

Accessible by Design: Ontario Public Service Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023 Annual Status Report

Learn more about how the Ontario Public Service continues to advance accessibility in the organization

Message from the Chief Talent Officer and Corporate Chief Information Officer

Accessibility is everyone's responsibility. As an inclusive employer and service provider, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) is committed to removing barriers for persons with disabilities and ensuring that everyone feels they belong, can fully participate, and has equitable access to the services provided to employees and members of the public.

In our role as co-chairs of the Implementation Steering Committee, which guides the delivery of the Accessible by Design: 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessible-design-2022-2025-ops-multi-year-accessibility-plan>) , we recognize the importance of demonstrating impact on improving accessibility in the OPS. Through this report, we are pleased to share the significant progress that has been made across all key areas of the plan.

Along with the ministries responsible for leading the implementation of 16 initiatives outlined in the plan, many other areas across the organization are contributing to the collective effort of advancing accessibility in the OPS.

The OPS's commitment to improving accessibility is also reflected in other enterprise-wide plans such as the OPS Leadership Pledge and the OPS People Plan (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-service-people-plan-2023-2026>) that guides the

organization in attracting, developing and retaining top talent that reflects Ontario's diversity.

We are committed through our collective efforts to achieve an OPS that is inclusive and accessible by design.

Mercedes Watson

Chief Talent Officer and Associate Deputy Minister, Treasury Board Secretariat

Mohammad Qureshi

Corporate Chief Information Officer and Associate Deputy Minister, Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery

Progress update on 2022-25 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*

(<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>) sets out a process to develop and enforce standards, intending to make Ontario more accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities.

Under the act's *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)*

(<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191>), the OPS and other organizations that fall under jurisdiction of the legislation are required to publish a multi-year accessibility plan, and publicly report annual progress.

The Accessible by Design: 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan – referred to as the “MYAP” or the “plan” – outlines how the OPS is responding to and going beyond its legislated obligations to identify, prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities.

The 2023 annual status report highlights meaningful progress and achievements to make the organization more accessible for its employees and people it serves. Approximately 50% of initiatives were completed and operational by the end of 2023, the second year of the four-year plan.

To measure progress, the plan's evaluation framework uses output-based performance indicators across all key areas. These performance indicators provide insights on the accomplishments of the organization.

The implementation of the plan continues to be reinforced by a multi-level governance structure. Led by the Implementation Steering Committee, the structure includes several director tables and an employee advisory group, which includes employees with disabilities, who provide human-centred accessibility advice and lived experience perspectives.

Progress made in the initiatives will help remove and prevent barriers in all areas of the public service, from the creation and implementation of policies and programs to facilities management, hiring and accommodation.

Inclusive employment

Key outcome: Candidates and OPS employees with disabilities have the support to join, work effectively, experience career growth, and have opportunities for learning, development, and progression.

Employees with Disabilities in the OPS

The biennial OPS Employee Experience Survey provides a point-in-time snapshot of the profile and workplace experience of OPS employees. The survey can help us understand trends, areas of strength, and areas where further work is needed to improve workplace outcomes for employees with disabilities.

The 2023 annual status report, marking the halfway point of the 2022-2025 MYAP cycle, serves as a key moment to assess the workplace experiences of OPS employees with disabilities.

OPS Employee Experience Survey Highlights ^[1]

Representation:

- 14.4% of respondents to the OPS Employee Experience Survey self-identify as having one or more disabilities. This is an increase of 1.1% compared to 2022

(13.3%).

Engagement and Inclusion:

- Employees with disabilities report lower engagement and inclusion scores (out of 100)* than employees with no disabilities.

Engagement Index	2022	2024
Employees with disabilities	64.1	63.7
Employees with no disabilities	70.5	69.6

Inclusion Index	2022	2024
Employees with disabilities	67.7	66.5
Employees with no disabilities	78.1	75.5

*Rating in the tables refer to a scale from 0 to 100 with '0' having the lowest rating to '100' as highest.

While the data and other key survey findings confirm that continued work to improve outcomes for employees with disabilities is needed, it also validates the plan's key area of inclusive employment with focus on employment accommodation, recruitment, enhancing career growth opportunities, expanding mental health resources, and addressing systemic employment barriers.

Disability employment accommodation

The OPS has committed to streamline and integrate employment accommodation in the OPS. This includes ensuring the smooth transition of accommodation plans and supports when an employee with disabilities changes jobs or ministries.

OPS Workforce Data [2] :

- 57.3% of OPS employees with disabilities report requiring accommodation to perform their job.

Year two achievements

The OPS Disability Accommodation Policy addresses ways in which employment accommodation can respond to employees' unique circumstances so that employees with disabilities can participate equitably in the organization.

In 2023, the policy has been updated to:

- Ensure portability to allow disability accommodation supports to transfer with employees when changing positions or ministries, as necessary
- Improve the employee experience by creating a clear distinction between general employment accommodation and return-to-work or health reassignment
- Increase accountability with enhanced data collection and reporting to support disability accommodation program improvements across the OPS

In addition, enterprise-wide resources have been developed and shared with all OPS employees to inform them of the changes to the policy as well as equip them with knowledge of the disability employment accommodation process.

This is a key commitment of the OPS Leadership Pledge and MYAP.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Streamlined employment accommodation processes help create an OPS workplace that is more inclusive and accessible, while removing employment barriers so that employees with disabilities can feel supported and engaged and can equitably participate in the organization.

Recruitment strategies

Develop and implement recruitment strategies to help increase the representation of persons with disabilities throughout the OPS, including entry-level talent and senior leadership diversification.

OPS Workforce Data:

- The percentage of employees who self-identify as persons with disabilities at the manager and senior executive levels has increased:

Employees with Disabilities	2022	2024
Manager level	11.5 %	12.9 %
Senior Executive level [3]	11.3 %	12.4 %

Year two achievements

Several strategies have been implemented through the Ontario Internship Program (OIP) (<https://www.internship.gov.on.ca/mbs/sdb/intern.nsf/LkpWebContent/ePublishedHOME>) and the Summer Employment Opportunities (SEO) program (<https://www.gojobs.gov.on.ca/Preview.aspx?Language=English&JobID=201105>) to offer work placements for students and recent graduates. The targeted strategies increase OPS representation of students and recent graduates who self-identify as persons with disabilities. Efforts include:

- Targeting secondary and post-secondary career fairs to promote OIP and SEO programs and enhance diversity of applicant pools, including students and recent graduates with disabilities
- Dedicated information sessions for students and recent graduates to highlight the OPS as an employer of choice, and an employer that supports persons with disabilities

- Updated social media promotions reflecting inclusive language and imagery
- Collaboration with employee groups with lived experience
- Continued partnership with current and promotional networks and advocacy groups, including March of Dimes (<https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca>)
- Promotion of availability of accommodations and proactive offers for support during the recruitment process and throughout the placements

In 2023, the OIP introduced a tailored stream for persons with disabilities called the Ability Internship Stream (AIS). Enhanced supports were provided for AIS candidates with disabilities throughout the recruitment process and internship placement. These supports include accommodations, tailored mentorship and career development opportunities. The stream is an important way to attract, grow, develop and foster a sense of belonging for persons with disabilities to fully participate at all levels of the OPS.

- 9% of the total OIP applicant pool applied to the AIS
- 17% of all successful applicants for OIP (139 hired) self-identified as having a disability and were hired through the AIS
- Over the past two years, there has been an increase in OIP applications from persons with disabilities. The increase has been enabled in part by targeted direct outreach and promotions during the application period, as well as the introduction of the AIS, demonstrating the OPS's commitment to supporting employees who identify as persons with disabilities.

Since 2022, the SEO program has offered a Diverse Talent Stream (DTS), reserving 1,000 positions for candidates from selected equity groups, including applicants with disabilities. In 2023, 89% of the positions reserved for the DTS were successfully filled by candidates identifying as persons with disabilities, Indigenous, Black, or bilingual (French/English).

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The student and recent graduate programs are being assessed to measure effectiveness. The OPS remains committed to optimizing support for diverse applicants by removing systemic barriers throughout the recruitment and placement processes.

Senior leadership diversification continues to be a priority. Treasury Board Secretariat conducted analyses of recruitment barriers for senior leadership positions in the OPS. This purpose was to better understand how members from underrepresented groups move throughout the recruitment process in the OPS. The analyses:

- Explored potential barriers in the recruitment process that may be impacting members from underrepresented groups
- Assessed three years of progress towards corporate diversification goals for senior leadership to achieve parity with the 2016/17 Ontario Labour Force by 2025

The analysis will be used to support human resources partners in the organization to continue identifying and resolving potential barriers in the recruitment process that may negatively impact members of equity-deserving groups.

Several ministries have implemented recruitment strategies to diversify the OPS workforce by attracting persons with disabilities and sourcing talent outside of the organization, including:

- ServiceOntario has partnered with Kerry's Place (<https://www.kerrysplace.org/>) , Canada's largest service provider to families with children, adolescents, and adults, with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This reciprocal relationship serves to both build understanding of the needs of all employees, and ensure persons with disabilities are aware of career opportunities within the OPS
- Participating in the Autism! CanTech (<https://autismcantech.ca/home.aspx>) Program in which the Ministry of the Solicitor General hired students with disabilities.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Inclusive recruitment strategies foster a diverse workforce that can better understand and address the needs of different communities and demographic groups within Ontario. This can lead to more tailored and responsive public services that are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of the province.

Overall, inclusive recruitment strategies within the OPS can contribute to a more effective, responsive, and trusted public service that better serves the needs of all Ontarians.

Diversity Sponsorship Program

The Diversity Sponsorship Program (DSP) is designed to support career development and advancement of OPS employees from groups underrepresented in senior leadership, including persons with disabilities. Retaining, developing and advancing employees from underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, supports the acceleration of senior leadership diversification in the OPS.

OPS Workforce Data:

- The average response score (out of 100) for employees with disabilities related to career progression and access to career growth opportunities has increased:

Career Progression and Growth Opportunities	2022	2024
I am satisfied with the way my career is progressing in the OPS	52.6	54.8
I have opportunities for career growth within the OPS	52.6	53.9

Year two achievements

Launched by Treasury Board Secretariat in February 2023, the OPS Diversity Sponsorship Program involves sponsors and participants working together on the participant’s career development, leveraging skills and networks to create greater visibility and endorsement for participants.

- The launch of the program fulfilled commitments under both the OPS Leadership Pledge and the MYAP

- A total of 250 participants and sponsors are registered for the 2023/2024 inaugural cycle. Of the registered participant partners, 20% identified as being a person with a disability
- An opening event was hosted in June 2023 consisting of a dynamic dialogue between a sponsor and their participant partner, followed by a question-and-answer session, this:
 - laid the foundation for understanding what a sponsoring relationship might look like;
 - provided an opportunity for sponsors and participants to ask questions to support their own relationships; and
 - created a sense of excitement about their upcoming sponsorship journeys.
- Various resources such as articles, videos, podcasts, polls, group chats and informal engagement drop-in sessions are shared regularly. Topics relate to inclusive leadership, new managers, recruitment, retaining employees, sponsorship and supporting people from groups that are underrepresented in senior leadership ranks, including persons with disabilities

In 2024, the program will encourage senior leaders to register for the second cycle of the program to sponsor OPS staff from groups underrepresented in senior leadership positions.

In addition to the enterprise-wide efforts of supporting career development for persons with disabilities in the OPS, individual ministries continue to implement local programs that reflect specific contexts:

- The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development is continuing to develop aspiring managers via the Readying Future Managers (RFM). This is a nominated leadership development program aimed at building knowledge, skills, and behaviours of participants including persons with disabilities.
 - RFM is designed and delivered using adult learning principles comprising formal, relationship, and experiential learning.
 - For the selection process for the 2024 cohort, 23% of selected RFM Participants self identified as persons with disabilities and 100% of all RFM participants were matched with an Executive Sponsor Champion.

- This is a significant improvement from 2023 where 13% of RFM participants self-identified as persons with disabilities.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Inclusive career development programs such as the DSP create safer spaces and provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to broaden their skills and networks and contribute to the creation and delivery of accessible products and services that benefit all.

Mental health resources and services

The OPS has committed to expanding mental health resources and services, including for OPS employees with disabilities.

OPS Workforce Data

- Employees with disabilities continue to have a lower average score (out of 100)*, compared to those with no disabilities, when asked about the adequacy of OPS mental health support programs:

OPS mental health support programs are appropriate to my needs	2022	2024
Employees with disabilities	43.2	43.8
Employees with no disabilities	56.2	56.9

*Rating is a scale from 0 to 100 with ‘0’ being least appropriate to needs and ‘100’ being most appropriate.

Year two achievements

To improve mental health outcomes for all employees, the OPS acquired additional services to support employees. This is a key commitment in both the OPS Leadership

Pledge and MYAP.

The OPS continues to prioritize mental health by creating supports and providing services for employees across the organization. This includes the new Inclusive Counselling Services (ICS) program, which:

- Provides OPS employees and their family members, specifically those in underrepresented groups, access to short-term counselling at no cost to themselves
- Gives users access to a directory of professionals to help identify a counsellor based on their self-identification and personalized needs
 - ICS counsellors have developed personal profiles which outline demonstrated experience with underrepresented groups as well as characteristics that may meet personalized user needs, such as spiritual and religious affiliation and language proficiency.
 - There are ICS counsellors that self-identify as persons with disabilities as well as have demonstrated experience in mental health, social services, crisis response and working with persons with disabilities.

While work is underway to further expand mental health resources and supports for OPS employees, the Ontario government also funds health service providers to provide mental health services and supports to Ontarians, including for children and youth with disabilities. For example, the Ministry of Health provides funding to Strides Toronto (<https://stridestoronto.ca/>), the host site for One Stop Talk/Parlons Maintenant (<https://stridestoronto.ca/program-service/one-stop-talk-parlons-maintenant/>), an innovative provincial mental health counseling service for children and youth across Ontario under the age of 17.

Provincially launched in September 2023, the service provides equitable, in-the-moment access to free, brief virtual counselling services and connects clients with registered and trained clinicians across the province. One-Stop Talk provides access to mental health services to children and youth who are unable to access traditional in-person services for various reasons including disability.

Interpretation services are available in 200+ languages, including French, American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise (Quebec Sign Language).

By the end of 2023:

- 26,265 people had called and/or visited the website for information
- 1,264 total clients were served
- Client data showed that approximately 85% of clients were not receiving ongoing mental health services elsewhere
 - 32% of clients surveyed noted they would have nowhere else to turn for support if One Stop Talk/Parlons maintenant was not available

Strides Toronto is continuously working to further improve service delivery for persons with disabilities, including extending days and hours of operation to create more flexibility for clients and exploring opportunities with Deaf community partners to improve accessibility.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Enhanced mental health services support employees in accessing tailored resources in an equitable and targeted manner. The expansion of services helps reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental health in both the OPS and broader society.

Addressing systemic employment barriers in policy and program

Proactively identify and address systemic employment barriers with a focus on recruitment, promotion, and career development, including for OPS employees with disabilities.

OPS Workforce Data:

- Employees with disabilities have lower average response scores (out of 100), compared to those with no disabilities, when asked if their ministry supports persons with disabilities well, and if the OPS hires and promotes people fairly:

My ministry does a good job supporting persons with permanent or temporary disabilities	20 22	20 24
Employees with disabilities	57. 1	56. 6
Employees with no disabilities	73. 9	72. 8

The OPS hires and promotes people based on their skills, abilities and experience	20 22	20 24
Employees with disabilities	45. 4	44. 7
Employees with no disabilities	54. 3	52. 7

*Rating in the tables refer to a scale from 0 to 100 with '0' having the lowest rating to '100' as highest.

Year two achievements

The OPS Policy on Preventing Barriers in Employment sets out principles and requirements for identifying, preventing, removing, or mitigating systemic employment barriers that may arise from workplace culture and/or human resource management directives, policies, or practices in the OPS workplace. It was updated in June 2023.

In addition, a new OPS-wide program to identify and remove systemic employment barriers has been established in June 2023. The first stage included analysis of employee experiences and data on employment outcomes to inform focus areas for the first program cycle.

Key considerations to determine focus areas included:

- Availability of evidence
- Potential impact
- Existing and new opportunities
- Pace of change, with a goal to balance immediate gains with longer-term transformation

In 2024, the program will focus on improving equity outcomes in hiring, including recruitment and promotion. Both the policy update and the new program fulfil commitments in the OPS Leadership Pledge and MYAP.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

The effective removal of systemic employment barriers aims to improve employment outcomes and workplace experiences for employees with disabilities.

Equitable customer service

Key outcome: Clients of all abilities receive seamless, dignified, and equitable access to barrier-free services from well-equipped front-line OPS employees.

Strategies to enhance accessible customer service

Develop and implement strategies to support OPS front-line employees in providing accessible customer service. This includes developing new tools that equip employees to provide accessibility services through all delivery channels.

Year two achievements

ServiceOntario's Contact Centres – often the first point of contact for the people of Ontario – are responsible for connecting people of all abilities with important government services. To ensure service agents are informed and equipped to do the best possible job of that, a mandatory monthly training program using modern and effective learning practices with accountability measures built in was implemented. Strengthening our front-line employees' understanding of the requirements under the *AODA* and *IASR* through an Accessibility Checklist helps ensure they are equipped with the skills and resources to deliver equitable customer service.

Each month, ServiceOntario Contact Centre agents are required to complete training modules, including the Accessibility Checklist, which includes many enhancements to the *AODA* compliance that takes place within the centres. Some of the benefits of the checklist are:

- Knowledge checks to ensure the material is understood
- A completion survey for each module to eliminate manual tracking
- An internal training site that makes the program easily accessible to all employees
- Pre-requisites for modules to ensure material is completed in order

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Ontarians with disabilities accessing services for vital government programs and services will be met with knowledgeable front-line employees equipped with skills and resources to deliver equitable customer service.

Refresh of OPS training on *AODA* accessibility standards

Renew and enhance required OPS training on *AODA* and *IASR* accessibility standards. This includes developing new content for all modules to reflect regulatory changes and best practices for delivering accessible and inclusive customer service.

Year two achievements

Extensive consultations were conducted with inter-ministry subject matter experts to inform the development of the curriculum and establish learning objectives of the modernized *AODA* training for all OPS staff and managers. Jurisdictional scans were completed to identify current and emerging trends in workplace accessibility training.

Partnership has been established with an internal service provider to support eLearning development.

As a result, multiple online modules, including supplementary resources such as check lists and job aids, will be developed in 2024 and 2025. The modernized training will take a user-centred approach, including applying best adult learning practices, and engaging with diverse user groups to inform and test the content and user experience.

In addition, the Ministry of Transportation, in consultation with accessibility professionals across the OPS, has developed and launched an internal online resource to supplement the existing required OPS training on AODA accessibility standards and to encourage OPS employees to incorporate fundamental accessibility practices in their day-to-day work.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Modernized AODA trainings required for all OPS staff will enable all employees, including front-line staff, to provide seamless, barrier-free, equitable and inclusive customer services to persons with disabilities.

Next key milestones

The review and update of the OPS Accessible Customer Service Policy (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessible-customer-service-policy>) has started.

Engagement with key ministry customer service program areas and internal stakeholders, including employees with disabilities, has been completed. Progress will be included in future annual MYAP status reports.

Digitally inclusive communications

Key outcome: Members of the public and OPS employees of all abilities are provided with equitable access to OPS digital information, products, and services that meet accessibility requirements.

OPS Web Accessibility Compliance Plan

Implement the OPS Web Accessibility Compliance Plan to meet accessibility requirements by focusing on public-facing websites first, establishing an accessible digital standard, remediating corporate applications, and promoting a cultural transformation towards considering accessibility from the beginning of all projects.

Year two achievements

The OPS Web Compliance Accessibility Plan has been created to address six areas of digital accessibility in the organization:

- Creating remediation plans to address non-compliant internet/extranet sites
- Standardizing policy and tools for consistent accessibility integration
- Achieving compliance of corporate and enterprise web applications for all OPS staff
- Enhancing supports for accessible document creation
- Meeting accessibility requirements for all videos produced by the OPS
- Supporting cultural transformation so that the OPS practices accessibility by design

Progress on the plan includes:

- Launched OPS Digital Accessibility Standard: a set of requirements and expectations for designing, developing, and delivering accessible products to support inclusively designed digital services
- Incorporated updated resources for procuring accessible digital products into the OPS accessible digital procurement toolkit
- Added new web and document accessibility testing tools to the internal company portal for any staff to download and install at their convenience
- Created education campaign plan to promote document accessibility related resources, tips and training, and standard active offer language for OPS e-mail signatures and documents

The implementation of the OPS Web Compliance Accessibility Plan will continue throughout 2024 to advance compliance with information and communication standards under the IASR.

OPS Digital Accessibility Standard

Develop an OPS Digital Accessibility Standard to provide clear corporate guidance on digital accessibility requirements and establish consistent digital accessibility principles for the entire organization.

Year two achievements

The OPS Digital Accessibility Standard (ODAS) is a set of requirements and expectations for designing, developing, and delivering accessible products to support inclusively designed digital services. The standard is a deliverable under the OPS Web Accessibility Compliance Plan to address the lack of standardization of policy and tools.

The standard was approved and published in the OPS in December 2023 and will come into effect on September 1, 2024. The standard:

- Includes six requirements to ensure OPS websites, web and mobile apps, and other digital products are accessible from the start
- Standardizes accessibility testing methods, tools, and reporting for digital products and services
- Establishes simple procedures to verify the accessibility of documents before they are posted on online platforms such as Ontario.ca

The Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery, Treasury Board Secretariat, and the GovTechON Accessibility Centre of Excellence are working together to roll out the standard to all employees and implement it across the organization through enterprise-wide communications, information sessions and accompanying resources.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Establishing and enforcing ODAS at all levels of the organization creates conditions for accessibility to be integrated from the start in digital products and services that the OPS creates for its employees, partners, and members of the general public.

Next key milestones

Implementation continues for the remaining digitally inclusive communications initiative:

- Create and implement the OPS Web Accessibility Literacy Strategy to build digital accessibility expertise in the OPS

A strategy has been developed for an executive leadership communications campaign to increase awareness, promote digital accessibility resources, and demonstrate enhanced commitment to accessibility in the OPS.

Barrier-free government facilities

Key outcome: Clients and OPS employees of all abilities feel welcome in OPS facilities that incorporate inclusive design practices and technologies.

Accessible OPS workplace standards

Develop OPS office workspace standards that include accessibility and create an implementation plan for applying these standards to new office infrastructure projects.

Year two achievements

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Ontario developed the OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS) to inform ministries and users of OPS office spaces of the approach to building accessible, modern and flexible workplaces. The OMOS is a document on enterprise design that outlines the design principles, concepts, strategies and best practices relating to the transformation of workplaces across the OPS.

Released in March 2023, the OMOS provides guidance on anticipating, identifying and removing barriers in the built environment so that persons with disabilities can equitably access OPS workspaces. Guided by the accessibility standards set out in the Ontario Building Code, the AODA and other accessibility standards, guidelines and best practices, the Accessibility Space section of the OMOS provides recommendations on creating barrier-free office spaces, including:

- Clearances for doors and doorways, turning circles, clear floor space and chair space
- Options for furniture solutions to provide larger turning circles in offices, meeting rooms and 60-minute rooms

The OMOS is being applied to all new OPS office space infrastructure projects.

The OMOS was updated in December 2023 and will continue to be reviewed annually.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Employees with disabilities will have barrier-free workplaces that are designed to be accessible from the start, allowing their accommodations and full participation.

Updates to the Guidelines for Barrier-Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities

To foster a more inclusive environment that recognizes the diversity of gender identities and expressions in our workplace including Two-Spirit, Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender Non-Conforming employees.

Year two achievements

Within the spaces where OPS employees work that are owned or leased by the government, signage has been installed outside 290 single use/universal washrooms to indicate these are “All Gender.”

As new construction and reconstruction occurs, new interior signage will be installed in multi-stall washrooms to say:

- “We respect everyone’s right to use the washroom that corresponds with their gender identity and/or gender expression.”

In addition, all gender signage considerations have also been incorporated into the OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS). This is a key commitment of the OPS Leadership Pledge and MYAP.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

An intersectional approach to accessibility that takes into consideration the diversity of gender identities and removes barriers for employees from multiple equity-deserving groups.

Inclusive design resources

Develop resources to build OPS expertise around inclusive design, including collaborating with knowledgeable organizations and stakeholders.

Year two achievements

The Treasury Board Secretariat released seven resources on inclusive design of the built environment to all OPS employees, including employees and partners working on the design of government facility projects. Developed in collaboration with the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University, these learning resources are intended to inform and enhance the consideration of inclusive design principles at all stages of project development. Topics covered include inclusive design of washrooms, wayfinding, parking, and passenger loading zones.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Awareness of inclusive design for office and public spaces helps incorporate accessibility from the early design stages of future government facilities projects, resulting in the removal of barriers for persons with disabilities.

Additional accessibility achievement

To help improve accessible built environment requirements to meet the current needs of persons with disabilities, the Design of Public Spaces Standards Development Committee continued its review of the existing accessible built environment requirements in the *IASR* under the *AODA* and the Ontario Building Code. The committee is chaired by an accessibility strategist and is composed of representatives from various public and private sectors, including persons with disabilities. The committee plans to release its initial recommendations report in 2024 for public consultation.

Upon submission of the committee's final report, the government will consider the recommendations to the design of public spaces standards and the Ontario Building Code. Work will inform broader commitments to improve accessibility across the province as well as improvements to the barrier-free design of future Ontario government projects.

Accessible procurement and transfer payments

Key outcome: Accessibility is effectively integrated at each stage of OPS procurement and transfer payment processes to ensure no public dollars are spent in creating barriers for persons with disabilities.

Accessible Procurement Toolkit

Create an Accessible Procurement Toolkit to build OPS employee and vendor expertise and understand best practices for accessible procurement.

Year two achievements

Focusing on digital procurement, the GovTechON Accessibility Centre of Excellence developed the Accessible Digital Procurement Toolkit, a resource to support OPS employees working on digital initiatives that involve procurement.

The toolkit includes:

- Best practices on how accessibility can be prioritized in procurement, such as asking vendors for evidence to support accessibility
- Sample language to help incorporate accessibility into business documents, including business cases and Requests for Proposals
- Recommended breakdown for the rated requirements when evaluating each solution for accessibility, such as sample questions when evaluating accessible technologies
- Internal and external digital accessibility resources for procurement

This completes the first phase of the overall procurement toolkit modernization. Consultations are continuing towards the development of resources for other areas of procurement.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Embedding accessibility from the start and throughout the stages of the procurement cycle will help ensure digital products and services will be barrier-free.

Accessible transfer payment rules

Assess OPS transfer payment rules and embed accessibility requirements into the
Transfer Payment Accountability Directive and Transfer Payment Operational Policy, as
well as in support materials.

Year two achievements

In 2023, the Transfer Payment Operational Policy was updated after a comprehensive review. Updates to the policy include a new principle on accessibility and inclusion in transfer payment program design, administration, and oversight to help ensure that no barriers are created for Ontarians.

An accompanying resource guide was also developed for OPS staff to support
accessible practices in transfer payments.

Initiative impact for persons with disabilities

Incorporating accessibility from the start in transfer payment processes proactively removes barriers for persons with disabilities in projects funded by the OPS.

Additional accessibility accomplishments

Accessible state ceremonial events

The Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs worked to deliver the Government of Ontario's state ceremonies in a way that is more inclusive of the Ontario public.

One of these events was the state funeral of Ontario's former Lieutenant Governor, David C. Onley (<https://www.lgontario.ca/en/lg/david-onley/>), in January 2023. Notably, Onley was Ontario's first Lieutenant Governor with a physical disability and championed disability issues for many years. His state funeral was planned and held in an inclusive manner so that everyone from the disability community could participate meaningfully and equitably.

Actions included:

- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers were equipped with training and tipsheets on providing accessible customer service to members of the public with disabilities
- Offering personal support workers onsite for the funeral and public visitation
- Lowering the height of the casket to allow those using mobility devices to pay their respects
- Using a single barrier-free access point for all guests and creating designated spaces for mobility devices and support animals
- Offering ASL interpretation services, portable listening devices, portable devices for voice-dictated condolence messages, and closed captions displayed on viewing screens within the church
- Printing all event programs in a large print font and in Braille

Similar practices were implemented to improve public access at additional state ceremonial events in 2023, including the Coronation celebration at Queen's Park (May), the Remembrance Day commemoration (November) and the Lieutenant Governor Installation ceremony (November). Improving accessibility standards at state ceremonial events will enable all Ontarians to equitably and meaningfully participate in events organized and delivered by the OPS.

Expanding supports for students with disabilities

The Ministry of Education launched the Cooperative Education Supports for Students with Disabilities Pilot in September 2023. The pilot enables participating school boards to provide targeted supports to students with disabilities to enhance participation in cooperative education courses. The primary objective of this program is to provide valuable job skills and experience to students with disabilities in areas of their interest. Additionally, the program seeks to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of the abilities and potential of students with disabilities among educators, employers, and the wider community
- Promote inclusive practices and equal opportunities for students with disabilities in the workplace
- Foster a collaborative relationship between school boards and employers to support the success of students with disabilities

Funding is provided for additional support, such as educational assistants and other paraprofessionals, who will work alongside cooperative education and special education teachers. The additional support is to provide personalized support to students with disabilities during their cooperative education placements. This support may include identifying and removing barriers and supporting students in their successful acquisition and participation in the cooperative education placement.

School boards are responsible for implementing the pilot in accordance with school board collective agreements and provincial legislations, regulations, and policies. The pilot will continue to be implemented for three school years from 2023-24 to 2025-26. Removing barriers from students with disabilities seeking cooperative placements prepares them to enter and succeed in the workforce post-graduation.

Contact us

Recognizing the ongoing need for progress, the OPS continues to advance accessibility to make the organization a barrier-free one for persons with disabilities.

For more information about this plan or to request an alternative format, please contact the OPS Accessibility Office at MYAP@ontario.ca (mailto:MYAP@ontario.ca)

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Footnotes

- [1] ^ Data and findings presented in this section come from the 2024 OPS Employee Experience Survey.
- [2] ^ All representation and sentiment data in this report uses results from OPS Employee Experience Surveys.
- [3] ^ Director level and above.