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Accessibility Plan 2007-2008

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

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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.

Five key areas have been identified for the first accessibility standards: customer service, transportation, information and communications, the built environment, and employment.

The accessible customer service regulations were approved by the Lieutenant-Governor and will come into force on January 1, 2008.

An initial proposed standard on accessible transportation has been developed by the Transportation Standards Development Committee. It was posted for public review on June 27, 2007 and will be available for public comment until September 28, 2007.

The Standards Development Committee that will draft the proposed information and communications standard was established and began meeting in April, 2007. The committees developing the accessible built environment and accessible employment standards have been selected and will begin meeting in the fall of 2007.

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 These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.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 fifth annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It highlights the achievements of the 2006-07 plan and outlines the commitments for 2007-08 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.

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Message from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) 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 fifth year in which plans have been written and are being implemented by organizations such as ours across the province.

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

The accessible customer service regulations were approved by the Lieutenant-Governor and will come into force on January 1, 2008.

An initial proposed standard on accessible transportation has been developed by the Transportation Standards Development Committee. It was posted for public review on June 27, 2007 and will be available for public comment until September 28, 2007.

The Standards Development Committee that will draft the proposed information and communications standard was established and began meeting in April, 2007.

The committees developing the accessible built environment and accessible employment standards have been selected and will begin meeting in the fall of 2007.

Here at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we are building on the success of our previous four 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.

The ministry is committed to improving accessibility through identifying, removing and preventing barriers, working together within our ministry, across government and in our relationships with our stakeholders.

The ministry continues to work to better educate staff on accessibility. Examples of this work in the past year include web publishing training for over 80 employees, training of over 75 managers in employee accommodation and return to work policies and procedures, and a workshop for 18 front-line employees to help better welcome customers with disabilities who come to our ministry for services. 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.

Leona Dombrowsky
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

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Report on Achievements

2006 - 2007 Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs identified some specific initiatives for 2006-2007 to reduce or eliminate barriers to accessibility for citizens and employees. This section provides a status report on those efforts.

Customer Service

1. **Commitment:** 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.

Status: Completed

Action: The provision of relevant education and awareness sessions through the *Lunch and Learn* program was promoted on the ministry's *Wellness* intranet page. Staff participated in a number of relevant workshops which fostered a positive approach to maintaining mental and physical well being.

A Deputy Minister's communication was sent to all staff to highlight efforts made to reduce barriers to accessibility, resources available to support their own efforts, and to encourage their personal involvement in the working group.

Two members of the Working Group attended the Accessibility Expo in Toronto in May 2007 to participate in workshops and presentations to improve awareness on accessibility issues.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

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Employment

1. **Commitment:** Training will be provided to managers on accommodating employees as well as accommodating

job applicants who have disabilities.

Status: Completed

Action: This winter, details of the new public service's employment accommodation and return to work policy were shared with all ministry staff. Human Resources Branch staff attended information sessions explaining the policy in order to prepare to provide advice and support to ministry managers.

As part of its *Managers' Forum* series, the ministry held a workshop for all managers on changes to the employee accommodation and return to work policy. Human Resources staff have conducted numerous individual consultations with managers to support the accommodation of individual employee needs.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

2. **Commitment:** Tools will be made available and promoted as a way to identify any potential new barriers employees may face (barriers that are attitudinal, physical, or in the areas of communications, information, and policy).

Status: Completed

Action: The Ministry intranet site for Accessibility includes a 'Suggestion Box' which invites employees to identify barriers to accessibility. In addition, employees have made use of the email address accessibility.omafra@ontario.ca in order to outline barriers experienced in the workplace.

Timeframe: September 2006- August 2007

Communication and Information

1. **Commitment:** The ministry will ensure that design and delivery and administration of ministry-funded programs do not create barriers for people with disabilities.

Status: Completed

Action: Two areas of focus this past year have been: to ensure any consulting services purchased to help with the design of ministry programs follow the guidelines in place under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act to obtain those services; and to design barrier free public events using the planning tool "Planning for Accessible Events". Some examples of this practice:

- The ministry held upwards of 1000 regional meetings and workshops in 2006-2007. Persons with disabilities have participated as members of local organizations and have attended many of these local events.
- The Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs Tribunal requests participants self-identify accommodation requirements in their Notice of Hearing.
- The procedural guideline was used as a planning tool for an Expo held in February 2007 which had over 400 attendees.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

2. **Commitment:** The ministry will work to implement new software, an Enterprise Content Management System, to keep its internet and intranet web sites compliant and barrier-free.

Status: Ongoing

Action: The ministry continues to take steps to put in place the public service's Enterprise Content Management System (Stellent). This system is designed to help maintain the compliance of its internet and intranet sites. The ministry has put into place a new web publishing process with web Publishing coordinators, employees who are centrally located in Communications Branch, who review and monitor web content for ODA compliance before it is published.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

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Built Environment

1. **Commitment:** Work will continue to identify and set priorities for specific projects to include in the ministry's 2007-2008 Infrastructure Plan.

Status: Completed

Action: Renovations involving eight projects were completed at the ministry's Guelph headquarters, each having regard for barrier free design principles.

Overview assessments were completed for areas at the Stone Road head office complex in Guelph.

The ministry worked closely with the Ontario Realty Corporation to review client needs and ensure barrier free design features were incorporated into plans for capital repair projects, e.g. four new building entrance doorways at 1 Stone Road, Guelph. This helped to ensure that standards for barrier free design were appropriately adapted to the project or work.

The ministry worked with the realty corporation and ProFac, the building manager to help the realty corporation define its roles and responsibilities for building common areas and to encourage planning for capital projects in these areas.

Timeframe: September 2006 - January 2007

2. **Commitment:** The ministry will continue to work with agencies to identify any special commitments they will need to make to foster compliance with the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Status: Ongoing

Action: Information on new standards under the new accessibility legislation are being shared through ministry liaisons with agency staff as progress is made on their development.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

Acts and Regulations

1. **Commitment:** Legal Services will ensure that barriers to accessibility are appropriately addressed in proposed ministry legislation.

Status: Completed

Action: Legal Services continues to address barriers to accessibility in proposed ministry legislation and regulations, identifying, removing and preventing potential barriers to persons with disabilities.

Legal Services also has done its part to help the Ministry in carrying out its commitments in the accessibility plan in other areas, including providing advice on the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities in the area of employment, and by choosing fonts and type sizes recommended by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind for their legibility by persons who have visual impairments.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

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Ongoing Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs continued to strive to improve accessibility in a wide range of areas - both for citizens seeking products and services, and for employees seeking to enjoy a barrier-free work environment. This section provides a status report on those efforts.

Customer Service

1. **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.

Status: Ongoing

Action: Awareness was raised among front line employees regarding the needs of persons with disabilities using two tools. A four-hour workshop entitled "May I Help You?" was held in June for employees in Guelph. The workshop included tips and techniques for serving persons with vision impairments, deaf or hard of hearing, physical, mental health and learning disabilities. Eighteen employees in the Guelph office of the ministry and with Service Ontario received training and resources. In addition, front line staff across the ministry were encouraged to review the new on-line training resource (also entitled "May I Help You") available through the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario.

Timeline: Spring 2007

2. **Commitment:** The accessibility planning work group will continue to review its membership to ensure that it adequately represents the focus of ministry priorities.

Status: Ongoing

Action: The working group maintained an appropriate level of employee participation including division and field representation through a year which saw the ministry undergo an internal reorganization. Employees with a disability continue to be encouraged to support the working group's efforts through membership.

The accessibility planning working group met to review action plans and timeframes to support the commitments outlined in the accessibility plan. The intranet web site 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 to enable staff to procure accessible goods and services, or plan accessible meetings.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

3. **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 accessibility planning working group will work with ministry employees to review its usefulness as a planning tool and ensure its continuous improvement.

Status: Completed.

Action: A link to the Procedural Guideline was posted on the Ministry's intranet site to provide for higher profile. Numerous individual consultations were held between employees and members of the working group to provide advice with regard to the guideline's interpretation. Members of the working group attended the module "How to Plan Accessible Events" held as part of the May 2007 Accessibility Expo in Toronto to remain up to date on this matter.

Timeframe: Spring 2007

Employment

1. **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.

Status: Completed.

Action: Over the course of the year, 82 competitions for positions at the ministry were held. All job opportunities advertised encouraged persons with disabilities to identify any accommodation they needed with examples provided such as wheelchair access or sign-language interpretation. The ministry responded to at least one request for accommodation this past year. Some individual consultations were held with job applicants to let them know about the ministry's obligations in this area.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

2. **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.

Status: Completed.

Action: A total of 5 ergonomic assessments took place this past year resulting in the workstation equipment and or accessories made available, including voice activated software, specifically sized and/or outfitted chairs, footrests and an adjustable desk.

The ministry's intranet site maintained information in order to help promote ergonomics in the ministry, with resources such as an 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.

Legal Services supported awareness and training efforts by providing advice on the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities in the area of employment. Human Resources employees conducted a training session for managers and provided individual consultation as well.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

Communication and Information

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

Status: Completed.

Action: The ministry continues to make new publications available in alternate format if requested, and ensures that TTY numbers are included in publications available to the public.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

2. **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.

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

Web publishing training was attended by 87 staff, representing the majority of employees with responsibility in this area. The training included awareness of web content accessibility issues and basic skills in preparing accessible web content.

Two web publishing coordinators attended training in making documents published in portable document format (PDF) accessible. This should allow the ministry to ensure all documents in this format on our website are accessible.

Beginning in November 2006, the ministry helped make government information more accessible by participating in the first phase of a pilot project to foster clear writing practices. A comprehensive web site developed by Cabinet Office Communications helped the Ministry to look at its writing practices and adopt new ones. Ministry communications employees were trained in these practices.

As part of the pilot, the areas of the ministry internet web site which focus on rural affairs and avian influenza were rewritten in plain language. Under the OPS Clear Web Writing Project, the Bird Flu site (<http://www.ontario.ca/birdflu>) and Rural Development site (<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/index.html>) were made easier to understand and more accessible.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

Built Environment

1. **Commitment:** To identify and develop an Infrastructure Plan that will recommend annual financial resources 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.

Status: In Progress

Action: The Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario and the University of Guelph, partners with the ministry, have developed an annual process for identifying and evaluating minor capital projects against a number of criteria, including: animal care, human health and safety, building code compliance, building integrity, life cycle replacement, efficiency / conservation, and program needs and priorities. The new Rudy Brown Rural Learning Centre opened at Ridgetown College in November 2006, designed in full compliance with the legislation. Accessibility upgrades to the main administration building in Kemptville College were deferred until the completion of an overall campus master plan.

Timeframe: September 2006 - August 2007

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.
- The ministry will follow-up on all "suggestion box" items, and promote accessibility.omafra@ontario.ca.

Employment

- Human Resources and Legal Services will work together to support and educate employees regarding requirements under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities. The ministry will also make use of support available through the new OPS Regional Employee Health and Wellness Pilot Project to support the process of identifying and addressing accommodation requirements.

Communications and Information

- The new resource "Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities / Special Needs" will be implemented in the ministry in the following ways:
 - the Emergency Unit's planning awareness sessions will include items on the subject of People with Disabilities / Special Needs
 - Branch Continuity Planning leads will be directed to include current employee needs for accommodation in their 2007 branch recovery plans
 - Operational protocol items will be included for the new Ministry Emergency Operation Centre to assist with the identified disabilities and special needs of the individuals responsible for emergency response
 - The Emergency Unit will work with service providers to provide input to Ministry Alternate Worksite arrangements to support disabilities and special needs
 - The Emergency Unit will work with service providers to provide input to the various Facility Emergency Plans (evacuation and first aid / CPR / AED response) to ensure they are aligned with the guide

Built Environment

- On finalization of new AODA standards for each of office, institutional and special purpose category buildings, accessibility deficiencies will be assessed and prioritized for buildings occupied by ministry staff as well as buildings owned by the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario
- Capital projects approved under the ministry's 2007/08 Infrastructure Plan as well as minor reconfiguration projects will continue to incorporate accessibility features in accordance with the 2006 version of ORC's Barrier Free Design Guidelines; projects proposed in the ministry's 2008/09 plan will have regard for those AODA standards approved at the point of final design. Projects approved for 07-08 include the construction of a new elevator and barrier free washrooms on all three floors of the main administration building at Ridgetown. The Reek admin building houses the library, computer labs and central administration offices. Project cost is estimated to be at \$600,000.

Acts and Regulations

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

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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: The ministry will provide targeted training to new employees who provide direct service to clients

in the ways described above to support their understanding of the unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

Responsibility: Line Managers, Human Resources

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

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Communications and Information

1. **Barrier:** Changes to the workplace resulting from the development of standards under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the implications of those changes may not be well understood by managers.

Commitment: The ministry will devote a section of its Accessibility Intranet site to the latest information on standards development, and hold awareness sessions with managers at appropriate points throughout the year to ensure they remain current with the changes.

Responsibility: Accessibility Planning Working Group, Communications

Timeline: September 2007-August 2008

Built Environment

1. **Barrier:** Physical barriers to accessibility need to be identified and addressed as a team approach including the ministry, Ontario Realty Corporation and ministry site building service providers.

Commitment: The ministry will work with the new Building Administration Relations Committees to ensure a team approach is taken to address building accessibility issues.

Workstation size reviews and subsequent implementation of furniture refreshes being completed by the ministry will consider staff and client circulation and accessibility improvements.

The ministry will continue to work with its Agencies to encourage increased accessibility of agency-owned facilities.

Responsibility: Service Management Branch, Research and Innovation Branch

Timeline: September 2007-August 2008

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For More Information

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

Please phone: (519) 826-3135

General inquiry number: (519) 826-3100

TTY number: (519) 826-7402

Toll Free: 1 888 466-2372

E-mail: accessibility.omafra@ontario.ca

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

Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services' Accessibility Ontario web portal at: <http://www.mcass.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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