



Elections  
Ontario

# 2020 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan



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# 2020 Status Update to Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

## Message from CEO

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Elections Ontario is a non-partisan office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario responsible for administering elections. Our role is to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process and manage elections in an efficient, fair, and impartial manner. Elections Ontario abides by all legislative requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Our *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan* outlines how we continually seek to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility. This status report serves as an update on the fourth year of our plan.

This past year has been one of change and adaptation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but thanks to the commitment of staff, we remain on track to deliver the 2022 general election. Like many, staff at Elections Ontario transitioned to working remotely in March 2020, leveraging our recently upgraded office suite to continue our delivery of the next provincial election.

The changes to our working arrangements highlighted how technology can support the electoral process for all voters, including those persons with disabilities. The experiences of the past year will inform future advancements, making voting easier and ensuring accessibility. We are already developing new ways to interact with voters through personalized, digital channels.

As we adapt to COVID-19, we remain committed to the integrity, security, and accessibility of elections in Ontario and ensuring the safety and security of voters and staff.

Greg Essensa  
Chief Electoral Officer

## Overview

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Elections Ontario is mandated to prepare an annual status report on the progress we have made implementing our multi-year accessibility plan. This is our annual status report for the fourth year of the *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*.

## Background and Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* establishes accessibility standards and requirements for five legislative standards: customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces. The four applicable standards that Elections Ontario is required to adhere to under the Act are listed and explained below:

- Customer service standard: provide accessible customer service to persons with disabilities so that they can access the same goods and services as everyone else.
- Information and communications standard: create, provide, and receive information in ways that are accessible for persons with disabilities.
- Employment standard: provide accessibility and accommodations to employees across all stages of the employment life cycle.
- Public spaces standard: design public spaces to make it easier for everyone (persons with disabilities, seniors, and families) to use these areas. Public spaces can include exterior paths of travel, accessible parking, service-related elements, and the maintenance of public spaces.

Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, Elections Ontario has ongoing obligations to accommodate persons with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* is incorporated into all areas of our work and we recognize that additional accommodation measures that go beyond the Act may be required in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

## Commitment to the Plan

Elections Ontario strives to meet the needs of its employees and customers with disabilities and is working hard to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.

We are committed to fulfilling our requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. This accessibility plan outlines the steps we have taken to meet those requirements and to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Our plan demonstrated how Elections Ontario will play a role in making the province accessible for all Ontarians.

Elections Ontario is committed and legislated to implement all requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, as we have done since the legislation passed in 2005. Accessibility is embedded into all areas of our work, both internally for staff and externally for the more than 10.2 million voters we serve. Our multi-year accessibility plan, which is created every five years, guides staff on how to implement the legislation we are mandated to meet.

Staff are also provided with guidelines, policies, training, and best practices and procedures so that we continue to incorporate accessibility in an efficient and focused manner.

## Update on 2020 Accessibility Initiatives

Elections Ontario undertakes and completes accessibility initiatives as part of its ongoing strategy to prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities.

For each of the initiatives listed throughout this document, we have identified the “deliverable” followed by the “status update”:

- **Deliverable:** what we are legislated to do under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* for each of the standards, and what we have committed to do in our multi-year accessibility plan.
- **Status Update:** what we have accomplished for the year 2020.



# General Requirements

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There are several general requirements that must be implemented in accordance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Under the legislation, we are required to have:

- Multi-year accessibility plans
- Accessibility policies
- Staff training
- Accessible procurement policies and processes

A report on each of the requirements is listed below.

## Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

A multi-year accessibility plan outlines an organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility while meeting its requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. The "deliverable" and "status update" for Elections Ontario's *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan* are provided below:

### Deliverable for Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Establish, implement, maintain, and document a five-year accessibility plan which outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers. Organizations are required to provide an annual status report on the measures and steps taken on a yearly basis.

### Status Update on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Elections Ontario continues to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility as we implement the deliverables outlined in the *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*.

We recognize and appreciate the input and continued support from individuals and community agencies representing persons with disabilities across the province. Their expertise has helped to guide Elections Ontario as we continually improve and enhance the services we provide:

The organizations that helped us create the *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*, and who continue to provide support through our MYAP Committee are:

- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Arthritis Society
- Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf
- Canadian Hearing Services

- CNIB, Toronto
- CNIB, Ottawa
- Community Living Ontario
- March of Dimes Canada
- Ontario College of Art & Design University (OCAD)
- Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy
- Parkinson Canada
- Spinal Cord Injury Ontario

### **Virtual MYAP Committee Consultation**

Elections Ontario strives to make voting easy for Ontarians and to remove barriers to voting. An important aspect of incorporating accessibility into all areas of our business and the electoral processes is listening and responding to feedback from individuals and community agencies representing persons with disabilities. Elections Ontario meets regularly with the individuals and community agencies representing persons with disabilities who make up the MYAP Committee, to discuss accessibility during an election.

Our discussions with the committee provide an opportunity for members to share their experiences and expertise. This year, these discussions gave us a clearer understanding of how we could improve and ensure accessibility during an election, if one was held during the pandemic.

We held our first virtual MYAP Committee consultation on Thursday, October 29, 2020 to address accessibility needs and concerns for future elections in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We gathered feedback from committee members about the best platform to use for our virtual meetings. Based on their feedback, we opted for a platform that allowed attendees who required sign language interpretation to pin the interpreter while being able to view the other speakers and presentation at the same time. All materials were created in an accessible format and sent to attendees ahead of the meeting.

Ahead of the meeting, we also sent a questionnaire to community agency members so they could gather input from their colleagues and clients.

The survey and group discussion focused on two key areas:

- COVID-19 and election accessibility.
- Voter education and communication.

All participants agreed that COVID-19 would increase concerns for persons with disabilities during voting. The following summarizes the ideas shared and recommendations made during the round table discussion:

- Permit voters to schedule appointments for advance voting.

- Include information about how to prepare for voting on the voter information card, with a focus on the supports and services available to persons with disabilities.
- Provide clear signage and large print ballots to assist those with low vision or who are blind.
- Ensure tools, such as assistive voting technology, braille ballot templates, secrecy folders and pens, are one-time use or disinfected after each use.
- Increase sanitization and use of touchless surfaces for individuals that are blind.
- Consider disposable braille ballot templates, pens, and other tools.
- Consider the use of clear masks for poll workers so those who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing can lip-read.
- Accompany mail-in ballots with infographics or plain-language instructions to make materials easier to understand.
- Avoid an over-reliance of online-only services.
- Promote alternative, easy-to-use customer service formats to address a variety of needs.
- Create and embed ASL/LSQ videos on Elections Ontario's webpages to enhance accessibility for persons who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.
- Consider sharing those videos with accessibility agencies so they can embed these videos on their websites.
- Suggest using the DeafDots video platform, to provide information to the deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing in American Sign Language (ASL) and Quebecoise Sign Language (LSQ).
- Cover how to book an interpreter, the availability of assistive voting technology, the voting process, and accessible voting options in videos.
- Use live interpreters in polls through remote video interpreting services.
- Use infographics as a universal language.
- Link directly to the accessible voting page from Elections Ontario's home page on the website to limit navigation for users.
- Provide voter information cards in braille for persons who have low vision or who are blind.
- Use community agencies to share information about accessible voting options and services.

Elections Ontario's internal Accessibility Committee is reviewing the recommendations to identify those that can be actioned in time for the 2022 general election. Some may be implemented for the election or identified as a potential pilot project in future.

Elections Ontario is also working with the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health on how we can administer accessible and safe elections. Given the continued impact of COVID-19 on the province, we have begun modifying our

plans for the 2022 general election to protect the health and safety of staff and voters.

### **Elections Ontario's Internal Accessibility Advisory Committee**

In April 2020, a standing committee was established as part of Elections Ontario's governance structure to ensure that we continue to consider accessibility in every aspect of our service delivery—including products, policies, processes, and protocols.

The Accessibility Committee includes members from every division within Elections Ontario. It is responsible for reviewing research, MYAP committee meeting feedback, legislative requirements, industry and community best practices, and direct experience from an accessibility perspective.

In its first year, the committee established a process to assess the recommendations from the MYAP committee and identify opportunities and issues to determine how Elections Ontario can introduce changes that will improve services for voters with disabilities.

### **Annual Compliance Report and Accessibility Status Report**

Elections Ontario filed an annual compliance report in December 2020, with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, in compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Elections Ontario met all its deliverables for the year.

We also prepared our annual status update on the progress we have made under the *2017-2021 Year Multi-year Accessibility Plan*.

## **Accessibility Policies**

Accessibility policies outline how an organization will meet their obligations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* as it refers to the Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation. The “deliverable” and “status update” are listed below:

### **Deliverable for Accessibility Policies**

Every organization shall develop, implement, and maintain policies governing how the organization achieves accessibility and meets its requirements under the accessibility standards. The policies must be consistent with the core principles of independence, dignity, integration, and equality of opportunity.

### **Status Update on Accessibility Policies**

Elections Ontario has an Accessibility Policy and an Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation Policy, both of which cover the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* standards that are applicable, including customer service, employment, information and communications and public

spaces. The policies are consistent with the four core principles of the Act: independence, dignity, integration, and equal opportunity.

### **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation Policy**

Our Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation Policy was revised to align with the changes to the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation—in particular, adding the Accessible Customer Service Standard to create a single policy.

## **Staff Training**

All organizations are required to provide training on the Accessible Customer Service Standard, the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, as it relates to persons with disabilities. The “deliverable” and “status update” for staff training are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Staff Training**

All employees and volunteers must be trained on the Customer Service Standard. They must also be trained on the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, as appropriate to the employee’s duties.

Staff shall be trained as soon as practicable. Records will be maintained of the training provided, including dates and the number of individuals trained. Should there be any changes to the policy, staff shall be trained on the policy changes.

### **Status Update on Staff Training**

All new Elections Ontario staff completed training on the Customer Service Standard, the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, in accordance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Records are maintained on who was trained and when.

In response to the feedback we received from persons with disabilities during the 2018 general election, we improved our processes and training. New story boards and case studies were created as part of the training to show how accessible customer service should be provided for all voters.

A review of all accessibility-related training materials (documents and videos) for election officials and staff was undertaken to ensure compliance with existing legislation and overall accessibility. The following training documents and videos were reviewed:

- *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* Overview
- Accessible Customer Services Training
- Assisting and Directing Electors

- Electors Who Require Assistance
- Voting Location Assessment Training
- Understanding the Voting Location Inspection Tools
- Voting Location Inspection Checklist
- Voting Location Reference Guide
- Office Inspection Checklist
- Using Remediation Supplies
- Site Accessibility Standards Policy
- Accessible Customer Services Training Video
- Voting Location Training Video
- More Days, More Ways to Vote Video
- Assistive Voting Technology Process Video
- Process for Voting on Election Day Video

Provincial by-elections were called for the electoral districts of Orléans and Ottawa—Vanier, with an election day set for February 27, 2020. In preparation for the elections, all returning office staff and election officials in both electoral districts were trained to deliver services in an accessible manner as per the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

## Accessible Procurement

For goods and services to be more accessible to persons with disabilities, it is important that organizations incorporate accessibility into their procurement process. The “deliverable” and “status update” to ensure we incorporate an accessible procurement process are provided below:

### Deliverable for Accessible Procurement

Accessibility criteria and features shall be incorporated when procuring or acquiring goods, services, facilities, and self-service kiosks, except where not practicable to do so. If not practicable to do so, an explanation will be provided upon request.

### Status Update on Procurement

Elections Ontario incorporates accessibility design, criteria, and features when it procures or acquires goods, services, or facilities, unless it is not practicable to do so, and will provide an explanation in those instances.

As part of our request for proposals process, Elections Ontario includes a requirement that all contractors or service providers working on its behalf be previously trained on, and understand, the standards applicable to the procurement request. This includes completing training on the Customer Service Standard and accessibility-related obligations under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. Additional training for staff may be required for the

Information and Communications, Employment, Design of Public Spaces and Transportation standards, depending on the request for proposals.

Proponents are required to submit a document describing their accessible training policy as part of their response to a request for proposals, including a summary of the training and training dates.

# Customer Service Standard

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The Customer Service Standard applies to all organizations, including the government, the Legislative Assembly, and public, private, and non-profit organizations, that provide goods or services, either directly to the public or to other organizations in Ontario (third parties), and that have one or more employees in Ontario.

Below are the legislated requirements under the Customer Service Standard and the “deliverable” and “status update” for each:

- Assistive devices.
- Service animals and support persons.
- Notice of service disruptions.

## Assistive Devices

Persons with disabilities may need to use their own assistive devices in order to access an organizations goods and services. The “deliverable” and “status update” for assistive devices is provided below:

### Deliverable for Assistive Devices

Develop a policy on allowing persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to access an organization’s goods and services and any other measures offered.

### Status Update on Assistive Devices

Ahead of the 2018 general election, and in response to feedback, Elections Ontario modified its policies to allow voters to use their phones and or devices as an accessibility tool at a voting location. Our consultations with agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities identified that many were unaware of this change.

For the February 2020 by-elections in Ottawa-Vanier and Orléans, Elections Ontario expanded our outreach and marketing campaign to raise awareness about the accessible voting options available for persons with disabilities. A toolkit was created to promote the accessible voting options, including the use of phones and devices in the polls. Information about accessible voting options was also included in the outreach kits sent to all community organizations within the electoral districts.

Assistive voting technology is also available at returning and satellite offices before election day to allow persons with disabilities to vote independently. Voters using the technology can listen to an audio version of their ballot, make their selection using one of three controller options, confirm their selection, and mark their ballot. The three controller options are an audio



tactile interface, a sip and puff device, and left and right paddles, and the machine includes a ballot marking device and printer. While the use of assistive voting technology in the 2018 general election was limited, with only 62 voters using the machine, we are currently seeking approval to extend the use of assistive voting technology at returning offices to election day.

## **Guide Dogs, Service Animals and Support Persons**

Persons with disabilities may need to be accompanied by their guide dog, service animal or a support person.

### **1. Guide Dogs and Service Animals**

Guide dogs and service animals can assist a person with a disability in their daily lives. Regardless of whether they are providing physical or emotional support, they help the individual access goods and services and are allowed anywhere the public is allowed. The “deliverable” and “status update” for service animals are provided below:

#### **Deliverable for Guide Dogs and Service Animals**

As legislated under the Customer Service Standard, organizations must allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of the premises they own or operate that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by another law. If an organization cannot easily identify that the animal is a guide dog or service animal, they can ask the person to provide documentation from a regulated health professional.

#### **Status Update on Guide Dogs and Service Animals**

Elections Ontario continues to permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal, and they are permitted to go anywhere the public is allowed. This has been written into the Customer Service Policy we provide to all new staff as part of their training and orientation process.

The guide dog or service animal must be always under the care and control of the individual. Elections Ontario’s Customer Service training reminds staff to ensure that they do not touch or interact with a working guide dog or service animal.

### **2. Support Persons**

A support person can assist a person with a disability in order to help them with communication, mobility, personal care for medical needs or access goods or services. If a fee is being charged, the support person must know

ahead of time so that they are prepared in advance. The “deliverable” and “status update” for support persons are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Support Persons**

Organizations must permit persons with disabilities who receive assistance from a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public or third parties.

Where admission fees are charged for a support person of a person with a disability, organizations must provide notice ahead of time on what fees, if any, would be charged.

### **Status Update Support Persons**

We continue to permit persons with disabilities to bring their support person with them when accessing any goods or services provided by Elections Ontario. This includes services at our head office and at any voting locations during a by-election or general election.

Elections Ontario covers the cost of an ASL interpreter or an intervenor if a person with a disability requires one to vote. For the by-elections in Ottawa—Vanier and Orléans, Elections Ontario reached out to the Canadian Hearing Society and DeafBlind Community Services Ottawa to ensure that voters would be able to arrange for interpreting services and that Elections Ontario would be billed directly for the costs. This information was also promoted to community agencies in the Ottawa-Vanier and Orléans electoral districts so that persons with disabilities were aware that those services were available to them.

### **Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions**

In order to use or benefit from a provider’s goods or services, persons with disabilities usually use particular facilities or services. If there is a temporary disruption in those facilities or services, it is important that the individual is informed so that they can make plans accordingly. The “deliverable” and “status update” for providing notice of temporary service disruptions are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions**

Provide notice when facilities or services that persons with disabilities rely on to access or use goods or services are temporarily disrupted. The notice must include the following three pieces of information:

- Reason for the disruption.
- Anticipated duration of the disruption.
- Alternative facilities or services.

## **Status Update on Notice of Service Disruptions**

Elections Ontario is aware that the operation of certain services and facilities is important to persons with disabilities. Our Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation Policy instructs staff to provide a notice of disruption to the public, whenever applicable, including information about what service is being disrupted, the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, which may be available.

During a by-election or general election, we provide a notice of service disruption at impacted voting locations and on the Elections Ontario website, if necessary, so that voters with disabilities are aware of the disruption and the alternatives that may be available to them.

# Information and Communications Standard

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To help persons with disabilities access sources of information and communications, organizations are required to incorporate accessibility in the following four areas:

- Accessible feedback process.
- Accessible formats and communication supports.
- Emergency procedures, plans or public safety information.
- Accessible websites and web content.

## Accessible Feedback Process

For persons with disabilities to be able to provide feedback on the services they are receiving, they must have the means to be able to do so, and it must be in a manner that is accessible. The “deliverable” and “status update” to provide an accessible feedback process are listed below:

### Deliverable for Accessible Feedback Process

Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how goods or services are provided to persons with disabilities, and how the organization will respond to any feedback and act on any complaints. Organizations shall also ensure that the information about their feedback process is readily available to the public and that the feedback process is accessible to persons with disabilities by providing or arranging for accessible formats and supports upon request.

### Status Update on the Feedback Process

Elections Ontario values feedback from the public about the services we provide. Persons with disabilities can provide feedback in multiple ways, including by phone, email, fax, TTY, mail or electronically through our [website](#). During the two by-elections in Ottawa, we gathered feedback through these channels, as well as through voter feedback forms at the polls.

Feedback is also gathered through these channels during a general election. In addition, Returning Officers report on the accessibility measures taken during an election based on the feedback from voters at the polls. Other feedback is gathered from public opinion research and surveys, and through consultations and meetings with various community groups facing barriers to voting. We also meet with members of Elections Ontario’s MYAP committee to gather feedback on experiences and proposed updates for future elections.

The feedback we gather forms part of the Chief Electoral Officer’s report on the accessibility of the election, as per the requirements of the *Election Act*.

This feedback also assists Elections Ontario in our continued efforts and planning to ensure accessible voting for all Ontarians.

## **Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

To help persons with disabilities access sources of information and communications, it is important to ensure that they are created and available in accessible formats. The “deliverable” and “status update” to provide accessible formats and communication supports are listed below:

### **Deliverable for Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

Organizations must create, provide, and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible to persons with disabilities. They must also notify the public that accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request.

When a person requests an accessible format or communication support, organizations are required to consult with the person to determine their accessibility needs and the suitability of information they are providing. If it is not feasible to convert the information or communications, the organization must provide an explanation as to why it cannot be converted and a summary of the content.

The information or communication must be provided in a timely manner that considers the person’s accessibility needs and at a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons.

### **Status Update on Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

We continued to provide information and communications in accessible formats. All public communications materials distributed by Elections Ontario are created as an accessible Word document or PDF and are also available in alternative formats upon request.

In 2020, we redesigned the creative materials used for election advertising. The current creative has been in use since 2011, including for three general elections. The new creative will be used across multiple communication channels, including the website, social media, collateral, and other annual program advertising.

During the year, we tabled three reports with the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Each report was made accessible before being posted on our website.

Elections Ontario also hosted a virtual Political Advisory Committee meeting. We notified attendees that they could request accessibility accommodations, if needed.

### **Accessible Tools and Voting Options**

Feedback from the 2018 general election indicated that persons with disabilities were not aware of the accessible tools and voting options available to them. In response to this feedback, we prepared a new digital outreach toolkit called Voting Choices with information about the different voting options and accessible services available to voters, including the use of personal phones and devices in the polls.

The toolkit was designed to be accessible and shareable, and it was first sent out during the two by-elections in Ottawa—Vanier and Orléans. It allowed organizations and community partners to adapt the resource to the needs of their clients as they shared information about the by-elections. The toolkit included information on:

- How to register to vote.
- What ID to bring.
- When and how to receive a voter information card.
- Where and how to vote.
- How to mark or decline a ballot.

It also provided more details about accessible voting options, including the use of phones and personal devices as an accessibility tool at the polls, voting by mail or home visit, or having Elections Ontario cover the cost of an interpreter or intervenor.

The toolkits were shared with support organizations, shelters for voters experiencing homelessness, post-secondary schools, community centres, and more.

During the by-elections, we also sent a brochure to every address within the electoral districts with information about voting. It was written in plain language and met accessibility standards for print documents. It was available in alternative formats upon request.

News releases issued by Elections Ontario are made accessible before being posted to our website and distributed to the media. The two Returning Officers' Reports on Accessibility for Electors with Disabilities for the 2020 by-elections were posted to the website in an accessible format.

We also implemented a geo-targeted advertising campaign for this year's Provincial Voter Registration Month in March. The digital ad campaign was accompanied by social media and outreach campaigns and leveraged

community organizations' networks to share information. The program was a pilot project to measure the success of geo-targeting using mobile platforms and will provide valuable insight and knowledge on future planning for the 2022 general election.

## **Emergency Procedure, Plans or Public Safety Information**

A person with a disability may want to know and understand an organization's emergency procedures, plans or public safety information prior to attending or arriving at a location. It would be important for persons with disabilities to have that information in an accessible format or with appropriate communication supports. The "deliverable" and "status update" to provide emergency procedures, plans or public safety information, and the action taken by Elections Ontario are listed below:

### **Deliverable for Emergency Procedure, Plans or Public Safety Information**

If an organization prepares emergency procedures, plans or public safety information and makes the information available to the public, it must be available in accessible formats or with appropriate communication supports, as soon as practicable, and upon request.

### **Status Update on Emergency Procedure, Plans or Public Safety Information**

Should a visitor or the public visit our office facilities and make a request in advance for our emergency and safety information, we would provide the information in an accessible format that works for the individual requesting it.

## **Accessible Websites and Web Content**

Websites are often an easy and convenient way for persons with disabilities to access a company's goods or services without having to physically go to an office. Individuals can use their own assistive software and devices to manoeuvre through a website, provided it has been designed to be accessible. When a website is properly designed in a logical and understandable way, it helps everyone, not just persons with disabilities. The "deliverable" and "status update" to provide accessible websites and web content and the action taken by Elections Ontario are listed below:

### **Deliverable for Accessible Websites and Web Content**

By January 1, 2012, new internet and new intranet websites, and web content on those sites, must conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA, other than success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live) and 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

By January 1, 2016, **all internet** websites and web content on those sites must conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA, other than success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live) and 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

By January 1, 2020, **all intranet websites** must conform to WCAG 2.0, Level AA, other than success criteria 1.2.4 Captions (Live) and 1.2.5 Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

## **Status Update Website and Web Content**

Below is the status update for website and web-content as well as EO's intranet site.

### **Website and Web Content**

Elections Ontario's website meets the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* to conform with WCAG 2.0, Level AA. We continuously work to enhance the user experience.

In preparation for the Ottawa—Vanier and Orléans by-elections, Elections Ontario worked diligently to ensure information on the website was easily available and accessible. Our Voter Information Service and eRegistration tools were updated with new by-election information and tested for accessibility. The Voter Information Service allows voters to quickly find when and where they can vote, while eRegistration lets them easily confirm, update, or add their information to the voters list. Elections Ontario continued to post accessible documents on our website and give users the option to request alternative formats if needed.

### **Software Applications**

A review of Elections Ontario's software and applications showed that many of the applications we purchased were designed before accessibility requirements were mandated. Under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, we must ensure that various applications (desktop, mobile, and web) conformed with WCAG 2.0, Level AA. We reviewed and tested 150 applications for accessibility this year to determine which applications will need to be upgraded or replaced to remain in compliance with legislation.

One of the most significant undertakings this year, due to its impact on how we operate, was migrating our systems to the cloud. Moving to the cloud allowed us to upgrade our applications and provided us with more timely security updates. This enabled greater compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* while allowing us to quickly respond to our evolving needs in the lead up to an election. As we made this change, we remained focused on upholding public trust and protecting Ontario's electoral system. The cloud platform enhanced our security measures.



Due to the cloud migration, we were able to update to a combined office suite that uses cloud and installed versions of the software, giving staff access to local and web-based tools, including collaboration platforms. On March 17, 2020, the Government of Ontario declared a state of emergency in response to the spread of COVID-19 in the province. On March 23, it announced the closure of all non-essential businesses, prompting Elections Ontario to close its offices. Following the closure, all staff were able to work remotely for the remainder of the year given our newly upgraded systems.

Elections Ontario also created the following vendor procedures and guides so that all newly purchased applications would meet compliance levels required: Digital Accessibility and Usability Standards, Digital AODA Compliance Requirements and a Digital Accessibility Testing Handbook.

# Employment Standard

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The Employment Standard requires employers to provide accessible accommodation across all stages of the employment life cycle for an employee with a disability. By proactively removing barriers, employers can help to create workplaces that are accessible and that allow employees to reach their full potential. Below are the legislated requirements under the Employment Standard and the “deliverable” and “status update” for each:

- Recruitment, assessment, and selection.
- Accessible formats and communication supports for employees.
- Workplace emergency response information.
- Documented individual accommodation plans.
- Return to work process.
- Performance management.
- Career development, advancement, and redeployment.

## Recruitment, Assessment and Selection

Organizations must provide a notification that accommodations are available upon request during all three stages of employment, including recruitment, assessment, and selection. The “deliverable” and “status update” for recruitment, assessment and selection are provided below:

### Deliverable for Recruitment, Assessment and Selection

Every employer shall notify its internal and external job applicants that accommodations will be provided upon request to support participation in all aspects of the recruitment, assessment, and selection process.

New and existing employees are informed of the organizations policies for accommodating employees with disabilities. Once a person is hired or a current employee discloses that they require accommodations, an individual accommodation plan process begins.

Employers shall provide updated information to its employees whenever there is a change to existing policies on the provision of job accommodations to employees with accessibility needs due to a disability.

### Status Update on Recruitment, Assessment and Selection

Elections Ontario is an equal opportunity employer and provides and incorporates accessibility across all stages of the employment life cycle, including the recruitment, assessment, and selection processes. Both internal and external applicants are notified that accommodations are available upon request. Once an individual is hired, they are asked if they require any accommodations (both day-to-day operations or during an emergency

situation), and, if so, processes are followed to ensure we accommodate the individual throughout the lifecycle of their employment.

All external facing Human Resources documents have been made accessible. Staff continue to follow Elections Ontario's Employment Standard Procedures to ensure we create an accessible work experience for persons with disabilities.

In 2020, we reviewed all our job descriptions (approximately 150 positions, including those at our head office and in the field) for content, language, and accessibility. All documents were converted into an accessible Word document and posted as an accessible PDF. Templates were created so that all future job descriptions and job advertisements will be created as an accessible Word document.

A more inclusive statement was added to the request for accommodation section of the job advertisement, which has been revised to say "Elections Ontario is an equal opportunity employer. We are committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable and accessible environment, where all employees feel valued, respected, and supported."

During the Ottawa—Vanier and Orléans by-elections that took place in February 2020, we launched a pilot project to hire election officials through CNIB to help voters using our assistive voting technology. Community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities had previously suggested that voters with disabilities would feel more comfortable using the equipment if a person with a disability was providing the service. Although we did not see an increase in the use of assistive voting technology, it was a successful employment opportunity and feedback suggested that it did help to make persons with disabilities feel more comfortable using the device.

## **Documented Individual Accommodation Plan**

Employers will develop a written individual accommodation plan for employees with disabilities so that employers will have a clear and consistent approach for accommodating persons with disabilities. Below are the "deliverable" and "status update" for the individual accommodation plan process.

### **Deliverable for Individual Accommodation Plans**

Employers shall develop and have in place a written process for the development of a documented individual accommodation plan for employees with disabilities.

## **Status Update on Individual Accommodation Plans**

Elections Ontario continues to follow its written process for developing individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities who require workplace accommodations.

Once an individual notifies their manager or Human Resources that they require an accommodation, an individual accommodation plan is created. If an accommodation includes accessible formats and communications supports, information about the supports is also included in the plan. In addition, the plan includes individualized workplace emergency response plans and information, where required, and identifies any other accommodations that are needed.

## **Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees**

In order for persons with disabilities to perform their jobs effectively, they must be provided with the accessible formats and communication supports they require. The “deliverable” and “status update” for providing accessible formats and communication supports to employees are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees**

Organizations must consult with the employee to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for information that is needed to perform the employee’s job and information that is generally available to other employees in the workplace. The employer shall consult with the employee making the request to determine the suitability of an accessible format or communication support.

### **Status Update on Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees**

Elections Ontario continues to consult with employees to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for information that is needed in order to effectively perform the employee’s job, and information that is generally available to other employees in the workplace. Elections Ontario also continues to consult with the employee making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication support.

## **Workplace Emergency Response Information**

Employers must be informed and aware of the needs that an employee with a disability may have during an emergency situation. This will help employees

with disabilities and employers they work for prepare for a range of potential emergencies. The “deliverable” and “status update” is provided below:

### **Deliverable for Workplace Emergency Response Information**

Every employer must provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have disabilities, under the following conditions:

- When the employee’s disability is such that the information is necessary.
- The employer is aware of the need for accommodation due to the employee’s disability.

If an employee who receives individualized workplace emergency response information requires assistance, the employer shall, with the employee’s consent, provide the workplace emergency response information to the person designated by the employer to provide assistance to the employee.

Employers shall provide information required under this section as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the need for accommodation.

The individualized workplace emergency response information shall be reviewed when an employee moves to a different location, their overall accommodation needs or plans are reviewed, and when an employer reviews its general emergency response policies.

### **Status Update on Workplace Emergency Response Information**

Elections Ontario provides individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have a disability. A self-assessment containing a list of emergency situations is given to new hires so they can identify what assistance they may need during an emergency. Human Resources then develops an emergency response plan, which the employee then reviews to confirm it meets their needs.

## **Return-to-Work Process**

The return-to-work process ensures that employers have a documented process for supporting employees who return to work after being away for reasons related to their disabilities. The “deliverable” and “status update” for the return-to-work process is listed below:

### **Deliverable for Return-to-Work Process**

Develop a process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require accommodations to return to work. The process shall be documented, outline the steps the employer will take to facilitate the return to work and use the employee’s individual accommodation plan as part of the process.

## **Status Update on the Return-to-Work Process**

Elections Ontario has a documented process for supporting employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and who require accommodations to return to work.

When an employee has been absent due to illness or injury for at least two weeks, Human Resources provides them with a Return-to-Work Assessment form that includes their job requirements. This form must be completed by the employee and their medical professional prior to the employee's return to work and identifies any work modifications or accommodation requirements. Human Resources then initiates the individual accommodation plan process with the employee to assist them and to provide them with the tools required to perform their duties.

## **Performance Management**

It is important to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities when assessing performance management. The "deliverable" and "status update" for performance management are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Performance Management**

An employer that uses performance management for its employees shall take into account the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as individual accommodation plans, when undertaking its performance management process with employees with disabilities.

### **Status Update Performance Management**

Elections Ontario continues to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as an employee's individual accommodation response plan, when undertaking its performance management process with employees.

## **Career Development and Advancement**

When providing career development and advancement opportunities, employers are required to consider what accommodations employees with disabilities may need to succeed elsewhere in their organization or to take on new responsibilities in their current position. The "deliverable" and "status update" for career development and advancement are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Career Development and Advancement**

Employers that provide career development and advancement opportunities will consider the accessibility needs of their employees, as well as any individual accommodation plans, when providing career development and advancement to its employees with disabilities. This can include:

- Providing additional responsibilities within an employee’s current position.
- The movement of an employee from one job to another that may be higher in pay.
- Provide greater responsibility or be at a higher level in an organization.
- Any combination of the aforementioned.

## **Status Update on Career Development and Advancement**

Elections Ontario continues to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as an employee’s individual accommodation response plan, when providing career development and advancement opportunities to employees.

## **Redeployment**

By considering the accessibility needs of individuals with disabilities when redeploying employees, employers may help individuals continue to contribute effectively. The “deliverable” and “status update” for redeployment are provided below:

### **Deliverable for Redeployment**

Redeployment means the reassignment of employees to other departments or jobs within the organization as an alternative to layoff when a particular job or department has been eliminated by the organization.

An employer that uses redeployment shall consider the accessibility needs of its employees with disabilities, as well as individual accommodation plans, when redeploying employees with disabilities.

### **Status Update on Redeployment**

Elections Ontario continues to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities when moving and redeploying individuals to other positions. It is important that employees have their accommodation needs met so that they can continue to contribute effectively in their new position.

## **New ways of working**

We piloted two alternative working arrangements in 2020, in alignment with options available across the Ontario Public Service. With our enhanced ability to collaborate, we offered telework to management and introduced a compressed work week for non-management staff.

We realized the combined benefits of our systems upgrades and the introduction of alternative working arrangements early in 2020. On March 17, 2020, the Government of Ontario declared a state of emergency in response to the spread of COVID-19 in the province. On March 20, it announced the

closure of all non-essential businesses, prompting Elections Ontario to close its offices.

Following the closure, employees worked remotely for much of the remainder of the year. As a result of the changes, we made to our systems and working arrangements earlier in the year, we continued our work with minimal impact on our preparations for the 2022 general election.

Working remotely gave EO staff a better understanding of the importance of being provided with effective and proper electronic communication tools. We have a better understanding of how to conduct virtual meetings and communicate with one another in electronic formats—something persons with disabilities have been advocating for many years.

The pandemic also resulted in us having to find remote, digital options for recruiting, hiring, documenting, and onboarding new employees to the organization. Recruitment and selection processes, including job interviews and tests (if applicable), were conducted virtually.

Hiring documents were provided electronically to new hires and returned in the same manner. Digital signatures can now be used on supporting documents for new staff and on employment documents for all staff, including performance management, compensation and salary adjustments, employee relations, group insurance benefits charges and staff departures. This has resulted in more accessible processes for all job applicants and employees.



# Design of Public Spaces Standard

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Accessible public spaces include specific features that make it easier for everyone to use public spaces, including persons with disabilities, seniors, and families. The requirements under the Design of Public Spaces Standard applies to new construction and the redevelopment of elements in public spaces.

## Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations

When creating or renovating public spaces, Elections Ontario follows the Design of Public Spaces Standard. When creating accessible voting locations, we follow the Elections Ontario Voting Location Site Accessibility Inspection Checklist. The “deliverable” and “status update” for the accessible design of public spaces are provided below:

### Deliverable for Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations

When designing newly constructed or redeveloped public spaces, specific accessibility criteria must be incorporated into the following:

- Recreational trails and beach access routes.
- Outdoor public use eating areas.
- Outdoor play spaces.
- Exterior paths of travel.
- Accessible parking.
- Obtaining services.
- Maintenance and repair.

There are 44 sections under the Design of Public Spaces Standard with specific measurements and requirements that Elections Ontario would follow should we create any new spaces or undertake any major renovations.

### Status Update on Public Spaces and Accessible Voting Locations

Elections Ontario did not create or redevelop any new public space in 2020.

### Status Update on Accessible Voting Locations

In 2020, two by-elections were held in Ottawa—Vanier and Orléans. Elections Ontario sourced a total of 155 accessible voting locations and six advanced voting locations.

An accessibility audit of the potential voting locations found that 100 sites were accessible and 55 of them were able to be remediated to become accessible for a total of 155 accessible voting locations. For the advance

voting locations, five were accessible and one required remediation to be made accessible for a total of six accessible advance voting locations.

The voting locations were audited for accessibility as per Elections Ontario's Site Accessibility Standards. Our Voting Location Checklist included auditing the accessibility of the following for each building:

- Exterior signage (visibility and contrasting colours).
- Accessible parking (number, size, surface and lighting).
- Exterior pathway (width, surface, slopes and appropriate ramps).
- Accessible entrance (lighting, door width, threshold, power assist and hardware).
- Internal path of travel to voting location (width, surface, slopes and ramps).
- Internal door to voting room (door width, threshold and hardware).
- Elevator (location, dimensions, length of time on door opening).

## Other Accessibility Initiatives

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Elections Ontario complies with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* for our day- to day-operations, and when holding major events like a by-election or an election. In addition to the deliverables we have outlined, we also worked on the following in 2020:

### Braille Ballot Template

We received five complaints during the 2018 general election about the accessibility of our braille ballot template. We investigated and tested the quality and readability of the braille on the ballot template with a representative from CNIB and the Canadian Council of the Blind. We also held a two-hour focus group at CNIB with nine participants (eight with some level of visual impairment and one blind) on how to improve the template for voters. The key findings from the focus group, CNIB and the Canadian Council of the Blind were that we should:

- Add an indicator on the template to orientate the user.
- Increase the cell spacing of the double-digit braille numbering.
- Further define the dots on the braille numbering.
- Raise non-braille numbers (tactile) higher.
- Reduce size of braille numbering so it can be distinguished with a single finger roll.
- Add tracking lines to assist individuals with reading from left to right or move the information closer together, to the far right, so that it is directly beside the cut-out hole to mark candidate.
- Have two finger spaces between the tactile and the braille so that it breaks up the information, but no larger as it would create too big a gap and the user might think there is no further information.
- Have one finger space between the braille and the cut-out hole for marking the ballot.

Elections Ontario will be updating our braille ballot template to include the proposed changes including moving the information closer together to the right of the template beside the cut-out hole for marking the ballot.

Both CNIB and the Canadian Council of the Blind agreed that the new design will be less confusing for the user. The new template will be ready for the 2022 general elections, or any by-elections that may happen before then.

### Signage

Community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities requested that Elections Ontario review the standard visual signage at voting locations to better help voters navigate to and within a voting location.

We included this request in *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*, and in 2020 we simplified our signage to make it easier for voters to understand. Infographic icons are being used on several signs, including the ID requirements to vote, to clarify instructions.

Additional information about accessible voting options is available on our website so voters can prepare themselves before arriving at the voting location.

### **Legislative Amendments**

In order to safely deliver an election during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario submitted the Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on election administration and the COVID-19 pandemic to the Legislative Assembly.

The report made three recommendations for legislative change to ensure both the integrity of the vote and the health and safety of voters.

The three recommendations were:

- Extend the election calendar.
- Set election day to a day when schools are not in session.
- Establish 10 days of flexible advance polls.

These recommendations, which have previously been made to the Legislative Assembly, will allow us to better protect voters while improving our electoral processes for future elections.

### **Municipal Voters List**

On October 1, 2020, the Government of Ontario passed legislation making Elections Ontario responsible for the provisioning of municipal voter's lists, beginning in 2024.

This will simplify the voter registration process for voters while improving the accuracy of the municipal voters lists. Elections Ontario has met with stakeholders, such as the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, municipalities throughout the province, and several ministries to plan for this change.

### **In Closing:**

Elections Ontario remains committed to ensuring that we identify, remove, and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities, so that everyone has the same opportunities to vote.