



# Annual progress update on the Accessibility Strategy (2024)

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Stratégie sur l'accessibilité (2024)

# Annual progress update on the Accessibility Strategy (2024)

From: Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

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## Summary of progress updates

- More than 60 organizations have adopted the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport across the federal family, demonstrating that organizations are directly applying the social model of disability by removing barriers in the workplace and equipping employees with disabilities with the tools they need to succeed.
- Education and training are essential for growing our collective accessibility and disability confidence, with an aim of having a truly accessible workplace culture. Since January 2024, there have been over 15,870 registrations to the online self-directed course: [Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility](#).
- Departments have continued to collaborate to ensure consistency across the Government of Canada in accessibility practices. For example, the Accessible Procurement Resource Centre and the Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology program partnered to deliver sessions on how to embed accessibility into procurement, attended by over 1,400 public servants.
- Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) is acting on priority accessibility improvements in key buildings and has now assessed a total of 199 out of 230 federally owned or leased buildings.
- The strategy committed to hire 5,000 net new persons with disabilities into the public service by 2025. A total of 4,176 people have been hired, and since 2020, the representation of persons with disabilities working in the federal public service has increased by 2.3 percentage points, from 5.4% to 7.7%.

# Joint open letter from Secretary Bill Matthews and DM Champion for Federal Employees with Disabilities Tina Namiesniowski

2024 marked a significant milestone for public service accessibility as we celebrated the 5th anniversary of [Nothing Without Us: \[the\] Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#). The strategy has a simple, yet monumental goal: to make Canada's federal public service the most inclusive and accessible in the world.

When the strategy launched 5 years ago, the Government of Canada's (GC) accessibility journey was just beginning. Accessibility and disability inclusion were generally treated as an afterthought, and not part of everyday business.

Today, many more public servants know what accessibility and disability inclusion are, and why they matter. This means we are making progress on culture change, which is a key priority of the Accessibility strategy. Culture change involves creating a workplace that prioritizes accessibility in all we do, removing attitudinal and other barriers, and creating equitable opportunities for all employees so we can better serve all Canadians.

The strategy has helped to advance culture change by guiding departmental engagement, training, and capacity building on various accessibility topics. Additionally, annual government-wide events like the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National AccessAbility Week in May are encouraging culture change by equipping public servants with the knowledge required to make disability inclusion part of their daily work.

The strategy also reinforces the importance of the "Nothing Without Us" principle, which insists that the lived experiences of persons with disabilities guide our work. Indeed, persons with disabilities networks have been an essential enabler of change. These networks are strong voices advocating for barrier removal, improvements to accommodations and further culture change.

The *Accessible Canada Act* is another key driver of change, as it requires government departments to develop accessibility plans and annual progress reports. Created in consultation with persons with disabilities, these 3-year plans outline how departments will identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers across 7 [priority areas](#).

All public servants and Canadians are encouraged to read these plans and progress reports, as they are the blueprints for removing barriers. Public servants and Canadians are also encouraged to send accessibility-related feedback directly to the departments they interact with. Each department's web page has an accessibility page, linked to their homepage, with a link to send feedback.

While the act and the strategy are helping to pave the way toward a barrier-free public service and a barrier-free Canada by 2040, public servants and Canadians with disabilities still face barriers daily. Some barriers are complex and will take time to remove. But public servants must remember that accessibility is our collective duty. Developing personal responsibility for creating an accessible workplace and culture is critical for the public service to become barrier free and truly disability inclusive.

Public servants can take action every day to make a difference now. For example, persons with lived experience of disability must always be included in the design and use of our tools to ensure that accessibility considerations are ingrained from the start.

Additionally, education and training are essential elements of improving skills and growing our collective accessibility and disability confidence. Since January 2024, there have been over 15,870 registrations to the online self-directed [Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility](#) course.

Public servants should also take advantage of the variety of [training](#), tools and [guides](#) to ensure that digital documents, forms and [meetings](#) are accessible. They should regularly consult the [GC Accessibility Hub](#) (internal to the GC network), which offers a wealth of resources to help include accessibility in all areas of our work (such as programs and services, and communications). By making these actions standard practice, we can make a difference for public servants and the Canadians we serve.

The GC has led several initiatives this year that are making a difference. Departments have partnered to share knowledge, collaborate, network, and promote consistency in accessibility practices.

For example, the [Accessible Procurement Resource Centre](#) and the [Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology](#) program partnered to deliver sessions on how to embed accessibility into procurement. Over 1,400 public servants attended these sessions. To improve data collection and use, the [Office of Public Service Accessibility](#) and Statistics Canada delivered an accessibility measurement workshop series to help departments create stronger accessibility plans backed by measurable commitments. Hundreds of public servants attended the workshops.

Accessible Standards Canada also released a Technical Guide on [Accessible and Equitable Artificial Intelligence Systems](#), which we encourage everyone to read. Artificial intelligence has potential benefits, but also poses risks for persons with disabilities if we do not control for unintended harms in automated decision-making.

The GC is also working to improve the accessibility of frontline services to Canadians. This year the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) became the first GC organization to introduce new dedicated phone lines, with bilingual service, for video relay service users. Launched with the Canadian Administrator of Video Relay Service (CAV), the service allows individuals who use American Sign Language or langue des signes québécoise to have direct contact with a CRA agent through their CAV interpreter.

The strategy also prioritizes increasing the representation of persons with disabilities working in the public service. The strategy committed to hire 5,000 net new persons with disabilities into the public service by 2025. A total of 4,176 people have been hired, and since 2020, the representation of persons with disabilities working in the federal public service has increased by 2.3 percentage points, from 5.4% to 7.7%. While this increase is encouraging, a 1.6 percent gap remains between representation and workforce availability of persons with disabilities.

Initiatives that support inclusive recruitment include the Public Service Commission's Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities, streamlined access to testing accommodations through the Candidate Assessment Tool, and more accessible and inclusive staffing methods, supported by the Ambassador Network for Inclusive Assessments.

To retain talent with disabilities and be an employer of choice, the GC must continue to streamline workplace accommodation processes by using tools such as the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport and by creating client-centric and coordinated approaches, as recommended by the Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund's final report. With more than 60 organizations adopting the passport across the federal family, organizations are directly applying the social model of disability by removing barriers in the workplace and equipping employees with disabilities to succeed.

We are moving closer to a barrier-free public service with the fall 2024 pilot of a user-centric, accessible and secure digital passport application. The pilot will generate valuable insights on usability and areas of improvement before the application's enterprise-wide launch on the GC internal network. Looking ahead, we encourage federal organizations to continue implementing the passport and integrating it into their workplace accommodation processes.

Meanwhile, Public Services and Procurement Canada is taking action on priority accessibility improvements in key buildings. Since last year, the department has assessed 40 more federally owned or leased buildings for accessibility, bringing the total assessments to 199 out of 230 buildings.

A pilot project led by Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) is also providing departments with an opportunity to test accessibility features for GC signage. Results will feed into the national standards on accessible signage, currently under development by ASC.

Looking toward the future, we know that the accommodations process needs to be improved. The recently launched Better Accommodation Project is a 1-year initiative designed to test promising accommodation solutions in 9 federal departments. Lessons learned from this project will inform our work to ensure that we provide employees with disabilities the supports they need to be fully productive. Of course, we also need to challenge ourselves about what more we can all do to remove barriers and/or prevent their creation in the first place, so that employees do not need to request accommodations.

2025 will be another significant year to build momentum and drive excellence in GC accessibility. All federal departments will build upon the learnings and feedback of the last 3 years to update their first accessibility plans in consultation with persons with disabilities.

The annual reports of the Chief Accessibility Officer and the Accessibility Commissioner will also inform these updates, as they offer perspectives on accessibility in both the public and private sectors. Among their suggestions is the Chief Accessibility Officer's recommendation for mandatory training and improved data collection, and the Commissioner's call to embed intersectional considerations into accessibility work. Their 2023 reports provide clear direction for our collective action, as will their next reports. We also encourage departments to consult [last year's strategy update](#), as it contains recommendations for action for each strategy pillar.

Overall, the government has a wealth of accessibility expertise, resources and solutions. Now is the time to integrate these best practices into departmental plans to create a consistently accessible public service for all Canadians.

As we continue this important work in the year ahead, we must uphold the principle of "Nothing Without Us" on which the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada was founded. Accessibility progress requires the participation of leaders at all levels, so let's get to it!

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