



**Employment and Social
Development Canada**

3-year accessibility plan

**Accessibility is everyone's
business**

December 1, 2022



Employment and Social Development Canada

3-year accessibility plan

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Glossary

The definitions below are from the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#) unless we show another source.

accessibility

The degree to which a product, service, program or environment can be accessed or used by all.

accommodation

Any change in the work environment that allows a person with functional limitations to do their job. Accommodations can be temporary, periodic or long-term, including:

- adjusting the physical workspace
- adapting the equipment or tools
- working flexible hours or job-sharing
- moving the workspace
- working from home
- removing or changing some non-essential tasks for others
- time off for medical appointments

assistive or adaptive device/technology

A device, system or equipment designed to help a person do a task. Examples include canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, hearing aids and personal emergency response systems. They can also be IT-related items such as screen-reading software.

barrier

Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation. Barriers can be physical, architectural, technological, attitudinal or based on information or communications. They can also be the result of a policy or practice. (Source: [Accessible Canada Act](#))

clients

People, businesses or their representatives served by, or using services provided by a government department.

disability

A disability is any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society. (Source: [Accessible Canada Act](#))

equity-seeking group

A group of persons who are disadvantaged based on one or more prohibited grounds of discrimination within the meaning of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. (Source: [Public Service Employment Act](#))

inclusion

The act of including someone or something as part of a group. An inclusive workplace is fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful.

Inclusion values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada’s evolving human rights framework. (Source: [Building a Diverse and Inclusive Public Service: Final Report of the Joint Union/Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion](#))

nothing without us

“Nothing without us” is one of the guiding principles of the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#). It means that persons with disabilities need to be fully and directly involved in the design of policies, plans, programs and services.

self-identification

Providing employment equity information for statistical purposes. The federal public service uses this information to monitor the progress of employment equity groups and to report on workforce representation.

systemic barrier

A systemic barrier is a pattern of behaviour in the policies and practices of an organization, which puts equity-seeking groups at a disadvantage.



Message from the Deputy Ministers

“We want you to imagine a Canada where we don’t leave anyone out. Where we seek out and celebrate disability diversity. Where we consider everyone’s needs from the beginning. A Canada where we are disability inclusive from the start. That’s the Canada we deserve. That’s the Canada we are creating – for everyone.”

-Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion

We are proud to share Employment and Social Development Canada’s (ESDC) 3-Year Accessibility Plan, based on the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and [Regulations](#). We developed this plan in consultation with our employees and clients with disabilities. It is in keeping with the principle of “nothing without us.”

Our vision is to be a leader in public service accessibility and a place where everyone can fully participate. This plan is a major step towards realizing that vision. We know that barriers to accessibility exist in our policies, programs, services and work environment. This accessibility plan outlines the actions we will take to identify, remove and prevent barriers at ESDC.

Our plan is ambitious and we will need to work together and try new approaches to realize our vision. We are prepared to adapt in response to feedback from our employees, clients, stakeholders and members of the disability community. We want ESDC to become a place where everyone can benefit from an inclusive, barrier-free environment that is accessible from the start.

To achieve this important goal, we will take action:

- **We will increase the representation of persons with disabilities in our workforce.** The public service as a whole made a commitment to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025. This commitment was made in the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#). ESDC’s target is to hire 1,187 persons with disabilities by 2025.
- **We will enhance our approach to workplace accommodations.** Our goal is to provide seamless, timely and integrated solutions. We will also support the implementation of the [Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport](#).
- **We will ensure our buildings, offices and facilities are accessible for employees, clients and the public.** We will also ensure that our hybrid work environment does not create new barriers for employees with disabilities.
- **We will ensure that all types of information and communications products are usable by all.** We will also ensure that we represent persons with disabilities fairly and accurately in speech, writing and images.

- **We will ensure that everyone has the knowledge to consider accessibility from the start of the procurement process.** This will help avoid delays and ensure that ESDC buys accessible goods and services.
- **We will involve persons with disabilities in the design of programs and services.** This will help address barriers in our service channels: in-person, phone and online.
- **We will review our human resources systems, data, policies and practices.** We will remove bias and promote an inclusive workplace where everyone can participate fully and equitably.
- **We will provide accessibility training** to all employees.
- **We will enhance leadership on accessibility at ESDC and make decisions using evidence.** We will encourage branches and regions in our department to develop their own accessibility plans to complement this one. These plans will respond to concerns from their employees and clients.

As we implement this plan, we will monitor and report on our progress every year. We will also keep listening to you and the feedback you have on this plan and the barriers you face. We know the success of this plan will require major organizational change. Each of us must take steps to remove barriers in our workplace and in the programs and services that we deliver.

As senior leaders at ESDC, we will set the bar high for how an accessible and inclusive ESDC should look and feel. We will know that we have made real progress when persons with disabilities tell us the change has become real for them.

Accessibility is everyone's business at ESDC, and we are confident that we can do this important work together.

Cliff Groen

(He/him/his)

Business Lead, Benefits Delivery Modernization, Employment and Social Development
Canada

Sandra Hassan

(She/her/hers)

Deputy Minister of Labour and Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social
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Tina Namiesniowski

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Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development

General

Alternate formats

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Feedback process description

Feedback from the public

Designated person to receive feedback

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizen Service Branch, is responsible for receiving feedback from the public on the ESDC Accessibility Plan or any issue related to accessibility.

What feedback can you submit?

You can submit feedback on this accessibility plan or the barriers you experience when dealing with ESDC. We welcome your feedback on the accessibility of our:

- services
- offices
- call centres
- websites

How we will use your feedback

We will use your feedback to improve accessibility at ESDC. We may address some feedback right away, or use it to develop future accessibility plans. We will include your feedback and how we have used it in our progress reports.

Confidentiality

Your feedback will not be associated with your name. We will share it only with those employees directly involved in improving accessibility at ESDC.

How to submit feedback

There are various ways you can submit your feedback. If you want to submit anonymous feedback, please use our online form and leave the contact information section blank.

We will acknowledge all accessibility feedback we receive, except feedback that is sent anonymously.

Online

- Submit your feedback using our [online form](#)

Email

- EDSC.ACCESSIBLE-ACCESSIBLE.ESDC@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Telephone

- 1-866-506-6806 (toll-free and video relay service)
- 1 800-465-7735 (toll-free teletypewriter)

Mail

Centre of Expertise for Accessible Client Service
Floor 3 Mail Drop 318
140 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau QC K1A 0J9

Feedback from employees of ESDC

Designated person to receive feedback

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources Services Branch, is responsible for receiving feedback from employees of ESDC.

What feedback can you submit?

Employees of ESDC can submit their feedback on the ESDC Accessibility Plan or any issue related to accessibility at ESDC.

How to submit feedback

Employees can contact the ESDC Accessibility Office using the email address or online feedback form available on the ESDC/SC Intranet site, under the Human Resources Services Branch tab.

Accessibility statement

We are committed to promoting best practices in accessibility. ESDC is implementing the European Union EN 301 549 standard. This standard includes the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA. It is the latest standard of the World Wide Web Consortium.

We know it is important to produce information that is accessible to everyone. If you have any difficulties accessing this content, please send us your [feedback](#).

Executive summary

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) was passed in 2019 and aims to achieve a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This involves identifying and removing the barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from participating fully and equally in society.

The Act requires Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to prepare and publish an accessibility plan every 3 years. These plans must show how we will identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for our employees and the people we serve.

More than 6 million Canadians over the age 15 have at least one disability, and that number is rising as our population ages. In addition, almost 3,000 employees at ESDC identify as having a disability.

Despite how common disability is in Canada, discrimination and systemic barriers to equal opportunity and inclusion still exist. In 2020, we started consulting our employees and clients with disabilities on this plan. Many told us that they had experienced barriers in the workplace and in accessing our programs and services.

The effects of these barriers are real. They can limit employees' contributions to their workplace, affect their careers and cause significant personal pain. In addition, when barriers prevent Canadians from accessing ESDC programs and services, this can affect their health, wellbeing and quality of life.

We know we have work to do to eliminate accessibility barriers at ESDC. We would like to go even further—our vision is to be a leader in public service accessibility.

This is our department's first accessibility plan. We developed it in the spirit of "nothing without us." This means that persons with disabilities must be involved in the design of policies, plans, programs and services.

We consulted the following groups between 2020 and 2022:

- employees with disabilities and managers
- clients with disabilities
- front-line staff
- outreach officers and service delivery partners

Our plan is broad and responds to the expectations of our clients and employees for bold, meaningful change. It lays the foundation for building an accessible and inclusive workplace, and for providing services to Canadians that are barrier free.

The ESDC Accessibility Plan outlines the [actions we will take over the next 3 years](#) to improve accessibility. We will identify, remove and prevent barriers in **6 of the priority areas set out in the Act**:

- employment
- built environment
- information and communication technologies (ICT)
- communication, other than ICT
- procurement of goods, services and facilities
- design and delivery of programs and services
- transportation (does not apply to ESDC's mandate at this time)

We also added **2 more priority areas** that reflect what we heard in our [consultations](#):

- workplace culture (added)
- data, research and analysis (added)

The activities in this plan will help us achieve the following **8 desired results**. Together, they will create a barrier-free ESDC.

- ESDC recruits and retains employees with disabilities, advances their careers, and provides timely access to accommodations.
- Persons with disabilities have barrier-free access to ESDC buildings, offices and facilities.

- Existing and new information and communication technologies (ICT) products, services and content are accessible for all users.
- ESDC communications are accessible and written in plain language.
- Accessibility criteria are considered when buying goods, services and facilities, and products include accessibility features where appropriate.
- In-person, phone and online client services are accessible for persons with disabilities.
- Everyone at ESDC has the knowledge and skills to make the department barrier free for persons with disabilities.
- ESDC makes evidence-based decisions to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.

We will develop internal implementation plans to ensure each activity is completed. These plans will include timelines, resources and leads who are accountable for making progress on each activity over the next 3 years. We will also develop a performance measurement framework to monitor our desired results and to report on progress.

We recognize that becoming a more accessible department is a journey, not a destination. The preferences and needs of persons with disabilities will continue to evolve. Improving accessibility at ESDC needs to be an ongoing effort at both the organizational and individual levels.

Our message is clear: at ESDC, accessibility is everyone's business. We will do what it takes to ensure every employee has the knowledge, tools and desire to make ESDC barrier free for all Canadians.

Our department

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), which includes Service Canada and the Labour Program, has a workforce of over 40,000 employees. Our mission is to build a stronger and more inclusive Canada, and to support Canadians in living productive and rewarding lives.

We are proud to deliver a wide range of programs and services that help Canadians move through life's transitions. For example, we:

- provide seniors with basic income security
- support unemployed workers and help them return to work
- help students to fund their post-secondary studies and to find a job
- help parents who are raising young children

- provide programs and income support to persons with disabilities and their families

Service Canada is the department's single point of access for some of our most well known programs. These include:

- Employment Insurance
- Old Age Security
- Canada Pension Plan
- Social Insurance Number
- Passport Program

In 2021 to 2022, our call centres answered close to 2 million requests for general information through 1 800 O-Canada. They also handled over 7 million requests for program-specific information. Our front-line staff helped 8.6 million people at 317 Service Canada Centres. And our clients accessed ESDC programs and services over 145 million times on Canada.ca.

As part of our commitment to offer Canadians high quality and timely services, we are working hard to respond to evolving client needs. We aim to deliver secure, easy-to-use and accessible services in all of our service channels.

ESDC is also one of the largest employers in the federal public service. We are committed to creating a diverse, respectful and inclusive workplace, where employees can fully participate. In 2022, Canadians recognized ESDC as one of Canada's Top 100 Employers and one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers.

The Accessible Canada Act

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) is a law passed in 2019. Its purpose is to make Canada barrier free for persons with disabilities by January 1, 2040. Federal organizations must identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. To do so, they must review their policies, programs, practices and services in the following priority areas:

- employment
- built environment
- information and communication technologies (ICT)
- communication, other than ICT
- procurement of goods, services and facilities
- design and delivery of programs and services

- transportation

The Act requires that organizations prepare and publish accessibility plans every 3 years, and include persons with disabilities in the process. Organizations must also set up a feedback process. The purpose is to receive and address feedback on their plans and accessibility barriers.

Finally, organizations must publish progress reports. These must describe the actions the organization has taken to remove barriers using the feedback it has received from clients and employees.

Developing the ESDC Accessibility Plan

“The principle of ‘nothing without us’ needs to be at the heart of this plan. The voices and experiences of people with all types of disabilities should guide our work. The ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network is proud to have played an active role in developing the department’s first accessibility plan. Our members share the common goal of creating an inclusive and accessible workplace at ESDC.”

-Kimberley Sauve, Chair, and Darren Deneumoustier, Champion, ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network

We began preparing the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) Accessibility Plan in summer 2019 when the *Accessible Canada Act* became law. Our first step was to set up the ESDC Accessibility Office (EAO). The EAO is responsible for preparing, publishing and monitoring the plan.

The EAO worked closely with the ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network and senior managers to raise awareness of the Act. In 2020, the EAO held engagement sessions with employees and managers to hear their views on accessibility barriers at ESDC. They worked together to develop solutions for removing them.

We used the findings from those sessions to create our [vision](#), [guiding principles](#) and an interim accessibility plan. Our senior management committee approved the interim plan in fall 2021. We also used a number of other sources:

- more than a dozen sessions with senior leaders and managers, and regular meetings of the Director General Working Group on Accessibility
- insights from subject matter experts, such as ESDC and university researchers
- advice from relevant ESDC committees, such as the Service Advisory Committee and the Inclusive Service Advisory Network
- findings from the annual Service Canada Client Experience Survey

- findings from virtual focus groups and in-depth interviews with clients with disabilities
- client feedback sent to Service Canada's Office for Client Satisfaction
- other surveys and data sources, including:
 - 2021 Survey on Accessibility at ESDC
 - 2021 ESDC Employee Pulse Survey
 - 2021 Onboarding Employees with Disabilities at ESDC Project
 - 2019 and 2020 Public Service Employee Survey
 - 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability
 - ESDC workforce demographic reports

We updated our plan in summer 2022, but our vision and guiding principles have not changed. This new accessibility plan reflects over a year of experience implementing activities to remove barriers and integrating lessons learned.

Vision

Our vision is to be a leader in public service accessibility.

We will eliminate barriers and maintain the changes required to prevent new ones from arising.

Our employees and clients with disabilities will be able to participate fully and equally in an inclusive, barrier-free environment. Everyone will be able to realize their potential and feel they belong.

Guiding principles

The following principles will guide the implementation of activities in this plan. They reinforce the importance of including many participants in the process to identify, remove and prevent barriers at ESDC.

Nothing without us

We will listen to and involve persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of this plan. Their lived experiences are key for ensuring we base our plan on sound evidence.

Collaboration

Employees with disabilities, managers and senior leaders will work together and use different approaches to identify, remove and prevent barriers. We will use external sources of expertise as appropriate.

Responsive, proactive and results-driven

We will prioritize activities that support accessibility by design and that will have the most meaningful impacts. We will make changes based on feedback, lessons learned, new standards, best practices and new regulations.

Evidence-based

We will identify, remove and prevent barriers using data, research and ongoing monitoring.

Transparency and accountability

We will encourage employees to adopt a growth mindset, establish clear roles and responsibilities, and report on our progress regularly and in plain language.

Building on our strengths

Since we began implementing our interim accessibility plan in fall 2021, we have done important groundwork to remove accessibility barriers at ESDC. Below are some examples.

- Since 2020, we hired 1,150 persons with disabilities. ESDC's target is to hire 1,187 employees with disabilities by 2025. We now expect to surpass that target.
- We led the first Canadian Congress on Disability Inclusion, including a virtual career fair. This provided a unique opportunity for persons with disabilities to meet with prospective employers from across the country.
- We created a full-time chair position for the Employees with Disabilities Network. This network also has a senior-level champion and receives support from the deputy minister champion for employees with disabilities.
- We created the Diversity Outreach, Recruitment, Retention and Advancement team, which works to eliminate and prevent systemic barriers in human resources practices.
- We improved our approach to managing accommodation requests by tracking them in our internal HR system and launching the Employee Wellness Profile.
- We made all of our mandatory training courses accessible.
- We created an online toolbox of resources for our employees on how to write accessible content and hold accessible meetings and events. We also trained over 700 employees on how to write web content in plain language.
- We performed accessibility audits on a number of ESDC buildings and facilities.
- We completed a research project and tested new approaches to improve the onboarding experience of new employees with disabilities.

- We conducted our first employee survey on accessibility. This allowed us to gain insights into the experiences of employees with disabilities at ESDC.
- We equipped all 317 Service Canada Centres with video remote interpretation. This service allows a client to access sign language interpretation by video conference. We also installed hearing loop devices at our service counters, which can be helpful for clients who are hard of hearing.
- We installed indoor navigation beacons in 43 Service Canada Centres as a means of assisting clients who are blind or have vision loss.
- We added new accessibility features to all of Service Canada's 2,800 client computer workstations, including accessible keyboards and speech-to-text function.
- We made ESDC's webpages on Canada.ca easier to understand. They now meet a grade 6 to 8 reading level. ESDC's top 150 webpages, which represent over 90% of all visits, now meet this level.

Consultations

"We need fundamental change to make accessibility and inclusion the default at ESDC."

- Participant, 2020 engagement sessions

What our employees said

Listening to our employees

From August to October 2020, the ESDC Accessibility Office (EAO) held 28 employee and manager engagement sessions with close to 200 participants. The purpose was to obtain their views on accessibility barriers at ESDC and potential solutions.

Employees talked honestly and openly about their lived experiences, which were sometimes difficult and emotionally charged.

Many managers, especially those new to their role, talked frankly about their own biases and gaps in knowledge and skills. They also talked about the challenges that make it hard to help employees with disabilities reach their potential at work.

Findings

The following issues emerged from the 28 employee and manager engagement sessions.

- Fear of **stigma, discrimination and harassment** is a barrier to successful outcomes for employees with disabilities. This fear also stops many employees with disabilities from **disclosing their disability** and asking for the support they need.

- Many employees **do not understand disabilities or the experiences of employees with disabilities** at work. Lack of understanding can create a lack of empathy or respect for employees with different abilities and ways of working.
- Employees said that **minimum accessibility standards in building codes are not enough** to make buildings and work spaces truly accessible. Another issue is inconsistent availability of accessibility features in ESDC buildings, facilities and workstations.
- Some employees experienced **barriers related to software, online collaboration tools and phone systems**.
 - Some employees could not access ESDC’s learning, pay and other systems because they are not compatible with some assistive technologies.
 - Some said they do not know enough about available IT solutions or don’t know where to go for information, training and help.
- **When documents and web content are not accessible**, some employees cannot participate fully in meetings or access the same information as their colleagues.
- Lack of opportunities at different points in an employee’s career can prevent them from reaching their full potential. Participants shared examples of **inequities in recruitment, onboarding, training and career advancement**.
 - Persons with disabilities can be screened out of hiring processes based on the way job requirements are written. For example, “ability to write” instead of “ability to communicate.”
 - Some human resources coordinators do not know how to obtain supports that a person with a disability may need to participate in an exam or interview.
 - Some participants did not receive the tools they needed in time to start their job. This includes ergonomic equipment and assistive or adaptive tools and technologies. Others said that managers did not offer certain types of accommodations that would have been helpful to them, such as:
 - flexible hours
 - reduced hours
 - remote work
 - Some managers talked about their own biases that make them reluctant to hire or promote an employee with a disability.
- The **process for requesting workplace accommodations** is confusing and inconsistent for employees and managers.
 - The information is hard to find, and the process requires many requests and approvals.

- Participants said that it was not clear which types of issues require the employee to make a formal duty to accommodate request.
- Managers and employees agreed that labour relations should not be involved in the duty to accommodate process. Having a disability is not a performance issue.
- Managers said that budgets do not always cover the costs of ergonomic, assistive or adaptive equipment, tools and technologies.
- Employees **do not have a safe, neutral place to go for help** when they face barriers in the workplace related to accessibility. Most turn to the ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network.
- Managers play a central role in culture change and providing support to employees who face barriers. But **not all managers have the knowledge, skills and supports** to be effective in their role.
- Senior managers are in a unique position to provide clear vision, guidance and adequate resources for accessibility. Participants felt that senior managers want to help, but **progress is too slow**.

What our clients said

Service Canada is ESDC's service delivery network. It offers information and services to Canadians in-person, by phone and online. Service Canada carried out a number of consultation activities with clients with disabilities, as well as with our service delivery partners and front-line staff.

The purpose of these consultations was to understand the needs and expectations of clients with disabilities, as well as the barriers they face when accessing our programs and services.

Listening to clients with disabilities

The **Service Canada Client Experience (CX) Survey** is conducted annually. The latest survey (2020 to 2021) had 4,200 participants, including 916 who identified as having a disability. It is a key tool used to measure the satisfaction of our clients with some of our largest programs:

- Employment Insurance
- Old Age Security
- Canada Pension Plan (CPP)
- CPP Disability
- Social Insurance Number

Service Canada also held the **Service Channel Access Consultation** to gather input for this plan. It included 12 virtual focus groups and 105 in-depth interviews done between July and December 2021. In total, 129 clients participated, including 72 clients who identified as having a disability. The range of disabilities included:

- physical disabilities such as mobility, flexibility, dexterity or chronic pain
- cognitive disabilities such as learning, developmental and memory-related
- disabilities related to mental health
- disabilities related to sight, hearing and communication

Listening to our partners

Service Canada has a national network of outreach officers who regularly engage community organizations. These organizations often provide direct support to clients who face barriers in accessing our programs and services. Barriers could include not living close to a Service Canada Centre, or not having access to the internet or a phone. To inform this plan, our outreach officers interviewed 349 community organizations regarding barriers to service.

Listening to front-line staff

Our front-line staff are our primary point of contact with clients. They have relevant insights into the barriers clients with disabilities face in accessing services in-person, by phone and online. To inform this plan, Service Canada also surveyed the following employees:

- Service Canada Centre managers (66 participants)
- call centre managers (146 participants)
- employees who design services and content for the web (80 participants)

Findings

The most common barriers identified in our consultations are summarized below.

Lower client satisfaction among persons with disabilities

- In our most recent CX Survey, most clients with disabilities said they were satisfied with their service experience. That said, **clients with disabilities were less satisfied** with our services than clients who do not have a disability (76% vs. 86%). This was the case for all 3 service channels: in-person, phone and online.
- More than two-thirds of clients with a disability said that they had experienced at least one barrier to accessing services, compared to half of clients overall.

Trouble navigating the Service Canada website

- Many clients could not find the information they were looking for or that they needed to apply for a program or service.
- Fewer clients with disabilities said that using the website made the process of applying for a program or service easier for them. Some clients with a mental health-related disability, such as anxiety, felt overwhelmed using the website.
- Clients with disabilities found it harder to register for My Service Canada Account.
- About 1 in 5 clients with a disability said they do not have a smart phone. A smaller number said they do not have a computer or access to the internet.
- Over half of the employees surveyed who design services and content for the web said they do not have the necessary training, knowledge and skills to make content accessible.

Complex information, program requirements and application forms

- Clients with disabilities found it more difficult to locate the information they needed to apply for a program or service. They also said that it was difficult to understand the application process. Employees working in all 3 service channels said that forms, instructions and procedures are too complex.
- It is difficult for many clients to resolve an issue or complete an application without following up with a call centre or in-person officer. Some partners suggested offering assistance to help clients fill out application forms.
- Clients also said that having to wait longer than expected to get their application or claim approved can be a barrier. This was especially true for those with a disability related to mental health.

Applying for Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP Disability)

- Clients found it difficult to apply for CPP Disability. Many needed to ask family members to help them complete the form. The most common challenges were:
 - the length of the application form
 - the complex language used on the form
 - the amount and type of information needed to complete the form
 - the small font size (both online and in print)

Accessibility of Service Canada Centres

- Service Canada Centres and client computer workstations were closed or had limited hours during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a barrier for some clients with disabilities who needed or preferred to access in-person services.

- Some clients with disabilities said that not being able to visit a Service Canada Centre during business hours was a barrier. This was due to work, childcare, distance or lack of public transportation.
- Clients noted accessibility issues in Service Canada Centres, such as:
 - doors not being accessible
 - distances to washrooms and parking lots
 - elevators being out of service
 - limited seating in the waiting area
 - limited space for mobility devices
 - high counters and limited space for taking notes
 - noise and other distractions
 - having to talk to a service officer through plexiglass while wearing a mask

Call centre wait times

- Clients said that having to wait a long time on the phone was a barrier. Some would prefer to request a callback.
- Some said it was difficult to find the correct phone number to call to request information or follow up on an issue or application. In addition, long menus and automatic voice prompts can be very confusing.

Needing assistance from family or other representative

- Some clients with disabilities use a representative to access services on their behalf. In some cases, these clients could not access services over the phone. The reason was that they did not know they had to submit an authorization form in advance. In a few cases, front-line staff would not accept video relay service calls from a sign-language interpreter without an authorization form.
- Some clients with a cognitive disability said they had to rely on family or friends to explain their issue to a service officer over the phone.
- Some clients with a visual impairment said it was easier to bring a family member to a Service Canada Centre to get help. They said it was more efficient than dealing with their issue over the phone.

Attitudes of front-line staff

- Most clients with disabilities who dealt with Service Canada staff were very satisfied with their professionalism, attitude, courtesy and respectfulness. For those who had a negative

experience, the most common accessibility-related complaint was about rude or insensitive behaviour by an officer, such as:

- making assumptions about a client's disability
- making ableist comments
- lacking patience
- Our partners suggested that all staff who provide services to the public should have disability sensitivity training. Some employees said that they do not have adequate training in serving clients with invisible disabilities.
- Our partners and employees stressed that compassion and flexibility in how we design and deliver services are very important for better meeting the needs of persons with disabilities.

Our plan: priority areas, desired results and activities

The ESDC Accessibility Plan is a 3-year plan (2022 to 2025) that proposes solutions to the accessibility barriers identified in our [consultations](#). The plan contains:

- **8 priority areas** (6 are from the [Accessible Canada Act](#))
- **8 desired results** that we will achieve by 2040
- **68 activities** that will help achieve the desired results

We will develop internal implementation plans to ensure activities are completed on time. The plans will include resources and leads who are accountable for making progress on each activity over the next 3 years. Some activities are within ESDC's direct control. For other activities, ESDC will work closely with federal partners to complete them. These partners include:

- Public Service Commission
- Public Services and Procurement Canada
- Shared Services Canada
- Statistics Canada
- Treasury Board Secretariat

Priority area 1: Employment

“I feel well supported by my manager and co-workers, but I’m frustrated with the policies and processes for getting the accommodations I need.”

-Participant, 2020 employee engagement sessions

Desired result 1: ESDC recruits and retains employees with disabilities, advances their careers, and provides timely access to workplace accommodations

We will achieve this result through the following 12 **activities**:

By 2023

- Create a centre of expertise that applies a holistic approach to workplace accommodations. It will provide guidance and resources that help employees and managers obtain workplace accommodations in a timely manner.
- Promote the Treasury Board Secretariat’s self-identification platform and the benefits of self-identifying as a person with a disability.
- Support the development and implementation of the [Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport](#) (timeline to be confirmed).
- Explore the development of a sponsorship program for executives who identify as a person with a disability. We will also explore a mentorship program for employees with disabilities.

By 2024

- Review our HR systems to identify systemic barriers that affect persons with disabilities, and develop an action plan. This includes our:
 - employment systems
 - workforce data
 - policies
 - practices
- Ensure hiring documents are accessible and include information about an employee’s right to accommodation in the workplace.

By 2025

- Support the public service commitment to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities. ESDC’s target is to hire 1,187 persons with disabilities. We will do this by:
 - holding targeted recruitment events

- promoting inventories of persons with disabilities who have qualified in a hiring process, and supporting hiring in all job groups and levels at ESDC

Ongoing

- Test new approaches to improve the onboarding experience of employees with disabilities at ESDC.
- Develop retention strategies for employees with disabilities. These include:
 - providing guidance to managers and employees on workplace accommodations
 - publishing a quarterly learning series and monthly bulletin
 - promoting the employee exit survey to better understand why employees with disabilities leave ESDC and address the issues that they raise
- Enhance ESDC's workforce reports by including information about recruitment, departures and promotions of employees with disabilities.
- Track accommodation requests to identify issues that cause delays, and develop solutions.
- Promote the Employee Wellness Profile. This is an online tool that helps employees and managers have conversations about workplace accommodations.

Priority area 2: Built environment

"Many of us face day-to-day obstacles that limit our full participation at work. We could remove these with intentional planning and by using an accessibility lens and universal design principles."

-Participant, 2020 employee engagement sessions

Desired result 2: Persons with disabilities have barrier-free access to ESDC buildings, offices and facilities

We will achieve this result through the following 4 **activities**:

By 2023

- Update ESDC's interior design standard to exceed minimum accessibility standards, with an added focus on invisible disabilities.
- Ensure that ESDC's hybrid work policies address the needs of employees with disabilities.

By 2025

- Complete accessibility audits for ESDC buildings, offices and facilities, and develop an action plan to address barriers.

Ongoing

- Engage stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, to ensure ESDC buildings, offices and facilities exceed minimum accessibility standards.

Priority area 3: Information and communication technologies (ICT)

“Management doesn’t place a high importance on ensuring that technology is accessible. This includes the systems I need to do my job, to take courses, to apply for leave or browse the intranet. I feel excluded when I can’t use collaborative tools to work with my team.”

-Participant, 2020 employee engagement sessions

Desired result 3: Existing and new information and communication technologies (ICT) products, services and content are accessible for all users

We will achieve this result through the following 10 **activities**:

By 2023

- Simplify the process for providing employees with adaptive IT tools and technologies.
- Enhance training for IT staff to better support employees who use adaptive IT tools and technologies.
- Explore options to increase ESDC capacity for usability and accessibility testing.
- Participate in the development of a federal ICT Accessibility Standard and Accessibility Scorecard (timeline to be confirmed).

By 2024

- Replace ESDC’s current learning management system with one that is accessible and cloud-based.

By 2025

- Complete an accessibility assessment of PeopleSoft, ESDC’s human resources management system, and fix issues that are identified.

Ongoing

- Advance the IT Accessibility Compliance Project. This project will make all ESDC IT applications compliant with accessibility standards (timeline to be confirmed).
- Conduct accessibility assessments before buying new ICT products.
- Continue to make online learning content and course delivery accessible, and provide alternate formats when needed.

- Improve ESDC’s current learning management system by fixing known accessibility issues and continuously monitor.

Priority area 4: Communication, other than ICT

“Day-to-day business practices at ESDC are not always accessible, including the way we write documents. This prevents some of us from participating fully in meetings and effectively communicating with co-workers.”

-Participant, 2020 employee engagement sessions

Desired result 4: ESDC communications are accessible and written in plain language

We will achieve this result through the following 6 activities:

By 2023

- Ensure ESDC executive committee meetings and meeting materials are accessible.
- Ensure documents published under proactive disclosure rules are accessible. These include:
 - Question Period cards
 - ministerial transition material
 - parliamentary committee documents
- Update and promote *A Way with Words and Images*. This guidance helps federal employees use appropriate language to communicate effectively about disability in writing, speech and images.

Ongoing

- Update and promote guidance on preparing accessible content and holding accessible meetings and events.
- Provide training on how to create accessible and plain language content for the web.
- Ensure that all-staff meetings and events held at the department-wide level are accessible.

Priority area 5: Procurement of goods, services and facilities

“It can sometimes take 6 months to a year to obtain the equipment, tools and supports we need to do our job.”

-Participant, 2020 employee engagement sessions

Desired result 5: Accessibility criteria are considered when buying goods, services and facilities, and products include accessibility features where appropriate

We will achieve this result through the following 7 **activities**:

By 2023

- Explore options to prioritize buying accessibility-related goods and services in response to accommodation requests.
- Explore options for creating a central fund for buying workplace accommodations.
- Ensure managers are aware that they can use acquisition cards to buy different types of accommodations.

By 2025

- Conduct an assessment to better understand the issues in the procurement process that cause delays in buying accessible goods and services.

Ongoing

- Ensure procurement officers are trained to help managers consider accessibility requirements at the start of the procurement process.
- Make accessibility assessments mandatory for project approvals.
- Ensure managers are aware of the resources available to help them define accessibility requirements for the goods and services they are buying.

Priority area 6: Design and delivery of programs and services

“I have a visual impairment. For me, it was easier to bring a family member to a Service Canada Centre to help resolve my issue than handling it over the phone.”

-Participant, Service Channel Access Consultation, 2021

Desired result 6: In-person, phone and online client services are accessible for persons with disabilities

We will achieve this result through the following 12 **activities**:

By 2025

- Inform our clients of services that do not yet meet accessibility standards, and give them alternatives for accessing these services. We will do this by publishing accessibility statements for our websites, Service Canada Centres and contact centres.

- Update the training courses for ESDC employees who develop and deliver services. This will help them gain the skills they need to better support people with various types of disabilities.
- Make it easier for persons with disabilities to provide accessibility-related feedback on programs and services without having to submit a formal complaint.
- Strengthen the role of the Centre of Expertise for Accessible Client Service. This team offers guidance on making services more accessible.
- Add a disability inclusion lens to the suite of tools used to perform intersectional analysis. This will ensure the lived experiences and needs of persons with disabilities are considered in policy and program development.

Ongoing

- Ensure all new or improved services (in-person, phone and online) are developed in consultation with persons with disabilities and address their feedback.
- Ensure services, at all stages of development, meet or exceed standards for web accessibility, interior design and call centre best practices.
- Address barriers in the in-person channel, including gaps identified by real property accessibility audits. We will also use outreach approaches to make it easier for persons with disabilities to access our programs and services.
- Address barriers and develop accessibility best practices for the phone channel. This includes making it easier to use assistive technologies and to authorize a third party to act on a client's behalf.
- Address barriers in the online channel. This includes:
 - making program information easier to find and understand
 - improving online forms
 - providing clear letters and notices
- Conduct client satisfaction surveys with persons with disabilities.
- Ensure the tools, documents and facilities used to deliver grants and contributions programs are more accessible.

Priority area 7: Workplace culture

“I will advocate for approaches that build in accessibility from the start. I remain open to listening to your ideas about how we can build a true culture of inclusion at ESDC. Every change that we make brings us a step closer to becoming a barrier-free workplace. Accessibility is everyone’s business — I encourage you to make it yours.”

-Tina Namiesniowski, Deputy Minister and DM Champion for Employees with Disabilities at ESDC

Desired result 7: Everyone at ESDC has the knowledge and skills to make the department barrier free for persons with disabilities

We will achieve this result through the following 12 **activities**:

By 2023

- Develop a communications strategy for the ESDC Accessibility Plan, as well as products to raise awareness of accessibility and disability inclusion.
- Centralize accessibility learning and training.
- Develop a costing and funding framework for the ESDC Accessibility Plan.
- Review internal governance and accountability on accessibility and implement changes as appropriate.
- Explore options for creating an “accessibility ambassadors” initiative.

By 2024

- Encourage regions and branches to develop their own accessibility plans that complement the ESDC Accessibility Plan. Activities may include:
 - developing new awards and recognition options
 - encouraging employees to self-identify
 - naming branch accessibility champions
 - centralizing accessibility-related resources

By 2025

- Develop and implement an accessibility learning strategy and monitor learning needs.
- Build the capacity of the ESDC Accessibility Office as it relates to publishing the department’s accessibility plan and progress reports, and receiving feedback.

Ongoing

- Consult and actively engage the ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network on the design and implementation of accessibility initiatives.
- Develop and deliver annual programming and communications for:
 - National AccessAbility Week
 - International Day of Persons with Disabilities
 - other events related to accessibility and disability inclusion
- Ensure that employees can easily find tools and resources on accessibility and workplace accommodations.
- Encourage all employees to include clear, actionable accessibility commitments in their performance agreements.

Priority area 8: Data, research and analysis

“Data underpins everything we do and guides us in the decisions we make every day. How we collect it, manage it, and harness the power of data is critical as we improve services to Canadians.”

-Lori MacDonald, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of ESDC and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada

Desired result 8: ESDC makes evidence-based decisions to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility

We will achieve this result through the following 5 **activities**:

By 2023

- Conduct research on cognitive disabilities and update the workplace accommodation process as needed.
- Develop a performance measurement framework for the ESDC Accessibility Plan.

By 2024

- Assess ESDC’s diversity and inclusion training courses that relate to accessibility to ensure they are meeting the needs of employees.

Ongoing

- Collect employee feedback on the implementation of the ESDC Accessibility Plan.
- Conduct employee surveys on accessibility.

Priority area: Transportation

This priority area does not apply to ESDC at this time. For this reason, we have not developed activities related to transportation.

Accountability and governance

We created the Director General Working Group and the Assistant Deputy Minister Committee on the ESDC Accessibility Plan. They oversee many aspects of accessibility at ESDC and play a leadership role in developing and implementing this plan.

The Employees with Disabilities Network also plays an important role in shaping accessibility at ESDC. It is an employee-led forum, and many members are employees with disabilities who have lived experience with accessibility barriers. ESDC relies on the Network for meaningful engagement and leadership when implementing accessibility initiatives. The Network has an executive champion and a deputy minister champion, who act as agents for change. They influence and engage other senior leaders and ensure that decisions are made with accessibility in mind.

Finally, the ESDC Portfolio Management Board, chaired by the Deputy Minister, is responsible for approving the ESDC Accessibility Plan and progress reports. Members of the Board play a key role in enabling accountability, stewardship and transparency on accessibility.

Monitoring and reporting

This 3-year plan includes a wide range of activities. We expect these activities will reinforce and embed the changes that will benefit clients and employees with disabilities.

To implement the plan, we will work with persons with disabilities, stakeholders and governance committees. We will update the plan to reflect lessons learned, new research and best practices.

In accordance with the *Accessible Canada Act* and Regulations, we will publish an updated accessibility plan every 3 years. Progress reports will be published every year in between. In our progress reports, we will present an overview of the feedback we have received and how we have used it.

The ESDC Accessibility Office (EAO) will be responsible for monitoring the plan to ensure accountability for results. We will develop a performance measurement framework, drawing on the [Results Framework](#) for the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada. We will use this framework to report on progress.

Conclusion

The Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) Accessibility Plan sets out how we will identify, remove and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities. As one of the largest employers and service delivery organizations in the federal public service, ESDC will continue to lead by example.

In our first year of implementing our interim plan, we have achieved a lot and have learned a number of lessons. These will help us achieve the results of this new 3-year plan.

Perhaps our most valuable lesson has been how important it is to involve persons with disabilities in the design and development of new programs, services and policies. When we make our department more accessible for persons with disabilities, we make it a better place to work. We are also able to improve the accessibility of our programs and services for everyone.

This plan is just a starting point for making ESDC barrier free. To be truly inclusive, we need to build accessibility into everything we do, including our meetings, documents, hiring practices, and products and services. Every employee in our organization has a role to play, from our senior managers to our front-line staff. At ESDC, accessibility is everyone's business.