

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

*2006-2007
Accessibility Plan*



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Introduction

In June 2005, the Ontario legislature took a strong stand on accessibility when it passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005 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 be obligated 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 These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.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 Community and Social Services. It highlights the achievements of the 2005-2006 plan and outlines the commitments for 2006-2007 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.

Message from the Minister



I am pleased to present the 2006-2007 Accessibility Plan for the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

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

To commemorate this milestone, I was pleased to announce three new accessibility standards to be developed in communications and information, the built environment, and employment. These new standards are in addition to two accessibility standards already being developed in customer service and transportation.

This year, along with our work in implementing the government's province-wide commitment to accessibility, our ministry has taken a very comprehensive look at how it plans, develops and implements its own accessibility commitments. Our plan for 2006-2007 is part of a three year strategic framework aimed at embedding accessibility awareness into everything that we do. This year we will place primary emphasis on our role as an employer and work to broaden awareness, define leadership expectations and make accessibility awareness a cultural norm within the ministry. In 2007-2008, our emphasis will be on how we can improve our level of accessibility as a direct service delivery provider. And, in 2008-2009, we will improve accessibility in our role as a service manager with a focus on how we work with the transfer payment sector.

This new plan will build on the work that this ministry has already done to improve accessibility for our employees and for the people that we serve. Examples of this work are provided on the pages that follow.

Report on Achievements

2005 - 2006 Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The ministry is pleased to present its accessibility achievements for the period of September 2005 to September 2006. It should be noted that the 2005-2006 Accessibility Plan served as a joint plan between the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). For the purposes of this report back, achievements relating only to MCSS and those relating to the divisions shared with MCYS are included. For information on achievements relating to MCYS commitments from 2005-2006, please refer to the MCYS 2006-2007 Accessibility Plan.

The achievements listed are based on the planned commitments made in last year's plan. You will also find some additional achievements that resulted from opportunities to improve accessibility that occurred during the year.

Much of the work of the ministry focuses on programs and services that benefit people with disabilities and their families. While the ministry is proud of the work that has been done to date, it is aware that this is a path of continuous improvement. The ministry is committed to being a model of best practice in our role as an employer, as a service provider and as a funder of services provided by the transfer payment sector.

Ministry of Community and Social Services Achievements

Commitment

The ministry is committed to improving customer services to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The ministry has advised all ODSP staff that it is committed to improving customer service for ODSP clients by providing the most appropriate method of customer services including office visits, telephone interviews, mail out reviews, alternate site visits and home visits. Ministry staff are working closely with clients

by making alternate arrangements for people whose disability prevents them from visiting the local office.

The ministry has also installed televisions in the reception areas of many of its offices. These televisions feature the ODSP informational video. This video provides clients with a better understanding of ODSP services and is continuously played in a number of the ministry's regional and local offices including Newmarket, Barrie, Lindsay, Orillia, Whitby, Bracebridge, Ottawa, Cornwall, Pembroke/Renfrew, Hawkesbury, Hamilton, Brantford, Simcoe, Belleville, Kingston, Smith Falls, Brockville, London, Windsor, Peterborough, and all offices in the Toronto Region.

All ODSP local offices, with the exception of Ottawa and Mississauga local offices, have now implemented a new service delivery model. This has resulted in a reduction in the time required to approve new cases, shortened turn around times in processing case management requests and has increased the number of home and office visits completed.

The Northern Region offered a non-violent crisis intervention training session to help staff learn more about client issues and how to deal with clients more effectively. Other training for staff has included a number of community stakeholder meetings that have heightened awareness regarding client issues, employment barriers and accessibility issues.

Commitment

The ministry will evaluate various technical solutions to implement revised plain language, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) system generated letters.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

The ministry has completed an evaluation and will pilot plain language system generated letters for ODSP in Toronto.

Commitment

To improve communications with Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients who require alternate formats, the ministry will implement a business

process to enable ODSP staff to communicate with pre-approved clients by e-mail, in a safe and secure manner.

Status

In progress.

Action and Timeframe

A business case to support the use of e-mail has been developed.

Rationale

As a next step to support this commitment, the ministry will implement a pilot of the e-mail system to improve communications with ODSP clients who require alternate formats.

Commitment

To improve staff understanding of the barriers that people with disabilities often face, the Northern Regional Office will develop a staff education strategy using “lunch and learn” sessions.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

Throughout the year, information sessions designed to improve staff understanding of accessibility and disability related issues were provided to staff in the Northern Region Ontario Disability Support Program offices. These sessions included presentations by community stakeholders on clients with disabilities.

The Northern Region sends all new employees to the ministry’s Access, Awareness and Accountability (AAA) training.

Commitment

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario will make the recently developed customer service training package, “May I Help You – Welcoming Customers with Disabilities” available on-line for use by government ministries and stakeholders.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

“May I Help You – Welcoming Customers with Disabilities” is available upon request in electronic format.

“May I Help You” is a guide that provides information on how to welcome customers with disabilities, including customers with visual impairments, who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, who are deaf-blind, have physical disabilities, speech impairments, mental health disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities.

The paper copy of “May I Help You” is available to all ministries upon request.

Additional Achievement

1. The Directorate has made two “May I Help You” presentations to accessibility planning groups.
2. A self-directed, on-line e-learning module based on the “May I Help You” resource is under development.

Commitment

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (ADO) will inform organizations or people that may be subject to a future accessibility standard, of preliminary measures they can implement so that the goods, services, facilities, accommodation and employment they provide, and the buildings, structures and premises they own or occupy, are accessible to people with disabilities.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

The Directorate has undertaken a number of activities to assist organizations that may be subject to future accessibility standards. Specifically, the Directorate has:

- Amended the “Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)”. The guide is available on the Accessibility Ontario Internet site to support public sector organizations in planning;
- Updated the ODA train-the-trainer e-learning module. This module assists organization to meet the requirements of the ODA; and,

- Advised public sector organizations to focus on the key areas of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, specifically goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment and buildings.

The Directorate has made a number of new public education materials available including:

- “Accommodating People with Visual Impairment in the Workplace” was posted on the Accessibility Ontario Internet site in February 2006 and is available in alternate formats upon request; and,
- Customer Service Tip Sheets are available on the Accessibility Ontario Internet site and in alternate formats upon request.

The Directorate conducted public outreach through presentation, tools and resources including:

- Providing materials and delivering presentations at 24 public events such as the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind employability sessions;
- Providing Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) overview presentation materials to 26 organizations; and,
- Conducting a series of forums in partnership with Ontario Community Supports Association. These forums were designed to introduce the non-profit sector to the AODA.

The Directorate participated in a number of partnership projects with:

- The Ontario Heritage Society on making Ontario’s heritage programs and services accessible to people with disabilities;
- The Canadian Standards Association, Building Champions to encourage businesses to participate in training pilots on how to provide services to customers with disabilities;
- The Chinese Restaurant and Food Services Association on improving accessibility for small ethnic businesses;
- “Innoiversity” to enhance participation and presentation of people with disabilities in the media;
- The Toronto Business Association of Business Improvement Areas to provide tools on accessible customer service for small business;
- The Ontario Chamber of Commerce in developing an award program for best practices in accessibility for its members;
- Emergency Management Ontario in developing an emergency planning brochure; and,

- The Social and Enterprise Development Innovations in developing an on-line customer service training for northern and rural communities.

The ADO is working to develop proposed accessibility standards under the AODA. Accessibility standards related to transportation and customer service are under development by separate Standards Development Committees established under the AODA.

Commitment

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario will develop a training and information package for employers to increase awareness of how to make employment opportunities accessible to people with disabilities, i.e. hiring, training and retention.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

An employment handbook for frontline managers was developed and provided to approximately 250 employers and promoted to business associations.

Commitment

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario will continue to identify best practices and success stories to promote a blueprint for all organizations that are interested in improving opportunities for people with disabilities.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

A number of success stories have been published and are available online on the Accessibility Ontario Internet site.

Year four Ontarians with Disabilities Act planning documents and information sessions were provided to all ministry planning leads in June 2006.

MCSS and MCYS Shared Achievements

Commitment

The Communications and Marketing Branch will research methods to increase access to news releases and other communication products by people with disabilities who may not be able to rely on mainstream media because of barriers.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

The Branch met with representatives of VoicePrint, a national radio service for people with disabilities, to explore ways to disseminate information in an alternate format.

The ministry used the services of VoicePrint to announce the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council in December 2005.

Commitment

The 2005-2006 results-based planning training packages will include information on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) for ministry staff.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

In October 2005, the Human Resources Branch updated the Accessibility Impact Checklist for Results-based Planning package to include information on the AODA. The package was subsequently provided to policy staff.

The Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster, which provides information and information technology services to the ministry, continues to include information on accessibility obligations and considerations in the information and information technology package for the results-based planning process.

Commitment

Training on preparing cabinet submissions for ministry staff will include information on accessibility obligations.

Status

In progress.

Action and Timeframe

One training session on the Cabinet decision making process was held with staff from all ministry program areas in attendance.

The ministry, working with staff from the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario and the Ontario Disability Support Program, made revisions to the ministry's Cabinet submission checklist to include accessibility considerations.

Rationale

Future training sessions will also include an overview of accessibility obligations.

Commitment

The needs of people with disabilities will be considered in emergency management planning by the ministry.

Status

In progress.

Action and Timeframe

The Emergency Management Unit is planning a consultation with ministry employees with disabilities as well as non-government and transfer payment partners on the ministry's emergency management plan.

The Emergency Management Unit has developed a strategy for consulting with the transfer payment sector.

Rationale

These consultations are expected to occur later in 2006 and are included in the ministry's commitments for 2006-2007.

Additional Achievement

The Emergency Management Unit initiated work with Emergency Management Ontario (EMO) to develop an emergency preparedness guide for persons with disabilities. The guide is expected to be released in fall 2006 by EMO.

Commitment

Provide ministry managers and supervisors with additional information on how to provide accommodation to applicants with disabilities in the recruitment process.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

Accommodation needs of employees and applicants are addressed on an individual and as needed basis.

The Human Resources Branch has developed a tip sheet on providing accommodations in the recruitment process.

Commitment

Facilitate the exchange of information between employees with disabilities using assistive devices.

Status

In progress.

Action and Timeframe

Between April and June 2006, the Human Resources Branch and the Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster conducted research to identify technical requirements regarding information exchange using assistive technology.

The Human Resources Branch will pursue this initiative should there be sufficient interest after consulting with staff with disabilities.

Rationale

A communications plan will be developed to consult with staff.

Commitment

Identify any accessibility barriers that may exist in the Human Resources Branch career development programs or processes.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

Informal consultations with representatives from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the Association of Management, Administrative and

Professional Crown Employees of Ontario regarding barriers that may exist in career development programs for employees with disabilities took place in June 2006. The ministry will also consult with other ministries on best practices in eliminating barriers for employees with disabilities.

Additional Achievements

1. Ministry job advertisements now include consistent wording to reflect the Ontario Public Service Equal Opportunity Policy. In June 2006, the Human Resources Branch advised all human resources managers and human resource consultants to include the following in all job advertisements:

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Accommodation needs in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, will be considered for all employment activities, including the recruitment process. Information available upon request.

2. In April 2006, the Human resources Branch released a document entitled "Scented Products: Information for all Staff" on the branch Intranet site. The document was designed to increase the awareness of air quality and fragrance sensitivity issues by ministry staff. It complements a previous document for managers and supervisors entitled "Fragrance Sensitivity in the Workplace: An Employment Accommodation Guide for Managers and Supervisors".

Commitment

The ministry will continue measures to improve teletypewriter (TTY) services.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

The Human Resources Branch has promoted the use of TTY services by adding the branch TTY telephone number to its letterhead in October 2005. The Branch also provided TTY training to all reception staff in fall of 2005.

To promote the availability of this service to clients, a number of ministry regional and local offices have added TTY telephone numbers to their letterhead including Newmarket, Barrie, Lindsay, Orillia, Peterborough, Whitby, Ottawa, Pembroke/Renfrew, Hawkesbury, North Bay, all offices in the Toronto region, Hamilton, Kingston, and in the Central West region.

Additional Achievement

In fall 2005, the Human Resources Branch consulted with Ontario Disability Support Program offices regarding TTY services. As a result of these consultations, a TTY best practice guideline was drafted. The draft best practice guideline requires that public access TTY lines be answered in person and that numbers be published in a manner equitable to telephone numbers.

The draft best practice guideline was provided to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario to be shared with other ministries.

Commitment

Establish a Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster responsibility centre on information and information technology accessibility standards.

Status

In progress.

Action and Timeframe

The Cluster is committed to identifying a coordinator of information and information technology accessibility standards in the fall 2006. The coordinator will ensure that accessibility information is posted to the Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster Intranet site.

The Cluster coordinated a demonstration at Showcase Ontario in September 2006. This demonstration featured assistive technology devices used by employees and members of the public with disabilities. The demonstration was designed to increase awareness of assistive technology solutions that are available.

Rationale

The Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster has been addressing a number of issues following the disentanglement of cluster responsibilities between MCSS, MCYS and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. As a result, the identification of the coordinator has been delayed.

Commitment

The Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster will research cost-effective methods to provide information in alternate formats and alternate media.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

Cluster staff have conducted research and evaluation of options for alternate formats. Once a coordinator has been identified, all of the findings of the research and evaluation will be provided to the coordinator for analysis and development of recommendations for implementation.

Commitment

Help ensure ministry-sponsored events include pre-planning for accessibility.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

The Human Resources Branch has developed a tip sheet on accessible event planning.

Commitment

Continue to communicate the need for all new ministry managers and supervisors to complete the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) online training.

Status

Complete.

Action and Timeframe

In February 2006, the Human Resources Branch communicated the new location of the online ODA computer-based training for managers and supervisors. At that time, the Branch reminded managers complete the training. In September, 2006 the Branch asked all new managers, supervisors and human resources staff to verify that they had completed the ODA computer-based training.

Ongoing MCSS Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

There are a number of activities that the ministry undertakes on a regular and ongoing basis to consider accessibility for people with disabilities.

The ministry is mindful of the need to continually review its work relating to accessibility in a number of areas including access to information, awareness and training relating to accessibility, and enhancing services and how we deliver them to clients.

While activities related to each of the commitments have been completed in the 2005-2006 accessibility planning cycle, the ministry continues to place ongoing attention in the following areas:

Commitment

The ministry will continue to review acts and regulations with a view of addressing barriers to people with disabilities as work is planned.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

In 2005-2006, the ministry played an active role in consulting, reviewing and revising acts and regulations with a view to eliminating existing barriers and preventing the creation of new barriers to people with disabilities.

The Capital and Accommodation Services Branch provided input to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in assessing how changes to the new Ontario Building Code will impact accessibility.

All work regarding the implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the repeal of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act is considering accessibility.

In 2005, the Developmental Services Branch undertook an evaluation of its video-conferencing pilot projects. These pilot projects were designed to provide access to specialized clinical resources in rural or remote areas of the province. Based on this evaluation, recommendations have been made regarding potential changes to the models and to expand video-conferencing,

In 2005-2006, the Community Services Branch reviewed the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act, the Adoption Disclosure Act and the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Act for barriers to accessibility.

The ministry has made a number of important changes to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to improve access to supports and benefits:

- Effective November 2005, people eligible for the Pregnancy Nutritional Allowance were eligible to receive the allowance for an additional 12 months after the pregnancy ends as a breast-feeding allowance. This change was made to improve outcomes for new mothers who are receiving ODSP benefits and their newborn children.
- On April 1, 2006, a new focus was placed on improving access to employment services in Ontario Works for ODSP family members without a disability;
- On April 1, 2006, ODSP Employment Supports shifted focus from employment planning and preparation to job placement and retention. Eligible clients have gained access to employment and have sustainable and competitive jobs. Changes to Employment Supports will result in an increase in the number of clients who can access employment opportunities and who can achieve their employment goals. To complement this strategy, an Employer Outreach Secretariat was established to manage outreach and marketing activities. The Secretariat will help create opportunities for people receiving social assistance with an emphasis on people with disabilities. The Secretariat also administers the Employment Innovations Fund to encourage employers to develop longer term job opportunities for people receiving social assistance recipients, particularly people with disabilities;
- Effective May 2006, the rule that limited retroactive grants to four months was revoked to improve access to ODSP income support and benefits;
- In June 2006, the earnings of dependent adults who attend secondary school full-time and an amount paid under a training program were exempted as assets. This exemption is helpful to dependent adults who are saving for post-secondary education, and as a result, it will reduce economic barriers to education for children of people receiving ODSP benefits;
- Effective June 2006, the Employment and Training Start Up Benefit (ESUB) was expanded to include dependent children who have graduated from secondary school. The ESUB assists people receiving social

assistance with the initial costs of beginning a new job, training activity or employment activity. The expansion of eligibility for ESUB to dependent children will improve access to employment for children of people receiving ODSP who have completed high school and are ready to seek employment;

- In June 2006, the ODSP regulation was amended to provide a two per cent increase to the Back-to-School Allowance for eligible people with dependent children receiving ODSP; and,
- To allow ODSP recipients to keep more of their income support offered through the National Child Benefit Supplement, ODSP regulations were amended.

Rationale

The ministry will continue to consider how acts and regulations are in keeping with the elimination of barriers.

The ministry will be further expanding and enhancing access to specialized clinical resources through the use of video-conferencing technology in four Community Networks of Specialized Care. Proposals from the four networks were submitted in September 2006.

The ministry will continue its efforts to remove barriers to employment for ODSP recipients and their family members. In November 2006, a regulation change will take effect to provide new earnings and employment incentives to ODSP recipients, allowing them to keep more of their employment earnings.

In October 2006, the ministry will provide a two per cent increase to the Winter Clothing Allowance for eligible people with dependent children receiving ODSP under the ODSP regulation change that was made in June 2006.

These changes are included in the ministry's 2006-2007 plan as commitments.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to meet the accessibility planning requirements of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA), 2001.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The Human Resources Branch has reviewed accessibility planning progress to date within the ministry, assessing past difficulties and achievements. In April 2006, the Human Resources Branch conducted a mid-year review to assess the progress of the ministry in achieving the commitments made in the 2005-2006 Accessibility Plan and found that the ministry was on track to meet its commitments.

The Human Resources Branch has continued to maintain the confidential electronic mailbox which allows staff to identify barriers and submit suggestions on accessibility.

The Human Resources Branch continues to investigate a variety of tools and resources on accessibility and customer service to determine the most effective ways to deliver information to staff.

The Human Resources Branch has provided advice to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario on the Customer Service Accessibility Standards, the Ontario Public Service-Wide Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Strategy, the on-line training tool that provides customer service to people with disabilities. Once finalized, the training materials being developed by the Directorate will be distributed to staff.

The Communications and Marketing Branch launched an expanded accessibility Intranet web page for use by staff in October 2005. This information was then included in the new, fully accessible ministry Internet site which was launched in June 2006.

Rationale

MCSS will meet the accessibility planning requirements of the ODA on an ongoing basis.

Additional Achievement

For the 2006/2007 cycle, the development of the MCSS Accessibility Plan was lead by the Deputy Minister's Office. A strategic three year framework was developed and approved. This framework will take a measured and strategic approach and use an accessibility lens to review what the ministry does and how it does it. The ministry has also embedded accountability for the development and implementation of its accessibility plan in its senior executive team with the Deputy Minister as the executive champion.

Commitment

The Internet website of the ministry will continue to meet the accessibility requirements of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

In June 2006, the ministry launched its new Internet site. Designed to reflect the five pillars that comprise the ministry's renewed mandate – accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities, developmental services, community services, social assistance, and the Family Responsibility Office – the site is fully accessible and meets all three accessibility priorities of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), exceeding Ontario Public Service standards. New features include a text-only option in high contrast for users with a visual disability.

Rationale

The Communication and Marketing Branch continues to monitor and update the ministry's Internet site.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to provide official ministry publications in alternate formats upon request.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The ministry did not receive any requests for official publications in alternate formats in 2005-2006.

Rationale

The Communications and Marketing Branch will respond to requests as they are received.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to fulfill the guidelines for implementing the procurement provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2001 (ODA).

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The Financial Planning and Business Management Branch organized and provided two full-day training sessions on procurement in October 2005 and December 2005. A total of 77 staff attended the sessions and were provided with an ODA procurement checklist. Additional procurement training sessions will be provided on a regular basis.

The ministry is reviewing its procurement policies. Consultations began in late summer 2006.

In September 2005, the ministries launched the new Electronic Manual of Ministry Administration (EMMA) Intranet site. The site is user-friendly for persons with disabilities. An ODA procurement checklist is available to staff online.

The ministry's Consulting Services Report Template has been updated to confirm that the ODA requirements have been considered in the planning stage of any new procurement consistent in accordance with the ODA.

The Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster worked with the Human Resources Branch to develop a list of web sites related to all aspects of accessibility.

A link is available from MyOPS to the information technology procurement Intranet site which includes specific documents relating to the procurement of information and information technology consistent with the provisions of the ODA.

Rationale

The ministry will continue to fulfill the guidelines for implementing the procurement provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001.

Links to the web sites related to accessibility were posted on the Cluster Intranet site in September 2006.

Commitment

The ministry continues its strong commitment to meeting the individual accommodation needs of employees and applicants with disabilities.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The ministry will continue to implement the government policy on employment accommodation requiring managers to address the individual needs of employees and applicants for work-related barriers.

A wide variety of individualized accommodations were provided to employees in 2005-2006 including the:

- installation of ceiling track lift in a washroom;
- provision of American Sign Language Interpreter services;
- purchase, installation and training on use of emergency evacuation chairs;
- installation, customization and training on a voice recognition assistive device system for operating computers;
- provision of ongoing workplace attendant care services;
- modification of office workstations and tasks based on assessments conducted by Registered Occupational Therapists;
- provision of ongoing consultant services for the technical support and customization of a complex assistive device system; and,
- analysis of potential barriers including job-site analysis and functional abilities evaluation.

Rationale

The ministry will continue to accommodate staff and applicants with disabilities on an ongoing basis.

Additional Achievements

1. The Human Resources Branch developed a "Fragrance Sensitivity Accommodation Guide" for managers. This guide was distributed in May 2006 and provides managers and supervisors with important information about fragrance sensitivity and how to respond effectively to this issue.
2. The Human Resources Branch also developed a guide for managers and supervisors on the evacuation of employees requiring assistance in the event of an emergency. The guide provides practical advice on how best to support employees requiring assistance and how to develop individual evacuation plans for these employees. A number of other branches developed and updated individual evacuation plans for staff needing assistance in the event of an emergency and held training sessions for evacuation buddies.

3. In May 2006, the Developmental Services Branch released a public consultation paper. This public consultation paper was made available in several formats including plain language, large print and audio.
4. All Ontario Disability Support Program Employment Supports directives and forms have been revised to improve accessibility and readability for staff and clients with disabilities.

Commitment

The ministry will continue to improve the accessibility of their facilities and offices where and whenever possible.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

In 2005-2006, the Capital and Accommodation Services Branch implemented 218 projects. Within these projects, the Branch worked to improve accessibility.

The ministry has taken a leadership role in promoting and implementing enhanced accessibility across all of its operational and customer service sites.

As part of the four-year Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Capital Fund Strategy, the Branch is committed to implementing a customer driven model office concept which enhances the provision of customer access and service in all ODSP locations.

A number of alteration projects in both field and corporate offices have focussed on the creation of more efficiently designed workstations to improve access and circulation for staff and clients with disabilities.

In addition, any project that involves either the renovation of space or the creation of new space uses accessibility and barrier-free design.

Rationale

The ministry will continue to improve the accessibility of their offices and facilities on an ongoing basis.

Additional Achievement

In June 2006, the Deputy Minister's Office invited Capital and Accommodation Services Branch to tour the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Centre in Toronto. The newly renovated site illustrated the types of innovations

that the CNIB has implemented for people with vision impairments for consideration for use in ministry offices and facilities.

Commitment

Funded capital program projects of the ministry will continue to meet the accessibility standards of the 1997 Ontario Building Code.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

All new construction and renovations was done in compliance with the Ontario Building Code and include accessibility considerations.

Rationale

Throughout the year, projects will continue to be required to meet, at minimum, the barrier-free design standards of the 1997 Ontario Building Code.

Commitment

The Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster, which provides information and information technology services to the ministry, will continue to track and provide timely solutions to information and information technology accessibility problems, where possible.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

Cluster business consulting managers continue to respond to accessibility issues relating to information and information technology that are raised by staff.

Rationale

The Cluster will continue to track and provide timely solutions to information and information technology accessibility problems, where possible.

Commitment

Management Support Branch (MSB) will undertake several initiatives to increase accessibility.

Status

Ongoing.

Action

The Branch began offering staff training sessions on accessibility in July 2006.

MSB has completed research on best practice criteria in the development of an accessibility checklist to address the issues that the Branch needs to consider in the delivery of services to its internal clients. The Branch is working with the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario in the development of the checklist.

In collaboration with the Human Resources Branch and the ADO, MSB developed a survey to help identify accessibility issues of its corporate and regional office clients.

The Branch, together with the ADO, continues to deliver sign language training “lunch and learn” sessions for staff.

Timeframe

The accessibility checklist was implemented in September 2006.

Sign language training sessions for staff were held in September 2006.

Rationale

The Management Support Branch will continue to undertake several initiatives to increase the accessibility awareness of its staff.

Commitment

The Corporate Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs (CPIA) Branch will continue to consider the accessibility needs of Ontarians with disabilities in federal/provincial/territorial relations.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

As the co-chair of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Benefits and Services for Persons with Disabilities Working Group, the ministry continues to pursue initiatives for persons with disabilities.

In October 2005, FPT Ministers released a public communiqué that reaffirmed their commitment to the objective of full inclusion of Canadians with disabilities in society.

The Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities, which helps improve outcomes for people with disabilities, was extended to March 2007.

Rationale

The CPIA Branch will continue to advocate on behalf of Ontarians with disabilities in federal/provincial/territorial relations.

Additional Achievement

Ontario has also initiated discussions on a proposed Federal National Disability Act. These discussions are ongoing and could help establish national accessibility standards.

Commitment

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario will continue to update the Accessibility for Ministries Intranet site. This reference site, available for all Ontario government ministries, promotes a focus on accessibility planning under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 and the transition to standards development under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The Accessibility for Ministries Intranet site was updated to provide ministries with tools and resources to transition to standards under the AODA. Each ministry has been asked to include forward-looking commitments organized under the four priority areas of the AODA: customer service, employment, communications and information; and the built environment.

Commitment

In its Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) offices, the ministry will continue to improve accessibility through implementation of the model office design as renovations and relocations occur. The model office design includes some accessibility features that exceed the accessibility requirements of the 1997 Ontario Building Code and the Standards for Barrier-Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

Twenty-three ODSP offices have undergone accessibility improvements including: Barrie, Burlington, Cambridge, Chatham, Elliot Lake, Guelph, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener, two offices in Mississauga, Newmarket, Lindsay, Orillia, Peterborough, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Whitby and five offices in Toronto.

Six ODSP offices are consistent with the model office design, specifically, Bracebridge, North Bay, Owen Sound, Toronto, Windsor and Hamilton.

Examples of some of the new features include enhanced reception areas, client counter services, desk-side interviewing, refurbished public areas and washrooms, improved internal circulation, more automatic door operators, and wider main doors.

Rationale

The ministry will continue to implement appropriate aspects of the model office design in ODSP offices and facilities as renovations and relocations occur.

Commitment

The ministry will develop additional communications materials in pre-printed alternate formats for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients.

Status

Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe

The ministry provides many documents on the ministry's accessible Internet site, including several forms, that are available in large print. Forms are also available in Braille.

The ODSP Employment Supports Application Package forms are now available in large print. The ministry continues to make available upon request, forms in Braille, on audio cassette and on compact disk formats.

Rationale

All forms relating to social assistance are being reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Commitments — Measures to Prevent New Barriers

The ministry has adopted a strategic approach to accessibility planning in order to meet our commitments under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 and to prepare us to fully implement the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Under the theme of Valuing and Celebrating Accessibility, the ministry's three year accessibility framework will address our role as an employer, as a provider of services to clients and as a funder in the transfer payment sector.

The ministry has established working groups to support both planning and implementation of activities based on the following six priorities:

- Taking Stock and Continuous Improvement;
- Transfer Payment and Internal/External Business Processes;
- Direct Service Delivery;
- Outcome Measurement;
- Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment; and,
- Learning and Training.

The ministry also recognizes that communication and engagement strategies are keys to its success in improving awareness of disability and accessibility issues.

For the 2006-2007 accessibility planning cycle, the ministry will place particular emphasis on its role as an employer to bring us closer to our goal of an organization that truly values, promotes and celebrates accessibility as a part of its diverse workforce.

Customer Service

- The ministry will continue to provide the Access, Awareness and Accountability training to all new Ontario Disability Support Program staff and to other staff and managers as appropriate.
- The ministry will continue to improve the accessibility of its offices and facilities for staff and clients with disabilities.

- An accessibility focus will be placed on the technology upgrades that are being made at the Family Responsibility Office to provide equal access to services for people with disabilities.

Employment

- The ministry will promote the Deputy Minister's confidential online suggestion box as the medium for staff to identify barriers and submit suggestions on accessibility.
- The ministry will pilot a management foundations program for all new managers that will include accessibility awareness training.
- The Human Resources Branch will request that all new managers, supervisors and human resources staff verify they have completed the on-line Ontarians with Disabilities Act online training.
- The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario will continue to identify and publish on its Internet site best practices and success stories to promote a blueprint for all organizations that are interested in improving opportunities for people with disabilities.

Communications and Information

The ministry will undertake a number of initiatives designed to improve communications and information exchange including:

- Hosting a leadership day in 2006 that will promote disability awareness and accessibility;
- Reviewing its Intranet site to ensure that it is accessible to all employees;
- Regularly publishing articles that feature accessibility issues in its internal quarterly newsletter *The Comet*;
- Promoting its process to solicit and address ideas and suggestions from staff relating to accessibility; and,

- Launching an internal education program based on the public campaign developed by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario.

Built Environment

- New leases and lease renewals will be negotiated to address the elimination of any barriers to staff, clients or the members of the public with disabilities.

Acts and Regulations

- The identification of barriers and accessibility-related issues will be included in the review of all new statutes, regulations and amendments.

Commitments —

Barriers to be Addressed

A review of the ministry's programs and services was conducted to identify barriers to accessibility. The ministry is committed to addressing these barriers over the coming year. This section summarizes these commitments.

Customer Service

Barrier

There are systemic barriers in accessing some of the ministry's programs and services.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Learning and Training working group will develop and disseminate a lexicon of acceptable terms relating to people with disabilities;
- The Direct Service Delivery working group will undertake a review of options to upgrade telephone systems to appropriately address the needs of clients and employees with disabilities;
- The Direct Service Delivery working group will review the technology upgrades at the Family Responsibility Office using an accessibility lens;
- The Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment working group will continue to improve teletypewriter (TTY) services, including exploring long term management of TTY best practice guidelines within the Ontario Public Service;
- The Developmental Services Branch will further expand and enhance access to specialized clinical resources through the use of video-conferencing technology in four Community Networks of Specialized Care;
- The Ontario Disability Support Branch will continue to remove barriers to employment for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients and their family members. Specifically, in November 2006, a regulation change will take effect to provide new earning and employment incentives to ODSP recipients, allowing them to keep more of their employment earnings. The ministry will also provide a two per cent increase to the Winter Clothing Allowance for eligible people with dependent children receiving ODSP;
- The Social Assistance and Municipal Operations Branch and the Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster will revise existing ODSP brochures and

products to conform to the Accessibility Standards that are being developed by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario. The ministry will implement a pilot e-mail system to improve communication with ODSP clients in October 2006;

- In spring 2007, the Social Assistance and Municipal Operations Branch and the Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster will pilot plain language system-generated letters for ODSP clients in Toronto;
- The Children, Youth and Social Services Cluster will implement the findings of its research methods to provide information in alternate formats and alternate media;
- The Communications and Marketing Branch will provide official ministry publications in alternate formats upon requests; and,
- The Social Policy Development Division will continue to review and revise as appropriate all forms relating to the delivery of Ontario Works and ODSP using an accessibility lens.

Timeline

By September 2007.

Barrier

Planning for emergencies has not been as inclusive as it should be in considering the needs of people with disabilities.

Commitment and Responsibility

- The Emergency Management Unit will consult with external organizations serving people with disabilities in planning for the ministry's legislated responsibilities under the Emergency Management Act, specifically the provision of food, clothing and shelter, in the event of a community emergency.

Timeline

Fall 2006.

Employment Accommodation

Barrier

New staff and managers may not be aware of accessibility issues in the workplace.

Commitments and Responsibility

- In fall of 2006, the Renewal Strategies Office will host a leadership day that will promote disability awareness and accessibility;

- The Learning and Training working group will implement an education program to enhance managers' and leaders' knowledge of employee accommodation obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Ontarians with Disabilities Act;
- The Communications and Marketing Branch will launch an internal ministry education program based on the public campaign developed by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario;
- The Learning and Training working group will develop and disseminate a lexicon of acceptable terms relating to people with disabilities; and,
- The Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment working group will improve the ministry's recruitment processes and practices including postings, interviews, outreach and scoring.

Timeline

By September 2007.

Barrier

Employees with disabilities using assistive devices may benefit from an opportunity to network and exchange information.

Commitment and Responsibility

- The Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment working group will work to explore means by which employees with disabilities using assistive devices to operate their computers could obtain or share (at their discretion) information that would help them get the most out of those assistive devices.

Timeline

Fall 2006.

Barrier

Barriers may be impacting the way in which employees with disabilities access career development programs and processes.

Commitment and Responsibility

- The Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment working group will consult with other ministries on best practices in dealing with barriers in career development programs and processes.

Timeline

Fall 2006.

Communications and Information

Barrier

The ministry's Intranet site may not be completely accessible for staff with disabilities.

Commitment and Responsibility

- The Taking Stock and Continuous Improvement working group will commission an accessibility audit of the ministry's Intranet site.

Timeline

Winter 2006.

Barrier

The ministry would benefit from having its staff more aware of disability issues and more engaged in accessibility.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Communications and Marketing Branch will review how documents are provided to ministry staff to ensure accessibility;
- The Renewal Strategies Office will actively engage ministry employees with disabilities and profile them as appropriate;
- The Communications and Marketing Branch will promote the Deputy Minister's online suggestion box as a way to solicit suggestions from staff on accessibility issues; and,
- The Renewal Strategies Office will support the availability of a number of accessibility-themed "lunch and learn" sessions for ministry staff, including sign language training.

Timeline

By September 2007.

Built Environment

Barrier

Some of the ministry's locations may not be completely accessible to staff and clients with disabilities.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Taking Stock and Continuous Improvement working group will commission an accessibility audit of the ministry's head office location at 80 Grosvenor Street, Toronto;
- The Taking Stock and Continuous Improvement working group will commission an accessibility audit of one of the ministry's corporate locations and one of the ministry's regional office locations;
- The Capital and Accommodations Services Branch will continue to refresh the ministry offices that provide services to Ontario Disability Support Program clients; and,
- The Capital and Accommodations Services Branch will begin ministry office renewal based on findings of the accessibility audits.

Timeline

By September 2007.

Acts and Regulations

Barrier

The ministry has a role to play with its partners in the transfer payment sector in addressing accessibility issues.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Transfer Payment and Internal/External Business Processes working group will make the ministry's service contracting documents available in accessible formats; and,
- The Transfer Payment and Internal/External Business Processes working group will develop tools to support the ministry's transfer payment agencies to prepare for the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Timeline

Spring 2007.

Barrier

The ministry will consider acts or regulations for a review for barriers to people with disabilities as work is planned.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Transfer Payment and Internal/External Business Processes working group will make revisions to the ministry's Cabinet Submission Checklist to include accessibility considerations;
- The Learning and Training working group will make training sessions on preparing Cabinet submission, including accessibility considerations, available to ministry staff; and,
- The Corporate Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs Branch will continue to champion ways to improve outcomes for people with disabilities at the Federal/Provincial/Territorial level.

Timing

By September 2007.

Other

Barrier

The ministry may be in a position to promote the use of organizations that employ people with disabilities and to improve its procurement practices to promote accessibility.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment working group will produce and disseminate a list of organizations that employ people with disabilities. This list will be considered when staff are retaining vendors, consistent with existing procurement directives.
- The Human Resources Practices, Procurement and the Built Environment working group will develop procurement policies to avoid the creation of barriers in technology and equipment purchases and leases.

Timeline

Fall 2006.

Barrier

Outcomes regarding accessibility have not been measured or tracked in a meaningful manner.

Commitments and Responsibility

- The Outcome Measurement working group will establish a baseline and tools to measure the ministry's progress in improving accessibility; and,

- The Outcome Measurement working group will develop a reporting and tracking template and integrate ministry accessibility planning into VISTA.

Timeline

By September 2007.

For More Information

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

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Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services Accessibility Ontario web portal at: www.mcss.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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