



Investing in Accessibility

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
Annual Report 2023

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A message from the Minister

It is my pleasure to table the 2023 report on the [*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\)*](#).

The substantial accomplishments outlined in this report are the result of the unwavering dedication and hard work of countless individuals and organizations across the province, and our government's steadfast commitment to building and investing in an accessible Ontario.

To achieve this goal, we continue to work on identifying, preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities, so they can fully participate in daily life. This means putting accessibility and inclusion at the forefront of cross-government planning efforts through a clear focus on tangible results and targeted investments.

The programs and initiatives outlined in this report are varied and extensive. They include significant infrastructure investments in our most cherished public institutions like hospitals, long-term care homes and schools, as well as extensive investments to help ensure everyone has equitable access to transit. This includes the new Ontario Line, bringing back the Northlander, GO expansion and Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program funding, which has helped purchase over 2,200 new accessible buses and other essential public services.

They also include multiple programs to help people with disabilities find and succeed in meaningful employment. Targeted programs like the Skills Development Fund, Better Jobs Ontario, Project Search and other initiatives open up doors to new opportunities that will help people with disabilities participate more in their community and their local economy.

Support for students in our schools and postsecondary institutions is also essential to helping children and youth with disabilities succeed, both now and in the future. Our Removing Barriers for Students with Disabilities program and the tens of millions of dollars invested annually in Special Purpose Grants are just two examples of the importance placed on ensuring equal opportunity for students with disabilities for generations to come.

Important work is also being done by our municipal partners at the community level to drive their accessibility plans forward. This will help ensure Ontario meets the needs of our neighbours and friends with disabilities. And we continue to offer our strong support and guidance to help them succeed.

It is a true team effort to further accessibility, so I also thank all my fellow Ministers and other government colleagues who continue to put an accessibility lens on everything we do as we work across government.

Investing in accessibility is investing in an inclusive Ontario for today and forever. Together with all our dedicated and hard-working partners, it is our mission to work towards a progressively more accessible province each and every day. Ontarians expect no less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond Cho". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Raymond" and the last name "Cho" clearly distinguishable.

Raymond Cho,

Minister for Seniors and Accessibility



AODA towards 2025

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) identifies, removes and prevents barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities by developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in five key areas of daily life. Since the AODA was passed, the government has collaborated with the disability community, businesses and other internal and external strategic partners to develop these standards. The standards help move Ontario forward on its journey to create a more accessible and inclusive province. However, we know that accessibility is an ever-evolving journey. We will continue to review the AODA regularly to improve the lives of Ontarians beyond 2025, and in the process, consider new accessibility standards or amendments to existing ones.

This report examines the implementation and effectiveness of the AODA and is [a legislative requirement](#).

Legislated committees and council

As required by the AODA, [standards development committees](#) (SDCs) and the [Accessibility Standards Advisory Council](#) (ASAC) were established to advance accessibility in Ontario. These advisory groups represent a variety of diverse voices and sectors, including people with disabilities, municipalities, businesses and community organizations.

Standards development committees review existing accessibility standards and offer suggested changes or propose new standards in their area of focus. They provide recommendations to the government on ways to identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers.

The Accessibility Standards Advisory Council is responsible for providing strategic advice to the government on accessibility. This includes, among other things, advising the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility on progress made by standards development committees in the development of proposed accessibility standards and in achieving the purpose of the AODA.

Standards development committees' progress

In 2023, the [Design of Public Spaces Standards Development Committee](#) continued its review of Ontario's accessible built environment standards that are currently in regulation under the AODA, as well as the Ontario Building Code's 2015 barrier-free accessibility requirements. These spaces include areas like bike paths, playgrounds, service counters and accessible washrooms.

The committee, led by chair Julie Sawchuk, provided its initial recommendations in November 2023. Ms. Sawchuk subsequently submitted a letter to the minister noting that the committee had proposed to gather wide-ranging feedback on its recommendations. "We believe in the power and voice of people with disabilities and want to ensure that their opinions are considered in the development of our final recommendations," she wrote. This sentiment aligns with the purpose of the AODA, which recognizes the history of discrimination against people with disabilities in Ontario and aims to involve people with disabilities in the development of accessibility standards.

The Design of Public Spaces Standards Development Committee's initial recommendations report was released in June of 2024 for public consultation.

Another standards development committee is also working to improve accessibility in Ontario. The [Customer Service Standards Development Committee](#) began the second review of the accessibility standards

for customer service under the AODA. The committee is chaired by Jeff Adams, a lifetime advocate for equity-related issues, Paralympic champion and lawyer with experience in labour, employment and human rights law. Initiated in 2023, this committee submitted its initial recommendations report to the minister and launched a public consultation in fall 2024.

Council achievements

The Accessibility Standards Advisory Council continued to provide strategic advice to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility throughout 2023. It has made valuable contributions to improve the accessibility of the government of Ontario's procedures, places and services. Led by Matthew Shaw, the council also provided expertise and advice on a wide range of areas, including transportation, artificial intelligence and digital services, accessibility and the built environment, and AODA compliance and enforcement.

In addition, the council also advised the minister on the progress of the Design of Public Spaces Standards Development Committee, including providing feedback on the committee's draft recommendations.

Fourth legislative review of the AODA

The AODA is about identifying, removing and preventing barriers to access for people with disabilities. The AODA and its regulations must be reviewed for their effectiveness every three years following the tabling of the previous review.

In 2022, Rich Donovan was appointed to conduct the fourth legislative review of the AODA. Mr. Donovan is an accessibility expert with lived experience and leads a business that helps clients find economic value within the disability market. As part of his review, Mr. Donovan consulted with the public, including people with disabilities. He released an interim report in March 2023 and submitted his [final report](#) to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility in June 2023.

Mr. Donovan's report included comprehensive recommendations and observations of accessibility in Ontario. After time spent carefully reviewing and providing thoughtful analysis, Ontario took early action

on new initiatives. These included planning a survey with everyday people with disabilities to provide their direct experience and feedback on accessibility issues, as a first step toward establishing a group of people with disabilities to provide ongoing feedback about accessibility issues. Other actions included reviewing evacuation approaches for all government-owned buildings to improve the safe evacuation of people with disabilities and ensuring all government procurement through Supply Ontario incorporates accessibility.



Jobs for people with disabilities

Ontario is working to help people with disabilities find employment through programs that target all ages and abilities.

Project SEARCH

[Project SEARCH](#) is a one-year job skills training program that provides employment experience to students with developmental disabilities who are in their final year of high school to help prepare them for the transition from high school to the workplace. *The Developmental Disabilities Pilot – Student Transitions* is an application-based pilot that provides funding to Ontario school boards to support the viability and implementation of Project SEARCH sites to provide work experience to students who apply to participate and meet certain criteria.

In 2023–24, the [Ministry of Education](#) provided time-limited funding of \$478,000 for the school year to expand Project SEARCH sites so that more high-functioning students with developmental disabilities could apply. In the current year, the ministry provided funding to eight new school boards for exploration of the program model's viability in their areas. It also provided funding for start up costs to other school boards that completed their exploration phase and purchased a program licence. Project SEARCH's global data shows that more than 70% of the program's participants found immediate employment.

Better Jobs Ontario

The [Better Jobs Ontario](#) program provides eligible and suitable individuals with vocational skills training and financial support for up to 52 weeks to help them find employment in high-demand jobs in Ontario. Individuals can apply to receive up to \$28,000 for training costs and financial supports for tuition, books, transportation and basic living allowances. Additional funding may be available for disability-related support and child care costs.

In 2022–23, of the more than 3,000 new clients starting Better Jobs Ontario, 559 individuals (18.2%) self-identified as having a disability. In 2022–23, Ontario invested approximately \$70 million in the program.

Skills Development Fund

The [Skills Development Fund Training Stream](#) offers funding to organizations for innovative projects that address challenges to hiring, training or retaining workers to drive Ontario's economic growth and increase its long-term economic competitive advantage through workforce development strategies.

One of the program's main objectives is to support workers and job seekers who face higher barriers of entry and enhance their pathways into meaningful and gainful employment. This includes people with disabilities, as well as youth, women, Indigenous peoples, racialized persons, justice-involved individuals and members of at-risk communities.

In May 2023, Ontario [announced \\$6.5 million](#) to support five innovative projects to help more than 3,770 people with disabilities find meaningful work in their communities in various sectors. The funding recipients included:

- **Canadian National Institute for the Blind**, which received \$3,476,885 for a project helping youth who are blind, partially sighted or deafblind find jobs. It will also help Ontario employers better accommodate workers with sight loss.

- **Community Living Toronto**, which received \$1,816,053 to support a project that aims to help more people with intellectual and developmental disabilities find jobs by matching them with employers seeking to fill positions in sectors like hospitality, customer service, retail, IT and manufacturing.
- **Do Good Donuts**, which received \$149,230 for a project that supports youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities through a work-based training program that includes hands-on training and support to help them transition into employment in the community.
- **Geneva Centre for Autism**, which received \$848,890 to support a project that aims to better prepare people with autism for good jobs. Participants will receive eight weeks of accessible pre-employment group training followed by an additional four weeks of one-to-one support with an employment facilitator for skill building, career exploration, etc.
- **PTP Adult Learning & Employment Programs**, which received \$256,177 to support a project to help people with intellectual disabilities find meaningful employment. Working with George Brown College's College Vocational (CV) Program, this program will focus on skills training, employment counselling, specialized workshops and assistance in securing work placements.

This funding was part of \$105 million in Skills Development funding that supported people with disabilities in 2022–23.

Supported Employment

The Supported Employment program is designed for individuals who face complex barriers to employment as a result of a disability. These barriers may include some combination of limited or interrupted labour market experience, low levels of education or literacy, and other challenging life circumstances, such as poverty or lack of family/parental support. The program offers a range of services and opportunities for people with disabilities to prepare for and secure employment. In 2022–23, Ontario invested \$4.8 million in the program. Over that same time, 544 new clients started the Supported Employment program, and upon exiting the program, 232 participants indicated they were either employed or involved in further education/training.

Youth Job Connection and Youth Job Connection Summer Programs

The [Youth Job Connection](#) and [Youth Job Connection Summer](#) programs offer young people experiencing multiple and/or complex barriers, including those with disabilities, ways to find employment beyond traditional job search and placement opportunities.

The Youth Job Connection program serves Ontario youth, aged 15 to 29 years old, who are not working, in school or in training, and facing employment barriers, by providing employability and employment skills development, education/training and work experiences. Its goal is to support participants find long-term employment and meaningful careers, while also assisting them to take steps towards secondary or postsecondary education or other skill-building programs.

The Youth Job Connection Summer program provides summer, part-time and after-school job opportunities to Ontario students aged 15 to 18, particularly those facing challenging life circumstances and at risk of struggling in their transition from education to work.

In 2022–23, Ontario invested approximately \$51 million in Youth Job Connection and \$10.5 million in Youth Job Connection Summer. More than 7,200 new clients participated in the Youth Job Connection program at that time and 2,240 (31 %) self-identified as having a disability. Of the more than 3,900 new clients in the Youth Job Connection Summer program, 684 (17.4 %) self-identified as having a disability.

Women's Economic Security Program

Ontario's [Women's Social and Economic Opportunity Program](#) supports projects that provide new opportunities for low-income women, including women with disabilities, to increase their financial security. Participants can access training to equip them with the skills, knowledge and experience to become employed, start an apprenticeship or a small business.

Women with disabilities who wish to apply to the training programs are eligible for accommodations and support to enable them to participate. In 2023–24, Ontario invested \$5.5 million in the program.



Working for you

Ontario supports and promotes numerous programs and initiatives focused on helping people, communities and organizations. Through these targeted programs, the province is helping people with disabilities and seniors stay independent, safe, active and socially connected. By promoting and providing programs and services, we're helping to create a more accessible and inclusive Ontario for people of all ages and abilities.

Home and Vehicle Modification Program

The [Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility](#) provides funding for the [Home and Vehicle Modification Program](#) run by March of Dimes Canada. This program helps eligible individuals with mobility restrictions to continue living safely in their homes, participate in their communities and avoid job loss. It is intended to help eligible adults and children most in need of assistance. By making modifications to their homes or vehicles, people with disabilities can live safer, more independent, comfortable and convenient everyday lives. Eligible individuals may receive a grant of up to \$15,000 for home modifications and/or up to \$15,000 for vehicle modifications.

Starting in 2022–23, the government invested \$46.8 million over three years in the program. This is an increase of almost 50% to support

people with disabilities. In 2022–23, over 1,500 individuals made modifications to their homes or vehicles through the program. This is almost double the number of individuals who received modifications in 2021–22.

Eligible home modifications include ramps, widening of doors, stairway lifts and bathtub safety rails. Modifications to vehicles include transferable equipment, such as lifts and hand controls, garage door remote controls and specialized seating.

Assistive Devices Program

Ontario invests more than \$500 million a year in the [Assistive Devices Program](#), which supports people with disabilities with wheelchairs, hearing aids, diabetic equipment and supplies and more.

Home care

[Home care services](#) support people of all ages who require care in their home, at school or in the community. Many services can help seniors and people with complex medical conditions live in their homes for as long as possible.

In Budget 2023, the government accelerated investments into home care, as part of [Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#), to bring funding up to \$569 million, including nearly \$300 million to support contract rate increases to stabilize the home and community care workforce. This built on the 2022 Budget, when the government announced a plan to invest \$1 billion over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their own home and community. The investment supported the expansion of services and workforce compensation. In the 2024 Budget, the government is investing an additional \$2 billion over three years to increase compensation for personal support workers, nurses, and other frontline care providers, and to stabilize expanded services.

Abilities Centre support

[The Abilities Centre](#) in Whitby is a community hub that delivers inclusive programming to help build life skills and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, while also promoting the value of inclusive hiring to employers. In 2023–24, Ontario invested \$3 million in the Abilities Centre to support a variety of programs for people with disabilities. These include the LEAD ON program that helps organizations become more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities, as well as Abilities Centre Enterprises, which offers skills development to help participants prepare for work in their communities and achieve their economic goals.

Changes to the Ontario Disability Support Program

Following the 5% rate increase in September 2022, Ontario implemented another increase to income support rates for the [Ontario Disability Support Program \(ODSP\)](#) in July 2023. This was the first annual rate increase tied to inflation which brought the total increase in ODSP rates to almost 12% over a 12-month period.

In February 2023, Ontario implemented changes to the Ontario Disability Support Program that increased the amount of earnings that people with disabilities can have before their ODSP income support is reduced. The employment earnings exemption increased from \$200 to \$1,000 per month for ODSP recipients with a disability, with a 25% exemption of earnings after the first \$1,000.

The government also continued to help people with disabilities make choices for themselves and their family without fear of losing their ODSP health benefits. When ODSP recipients make enough money from employment and no longer need ODSP, the program may continue to provide coverage for important benefits like prescription drugs and dental care for them and their children.

EnAbling Change Program

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility provides funding to not-for-profit organizations, municipalities, industry associations and professional associations across a range of sectors through the [EnAbling Change Program](#). This program educates their stakeholders about accessibility, supports regulatory compliance with the AODA and drives cultural awareness about the value and benefits of accessibility.

Funding applications for the 2023–24 EnAbling Change Program [opened in May 2023](#). In 2023–24, the program's focus was on projects that create equitable opportunities in the labour market, drive a culture of respect and dignity for people with disabilities, and support awareness of, and regulatory compliance with, the AODA.

In total, the government invested roughly \$1.5 million to support 14 projects through this cycle of the program.

The [recipients of the 2023–24 program](#) include:

- Balance for Blind Adults
- BioTalent Canada
- Canadian Apprenticeship Forum\Le Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage
- Geneva Centre for Autism
- Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
- InterAccess
- Milton Community Resource Centre
- Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) – Centre for Excellence
- ParaSport Ontario
- Pinnguaq Association
- The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- The County of Prince Edward
- Toronto Metropolitan University
- University of Ottawa Heart Institute

2023–24 project highlights

BioTalent Canada

The ministry provided approximately \$150,000 in funding so that BioTalent Canada can help create equitable employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the bio-economy manufacturing sector. The *EnAbling Change for the Bio-economy 2023–2024* project will include four events across Ontario and the development of employment toolkits. The project will also educate employers about recruiting and integrating new hires, as well as fostering a culture of respect, dignity and inclusion. It will also support AODA awareness and regulatory compliance.

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum/Le Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage

The ministry provided the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum/Le Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage with approximately \$100,000 to increase awareness about AODA compliance and employment standards, and provide tips and strategies to hire, train and support apprentices with disabilities. Created in partnership with the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, the *Recruiting and Retaining Apprentices with Disabilities in the Skilled Trades: A Guide for Employers* resource will provide practical information to various skilled trades experiencing labour shortages. The guide will be distributed to 1,500 Ontario skilled trades employers and associations in the manufacturing, food and infrastructure sectors.

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

The ministry funded Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital's *Inspire, Hire, Train, Retain: Co-designing resources with and for Ontario health care organizations to promote inclusive workforces* project to help create equitable employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the health care sector. Approximately \$149,000 in funding will allow the hospital to develop and deliver a “training in a box” kit that will prepare health care managers to hire, engage and retain workers with disabilities by increasing their knowledge about accessibility and inclusion.

Inclusive Community Grants Program

The [Inclusive Community Grants Program](#) helps communities become more inclusive and accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

In March 2023, the government announced a [\\$750,000 investment](#) to provide municipalities, non-profit organizations and Indigenous communities with grants for local projects that will help older residents and people with disabilities participate in community life.

The [15 recipients of the 2023–24 program](#) include:

- Abbey Gardens Community Trust
- Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living
- City of Greater Sudbury
- City of North Bay
- City of Sault Ste. Marie
- Ivan Franko Homes
- Norman Park, City of Kenora
- St. Clair Region Conservation Authority
- The Hamilton/Burlington YMCA
- Township of Algonquin Highlands
- Town of Espanola
- Township of Madawaska Valley
- Township of Selwyn
- Township of St. Joseph
- Township of Tay Valley

2023–24 project highlights

City of Kenora

The ministry provided the City of Kenora with up to \$60,000 to continue accessibility upgrades at Norman Park. Significant work has already gone into the park over the last three years to improve accessibility. New upgrades will include additional accessible parking areas, an alternate access to the beach ramp and a Mobi-mat (a portable, non-slip wheelchair beach access mat), and the completion of an accessible trail from the sidewalk on Lakeview Drive.

Tay Valley Township

The ministry provided almost \$50,000 to Tay Valley Township so they can launch 50 new accessible age-friendly sports and recreation activities/programs for 300 local seniors in eight small, rural communities. This will help improve the physical and mental health of diverse local populations, as well as reduce social isolation and enhance the quality of community life.

Township of Selwyn

The ministry provided the Township of Selwyn with up to \$60,000 to install an assistive kayak launch at Isabel Morris Park and a fully accessible canoe/kayak launch at Lakefield Beach. The accessible kayak/canoe launch will help visitors of all ages and abilities, including older adults and people with disabilities, to access parks, recreation services and activities.

Mobi-mats for beach access

[Ontario Parks](#) continues to install Mobi-mats at parks across the province. Mobi-mats help people using walkers, wheelchairs and strollers avoid walking through the sand so they can get near or to the water's edge quickly and safely.

Partner Facility Renewal

Ontario invests annually in accessibility projects as part of the Partner Facility Renewal (PFR) Program, which supports building upgrades to maintain and modernize facilities that provide vital community programs and services. In 2023–24, Ontario invested \$21 million in the program for [social services facilities](#), such as women's shelters and agency offices. This, in turn, helped make those spaces more accessible by funding projects such as installing ramps, railings, automatic doors, and other upgrades.

ServiceOntario virtual appointments and renewals

In 2023, Ontario made accessing vital government services easier and more accessible for people and businesses across the province. The virtual appointment pilot program that offered eligible Ontarians the option to renew their health card through a live video link with an agent [was extended](#) to eligible health card holders 18 years of age or older. This provides more Ontarians who may find it difficult to visit a ServiceOntario centre in person with a convenient option to renew from home.

In addition, customers who require in-person visits can now book multiple ServiceOntario services at many of the busiest service centres in a single appointment through their smartphone or computer. They can also book a single appointment for the whole family. Those with accessibility needs can identify them ahead of the appointment, so that any necessary preparations can be made in advance. Over the course of 2023, ServiceOntario expanded this service to more than 140 centres.

To further improve the customer experience and provide additional options to connect with ServiceOntario, [the government announced in December 2023](#) that new ServiceOntario centres would be opening in select Staples Canada stores as of February 1, 2024, with additional locations opening later in the year. This pilot project will provide customers with greater access to important government services,

such as driver's licence and health card renewals, in a retailer that has locations across the province, with ample parking and extended operating hours on weekdays and weekends.

Removing Barriers for Students with Disabilities

The [Ministry of Education](#) is working to help prevent and remove barriers for students with disabilities through its *Removing Barriers for Students with Disabilities* fund. This application-based, one-year funding was provided to school boards for the 2023–24 school year. School board projects included transition supports for students and accessible sports pilots. Projects also included training on ableism and Universal Design Learning — an educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments and spaces to accommodate individual learning differences.

Geneva Centre for Autism

The Ministry of Education has supported the [Geneva Centre for Autism](#) since 2005 by funding innovative training for classroom educators. In 2023, the ministry committed \$4.5 million for the 2023–24 school year to help educators support students with autism. This is part of a total funding commitment of \$9 million over two years. With this investment, the centre will provide access to a suite of online courses for all publicly funded schools to support learning for students with autism.

Through their Online Training ABA program stream, Geneva offers a course titled *ADHD in the Classroom: Supporting Student Success*. This has been the most popular course among educators since it was offered in 2022–23. It was offered again to educators in the 2023–2024 school year.

Supporting postsecondary students

Since 2018, Ontario has invested millions of dollars to improve accessibility in postsecondary schools across the province.

In 2022–23, the [Ministry of Colleges and Universities](#) invested more than \$170 million in retrofits, repairs and renewals at Ontario college and university campuses, which included some AODA-related improvements. The ministry also provides approximately \$55 million annually in Special Purpose Grants to support postsecondary students with disabilities, including providing Offices for Students with Disabilities in publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes.



Building Ontario together

Transit investments

In its [2023 Budget](#), the Ontario government committed to investing \$70.5 billion in public transit over the next 10 years. This investment includes the Ontario Line, which will connect more than 40 other transit routes, including GO Transit and existing Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) subway and streetcar lines.

In 2023, Ontario worked with other levels of government to support accessible transit across the province. Transit funding programs require that any transit vehicles purchased must be accessible, thus ensuring better public transportation access for people with disabilities. In November 2023, the governments of Ontario, Canada and the City of Toronto [announced](#) the delivery of 60 new, fully AODA-compliant streetcars for the TTC. Ontario contributed \$180 million of the total \$560-million investment in the new Canadian-made streetcars, demonstrating that all three levels of government are committed to accessibility. In addition, Ontario has committed to funding 55 new accessible subway cars for the TTC through a new deal negotiated with the City of Toronto.

Ontario is also helping to make transportation and transit services more accessible, convenient and safe. Ministry of Transportation initiatives include:

- Having accessible washrooms at all new rest areas and ONroute centres.
- Including accessible pedestrian signals in new highway infrastructure.
- Having traffic control signals with accessible pedestrian signal features inspected every six months to ensure signal operations are in compliance with Ministry of Transportation standards and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR).
- Building AODA-compliant signalized intersections that meet accessibility requirements under the IASR's [Design of Public Spaces standards](#). These intersections address the needs of pedestrians with cognitive and/or sensory disabilities, and enhance the safety, mobility and independence of Ontarians with disabilities. The work includes installing accessible pedestrian signals, tactile features, audible push buttons and dropped curbs. Since 2018, the Ministry of Transportation has completed more than 100 AODA-compliant signalized intersections and more are planned for the future.

In addition to improving infrastructure, work is also being done by [Metrolinx](#) to improve transit for people with disabilities. Metrolinx is an agency of the Government of Ontario that was created to improve the coordination and integration of transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. In fall 2023, Metrolinx joined the [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower](#) program to support people with disabilities that may not be immediately visible. With this program, customers may request and wear a sunflower pin, which voluntarily indicates to GO Transit and UP Express employees that additional help, understanding or a little more time may be required. Metrolinx is the first public transit agency in North America to adopt the program.

Metrolinx also does ongoing work to improve accessibility through its [Accessibility Advisory Committee](#). Its members include customers with a wide range of disabilities, seniors and staff from agencies that support people with disabilities. They have provided expert advice and input throughout the year, including advice on bus driver training to ensure driver sensitivity to customers with disabilities.

More accessible transportation is also planned for northeastern Ontario. Work continues on the [Northlander passenger train](#), which is expected to be in service by 2026. Three new trainsets have been purchased, which will be fully accessible and include built-in wheelchair lifts and mobility aid storage spaces. The wide aisles will exceed current accessibility standards and braille signage will be provided on seat numbers and call-for-aid buttons. The trainset interiors will also include passenger information systems with audio and visual announcements. In 2023, work also included station planning and construction, environmental assessments and community engagement.

Ontario's Building Code

Ontario's [Building Code](#) supports increased accessibility across the province by promoting high standards for barrier-free accessibility that result in more accessible spaces and buildings being constructed. For example, the code requires a barrier-free path of travel in 15% of new units in multi-unit residential buildings, contributing to improved design standards. There are also requirements for power door openers to be provided at entrances to a wider range of buildings, and at entrances to barrier-free washrooms and common rooms in multi-unit residential buildings.

Accessibility requirements apply to new construction and major renovations and work together with the [Design of Public Spaces Standard](#). This includes all new and renovated hospitals, long-term care homes, courthouses, schools, colleges, universities and provincial buildings.

The next edition of the Ontario Building Code, which was filed in April 2024 and will come into force on January 1, 2025, provides for further enhancement of accessibility requirements.

Ontario is also working nationally to support a more inclusive and barrier-free Canada through a commitment on the harmonization of the provincial building code and national construction codes. Ontario has identified improved barrier-free accessibility as one of the top priorities for the harmonized national code development system, which will support the evidence-based development of accessibility improvements for the 2025 and 2030 national codes for adoption in Ontario.

2024 Ontario Building Code – Accessibility Changes

Overview

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code changes to accessibility provisions, which come into effect on January 1, 2025, will enhance accessibility by aligning with accessibility requirements in the 2020 National Construction Codes that are an improvement over Ontario's leading standards for accessibility.
- Ontario has expressed support for accessibility as a continuing priority for 2025 and 2030 national code development as part of a pan-Canadian approach to removing barriers for persons with disabilities.
- New priorities for improved accessibility are currently being developed by an AODA Standards Development Committee and recommendations related to Ontario's Building Code will be considered through the code change review process and with consideration of Ontario's commitment to national harmonization of construction codes.

Specific Changes to the Ontario Building Code

Building entrances:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require all pedestrian entrances into a barrier-free storey of a building to be barrier-free and connect to a barrier-free exterior path.

Areas requiring a barrier-free path of travel:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will provide clarity to areas that are required to have a barrier-free path of travel.

Barrier-free path of travel to building entrances, exterior passenger loading zones and access to parking areas:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require a direct barrier-free path of travel between a barrier-free building entrance to a designated barrier-free parking area (where it is provided), to an exterior passenger loading zone (where it is provided), and to a public thoroughfare.

Accessibility signs:

- The locations where signs providing visual information are required have been expanded. The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require these signs to be installed to indicate the location of barrier-free entrances, ramps, exterior passenger loading zones, barrier-free washrooms and showers, barrier-free elevators, barrier-free parking spaces and assistive listening systems or adaptive technologies.
- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require signs to include the international symbol of access or the international symbol of access for hearing loss and appropriate graphical or textural information.
- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will mandate, where tactile information signs are required, to have braille and tactile characters in accordance with the CSA B651 standard "Accessible design for the built environment" installed in specific locations.

Exterior walks:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require exterior walkways that are part of a barrier-free path of travel to have at least a 1,600 mm wide surface of a different texture to that surrounding it.

Ramps:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require ramps that are located in a barrier-free path of travel to have a minimum width of at least 1,000 mm between handrails.
- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will also require ramps that are located in a barrier-free path of travel to also have a level area of at least 1,700 mm by 1,700 mm at the top and bottom of the ramp.

Passenger elevating devices:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will ensure that the passenger elevating device that is located in a barrier-free path of travel have specific clear floor space measurements (i.e., 1,500 mm long by 1,500 mm wide).

Assistive listening systems:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require at least one service counter to be equipped with an assistive listening system in each location where services are provided to the public at service counters in buildings of assembly occupancy.

Showers and bathtubs:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require at each location where a showering facility is provided for the customers or as part of a common-use area for employees, to have at least one universal dressing and shower room.

Service counters:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require, where service counters are provided, at least one section of the service counter to be barrier-free with specific dimensions.

Water bottle filling stations:

- The 2024 Ontario Building Code will require at least one water bottle filling station (where they are provided) be equipped with controls that activate automatically. They should be located along the barrier-free path of travel.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Accessibility Standards Canada

In 2022, Ontario signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Accessibility Standards Canada and work continued in partnership with the federal government in 2023.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) with Accessibility Standards Canada](#) will support future collaboration in Building Code development at the provincial and national levels.

Work also continued under the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility's MOU with Accessibility Standards Canada. It aims to optimize each organization's objectives by reducing or eliminating the duplication of resources and efforts. This could entail information sharing and collaborating on joint research needs.

Investing in Ontario's infrastructure

Ontario is investing \$107 million over five years (beginning in 2022–23) to complete accessibility projects at provincial government buildings through [Infrastructure Ontario](#), a provincial agency that supports the Ontario government's initiatives to modernize and maximize the value of public infrastructure and real estate. On behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure, it will be undertaking 372 accessibility projects at 584 buildings between 2022–2023 and 2026–2027. These accessibility projects are intended to address key features, such as exterior access ramps.

As of November 2023, accessibility projects have been completed at 275 buildings and accessibility work has been awarded to contractors for an additional 146 buildings.

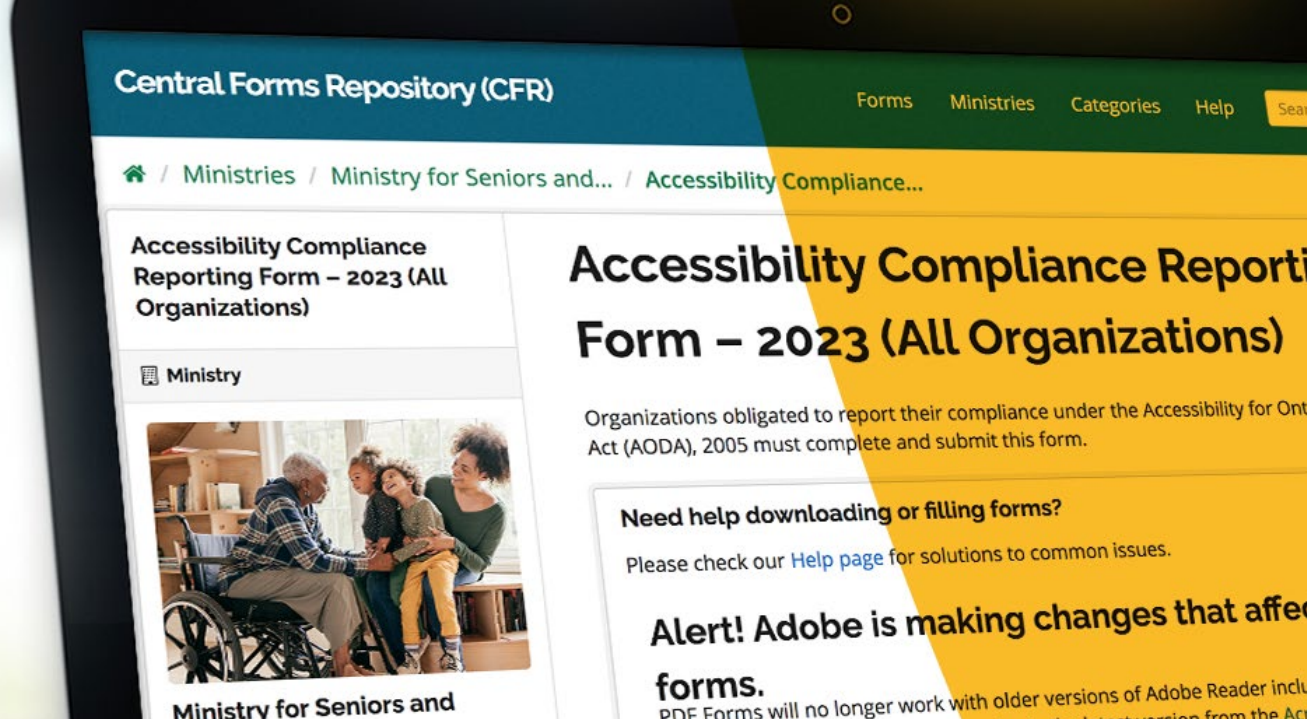
Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program

Investing in infrastructure to help meet the needs of the province's growing communities remains a top priority for the government. Through the [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program \(ICIP\)](#), a combined \$30 billion federal-provincial infrastructure program, Ontario is investing \$10.2 billion in over 1,200 transit, green, community, culture and recreation, rural and northern, and other priority infrastructure projects in communities across the province. [The Ministry of Infrastructure](#) is responsible for implementing this program by making targeted investments in projects that create strong, dynamic and inclusive communities.

In collaboration with the federal government, the Ontario government has developed and implemented a requirement under this program to ensure that all federally funded, public-facing infrastructure projects meet the highest published, applicable accessibility standard in a respective jurisdiction.

School renewal and repair

The [Ministry of Education](#) provides ongoing funding to school boards to address school renewal needs and keep schools in a state of good repair. Each year, school boards are allocated approximately \$1.4 billion to repair and renew school buildings and sites. A portion of this massive investment can be used to improve accessibility in schools by installing items such as elevators and ramps.



Helping organizations meet accessibility requirements

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility oversees compliance with the AODA and the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation \(IASR\)](#). The ministry works to help ensure approximately 444,000 organizations that provide goods, services or facilities to the public fulfill their obligations under the Act.

Building awareness

Each year, the ministry conducts targeted outreach and education campaigns to increase awareness of provincial accessibility laws and requirements.

The ministry also regularly publishes the [AODA Toolbox](#), an e-newsletter with relevant resources and practical tips that organizations can use to become more accessible and better understand the overall benefits of accessibility. In 2023, the ministry published six editions of the AODA Toolbox that included timely updates, key issues, resources and success stories. Each of these editions were distributed to the AODA Toolbox's more than 9,000 subscribers.

Ensuring compliance

The ministry is responsible for ensuring compliance with accessibility standards and other requirements under the AODA. It uses a modern regulatory approach, working directly with organizations to help them understand their obligations under Ontario's accessibility legislation, requiring them to submit compliance reports, auditing and inspecting organizations to verify they are following requirements and enforcing requirements where appropriate.

2023: compliance and enforcement activities

Self-certified accessibility compliance reporting

The AODA and the [*Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation*](#) establish that certain organizations are required to submit accessibility compliance reports. These include:

- businesses and nonprofit organizations with 20 or more employees
- all designated public sector organizations
- the Ontario Public Service (Ontario government)
- the Legislative Assembly.

These organizations are asked to confirm they have met their accessibility requirements by answering various questions. As outlined in the AODA, each organization must make its report available to the public.

Each sector has a different schedule to submit these reports:

- provincial government entities, inclusive of the Ontario Public Service and the Legislative Assembly, report **every year**
- all designated public sector organizations are required to report **every two years**
- all private and business/non-profit sector organizations with 20 or more employees are required to report **every three years**.

Inspections

To ensure the safety of people with disabilities, the ministry created and implemented a new on-site inspection pilot program to verify compliance of select Design of Public Spaces and Transportation accessibility requirements in transportation, education and municipal buildings. The inspections tested grab bars and carpeted surfaces on buses, edge protection and slip resistance for exterior paths and also verified measurements for parking spaces.

Audits

In 2023, MSAA continued to expand its audit activities, providing compliance assurance for key accessibility requirements. The ministry is on track to assess all auditable requirements by 2025.

The ministry conducts two types of audits to oversee compliance with the AODA:

1. **Attestation audits** are used to facilitate accessibility compliance reporting among organizations that had:
 - reported previously but failed to meet the most recent reporting deadline
 - submitted a report indicating non-compliance
 - never filed in the past.
2. **Verification audits** are used to ensure that organizations that indicated compliance in their report are, in fact, meeting requirements. Verification audits are conducted every year to obtain and verify evidence of compliance. These audits may vary in scope, some targeting a few requirements in one standard while others are more comprehensive, targeting numerous requirements across multiple standards. More comprehensive audits take longer to complete, resulting in some fluctuation in the number of audits completed from year-to-year.

Overall, in 2023, the ministry launched:

- 164 attestation audits (113 were completed by December 31, 2023).
- 897 verification audits (737 were completed by December 31, 2023).

An additional 435 audits carried over from previous years were also completed. Of these, 235 were verification audits and 200 attestation audits.

In total, 972 verification audits were completed in 2023. These audits assessed the General Requirements sections of the IASR and the AODA, as well as the Customer Service, Information and Communications, Transportation, Employment and Design of Public Spaces standards.

The results of the 972 completed verification audits break down as follows:

- 194 designated public sector organizations were audited for a total of 127 requirements.
 - The requirements with the highest rate of compliance (approximately 80%) were establishing accessibility policies and training, and providing workplace emergency response information to employees who have a disability.
- The requirements with the lowest rate of compliance were consultation on outdoor play spaces (27%) and design (40%), and making the accessibility report publicly available (46%).
- 778 business and non-profit organizations were audited for a total of 114 requirements.
 - The requirements with the highest rates of compliance were establishing accessibility policies (89%), providing notice of temporary disruptions to accessibility (90%) and developing a policy on the use of service animals and support persons (90%).
 - The requirements with the lowest rate of compliance were formatting of documents (30%), providing accessible websites and web content (6%), and making the accessibility report publicly available (33%).

Enforcement

Through audits, on-site inspections and a range of compliance and enforcement tools, the ministry works to ensure obligated organizations comply with the AODA and its standards.

When audited organizations are found to be non-compliant, the ministry works with them to establish compliance before considering enforcement measures. In cases where organizations do not engage with the ministry or avoid meeting their legal obligations, they can be subject to enforcement measures outlined in the AODA. In 2023, 98.4% of verification audits were resolved as compliant without escalation and eight Director's Orders were issued to resolve non-compliance.



Raising awareness about accessibility

Increasing awareness of Ontario's accessibility standards helps organizations reduce barriers for people with disabilities. In 2023, the ministry continued to provide targeted information to organizations across all sectors on how to promote accessibility both within and outside their organization, as well as help them meet their accessibility requirements. Outreach activities included a variety of initiatives: publishing stakeholder e-newsletters, creating and distributing helpful resources and inspiring success stories, and promoting [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#) in October.

Light it Up! for National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

On October 19, 2023, Ontario participated in [Light It Up! For NDEAM](#), an annual event led by the [Ontario Disability Employment Network \(ODEN\)](#) that lights up buildings in blue and purple across the country to help raise awareness about the many benefits of inclusive hiring. This was the second year the Ontario government participated in this annual event held during National Disability Employment Awareness

Month (NDEAM) in October. Several provincial government buildings were illuminated in support of the event, including the Lincoln Alexander Building in Orillia, Robinson Place in Peterborough, Garden City Tower in St. Catharines, Frost South building in Toronto and 1 Stone Road in Guelph.

Helping make municipalities more accessible

Minister Cho promoted the government's programs and initiatives that are helping make communities more inclusive through partnerships with municipalities and other key stakeholders at various important conferences in 2023. Examples include the:

- Rural Ontario Municipal Association conference (ROMA) (January 22–24)
- Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference (AMO) (August 20–23).

In addition, accessibility-related grants and partnership programs were also strongly promoted to municipalities and other key stakeholders. Examples include:

- [Inclusive Community Grants news release](#) (March 10, 2023)
- [EnAbling Change Program news release](#) (May 12, 2023).

Celebrating and recognizing people with disabilities and leaders in accessibility

Throughout the year, Minister Cho raised awareness about the benefits of inclusion by celebrating accessibility leaders and reinforcing the government's commitment to making Ontario more accessible. Examples include:

- National AccessAbility Week (May 28 to June 3) – social media

- David C. Onley Award for Leadership in Accessibility:
 - [news release](#) and social media celebrating the recipients (September 15)
 - acknowledgement of the passing of Mr. Onley in January 2023, including a [Premier's Statement](#) (January 15)
- [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#) – news release and social media (October 3)
- [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#) – minister's news statement and social media (December 3).



Moving accessibility forward

Extensive and targeted cross-government investments set the foundation for major advances in accessibility in our province in 2023. Project by project, community by community, every dollar the government is investing in infrastructure, programs and services has a focus of making our communities accessible to people of all abilities. This includes every new and renovated hospital, school, long-term care home, courthouse and provincial building. As a result, Ontario is achieving, meeting and exceeding AODA standards across government and province wide.

Ensuring equal participation for people with disabilities in everyday life is fundamental to our values as a society. Only shared objectives and persistent work between all levels of government, businesses, community organizations and individual advocates will bring sustained progress. We look forward to many more shared achievements in 2024.

