



2007 Annual Report



Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)



The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Community and Social Services
Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs

December 2007

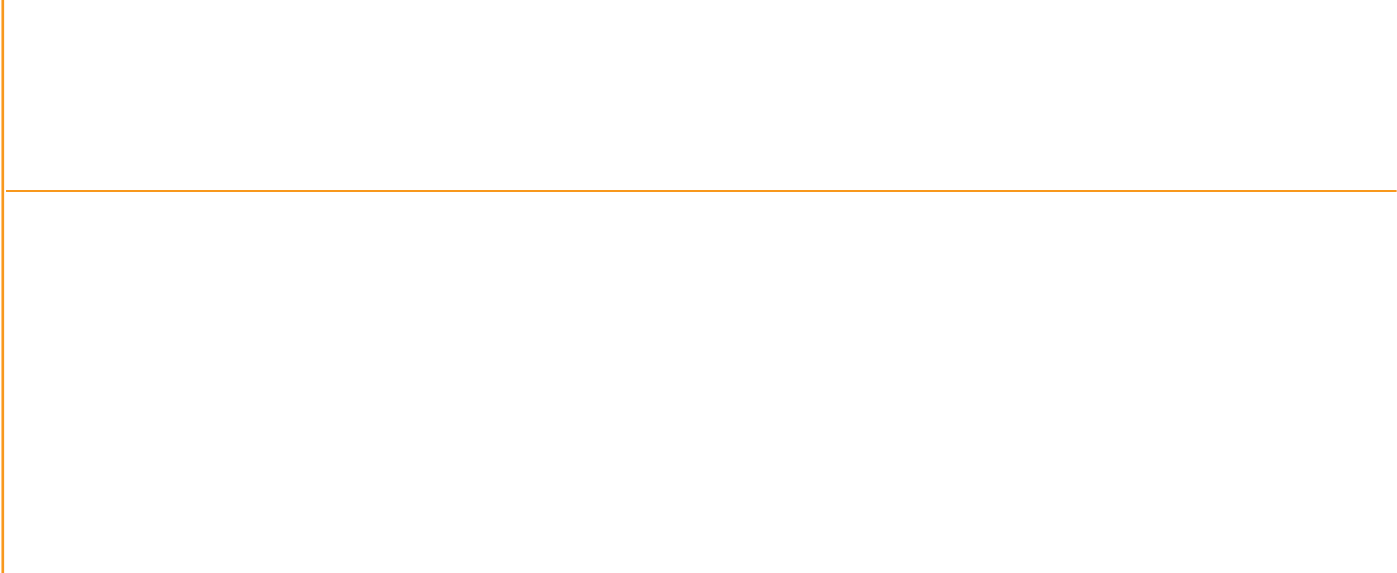


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Message from the Minister of Community and Social Services

I am pleased to present the 2007 Annual Accessibility Report under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 lays out a comprehensive road map to make Ontario accessible to all people by 2025 through the development, implementation and enforcement of new province-wide mandatory accessibility standards for many of the most important areas of our lives.

Over the last year, we have achieved significant milestones in implementing the act and working towards our goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025.

On January 1, 2008 the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service regulation will come into force across Ontario. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service are the first of five province-wide accessibility standards to be developed under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and are the first of their kind in Canada.

Accessible Customer Service means that people with disabilities will have equal opportunity to access the same services as everyone else.

We are also supporting the committees that are working on developing the next four proposed standards, in the areas of transportation, information and communication, employment and the built environment. These standards will translate into a province where all Ontarians will have access to goods, services, education and employment — whether they have a disability or not.

This past May, the government launched a new public education campaign aimed at raising awareness about accessibility by challenging public attitudes about disability and promoting new accessibility standards as they are created in coming years. The first phase of the AccessON campaign targets the business sector to help them understand what the new legislation will mean for them. The second phase will be launched in the coming year, and will focus on our communities and what we can do to make the neighbourhoods where we live and play accessible for everyone.

This January, we will launch a new section, www.AccessON.ca/compliance which will serve as a resource of information and tools for businesses and organizations that need to comply with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.

As part of our ongoing commitment to public education about accessibility, we also continued to build strategic partnerships and expanded several of our existing partnerships to explore new ways of supporting and celebrating businesses and other organizations as they move toward greater accessibility for their customers and employees.

It has been a tremendously exciting year, and we have made significant progress towards our goal. In the coming years, we are committed to working together with the broader public service, the business community and citizens of all abilities, to build a province where everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

An accessible province will benefit everyone, because it is only when every Ontarian can fulfill their full potential that Ontario can be the very best it can be.

Regards,



Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Community and Social Services
Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs

Introduction: Taking action to make Ontario accessible to all

A change has begun.

In June of 2005, the members of the Ontario Legislature voted unanimously in favour of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The Act lays out a roadmap for making Ontario accessible by 2025 for those who live and visit here through the development of new province-wide standards on accessibility.

Under the act, standards are to be developed via an open and transparent process in which the public, the disability community, the broader public sector (such as colleges, universities and hospitals), the private sector, as well as the provincial and municipal governments, are all actively involved in the process.

In 2006, the groundwork was laid. The committees that would draft the first proposed accessibility standards were convened. A council of leaders from the disability community and the private and broader public sectors was appointed to advise the minister on the implementation of the AODA, including the development of proposed standards. Key partnerships were forged with organizations at the heart of Ontario's business community and the non-profit sector.



By the end of 2007, a significant milestone was achieved with the passage of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service which will come into effect on January 1, 2008. The Customer Service standards are the first standards to be developed under the AODA and the first of their kind in Canada.

The year ahead will be spent developing the next four proposed standards in the areas of transportation, information and communications, employment, and the built environment. It will also be dedicated to supporting businesses and organizations as they learn about these first standards on accessible customer service: what it means for them, and how they can incorporate the new requirements for accessibility into their regular business improvements.

Introduction: Taking action to make Ontario accessible to all

As the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (ADO) works to develop the tools and resources that will provide this support, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) will be working to lead the way in improving accessible customer service. The OPS has always taken its role as a catalyst for change in this province seriously, and the shift to making accessibility part of our daily lives will be no different. The Ontario government is committed to improving accessibility as an important step towards a stronger and more prosperous province.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress to date on the implementation of the AODA. Over the last year, in addition to the development of the first accessibility standards, many other important steps were taken towards achieving an accessible province including a new web-based campaign designed to educate the public on the barriers that people with disabilities face, a guide to help people with disabilities and their families during a time of emergency, expanded partnerships with key stakeholders in the business and non-profit worlds, and much more.

Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

In October of 2005, the Ontario government put out the call for members of a committee that would collectively propose Ontario's first standards on accessible customer service for people with disabilities. They would be the first standards developed under the government's landmark accessibility legislation – the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

The Customer Service Standards Development Committee (SDC) was made up of 27 individuals including the committee's Chair, Judith Sandys of Ryerson University. The committee members included a broad spectrum of individuals who represented the business community, different municipalities, various Ontario government ministries, other public sector organizations such as hospitals and colleges, persons with disabilities, as well as representatives of persons with disabilities and service organizations.

These groups came together to develop a standard on accessible customer service for businesses and organizations that deliver goods and services to the public in Ontario.

In the fall of 2006, the Customer Service Standards Development Committee finalized its initial proposed standard and the proposal was posted on the web for public review and comment.

The idea that standards should be developed in an open and co-operative fashion is a theme that runs throughout the AODA. The selection process for the SDCs is done through an open and transparent process, the minutes for each of the SDCs' meetings are posted online, and once each initial proposed standard has been drafted and agreed upon by the SDC, it is posted online for the public to review and offer feedback. The process encourages input and involvement from all members of the public and supports the open, transparent spirit of the act.



Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

Once the public review process was completed, the committee reviewed the feedback from the public and, after making revisions to its initial proposed standard, submitted the final proposed standard to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service will come into force on January 1, 2008.

What the standard says

Under the new standards, organizations will be required to:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to persons with disabilities, including a policy about the use of assistive devices.
- Use reasonable efforts to ensure that their policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:
 - o the goods or services must be provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities
 - o the provision of goods or services to persons with disabilities and others must be integrated unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the goods or services
 - o persons with disabilities must be given an opportunity equal to that given to others to obtain, use and benefit from the goods or services
- Communicate with customers with disabilities in a manner that takes into account the customer's disability (for example, providing a publication in an alternate format, such as audio or Braille).
- Train their customer service staff, volunteers and people responsible for developing the organization's customer service policies, practices and procedures in the provision of accessible customer service.
- Permit customers with disabilities who have support persons or service animals to use them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public and, where admission fees are charged, provide advance notice concerning what admission, if any, would be charged with respect to a support person.

Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

- Provide notice when accessibility to services or facilities for customers with disabilities is temporarily disrupted (for example, posting signs at the entrance of a building to let customers know that one or more elevators is temporarily out of service)
- Establish a process for customers to provide feedback respecting the provision of customer service to persons with disabilities and for the organization to take action on complaints.

The regulation will be reviewed within five years by the Standards Development Committee to determine whether any revisions, updates or changes to timelines are warranted.

Who has to comply

All organizations in Ontario that provide goods or services to the public or to other third parties, and have at least one employee, will be covered by the standards. This includes private businesses, non-profit organizations, provincial and municipal governments and agencies, and public sector organizations such as universities, colleges, hospitals, school boards and public transit organizations.

Businesses and organizations with 20 or more employees, as well as designated public sector organizations, will have to file accessibility reports to show that they are meeting each of these requirements.



“Consumers with disabilities have money to spend on products and services that meet their needs ... Factor in the wealth of a growing seniors population, as well as their friends and families, and this combined market presents terrific business opportunities in a market that is relatively underserved.”

- *Open for Business: The Value of Accessibility*, a report by the Conference Board of Canada, 2007

Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

While the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service come into force on January 1, 2008, organizations will have either two or four years in which to bring themselves into compliance and begin submitting accessibility reports. Different types of organizations have different timelines in which to comply. Exact dates for reporting will be determined in a reporting regulation.

For purposes of compliance and reporting, the standards divide businesses and organizations into three categories, as described below:

(1) Designated public sector organizations with one or more employees are required to:

- comply with the standards starting January 1, 2010
- file accessibility reports starting in 2010.

Designated public sector organizations include:

- provincial ministries
- designated provincial agencies that provide customer services
- Legislative Assembly and its offices
- municipalities
- universities
- colleges of applied arts and technology
- public hospitals
- school boards and public transportation organizations.

Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

(2) Private sector and non-profit businesses and organizations with 20 or more employees are required to:

- comply with the standards starting January 1, 2012
- file accessibility reports starting in 2012.

(3) Private sector and non-profit businesses and organizations with one to 19 employees are required to:

- comply with the standards starting January 1, 2012
- These organizations are not required to file accessibility reports. Following the public review process, an additional regulation was included along with the standards that exempts these organizations from filing accessibility reports. This allows smaller organizations, which have limited resources, to focus their efforts on achieving results.



Nationally, people with disabilities account for an estimated \$25 billion a year in consumer spending, and influence the spending decisions of 12 to 15 million other Canadians.

– RBC Financial Group report, 2000.

Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

Helping Businesses and Organizations to Comply

Today, one in seven Ontarians is living with a disability and, with an aging population, that number, and the number of senior citizens in this province, is going to continue to grow. The businesses and organizations that can offer barrier-free experiences are going to be the ones successful in tapping into this expanding market.

In order to help businesses and organizations more easily understand what the new Accessibility Standards for Customer Service mean for them and what they will need to do to comply and when, the government is developing a series of tools, resources, and strategic partnerships to help.

Tools

- Guide to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation – In early 2008, the government will release a guide that explains the meaning of the regulation for the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service in clear, plain language.
- Compliance Assistance Tool Kit – Also in early 2008, the government will develop a How To Guide, sample policies, checklists and a sample training resource to assist obligated organizations with compliance of the customer service regulation.
- Talk to Me: Serving Customers with Disabilities – Five short sector-specific training videos that include clips of real people with a range of disabilities talking about the barriers they most commonly face and offering specific customer service tips and techniques that they find helpful.
- An Accessible Ontario: It's Just Good Business – A DVD training tool developed to help small and medium-sized businesses make their operations more accessible for all of their customers.
- May I Help You? – An on-line course developed for members of Ontario's Public Service who interact with the public on a regular basis. The course helps front-line staff develop a better understanding of the barriers that exist for people with disabilities and teaches them how to provide the best possible service to all Ontarians.

Ontario's New Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

Resources

- Contact Centres – The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario has teamed up with ServiceOntario and the Canada-Ontario Business Service Centre to offer support for business owners or managers who have questions about the new standards and what they need to do to comply.
- Compliance Assistance Website – In January of 2008, the ADO will launch a new section on the Ministry of Community and Social Services' website which will house all of the compliance materials to help organizations better understand their responsibilities and provide them with the tools and resources they need.

Strategic Partnerships

- Retail Council of Canada (RCC) – The Ontario government has teamed up with the RCC to promote accessibility within the retail sector and offer Ontario's retailers compliance tools and resources that are designed specifically for retailers. These tools will help them become more aware of how accessibility can benefit their businesses and what they need to do to comply with the new Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.
- Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) – The Ontario government is working together with AMCTO to develop tools and resources to assist municipalities in complying with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.



“Successful businesses, small and large alike, embed accessibility in their business practice. They understand that people with disabilities and seniors are a large and growing segment of the population that wields tens of billions of dollars in purchasing power.”

- *Open for Business: The Value of Accessibility*, a report by the Conference Board of Canada, 2007

Other standards under development

Under the AODA, four more standards development committees were established in 2007 to develop proposed standards for accessibility in the areas of: transportation, information and communications, employment, and the built environment.

Each of the proposed standards will be developed by a Standards Development Committee (SDC) made up of men and women who represent the business community, the disability community, the non-profit sector, provincial government ministries, as well as other public sector organizations such as hospitals and colleges.

In general terms, the role of the SDCs is to draft proposed accessibility standards on different areas of public life. During their work they are to consider the full range of disabilities in identifying barriers; appreciate and advance, in a balanced and fair way, the views and interests of the diverse Ontario sectors, industries, organizations, groups, communities and persons with disabilities; and make achieving the purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act the primary consideration in all of their work.

Following is an update on the current status of each of those committees and the standards on which they are working.

Transportation

The Transportation Standards Development Committee is chaired by Al Cormier, a consultant with a long history in the transportation sector.

The committee submitted their proposed standard for public review in June of 2007. The public review process ended in September, 2007 and the committee reconvenes in early 2008 to consider the input they have received from the public. The committee will then work on finalizing its proposed standard for submission to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Information and Communications

The Information and Communications Standards Development Committee is chaired by Laura Talbot-Allan, president and senior partner of TalbotAllan Consulting, previously vice-president of external relations at the University of Waterloo and a senior executive in the telecommunications private and public sectors.

The Information and Communications SDC is meeting regularly and looks forward to having an initial proposed standard ready to post for public review in 2008.

Other standards under development

Employment

The Employment Standards Development Committee is chaired by Dr. Robert Kosnik. Dr. Kosnik has taught Occupational and Environmental medicine for the University of Toronto and University of California, San Francisco.

The committee had their first meeting in the fall of 2007.

Built Environment

The Built Environment Standards Development Committee is chaired by Ron Meredith-Jones. Mr. Meredith-Jones brings with him over thirty years of executive experience in the insurance industry, and was also on the Board of the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute for over a decade as Director, Treasurer and Board Chair.

The committee had their first meeting in the fall of 2007.



“Businesses that appreciate the value of people with disabilities and embed good accessibility in their culture and practice will have a competitive advantage.”

- *Open for Business: The Value of Accessibility*, a report by the Conference Board of Canada, 2007

Education and awareness

Research from other jurisdictions has shown that compliance rates with accessibility standards have typically been higher when a strong, targeted education and awareness campaign has accompanied the regulations. When organizations better understand the barriers that exist, and are educated early on about the new standards, they are more likely to embrace the change in a positive way.

For that reason, the ministry is committed to continuing its work to raise awareness among the public, as well as the businesses and organizations that will have to comply with the standards, in order to build momentum for change.

Some of the key education and awareness initiatives from this year include:

- **AccessON.ca** – A new public awareness campaign was launched in May of 2007 to help the public better understand the barriers that people with disabilities face, what the Ontario government is doing to make the province more accessible, and what they can do to help.

The campaign includes a new website at **www.AccessON.ca**, as well as posters and pamphlets that can be seen in community locations across the province.

The first phase of the campaign is directed towards Ontario business owners and managers to help them understand accessibility and what the new legislation will mean for them. Phase two will focus more on our communities and what we can all do to make the neighborhoods where we live and play more accessible for everyone.

- **OPS Accessibility Expo** – To celebrate National Access Awareness Week in May of 2007, the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario organized an Accessibility Expo for Ontario Public Service staff at Queen's Park. The event was held over two days and more than 500 OPS staff members attended.

Seminars, demonstrations and experiential workshops helped raise awareness about the importance of accessibility and the need for the OPS to lead the way in terms of change.

- **Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/Special Needs** – To recognize Emergency Preparedness Week in May of 2007, Emergency Management Ontario (EMO), in partnership with the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, launched the Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/Special Needs.

Education and awareness

The guide was developed with the help of more than 20 different groups with expertise in the field and is the most comprehensive emergency preparedness resource for people with disabilities and special needs in Canada. In addition to providing checklists and offering emergency planning guidance for people with disabilities and special needs, the guide offers tips to the general public on how to assist someone with a disability during an emergency, and lists “dos and don’ts” relating to specific disabilities.

- **Participation in Conferences/Events** – In order to spread the word about the importance of accessibility for our aging population, and the work that the Ontario government is doing in terms of the development of new province-wide standards on accessibility, staff from the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario visited and participated in a number of conferences, seminars, workshops and Annual Meetings in 2007 in order to speak out about accessibility and answer questions.
- **Partnerships** – Making Ontario into an accessible province by 2025 is an enormous undertaking, and one that the ministry – even the Ontario government – cannot do alone. Forging partnerships with disability groups, private sector umbrella organizations and non-profit agencies is absolutely key to success in this journey as many of these partners have the capacity to reach out and convey the message directly to an enormous group of individuals and other organizations.

So far, the ministry has managed to build strategic partnerships with a number of groups such as the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Council of Canada and the Canadian Standards Association.



Education and awareness

This year, we expanded several of our existing partnerships to explore new ways of supporting or celebrating businesses and other organizations as they move towards greater accessibility for their customers and employees. Following are some examples of partnerships that were expanded in 2007:

- ▶ Innoversity – The government worked with the experts at Innoversity to further develop the Media Access and Participation (MAP) initiative and offer “Lunch and Learn” workshops. The MAP initiative works to engage the media industry to promote positive portrayal and participation of people with disabilities in the film and television industry.
- ▶ Link Up Employment Services – Through this partnership, the government supported Link Up in the development of an employment handbook for frontline managers to identify, prevent and remove systemic barriers in their hiring and employment practices for people with disabilities.
- ▶ Ontario Chinese Restaurant and Food Services Association (OCRFA) – With the help of the Ontario government, the OCRFA has launched a recognition award program called the Ontario Accessible Customer Service Awards to encourage businesses in this important retail community to strive for greater accessibility for their customers and employees. The first awards were presented at the Chinese Professional Association of Canada Professional Development Day on June 10, 2007.

Update on Accessibility Standards Advisory Council (ASAC)

The AODA provides for the creation of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council (ASAC). The role of the council is to provide high-level, strategic advice to the Minister of Community and Social Services on matters relating to standards development and implementation of the AODA, including public education.

The council was announced in December of 2005. The council’s inaugural chair was David Onley, a veteran journalist with CityTV in Toronto and long-time advocate for people with disabilities. Vice-chair Tracy MacCharles, has a strong background in employment equity for people with disabilities.

The council has worked diligently over the past year, meeting with the chairs of the customer service and transportation SDCs to discuss the standards development process, consulting with the minister at each of their regular meetings to provide advice as the

Update on Accessibility Standards Advisory Council (ASAC)

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service were being developed and revised, and offering important and educated feedback on the government's new AccessON public education campaign on accessibility. So, it was bittersweet news that came in September of 2007; David Onley would resign as Chair of the council in order to accept an appointment as the 28th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

David Onley is Ontario's first Lieutenant Governor with a physical disability, having contracted polio at the age of three a disease which left him with severely reduced physical mobility. Mr. Onley has stated that accessibility will be the overarching theme of his mandate as Lieutenant Governor.

The council wishes Mr. Onley all the best in his new role. The council's loss is truly the entire province's gain.

In November, Tracy MacCharles accepted the minister's invitation to take over the role as Chair and the council was pleased to welcome Elizabeth Grandbois as a new member and the new Vice-chair.

Ms. Grandbois has a background in nursing but, in 1997, she was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) and her entire life changed. Shocked to learn there was no treatment, and amazed at the significant lack of understanding of this devastating illness, she set out on a tireless campaign to raise the profile of the disease and garner support for those suffering.

Ms. Grandbois is the Founder and Director of Elizabeth's Concert of Hope, a foundation which has raised over \$2.5 million dollars for ALS awareness, research and patient care. She was inducted into the Terry Fox Hall of Fame this year in recognition of her efforts to increase public awareness and improve the quality of life of others living with disabilities.

The minister looks forward to the council moving ahead with its work in 2008 under the leadership of Ms. MacCharles and with the experience and dedication of Ms. Grandbois now joining the already impressive caliber of men and women at the table.

"Accessibility is that which enables people to achieve their full potential. It is inclusion. Accessibility is a human right and accessibility is right."

– David Onley,
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario,
Installation Speech.

Looking ahead

A great deal has been accomplished in 2007, not the least of which is the development and passage of the first accessibility standards under the AODA — the first of its kind in Canada. However, there is still a great deal of work to do, and in 2008, the work of implementing the AODA will continue as the next four standards go through the process of being drafted, posted for public review and ultimately passed as new regulations.

Other highlights for the year ahead include:

Standards Development

The Transportation Standards Development Committee will continue to meet in 2008. They will consider the feedback that came in during the public review period and then submit their final draft standard to the minister for consideration for passage into regulation.

The Information and Communications, Employment, and Built Environment Standards Development Committees will develop their initial proposed standards.

Helping Ontario Organizations Comply With New Standards

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario will continue to develop and distribute new tools and products for compliance assistance to support obligated organizations in the implementation of accessibility standards.

Building Partnerships

New partnerships will be developed in collaboration with sector leaders from the private and broader public sectors in order to spread the word about accessibility and help business and organizations understand what the work that the government is doing under the AODA means for them.

Raising Public Awareness about Accessibility

The government will expand the AccessON public awareness campaign to include awareness about barriers in our communities and some of the potential solutions to those barriers.

Conclusion

When the members of the Legislature passed the AODA unanimously on June 13, 2005, they embraced the vision of an Ontario that is truly accessible to all. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service are the first standards on accessibility in Ontario, and the first of their kind across the country. An enormous amount of work has been done behind the scenes, but the passage of this first of five standards marks the tangible beginning of that vision becoming a reality.

A great deal of work still needs to be done, both to fully educate businesses and organizations on what these first standards mean to them, and also on the development and implementation of the other four standards. But that work is well under way and with the help of our partners in the corporate, non-profit and broader public sectors, as well as the members of the Ontario Public Service, we're going to realize that vision of an Ontario accessible to all.



“By continuing to work together with our private sector and broader public sector partners, we will build a province where all Ontarians will have access to goods, services, transportation and employment in their community— whether they have a disability or not. We can make the dream of an accessible Ontario a reality.”

- *The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur,
Minister of Community and Social Services,
Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs*

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