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Ministry of Community and Social Services

2015 Accessibility Plan

How the Ministry of Community and Social Services identified and removed barriers in the Ontario Public Service in 2015 and future accessibility commitments for 2016.

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Executive summary

The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) complies with the [Accessibility Standards for Customer Service \(ASCS\)](#) and the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation \(IASR\)](#). These regulations establish phased-in requirements in the following accessibility standards:

- customer service
- information and communications
- employment
- transportation
- design of public spaces

The Ministry of Community and Social Services 2015 Accessibility Plan, celebrates the tenth anniversary of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* and demonstrates how the measures taken in 2015 and proposed for 2016 support the broader Ontario Public Services efforts as we continue on our path to an accessible Ontario in 2025.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services’ goal is to help Ontario's most vulnerable populations achieve their potential, build independence, and improve their quality of life through strong and sustainable services and supports that help protect people from crisis, harm and social exclusion. The Ministry's work supports the government's commitment to invest in people and remove barriers to jobs with the goal of advancing economic prosperity and alleviating poverty in Ontario.

We are continuously improving customer service, as well as our information and communications to be more accessible to all citizens who require our services. We strive to embed accessibility into everything we do. For example, in 2015, the Ministry promoted the [OPS Inclusion Lens](#) as a tool for identifying areas for improvement with regard to accessibility in event planning, policy and program design, as well as training.

Related



[Multi-year accessibility plan for the Ontario Public Service](#)

[Accessibility standards for customer service](#)

[Services and supports for people with developmental disabilities](#)

[Accessibility standards for the web](#)

This year's plan promotes the importance of giving a voice to Ministry staff and encourages dialogue on accessibility barriers and opportunities to enhance the workplace environment in making it more accessible. The plan provides an opportunity for our Ministry to go beyond confirming compliance with regulated minimum requirements and truly integrate accessibility into our workplaces.

By supporting an integrated approach to organizational health and effectiveness, the Ministry will ensure accessibility is part of all aspects of corporate and regional programming. This includes gathering feedback from workplace culture leads throughout the Ministry on accessibility gaps and opportunities for enhancements. This also includes consulting with Ministry leadership on supports required to ensure accessibility is not only supported but widely promoted for all staff.

At the Ministry of Community and Social Services, promoting accessibility awareness, removing barriers, and ensuring that all employees are able to participate fully and meaningfully in their workplace, is the responsibility and pride of the entire organization.

Section one: report on measures taken by the ministry in 2015

Customer service

Ontario Public Service Multi-Year Action Plan (OPS MYAP) key outcome:

People with disabilities who are OPS customers receive quality goods and services in a timely manner.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2015

The ministry seeks client feedback on accessibility

- Staff and customer feedback is sought on accessibility innovations and improvements. The Ministry's Social Policy Development Division seeks feedback on program innovations and improvement from stakeholder groups, advisory tables and working groups, which include people with disabilities and/or agencies that provide support services.
- Comments and feedback provided via the MCSS Internet site are used to help the Ministry improve programs and services.
- In the Social Assistance Operations Division, customer feedback is sought through surveys and questionnaires regarding accessibility requirements, accessible parking spots, desk-side model, service delivery, and location of parking areas.
- First Nation Ontario Works Service Delivery Agents provided recommendations on strategies that would accommodate First Nation residents applying to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Income Support as there are unique challenges in ensuring the Disability Determination Package is received, completed and submitted to the Disability Adjudication Unit in a timely manner.

The OPS inclusion lens and the MCSS inclusion plan

- In the Children, Youth and Social Services I&T Cluster (CYSSC), the OPS Inclusion Lens continues to be applied in the accommodation of staff, project planning, governance processes and architecture (in particular, the business architecture domain). In addition, Architects apply the lens as new programs and services are being described/defined – as per the I&IT Accessibility Guidebook published by the I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence (ACOE) in late 2011.

- The 2013-2016 [MCSS Inclusion Plan](#), a three-year action plan to strengthen diversity and inclusiveness, was implemented throughout the Ministry. Inclusion and accessibility are taken into consideration in the development of ideas and event planning as well as aspects that support and champion diversity.

Embedding awareness

- Managers were encouraged to incorporate and support accessibility and inclusion leadership commitments in their Performance Development Plans.
- The Ministry continued to exceed the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service by requiring all staff complete the two online May I Help You training modules on providing accessible customer service. As part of the onboarding process, new staff are advised that these two modules are mandatory and all employees are encouraged to complete the accessibility related training found in the [OPS Learning and Development Catalogue](#).

Information and communications

[MYAP](#) key outcome

Information and Communications are available in accessible formats or with necessary supports to all [OPS](#) staff and customers.

Measures taken by [MCSS](#) in 2015

Accessible internal and external communications

- Accessibility was considered when developing internal and external communications, websites, technology solutions and documents. All content posted to the Ministry's Internet and intranet websites has been tested against the current standard, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA. Any issues discovered with the content or product were then remediated before being made available.
- FRO documents continue to be provided in an accessible format, and, upon request, alternate formats are provided to meet requesters' needs in a timely manner in order for them to participate fully and meaningfully. Service feedback and client requests for documents in accessible format can be received by phone, [TTY](#), in person, in writing, or electronically by making arrangements with FRO's Accessibility Operational Lead.
- The training team at the FRO also considers accessible font, word count per page, text size and text colour when developing training guides and materials. Voice-over documents and templates are being created to make e-learning training accessible for the visually impaired. The Forms and Letters Review Committee has reviewed and updated all of FRO's public letters and forms using the [OPS Correspondence Style Guide](#) and Ontario [AODA](#) standards to ensure the documents are accessible.
- In the Social Assistance Operations Division, staff members utilize the accommodation questionnaire when in contact with clients to meet their needs. For example, offering French Language Services, using larger print for written communication or using a larger interview room to accommodate clients who require a support person with them. Introductory sign language courses are approved when requested by staff to support them in communicating with their client base.
- The use of secure email by [ODSP](#) staff to communicate with clients was encouraged by managers and there was an increase in secure email communication. Subsequently, this makes communicating with [ODSP](#) staff more accessible and available for clients.

I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence – building accessibility

- Accessibility of communications, documents and I&IT solutions is one of the key factors considered in the design and architecture of I&IT solutions in the Children, Youth and Social Services I&T Cluster. The I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence (ACOE) continued to provide OPS staff with resources for creating and enhancing the accessibility of their websites, web applications and web content.
- ACOE launched the Cluster Compliance Initiative in 2015, to help support web compliance efforts across the Clusters in preparation for the January 1, 2016, regulatory deadline. A Cluster Web Accessibility Compliance Lead was appointed in each Cluster to coordinate and support web compliance efforts. ACOE provided specialized support for compliance efforts including, but not limited to:
 - guidance with accessibility testing methodology and tools
 - alignment in accessibility reporting processes
 - six accessibility testing videos to help assist Cluster Tester Resources in their testing efforts; and
 - participation on Cluster Compliance Task Forces

Employment

MYAP key outcome

OPS employees with disabilities participate fully and meaningfully in their employment.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2015

Accessibility at work

- The Human Resources Strategic Business Unit continues to work with clients and management to support employment accommodation and return to work by addressing employment barriers in a timely and responsive manner.
- ODSP managers participated in online and in-person training related to the new Attendance Support Management System (ASMP) provided by HR Ontario and have implemented this program in order to support staff with disabilities or accommodation requirements.
- Divisions and Regions were encouraged to take a deep dive approach to analyzing the 2014 OPS Employee Survey results and select workplace culture priorities to focus on for enhancement. Performance Barriers was a commonly identified priority for most Divisions and Regions. Divisions and Regions who selected Performance Barriers as a priority were encouraged by the Corporate Services Branch to consult with staff on how they can be supported to reduce any existing barriers. Leaders were encouraged to do everything possible to remove any barriers, including accessibility barriers that separate people from the real work they need to do. Tips provided include:
 - consider what managers can do to make workplace policies and practices that could impede staff's performance more effective in work units; and
 - ensure that staff accessibility requirements are addressed so that they can better deliver results

Emergency management in the ministry

- Business unit emergency management plans outline the requirement to make emergency plan information available in an accessible format upon request.
- The plans include an updated “accessibility impact statement” that outlines the Ministry's commitment to deliver services to people with disabilities as they relate to:

non-emergency events whereby people with disabilities may be affected as a result of a disruption to normal business processes; and

- emergency events whereby an alternative service delivery location is utilized to ensure the continuity of business service is maintained
- All Ministry approved business unit Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) include an updated accessibility statement.
- The Emergency Management Unit developed an Accessibility Checklist for assessing Alternate Service Delivery Locations (ASDL).

Accessibility awareness

- The Ministry, in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, holds a Manager's Community of Practice (MCoP) which provides managers with an opportunity to hear best practices, discuss issues and ask questions regarding Employment Accommodation. Managers across both Ministries completed a survey to inform the topics and frequency preference for the meetings of this MCoP. Survey results indicated that accommodating mental health in the workplace was the topic most managers were interested in. Based on the feedback received, the Corporate Services Branch held a session on this topic.
- The Ministry participated in the OPS Continuum Pilot project in 2014, and the Inclusion Reference Group which was formed in 2015, to continue and deepen the learning from the pilot. In March 2015, a “Courageous Conversations” training session was offered to provide members with additional communication and emotional literacy skills to navigate conflict.

Built environment

MYAP key outcome

There is greater accessibility into, out of and around OPS facilities and public spaces.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2015

Capital planning

- Through strategic planning of the MCSS capital fiscal plan, the Capital Planning and Delivery Branch (CPDB) has moved forward with the implementation of the “Design of Public Spaces” and the updated barrier-free design requirements of the Ontario Building Code for service delivery and offices. CPDB also continues to address current infrastructure barriers and develop strategies to ensure its compliance with the “Design of Public Spaces” and AODA requirements as identified in the Infrastructure Ontario (IO) Guidelines for Barrier-free Design of Ontario Government Facilities and building code.
- The Ministry continues to address accessibility in all its owned and leased spaces through design compliance with current AODA Building Code requirements, “Design of Public Spaces” and applicable IO Guidelines for Barrier-free Design of Ontario Government Facilities.
- All CPDB decision-making and planning identifies and addresses AODA compliance through IO and their service providers/vendors of records when designing new or renovating existing Ministry office locations. Current practice also includes procurement of ergonomic furniture, fixtures and equipment, stemming from workstations, private office suites and file systems necessary to support staff with physical accommodations and making the office environment accessible.
- As needed, local ODSP offices are upgrading their office areas to become fully accessible.

Public and staff engagement

- The Ministry ensured that meeting facilities used for public engagements were accessible and continued to actively offer physical accommodations for staff engagements. When planning ministry-wide events for staff, the Corporate Services Branch applies the [OPS Inclusion Lens](#). Through the use of the Lens, the Corporate Services Branch is able to consider a more thorough approach to accessibility when planning events. Some examples of this approach include:
 - conducting a site visit to check a location's accessible features
 - inspecting meeting rooms to ensure they are large enough to provide circulation and seating for participants who use wheelchairs, scooters, guide dogs or other mobility aids
 - briefing volunteers on the location of the elevators, accessible washrooms and accessible fire exits and,
 - giving participants an opportunity to indicate any accommodation or dietary needs ahead of time
- Accessibility in the built environment was the newest requirement of the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)* under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Though training for this requirement is open to all staff, the Ministry determined a target audience, based on the following definition: “employees identified as having duties that are impacted by the requirements for accessibility in the built environment”. As of December 31, 2015, a total of 146 [MCSS](#) and Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) employees completed the online course “Accessible Built Environment in the [OPS](#)”.

General outcomes

[MYAP](#) key outcome

[OPS](#) staff are able to identify barriers to accessibility, in [OPS](#) policies, programs, services and facilities, and actively seek solutions to prevent or remove them on a continuing basis throughout the organization.

Measures taken by [MCSS](#) in 2015

Accessibility continues to be an organizational commitment for the ministry

- Accessibility requirements have been embedded in procurement policies and tools in order to support customer service objectives.
- Ministry delegates attended the Ontario Job Opportunity Information Network (JOIN) Annual Conference and heard from leaders in the field of accessibility who are building accessible workplaces and are part of the successful realization of an inclusive Ontario.
- The Community & Developmental Services Division's (CDS) Team Charters include championing accessibility and diversity objectives and adhering to requirements and guidelines. The [CDS](#) Assistant Deputy Minister's Office has a Positive Space Champion who facilitates team discussions on inclusion.
- The Peer Employment Mentor (PEM) pilot implementation phase launched in October 2014 and ended in September 2015. Through this pilot project, people who have lived experience with a disability were employed as mentors by community-based delivery agents to support [ODSP](#) clients as they considered taking steps towards looking for work. During the pilot, 10 select [ODSP](#) employment supports service providers were contracted to deliver mentoring support to people with disabilities. An aggregate total of 28 mentors were deployed by these agencies, which was comprised of individuals with a wide range of disability types and experience as either current or former [ODSP](#) clients who have

found employment. The [PEM](#) is currently in the evaluation phase with a report expected in April 2016.

- The Kenora Chief Advisory pilot to expand [ODSP](#) employment supports services in the region’s Aboriginal communities was launched in April 2015. In addition, the Ontario Disability Support Program Branch (ODSPB) also supported a similar pilot by the March of Dimes Canada that would expand employment support services on Manitoulin Island. These projects are being managed by the North Regional Office with support from [ODSPB](#). Outcomes of these pilots will be assessed in spring 2016.
- The Ontario Works Branch in the Social Policy Development Division is developing a provincial client satisfaction survey that would measure the effectiveness of service delivery standards of Ontario Works delivery partners. The deployment date of the survey is still to be determined.

Section two: report on measures proposed by the ministry for 2016

Customer service

[MYAP](#) key outcome

People with disabilities who are [OPS](#) customers receive quality goods and services in a timely manner.

Measures Proposed by [MCSS](#) for 2016

The Ministry will:

- Develop a longer term learning and development strategy for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) staff, [ODSP](#) managers and in corporate branches of the Social Assistance Operations Division staff. A competency-based program that provides skills and tools, as well as a standardized behavioral framework for successful human services interactions skills will be introduced as part of the strategy. While not specifically targeted to better support clients with mental health issues, the implementation of this professional development program could serve to enhance relationships with [ODSP](#) clients, including those clients with mental health issues.
- Encourage the use of the [OPS](#) Inclusion Lens for new policies, programs, practices and services. FRO’s stakeholder outreach strategy and Client Service Charter will be developed using the [OPS](#) Inclusion Lens and [AODA](#) guidelines.
- Work to become more accessible to First Nation [ODSP](#) applicants residing in rural and remote First Nation communities. To facilitate communication and document sharing, the North Region will set up secure generic email accounts between the First Nation Ontario Works office and both the North Region [ODSP](#) office and the Disability Adjudication Unit.
- Continue to focus on the priorities set out in the Ministry’s multi-year Diversity and Inclusion Plan and support the [OPS](#) vision of being a diverse and inclusive organization.
- Continue to require that staff complete the mandatory online training modules related to the [AODA](#) and the [IASR](#) and promote the complete range of accessibility-related training including the [OPS](#) Inclusion Lens e-learning.

Information and communications

MYAP key outcome

Information and Communications are available in accessible formats or with necessary supports to all [OPS](#) staff and customers.

Measures proposed by [MCSS](#) for 2016

The Ministry will:

- Promote the use of secure email on a case-by-case basis to enhance communication with clients who opt for this method of information services.
- Continue to monitor new products on an ongoing basis to ensure that the current standards, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA, are upheld.
- Continue to provide documents in an accessible format, and upon request, provide alternate formats to meet requesters' needs in a timely manner in order for them to participate fully and meaningfully.

Employment

MYAP key outcome

[OPS](#) employees with disabilities participate fully and meaningfully in their employment.

Measures proposed by [MCSS](#) for 2016

The Ministry will:

- Encourage ongoing staff dialogue at a variety of meetings on matters pertaining to accessibility.
- Ensure that training related to accessibility standards is included in onboarding of new employees. The new Ministry orientation portal will include a link to mandatory courses.
- Advise managers to include a performance commitment regarding accessibility in their performance plan.
- Continue to provide, through the Manager's Community of Practice, a forum for Managers to raise questions and to learn and discuss issues, challenges and solutions to providing employee accommodation, while raising awareness of disability issues through guest speakers.
- In addition, the Ministry's Accessibility Lead will attend Workplace Culture Committee meetings to provide relevant accessibility information and seek feedback from staff across the Ministry on accessibility opportunities for improvement and ongoing successes.

Built environment

MYAP key outcome

There is greater accessibility into, out of and around [OPS](#) facilities and public spaces.

Measures proposed by [MCSS](#) for 2016

The Ministry will:

- Ensure that meeting facilities used for public engagements are accessible.
- Continue to actively offer physical accommodations for staff engagements.
- Continue to address accessibility in its owned and leased spaces.
- In addition, [ODSP](#) desk side modernization, which is part of the modernization of [ODSP](#) offices, will encompass [AODA](#) compliance, changes to the building code and accessibility best practices to increase client access to services.

General outcomes

MYAP key outcome

OPS staff are able to identify barriers to accessibility in OPS policies, programs, services and facilities, and actively seek solutions to prevent or remove them on a continuing basis throughout the organization.

Measures proposed by MCSS for 2016

The Ministry will:

- Offer training to staff on how to use the OPS Inclusion Lens to encourage an even broader use of the tool in the development, implementation or evaluation of a policy, program or service.

Section three: addressing the identification of barriers in legislation

Introduction

In 2005, the government introduced the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, with the goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025. In support of this goal, the government subsequently committed to review Ontario legislation to identify and address accessibility barriers, and undertook a coordinated review of 51 statutes considered to have a high impact on persons with disabilities. This review has now been completed.*

Our Ministry remains committed to the goal of ensuring that Ontario legislation does not create barriers to persons with disabilities. We will continue to report through our accessibility plan, the actions taken to identify and remove barriers in Ministry Acts, regulations, policies, programs and services. The findings of the coordinated review of high impact statutes will inform our Ministry's approach to carry out this work.

Measures currently in place

The following measures are in place to assess our Ministry's proposals for new Acts, regulations, policies and programs and services to determine their effect on persons with disabilities:

- FRO has developed a policy on accessible customer service, which deals with how to address and remove barriers in accessing FRO services. This policy has been developed using the OPS Inclusion Lens.
- Staff from the Social Policy Development Division are encouraged to use the OPS Inclusion Lens in all aspects of policy development and analysis. They are supported in this use through training, mentoring and job tools (e.g. submission guidelines).

Actions taken in the past year

In 2015, the Ministry of Community and Social Services took the following actions to address barriers in its Acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services in response to identified barriers:

- The Ministry seeks input from people with disabilities and various organizations representing the interests of the disability community to better understand the needs and experiences of people with disabilities for the purposes of policy and program design.

- Employment Supports business processes have been streamlined to provide better and consistent services to persons with disabilities.

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Ontario is the first Canadian Province to pass a law to improve accessibility in the areas that impact the daily lives of people with disabilities.

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