



ATSSC Accessibility Plan Progress Report

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General

Progress report at a glance

The Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada (ATSSC) is committed to making its programs, services and environments more accessible, in keeping with the [Accessible Canada Act](#). The ATSSC's [accessibility plan](#) (published in 2022) identified key initiatives to implement over several years as we work to provide equitable, barrier-free access for all those who interact with our organization and the administrative tribunals we support.

This report offers a detailed overview of our progress. It outlines the actions we have taken so far and notes the valuable lessons we learned during the first year of implementing the accessibility plan. From raising awareness of accessibility requirements and needs, to promoting inclusion, to ensuring that physical and virtual environments are accessible, the goal of our accessibility plan is to ensure the ATSSC is a place where the importance of accessibility not only recognized, but actively championed.

The ATSSC's mandate is to provide access to justice for all Canadians. Many of the tribunals we support have completed the Access to Justice Index for Federal Administrative Bodies (the Index) to help determine if our services meet accessibility requirements. Completing the Index also allowed us to identify best practices that could be expanded to others, such as offering plain-language legal writing training to lawyers. In 2024, we will continue to foster collaboration and exchange tools and best practices within the ATSSC.

Much work remains to be done to make justice fully accessible, but the ATSSC made excellent progress in 2023. We are mobilizing resources to ensure continued progress, and the independent tribunals we support are committed to joining us as we work towards a shared goal of making justice fully accessible to all Canadians.

Contact

We invite the public to comment on the Accessibility Plan Progress Report and to contact us to obtain this document in other formats.

You can contact the ATSSC by email, telephone or mail.

- **Email:** communications@tribunal.gc.ca
- **Phone:** 613-954-6350
- **Mailing address:**
Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada (ATSSC)
Attention to: Director General, Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer
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Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E1

You can ask to receive the ATSSC Accessibility Plan Progress Report in the following formats:

- print
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic format compatible with adaptive technologies for people with disabilities

The ATSSC must provide its Accessibility Plan Progress Report in alternate formats, upon request.

- Requests for documents in braille or audio format are processed within 45 days.
- The response time for all other requests is 15 days.

Areas described under Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act

Beginning in 2023, the ATSSC will focus on the 7 pillars of Section 5 of the [Accessible Canada Act](#):

1. Employment
2. Built environment
3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
4. Communication, other than information and communication technologies
5. Procurement of goods, services and facilities
6. Design and delivery of programs and services
7. Transportation

Employment

Employment refers to all processes, practices and services that the ATSSC uses to support employees in their professional journey within the organization. This support begins with recruitment and continues with hiring, onboarding, providing accommodations, career and talent development, performance management and job exit.

The Employment pillar of the [ATSSC Accessibility Plan](#) included 6 main actions. Each action included several key activities.

Action 1: Contribute to meeting the Government of Canada's commitment to hiring at least 5,000 people with disabilities by 2025

The first action is to contribute to the Government of Canada's commitment to hire at least 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025. Although the ATSSC exceeded its target for hiring persons with disabilities in 2022 (116%), we continued to work to increase their representation.

In 2023, we took steps to remove barriers in our employment systems. This included adding measures to promote inclusive hiring in staffing processes, such as limiting the area of selection. We also developed a checklist of systemic assessment barriers that we now use in all staffing processes.

We invested in training for human resources staff and hiring managers on topics such as unconscious bias and other potential employment barriers. The Diversity and Inclusion Learning Path outlined on the ATSSC intranet suggests courses, videos, readings and other learning activities and includes a section dedicated to accessibility. We also developed our own course on inclusive staffing practices and made it mandatory for managers to follow this training.

The ATSSC actively encouraged staff to begin using the [Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport](#), which helps employees get the tools and measures they need to succeed. To ensure we promote inclusion and accessibility during all stages of employment, we began promoting the Accessibility Passport during the onboarding process for new hires. We added the following paragraph to all letters of offer to proactively encourage new employees to speak their managers about their accommodation needs:

"You should inform your manager of your accommodation needs before your start date or as soon as possible. If you already have a [Workplace Accessibility Passport](#), feel free to send it to your manager. For more information, please consult the [Directive on the Duty to Accommodate](#)."

Action 2: Raise awareness of the reality of equity-seeking groups

The second action of the Employment pillar is to raise awareness of the issues that equity-seeking groups face.

In 2023, the ATSSC's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee provided a safe space for employees to share their experiences and to help increase awareness of EDI issues across the organization. The committee is also planning awareness-raising initiatives for 2024, including information sessions on EDI-related topics, organized in partnership with various areas of the ATSSC.

The ATSSC is developing a toolkit to help managers better understand EDI issues and to create a safe space for EDI discussions within their teams. In 2024, we will add this toolkit to the collection of resources we provide to managers to help them foster an inclusive, respectful, and accessible work environment.

The ATSSC continues to build awareness of accessibility needs among hiring managers, staff and tribunal members. We plan to create a more accessible and inclusive working environment by improving the quality and accessibility of our communications and documents. We are developing plain language tools and an accessibility checklist for documents. In 2024, we also plan to offer training on creating accessible documents with Word, PowerPoint and Excel.

Action 3: Ensure that all ATSSC staff and tribunal members have access to the tools, devices, and support measures required to succeed

The ATSSC made significant progress on Action 3 in 2023. The Information Services and Solutions Team (ISST), in collaboration with Human Resources, met with Shared Services Canada's (SSC) [Accessibility, Accommodations and Adaptive Computer Technology \(AAACT\)](#). AACT shared best practices with ISST and outlined the accessibility requirements and evaluation criteria they should apply to IT-related accommodation requests.

The ATSSC is taking a proactive approach to supporting our staff's ergonomic needs. We provide ergonomic assessments and offer ergonomic equipment to existing and newly hired staff. We handle requests for accommodation on an individual basis and seek support from external partners such as AACT, if necessary.

We promote the [Government of Canada Accessibility Passport](#) to ensure that employees receive the support they need to succeed in their roles. We proactively inform new hires about the passport so that we can put solutions in place as soon as possible.

Action 4: Collaborate with equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) committees, employees and their managers, and other stakeholders to complete a gap analysis of current accommodations process for new and existing employees

The ATSSC aims to ensure that accommodation procedures are comprehensive, effective and tailored to the needs of individuals. We recognize the importance of having sound accommodation processes in place to help every member of our workforce reach their full potential at work.

We are committed to reviewing accommodation requests on a case-by-case basis to ensure that each request is carefully evaluated. This allows us to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment by considering the unique needs of each individual.

We ask staff to give us feedback on their accommodation requests so that we can make the process as effective and efficient as possible.

Action 5: Ensure all existing employees can get information about workplace accommodations

The ATSSC is committed to making it easy for employees to access information about accommodation requests. In 2023, we updated the ATSSC intranet page on workplace accommodations to ensure employees can easily find the information they need. We also invested significant effort into developing a new, accessible intranet that follows the Canada.ca model. This new intranet will make it easier for staff to find information about accommodation measures and follow the steps to request an accommodation. It will include several enhancements, including easier access to application forms for workplace accommodation. We plan to launch the new ATSSC intranet and its revised content on April 1, 2024.

Built environment

Built environment refers to all structures and objects that make up the ATSSC's workspaces. This includes entrances, elevators, meeting rooms, hearing and mediation rooms, offices, and lighting.

Action 1: Ensure that all refit and modernization projects under the control of the ATSSC respect Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) built-environment accessibility standards

The ATSSC is continuing to work on key objectives which aim to make the built environment accessible. We are committed to ensuring that all refit and modernization projects under our responsibility meet Public Services and Procurement Canada's (PSPC) built environment accessibility standards.

To fulfill this commitment, we have all projects involving workspace modifications reviewed by design experts who ensure plans fully meet the accessibility standards set by PSPC. In addition, we introduced a new space reservation system for staff working in unassigned workspaces. This system allows staff to select and reserve accessible workstations and workspaces, including those where food is prohibited—an important measure for individuals with food allergies.

In 2023, the Facilities and Workplace Management teams played an important role in supporting the organization in the implementation of the new common hybrid work model for the public service, an action that wasn't included in the [ATSSC's accessibility plan](#). The Facilities team was involved in reconfiguring several office spaces and ensured that changes were consistent with PSPC's accessibility requirements. In addition, it guided the purchase, installation and adjustment of accessible and ergonomic equipment and furniture. In line with these efforts, the Workplace Management team organized several ergonomic information sessions for staff to support their transition to a new work environment.

Information and communications technologies

Information and communications technologies (ICT) refers to the ways people share and access information. It can include emails, meetings, visual communications, and documents. It also refers to how content is written and presented on websites like Canada.ca or on tribunal websites. The ATSSC has a website on Canada.ca and an intranet site, and it also helps the 12 tribunals it supports to develop and maintain their respective websites.

Action 1: All ATSSC internal and external webpages (including those of the administrative tribunals it supports) are compliant with Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) Guidelines on Making Communication Products and Activities Accessible (WCAG 2.1 AA Standards)

In 2023, the ATSSC completed several important improvements. The ATSSC's website is now fully compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standards and aligned with the Canada.ca platform.

In addition, the ATSSC has begun an in-depth analysis of tribunal websites to assess their level of compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards. Although we made progress in 2023, this is a large-scale project that will continue into 2024. While several tribunal websites were recently updated and may require minimal adjustments, others may need a complete overhaul to reach the targeted accessibility standards. To address these challenges, we formed a working group in September 2023 to collaborate on common challenges such as website accessibility. We are committed to collaborating with stakeholders to identify and resolve accessibility issues in a consistent and coordinated way that can benefit all the tribunals we support. In addition, the ATSSC is exploring ways to monitor WCAG compliance on an on-going basis.

Action 2: All newly procured hardware and software will be accessible and meet European Norm (EN) 301 549 standards

In 2023, we made progress towards ensuring that all new procured hardware and software is accessible and meets the European Norm (EN) 301 549 standards. The Information Services and Solutions Team (ISST) works closely with Procurement to integrate Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) accessibility criteria and information technology (IT) procurement standards. As a result of this collaboration, we use the Accessibility Consideration Certification form for all procurement requests. Ensuring that all newly acquired hardware and software meet established standards helps us to provide an accessible working environment.

In 2024, the ATSSC is also planning to provide training on the hardware and software accessibility standard to ISST and procurement teams, including those responsible for purchasing hardware and software.

Action 3: Review requirements regarding the prevention and blocking of assistive or adaptive technologies, software or equipment

The ATSSC launched several initiatives to support this action item in 2023. One of these was a review of the process for offering printers to employees. Previously, we limited access to printers to support the transition to a paperless environment, but we changed this practice to ensure that staff with certain limitations can access printed documents. The Workplace Management team now reviews requests for printers to ensure proper accommodations are provided. This approach helps guarantee that employees are well supported while maintaining our ongoing transition to a digital environment.

We are also establishing procedures to ensure staff can access headsets that meet accessibility requirements.

The ATSSC is implementing an audio-visual strategy to equip hearing rooms with tools and software accessible to all tribunal members, ATSSC employees, interpreters, stenographers, parties, witnesses, counsel, and members of the public. We plan to add a wider range of accessible technologies, software, and support equipment to hearing rooms by the end of 2024.

Communication, other than information and communication technologies

Communications other than information and communications technology (ICT) includes all the ways in which the ATSSC communicates including letters, emails, forms, templates, procedures, instructions, verbal communications, and images, among other methods.

Action 1: Ensure that the content of all documents, forms, templates, messages (internal and external), hyperlinks, images and websites is accessible and complies with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) Guidelines on Making Communication Products and Activities Accessible.

In 2023, we launched and partially completed an in-depth analysis of the accessibility gaps of all communication products under the responsibility of the ATSSC.

We are developing several tools and practices, including the use of plain language for all communications to staff. We plan to offer training on creating accessible documents with Word, PowerPoint and in 2024. We are also developing an accessibility checklist for documents used in presentations.

The ATSSC is also exploring different ways of communicating information, including video and audio clips, graphics, and infographics. Using a variety of communication formats can help meet diverse needs and preferences and make it easier for a wider range of people to access information.

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

Accessible **procurement** meets as wide a range of user needs as possible from the start of a procurement process. ATSSC procurement staff are responsible for ensuring that they include accessibility requirements and considerations in the procurement and decision-making processes.

Action: Ensure that all procurement decisions are made with accessibility considerations in mind

In 2024, we will create a checklist of accessibility considerations related to procurement to improve procurement management within the ATSSC. We will draw upon the expertise of other federal government organizations to develop a checklist adapted to our operational needs.

In 2023, we increased awareness of accessibility criteria within the ATSSC procurement team. We also developed an accessibility assessment form that clients must complete when they submit contract requests. In 2024, we will develop additional resources to educate clients about accessible procurement, including an information sheet and detailed instructions on the updated ATSSC intranet.

Design and delivery of programs and services

The ATSSC's **design and delivery of programs and services** are guided by our operational mandate of providing essential support services to federal administrative tribunals. Our programs and services support the proper functioning of day-to-day operations of internal services and the tribunals we support.

Action 1: Ensure changes to programs and services, including design and delivery elements, include broader accessibility considerations

The ATSSC undertook several actions in 2023 to support the design and delivery of barrier-free programs and services and developed plans for the years ahead.

In September 2023, we established a collaborative working group to identify common challenges and accessibility gaps in tribunal secretariats. We assessed the accessibility standards of the main registry services offered to the administrative tribunals supported by the ATSSC and developed an action plan to implement in 2024.

We will also update existing procedures to incorporate accommodations requests that could enhance overall accessibility and better meet the needs of tribunal members and the public. In the fall of 2023, the working group began identifying specific activities that will be implemented in 2024 and 2025.

We are also assessing the accessibility standards of the services we offer to the public, such as the Social Security Tribunal of Canada's call centre, the ATSSC's general inquiries line, the ATSSC's Library Services, and the ATSSC's Access to Information and Privacy Services. We plan to complete the assessment in 2024 and will develop an action plan to address areas needing improvement.

Action 2: Ensure all parties are aware that accommodations are available to them

We are focusing offering support proactively so that we can quickly put any necessary accommodation measures into place and ensure everyone has the chance to fully participate right from the start. A key step in this process is revising forms and instructions to make it easier for staff and members of the public to request and receive accommodations. We will also strive to reduce the number of times users need to click on website links to access information about accessibility and accommodation.

Transportation

Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act also mentions transportation. However, this section doesn't apply to the ATSSC as it refers to the national transportation network. When tribunal members and ATSSC staff need to travel to participate in hearings and mediations, we offer them accommodations as needed, on a case-by-case basis.

Consultations and feedback

Implementation of the action plan

In the winter of 2023, we held consultations to develop a more detailed accessibility action plan. Internal partners including the ATSSC's Human Resources team, Accommodation and Security team, Communications team and Information Services and Solutions team collaborated with the tribunals we support and their secretariats during these consultations.

We completed the consultations in May 2023, and proposed an action plan to a resources sub-committee made up of members of senior management. Much of the work identified for 2023 involved consultation and gap analysis for each of the pillars of the accessibility plan. The names of participants have not been noted for confidentiality reasons, with the exception of those who provided information in a professional capacity.

During the consultations, we asked questions about the [ATSSC Accessibility plan](#) activities. Subject matter experts reviewed, clarified and prioritized the responses. We also shared the action plan with secretariat management teams to gather feedback and identify risks.

Consultations took place in virtual meetings, group discussions and exchanges with the concerned teams. We chose to hold activities in this format to ensure inclusive and diversified participation. We also ensured that consultations were accessible by providing materials adapted to different disabilities.

The results of these consultations were used to identify key gaps, propose corrective measures, and develop an action plan including accountabilities and deadlines for each activity.

Accessibility working group

In the summer of 2023, the ATSSC took important steps to increase the accessibility of the 12 tribunals it supports, which are grouped under 5 secretariats. The executive directors of the secretariats met and were encouraged to complete the [Access to Justice Index](#) for each tribunal to better understand common challenges. At the same time, we also set up an accessibility working group including representatives from all the secretariats.

In September 2023, the working group met once they had received most of the Access to Justice Index reports prepared by Justice Canada. The reports revealed challenges and considerations that had not been identified through other assessments. We held discussions to identify common challenges and gain better insights into the implementation of the ATSSC's Accessibility Plan. We held weekly consultations in the

fall of 2023 and will continue to hold biweekly meetings in 2024 to collaboratively advance accessibility in the tribunals.

We held these consultations through virtual meetings and group discussions. We chose this approach to facilitate participation, and respect confidentiality constraints. We ensured that consultations were accessible to all participants.

The consultations identified a number of best practices already followed within certain tribunals that could be adopted by all tribunals. This collaboration between tribunals will be aligned with the ATSSC's accessibility action plan and will help us to apply initiatives consistently.

In early 2024, we will hold a priority ranking exercise to help focus resources on key areas requiring immediate action. We will then complete a detailed action plan and present it to senior management for endorsement.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

The ATSSC's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee played a key role in the consultation process and aimed to ensure a diverse and inclusive perspective. The EDI committee held monthly exchanges throughout 2023.

The committee discussed accessibility issues and the progress of activities included in the [Accessibility plan](#). The committee met virtually, which allowed members working in different cities to participate.

Committee members brought enriching perspectives and shared their personal experiences and accessibility challenges. Their input was essential to forming the ATSSC's action plan and they will continue to play an important role in improving accessibility at the ATSSC as we move forward.

Discussions with senior management

In the summer of 2023, we held discussions with executive directors to explain the importance of completing the [Access to Justice Index with the tribunals' agreement](#). These discussions gave us a clearer perspective on the ease of access to the tribunals. We invited executive directors to choose members of their teams to join the Accessibility working group. We also held a discussion with the tribunal chairpersons in July 2023.

In November 2023, we held individual meetings with executive directors to better understand their expectations and remind them of the Accessibility Working Group's objectives. They expressed a desire to receive a detailed action plan.

At the end of November 2023, the working group held a meeting with executive directors to share the progress outlined in the progress report. The executive directors

expressed their satisfaction with the creation of the working group and reaffirmed their interest in receiving a detailed plan of improvements related to the Access to Justice Index for 2024.

Progress report

In October 2023, we launched the process of drafting this progress report, which is an essential part of the evaluation and communication of our progress on the [Accessibility plan](#). We asked all subject matter experts and members representing the secretariats involved in the accessibility working group to share their comments and report their progress on the activities defined in the accessibility plan.

Completing this progress report has helped the ATSSC to comprehensively document the actions we implemented during 2023. It has also provided a valuable opportunity to highlight the successes we have achieved to date, the challenges we have overcome, and the lessons we have learned. It will help guide our continued efforts to improve accessibility at the ATSSC.

Conclusion

In 2023, the ATSSC made important improvements to accessibility in several areas. We focused on gaining a clear understanding of our strengths and weaknesses to better plan our actions and optimize resources to achieve results.

In 2024, we will continue to uphold our commitment to accessibility by implementing activities that will bring us closer to our goal, including:

- encouraging ongoing feedback from stakeholders and exploring the possibility of introducing anonymous feedback forms to make the process more accessible and open to all;
- encouraging ongoing collaboration with people with disabilities;
- fostering continued collaboration and communication between the ATSSC's secretariats and business units;
- sharing information and progress on accessibility improvements more regularly to ensure a consistent approach throughout the ATSSC; and
- increasing awareness by expanding accessibility training for new hires and existing staff.

The ATSSC has laid the necessary foundations to put its commitment to accessibility into action. We look forward to continuing our journey to improve access to justice for all Canadians.