



Design and Delivery of Accessible Programs and Services, Including Customer Services

July 29, 2025

Technical Guide



Accessibility Standards
Canada

Normes d'accessibilité
Canada

Canada

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2 About this technical guide

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Accessibility Standards Canada develops equity-based accessibility standards and guidance. Accessibility Standards Canada seeks to create inclusive standards that can impact all persons with disabilities while recognizing their intersectionality and expertise. Accessibility Standards Canada is sharing this technical guide so that organizations can begin implementing this guidance in their work while a standard in this area is being developed. This technical guide focuses on areas where people with disabilities may face barriers related to accessible design and delivery of programs and services including customer service. This includes the policies, procedures, practices, and structures which are delivered to clients and/or the public. Equity refers to fairness, justice, and freedom from discrimination. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and focuses on enabling all individuals to achieve the same outcomes.

2.1 Audience

This technical guide is intended for all Government of Canada departments, agencies, and federally regulated entities as well as anyone seeking guidance to improve accessibility in this area.

3 Context

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3.1 General

Accessibility Standards Canada develops technical guides that align with its vision. This vision is rooted in the principles of the *Accessible Canada Act* and “nothing without us”. These principles reflect a commitment to breaking down barriers to accessibility that can impact all persons in Canada—especially persons with disabilities and their families—ensuring full and equal participation in society.

As part of the “nothing without us” principle, Accessibility Standards Canada promotes that accessibility is good for everyone, as it can have society-wide benefits. As a result, Accessibility Standards Canada develops technical guides to promote accessibility and accessible best practices. This means that this technical guide incorporates best practices, the lived experience of people with disabilities, and information aimed at achieving the highest level of accessibility. This approach is meant to drive innovation, foster change, and promote requirements and best practices that have broad positive impacts.

This approach strives to improve outcomes for all Canadians, including creating employment opportunities and solutions that contribute to Canada’s economic growth.

By proactively removing barriers, these guides' support the key accessibility principles of the *Accessible Canada Act* and “nothing without us”, support organizations on their accessibility journeys, and move Canada closer to being barrier-free by 2040. The technical content of this guide benefits:

- people with disabilities;
- people without disabilities;
- the federal public sector;
- the private sector;
- non-government organizations;
- Indigenous communities; and
- society.

The guidance provided in section 4 supports the goals of the *Accessible Canada Act*.

3.2 *Accessible Canada Act*

The *Accessible Canada Act* provides a framework which allows for the proactive identification, removal, and prevention of barriers wherever Canadians interact with areas under federal jurisdiction. It puts in place mechanisms that would systematically address accessibility. The purpose of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to make Canada barrier-free by January 1, 2040. This involves identifying, removing and preventing barriers in federal jurisdiction in the following priority areas:

- employment;
- the built environment (buildings and public spaces);
- information and communication technologies;
- communication, other than information and communication technologies;

- the procurement of goods, services and facilities;
- the design and delivery of programs and services; and
- transportation (airlines, as well as rail, road and marine transportation providers that cross provincial or international borders)

3.3 *Accessible Canada Act* consultations

To inform the development of the *Accessible Canada Act*, in 2016-2017 the Government of Canada undertook the largest and most accessible consultation on disability issues that Canada has ever seen. Over 6000 Canadians and over 90 organizations shared their ideas about an accessible Canada. Participants wanted the legislation to apply to all areas under the control of the Government of Canada and that Canada should become a leader in accessibility. While participants acknowledged that the development and implementation of some standards will take longer than others, they noted guidance should be clear and any accessibility requirements should lead to positive lasting change.

The "nothing without us" principle means that people with disabilities are engaged and involved in the identification, prevention, and removal of barriers. This also means consulting and working closely with people with disabilities, diverse disability communities and other experts to develop accessibility guidance to remove barriers. The principle of "nothing without us" drives everything we do at Accessibility Standards Canada, including relying on the knowledge and experiences of people with disabilities in the development of accessibility guidance.

3.4 Key Accessible Canada Act principles

The *Act* is to be implemented in recognition of, and in accordance with, the following principles:

- everyone must be treated with dignity;
- everyone must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the life they are able and wish to have;
- everyone must be able to participate fully and equally in society;
- everyone must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire;
- laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the ways that different kinds of barriers and discrimination intersect;
- persons with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services, and structures; and
- accessibility standards and regulations must be made with the goal of achieving the highest level of accessibility.

3.5 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Canada joined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010. The United Nations Convention protects and promotes the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equality under the law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has served as the major catalyst in the global movement towards viewing persons with disabilities as full and equal members of society. The human rights approach has moved away from viewing persons with disabilities as subjects of charity, medical treatment and social protection. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act were foundational human rights frameworks that support equity on which the *Accessible Canada Act* was built.

4 Guidance: understanding the impact

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4.1 Introduction

Twenty-seven percent of Canadians identify as having one or more disabilities and this number will only increase as our population ages.

The *Accessible Canada Act* calls on individuals and organizations to make society more equitable and inclusive by designing and delivering programs and services (including customer service) in an accessible manner. Intentionally designing programs and services with accessibility at the forefront is the most effective way organizations and providers can ensure that everyone can actively participate.

Training staff to accommodate diverse needs and provide equitable service delivery results in people with disabilities receiving appropriate personalized assistance, whether delivered in person, over the phone, or online. These combined efforts eliminate barriers and create the best opportunity for people with disabilities to gain the same opportunities as their peers such as employment and community engagement.

For example:

- People who are deaf, deafened or hard-of-hearing communicating and interacting with online public programs and services through video relay interpreters and online captioning services can communicate in real time with a service provider.
- People who use wheeled mobility aids or other mobility aids can easily enter accessible buildings and participate in work and civic events without experiencing physical barriers.
- People who are blind or partially sighted can use assistive technology, such as a screen reader, to access and listen to online content from an organization's accessible website.

These scenarios are achieved when programs, services, and service delivery are designed to be accessible, and customer service representatives are trained to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Organizations should adopt a culture of accessibility and inclusion, making it an organizational norm. Below are steps to create barrier-free programs and services.

4.2 General recommendations

4.2.1 Align with key *Accessible Canada Act* principles

Organizations should align their programs and services with the principles of the *Accessible Canada Act*. At a high level, this means a program or service's impact on people with disabilities needs to be considered from the earliest stages of its development and throughout its existence.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by considering how programs or services (provided directly or indirectly through third-party contracts, licenses, or other arrangements) align with the following principles:

- **Dignity for all.** Does the organization's programs or services treat people with disabilities with dignity regardless of their disabilities or relationships with others?
- **Equal opportunity.** Does the program or service provide people with disabilities the opportunity to have access to the same results from the program or service regardless of disability?
- **No additional charges or qualifications.** Are people with disabilities able to participate in or benefit from a program or service, if they qualify, without being confronted by such barriers as being charged extra for accommodations or administering licenses or certifications?
- **The choice to participate.** Is equal opportunity offered to people with and without disabilities to participate in or benefit from the same services, programs, or activities if they qualify for the services or programs, regardless of whether a separate service or program exists?
- **Equal benefit.** Are people with disabilities afforded equal opportunity to obtain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement as that provided to others if those people otherwise qualify for that service?
- **Equal access.** Is barrier-free access offered to full and equal social participation, regardless of a person's disabilities?
- **Choice of accommodation.** Are people provided meaningful options and the freedom of choice, including the freedom to choose whether to accept an accommodation?
- **Achieve the highest level of accessibility.** Are organizations aiming to achieve the highest level of accessibility for people with disabilities when designing and delivering programs and services?

- **Contribution and feedback.** Are people with disabilities included in developing and designing programs, services, and service delivery, including in customer support and advisory and planning committees?

4.3 Getting started: examine all elements of programs and services

The goal of accessibility is to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are considered when organizations design and deliver programs and services to employees and the public, whether they are in-person, by phone, or through an online platform. When programs and services are designed, developed, and delivered with accessibility in mind, everyone benefits. This means that all elements of program and service design and delivery must be examined.

For example, an organization that is planning an event needs to ensure that:

- the venue or facility is physically accessible;
- the content of the program or service is accessible (for example, in alternate formats);
- communications about the program or the service is accessible (for example, a sign language interpreter and captioning are available in-person and in virtual settings);
- marketing communications about the program or service are accessible (for example, websites, social media, or email);
- a plan for accommodating support persons, service dogs and guide dogs is established; and
- the venue is accessible for people with sensory impairments by reducing sounds, smells, and sights.

To meet the needs of people with disabilities when designing, maintaining, and refining programs and services to be accessible organizations should start by:

- Designing programs and services by focusing on the user's perspective. People with disabilities face a myriad of barriers. The organisation is better able to identify and prevent barriers by seeking their input at the earliest stages of planning. They can also reach out to organizations that represent the needs of people with disabilities at throughout the design process.
- Making it easy for users to provide feedback on programs and services and review their feedback regularly. Encourage positive and negative feedback from users across various accessible mediums (for example, paper forms, social media). Establish a regular cadence of organizing and reviewing this feedback. This helps organizations continually improve how they deliver programs and services.
- Helping users understand the customer service journey. Customer service poses unique challenges to everyone and can be magnified for users with disabilities. Make this process more accessible for everyone by letting users know exactly what they must do, how long it will take, and their rights.
- Using and leveraging organizational processes. Having good organizational processes in place (for example, having an accessibility coordinator) makes designing and delivering accessible programs and services much easier.
- Taking advantage of existing standards and best practices. Other organizations have adopted strategies that simplify eliminating barriers. Instead of reinventing the wheel, use these standards and best practices. An accessibility coordinator can help identify these practices.

Additional details of each of these elements are provided in the subsections below.

4.3.1 Capture the user's perspective in designing and delivering programs, services and customer service

People with disabilities often face additional socio-economic barriers that go beyond traditional barriers such as inaccessible buildings and communication. For instance, some people with disabilities may face financial hardship or other barriers due to various intersecting identities. The best way to understand the barriers created by these intersecting challenges is to meet users where they are and involve them early in the planning process.

To meet this guidance, when designing and delivering programs, services, and customer services, organizations should start by:

- contacting organizations representing people with disabilities when designing or modifying programs and services;
- providing compensation to people with disabilities for their time and expertise;
- using various means of outreach when designing engagement activities for the development of programs, services and customer service (for example, in-person community meetings, virtual meetings, surveys);
- considering the different barriers that people with disabilities may face when seeking their feedback and plan to offer accommodations; and
- ensuring that all feedback you solicit is shared with organization leadership to help increase their understanding on the need to increase the accessibility of programs and resources.

4.3.2 Understanding the needs of users

It is critical to understand user needs as early as possible in the design and development process of every aspect of programs, services, and customer services is critical.

For example, staff who are tasked with marketing or advertising upcoming programs or services need to consider the potential accessibility challenges of each marketing or advertising channel. Is a direct-to-customer email accessible? Are social media channels accessible to users with disabilities?

Organizations that are new to accessibility may again find that discussing these issues with people with disabilities is the best practice for meeting users' needs.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by considering:

- The need for organizational leadership to receive training or educational materials on the importance of making programs and services accessible and equitable.
- The potential implications of a "one-size-fits-all" approach for the program and service. This may not work and different mediums of delivery (i.e., virtual versus in-person versus over the phone) may require different methods of delivery (for example, how a customer provides information in person may differ than how they provide it through a phone conversation). As a result, a different approach may be required). Sometimes delivery methods require flexible solutions.
- The accessibility of communications for customers with sensory disabilities.
- The impact that a provider's means of delivery may have on users.
- The physical accessibility of venues.

For additional guidance on accessible communication and the physical accessibility of the built environment, consult the following resources:

- [CAN/ASC-2.3-Model Standard for the Built Environment- Accessibility for federally regulated entities as defined by the Accessible Canada Act](#)
- [CAN/ASC-3.1-Plain Language](#)
- [CAN/ASC-EN 301 549:2024-Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services \(EN 301 549:2021, IDT\)](#)

4.3.3 Solicit customer feedback throughout implementation

Organizations should solicit feedback from people with disabilities throughout the implementation of their program or service. This feedback can be a valuable way to identify and eliminate barriers. This can lead to a more equitable experience for all.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Proactively providing accessible online forms and other means for consumers with disabilities to give feedback (both online and on-premises).
- Soliciting detailed information in ways that prompt customers to make their needs known.
- Following any regulatory requirements for soliciting and incorporating feedback for your particular sector. For example, the *Accessible Canada Act* requires that organizations solicit and incorporate feedback into their accessibility plans.

4.3.4 Create a schedule for reviewing feedback

Feedback is not valuable unless it is regularly reviewed to identify patterns and set priorities. If an organization doesn't have a schedule (i.e. annual) for reviewing feedback, accessibility issues can arise that affect the program or service experience for all.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Planning and scheduling reviews ahead of time to minimize disruptions and to be as effective as possible.
- Combining this information with information gleaned from performing self-evaluations (Section [4.4.2](#)) to understand:
 - where there are areas for improvement to meet the requirements of accessibility standards;
 - where other barriers may exist for people with disabilities; and
 - how they can make improvements.
- Following any regulatory requirements for your sector. For example, organizations that must comply with the *Accessible Canada Act* must update their accessibility plans every three years.

4.3.5 Special considerations for customer service

Engaging with customer service can be difficult for all customers, particularly for customers with disabilities. Organizations should implement best practices to streamline the process of making customer service more accessible and usable.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Giving customers with disabilities a clear understanding of the process for resolving issues when a customer's needs cannot be immediately resolved. This includes a step-by-step outline the necessary next steps and the name and contact information of a responsible employee etc.
- Including essential information such as the prices and the conditions to cancel or change products or services when information is provided to customers. Such "key information" should be highlighted as clearly as possible and acknowledged by the customer.
- Using accessible systems that are streamlined to ensure they are not distracting or presenting unnecessary information when automated chat and voice response technologies are used to communicate with customers. Organizations should also make it easy for customers to contact them through alternate means (for example, by telephone or whatever accessible communication channel the customer prefers).

4.3.6 Take advantage of useful processes and procedures

Accessibility can seem overwhelming if organizations don't broadly share information, feedback, and best practices. Accessibility practices should benefit the entire organization. Organizations should leverage the best practices outlined in Section [4.4](#) (Organizational Processes).

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Designating an accessibility coordinator (see Section [4.4.1](#) for more information) to ensure that one person is responsible for the organization's compliance with accessibility requirements. The accessibility coordinator can bring together all the accessibility best practices so that everyone can easily find them.

- Having a straightforward process for receiving and regularly reviewing customer feedback from users with disabilities to:
 - identify patterns;
 - prioritize where latent accessibility barriers may exist; and
 - correct them.

4.4 Organizational processes

Section [4.3](#) focused on making programs and services accessible for people with disabilities. At a broader level, there are essential steps that organizations should take to remove barriers. The processes in this section support the steps outlined for specific programs and services in Section [4.5](#).

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Designating an accessibility coordinator that reports directly to senior management. Organizations should have a “point person” to:
 - coordinate efforts;
 - provide accountability; and
 - be the face of accessibility in the organization.
- Performing a self-evaluation and creating feedback mechanisms. These steps are essential to understanding the barriers that currently exist in organizations and giving people with disabilities a means of helping organizations identify those barriers. These processes also help organizations to set priorities.

- Training team members and using performance goals. Once barriers are understood and priorities are set, organizations have clarity over what training is needed and how performance goals should be set. Implementing focused training and specific performance goals can help to ensure that barriers can be removed, and accessibility can be improved.

Additional details of each of these steps are provided in the subsections below.

4.4.1 Designate an accessibility coordinator

To coordinate efforts across an organization or department and efficiently respond to the needs of people with disabilities, organizations should designate a coordinator that reports directly to senior management to coordinate and implement these efforts (an accessibility coordinator). For instance, if a sign language interpreter is needed to make a document accessible for any user who is deaf, having an accessibility coordinator (or content created by the coordinator) to go to for assistance will eliminate confusion. The accessibility coordinator can also work with consumers with disabilities to address their needs when front-line staff need support resolving an issue.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- appointing an accessibility coordinator to oversee accessible programs and services (including customer service);
- sharing contact information to reach the appointed staff member including their name, office address, and phone number with anyone who requests it;
- providing the accessibility coordinator's contact information on its accessible website where people with disabilities can easily find it;
- recording actions, policies, and practices for coordinating and achieving accessibility; and

- making this information accessible and freely available to employees and the public within physical venues, on websites, and through other avenues of communication such as social media.

For example, many organizations create a page on their website that contains:

- their commitment to accessibility;
- links to their policies and practices; and a way to contact the organization for specialized help with accessibility matters.

Best practices for developing a Customer Service policy or incorporating accessibility into a Customer Service policy can be found in the links below:

- [CAN/ASC-5.2.1-Part 1-Design and Delivery of Accessible Programs and Services: Accessible Service Delivery–Accessibility for federally regulated entities as defined by the Accessible Canada Act](#)
- [Government of Canada Guideline on Service and Digital](#)

4.4.2 Perform a self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is an essential element of continuous improvement and removing barriers.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Reviewing their programs, services, policies, and practices within a year of adopting new policies, procedures or practices. This allows for remediation, incorporation of consumer feedback, and continual improvement. This review should be repeated at least every three years.
- Encouraging interested people, including people with disabilities or groups representing them, to join the self-evaluation process and provide their opinions.

- Asking frontline staff how well the systems, processes, and procedures work to help them find and assist customers with disabilities including those who face multiple barriers.

4.4.3 Use feedback for continual improvement

People with disabilities may have questions, suggestions, and complaints. Organizations should take this input seriously.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- developing a robust grievance process;
- communicating the grievance process and how to initiate it;
- developing informal feedback process and mechanisms and informing consumers of these feedback processes and mechanisms; and
- leveraging the wealth of information that customers provide.

This allows people with disabilities or people acting on their behalf to make the organization aware of accessibility barriers. The organization can then respond promptly. Complaints highlight areas where improvements are needed and provide valuable insights into consumer experiences.

Organizations should always advise people of their right to file an accessibility complaint with the appropriate body, such as the Accessibility Commissioner or the Human Rights Commission. This is important for maintaining transparency and fairness to consumers.

Informal, "every day" mechanisms such as a specific online portal or an accessibility answer desk can resolve consumer issues and service complaints faster. These mechanisms are generally less disruptive for the customer than filing formal complaints. Organizations should always record consumer feedback and evaluate it regularly to identify barriers that need removal.

Organizations can continually improve the accessibility and inclusivity of programs and services by regularly reviewing customer complaints, feedback, and learning from staff experiences. They can use this information to develop creative and innovative solutions that will prevent future barriers and create positive customer outcomes. These reviews are also an excellent opportunity to incorporate new accessibility best practices as they are identified.

Further guidance on complaint processes:

- [Canadian Human Rights Commission complaint process](#)

4.4.4 Create a culture of accessibility

Stigmatization and discrimination deny people with disabilities their dignity and potential and are two of the most significant obstacles in achieving equal opportunity and social integration. The *Accessible Canada Act* focuses on building accessibility confidence and creating a culture of accessibility within federally regulated entities. Below are strategies organizations may consider:

- Developing and delivering accessibility and disability awareness training for all employees. An initial target metric could focus on achieving 80% or more of the employees completing the training, with a stretch goal of achieving 100% of employees. Organizations should also update training on a yearly basis to reflect new standards, policies, programs, and practices.
- Creating a disability or accessibility employment resource group. This group can promote and sponsor accessibility initiatives throughout an organization. This group can work closely with the Accessibility Coordinator outlined in Section [4.4](#).

- Promoting cultural change by having panel discussions with representatives of various disability groups. These representatives could speak about their lived experiences and all employees could attend. While culture change usually happens through very small continual steps, it can be accelerated when staff members have an "aha moment" by:
 - putting a human face to an abstract need;
 - hearing directly from customers about their experience; and
 - learning how small accessibility changes can have an impact on customers with disabilities' ability to better access the organization's programs or services.
- Following the guidance of clause 11 of [CAN/ASC-1.1:2024\(REV-2025\)-Employment](#) on culture, engagement, and education.

4.4.5 Train team members

People with disabilities deserve the same courtesy and respect as any customer. Training team members to meet the needs of customers with disabilities is a critical element of customer service for program and service design and delivery. Proper training ensures that organizations are respectful, informed, and responsive to the diverse needs of all customers, including people with disabilities. Organizations should create a policy that specifies how this training will be developed and provided.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by including the following modules in their training:

- disability etiquette and awareness;
- equitable communication;
- interaction with service or guide dogs and support persons;
- specialized equipment and making accommodations;
- problem-solving complex issues; and

- determining when to call on a higher level of service or management for assistance.

For example, people with disabilities have preferences regarding the language used to describe their disabilities. Some prefer the “people first” language (person who is blind), and others prefer their disability be used first (blind person). There are common courtesies for communicating with people who are deaf and their interpreters, such as keeping focus on the person who is deaf instead of the interpreter. It is not appropriate to touch a person's service or guide dog or white cane without asking permission. It is customary to ask permission before assisting people with disabilities, such as opening a door or guiding someone to a specific location.

The training should:

- be inclusive of everyone in the organization, including volunteers and contractors;
- cover the organization's policies, programs, services, and goods;
- be refreshed and offered yearly when a program or service is updated, or a new program or service is launched; and
- keep a record of who was trained and when to ensure everyone is updated on training.

A best practice implemented by many public and private organizations is to develop and deliver an annual accessibility etiquette and awareness training for all employees. An initial target metric could focus on achieving 80% or more of the employees completing the training, with a stretch goal of achieving 100% of the employees. Organizations should update this yearly training to reflect new standards, policies, programs, and practices.

Best practices for training organizations on serving people with disabilities include the following guides:

- [Government of Canada centre of expertise for accessible client service](#)

- [AccessAbility playbook: delivering accessible client service](#)

4.4.6 Goals and monitor performance

Setting goals to remove barriers and monitoring their effectiveness is essential to updating accessibility plans (as required by the *Accessible Canada Act*) and making future recommendations. This is especially important once an organization has published clear policies and procedures for accessibility. Critical aspects of customer service delivery should be evaluated for accessibility regularly, such as:

- in-person, phone, and online delivery channels;
- the built environment; and
- any other tools, documents, or facilities used to deliver elements of programs or services, including funding or grants.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by including findings and recommendations from:

- the feedback process for their *Accessible Canada Act* accessibility plan;
- their progress reports;
- their feedback processes; and
- their self-evaluation.

4.4.7 Additional organizational processes

Organizations can also do the following to remove barriers and improve accessibility for their customers with disabilities:

- Involve people with disabilities in deciding how best to design and deliver programs and services. As discussed more thoroughly in Section [4.3](#), organizations should develop trusted partnerships with organizations representing users with disabilities to align with the principle of “Nothing without us.”
- Include clauses about accessibility of products and services in the Terms and Conditions and other procurement documentation. These documents can include an organization’s procurement policy or an accessibility conformance report from vendors and contractors in technology and other goods and services proposals. Include training to re-enforce the importance of these documents being accessible.
- Include accessibility in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) planning and testing. Developing an information and communication technology plan that includes accessibility ensures that an organization’s plans for its digital infrastructure embraces accessibility and interoperability with assistive technology used by people with disabilities. Create an accessibility testing policy and train testers on assessing and remediating products and services throughout their lifecycles.
- Treat accessibility as a business need. Include accessibility with other organizational programs and service audits (for example, privacy and security) so that it is provided with organizational resources and treated like a valuable part of the organization.
- Take accessibility concerns seriously. Develop forward-looking, time-based strategies for resolving issues users have identified as barriers and make this information available to users as progress is made.

4.5 Specific obligations

People with disabilities have and continue to face many types of barriers. Many have and are working to help organizations understand the need to eliminate longstanding barriers and create solutions that meet the needs of everyone. It is essential for specific programs and services (Section [4.3](#)) and for organizations at a broader level (Section [4.4](#)) to understand how to avoid repeating the creation of barriers and to be aware of common solutions.

The topics covered here form a checklist of the actions organizations should take when designing, implementing, and reviewing the delivery of programs and services.

4.5.1 Accompaniment by service and guide dogs

Service and guide dogs often accompany people with disabilities and assist with essential tasks like navigation, retrieving objects, or ensuring safety. A service or guide dog is a dog individually trained to work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. It does not include pets or dogs that otherwise provide emotional support. When a service or guide dog accompanies a person with a disability, organizations should ensure that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the dog and keep it with them when they are on the premises.

In many cases, it will be evident that the dog is trained to help a person with a disability (for example, the dog is seen helping a person who is blind navigate, pushing a person's wheelchair, or supporting someone who has difficulty moving). In some cases, however, the service or guide dog may support a person's invisible disabilities (for example, a seizure alert dog), and these inquiries may be warranted.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Observing before acting:
 - Does the dog have a harness, vest or I.D. tag?
 - Is the dog behaving appropriately (i.e., quiet, under control, not approaching others)?

If the answer is yes to both, do not question the person with a disability and allow them full access as required by law.

A person with a disability and their service or guide dog may be refused access to the premises if:

- the dog is not behaving, and the person does not stop it from misbehaving;
- the dog is not trained to relieve itself only in designated areas; or
- the dog would be dangerous to its person or others (for example, if a service dog or guide dog is not responding to the commands of its handler and is aggressive towards other customers).

If the dog is not visibly marked with a harness, vest or I.D. tag as a service or guide dog, and the customer service representative is uncertain they may ask the following two questions:

- Does the person need the dog because of a disability?
- What tasks is the dog trained to perform?

Even if a service or guide dog is excluded, organizations should never exclude a person with a disability. In that case, organizations should have alternative ways to help people get, use, or enjoy programs and services.

Do not charge extra fees or impose additional rules on people with disabilities accompanied by service or guide dogs, even if those same fees or rules are applied to people accompanied by their pets. If organizations usually ask people to pay for damage their pet caused, they can request a person with a disability to pay for damage caused by their service or guide dog.

If customers are asked to wait more than 30 minutes, organizations should have dedicated places for service or guide dogs to go to the bathroom. Information on relief areas should be made public on an organization's website, in the service areas of the venue, or given by onsite staff. These relief areas should follow an accessible path and should be easy to locate through proper signage and identification.

For further information on specifications for service and guide dog relief areas and the built environment, see:

- [CAN/ASC-2.1-Outdoor Spaces](#), specifically clause 7.5 on service animal relief areas, and
- [CAN/ASC-2.3-Model Standard for the Built Environment - Accessibility for federally regulated entities as defined in the Accessible Canada Act for additional information on the built environment](#).

Relief areas should be in a location that conforms to guidance found in [CAN/ASC-2.1-Outdoor Spaces](#) clause 7.5.1. They should be posted online through the organization's website, onsite in the service areas of the venue, and should be communicated through onsite staff.

The way to relief areas should follow an accessible path in a location that meets the built environment and wayfinding and signage accessibility standards below. Directions to relief areas should be easy to find online through the organization's website, and onsite in the service areas of the venue, and it should be communicated through onsite staff.

Further information on accessible built environments and related topics:

- [CAN/ASC-2.3-Model Standard for the Built Environment - Accessibility for federally regulated entities as defined in the Accessible Canada Act](#)
- [CAN/ASC-2.1-Outdoor Spaces](#)

4.5.2 Accompaniment by support persons

People with disabilities may require a support person accompany them when accessing programs and services. For example, to navigate physical barriers, for communication assistance, for emotional support, for help with tasks, and safety and security. In other instances, organizations may require the presence of a support person to ensure the safety of the people with a disability. This section provides guidance for including support persons.

A person with a disability and their support person should enter the program, service venue, or facility together and stay with each other throughout the program or service venue. A person with a disability can be asked to have a support person with them on the premises only if the statements below are true:

- the support person is needed to keep the person with a disability or people around them healthy or safe; and
- there is no other reasonable way to keep the person with a disability or people around them healthy or safe.

Organizations cannot charge admission fees for the support person if either of the below is true:

- the provider says a person with a disability needs a support person on the premises; or
- the person with a disability needs a support person to use the premises or the services.

Organizations should provide notice beforehand regarding how much must be paid (if anything) for other support people who don't meet either of the above criteria.

People with disabilities may find their privacy compromised when receiving assistance in the presence of a support person. Organizations should have strong policies to protect against disclosing private information in front of support persons.

To meet this guidance, staff should start by telling the person with a disability:

- that their support person might see their private or secret information;
- what could happen to that information, and if it could be exposed elsewhere (for example, when signing in on a personal computer); and
- to ask the person if they agree to let their support person see their private or secret information.

Organizations should provide maximum autonomy to people with disabilities while respecting their privacy and security rights. In delivering programs and services, it is crucial to prioritize protecting the privacy, security, and data of users with disabilities providing training to staff and taking precautions with their technologies. To the maximum extent feasible, ensure that contractors and third parties (including support persons) understand and adhere to the same privacy and data-safeguarding requirements as the organization and its staff.

People with disabilities should also have the right to consent when it has to do with sharing and using their private information. To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- providing people with disabilities with accessible mechanisms to support informed consent;

- allowing a person using supported decision-making to select trusted advisors, such as friends, family members, or professionals, to serve as supporters when giving consent;
- providing information in a nontechnical, plain language form to clarify the decision's potential impact; and
- making it possible to withdraw consent at any time without any negative consequence.

Organizations should provide documents clearly explaining their policies in plain language following the [CAN/ASC-3.1-Plain Language](#) standard. This information should be provided in visible areas on the organization's premises, website, and anywhere else where a service or program is offered. Organizations should be prepared to provide information in alternate formats, such as large print or electronic, if requested.

Please also see Section [4.5.9](#) (Use Effective Written and Electronic Communication).

Further Information on communicating in Plain Language:

- [CAN/ASC-3.1-Plain Language](#)

4.5.3 Built environment, wayfinding and signage

Accessible in-person delivery of programs, services, and customer service requires the venue where people with disabilities receive services and participate in programs to be accessible and easy to navigate. This includes the building structure, the pathways to and inside the building, and the facilities, such as elevators, offices, bathrooms, mail and copy rooms, and self-service kiosks.

Suppose a service or program is being delivered in an outdoor area. In that case, program and service designers and deliverers should ensure that the area, the pathways to and from it, and any structures on it are accessible, such as bathrooms, picnic tables, playground structures.

Wayfinding, the practice of making sure people can experience and find their way within a physical space and to and from that space, and signage are particularly important for people with disabilities. For example, a person who is blind may rely on tactile walking surface indicators, tactile labels on doors or elevator buttons, or audible cues to orient themselves and navigate the space around them. At the same time, a person who is deaf may rely on signage and lighting to find their way. People who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids need their paths of travel (inside and outside of buildings) to be clearly marked and free of obstructions.

Accessible signage and wayfinding are important because they ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, can navigate spaces effectively, independently, and safely. Signage and wayfinding that are accessible are not just functional but essential elements of inclusive design, ensuring that everyone can use and enjoy a space equally, efficiently, and safely.

Further information about wayfinding and signage:

- [CSA/ASC B651:23 - Accessible design for the built environment.](#)

4.5.4 Maintain accessible features

A well-maintained, accessible environment promotes equal opportunities. People with disabilities rely on facilities, programs, and services to be accessible and well maintained. Accessibility features, no matter how advanced they are, become useless if they are not functional. When buildings have ramps, elevators, wide doorways, automatic door actuators (openers), and accessible restrooms, people can move freely without relying on others for assistance. These accessible spaces ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in various activities, whether attending events, accessing a service or participating in a program.

Organizations should ensure that their accessible elements and features are properly maintained and in good working condition. This ensures people with disabilities can use these components at any time. Additionally, organizations should avoid creating new barriers that could obstruct accessibility features. For example, avoid temporarily blocking ramps or aisles with boxes or garbage containers.

Facilities do break down, and sometimes accessibility features are not available. If there is a problem with the features needed to make programs, products, services, or facilities accessible to people with disabilities, organizations should inform people of the problem using plain language and accessible formats through multiple channels such as:

- a program's website;
- social media; or
- directly through individual outreach.

Such notifications should describe why there is a problem (what happened), how long it will last, and it should describe the available accessible alternatives.

Please also see Section [4.5.3](#) (Built Environment, Wayfinding and Signage) and Section [4.5.8](#) (Use Effective Written and Electronic Communication).

4.5.5 The use of assistive devices including mobility aids

Assistive devices (including mobility aids and other personal assistance devices) enhance quality of life, promote inclusion, and enable independence for people with disabilities. Assistive devices range from physical items like hearing aids to digital solutions like speech recognition software and screen readers, to augmentative communication systems. These devices provide direct support to people with disabilities. Additional examples include mobility aids, cognitive aids, and vision aids.

People with disabilities may use wheelchairs and other mobility aids (for example, manually powered mobility aids, such as walkers, crutches, canes, braces, or similar mobility aids) to help them move around in places.

Always allow people with disabilities to use their assistive devices including mobility aids. Do not touch or adjust people's assistive devices. People with disabilities often consider these devices as extensions of themselves.

4.5.6 Make communication accessible

Making communication accessible for people with disabilities promotes inclusion and ensures that the needs, perspectives, and voices of people with disabilities are acknowledged and understood. Organizations should ensure that communication with people with disabilities (as applicants, participants, the public, and companions) is as accessible as communication with others, whether by phone, telephone, in person, or online.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by using:

- Accommodations (sign language interpreter, video remote interpreter, accessible documents, etc.).
- Plain language in all communications with the public in accordance with the [CAN/ASC-3.1-Plain Language](#) to ensure organizations communicate information regarding programs and services understandably.
- Accessible technology and digital content (documents and websites) where programs or services are provided through information technology.

An auxiliary aid is any device or service that enables effective communication for people with disabilities. These aids and services accommodate various needs, including hearing, seeing, speaking, reading, writing, remembering, or understanding. Examples of auxiliary aids include:

- **Qualified interpreters:** for sign language or spoken language interpretation.
- **Notetakers:** assist in capturing information during meetings or classes.
- **Screen readers:** software that reads text aloud for visually impaired people.
- **Computer-Aided Real-Time Transcription (CART):** provides real-time text transcription.
- **Written materials:** large print, braille, or electronic formats.
- **Telephone handset amplifiers:** Enhance sound for those with hearing loss.
- **Assistive Listening Devices (ALD):** improve hearing in noisy environments.
- **Video Interpreting Services (VIS):** remote sign language interpretation via video.
- **Teletypewriter (TTYs):** allow text-based communication over phone lines.
- **Closed Captioning (CC):** provides text for video content.
- **Email and text messaging:** Written communication options.
- **Taped texts and audio recordings:** Accessible formats for reading materials.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems include aided and unaided ways of communicating with people who communicate best through gestures, fingerspelling, drawings, pictures and communication boards, and devices that generate speech. One common system is a Picture Exchange Communication System that allows people with little or no communication abilities to communicate using pictures.

Organizations should provide auxiliary aids and services (including sign language interpreters) when requested and where needed to ensure people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate and enjoy the benefits of the organization's programs and services. It is preferable to ask people with disabilities what would provide them with the best accommodation. Auxiliary aids and services are most effective when promoting independence.

Provide and deliver information in accessible formats promptly and with privacy protections. When possible, provide people with disabilities with the opportunity to request an auxiliary aid or service before attending an event, accessing a service or participating in a program in person or remotely. Organizations should include information about how to request auxiliary aids and services on their program and services websites and in registration materials. In doing so, people with disabilities can provide the necessary information for organizations to plan for and provide the requested services in a timely manner.

If a person with a disability requires an interpreter, they should not be expected to bring their own except:

- in emergencies and an interpreter is not available; or
- when the person with a disability requests it, the support person or interpreter agrees to provide the service. A minor is not recommended to be asked to interpret except in emergencies where no other interpreter is available.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) enhances communication access for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. VRI allows on-demand remote access to qualified sign language interpreters. Deaf people can communicate effectively in real-time, whether at work, medical appointments, or other situations. In areas with limited in-person interpreters, VRI bridges the gap.

Video quality is essential for clear communication. If an organization chooses to provide qualified interpreters via VRI services, the organization should test the service to ensure it allows for the following:

- Fast and precise video and sound that can be projected over a suitable connection that displays smooth, sharp images without delays or other problems.
- Large image that clearly displays the interpreter (face, fingers, hands) and the person with disability they are helping, no matter how they are positioned (i.e., sitting or standing).
- Loud and clear sound of voices that are clearly heard.
- Sufficient training for the people who use and run the VRI services.

TTY devices can play a role in bridging communication gaps for many people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech impairments. TTYs allow text-based conversations instead of spoken language. Users type messages, which are transmitted over the phone line. This enables direct communication with others. Organizations could use TTYs and should consider other equally effective telephone systems, such as TTY relay systems, to communicate with people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech impairments. Accessible automated attendant voice mail or messaging systems can offer significant benefits to people with disabilities. Features like speech recognition, text-to-speech, customization and control, and time independence features allow people with disabilities to interact with automated attendant systems in a way that accommodates their communication preferences. Organizations that use an automated or computerized attendant system (including voice mail, messaging, or other interactive voice response systems) that answers and directs calls should test the system to ensure it offers accessibility features and works well with TTYs and other auxiliary aids. Organizations should also ensure that telephone emergency services provide direct access to people who use TTYs and computer modems.

Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) ensures effective communication for people who are deaf and people with hearing and speech disabilities. When initiating a TRS call, the caller dials an assigned number that connects to a communications assistant (CA). The CA acts as an intermediary, relaying messages between the caller and the recipient based on each person's preferred form of communication. Privacy is maintained because of confidentiality requirements for the CA. TRS is available nationwide for local calls. TRS bridges communication gaps, allowing everyone to connect using standard voice telephones. Organizations should respond to telephone calls from all telecommunications relay services supervised by the Canadian Radio-television and Communications Commission in the same manner that they respond to other telephone calls.

Further information on message relay services:

- [Government of Canada Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Message Relay Services](#)

4.5.7 Leverage virtual communication for service delivery and customer service

Virtual services play a crucial role in enhancing the lives of people with disabilities. They remove barriers, allowing people to participate in services without travelling physically. For example, a person who has a chronic illness may find it difficult to travel, or someone who has mental health issues may find it overwhelming to be in public spaces. Providing services virtually can enable people to easily access services in a way that makes the best sense for them. Offering virtual services foster inclusion, independence, safety, and economic empowerment for people with disabilities.

“Virtual support” is the provision of service and support by the organization to a customer through equipment capable of live, two-way communication. This can include telephone and online technology and software. For example:

- email;
- video conferencing;
- text or voice messaging; and
- virtual reality.

Regarding virtual support:

Organizations should have trained staff who can easily use the accessibility features of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to deliver programs, services, and support. Staff should know how to operate commonly used assistive technology with such ICT to provide virtual services if needed. For example, if a person who is deaf requests a video conferencing session that video conferencing service should offer live captions and transcription services.

When communicating with people with disabilities, organizations should:

- Provide interpreter services and communication aids to people with disabilities and their companions free of charge (people with disabilities are not required to provide their interpreters). Be sure to ask people about their preferences.
- Rely on a companion interpreter (for example, a friend or family member of the person with a disability) only if:
 - there’s an imminent threat or emergency and a qualified interpreter is unavailable; or
 - a person with a disability request to use an adult friend or family member as an interpreter.

- Use an accessible virtual, or online platform that best meets the following:
 - the ability to include an interpreter on the same call as the individual and the organization;
 - live captions;
 - audio description;
 - a high-contrast display; and
 - automatic transcription.
- When scheduling a meeting, send materials and assess accessibility and technology needs before the meeting, including doing the following:
 - include a way for people with disabilities to note any accommodations when scheduling the meeting; and
 - contact the person with a disability before the meeting to work around possible technological challenges and ensure they feel comfortable with the platform.
- Provide closed captioning for all prerecorded customer video resources.
- Use TRS as an alternative to video meetings.
- Offer video conferencing to connect to an interpreter via virtual meeting for real-time sign language or oral interpretation.
- Make resources available in different formats, including printed information, audio recordings, or braille.

Further guidance on providing accessible meetings and virtual communication:

- [Employment and Social Development Canada guide to planning accessible meetings](#)

4.5.8 Use effective written and electronic communication

Clear and effective communication ensures that the needs, perspectives, and voices of people with disabilities are acknowledged and understood. Effective communication also builds trust and rapport and helps organizations identify the specific support needs of people with disabilities.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by adhering to the following guidelines:

- **Timely communication:** Ensure that communications consider the person's accessibility needs and are delivered promptly.
- **No additional cost:** When providing documents, charge no more than what is charged to other people.
- **Privacy and independence:** Protect the privacy and independence of the person with a disability if communication support is offered.
- **Accessible electronic documents:** Base online services or programs and electronic documents (such as forms) on an accessible platform that enables users to complete tasks effectively.

People have diverse needs. People who are blind may require formats such as braille, whereas individuals who are partially sighted may require large print, and people with cognitive disabilities may require audio formats. Offering a variety of accessible formats addresses diverse needs ensures that people with disabilities can access the same content as others. To meet diverse needs, organizations should ensure that materials are available in a variety of formats so that they are accessible to a wide range of people with disabilities.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by providing various formats. The following excerpt from Employment and Social Development Canada's Guidance on the *Accessible Canada Act: Alternate Formats* describe the types of alternate formats that federally regulated entities must make available upon request:

- **Print:** Printed or electronic text.
- **Large print:** printed or electronic text with a larger font size and good colour contrast. The smallest font size should be between 16 and 20 points.
- **Braille:** A system of cells and dots that represent characters and numbers. Braille can be in electronic or physical format. Readers use their fingertips to read raised dots on paper. Some electronic devices can read Braille in electronic format as well. Find more information about Braille on the CNIB Foundation website.
- **Audio format:** An audio recording or data file (such as a DAISY file).
- **Electronic format:** A text format, document, image, or file in a digital format compatible with adaptive technology intended to assist people with disabilities. Users navigate documents by moving between pages, sections, chapters, and tables of contents.

Organizations should also ensure that accessible web-based documents or other electronic documents provided in HTML conform to section 9 of [CAN/ASC-EN 301 549:2024-Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services \(EN 301 549:2021, IDT\)](#). Accessible versions of all other electronic documents should conform to section 10 of [CAN/ASC-EN 301 549:2024-Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services \(EN 301 549:2021, IDT\)](#).

Consult with the person requesting the information (where possible) to determine the most suitable accessible format or communication support. This approach ensures that communication is tailored to meet the specific needs of people with disabilities. Be prepared to provide both a physical and an electronic version of every document.

Further information on effective written and electronic communication:

- [Employment and Social Development Canada's guidance on the Accessible Canada Act: alternate formats](#)
- [Digital Accessibility Toolkit create accessible documents](#)

4.5.9 Plan for emergencies

Effective service delivery during emergencies is vital to public health and safety. People with disabilities can face significant barriers when accessing emergency services. Organizations should ensure their services are accessible during emergencies.

To meet this guidance, organizations should start by:

- Ensuring they are delivering accessible services during and after (short- and long-term) emergencies.
- Preparing for emergencies. Specifically:
 - removing all accessibility barriers in advance;
 - maintaining accessibility features during emergencies;
 - developing an accessible built environment; and
 - creating an accessible emergency egress.
- Adopting changes that keep everyone safe and ensuring all staff members are safe during an emergency.

Emergency egress guidance addresses the types of buildings that are advised to have an accessible travel path. It provides a process for planning, practising, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of emergency plans. All organizations delivering service and customer service in buildings should implement accessible travel paths.

Accessible emergency measures for people with disabilities should be considered by organizations that deliver programs, services and customer service. They should cover the following topics:

- General considerations for emergency planning and incident management.
- General considerations for vulnerable populations in emergencies.
- Pre-incident emergency planning and emergency plans.
- Hazard identification, risk assessment, prevention, and mitigation.
- Post-incident recovery.
- Public warning systems.
- Public information and communication.

Further guidance on emergency measures:

- [Accessible service delivery during emergencies, including COVID-19](#)

5 Links to other accessibility standards

- **Accessibility Standards Canada.** (2024, May). CAN/ASC - EN 301 549:2024 - Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services (EN 301 549:2021, IDT). <https://accessible.canada.ca/en-301-549-accessibility-requirements-ict-products-and-services>
- **Accessibility Standards Canada.** (2024, December). CAN/ASC-1.1:2024(REV-2025)-Employment. <https://accessible.canada.ca/creating-accessibility-standards/can-asc-112024-rev-2025-employment>
- **Accessibility Standards Canada.** CAN/ASC-5.2.1-Part 1-Design and Delivery of Accessible Programs and Services: Accessible Service Delivery—Accessibility for federally regulated entities as defined by the *Accessible Canada Act*. <https://accessible.canada.ca/creating-accessibility-standards/can-asc-521-design-and-delivery-accessible-programs-and-services>
- **Accessibility Standards Canada.** CAN/ASC-2.3-Model Standard for the Built Environment-Accessibility for federally regulated entities as defined by the Accessible Canada Act. <https://accessible.canada.ca/centre-of-expertise/built-environment/can-asc-23-standard-built-environment>
- **Accessibility Standards Canada.** CAN/ASC-3.1-Plain Language. <https://accessible.canada.ca/creating-accessibility-standards/public-reviews/can-asc-3-1>
- **Accessibility Standards Canada.** CAN/ASC-2.1-Outdoor Spaces, <https://accessible.canada.ca/can-asc-2-1>
- **CSA Group and Accessibility Standards Canada.** (2023). CSA/ASC B651:23 - Accessible design for the built environment. <https://www.csagroup.org/store/product/CSA-ASC%20B651%3A23/>

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