue outreach awareness and training to employees using a variety of media and interventions such as e-learning modules, presentations, workshops and lunch and learn sessions. A target group for the upcoming year will be employees of the ministry's Agricultural Information Contact Centre.

Responsibility: Line managers of employees who work directly with persons.

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

2. **Barrier:** New and emerging ministry program areas are not automatically represented on the ministry's working

group in order to ensure that any potential barriers associated with those programs are identified and remedies proposed.

Commitment: The Accessibility Planning Working Group (APWG) will continue to review its membership to ensure that it adequately represents the focus of ministry priorities.

Responsibility: APWG and ministry senior management.

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

3. **Barrier:** Persons and stakeholders who have a disability may not enjoy the same level of access to participate in public events.

Commitment: The Procedural Guideline to assist ministry employees to design and administer barrier free public events will be more widely promoted across the ministry and the APWG will work with ministry employees to review its usefulness as a planning tool and ensure its continuous improvement.

Responsibility: APWG and a cross-section of ministry employees planning public events

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

Employment Accommodation

1. **Barrier:** Potential candidates for job competitions who have a disability may not require the same access as the general public.

Commitment: Job competitions that are posted indicate the provisions that will be made for persons with a disability who apply, including accessible locations and accommodation.

Responsibility: Human Resources Branch

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

2. **Barrier:** Employees who have a disability do not always have the tools they require to perform their job to their potential.

Commitment: The ministry will work to provide ergonomic and other types of accommodation to employees to ensure their full participation on the job. Front line managers will be made aware and trained in supporting job accommodation practices.

Responsibility: Line Managers, Service Management Branch, Human Resources Branch

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

| [Top of Page](#) |

Communications and Information

1. **Barrier:** Publications may not be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Commitment: All new or revised publications will include a TTY number. Publications will be made available in alternative format to those who request it.

Responsibility: Communications Branch

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

2. **Barrier:** As new or revised content or software is introduced on the ministry Internet or intranet website, it may not be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Commitment: Implementation of new Enterprise Content Management System software will keep the ministry in step with the government's e-Government and e-Ontario strategies for improved seamless, simple, accountable and accessible service delivery. Until that implementation is complete, the ministry will actively ensure content is compliant with existing standards.

Responsibility: Communications Branch

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

Built Environment

1. **Barrier:** Assessments completed at ministry resource centres and other ministry properties have identified physical barriers to accessibility.

Commitment: To identify and develop an Infrastructure Plan that will recommend annual resourcing over a five year period for capital projects. Specific projects identified for this year include:

- Kemptville College - design and planning for accessibility upgrades to the main administration building.
- Ridgetown College - new classroom and athletic complex designed to current barrier free standards; design and planning for new elevator and accessibility upgrades at the main administration building; accessibility upgrades to various classrooms around campus.

Responsibility: Service Management Branch, Research and Innovation Branch

Timeline: September 2006-August 2007

| [Top of Page](#) |

For More Information

Questions or comments about OMAFRA's accessibility plan are always welcome.

Please phone: (519) 826-3135

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Toll Free: 1 888 466-2372

E-mail: Accessibility@omafra.gov.on.ca

Ministry website: www.omafr.gov.on.ca/

Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services' Accessibility Ontario web portal at: <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html>. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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| [Top of Page](#) |

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