



# Creating an Accessible Emergency Response Plan Guidelines for Federally Regulated Organizations

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# About Accessibility Standards Canada

Accessibility Standards Canada was created under the [Accessible Canada Act](#). This act encourages the creation of a barrier-free Canada.

## Our mandate

- Develop and review accessibility standards for federally regulated workplaces.
- Support and promote research that identifies, removes, and prevents accessibility barriers.

Accessibility is about creating inclusive communities for all.

## About these guidelines

This document contains practical information for federal organizations and federally regulated employers. Its purpose is to help you create an emergency response plan that makes accessibility a priority in your organization.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that federally regulated organizations have had to review their emergency procedures to ensure they are accessible to all. The lessons learned from these reviews form the basis of this document. National disability organizations and other stakeholders also helped create these guidelines.

## What's included

- Best practices for ensuring accessibility during emergencies. However, these are only a starting point. Adapt them to your specific needs.
- Advice on planning responses to a wide range of emergencies. How you apply these guidelines will depend on your organization and the type of emergency.
- Links to other useful resources.

## Tips

**Do your research.** Improving accessibility for some people can create a barrier for others. Research all accessibility improvement measures in the context of your organization before putting them in place.

**Talk to employees and clients about their needs.** This is key for ensuring accessibility measures are effective.

**Consider the needs of your community.** These guidelines do not mention specific populations. When making your service accessible, consider the needs of your community. For example, First Nations communities have distinct cultures, and unique accessibility needs. If possible, consider including First Nations languages and sign languages as part of your inclusive communications.

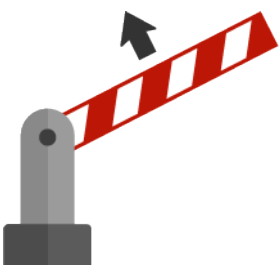
**Get appropriate advice.** These guidelines are not intended as medical or legal advice. When needed, get advice from a public health organization, a legal professional, your union, or your workplace health and safety committee.



### Note

**Local responses to emergencies are the responsibility of provincial, territorial, and municipal governments.**

## Getting started



Effective emergency response is key to ensuring public health and safety. But people with disabilities can face barriers, and emergencies often make these barriers worse.

Ensure your emergency response for people with disabilities is the same as for everyone else and is available to everyone at the same time. This includes all types of emergencies, including COVID-19.



Federally regulated organizations need to make sure their services are accessible, even during emergencies. Be responsive to:

- the needs of your community, clients, and employees before emergencies occur
- the new barriers created by emergencies
- the changes needed to deliver your services in an accessible way
- the feedback you receive about accessibility from those who use your services



### Note

#### ***Removing barriers benefits everyone!***

When you use inclusive and accessible design from the start, it is better for everyone. These benefits are sometimes called the “[The Curb Cut Effect](#).”

## Adopt an inclusive and accessible approach

Use an inclusive and accessible approach in your organization **before** an emergency occurs. During an emergency, activate the specific measures necessary to ensure accessibility. Get started by reviewing the following:

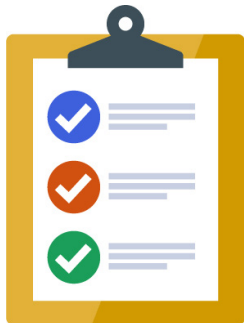


- [Accessibility for employees working from home](#)
- [Accessible practices for returning to the workplace](#)
- [Accessible service delivery during emergencies](#)
- [Accessible communication during COVID-19 and other emergencies](#)
- [Accessible communication: A guide for persons with disabilities](#)

Federally regulated organizations need to use an accessible approach. This includes removing and preventing barriers in line with the [Accessible Canada Act](#). This means making sure that people with disabilities:



- are treated with dignity
- have an equal opportunity to make choices
- can participate fully and equally in society
- are presented with enough accessible information to use all services
- can submit feedback on the design and development of policies and services



## Plan inclusive meetings

- [Create an accessible plan for the meeting.](#)
- [Conduct the meeting in an accessible way.](#)
- [Provide accessible services and materials.](#)

## Avoid chemicals and scents

Chemicals and scents can create barriers and/or or health problems for people with [multiple chemical sensitivities](#). An emergency might make the use of some chemicals or scents more common. Remove this barrier by doing the following:



- Maintain a scent-free workplace policy at all times, including during emergencies.
- Ensure that no volatile organic compounds are being used.
- Use strong [ventilation systems](#) to promote clean air in the workplace.
- Research chemical sensitivities in the workplace and in service delivery areas.



### Note

#### **Other information sources**

[These service providers and organizations](#) are a good starting point if you are looking for more information about accessibility.

# Be prepared for the next emergency



## Creating or updating an emergency plan

Federally regulated organizations need to create emergency plans that will be accessible to all Canadians.

- Create a plan to continue to deliver your services during emergencies.
- Make sure you can deliver these services in a way that is safe for both your staff and your clients.
- Understand who uses your services and how. Identify alternative accessible services and notify your users in advance.
- Communicate your plan to the public.

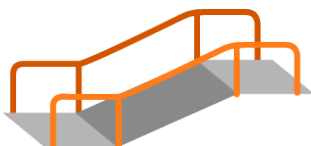


Make sure your plan includes resources for helping with the recovery after an emergency. Communicate the details of this plan in an accessible way.



Think about accessibility when developing or updating your emergency plan. This means considering the needs of all Canadians, including people with disabilities, when developing policies and services. Apply an accessibility lens when you do any of the following:

- develop [emergency policies and procedures](#)
- [communicate with your employees and the public](#)
- [design and deliver services to the public](#)
- design a new built environment (see: [International Best Practices in Universal Design](#))
- [plan for new construction or renovations](#)
- [buy goods or services](#)



**Consult people with disabilities.** They are the experts and know what they need. Include them in the planning process. Find out if an emergency could make your organization inaccessible. Find out what barriers people with disabilities faced during the previous emergency. Find out how to remove these barriers.



**Consult the public.** Get feedback from the public on what barriers they might face in your emergency plan. Create a feedback option that is open to the public. Create accessible public online meetings and consultations. Use the lessons learned to update your emergency procedures.



**Offer solutions.** Accommodate people with disabilities. For example, COVID-19 public health measures require face masks. However, they can be a barrier to communication for a person who lip reads (also called speech reading). A safe and accessible service would be to keep a supply of masks with a clear plastic window that shows the mouth.

In addition:



- Update your training materials.
- Inform employees and volunteers of accessibility enhancements and emergency plans.
- Work with other federally regulated organizations to share lessons learned and improve emergency responses.

When creating or updating emergency plans, make sure that changes do not create new barriers to accessibility.

### **Learn from and incorporate best practices**

Above all, it is your responsibility to provide accessible services. Still, there are best practices that people with disabilities can follow to prepare for an emergency and protect their personal health and safety during emergencies.



Take note of these best practices and be aware of how your organization could help with them. Use these practices to guide emergency planning or to help people with disabilities during emergencies. Make sure your employees also benefit from these practices.



## Staff training



**Helping people with disabilities.** Train employees and volunteers to [deliver services to people with disabilities during emergencies](#). Make sure staff are trained to communicate with them respectfully and effectively. For example, ensure that communications materials portray people with disabilities appropriately.

**Keeping co-workers safe.** Train staff to provide accessible services and keep the workplace accessible for their co-workers during emergencies.



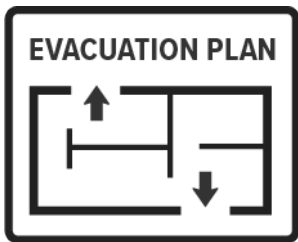
**Keeping the public safe.** Train staff to stay safe and to help all members of the public stay safe. Make sure employees and volunteers are knowledgeable about safety features during an emergency.

**Keeping clients safe.** Train staff or volunteers to help all clients, including people with disabilities, during emergencies. This should include:



- removing physical barriers
- how to accommodate and communicate with support people accompanying people with disabilities
- accommodating service animals
- having sign language interpreters always available

## Evacuation planning

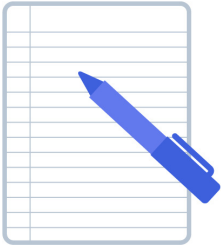


To evacuate a building safely, you need a plan to support the emergency egress of all staff members and the general public.

Make sure your emergency egress plan takes into account [the safety of all people with disabilities](#). It might be necessary to develop a specific plan for certain employees or volunteers.

- [Evacuating people who need assistance in an emergency](#)

## During an emergency



How an emergency impacts people can change quickly. Monitor the situation. If needed, adjust your response to stay accessible and still protect public health and safety. Also:

- Take note of any changes that are needed to ensure services remain accessible.
- Make sure your [meetings are inclusive](#).

### Ensure accessibility for employees



Accessibility also applies to employees and other members of your organization. People with disabilities should be able to work for your organization without facing barriers. This includes barriers that hinder their safety. Apply the same rules for barrier-free access to both the public and your own staff.

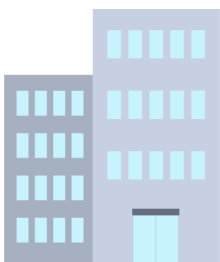
- [How people with disabilities can protect themselves during an emergency](#)

### Tips for remote work during an emergency (PDFs)



- [Best practices for accessibility when working from home](#)
- [Working from home accessibility checklist](#)
- [Tips for accessible online meetings](#)
- [Accessibility tips for online meeting hosts](#)

### Tips for making the return to work accessible (PDFs)



- [Checklist for an accessible return to the workplace during or after an emergency or public health crisis](#)
- [Key considerations for an accessible return to the workplace during a public health crisis](#)

Look for needs specific to the emergency, such as [how to make physical distancing easier for people with disabilities](#).

## After an emergency



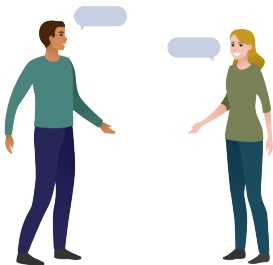
The lessons learned during an emergency will help you address future situations.

Review any notes you took during the emergency indicating the changes needed to improve accessibility. Also, review your emergency plans to determine what changes you should make. Review the following:

- [Best practices for accessibility when working from home](#)
- [Accessible service delivery during emergencies](#)
- Communication with the public:
  - [Communication based on technology](#)
  - [Face-to-face communication](#)
  - [Printed, written, and visual information](#)



Decide if accessibility enhancements added during the emergency should become permanent. But do not rely only on your own assessment. Seek feedback from the public, including:



- accessibility experts
- employees and volunteers
- people with disabilities
- others with experience using your accessibility features (enhancements)

After an emergency, update your plans. Make changes based on what you learned. Apply the lessons to create a new plan as soon as possible. Also:

- Get feedback on accessibility, especially from people with disabilities.
- Use informed feedback to improve your emergency response. Train your employees in the new approach.



### Note

**If the state of emergency lasts a long time, you might be able to apply some lessons while the emergency is ongoing.**

# How People with Disabilities Can Protect Themselves During an Emergency



Employees of federally-regulated organizations should also prepare for emergencies as individuals. For people with disabilities, these best practices can help to make accessible emergency plans. All employees should be aware of these practices, so that they can help co-workers or clients in an accessible way.

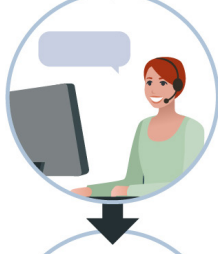
## Before an emergency: Communication plans and emergency kits



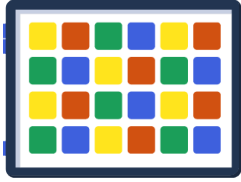
If you are a person with a disability and require accommodation from your employer, you can help your employer by doing the following:

[Make a communication plan](#). Make sure it includes the following information:

- the name and contact information of the members of your emergency [support team](#)
- your medical information, such as the name of your doctor, your health card number, and your health conditions, allergies, or chemical sensitivities
- telephone numbers for emergency services
- video relay service information
- notes on how you communicate
- contact information for interpreters or interveners
- reminders on how to access alert systems in your province or territory

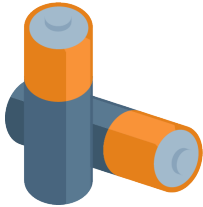


[Build an emergency kit](#). Include items you use daily. Restock and replace items as soon as you use them.



## Make sure you have what you need

- Have essential items such as [communications devices](#), food, water, and prescriptions.
- Replace any perishable supplies in your emergency kit.
- Make sure your battery-operated assistive devices are fully charged.
- Keep spare batteries.



For more information, see [Accessibility Standards Canada's Accessible communication during COVID-19 and other emergencies: A guideline for persons with disabilities](#).

## During an emergency: What you can do to protect your health and safety



### Stay in touch with your support team

- Keep in touch with your [support team](#). Let them know if you are having problems, especially if it impacts your health and safety.
- If you do not have a support team that would be available during an emergency, look for local resources in your community.

### Get information

Get information about the emergency. Good sources are:

- [technology-based communication tools](#)
- emergency apps (for example, [the COVID alert app](#))
- provincial and territorial [emergency alert systems](#) and local news channels and social media.



[Federally regulated organizations need to offer options](#) for alternative service delivery during an emergency. Find out which ones work for you. For example, special opening hours, online services or postal delivery.

### Get help

[Ask your support team for help if needed.](#)

- For online services, ask for help filling out forms.
- For in-person services, ask if you can register online if in-person services are not safe.



## After an emergency: Update your plan and give feedback



### Update your communication plan

Update your [communication plan](#) to reflect any changes, such as new people for your support network. Also, review the [technology](#) that you used to get services or communicate. Decide whether you should get new technology to avoid any problems you had during the emergency.



### Give feedback on barriers

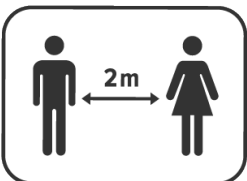
Tell organizations about the barriers to information or services that you faced. Tell them about alternatives that work for you. It is the responsibility of federally regulated organizations to seek feedback. [They must also provide an accessible option for the public to provide input.](#) For example, use the “contact us” form on their website.

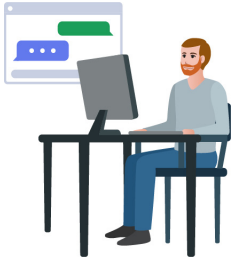
## Best practices



### [Accessible practices for returning to the workplace](#)

- [Key takeaways](#)
- [Scheduling](#)
- [Cleaning and other safety rules](#)
- [Physical distancing](#)
- [Workstations](#)
- [Face masks](#)
- [Work-related travel \(outside of travelling to and from the workplace\)](#)
- [If you feel ill](#)
- [Emergency procedures](#)
- [Mental health](#)





## Accessible practices for employees working from home

- [Key takeaways](#)
- [Equipment](#)
- [Scheduling](#)
- [Accessibility of online meetings](#)

## **Accessible communication during COVID-19 and other emergencies**



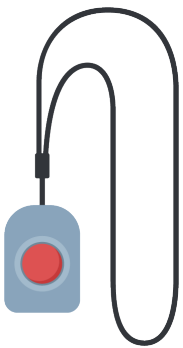
### A guideline for federally regulated organizations

- [Key takeaways](#)
- [General best practices](#)
- [Communication based on technology](#)
- [Face-to-face communication](#)
- [Printed, written, and visual information](#)
- [Other resources](#)



### A guideline for persons with disabilities

- [Develop a communication plan](#)
- [Identify how you will be alerted to an emergency](#)
- [Let others know about your communication needs](#)
- [Identify your communication assistive devices](#)
- [Research how to communicate in emergencies when travelling](#)
- [Other resources](#)



### Accessible service delivery during emergencies

- [Preparing for emergencies](#)
- [Accessible service delivery during emergencies](#)

## Resource list

- [Accessibility Standards Canada](#)
  - [Our mandate](#)
  - [Accessible Canada Act](#)
- Accessible communication during COVID-19 and other emergencies:
  - [A guideline for federal organizations](#)
  - [A guideline for persons with disabilities](#)
- [Accessible procurement](#)
- Designing a new built environment: [International best practices in universal design \(PDF\)](#)
- [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#)
- [Guidelines for the portrayal of persons with disabilities \(PDF\)](#)
- [Evacuating people who need assistance in an emergency](#)
- [Making physical distancing easier for people with disabilities](#)
- [Chemical sensitivity at work \(PDF\)](#)
- [Volatile organic compounds in consumer and commercial products](#)
- [The curb cut effect](#)

## Meetings

- [Planning an accessible and inclusive meeting](#)
- [Providing accessible services and materials](#)
- [Conducting the meeting](#)
- [Working from home: Accessible online meetings \(PDF\)](#)
- [Accessibility tips for online meeting hosts \(PDF\)](#)



## Working from home

- [Working from home accessibility checklist \(PDF\)](#)
- [Best practices for accessibility when working from home](#)
  - [PDF summary](#)

## Returning to work

- [Accessible practices for returning to the workplace](#)
- [Key considerations for an accessible return to the workplace during a public health crisis \(PDF\)](#)
- [Checklist for an accessible return to the workplace during or after an emergency or public health crisis \(PDF\)](#)

## Contact us!

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