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Ministry of Community and Social Services 2016 Accessibility Report

How the Ministry of Community and Social Services identified and removed barriers in the Ontario Public Service in 2016.

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Executive summary

Like all ministries, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) complies with the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation \(IASR\)](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_110191_e.htm#BK3) (http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_110191_e.htm#BK3). This regulation established phased-in requirements in the following accessibility standards:

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

The general requirements are:

- procurement
- training

In 2012, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) released its first multi-year accessibility plan (MYAP) entitled [Accessibility in the Ontario Public Service: Leading the Way Forward](https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-public-service-leading-way-forward) (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-public-service-leading-way-forward>).

The Ministry of Community and Social Service's (MCSS) 2016 Accessibility Report demonstrates how the measures taken in 2016 support the key outcomes and deliverables of the 2012-2016 OPS MYAP.

MCSS provides a broad range of programs that help to support vulnerable Ontarians achieve their potential, build independence, and improve their quality of life, through strong and sustainable services and supports.

We are very proud of the culture within the ministry, and the level of commitment by staff to serve the most vulnerable in our communities. Many ministry services and program areas work to support the OPS in removing accessibility barriers. Our social assistance programs provide financial and employment assistance to those in

need, and help people to live more independently in their communities; and developmental services provide supports for adults with developmental disabilities with places to live and help them work and participate in a range of community activities. Through the ministry's programs and services, we work to remove obstacles that impede opportunity and participation in community life.

The MCSS Accessibility Plan is an opportunity to highlight our ministries successes and accomplishments in integrating accessibility into our workplaces, removing barriers and providing opportunities to enhance the workplace environment by making it more accessible. Over the past year, the Ministry promoted and incorporated the OPS Inclusion Lens as a tool for identifying areas for improvement with regard to accessibility in policy and program design, event planning, as well as training.

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 of the entire organization.

Section one: report on measures taken by the ministry in 2016

Customer service

MYAP key outcome

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

Commitments in 2016

- Encourage the use of the OPS Inclusion Lens for new policies, programs, practices and services. The Family Responsibility Office's (FRO) stakeholder outreach strategy and Client Service Charter will be developed using the OPS Inclusion Lens and AODA guidelines.
- 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.
- 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.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2016

OPS Inclusion Lens/policies

The OPS Inclusion Lens is a multi-dimensional, web-based analytical and educational tool available to MCSS staff. It supports the user in "how" to develop and deliver inclusive, equitable, accessible and responsive

initiatives. As a best practice, the policy and program areas use the OPS Inclusion Lens when developing strategic plans, events and documents.

Staff are encouraged to use the OPS Inclusion Lens in all aspects of policy development and analysis, and whenever possible to inform new policies, programs or services that are implemented.

The OPS Inclusion Lens is also used in financial and business improvement policies, programs and practices and all managers and staff are encouraged to complete OPS Inclusion Lens e-learning.

Many divisions or program areas within the ministry are using the Inclusion Lens to inform policy and program development. A few examples of the OPS Inclusion Lens in practice are:

- Community and Developmental Services Division (CDSO) held Spring and Fall Team Days which were devoted to building leadership in inclusion with sessions focused on building community and enhancing the independence, inclusion and choice for people with developmental disabilities
- CDSO staff regularly meet with service providers, families and clients and received continuous input on the needs of people with disabilities. In the last year, the division held Spring and Fall Regional Engagements Sessions across five regions with over 800 staff from Transfer Payments Agencies and Developmental Service Ontario offices. The sessions built on themes from Team Days and were focused on adopting person centred approaches that place the individual at the centre of all decision-making
- the Social Policy Development Division (SPDD) sought 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
- the flexibility of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) platform has improved the response time to implement ministry initiatives such as a new Ontario Disability Support Program Prescribed Class, added for persons eligible for Adult Development Services and Supports
- the OPS Inclusion Lens has been used to simplify the informational pages for the Online Application for Social Assistance, and to better assist social assistance applicants understand the application process

Staff learning and accessibility training

- MCSS staff regularly seek ways to enhance their skills and knowledge around accessibility. For example:
 - staff in SPDD leverage in-house training on creating accessible documents, solicit guest speakers to raise awareness of disability issues and use American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for stakeholder events
- As part of the onboarding process during an employee's orientation, all new staff are informed of their obligation to complete the list of mandatory courses for OPS employees via LearnON.
- Staff are reminded on a regular basis to complete any outstanding mandatory AODA training courses via LearnON.
- The MCSS/MCYS leadership learning and development programs support the OPS's vision of a diverse and inclusive workplace through interactive learning related to anti-racism, respectful workplace policy, domestic violence, mental health and the indigenous cultural competency, etc.
- *Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC)/Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* related training is mandatory for new and existing staff and was included in the Fall 2016 Learning Path Pilot for new caseworkers as part of Foundational training in the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Information and communications

MYAP key outcome

Information and communications are available in accessible formats or with necessary supports to all OPS staff and customers.

Commitments in 2016

- 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.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2016

MCSS is responsive to feedback and provides accessible formats and communications supports in a timely manner upon request, and continues to notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and communications on the MCSS Internet site. MCSS is working with several partners to ensure that internal and external communications channels continue to meet the needs of staff and the general public.

Websites

As of January 1, 2016, the ministry Internet websites and web content on those websites conformed to international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) - WCAG 2.0 level AA.

The I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence (ACOE) has been working with ministries to develop a high-level action plan to work toward making all ministry intranet websites and web applications meet the January 1, 2020 requirements. In addition, the ACOE continues to support the ministry's accessibility efforts and has successfully coordinated several projects to meet WCAG 2.0 AA, such as:

- OASA (Online Application for Social Assistance) and Office Locator compliance.
- Testing and feedback for the Family Responsibility Office (FRO) Online Portal.
- Documents for the 2017-18 Transfer Payment Budget Package (TPBP).
- Social Assistance Extranet, which features enhancements that improve accessibility and overall user experience.

Emergency planning and business continuity

The ministry has an intranet site available for all staff with resources to assist in emergency planning for people with disabilities. This intranet page is updated as new information or material is available. The resources include information pertaining to:

- Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) emergency management plans include a requirement for the information to be made available in an accessible format upon request and an “accessibility impact statement” outlining 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 the normal business processes
 - emergency events whereby an alternative service delivery location is utilized to ensure the continuity of business service is maintained
 - Internal e-learning modules for emergency management were developed to meet online web accessibility standards

Events and publications

As part of regular ministry business practices, MCSS makes every effort to ensure venues are fully accessible to allow for participation in workshop, town halls, forums, and other in-person or virtual sessions whether in

person or through technology.

Accessibility is considered when sending communications products. Requests for documents in an alternate format are responded to in a timely manner and plain language, font style and size and translation are all utilized to ensure requirements are met on a regular basis:

- Upon request, the ministry provides and arranges for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for person with disabilities
- The I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence provides tools and resources to assist all staff in creating accessible documents
- All 2017-18 Transfer Payment Budget Package (TPBP) documents and TP Budget Master File (Excel template) have been reviewed and modified to be fully accessible.

Client services

- Clients are offered accommodations as a standard business practice and staff have access to supports (i.e. TTY, sign language interpreters, adjustable document font size and colour, home visits, secure email, etc.) to accommodate customers who require accommodations. Signage at public ODSF counters inform clients of accessible formats and that they should contact caseworkers to request this service.
- ODSF developed an Accommodation Policy for staff to reference when working with clients. Accommodation requirements are discussed with new staff and discussions occur with ODSF clients as part of the case management process. Staff inquire about accommodations via questionnaires to determine client needs.
- Secure email continues to be promoted by managers and caseworkers and has been proactively used by ODSF staff and clients. There has been a significant increase in the number of ODSF staff and ODSF clients who have registered for the program, as well as an increase in communication between staff and client. Currently, registration for secure email is completed at the request of a client that requires alternate forms of client communication. Secure email, allows a client to discuss the case specific circumstances with their caseworker without having to come into the office.

Employment

MYAP key outcome

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

Commitments in 2016

- 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 FRO staff across the Ministry on accessibility opportunities for improvement and ongoing successes.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2016

MCSS is committed to fair and accessible employment practices and has various employment-related achievements with a vision to create a diverse, accessible and inclusive organization that delivers excellent services and supports employees to achieve their full potential.

Mentoring and performance plans

- Accessibility, diversity and inclusion are incorporated into manager's annual performance plans.
- On an ongoing basis, the management team supports inclusion activities and share learning opportunities with staff. The management teams also continuously strive to promote an inclusive culture through leading by example.
- Managers continue to encourage ongoing staff dialogue at meetings on matters pertaining to accessibility.
- Staff that self-identify as a person with a disability, are provided with appropriate accommodations based on the employee's needs.

Staff orientation

- As part of a new employee orientation program, new members of staff are informed of their obligation to complete the list of OPS mandatory accessibility standards e-learning. Completion of training is documented in staff performance plans.
- The quarterly MCSS Orientation sessions provide new employees with an overview of accessibility in the OPS, including topics such as legislative requirements, ministry accessibility plans and mandatory accessibility training.

Accommodation requests

- Accessibility considerations are given during the recruitment process and accommodations are offered to candidates/panel members.
- Managers encourage ongoing staff dialogue pertaining to accessibility at team meetings, which provide an opportunity for discussion and learning and development by discussing articles / announcements / communications released by the Ministry/OPS.
- Managers continue supporting employment accommodations (i.e. Return to Work, mental health in the workplace, flexible work arrangements, etc.) and provide information to staff on the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) during orientation session and when need it.
- Staff requiring accommodations with equipment, service or flexibility needed. i.e. big monitors for those who have vision issues, head set, noise cancelling for those who have hearing issues, ergonomic chairs, standing desks and shock absorbing mat for those who work standing, keyboards and mice for those with mobility issues.
- Employees are encouraged to identify and discuss any potential employment accommodation needs at the time of assignment or at any time thereafter. Employees' needs are met in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.
- The Community and Developmental Services Division (CDS) has supported Transfer Payment Agency (TPA) undertaking innovative opportunities and collaborative projects in community to enhance access to employment supports in the Developmental Services sector.
- The ministry accessibility lead worked with the Workplace Culture Committee and the Manager's Community of Practice, to promote awareness of accessibility. Both forums provide staff and managers an opportunity to hear best practices, discuss issues and ask questions regarding a variety of issues around accessibility.

Transportation

MYAP key outcome

The OPS continues to support the development of transportation services for the people of Ontario that are barrier-free.

In 2016, MCSS where possible, made access to transportation and its related services more accessible, affordable, convenient, and safe for its clients and staff.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2016

- The ministry supported staff with disabilities and offered accessible transportation (i.e. taxis) as required to events and meetings.
- ODSP recipients and their families may access the medical travel benefit to help cover the cost of travel to medical appointments.
- Community and Developmental Services Division (Toronto Region) provided funding to Community Living Toronto to assist in a partnership initiative with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) on a TTC Readiness Program. This program provides facilitation and training to assist people with developmental disabilities to increase ridership skills on the TTC.

Design of public spaces

MYAP key outcome

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

Commitments in 2016

- 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.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2016

Building space improvements

The Infrastructure Planning and Delivery unit (IPDU) continues to address accessibility in owned and leased spaces. Current direction from the Ministry of Infrastructure (MOI) and Infrastructure Ontario (IO) is that work is carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Barrier-free Design of Ontario Government Facilities. The Capital Planning and Delivery Branch (CPDB) applies these standards for all space planning projects to ensure that all MCSS owned and leased spaces meet and/or exceed current AODA requirements.

ODSP desk side modernization, which is part of the modernization of ODSP offices, encompassed AODA compliance, changes to the building code and accessibility best practices to increase client access to services.

- In 2016/17, the following ODSP offices were updated to a desk-side model: Sudbury, Thunder Bay, South Porcupine, Hawkesbury, Belleville, Orillia and Toronto (Parkdale location).
- Changes made to some office spaces (Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Timmins) resulted in accessible washrooms, accessible interview rooms, wheelchair accessible floor space and braille signage.

Community and Developmental Services Division facilitates funding to increase accessibility at transfer-payment agencies, and in 2016 major capital funding was approved for a Violence Against Women's shelter to create a new, fully accessible site.

Public meetings

Accessible rooms and meeting facilities are booked according to the requirements of the participants and accommodation needs are pro-actively and regularly offered. Outreach and supports are offered to stakeholders to ensure participation at forums and meetings (e.g., wheelchair accessibility and other supports offered for self-advocates to participate, at meetings).

- Accessibility is also ensured when scheduling public engagements and invitations include active offer of accommodations.
- On an ongoing basis, the management team ensures that staff with disabilities can participate fully and meaningfully in their employment, while ensuring that their accommodation needs are met.

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.

Commitments in 2016

- 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.

Measures taken by MCSS in 2016

MCSS is committed to accessibility and accommodating the needs of staff with disabilities to ensure they enjoy an environment in which they can contribute fully and effectively to the ministry and their workplace.

The ministry also frequently 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. In the past year the following outreach has taken place:

- The Social Policy Development Division regularly engages people with disabilities and partners with specific interest in disability issues to inform policy and program development. The division actively seeks opportunities for co-creation and partnership in all areas of social services. Recent examples include:
 - development of a provincial disability employment strategy informed by a large external working group
 - ongoing development of a roadmap for income security reform through stakeholder working groups including people with disabilities and advocates
 - redesign of the ODSP medical review process with a dedicated adjudication working group including disability legal advocates
 - hosted a developmental services housing forum to engage adults with developmental disabilities, their families and a range of providers and advocates to explore innovative housing solutions
- Client Advisory Groups have been established at local or regional levels. These Client Advisory Groups are made up of ODSP clients and staff who work through issues and look for ways to improve service and better meet the needs of our disabled clientele.
- The I&IT Accessibility Centre of Excellence launched a new series of 8 courses to help staff learn how to test and create accessible documents and websites. The training has been delivered to over 700 OPS staff.

Section two: addressing the identification of barriers in legislation and implementation frameworks

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.

As a result of this review, the government made changes to 11 statutes spread across seven ministries to ensure that Ontario laws better reflect accessibility considerations. The changes to the 11 statutes were included in the government's 2016 Budget bill, which received Royal Assent on April 19, 2016.

Each ministry continues to be responsible for identifying and addressing barriers in their legislation and the policies and programs through which that legislation is implemented, and for reporting on results through its accessibility report.

Our Ministry remains committed to the goal of ensuring that Ontario legislation and implementation frameworks do not create barriers to persons with disabilities.

MCSS participated in the Ministry of the Attorney General's (MAG's) accessibility review of regulations in 2016. The ministry reviewed its regulations to determine if there were any tables or form graphics that needed to be eliminated in order for the regulations to be accessible and compliant with the AODA.

Actions taken in the past year

In 2016, the Ministry of Community and Social Services reviewed its Acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services and the ministry took the following actions to reduce accessibility barriers:

On November 21, 2016, the following regulations were filed:

- two tables in section 7 of O. Reg. 135/98, made under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997*, which outlined the percentage of Social Assistance costs payable by Ontario, were revoked and replaced with equivalent non-table provisions
- one table in section 33 of O. Reg. 222/98, made under the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997*, which outlined the amount payable on behalf of dependents for board and lodging, was replaced with equivalent non-table provisions

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Related

[All 2016 ministry accessibility reports \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-plans-2016\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-plans-2016)

[2012-2016 Ontario Public Service Multi-Year Accessibility Plan \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-public-service-leading-way-forward\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-public-service-leading-way-forward)

[Ontario Public Service Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2015 Annual Status Report \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-service-multi-year-accessibility-plan-2015-annual-status-report\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-service-multi-year-accessibility-plan-2015-annual-status-report)

[Ontario Public Service Policies That Make Accessibility Work \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-service-policies-make-accessibility-work\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-service-policies-make-accessibility-work)

[Ontario Regulation 191/11, Integrated Accessibility Standards \(https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191\)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191)