



Legislative Assembly of Ontario

2004 Accessibility Plan

The Speaker, Hon. Alvin Curling

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Introduction

In 2001, there were an estimated 1.5 million people in Ontario with self-disclosed disabilities. This number is expected to increase as the population ages.

In December 2001, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities, and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

In the Speech from the Throne, delivered on November 20, 2003, the Ontario Government confirmed its commitment to working with Ontarians with disabilities on meaningful legislation that will allow them to fully participate in building a stronger province.

This is the first annual accessibility plan for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It summarizes the Legislative Assembly's current status in overcoming and preventing barriers for persons with disabilities to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario building and the Assembly's products and services. It also outlines strategies that will be undertaken over the coming year to identify remaining barriers and to improve accessibility.

Achievements

Building upon its capital plan to upgrade the heritage Legislative Building, ongoing renovations and repairs have allowed the Assembly to move forward in addressing physical barriers in both its public and non-public areas. In addition, greater awareness among staff of the needs of Ontarians with a variety of disabilities has changed the way that services and products are offered.¹

¹ It is noted that the Speaker has control over only the Legislative Assembly building at 111 Wellesley Street. Some physical barriers exist at the Whitney Building at 99 Wellesley Street

A. Physical Barriers

1. Legislative Assembly Public Areas

Physical access is provided for people with physical disabilities to the Legislative Chamber (the House) and public areas of the Legislative Assembly. Ramped access is in place at both the north and south entrances, which are located close to the five designated parking spaces. (Clear signage indicates these entrances.) Elevators near the basement and first level entrances provide access to the second floor Chamber and the Speakers' Gallery on the third floor.

Access for people who use a mobility device is available to the Speaker's Gallery, part of the public gallery area, through its west entrance. This provides all visitors to have full view of the proceedings of the House. There are two spaces dedicated as accessible. Additional space can easily be added on a temporary, as-needed basis.

Many of the public washroom areas have been converted to provide accessibility. As funds become available other public area washrooms will be renovated to fully accommodate visitors with disabilities.

Access is also available to the main floor of the Chamber for Members of Provincial Parliament. Entrance is through the government (east side) lobby, with accommodation easily installed on a permanent or temporary basis on either side of the Chamber.

The public cafeteria area has been designed for physical accessibility and includes an eating area with adequate height tables for people who use wheelchairs.

Continued funding is included in the budget of Precinct Properties (the branch of the Assembly that is responsible for the Legislative Building) to remove existing physical barriers ensuring that the Assembly is fulfilling its requirement to make the building more accessible on an ongoing basis.

Information on the accessibility of the building is available for visitors through Interparliamentary and Public Relations. Full accommodation,

that is leased from the Government of Ontario to house staff of the Assembly. These barriers are not considered as part of this report.

as needed, is made for visitors with disabilities upon their arrival. This includes escort or direction through the building.

Similar provisions are made when sites are chosen for off-site committee hearings. Guidelines have been put into place to ensure that Ontarians wishing to attend such hearings can physically access the location of the hearings in order to participate. Policies are also in place to assist people when the physical barriers cannot be overcome.

2. Non-public areas

Physical accessibility has been addressed in most non-public areas of the Legislative building, including providing elevator access to the offices and secure areas and providing adequate washroom space. Accommodation and renovations to desk areas and workstations have been made on an as-needed basis to meet the needs of Assembly and MPP staff with disabilities.

B. Non-physical barriers

The Speaker and staff of the Legislative Assembly also recognize the impact that non-physical barriers can have on those visiting or working in the Legislative Assembly building or accessing its products or services.

Accomplishments in overcoming these barriers include:

- Braille signage in elevators.
- closed caption televisions in the public galleries of the Chamber and on the public broadcast television system. The captioning is captured and stored for future access.
- the availability of TTY (Teletypewriter) telephone systems in the public areas, the Legislative Library and the Clerk and Committee areas of the Legislature.
- the availability of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at committee hearings (both on and off-site) and during Chamber proceedings, as needed.
- training of committee, clerk and security staff in the needs of those with physical and mental illness disabilities.

As well, specialized training has been given to committee and security staff to assist them in making accommodation for people with all types of disabilities when the Committees of the Legislature hold hearings

either at the Assembly or across the province. Such training is updated prior to hearings on matters affecting the disability community.

C. Assembly Internet Site (www.ontla.on.ca)

In 2003 a review of the Assembly's website (www.ontla.on.ca) was undertaken by the Assembly's Web Management Team to ensure that it complied with the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the *W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0* (May 1999).

As a result of the review changes were made to the site's presentation, content and technology to ensure greater ease of access. The changes were:

- the existing drop down menus were replaced with index/home pages
- text equivalents were provided for all images
- all headings and links were converted to Verdana font. All annotations and other text were converted to Georgia font
- hyperlinks were all underlined and coloured blue
- all page title tags were given the format: "Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Title"
- access control keys were made to major links
- the scrolling marquee on the home page was replaced with static text
- descriptive and language indicators were added to all hyperlinks
- icons for printing, e-mailing and book marking were removed
- new index/home pages were created for the major sections of the site
- the "what's new" page was replaced with a glossary
- XHTML has been used for the newly created "includes" files and for the home pages
- Excess JavaScript were removed and new style sheets employed.

D. Assembly Publications

The official publications of the Legislative Assembly (including *Hansard* and *Votes and Proceedings*) are available to all Ontarians in electronic format directly from the Assembly's Intranet site. The site allows users to access the documents in both HTML and PDF formats, making them accessible for those using screen reader software and software that enlarges text for the visually impaired.

Over the past year the Assembly has worked with Publications Ontario to provide legislative documents in alternate format on an as-needed basis.

E. Assembly Employees

As mentioned above, accommodation has been made for those who work in the Assembly, through the use of TTY, ASL interpreters, the removal of physical barriers and the purchase of specialized software. Accommodation is also made for those who apply for positions at the Assembly. Interviews are held in rooms that are fully accessible to meet the needs of all qualified candidates.

All managers have been asked to take online training on the ODA through the WIN system.

Commitment and Strategies for 2004-2005

The Assembly's requirements under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* are not just to identify barriers that have been overcome, but to find ways to prevent new barriers being put into place and to find ways to remove any existing barriers.

There are a number of steps in the development of an accessibility plan. Completing these steps is the responsibility of a working group that has been recently created to identify disability issues and barriers within the Assembly. This group includes those with working knowledge of and responsibility for employees and visitors to the building, along with representatives of Precinct Properties and the Assembly's information technology committee. The Working Group will continue to monitor, evaluate and report on the progress in enhancing and improving accessibility for people with disabilities.

Working group activities for 2004-2005 include the identification of any remaining barriers (these will be identified by asking for staff input and asking for input from visitors to the building) and recommending any needed changes. Strategies for this year also include:

1. Formalizing policies that state the Assembly's commitment to meeting the requirements of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. These may include:
 - ensuring that the funding for accessibility renovations continues as a core part of the budget

- developing written guidelines for the purchase of equipment and services for the Assembly to ensure that the needs of those with disabilities are considered when specific goods and services are purchased.
 - developing written guidelines and/or policies to accommodate those with physical disabilities to attend off-site hearings (Currently the Assembly relies on the Ontario Accessibility Directorate's publication, *Planning for Accessible Meetings* (April 2002), in planning for its committee hearings)
 - ensuring that all new content developed for the Assembly's website will be accessible.
 - continuing to work with Publications Ontario to ensure that the Assembly's official publications are made available in alternative formats upon request.
2. Continuing the ongoing training for committee and security staff to ensure that they are able to assist those with all types of disabilities who visit the Assembly or wish to attend off-site hearings.
 3. Continuing the ongoing training of all staff who have interactions with visitors to the building to ensure that they can assist people with disabilities of all types.
 4. Installing a family washroom in the public area of the Assembly.
 5. Providing ASL interpreters for special events in the Chamber, e.g. the Speech from the Throne, budget, special visits, etc. (This would assist those who are viewing the event via television or from the floor of the Chamber).
 6. Installing a television set with closed captioning in the speaker's gallery.
 7. Developing a map that would give the visitor with a physical disability who enters the Legislative building from any entrance clear guidance in how to access ramps, elevators and all public areas. This map may also be made available on the Assembly website.
 8. Posting international symbols of accessibility on the Assembly website to indicate accessibility and availability of alternate formats and TTY equipment. Similar symbols should be included in notices of both on and off-site committee meetings.
 9. Posting more visible signage throughout the building to indicate the accessible path of travel for people with disabilities
 10. Developing information for the Assembly's website in 'plain' language for people with low literacy, intellectual or learning disabilities.

Conclusion

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario is committed to meeting, both now and in the future, the accessibility needs of Ontarians, making it easier for them to visit the Legislative building and to learn about, understand and use the Assembly's products and services. The areas identified in this report and the strategies developed for the year 2004-2005 demonstrate this commitment.

For more information on the Legislative Assembly's Accessibility Plan, please contact:

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