

**Progress Report on the
Employment and Social
Development Canada
3-Year Accessibility Plan -
2023**

**Accessibility is everyone's
business**

December 1, 2023



Employment and Social Development Canada

**Progress Report on the Employment and Social Development Canada 3-Year
Accessibility Plan – 2023**

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PDF

Cat. No. Em9-14E-PDF

ISSN 2817-8300




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Glossary

accessibility

The degree to which a product, service, program or environment can be accessed or used by all. (Source: [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#))

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. (Source: [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#))

barrier

Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of people 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. (Source: [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#))

common hybrid work model

The federal public service adopted a common hybrid work model that will see employees work on site at least 2 to 3 days each week, or 40% to 60% of their regular schedule. (Source: [Direction on prescribed presence in the workplace](#))

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 people 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](#))

intersectionality

An analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person’s identity (for example, sex, gender, age, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation, ability) combine to create particular forms of discrimination and privilege. (Source: [Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology](#))

microaggression

A comment or action that is regarded as subtly expressing prejudice against a person or group of people. (Source: [Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology](#))

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, progress reports, 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. (Source: [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#))

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. (Source: [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#))

About this progress report

The Accessible Canada Act

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA) was passed in 2019 and aims to achieve a barrier-free Canada by 2040. Under the ACA, regulated organizations must identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility in 7 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

To do so, they must review their policies, programs, practices and services.

The ACA also requires organizations to publish an accessibility plan every 3 years and develop progress reports in between. These reports must describe the actions the organization has taken to remove barriers using the accessibility feedback it has received from persons with disabilities.

This progress report applies to two regulated organizations:

- Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)
- Canada Employment Insurance Commission (CEIC)

ESDC administers the Employment Insurance Program on behalf of the CEIC. This means that the policies, programs, processes and practices that ESDC uses to carry out its operations also apply to the CEIC.

Implementing ESDC's 3-Year Accessibility Plan

This report covers the first 7 months of implementation since we published the [ESDC 3-Year Accessibility Plan](#) in December 2022. In it, we provide an update on the progress we have made toward achieving our vision and the 8 desired results in our plan:

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.

Desired results

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

Built environment: Persons with disabilities have barrier-free access to ESDC buildings, offices and facilities

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

Communication, other than ICT: ESDC communications are accessible and written in plain language

Procurement of goods, services and facilities: Accessibility criteria are considered when buying goods, services and facilities, and products include accessibility features where appropriate

Design and delivery of programs and services: In-person, phone and online client services are accessible for persons with disabilities

Workplace culture: Everyone at ESDC has the knowledge and skills to make the department barrier-free for persons with disabilities

Data, research and analysis: ESDC makes evidence-based decisions to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility

Message from the Deputy Ministers

ESDC has made progress towards our accessibility goals and there is still more to do. It's time to move from good intentions and ambitious plans to tangible action for clients and employees.

- Tina Namiesniowski, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development, and ESDC Champion for Employees with Disabilities

We are proud to share Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) first progress report on our [3-year accessibility plan](#). The accessibility plan responds to the requirements of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and [Regulations](#). We developed this report using feedback and consultation input from our employees and clients with disabilities.

We would like to thank the branches, regions, teams, and the ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network. They have been leading the way, working on the plan's activities, identifying and removing barriers, and promoting awareness of accessibility and disability inclusion. We also want to acknowledge all the individuals in our department who are passionate about learning, educating others and taking initiative to make ESDC barrier-free.

In this report, we update you on the progress we have made since we published the ESDC Accessibility Plan in December 2022. We have gone beyond initial steps and made strides in all [8 priority areas of our plan](#). Here are some highlights:

- we strongly contributed to the public service goal of hiring 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025. We hired 1,450 persons with disabilities from April 2020 to June 2023
- we launched the Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential, which offers guidance to employees and managers on workplace accommodations
- we carried out accessibility audits on nearly all our buildings and offices, and we finalized a new interior design standard to better meet the needs of persons with invisible disabilities
- we made Calibri 12 the default font for MS Outlook to improve the accessibility and readability of emails across the department
- we created accessible procurement guidance for managers and simplified our procurement processes
- we made video remote interpretation (VRI) available in more of our Service Canada Centres for clients who use sign language
- we developed new training for our front-line staff so they can better assist persons with disabilities

- we launched our accessibility learning strategy, offering a suite of courses for employees and managers

These are just a few examples that demonstrate our commitment to the goals of our accessibility plan. But we know that accessibility is a journey, and we still have important work ahead.

One challenge we faced this year was providing enough support for employees with disabilities in our new hybrid work environment. Some employees said that changes were made to the workplace without enough input from them and that guidance was sometimes unclear.

We also heard from clients who are deaf or hard of hearing. They suggested ways we could improve our in-person and phone interactions with them. Some would like to be able to text us their questions. Others appreciated the VRI services in our Service Canada Centres.

As Deputy Ministers, we want our employees and clients to know that we value your feedback. We are committed to removing the barriers you have faced and to sharing our progress on the accessibility plan. While sustainable change will take time, showing a sense of urgency, ambition and accountability is important to maintain credibility and confidence in the work underway and ahead.

We know that successfully implementing this plan will make a real difference for all our employees and clients, including those with disabilities.

Accessibility is everyone's business at ESDC. We will keep identifying, removing and preventing and removing barriers in our workplace and in the policies, programs and services that we deliver. We encourage all ESDC employees to continue working hard to make our vision of a barrier-free ESDC a reality. Each of us has a role to play. Stay engaged, be curious, and let's keep making progress together.

Andrew Brown

(He/him/his)

Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development

Cliff Groen

(He/him/his)

Associate Deputy Minister and Business Lead, Benefits Delivery Modernization, Employment and Social Development

Sandra Hassan

(She/her/hers)

Deputy Minister of Labour and Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development

Tina Namiesniowski

(She/her/hers)

Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development, and ESDC Champion for Employees with Disabilities

Lori MacDonald

(She/her/hers)

Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada

Paul Thompson

(He/him/his)

Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development

Message from the Employees with Disabilities Network

Networks are a real and important part of making things better for our employees and clients. They provide valuable insights for improving accessibility.

- Darren Deneumoustier, Champion, ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network

At ESDC, employees with disabilities play a crucial role in our accessibility efforts. As the Chair and Co-Chair of the Employees with Disabilities Network (EwDN), we understand how important it is to involve employees with disabilities in this work. We are proud of the many employees with disabilities who shared their thoughts and experiences for this report.

We want to celebrate the progress we have made at ESDC this year. This progress is evident in the work we have done to achieve the goals in the 3-year accessibility plan and in the grassroots initiatives led by employees across the department.

Since the launch of the plan, employees with disabilities have told us that they appreciate senior management's support for employee-led networks. They also feel that having access to more accessibility training and events that promote accessibility and disability inclusion is making a difference. The progress that the department has made in the first year of the plan shows that we can create a barrier-free future at ESDC if we continue to make accessibility a priority in everything we do.

However, we recognize that there is still much work ahead. Our members have shared that barriers persist our workplace. In our ever-changing work environment, new obstacles have appeared, and we will need new strategies and solutions to address them.

We are thankful for having dedicated leadership that is committed to going beyond what the law requires. We want to acknowledge the support of our Champion, Darren Deneumoustier, and Senior Associate Deputy Minister Tina Namiesniowski, who is the EDSC Champion for Employees with Disabilities. Both set a positive example by promoting employee networks, advocating for our needs, and showing a clear commitment to accessibility for employees and clients.

Employee networks play a crucial role in making our department more accessible. The EwDN provides a safe space for employees with disabilities and allies to come together, discuss important matters, and access resources. We create practical action plans that focus on raising awareness and making meaningful progress. Good planning sets the stage for success and helps us turn intentions into action.

As we move forward, we must strengthen our relationships and be practical while still having big aspirations. The experiences of employees with disabilities are valuable. When we break down biases and barriers, we can more easily contribute to our organization. We are excited to keep working together to create a more accessible ESDC for everyone.

Kimberley Sauve

(She/her/hers)

Chair, ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network

Aisha Thomas-Serran

(She/her/hers)

Co-chair, ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network

General

Alternate formats

This progress report and our feedback process description are available by request in large print, print, braille, MP3 (audio), e-text and DAISY formats.

Online

Submit your request using our [online form](#)

Email

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

Telephone

- 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232) (toll-free and video relay service)
- 1-800-926-9105 (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 process description

Feedback from the public

Designated person to receive feedback

The Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizen Service Branch, is responsible for receiving feedback from the public.

What feedback can you submit?

You can submit feedback on our accessibility plan, progress report, 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 or 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 in the same way it was sent unless it was 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 our accessibility plan, progress report, 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

ESDC is committed to promoting best practices in accessibility in all our policies, programs, services and workplaces. Accessibility is a fundamental part of the client and employee experience. We are 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

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is dedicated to making Canada more inclusive and accessible. We published our first [3-year accessibility plan](#) in December 2022 in response to the requirements of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA) and [Regulations](#).

The plan lays out our vision and actions to improve the accessibility of our programs, policies, services and workplace. As we near the end of the first year of our plan's implementation, we are pleased to update you on our progress.

In the following pages, you will learn about how we are putting into action the 68 activities in our plan, which cover the 7 priority areas set out in the ACA, plus 2 more:

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

This report also features “spotlights” that show how these actions are making ESDC more accessible for persons with disabilities in tangible ways.

We are making good progress on our commitments, and we expect to complete 25 activities in our plan by the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year. We have also identified, removed and prevented new accessibility barriers, thanks to your feedback and ideas. Many individuals and

groups within our department are working on initiatives that go beyond our accessibility plan. Their creativity and leadership are paving the way toward a barrier-free ESDC.

As we heard from our employees and clients with disabilities, we are off to a good start, but we must do more and do it faster. In our [Consultations](#) and [Feedback](#) sections you can read about the input we gathered from employees and clients with disabilities to assess our progress. We can only claim success if our actions truly improve the experiences of persons with disabilities.

We are striving to build a workforce and workplace that reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in Canada. In doing so, we acknowledge that systemic barriers to accessibility still exist and that they can have profound effects on employee well-being. We have work ahead to become fully inclusive and barrier-free.

One challenge we had this year was effectively supporting employees with disabilities in our implementation of our hybrid work model. While the model aims to apply a standard approach to where and how we work, we heard concerns that employees with disabilities were not consulted enough. Fulfilling accommodations requests in a timely manner was also a challenge. This was mostly due to a surge in demand as many employees returned to the office after several years of remote work.

And while we have exceeded our departmental hiring target for persons with disabilities that was set in the 2020 [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#), persons with disabilities are still under-represented in our workforce. Further, the results from the latest Public Service Employee Survey tell us that persons with disabilities are the equity group that faces the highest rates of harassment, discrimination and microaggressions on the job.

There is no doubt about the ongoing importance of improving our individual and collective understanding of accessibility, all types of disabilities, and the challenges employees with disabilities face in the work environment.

Our clients have shared their thoughts too. They appreciate the new accessibility features in our Services Canada Centres, such as wayfinding navigation and video remote interpretation. However, our latest Client Experience Survey found that persons with disabilities are less satisfied with their overall service experience compared to those without disabilities. In addition, clients who are deaf or hard of hearing told us that they would like more support from our call centres that is tailored to their needs.

We want everyone to know that we value your feedback. This year's report will show you how we are using your feedback, consultation input and other data sources to improve our progress every day. We are committed to finding more ways to engage with you in the future so we can all benefit from a barrier-free ESDC.

Feedback

All I wanted to do was change my direct deposit information for my pension payments and have someone email me the instructions. Instead, I was told to call the helpdesk. But I'm deaf and prefer using email.

- ESDC client

In this section, we provide a summary of the feedback we received through our [accessibility feedback processes](#) from December 2022 to July 2023. Our department has two processes: one for the public on our [website](#), and a separate one for employees on our intranet.

The feedback we received is organized by the [priority areas](#) outlined in our accessibility plan.

We received a **total of 76 pieces of feedback** for this report. We tagged each feedback item by barrier-type(s). In some cases, we tagged a single feedback item with up to 3 tags depending on the nature of the feedback, barrier or issue, for a total of 146 tags.

During the reporting period, all feedback was sent to us via email or online form by the following groups:

- Employees: 72%
- ESDC clients: 11%
- Representatives of an organization: 11%
- Members of the public: 4%
- Other: 2%

Feedback by priority area

ESDC Accessibility Plan priority areas	Feedback tags by barrier-type
1. Employment	46
2. Built environment	16
3. Information and communication technologies (ICT)	12
4. Communication, other than ICT	20
5. Procurement of goods, services and facilities	3
6. Design and delivery of programs and services	19

ESDC Accessibility Plan priority areas	Feedback tags by barrier-type
7. Workplace culture	27
8. Data, research and analysis	1
Other	2
Total feedback tags	146

Feedback themes

Common Hybrid Work Model: About 13% of the feedback we received was about our new work model. Employees said it was implemented too fast and without enough consultation. Some said it was hard to work in open offices after working from home during the pandemic, especially for those with sensory challenges or chronic conditions. They felt that the new model did not consider their needs and caused stress. People with vision and mobility disabilities were concerned about having to book a different workstation every day and the challenge of having to familiarize themselves with different office layouts.

Workplace accommodations: About 28% of the feedback was from employees who said that they had trouble getting the workplace accommodations they need. Some said it took a long time, and others thought the process for requesting accommodations was confusing. Some employees were frustrated because their managers were not helpful. During the reporting period, we referred several employees to the Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential to get assistance with the process.

Services for clients with hearing disabilities: About 5% of feedback came from clients with hearing disabilities who said they needed better ways to communicate with the department. Some had trouble communicating with staff in our Service Canada Centres and accessing programs by phone as our call centres are not equipped to take calls from people who use sign language.

Fear of self-disclosure: Some employees were afraid to tell their manager or colleagues that they have a disability. They thought it might lead to negative consequences or affect their career advancement.

Barriers in training and learning: About 10% of feedback was about the accessibility of training and learning materials. Some materials were not compatible with screen readers. We received several emails from new employees who could not easily access the training systems they need to work in our processing and call centres.

Requests for assistive and adaptive technology: We referred many employees to our IT Accessibility Office to get advice on items such as screen readers and other assistive and adaptive tools. Another popular topic was how to make documents accessible.

Requests for collaboration: Various federal departments asked the ESDC Accessibility Office for advice on implementing accessibility plans and sharing resources.

We received less feedback about the following priority areas: Procurement of goods, services and facilities; and Data, research and analysis. And we did not receive any comments on our feedback processes.

Implementing feedback

The ESDC Accessibility Office (EAO) works with the Office for Client Satisfaction and the Centre of Expertise for Accessible Client Service to respond to the feedback we receive. This is what we do with the feedback:

- help the employee or client by offering guidance, tools or referrals to experts inside or outside the department to address the issue
- work with the client to gather more information
- send the feedback to the right branch or business line (e.g., Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, Passport, Canada Student Financial Assistance Program) so they can address the issue
- log the barrier in our tracking tool and use the feedback to shape future accessibility plans
- include the feedback in our governance reports and bring systemic or recurring issues to the attention of senior management

We now have more feedback on accessibility than ever before. However, considering our department's size and the number of employees and clients we serve, we think the amount of feedback is likely lower than it could be. We will address this by promoting our feedback processes and encouraging our employees and clients to send us their input.

We are also working with other government departments to learn from their experiences in managing feedback. We will continue to work closely with partners across the department to make sure we are using feedback to remove barriers and to consider new ideas on how to improve accessibility.

Consultations

Things are getting better, but 2040 is too long to wait for true inclusion.

- Participant, employee consultations

In this section you will read about the consultations we held and the findings we used to assess our progress in implementing our accessibility plan. Consulting persons with disabilities helps us produce an accurate account of our department's progress toward becoming barrier-free.

To prepare this progress report, we consulted employees and clients with disabilities by proactively engaging them beyond our formal feedback processes. The participants we consulted identified as having a wide range of disabilities. You can find more information in [Appendix B: Employee consultations](#) and [Appendix C: Client consultations](#).

Consulting our employees

We collected information from employees to obtain their views on the progress we had made on our accessibility plan since it was published in December 2022. We wanted to know what was helping or hindering our progress. Based on their comments, we identified common themes and areas for improvement.

We used several data sources to assess our accessibility progress this year, including:

- Employees with Disabilities Network survey on progress on ESDC's Accessibility Plan: 189 respondents
- Consultation with the Employees with Disabilities Network Executive Committee and interview with the Network Champion: 11 participants
- Employees with Disabilities Network annual survey: 176 respondents
- Public Service Employee Survey: 3,020 ESDC respondents who self-identified as having a disability

We hear you

Overall perception of progress

We learned that many employees are not familiar with the ESDC Accessibility Plan. For those who were familiar with it, their perceptions of progress were mixed. Some noted small changes in various priority areas but also expressed that there was room for improvement.

In the EwDN survey on accessibility progress, the largest group of respondents, 40%, did not feel that tangible progress had been made. However, almost 25% felt that ESDC is more

accessible now than it was a year ago. Nearly 20% felt that ESDC is less accessible now than it was a year ago, and 15% did not know.

Employees had concerns about slow progress and how potential budget cuts could slow things down. They identified these as the top 3 priority areas where we should focus our efforts:

1. Employment
2. Workplace culture
3. Built environment

The EwDN survey on progress revealed differing views on progress between the various priority areas:

Employment: About 50% of respondents observed small or moderate changes, while 10% saw major changes. However, 40% reported no change or did not know.

Built environment: About 45% observed small or moderate changes, while about 15% saw major changes. However, just over 40% reported no change, or did not know.

Information and communication technologies (ICT): About 55% observed small or moderate changes, while just over 15% saw major changes. However, just over 30% reported no change, or did not know.

Communication, other than ICT: About 55% observed small or moderate changes, while nearly 30% saw major changes. However, just over 15% reported no change, or did not know.

Procurement of goods, services, and facilities: Over 30% observed small or moderate changes, while around 10% saw major changes. However, almost 60% reported no change, or did not know.

Design and delivery of programs and services: About 40% observed small or moderate changes, while just over 20% saw major changes. However, almost 40% reported no change, or did not know.

Workplace culture: Just over 55% observed small or moderate changes, while around 10% saw major changes. However, just over 35% reported no change, or did not know.

Data, research and analysis: About 55% observed small or moderate changes, and nearly 10% saw major changes. However, just over 35% reported no change, or did not know.

Areas where progress has been made

We also asked employees to tell us about any activities, initiatives, events or other factors that they felt were helping to make ESDC more accessible for persons with disabilities. Out of the 189 employees who answered the EwDN survey, more than half (100) answered this open-ended question.

Champions and employee networks: Employees felt that exceptional leadership and accessibility champions drive success. The EwDN plays a pivotal role in supporting employees

with disabilities. Employees emphasized the need to continue investing in and promoting employee networks. They said these groups offer a lot of help, knowledge, resources and advocacy for employees with disabilities.

Communications and events: Employees said they appreciate that more events are being held to raise awareness of accessibility and disability inclusion. Several mentioned the Canadian Congress on Disability Inclusion. They believe these events help create a sense of community and foster a culture of accessibility.

Accessible meetings: Respondents were pleased that meetings have become more accessible. They mentioned the improved use of sign language interpretation, closed captioning and accessible materials.

Awareness and learning: Some respondents noted the department's efforts to promote accessibility training and make learning materials accessible for everyone.

Inclusive management attitudes: Employees mentioned that having an informed manager with an inclusive attitude, as well as leaders who show a positive attitude in meetings and corporate communications, help make ESDC more accessible.

Key challenges

Employee consultations revealed mixed perceptions of progress and the desire to make improvements in the following areas:

Workplace accommodations: improvements have been made, but challenges persist, including a complicated process, long wait times and inconsistent availability of accommodation options and rationales for approvals. Some employees talked about the need for more compassion and empathy throughout the process.

Manager knowledge and training: managers play a significant role in creating an inclusive workplace, but employees said that managers lack the training and commitment to remove accessibility barriers. Employees are pleased with the amount and types of accessibility training available but emphasized the need for mandatory training for managers.

Workplace technology: Some employees noted that IT accessibility can be a challenge for employees who use screen readers, including compatibility issues with internal systems.

Harassment, discrimination and microaggressions: in the latest Public Service Employee Survey (PSES), 17% of employees with disabilities reported experiencing harassment on the job, while 6% of employees without disabilities did. Additionally, 16% of employees with disabilities experienced discrimination on the job compared to only 4% of employees without disabilities. And according to the EwDN annual survey, 48% of respondents said they had experienced discrimination, harassment or microaggressions at work because of their disability.

Valuing lived experience: some employees with disabilities felt that the department does not truly value the experiences and talents of employees with disabilities. In the latest PSES, 65% of employees with disabilities feel valued at work compared to 77% of employees without disabilities.

Consulting our clients

Service Canada is ESDC's service delivery network that offers information, programs and services to Canadians in-person, by phone and online. Service Canada is developing plans in consultation with clients with disabilities, as well as with our service delivery partners and front-line staff, to remove barriers in our programs and services.

Below you will read about the information we gathered from our clients about the accessibility of our programs and services. The goal was to identify key themes and areas of concern, so we could better understand the challenges that clients with disabilities face, and to make improvements.

We used several data sources to assess the accessibility of our programs and services:

- [Service Canada's annual Client Experience \(CX\) Survey 2021-22](#): 935 respondents identified as having a disability. Of the respondents with disabilities, 83% applied for Canada Pension Plan Disability
- CX Survey 2021-22 qualitative research: 78 participants. These participants were selected among the CX Survey respondents either because they reported lower satisfaction with their service experience and/or they experienced an issue related to accessibility
- Video remote interpretation exit surveys: 75 respondents

We hear you

Overall perception of progress

According to our latest CX survey, the overall satisfaction of clients with disabilities with their service experience decreased in 2022, dropping from 76% in 2021 to 69%. The decrease in satisfaction was similar to the decrease in satisfaction reported by all clients.

Clients with disabilities reported lower satisfaction with the services provided in-person, online and through specialized call centres. Declines in satisfaction were widespread and may have been influenced by external factors such as pandemic-related fatigue, rising living costs and disruptions in the job market.

There were also some significant gaps between clients with disabilities and clients overall in relation to certain aspects of their service experience. Clients with disabilities had more difficulty with the following:

- finding program information
- figuring out if they were eligible for a program
- finding out the steps to apply
- knowing what information to provide when applying for a program
- putting together the information needed to apply
- completing steps online

In addition, clients with disabilities found it more difficult to apply for the following programs:

- Canada Pension Plan Disability
- Employment Insurance
- Guaranteed Income Supplement
- Old Age Security

Areas where progress has been made

Attitudes of front-line staff: Many respondents felt staff were respectful and helpful.

Video remote interpretation (VRI) in Service Canada Centres: Notably, 87% of clients who completed an exit survey after using the VRI service gave their interaction a 5-star rating. Only 8% gave a 3-star rating or below.

Key challenges

Trouble using the Service Canada website: More clients found it difficult to navigate and understand information on the Service Canada website.

Complicated information, program requirements and forms: Clients also faced challenges with long forms and complex program requirements.

Applying for Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D): Clients expressed that they had trouble applying for CPP-D, especially figuring out the online steps. Many were not sure about whether they had filled out their application correctly.

Accessibility of Service Canada Centres: Some clients faced barriers, such as being unable to visit a Service Canada Centre during business hours or living too far away. Clients also expressed dissatisfaction with long wait times and line-ups. These delays were particularly challenging for clients with mobility restrictions.

Call centre wait times: Although fewer clients expressed dissatisfaction with long wait times in 2022 compared to 2021, some still had trouble getting through to an agent in a reasonable time.

Needing assistance from others: More clients in 2022 needed help from people other than Service Canada staff to access services. Some clients with vision impairments said that they had to ask family members for help. Others used a magnifying glass or printed their form or application in a larger font in order to read it.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

Clients who receive disability-related benefits suggested the following improvements:

- allowing clients to use a narrative format to describe their situation, and having more space to fill out their responses
- giving the option to answer questions verbally instead of in writing
- giving clearer, simpler instructions on what is needed to apply or qualify for benefits
- changing the font size on forms to 14 or 16
- creating a dedicated help line for clients applying for disability benefits

Progress by areas in section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act*

In this section, we explain how we are working toward our goal of becoming a barrier-free organization by 2040. We provide details on how we are removing barriers in the priority areas outlined in section 5 of the [Accessible Canada Act](#).

We also give updates on each of the 68 activities in our [3-year accessibility plan](#). Some of these activities will be completed by the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year, while others will continue into 2025. Some are now ongoing and part of our regular work. All the activities work together to achieve the [vision and 8 desired results](#) of our accessibility plan.

Each priority area section includes a “spotlight” to show how we are making tangible progress toward removing accessibility barriers. Although we celebrate this progress, we know we still have a lot of work to do to achieve our vision.

Employment

Barriers identified in our plan

- the process for requesting workplace accommodations is confusing and causes delays
- employees with disabilities do not have a safe, neutral place to go for help and support
- managers do not have the awareness and training needed to effectively support their employees with disabilities

- employees with disabilities fear disclosing their disability and asking for support
- employees with disabilities perceive unfairness in hiring, onboarding, training and career advancement practices
- there is not enough support for employees with disabilities who experience harassment or discrimination

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

We are making progress to attract and recruit employees with disabilities and to provide them with the support they need to succeed. We want to ensure fairness in all our policies and practices, and prevent harassment and discrimination. We are listening to our employees' feedback and exploring new tools and approaches to make our workplace more accessible for everyone.

In the years leading up to the launch of our accessibility plan, we made progress in recruiting persons with disabilities through dedicated processes, inventories, student programs, and campaigns to hire recent graduates.

We strongly contributed to the public service goal of hiring 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025. The target set for our department was 1,187 individuals, but we surpassed that target by hiring 1,450 persons with disabilities from April 2020 to June 2023. Over that period, the representation of persons with disabilities in our workforce rose from 7.1% to 7.7%.

Another step we took was to establish the Workplace Assessment Office (WAO). The WAO promotes a work environment that is inclusive, accessible and free of harassment and discrimination. It provides consultations, workplace assessments, personalized support and liaison with other HR partners, including:

- Harassment and Violence Centre of Expertise
- Centre for Informal Resolution and Coaching
- Office of Values and Ethics
- ESDC Ombuds

Spotlight: Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential

In fall 2022, we established the Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential (CoE for OEP) to provide support for employees who need workplace accommodations, whether in the office or at home. Its services were designed based on consultations with persons with disabilities. While it is a new resource, it has already shown improvement over the previous Duty to Accommodate Centre of Expertise, according to employee feedback.

The CoE for OEP is a neutral resource that works with employees and managers to make the process for requesting workplace accommodations easier to navigate. They provide guidance, tools and training, with a focus on:

- setting out a process where employees obtain the tools and environment they need to perform at their best
- ensuring managers have the right information to make accommodation decisions
- creating an environment where employees and managers work together, hold respectful conversations and find solutions

The CoE for OEP has received a lot of positive feedback. Employees with disabilities have said the staff are knowledgeable and compassionate. The CoE values feedback from users and plans to review its service model and enhance its services based on their input.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Employment)

Activities	Timeline	Status
1.1 Create a centre of expertise that applies a holistic approach to workplace accommodations.	By 2023	Completed
1.2 Promote the Treasury Board Secretariat's self-identification platform and the benefits of self identifying as a person with a disability.	By 2023	Delayed
1.3 Explore ways in which the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport could be integrated with ESDC's existing workplace accommodations and wellbeing tools, such as the PeopleSoft Accommodations module and the Employee Wellness Profile	By 2025	On track
1.4 Explore the development of a sponsorship program for executives who identify as a person with a disability.	By 2023	Delayed
1.5 Review our HR systems to identify systemic barriers that affect persons with disabilities and develop an action plan.	By 2024	On track
1.6 Ensure hiring documents are accessible and include information about	By 2024	On track

Activities	Timeline	Status
an employee’s right to accommodation in the workplace.		
1.7 Support the public service commitment to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities. ESDC’s target is to hire 1,187 persons with disabilities.	By 2025	On track
1.8 Test new approaches to improve the onboarding experience of employees with disabilities at ESDC.	Ongoing	On track
1.9 Develop retention strategies for employees with disabilities.	Ongoing	On track
1.10 Enhance ESDC’s workforce reports by including information about recruitment, departures and promotions of employees with disabilities.	Ongoing	On track
1.11 Track accommodation requests to identify issues that cause delays and develop solutions.	Ongoing	On track
1.12 Promote the Employee Wellness Profile. This is an online tool that helps employees and managers have conversations about workplace accommodations.	2023	Completed

Challenges and new barriers

This year, our focus has been on hiring persons with disabilities, but we must also work on retention. Persons with disabilities are still under-represented in our department and the public service. Although we surpassed our hiring target, our workforce representation of persons with disabilities is still 2.2 percentage points below workforce availability.

Supporting persons with disabilities in the workplace does not end when we hire them. We must support their career development and create a welcoming and inclusive workplace culture.

We must also address the fact that persons with disabilities continue to face higher rates of harassment and discrimination at work, according to the latest Public Service Employee Survey.

Additionally, as we transitioned to a hybrid work model, employees with disabilities encountered new barriers. Some felt left out of the decision-making process and had difficulties getting the accommodations they needed in a timely manner. We must ensure that our work environments meet everyone's needs.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- add specific activities to our plan to prevent and address harassment and discrimination against persons with disabilities
- organize learning sessions to share the lived experiences of employees with disabilities, to improve awareness of the barriers they face in the workplace
- gather feedback on the Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential and explore different business models to meet employees' accommodations needs
- review our internal policies related to the Common Hybrid Work Model with an accessibility perspective in mind

Built environment

Barriers identified in our plan

- building code standards alone do not ensure workplace accessibility
- availability of accessibility features varies across our offices and Service Canada Centres

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

Employees began to return to our offices earlier this year after several years of remote work. This renewed our efforts to address barriers in the physical workplace.

To prepare for our employees' return to the office, our real property experts conducted surveys and talked to different groups, like our employee diversity networks and technical experts, to assess any changes required. This collaboration helped us to develop new solutions for specific needs.

Several projects are underway to help make the built environment more accessible. For example, we drafted a new interior design standard that goes beyond national building codes. It includes improvements like:

- wider walkways and new accessible signage
- new office colours and materials chosen with input from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind

- designated areas designed to meet the needs of different types of disabilities, both physical and invisible
- washrooms that are accessible to everyone

We also created the Real Property Hub to help employees adjust to their new office settings. The Hub is an intranet page with information, resources, videos and tips. Employees can take a virtual tour of their office, find accessible washrooms, and refer to a toolkit to better understand the features of our new flexible workspaces.

Lastly, the Western and Territories Region publishes a monthly newsletter called “Access by Design.” It covers topics like office safety, considering different sensory needs during meetings, and being mindful of allergens in the workplace.

Spotlight: Toronto–North York Flagship Service Canada Centre

We are excited to share that the Toronto–North York Flagship Service Canada Centre (SCC) won the International Social Security Association’s (ISSA) Americas Good Practice Award 2023 Certificate of Merit. This is awarded to organizations that show exceptional leadership in delivering service-oriented solutions to clients.

In planning the Flagship SCC, the Ontario Region engaged stakeholders and community experts, such as the Inclusive Service Advisory Network. They helped identify barriers to accessibility in our SCCs and offered solutions for clients. The Flagship SCC maximizes technology and enables staff to move from behind the counter to meet clients in their space.

It also has wayfinding navigation and tactile flooring to help clients who are blind or have a visual impairment navigate the office. Workstations are equipped with video remote interpretation (VRI) tablets to give clients who use sign language on-demand access to sign language interpreters over video chat.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Built environment)

Activities	Timeline	Status
2.1 Update ESDC’s interior design standard to exceed minimum accessibility standards, with an added focus on invisible disabilities	By 2023	Completed
2.2 Ensure that the needs of employees with disabilities are considered in built environment decisions related to ESDC’s new hybrid work environment	By 2023	Completed
2.3 Complete accessibility audits for ESDC buildings, offices and facilities, and	By 2025	On track

Activities	Timeline	Status
develop an action plan to address barriers		
2.4 Engage stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, to ensure ESDC buildings, offices and facilities exceed minimum accessibility standard	Ongoing	On track

Challenges and new barriers

Barriers still exist in our physical workplaces. Some plans to improve our buildings were delayed because we had to shift resources to support our employees who returned to the office earlier this year. However, we have finished most of our building accessibility audits and will soon have detailed plans to make over 400 sites more accessible. These improvements will happen over several years as we find out what works best in our new hybrid work environment.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- align our lease renewal strategy to match funding constraints so that accessibility improvements can be made faster
- keep working with outside groups like the Canadian Standards Association Group to understand changes to building codes and apply them

Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Barriers identified in our plan

- some software, online tools and phone systems need to be checked for accessibility, and known issues need to be fixed. Often, commercial software and tools do not meet accessibility standards
- there are no mandatory requirements to make all internal documents and web content fully accessible
- some learning content is not fully accessible
- the process to request workplace accommodations is confusing and causes delays in obtaining assistive and adaptive technology
- some employees are not aware of the assistive and adaptive technology that are available to them

- employees need more coaching on how to use assistive and adaptive technology and equipment

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

To become an accessible and inclusive department that is representative of the Canadian population and attracts and retains top talent, we need accessible information, tools and equipment.

Last year, we continued to assess our IT applications and systems for accessibility issues. These include our HR system (PeopleSoft), and our learning management system (Saba). We have also improved the guidance, training and support offered by our IT Accessibility Office (ITAO).

Additionally, we launched the MyESDC app, which is accessible and centralizes HR resources and information for employees. We also streamlined our processes for providing assistive and adaptive technology and equipment to employees, such as screen readers. To improve the support we offer, we are gathering more user feedback, collaborating closely with IT partners, and providing direct assistance to employees and their teams.

For example, the ITAO conducted over 20 sessions on IT accessibility, offering practical guidance to employees on how to create accessible documents and hold accessible meetings. They also partnered with the International Association of Accessibility Professionals to ensure IT staff stay updated on accessibility requirements and trends. Finally, the ITAO manages a library of assistive and adaptive IT solutions that employees can borrow before deciding what best suits their needs. This has proven to be effective and will continue.

Our commitment to accessibility extends to our learning content and course delivery. This year, we extended the contract for our learning management system, Saba, to ensure a smooth transition to a more accessible, cloud-based system in 2028. We actively track and address accessibility issues in Saba and work directly with the supplier when needed. All courses undergo accessibility reviews, and any gaps are addressed with accessibility statements or alternate formats.

Lastly, we made Calibri 12 the default font for MS Outlook. This font improves the accessibility and readability of emails across the department.

Spotlight: IT accessibility support for employees with a visual impairment

This year, our IT Accessibility Office established a new Community of Practice (CoP) for employees with a visual impairment who use the Job Access with Speech (JAWS) screen reader. The CoP holds regular meetings with users to talk about JAWS updates, share tips, discuss best practices, and gather user feedback.

They also work together with IT application developers and testers to ensure that their work is compatible with JAWS. In addition, they provide training on adaptive technology for individuals

with a visual impairment. This effort aims to reduce the number of issues experienced by users of this software in their work.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Information and communication technologies (ICT))

Activities	Timeline	Status
3.1 Simplify the process for providing employees with adaptive IT tools and technologies	By 2023	On track
3.2 Enhance training for IT staff to better support employees who use adaptive IT tools and technologies	By 2023	On track
3.3 Explore options to increase ESDC capacity for usability and accessibility testing	By 2023	Delayed
3.4 Participate in the development of a federal ICT Accessibility Standard and Scorecard	Timeline under review)	On track
3.5 Procure a new learning management system that is accessible and cloud based	By 2028	On track
3.6 Complete an accessibility assessment of PeopleSoft, ESDC’s human resources management system, and fix issues that are identified	By 2025	Delayed
3.7 Advance the IT Accessibility Compliance Project. This project will make all ESDC IT applications compliant with accessibility standards	Timeline under review	Delayed
3.8 Conduct accessibility assessments before buying new ICT products	Ongoing	On track
3.9 Continue to make online learning content and course delivery accessible, and provide alternate formats when needed	Ongoing	On track
3.10 Improve ESDC’s current learning management system by fixing known	Ongoing	On track

Activities	Timeline	Status
accessibility issues and continuously monitor		

Challenges and new barriers

The reality is that many IT accessibility compliance projects require more funding to see them through. We are working on a funding strategy to make sure our IT investments are in line with accessibility requirements. This work is partly dependent on the release of the new Treasury Board Secretariat ICT Accessibility Standard.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- identify a long-term and sustainable source of funds for IT accessibility investments
- pilot automation for IT accessibility assessments
- work with the Employees with Disabilities Network to improve our user testing capabilities
- use the feedback of users with disabilities to prioritize our process improvements and IT accessibility initiatives

Communication, other than ICT

Barriers identified in our plan

- there are no mandatory requirements to make all internal documents and web content fully accessible
- employees at all levels need more training and guidance on accessibility, inclusion and barriers faced by persons with disabilities

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

Making all communications accessible means every employee needs to know how to prepare documents and hold meetings that are accessible by default. In the last few years, we have promoted training, tips and best practices throughout the organization to encourage everyone to learn about accessible communication. This includes weekly “accessibility quick tips” in our corporate newsletters.

We also made sure our all-staff events and large meetings are fully accessible. We use services like captioning, simultaneous translation and sign-language interpretation. Lastly, since 2021, over 1,000 ESDC employees were trained in writing in plain language for the web, and we will continue these efforts.

Spotlight: IT Accessibility Community of Practice: demystifying accessibility

The IT Accessibility Office created the IT Accessibility Community of Practice (CoP). It is a virtual group that uses Microsoft Teams to share information and learning. The CoP has sub-groups for different topics like accessible IT development, accessible meetings, and adaptive technology.

Hundreds of employees are part of the CoP. Anyone can post a question or share information about IT accessibility. The most popular feature is the monthly virtual learning sessions that cover common accessibility topics. The CoP also offers customized sessions on topics such as making documents and meetings accessible, and using Microsoft 365 accessibility features.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Communication, other than ICT)

Activities	Timeline	Status
4.1 Ensure ESDC executive committee meetings and meeting materials are accessible	By 2023	On track
4.2 Ensure documents published under proactive disclosure rules are accessible	By 2023	Completed
4.3 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	By 2023	Delayed
4.4 Update and promote guidance on preparing accessible content and holding accessible meetings and events	Ongoing	On track
4.5 Provide training on how to create accessible and plain language content for the web	Ongoing	On track
4.6 Ensure that all-staff meetings and events held at the department-wide level are accessible	Ongoing	On track

Challenges and new barriers

Some employees still need to learn about accessible communication or are worried about making mistakes. We need to create an environment in which everyone is motivated and enabled to show leadership in making everything they create accessible from the start.

In addition, accessibility practices and preferences change over time, and we need to make an effort to keep up. For example, in meetings, it has become more common to include a brief description of the presenter's visual appearance and surroundings when introducing themselves. This provides added context for people with a visual impairment. It is also best practice to ask participants about their accessibility needs well in advance of a meeting, so that everyone can take part. These practices are not applied consistently throughout our department.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- keep promoting accessibility tips, best practices and training opportunities in our corporate messages
- update our internal communications guidelines to include descriptive meeting introductions and the requirement to ask meeting participants about their accessibility needs
- include accessibility training in employees' learning plans
- create accessible corporate templates (in Word, PowerPoint, etc.) with accessibility instructions built-in

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

Barriers identified in our plan

- accessibility requirements are not always considered when buying goods and services
- there are often delays in purchasing assistive and adaptive technology and equipment
- managers lack training in accessible procurement

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

Accessible procurement is about considering the end user, the context and the goal when purchasing a product or service. It is not just about compliance with rules, but about creating better solutions for everyone. Products and services that meet the needs of a diverse range of users from the start are less expensive than adapting or replacing them later.

To make our procurement practices more accessible, we have taken several steps this year:

leadership and collaboration: we regularly take part in communities of practice to learn and share best practices in accessible procurement across federal departments. This year, we will also begin co-chairing the Agents of Change Community of Practice to encourage more collaboration and information sharing among procurement experts

offering more support: our procurement officers now work closely with business leads to create procurement documents that are accessible and consider the needs of end users

training: all procurement officers must take the course “Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility” by the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year. We also introduced a “Procurement 101” course to help business leads better understand how to incorporate accessibility criteria from the start

streamlining accommodations purchases: to speed up the purchase of workplace accommodations, we have updated our guidance to clarify that managers can purchase tools and equipment without requiring their employee to submit a formal Duty to Accommodate request. Additionally, we have assigned a dedicated buyer for accommodations-related purchases so that these requests can be prioritized

Spotlight: Procurement Roadmap

To make procurement more accessible from the start, we have gathered essential resources in one place, called the Procurement Roadmap. Here, employees can find valuable tools to help them define their procurement requirements with accessibility in mind. These resources include:

- Accessibility Hub: offers various tools to assess procurement requirements
- Accessible Procurement Nugget: contains meaningful considerations for accessible procurement, along with questions to guide employees in incorporating accessibility into their requirements definition
- Accessibility Standards List: a convenient list of accessibility standards for various commodity groupings
- AccessAbility Playbook: helps employees learn about the needs of end users and seamlessly integrate accessibility into their procurement process

Status of accessibility plan activities (Procurement of goods, services and facilities)

Activities	Timeline	Status
5.1 Explore options to prioritize buying accessibility-related goods and services in response to accommodation requests	By 2023	Completed
5.2 Explore options for creating a central fund for buying workplace accommodations	By 2023 (timeline under review)	Not started
5.3 Ensure managers are aware that they can use acquisition cards to buy different types of accommodations	By 2023	Completed

Activities	Timeline	Status
5.4 Conduct an assessment to better understand the issues in the procurement process that cause delays in buying accessible goods and services	By 2025	On track
5.5 Ensure procurement officers are trained to help managers consider accessibility requirements at the start of the procurement process	By 2023	Completed
5.6 Make accessibility assessments mandatory for project approvals	By 2023	Completed
5.7 Ensure managers are aware of the resources available to help them define accessibility requirements for the goods and services they are buying	Ongoing	On track

Challenges and new barriers

Sometimes compliance with accessibility standards is not enough to ensure that the products and services we buy are accessible. Users with distinct needs should be engaged from the start to ensure that products and services can be used by people with a wide range of functional abilities and be usable by anyone to the greatest extent possible without modifications.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

help buyers use existing consultation mechanisms or advisory committees that represent users with disabilities to ensure that accessibility criteria will result in truly accessible products and services.

Design and delivery of programs and services

Barriers identified in our plan

- According to our latest Client Experience (CX) Survey and qualitative research:
- the overall satisfaction of clients with disabilities with their service experience is lower than that of clients overall (69% vs. 81%), and is lowest among Canada Pension Plan Disability clients (60%)
- clients with disabilities gave lower service channel satisfaction ratings for services provided in-person, online and through specialized call centres

In addition, clients with disabilities reported that:

- program information, requirements and application forms are too complex
- the Service Canada website is difficult to navigate
- Service Canada Centres are not fully accessible, and accessibility features vary by office
- call centre wait times are too long
- they had to rely on others for help when accessing programs and services

Other barriers:

- accessibility requirements are not always considered in program and policy development
- employees do not fully understand the barriers faced by persons with disabilities

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

Service accessibility is one of our top priorities. We aim to offer our clients flexible access to services, programs and benefits with clear, consistent information across service channels—online, phone or in-person.

We are making our services more accessible by improving the way we design services, developing new partnerships and involving various stakeholder communities. Here are some examples of the activities we accomplished this year:

- installed wayfinding navigation systems in Service Canada Centers to help people with visual impairments safely navigate. These systems send customized voice messages to clients' phones to help guide them
- equipped our Service Canada Centres with video remote interpretation (VRI), which allows clients who use sign language to communicate through a sign language interpreter who is off-site. American Sign Language and Quebec Sign Language are both offered
- completed our 5th annual Service Canada Client Experience (CX) Survey
- introduced a client feedback questionnaire in our Service Canada Centres. We will also begin capturing accessibility related feedback in two other questionnaires by the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year, for 1 800 O-Canada and eServiceCanada
- created a Service Accessibility resource page to help our employees design policies and services with users' needs in mind
- developed a course for our front-line staff to enhance their skills in serving persons with disabilities. The course covers topics like:

- identifying clients' accessibility needs
- using assistive devices
- serving clients accompanied by service or support animals
- serving clients who have environmental sensitivity needs
- worked with our Client Experience (CX) Centre of Expertise to design policies, programs and services that are barrier-free. They use approaches like user testing, journey mapping, user-centred design and feedback integration. Completed projects include the [Retirement Hub](#) for seniors, [Old Age Security Benefits Estimator](#) and the Onboarding Employees with Disabilities project.
- released the [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#) in late 2022, which includes ensuring that the needs and perspectives of persons with disabilities are reflected in government policies and programs
- began reviewing all Cabinet proposals from an accessibility perspective to prevent new barriers as federal departments and agencies develop or change their policies and programs
- improved the accessibility of online content, letters and forms for the Registered Education Savings Plan

Spotlight: Video remote interpretation: making client services more accessible

Video remote interpretation (VRI) helps Service Canada staff communicate with clients who use American Sign Language (ASL) or Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) when they access in-person services in Service Canada Centres and passport offices.

VRI is a combination of face-to-face and online interpreting. Using a computer tablet with a camera, the client and the Citizen Service Officer (CSO), who are together at a Service Canada Centre, connect with a sign language interpreter who is off-site. The interpreter relays the client's message to the CSO and uses sign language to communicate the CSO's message to the client.

This means that our clients get guaranteed access to a sign language interpreter quickly. They no longer need to call Service Canada in advance to ask for the service, and interpreters no longer have to be on-site. Clients do not have to rely on family, friends or anyone else to access services or hire an interpreter at their own expense: VRI is free of charge.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Design and delivery of programs and services)

Activities	Timeline	Status
6.1 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	By 2025	Delayed
6.2 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	By 2025	On track
6.3 Make it easier for persons with disabilities to provide accessibility-related feedback on programs and services without having to submit a formal complaint	By 2025	On track
6.4 Strengthen the role of the Centre of Expertise for Accessible Client Service. This team offers guidance on making services more accessible	By 2025	On track
6.5 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	By 2025	On track
6.6 Ensure all new or improved services (in-person, phone and online) are developed in consultation with persons with disabilities and address their feedback	Ongoing	On track
6.7 Ensure services, at all stages of development, meet or exceed standards for web accessibility, interior design and call centre best practices	Ongoing	On track
6.8 Address barriers in the in-person channel, including gaps identified by real property accessibility audits. We will also use outreach	Ongoing	On track

Activities	Timeline	Status
approaches to make it easier for persons with disabilities to access our programs and services		
6.9 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	Ongoing	On track
6.10 Address barriers in the online channel	Ongoing	On track
6.11 Collect feedback from clients with disabilities through surveys and questionnaires	Ongoing	On track
6.12 Ensure the tools, documents and facilities used to deliver grants and contributions programs are more accessible	Ongoing	On track

Challenges and new barriers

We have made progress in improving our service delivery practices, but clients with disabilities are still less satisfied with their service experience than those without disabilities. For instance, some found in-person service wait times too long, especially if they had mobility issues or children with special needs. Others said the time-outs for online applications are too short and they had to start over.

People who have been marginalized or are vulnerable can face complex barriers accessing government programs. They said they could benefit from a dedicated call centre to help them with their benefits applications and follow-ups.

Finally, some members of the public asked to join future consultations on new and existing programs and policies, such as Workforce Development Agreements, the Enabling Accessibility Fund and the Canada Disability Benefit.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- create a separate line or courtesy window for clients with accessibility needs. One client suggested having a sensory-friendly area in our Service Canada Centres
- explore other service options for clients who are deaf, hard of hearing or who have a speech disability. These could include text, chat or Canada VRS, which is a relay service that connects users to call centre staff via a sign language interpreter online
- form an advisory board consisting of persons with disabilities, community experts and other stakeholders to identify barriers to accessibility and find client-centred solutions

Workplace culture

Barriers identified in our plan

- employees with disabilities face stigma, harassment and discrimination
- employees at all levels need more training and guidance on accessibility and workplace accommodations
- accessibility progress is slower than desired
- employees with disabilities lack trust in the organization

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

Since we released our accessibility plan, more employees are learning about and applying accessibility best practices. Training and regular communication about the importance of accessibility and disability inclusion are having a positive impact. Many branches have developed their own accessibility plans, committees and resources that respond to their employees' specific needs.

To continue to support employees in their learning, we implemented the Accessibility Learning Paths. These paths bring all accessibility learning together in one place. Over the past year, more than 1,300 employees voluntarily took accessibility training. Many were interested in topics such as understanding neurodiversity and web accessibility. In addition, our “ask me anything” sessions were very popular and introduced many employees to the lived experiences of their colleagues with disabilities.

Corporate communications and events have been crucial for raising awareness about accessibility in the workplace. This year, we achieved the following:

- held the second annual Canadian Congress on Disability Inclusion in May 2023, with over 3,500 participants. The theme was “Disability Inclusion: From Possibilities to Practice”
- shared regular corporate messages and senior leader blogs about accessibility, disability inclusion, events and training
- launched the “Workplace Matters” intranet site, which houses a wealth of resources that promote workplace accessibility and is sponsored by one of our deputy ministers

Our employees have also taken the initiative to improve accessibility, for example:

- a Skills and Employment Branch employee developed a career advancement pilot that pairs junior policy analysts with disabilities with manager-mentors
- a group at the College@ESDC established an accessibility allies network to promote best practices for creating accessible learning systems and materials

- an HR Branch employee created the “Living with Different Brains” Microsoft Teams channel, a virtual community with over 200 members, to share experiences and support for various disabilities
- through the ESDC Innovation Fund, we funded employee-led initiatives, such as a coaching pilot for employees with attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, we are grateful for the Employees with Disabilities Network (EwDN). They work hard to improve our workplace culture by promoting employment equity, diversity, accessibility and inclusion. This employee-led forum for persons with disabilities has over 600 members. Its size has almost doubled since early 2022. The EwDN receives funding for their activities and has a paid, full-time chair.

This year, the EwDN launched a new feature in its monthly newsletter: “Our Stories. Our Voices.” This section shares the unique personal journeys of people in the Network. These stories help shape our collective understanding of disabilities, barriers and why inclusion is so important. People who have shared their stories have reported that doing so, while scary, helped them feel empowered and heard within the organization.

Spotlight: Employee Wellness Profile

The Employee Wellness Profile (EWP) is a fully accessible, confidential platform driven by the “yes-by-default” approach. It enables employees to consider a range of supports that could help them in their jobs. It prompts employees to reflect on their wellness needs and find flexible solutions to everyday challenges or stresses at work. Managers can use it to quickly assess the need for workplace accommodations.

This tool was piloted in our Western and Territories Region last year. Over 60% of employees in that region have used the EWP and had great feedback to share:

- 90% found it could improve the relationship between employees and managers
- 75% thought the guided discussions in the tool will help them perform better

The EWP covers many aspects of health and wellness, such as accessibility requirements, ergonomics, accommodations, family responsibilities, mental wellness and work-life balance. The EWP has its own intranet page with videos, FAQs, user stories and support options.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Workplace culture)

Activities	Timeline	Status
7.1 Develop a communications strategy for the ESDC Accessibility Plan, as well as products to raise awareness of accessibility and disability inclusion	By 2023	Completed

Activities	Timeline	Status
7.2 Centralize accessibility learning and training	By 2023	Completed
7.3 Develop a costing and funding framework for the ESDC Accessibility Plan	By 2023	Completed
7.4 Review internal governance and accountability on accessibility and implement changes as appropriate	By 2023	On track
7.5 Explore options for creating an “accessibility ambassadors” initiative	By 2023	Completed
7.6 Encourage regions and branches to develop their own accessibility plans that complement the ESDC Accessibility Plan	By 2024	On track
7.7 Develop and implement an accessibility learning strategy and monitor learning needs	By 2025	On track
7.8 Build the capacity of the ESDC Accessibility Office as it relates to publishing the department’s accessibility plan and progress reports and receiving feedback	By 2025	On track
7.9 Consult and actively engage the ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network on the design and implementation of accessibility initiatives	Ongoing	On track
7.10 Develop and deliver annual programming and communications for NAAW, IDPD and other events related to accessibility and disability inclusion	Ongoing	On track
7.11 Ensure that employees can easily find tools and resources on accessibility and workplace accommodations	Ongoing	On track
7.12 Encourage all employees to include clear, actionable accessibility commitments in their performance agreements	Ongoing	On track

Challenges and new barriers

Our consultations and feedback show that our department is getting more confident about accessibility, but there is still a lot to learn, demystify and de-stigmatize when it comes to disability inclusion and supporting employees with disabilities. Our plan needs to go further by recognizing that persons with disabilities can belong to more than one equity group that faces discrimination.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- apply an intersectional lens to our plan
- maintain funding for the Employees with Disabilities Network
- share best practices with other departments and partners to boost our confidence about accessibility and quickly fix problems across the Government of Canada, especially when we find solutions that work well

Data, research and analysis

Barriers identified in our plan

- employees do not fully understand the barriers faced by persons with disabilities
- there are no clear rules or processes to make sure accessibility is a priority

Progress in removing or preventing barriers

Data is a critical part of our work to make ESDC more inclusive and accessible. By collecting and reporting on our data, we can better understand the accessibility barriers in our department and see if we are meeting our goals. This year, we have been testing new ways to gather data.

For example, we developed new surveys and consultation approaches to gather the views of employees with disabilities about accessibility progress and the implementation of our plan.

Next year, we will also get more information from our ESDC Ombuds Office, our Employment Systems Review, and our Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential. This will help us learn even more about our progress and challenges.

Spotlight: Learning Branch Accessibility Committee Employee Surveys

The Learning Branch Accessibility Committee (LBAC) is an employee-led committee at ESDC. LBAC's focus is to promote awareness and understanding about disability and accessibility to foster a more inclusive workplace in the Learning Branch.

LBAC conducted its second accessibility survey of branch employees in April 2023. One of the key findings was that managers and employees were having more productive conversations about accessibility and accommodations.

Based on this data, senior management recommended that managers have regular conversations with their employees about their accessibility needs, not just at the end of the year or when a new employee joins their team. When a manager creates a safe space for dialogue on accessibility, it is an opportunity to break barriers and help employees achieve their full potential.

Status of accessibility plan activities (Data, research and analysis)

Activities	Timeline	Status
8.1 Conduct research on cognitive disabilities and update the workplace accommodation process as needed	By 2023	Completed
8.2 Develop a performance measurement framework for the ESDC Accessibility Plan	By 2023	Completed
8.3 Assess ESDC's diversity and inclusion training courses that relate to accessibility to ensure they are meeting the needs of employees	By 2024	On track
8.4 Collect employee feedback on the implementation of the ESDC Accessibility Plan	Ongoing	On track
8.5 Conduct employee surveys on accessibility	Ongoing	On track

Challenges and new barriers

We have also faced some challenges in this area. For example, some of our data collection processes take a long time, and it can be difficult to turn data into useful information. Another issue is “consultation fatigue.”

Some of the people we consulted said that they are tired of being asked the same questions by different groups and that they are not always told how their input has been used.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- find more efficient ways to obtain input from the public
- make sure that everyone we consult knows how we will use their input

- improve our capacity in project management, planning and reporting, to keep track of all accessibility initiatives and barriers throughout the department

Transportation

Barriers identified in our plan

ESDC does not offer transportation services. When we developed our accessibility plan, we had reviewed our policies, practices, programs and services for this priority area, and we had not identified any barriers. However, based on our consultations, we will assess if there are any accessibility barriers that prevent employees from getting to or moving between our different work sites.

Suggestions for future accessibility plans

- make sure that employees who attend in-person meetings can easily arrange for a taxi, shuttle, or public transit that is accessible
- be flexible with employees who use accessible transit if their transit times do not match their work hours. Some employees might need a break after using transit
- make sure all employees have safe and accessible places for pick-up and drop-off. This also applies to employees with a temporary injury

Governance and accountability

We created the Director General Working Group and the Assistant Deputy Minister Committee on the ESDC Accessibility Plan. The members of these committees are responsible for the priority area(s) that align with their business lines. They oversee many aspects of accessibility at ESDC and play a leadership role in developing and implementing our accessibility plan and monitoring progress.

The Employees with Disabilities Network (EwDN) also plays a key role in shaping accessibility at ESDC. ESDC relies on the Network for meaningful engagement and leadership when implementing accessibility initiatives. The EwDN's Champion and the ESDC Champion for Employees with Disabilities act as agents for change.

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.

Tracking and measuring progress

The ESDC Accessibility Office (EAO) is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the 68 activities in our accessibility plan, as well as our progress toward achieving the plan's [8 desired results](#). To do so, we have developed a draft performance measurement framework with key performance indicators (KPIs) to see if we are making the department more accessible for persons with disabilities. We will begin using this framework in 2024.

We will add KPIs to our framework over time as more data sources become available. Some of the KPIs are still being developed and will be aligned with the Treasury Board Secretariat's [Accessibility Results Framework](#). We will use our performance results to make strategic decisions.

In addition to performance measurement, we also share lessons learned and innovations with various inter-departmental communities of practice so that we can learn from other departments and stakeholders.

Conclusion

My view is that normalizing conversations about disability and accessibility can foster change in our public service culture and lead to better experiences for all employees and clients.

Ayshe Calisal, Advisor and Chair, Learning Branch Accessibility Committee

ESDC is dedicated to making the department inclusive and accessible for everyone. Our 3-year accessibility plan is on track, and we have made good progress in the first 7 months covered in this report. Important groundwork has been completed and more is underway to improve our policies, programs, services and workplace.

We have seen considerable momentum throughout our organization to continue this work. As this report shows, individuals and groups within our department are taking on their own projects and removing barriers, even beyond our accessibility plan. Their creativity and leadership are paving the way toward a fully accessible ESDC.

But there is still much work to do to ensure we meet the needs of all our employees and clients. The consultations we held underlined what we already know: that despite the best of intentions and ongoing efforts, achieving real progress that makes a tangible, positive difference for persons with disabilities takes time. There is neither a magic bullet, nor a one-size-fits-all solution.

We will keep learning and finding ways to improve. Our employees and clients want to see action not just within our department, but across the Government of Canada as a whole. That is why we are working together to share ideas and best practices, so we can make progress faster.

Most importantly, we understand the importance of consulting our employees, clients, stakeholders and the public, to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers at ESDC. We need to keep receiving your feedback and taking action based on your experiences. We will continue to listen, adjust our course when needed, and stay committed to making ESDC barrier-free for everyone.

This report on progress is just the start. To be fully inclusive, we must make accessibility part of everything we do, from our meetings and documents, to our offices, procurement processes, policies and programs. Every employee has a role to play. At ESDC, accessibility is everyone's business.

Appendix A: Draft performance measurement framework

A performance measurement framework identifies the key performance indicators (KPIs) required to monitor and track the performance of a program, like the ESDC Accessibility Plan. The draft framework below will allow us to track our progress across priority areas to see if we are achieving the [8 desired results of our accessibility plan](#). Starting in 2024, we will use this framework in our annual reporting.

We will add KPIs to our framework over time as more data sources become available. Some of the KPIs are still being developed and will be aligned with the Treasury Board Secretariat's [Accessibility Results Framework](#).

The baselines below reflect the 2023 data pertaining to persons with disabilities. The targets we have set reflect the 2023 data pertaining to people without disabilities. Our goal is to close the gap between the experiences of persons with disabilities and those without disabilities, and to find out whether our actions to remove accessibility barriers are making a difference.

The ultimate outcome we want to achieve is an inclusive, barrier-free environment for employees and clients with disabilities.

Key performance indicators

Priority area: Employment

Short-term outcomes (2 to 4 years)

a) Improved recruitment, retention and promotion of employees with disabilities

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
Total # of employees who self-identify as having a disability	1,652	2,839	Workforce reports
% of employees with disabilities who stay at ESDC for at least 2 years	70.5%	71%	PeopleSoft HR system
Annual promotion rate of persons with disabilities	4.1%	6%	PeopleSoft HR system

b) Improved access to workplace accommodations

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of employees with disabilities who state that accessibility or	15%	3%	Public Service Employee Survey

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
accommodation issues cause stress at work to a large or very large extent			

Medium-term outcomes (4 to 6 years)

c) ESDC is representative and leads in retaining employees with disabilities

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of employees who self-identify as having a disability	7.1%	9.6%	Workforce reports Canadian Survey on Disability

d) Enhanced employee understanding of systemic barriers faced by employees and clients with disabilities

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of employees who report a change in their level of knowledge related to systemic barriers after completing accessibility training	84.5%	86.5%	Saba learning management system
% of employees with disabilities who agree that they can initiate a formal recourse process without fear of reprisal	49%	64%	Public Service Employee Survey

Priority area: Built environment

Long-term outcomes (6 years or more)

a) ESDC buildings, offices and facilities meet or exceed minimum industry requirements for accessibility

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of employees with disabilities who rate the physical work environment as	11%	6%	Public Service Employee Survey

a source of stress to a large or very large extent			
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Priority area: Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Short-term outcomes (2 to 4 years)

a) Employees with disabilities have the tools and technologies to perform their job

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of employees with disabilities who state that they have the tools, technology, and equipment to do their job	83%	91%	Public Service Employee Survey

b) ESDC external IT solutions meet accessibility standards

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of new external IT solutions / applications that meet accessibility standards	100%	100%	IT data sources

Medium-term outcomes (4 to 6 years)

c) ESDC internal IT solutions meet accessibility standards

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of internal IT solutions / applications that meet accessibility standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing COTS software: 18% Custom solutions: 16% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing COTS software: 40% Custom solutions: 50% 	IT data sources

Priority area: Communication, other than ICT

Short-term outcomes (2 to 4 years)

a) ESDC published content meets accessibility standards

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of EI/ CPP/ CPP-D/ OAS/ GIS/ SIN clients with disabilities who report that it was easy to find information about the	59%	79%	Service Canada Client Experience Survey

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
program on the Government of Canada website			
% of EI/CPP/PPP-D/OAS/GIS/SIN clients with disabilities who report it was easy to understand information about the program on the Government of Canada website	64%	75%	Service Canada Client Experience Survey
% of EI, CPP/PPP-D/OAS/GIS/SIN clients with disabilities who report it was easy to find out the steps to apply on the Government of Canada website	54%	78%	Service Canada Client Experience Survey

Priority area: Procurement of goods, services and facilities

Medium-term outcomes (4 to 6 years)

a) ESDC procures goods and services that exceed minimum accessibility requirements

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of procurement contracts that meet and can be validated against accessibility requirements	TBD	TBD	TBD (align with TBS)
% of ESDC procurements / contracts that incorporate accessibility considerations	TBD	TBD	TBD (align with TBS)

Priority area: Design and delivery of programs and services

Short-term outcomes (2 to 4 years)

a) All service channels are more accessible for clients with disabilities

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of clients with disabilities who are satisfied with the overall quality of service of the Specialized Call Centre and the 1 800 O-Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialized call centre: 57% 1 800 O-Canada: 51% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialized call centre: 64% 1 800 O-Canada: 59% 	Service Canada Client Experience Survey

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
general information phone line			
% of clients with disabilities who are satisfied with the overall quality of service of Service Canada Centres	70%	81%	Service Canada Client Experience Survey
% of clients with disabilities who are satisfied with the overall quality of service of My Service Canada Account (MSCA) and eServiceCanada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSCA: 68% eServiceCanada: 70% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSCA: 70% eServiceCanada: 76% 	Service Canada Client Experience Survey

Medium-term outcomes (4 to 6 years)

b) Clients with disabilities who access and receive services and benefits from ESDC are satisfied with their service experience

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of clients with disabilities who are satisfied with their service experience	69%	81%	Service Canada Client Experience Survey

Priority area: Workplace culture

Medium-term outcomes (4 to 6 years)

a) Persons with disabilities feel they are treated with respect by ESDC

Performance indicator	Baseline	Target	Data source
% of employees with disabilities who agree with the statement: "Overall, my department or agency treats me with respect."	79%	90%	Public Service Employee Survey
% of ESDC employees with disabilities who would recommend ESDC as a great place to work	69%	82%	Public Service Employee Survey

Human Resources Services Branch

% of employees with disabilities who strongly feel valued at work	65%	75%	Public Service Employee Survey
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Appendix B: Employee consultations

This appendix provides details on the people we consulted, how and when we consulted, and the questions we asked.

Employees with Disabilities Network survey on progress on ESDC's Accessibility Plan

In July 2023, the ESDC Accessibility Office conducted a survey of the members of the Employees with Disabilities Network (EwDN) to find out about how well ESDC is doing in implementing its 3-year accessibility plan. We wanted to know if the plan was making a difference.

The survey had 6 multiple-choice questions and an open-ended question. A total of 189 members (about 30%) completed the survey. Out of those, more than half (100) shared their thoughts in the open-ended question. Among the respondents, 171 identified as having a disability, while 18 did not. The respondents represented a diverse group of persons with disabilities.

We asked the following questions:

Question 1

Are you a person with a disability?

Question 2 [If “Yes” to question 1]

You indicated that you are a person with a disability. If you wish to provide further details, please select the box(es) that apply to you. Mark all that apply.

- A mental health disability affects psychology or behaviour, such as anxiety, depression or social / compulsive disorder or phobia or psychiatric illness
- A cognitive disability affects ability to carry out tasks involving executive functioning, such as planning and organization, learning information, communication, and memory, including autism or Asperger's syndrome, attention deficit disorder, and learning disabilities
- A chronic health condition or pain affects ability to function on a regular or episodic basis due to migraines, Crohn's disease, colitis, and other disabilities or health conditions
- A sensory or environmental disability affects sensitivity to light, sounds or other distractions, as well as allergens and other environmental sensitivities

- A mobility disability affects ability to move your body, including the required use of a wheelchair or a cane, or other issues impacting your mobility
- Challenges with flexibility or dexterity affect ability to move joints or perform motor tasks, especially with your hands
- A seeing disability affects vision, including total blindness, partial sight, and visual distortion
- A hearing disability affects ability to hear, including being hard of hearing, deafness, or acoustic distortion
- An intellectual disability affects your ability to learn and to adapt behaviour to different situations
- Another disability
- A speech disability affects ability to talk, including total speech loss, partial speech, and speech distortion
- Prefer not to specify

Question 3

- To what extent are you familiar with the ESDC Accessibility Plan?
- Not at all
- To a small extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent
- Don't know

Question 4

- Do you feel that ESDC is more accessible today than it was a year ago?
- Much less accessible
- Less accessible
- Unchanged
- More accessible
- Much more accessible
- Don't know

Question 5

Listed below are each of the priority areas and desired results in the ESDC Accessibility Plan:

- Priority area 1: Employment – Desired result: ESDC recruits and retains employees with disabilities, advances their careers, and provides timely access to workplace accommodations
- Priority area 2: Built environment – Desired result: Persons with disabilities have barrier-free access to ESDC buildings, offices, and facilities
- Priority area 3: Information and communication technologies (ICT) – Desired result: Existing and new information and communication technologies products, services and content are accessible for all users
- Priority area 4: Communication, other than ICT – Desired result: ESDC communications are accessible and written in plain language
- Priority area 5: Procurement of goods, services and facilities – Desired result: Accessibility criteria are considered when buying goods, services and facilities, and products include accessibility features where appropriate
- Priority area 6: Design and delivery of programs and services – Desired result: In-person, phone and online client services are accessible for persons with disabilities
- Priority area 7: Workplace culture – Desired result: Everyone at ESDC has the knowledge and skills to make the department barrier-free for persons with disabilities
- Priority area 8: Data, research and analysis – Desired result: ESDC makes evidence-based decisions to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility

To what extent do you feel ESDC has made progress in each of those areas?

- Not at all
- To a small extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent
- Don't know

Question 6

Which of the priority areas below do you feel are the most and least important for ESDC to make progress on over the next year? Please rank them from most important (#1) to least important (#8).

- Priority area 1: Employment
- Priority area 2: Built environment
- Priority area 3: Information and communication technologies (ICT)
- Priority area 4: Communication, other than ICT
- Priority area 5: Procurement of goods, services and facilities
- Priority area 6: Design and delivery of programs and services
- Priority area 7: Workplace culture
- Priority area 8: Data, research and analysis

Question 7

Is there a specific event, activity, policy, program, process, system (or other) that you have experienced, or that you know of, that you feel is positively contributing to a more accessible ESDC for employees and/or clients with disabilities? Please share in your own words.

Consultation with the Employees with Disabilities Network Executive Committee

The Employees with Disabilities Network (EwDN) is the department's employee-led forum for employees with disabilities. It has about 600 members, and its membership has almost doubled since early 2022. The EwDN promotes employment equity, diversity, accessibility and inclusion of employees with disabilities, and offers a supportive and responsive community.

The ESDC Accessibility Office held a virtual meeting with the 10 members of the EwDN Executive Committee in June 2023. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain the views of the executive members on the progress ESDC had made on implementing its accessibility plan. We shared background information in advance.

We asked the following questions:

Question 1

Several activities in the ESDC Accessibility Plan have been completed since the launch of the plan in December 2022. How do you feel about the progress that ESDC is making in the following areas?

- workplace accommodations (e.g., the Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential; the Accommodations module in PeopleSoft; the Employee Wellness Profile, other)

- workplace culture (e.g., corporate or team communications; awareness raising; training and learning; opportunities to provide accessibility-related feedback, other)
- technology, including corporate systems (e.g., ESDC intranet, IT Accessibility Office services; PeopleSoft; Saba; other systems that you use regularly in your job, other)

Question 2

This is part of our vision statement in the accessibility plan: “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.”

- Do you feel ESDC is closer to realizing this vision than we were a year ago?

Question 3

What is one thing that we could do immediately / over the next 6 months / in the next year that could make a difference for you and/or other employees with disabilities at ESDC?

Interview with the Employees with Disabilities Network Champion

The ESDC Accessibility Office interviewed the EwDN Champion in June 2023. The purpose of the interview was to gain the Champion’s perspective on the progress ESDC had made on implementing its accessibility plan and what more could be done to speed up progress. We shared background information in advance.

We asked the following questions:

Question 1

What has been the biggest factor in making progress on accessibility at ESDC so far? Can you share any tangible examples of activities or other initiatives that are making a difference?

Question 2

What hasn’t been working well so far, and why?

Question 3

What must we do differently to overcome major roadblocks? How can we work better across the department to make progress on ESDC’s corporate priorities on accessibility?

Question 4

How can leaders across the department play a bigger role in advancing accessibility?

Question 5

This is part of our vision statement in the accessibility plan: “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.”

- Do you feel we’re making progress and “making it real” for employees with disabilities at ESDC?

Question 6

What is one thing that we could do immediately / over the next 6-months / in the next year that could help us speed up progress?

Public Service Employee Survey

The Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) takes place every two years and provides information to help improve people management practices in the federal public service. Federal departments and agencies can identify their areas of strength and concern related to topics such as:

- employee engagement
- anti-racism
- equity and inclusion
- workplace well-being

The most recent survey ran from November 21, 2022, to February 5, 2023. At ESDC, 3,020 respondents (13%) identified as having a disability.

The PSES found that ESDC employees generally have positive feelings about their work environment, including aspects like performance management, career development, job readiness, and support for mental health from their immediate supervisors.

However, there are some significant differences between the experiences of employees with disabilities and those without:

- **employee engagement:** 65% of employees with disabilities feel valued at work compared to 77% of employees without disabilities
- **workforce training:** 71% of employees with disabilities believe they get the training they need compared to 80% of employees without disabilities
- **diversity and inclusion:** 79% of employees with disabilities feel like equal team members compared to 88% of employees without disabilities

- **physical environment and equipment:** 81% of employees with disabilities believe they have the necessary information, training and equipment to do their job compared to 90% of employees without disabilities
- **harassment and discrimination:** 17% of employees with disabilities reported experiencing harassment on the job compared to 6% of employees without disabilities. Additionally, 16% of employees with disabilities experienced compared to only 4% of employees without disabilities
- **confidence in senior management leadership:** 62% of employees with disabilities expressed confidence compared to 73% of employees without disabilities

Employees with Disabilities Network annual survey

In March 2023, the ESDC Employees with Disabilities Network (EwDN) conducted its annual survey. The survey ran for 2 weeks. Out of 564 members, 176 members (30%) completed the survey. Among the respondents, 96% identified as a person with a disability, while 4% identified as being an ally for persons with disabilities.

The survey generated insights on the following topics:

- reasons for not self-identifying as a person with a disability
- impact of their medical condition on ability to work
- workplace accommodations and Duty to Accommodate (i.e., types, approval rate, implementation time, reason for denial, reason for not making a request)
- discrimination, harassment and microaggressions
- Centre of Expertise for Optimizing Employee Potential
- general questions about satisfaction with the EwDN, including its funding model and members' participation in events

Appendix C: Client consultations

Service Canada Client Experience Survey

The [Service Canada Client Experience \(CX\) Survey](#) is conducted annually. It measures the end-to-end service experience delivered by Service Canada and tracks the impact of service delivery change on clients' ability to access the following federal programs:

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

The survey has two parts: a quantitative survey conducted by telephone, and a qualitative research phase.

In the most recent survey in 2022, 935 respondents identified as having a disability. The most common disabilities were mobility issues, followed by mental health and cognitive disabilities. Of the respondents with disabilities, 83% applied for Canada Pension Plan Disability.

Client experience qualitative research

A qualitative research approach was used to explore opportunities for improvement in service delivery and channel use. Participants were selected among the CX Survey respondents either because they reported lower satisfaction with their service experience and/or they experienced an issue related to accessibility. We conducted 32 in-depth interviews and 8 online focus groups. A total of 78 clients participated in the research.

Video remote interpretation exit surveys

Most of our Service Canada Centres are equipped with video remote interpretation (VRI) tablets that enable clients who use sign language to communicate with front-line staff through a sign language interpreter who is off-site. After each VRI call that took place in a Service Canada Centre, we asked clients to rate their satisfaction using a 5-star system. Between April and June 2023, 137 clients used the VRI service. Among those clients, 55% completed an exit survey. Of those who responded, 87% gave the interaction a 5-star rating, while only 8% rated it 3 stars or lower. On average, the VRI service received 4.7 out of 5 stars for the quality of the experience.