Elections Ontario

2021 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Table of Contents

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Message from CEO

As a non-partisan office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Elections Ontario is responsible for administering elections while upholding the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process. Our role is to deliver electoral events in an efficient, fair, and impartial manner for all Ontarians. Elections Ontario abides by all legislative requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.* As is outlined in our *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan,* Elections Ontario makes it a priority to identify, prevent, and remove barriers to accessibility in all aspects of our business. This status report will provide an update on the fifth year of our plan.

Throughout this past year, Elections Ontario has continued planning for the 2022 general election while simultaneously responding to significant legislative change as well as required adjustments to voting processes as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Despite this unpredictable change, our staff have continued to successfully complete deliverables required ahead of the election thanks to their flexibility and adaptability. In 2021, significant progress on several of our accessibility initiatives have been made, some of which include the completion of the Elections Ontario *2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*, continued engagement with the accessibility community, enhancements to voting processes and technology, among other accomplishments detailed in this status report. As we move into the final few months ahead of the 2022 Ontario provincial general election, Elections Ontario will continue to ensure that we are equipped to deliver an election where the health, safety, and accessibility needs of all participants are prioritized and where the dignity, independence, integration, and equality of opportunity of each elector are considered while enabling each elector to cast their ballot.

Greg Essensa

Chief Electoral Officer

Overview

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 fifth year of the *2017-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*.

Background and Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (the Act) was enacted with a purpose of developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards so that all Ontarians will benefit from accessible services, programs, spaces and employment. It establishes accessibility 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** – provides accessible customer service to persons with disabilities so that they can access the same goods, services or facilities as everyone else

- **Information and Communications Standard** – creates and provides information and communications in ways that are accessible for persons with disabilities

- **Employment Standard** – creates and provides accessible workplace and employment practices to potential or current employees with disabilities across all stages of the employment cycle

- **Design of Public Spaces Standard** - provides requirements to make public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped easier for everyone to access (including persons with disabilities, older adults and families)

Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC), Elections Ontario has ongoing obligations to accommodate persons with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. The 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 OHRC.

Commitment to the Plan

Prevention and accommodation are key to Election Ontario's commitment to remove access barriers for its employees and customers with disabilities. We can proudly say that we have fulfilled each of our requirements under the Act.

Elections Ontario has embedded the Act's four principles into all areas of our work, both internally for staff and externally for the more than 10. 2 million voters we serve:

The four principles are:

- Dignity – Persons with disabilities are treated as valued and as deserving of effective customer services as others

- Independence – Persons with disabilities have the freedom to make their own choices

- Integration – Persons with disabilities can fully benefit from the same goods, services or facilities as others

- Equality of opportunity – Persons with disabilities have the same opportunity to obtain, use and benefit from goods, services or facilities as others

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.

Election Ontario's Multi-year accessibility plan is created every five years and it guides staff on how to implement the Act's legislative requirements by outlining the steps we have taken to meet each requirement. Our plan demonstrates how we will play a role in making the province accessible for all Ontarians.

Update on 2021 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 Act for each of the standards, and what we have committed to do and consider in our current 2017-2021 and upcoming 2022-2026 Multi-year accessibility plans

- **Status Update:** what we have accomplished for the year 2021 and what we are committed to or considering for the year 2022

General Requirements

There are several general requirements that must be implemented in accordance with the 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 (MYAP) outlines an organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility while meeting its requirements under the Act. The "deliverable" and "status update" for Elections Ontario's 2017-2021 MYAP are provided below:

Deliverable for Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Establish, implement, maintain and document a five-year accessibility plan that 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 has completed its 2022-2026 MYAP. The plan serves as a roadmap for removing barriers as we continue to serve persons with disabilities.

We will be publishing annual status reports on the Elections Ontario website to show the progress we are making in our new five-year plan. The 2022-2026 MYAP and our annual status reports are available in accessible formats upon request.

Elections Ontario continues to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility as we implement the deliverables outlined in the 2022-2026 MYAP.

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 2022-2026 MYAP, 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

An integral part of making voting easy begins with listening and responding to feedback from persons with disabilities and the community agencies that represent them. These individuals and agencies make up the MYAP Committee and Elections Ontario hosts regular meetings to discuss accessibility during an election. These consultations are a vital aspect in incorporating accessibility into all areas of Election Ontario's business and electoral processes.

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 for a greater variety of disability types, including invisible or hidden disabilities. Disability types within this category are not immediately apparent and can stem from conditions related to mental health such as anxiety, or autoimmune diseases like arthritis. Another key deliverable for the 2022-2026 MYAP involves increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including positions with Elections Ontario that become available during elections.

We held a virtual MYAP Committee consultation on August 12th, 2021 to address accessibility needs and concerns for future elections, with a focus on the 2022 general election.

The following summarizes the ideas shared and recommendations made during the round table discussion.

Ideas to make elections more accessible:

- Consider the use of the Canadian Hearing Society's Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) platform where using spoken language, the sign language interpreter can convey what the voter with a hearing disability is communicating to the election official and vice versa

- Refresh the Vote by Mail process to include the braille ballot template along with the ballot

- Post elections information, including Elections Ontario logo on MYAP agency websites

- Embed American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise interpretation and audio description into Elections Ontario public videos

- Include more plain language and visuals like infographics on the Elections Ontario website and documents such as Voting Information Cards (VICs) to make them easier to read

- Add more communication about the measures Elections Ontario is taking for health and safety in recognition of people who might feel more anxious due to the pandemic

- Better facilitate accessible voting by providing an option to call or email Elections Ontario directly instead of relying solely on current instructions to contact a local returning office to reduce the burden

- More training provided with respect to people with "invisible" disabilities like "autoimmune system deficiency"

- Staying with traditional methods such as mailouts for older generations who don't use social media as often or at all

Ideas to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities:

- Contact Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) as an umbrella organization that is in touch with the community agencies representing persons with disabilities and can share employment opportunities and training

- Send out job postings for different positions offered by Elections Ontario to employment services serving persons with disabilities

- Consider job-sharing for elections day twelve-hour shifts that may be too long for some

- Make it easier to find information about the employment opportunities during elections

Elections Ontario's internal Accessibility Committee has reviewed 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 the 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 two years, 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.

Progress during 2021 included:

- Updated contingency guidelines for poll official training to include curbside voting

- Discovered new ways Elections Ontario app will assist electors with disabilities during assessment

- Incorporated best practices currently used to ensure signage within poll locations is accessible into new COVID signage

- Captured more clear pre-election information on the voting process within the website's section on voting choices, including how to pass materials to a polling official if there is a counter or plexiglass barrier

- Developed plan to sanitize all accessibility tools such as Assistive Voting Technology (AVT), braille/tactile templates, secrecy folders and pens after each use

- Clarified language used to inform people about AVT, including what it is and where it's available to make it easier to read

- Made AVT available at returning offices on voting day
- Confirmed that all language on our website is at a Grade 5 level, as well as all communications material and COVID content during assessment
- Created a plan to embed all public videos with American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise
  - audio description will be embedded in all new public videos, or an audio track will be provided
- Added a large tile on Elections Ontario's homepage that links directly to "Accessible Voting"
- Increased communication with employment agencies for persons with disabilities
- Updated accessibility content in eopedia

Annual Compliance Report and Accessibility Status Report
Elections Ontario filed an annual compliance report in October 2021 with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, in compliance with the 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 MYAP, along with commitments and considerations moving forward with the 2022-2026 MYAP.

Accessibility Policies

Accessibility policies outline how an organization will meet their obligations under the Act as it refers to the Customer Service Standard (CSS) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR). 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 Act's core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

Status Update on Accessibility Policies

In March 2021, Elections Ontario's accessibility policies were rewritten to include elements of the CSS and IASR as one document.

One of the last deliverables from the 2017-21 MYAP was to determine whether or not "ableism and discrimination" needs to be considered as an internal policy or as part of Elections Ontario's accessibility policy. This

recommendation was a suggestion from community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities.

In 2021, an extensive review of other government agencies was undertaken and it was determined that it is not necessary to have another policy related to ableism and discrimination because they are both covered in Election Ontario`s accessibility policies.

Staff Training

All organizations are required to provide training on the CSS, the IASR and the OHRC 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 CSS. They must also be trained on the IASR and the OHRC, as appropriate to the employee's duties.

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

Status Update on Staff Training

In 2021, all new Elections Ontario staff completed training on the CSS, IASR and OHRC in accordance with the Act. Records are maintained on who was trained and when.

Staff training videos were reviewed for accessibility in 2020, and necessary changes were made in 2021. In 2022, all videos on our website, including staff training videos, will become more accessible as we embed American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise interpretation within them. Audio descriptions will be embedded in all new videos, or a separate audio track will be provided.

All elections officials will complete the 25-minute accessible customer service video on how to effectively communicate and provide services to persons with disabilities in a caring and accommodating manner. In 2021, training videos for elections officials were embedded with accessibility features, including the following:

Headquarters Training programs

The Returning Officer Support Network, Special Ballot Support Network, Field Technicians, Technology support call centre, Payroll:

- Accessible Microsoft PowerPoint presentation files (PPTs) available for programs
- Videos have embedded captions

Poll Official Training Programs

Advance Poll and Polling Day training programs:

- Accessible PPTs available for programs
- Video have embedded captions
- If requested, manuals and guides have accessible Word versions

Key Staff Training Programs

Returning Office Staff:

- Accessible PPTs available for programs
- Colours used in PPTs chosen with accessibility in mind e.g., yellow bullets were removed from training programs
- Videos have embedded captions

Returning Officer orientation virtual sessions were also later built to include captions

- Scripts are available upon request

Accessible Procurement

For goods, services or facilities 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 CSS and accessibility-related obligations under the OHC. 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

The Customer Service Standard (CSS) 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 CSS 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 to access an organization's goods, services or facilities. 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, services or facilities and any other measures offered.

Status Update on Assistive Devices

This year, in response to feedback requesting more accessible options to obtain information about upcoming elections, the Elections Ontario app has been developed. The new app will allow users who choose to create an account and link it to their voter registration to quickly access information about when, where and how they can vote, including a scannable voter information card, and receive personalized notifications.

We are consulting with voters with disabilities through focus groups to ensure the Elections Ontario app is accessible and meets their needs. The platform will also accommodate the personal device settings and assistive technologies voters with disabilities already use.

The Elections Ontario app will go live during Provincial Voter Registration Month in March 2022 and be piloted during the 2022 general election. We look forward to receiving input on the app so that we can continue to improve and expand it.

We continue to provide assistive voting technology at returning offices during advance voting.

For the 2022 general election, voters will also be able to schedule appointments to use assistive voting technology on election day. Walk-in requests to use the technology will be accommodated, where possible.

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.

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, services or facilities 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 CSS training reminds staff to ensure that they do not touch or interact with a working guide dog or service animal.

Support Persons

A support person can assist a person with a disability to help them with communication, mobility, personal care for medical needs or access goods, services or facilities. 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, services or facilities provided by Elections Ontario. This includes services at our head office and at any voting locations during a by-election or general election.

Notice of Temporary Service Disruptions

If there is a temporary disruption affecting the provision or use of goods, services or facilities that persons with disabilities rely on, it is important that notices of temporary service disruptions are provided and available through accessible formats or communication supports upon request so individuals 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 access to goods, services or facilities that persons with disabilities rely on 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 access to certain goods, services or facilities is important to persons with disabilities. Our IASR policy instructs staff to provide a notice of disruption to the public, whenever applicable, including information about what access to the goods, service or facility is being disrupted, the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative access to the goods, services or facility, if any, that 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

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

- Feedback process

- Accessible formats and communication supports

- Emergency procedures, plans or public safety information

- Websites and web content

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, services or facilities 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 itself 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 gathers feedback from voters and other stakeholders as part of our ongoing efforts to modernize the electoral process to better meet the needs of voters. This includes identifying and eliminating barriers to voting for persons with disabilities.

We collect feedback through many channels, including regular consultations with our MYAP community agencies and stakeholder surveys. Persons with disabilities can also provide feedback in multiple ways, including by phone, email, fax, TTY, mail or through our website.

Beginning in 2021, a plan was developed for voters to be able to provide feedback about their voting experience electronically at voting locations. This process will replace the paper forms used in the past. A poster will be displayed in all voting locations with clear instructions on how to provide feedback electronically and where feedback can be sent.

The electronic feedback system will be used for the first time during the 2022 general election, and for all future elections Every poll official is trained on how to direct electors who are having difficulty accessing feedback or any other service. You can speak to any poll staff and they will provide assistance or direct you to the person who can best assist you.

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 through accessible formats or communication supports. 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

Elections Ontario recognizes the importance of an elector's need to understand the voting process, allowing them the ability to make informed decisions. We provide or arrange for accessible formats and communication supports upon request and work with persons with disabilities to determine the suitability of the format or support.

During elections, we cover the cost of an American Sign Language or Langue des Signes Québécoise Interpreter or Intervenor. Persons with disabilities can also use their phones or assistive devices to look up information or as a tool to communicate with election officials.

American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise interpretation will also be embedded in all of Elections Ontario's informative public-facing videos. Any new videos will include audio description or a separate audio track will be provided.

All accessible formats and communication supports will continue to be provided in a timely manner and at a cost that is no more than the regular price charged to others.

Accessible Tools and Voting Options

In 2021 we implemented several accessible tools and voting options for the 2022 election. We are continuing with future planning to help electors better understand the voting process, allowing them to make informed decisions. Options include:

- Refreshing the Vote by Mail process to include the braille ballot template along with the ballot

- Including more plain language and visuals like infographics onto Elections Ontario website and documents such as Voting Information Cards (VICs) to make them easier to read

- Better facilitating accessible voting by providing an option to call or email Elections Ontario directly instead of current instructions to contact a local returning office to reduce the burden

- Posting elections information, including Elections Ontario logo on MYAP agency websites

- Considering the use of the Canadian Hearing Society's Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) platform that allows three-way communication via sign language interpreting and spoken language between the customer, interpreter and hearing person

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 through an accessible format or communication support 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 information about a company's goods, services or facilities without having to physically go to a building. 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

Now that Elections Ontario has successfully met all requirements of the Act to conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA, we are exploring meeting the guidelines under WCAG 2.1. Meeting these guidelines is not a requirement under the Act; however, Elections Ontario is committed to making websites and web content more accessible to a wider range of persons with disabilities, including enhanced accommodations for:

- blindness and low vision
- deafness and hearing loss
- limited movement
- speech disabilities
- photosensitivity
- some accommodation for learning disabilities and cognitive limitations

Guidelines will not address every user need for persons with these disabilities; rather, accessibility of web content on desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices.

Following these guidelines will also make Web content more usable to users in general.

Employment Standard

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 or selection process
- Notice to successful applicants
- Informing employees of supports
- Accessible formats and communication supports for employees
- Workplace emergency response information
- Documented individual accommodation plans
- Return to work process
- Performance management
- Career development and advancement
- Redeployment

Recruitment, Assessment or Selection Process

During a recruitment process, an employer shall notify job applicants who are individually selected to participate in an assessment or selection process that accommodations are available upon request in relation to the materials or processes to be used.

Notice to Successful Applicants and Informing Employees of Supports

When making offers of employment, employers shall notify the successful applicant of its policies for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Every employer shall also inform its employees of its policies used to support its employees with disabilities, including, but not limited to, policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to disability.

The "deliverable" and "status update" for recruitment, assessment or selection; notice to successful applicants and informing employees of supports are provided below:

Deliverable for Recruitment, Assessment or 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.

Deliverable for Notice to Successful Applicants and Informing Employees of Supports.

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 or Selection; Notice to Successful Applicants and Informing Employees of Supports

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.

Following the requirements of the Act and the OHRC, we provide accommodations to applicants with disabilities throughout the recruitment and selection process. We provide and incorporate accessibility across all stages of the employment life cycle.

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's specific needs.

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 and 2021, we completed our review of all our job descriptions (approximately 150 positions, including those at our head office and in the field) for content, language and accessibility. We also reviewed each job advertisement for these positions in the same manner. Each job advertisement and job description 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.

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 or 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

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 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
- When 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
- 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, that 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 consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as individual accommodation plans, when undertaking its performance management process.

Status Update on 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
- Providing 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.

Design of Public Spaces Standard

The Design of Public Spaces Standard (DPSS) provides requirements to make public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped easier for everyone to access, including persons with disabilities, older adults and families. The requirements under the DPSS apply 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 requirements under the DPSS. When creating accessible voting locations, we follow the Elections Ontario Voting Location Site Accessibility Inspection Checklist that includes elements of the DPSS. 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 DPSS 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 2021.

Status Update on Accessible Voting Locations

In 2021, Elections Ontario selected and inspected over 7000 potential voting locations for use in the 2022 general election. The voting locations were audited for accessibility as per Elections Ontario's Site Accessibility Standards. The Voting Location Inspection 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 room (width, surface, slopes and ramps).

- Internal door to voting room (door width, threshold and hardware).

- Elevator (location, dimensions, length of time on door opening).

- Accessible Washroom for staff (door width, stall size and accessories).

- Remediation products required.

As per section 13.1(3) of the *Election Act, 1990*, from December 2, 2021 to January 4, 2022, Elections Ontario posted the list of proposed voting locations on the public website along with details about steps taken to ensure the accessibility of each location. An invitation was also sent to members of the public to comment on whether the locations are sufficiently accessible.

Other Accessibility Initiatives

Elections Ontario complies with the Act for our day-to day-operations, and when holding major events like a by-election or general election. In addition to the deliverables we have outlined, we also worked on the following in 2021:

Braille Ballot Template

In 2020, Elections Ontario completed its testing of the quality and readability of the braille on the ballot template with representatives from CNIB and the Canadian Council of the Blind. After implementing the recommended changes, a new design was finalized in 2021 and both CNIB and the Canadian Council of the Blind representatives agreed that the new design will be less confusing for the user. The new template will be incorporated into the 2022 general election, or any by-elections that may happen before then.

Signage

The 2020 Accessibility Status Report included a deliverable related to community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities who requested that Elections Ontario review the standard visual signage at voting locations to better help voters navigate to and within a voting location. In 2021 we simplified our signage by adding infographic icons on several signs, including the ID requirements to vote, to clarify instructions. Additional information about accessible voting options is now available on our website so voters can prepare themselves before arriving at the voting location.

In 2021, we conducted a similar review on all signage related to COVID-19 and these signs have gone through the same simplification process to ensure awareness of Election Ontario's health and safety precautions at voting locations.

Legislative Amendments

To allow Elections Ontario to better protect voters 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

In 2021, recommendation three, "Establish 10 days of flexible advance polls" was approved and will be a part of the 2022 general election.

Municipal Voters List

On October 1, 2020, the Government of Ontario passed legislation making Elections Ontario responsible for the provision 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 (AMO), municipalities throughout the province and several ministries to plan for this change.

The main objective is to transition the provisioning of Preliminary Lists of Electors (PLEs) from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation to Elections Ontario. To do so, a full-time team is in place to deliver the following capabilities:

- A new register of electors that includes municipal requirements
- A simplified Elections Management System that enables the provisioning of PLEs on demand
- A portal for municipalities to access PLEs
- Enhancements to e-Registration to support municipal requirements
- Enhancements to elector, address and property data feeds

So far the team has completed the following two capabilities:

1. Design of the new Register
2. Procurement of Information Technology services to enhance existing systems and build new systems

Next steps are to:

- Start or continue the building of new systems
- Update elector ID policies to reflect municipal requirements
- Implement enhanced data feeds
- Update Election Ontario's elector engagement plan

In Closing

Elections Ontario remains committed to ensuring that we identify, remove and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities to ensure the voting process meets requirements set out in *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. However, making voting easy warrants going above and beyond legislative requirements and our goal is to provide everyone with the same opportunities to fulfill their democratic right to vote.