

**Minister Responsible for the
Status of Persons with Disabilities**

Annual Report 2024-25

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Introduction

This annual report covers the period of April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. This report was created to fulfill the requirements set out in section 7 of the **Accessibility Act**, which requires the Minister to prepare an annual report describing the actions taken for the purpose of achieving accessibility, outlined in section 6 of the **Accessibility Act**.

Actions Taken by the Minister

Section 6 of the **Accessibility Act** requires the Minister to:

- raise awareness of how barriers impact persons with disabilities.
- promote and encourage the prevention, identification and removal of barriers.
- oversee the development and implementation of accessibility standards necessary to attain the purpose of this Act.
- provide information to assist individuals, organizations and public bodies to integrate applicable accessibility standards into activities and undertakings; and
- ensure that individuals, organizations and public bodies that may be subject to accessibility standards are consulted in the development of the accessibility standards.

On behalf of the Minister Responsible for the Status of Person with Disabilities, the Department focused on completing the actions contained in this report to improve accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities in 2024-25.

Highlights include:

- Completed the process of appointing new members, chair, and reappointing existing members to the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board (the Board).
- Providing support and guidance on the establishment and progress of the standard development committees. This included supporting the Customer Service standard development committee and preparations for the establishment of the Information and Communication standard development committee.
- Ongoing work to meet the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan's year one goals and objectives with the support of all core government departments and the Disability Policy Office (DPO).
- Continuing to engage and collaborate with the community of and for persons with disabilities, and individuals, organizations and public bodies that will be subject to future accessibility standards.
- Leading the development of the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit (NLDB) and working in collaboration with the Government of Canada to establish administrative processes to deliver this benefit. In addition, working with our federal partners to deliver information and awareness sessions regarding the

Disability Tax Credit, Registered Disability Savings Plans (RDSP) and the NLDB with the goal to help inform Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with disabilities about these benefits. The NLDB was publicly announced in June 2024 and payments of up to \$400 per month to qualifying persons with disabilities will come into effect July 2025. Work is ongoing to implement the \$1,200 annual RDSP contribution for qualified individuals. The NLDB is in addition to other provincial financial supports that persons with disabilities may receive.

Accessibility Plans

With the support of DPO, public bodies were provided education and guidance on developing their accessibility plans. This process is ongoing to help ensure compliance with the **Accessibility Act**.

In 2024-25 the Provincial Government worked on the goals and targets identified in the Accessibility Plan 2024-2026 that includes:

1. Accessibility/Disability Training Development

- Two eLearning courses are in development for Public Service employees:
 - Accessibility Awareness and Action Planning which focuses on the **Accessibility Act**, accessibility plans and how to build accessibility into work environments, policies and programs.
 - Disability and Accessibility Awareness is a course under development in collaboration with the community of and for persons with disabilities that focuses on cross-disability and accessibility awareness training, with the goal that this training be delivered to all public service employees.

2. Improving Accessibility in Training

- Twenty (20) existing courses identified for an upgrade using RISE eLearning software.
- The following eLearning courses for the Public Service staff have been updated to enhance accessibility: Fraud Prevention and Detection, Fostering a Harassment-Free Workplace, Internal Controls, and Green Procurement.

3. Accessible Communications Policy

- Oversight committee formed to ensure application of the policy.
- Accessible Communications Policy revised and in final stage of review process.
- Online accessibility resource developed and undergoing peer review by Web Services and Communications.

4. Software Accessibility (Microsoft 365 Rollout)

- All departments trained on M365 with accessibility features.
- Dedicated accessibility tab launched on the “Welcome to M365” Teams site.
- Executive teams across departments received targeted training.
- Webinars on M365 accessibility features launched April 28, 2025.

5. Accessibility Study of Government Buildings

- Site visits completed and reports received for all twenty (20) buildings.

6. Selection Board Chair (SBC) Training Enhancements

- Disability awareness integrated into SBC training.

- Progress is being made in collaboration with Centre of Learning and Development (CLD) to explore how existing PSAccess course offerings can be made available to SBCs within Delegated Staffing Authorities.
- The PowerPoint used in SBC training has been reviewed and improved to include a stronger focus on disability awareness.

7. Recruitment Process Accessibility Review

- Public Service Commission (PSC) reviewed current recruitment practices with primary recruiters and recruitment management teams, as well as corporate leadership.
- Feedback compiled; recommendations to be made in 2025.

8. Accessible Procurement Improvements

- Public Procurement Agency (PPA) worked with its online procurement platform provider (MERX) to identify enhancements like descriptive links and screen reader compatibility.
- Improvements to be implemented in 2025 where practicable to enhance the accessibility of bid documents.

9. Departmental Accessibility Leads and Oversight Committee

- An Accessibility Oversight Committee with representation from each department (accessibility leads) has been established.
- During 2024, the Accessibility Oversight Committee collaborated to advance and evaluate progress on the goals outlined in the Accessibility Plan 2024-26.

Accessibility Standards

In the Fall of 2024, the process of four Board reappointments, the appointment of the chair and two new Board members were completed. The vice chair appointment process is anticipated to be completed in 2025-26. This will ensure the continuity of standard development. In December 2024, the Minister approved the Board's request to increase the meeting frequency per year and approved the revised Board's terms of reference.

The Board established the Accessible Customer Service Standard Development Committee in December 2024, as per Ministerial direction provided during the 2023-24 fiscal year. It is anticipated that the Minister will receive the Board's draft recommendations for Accessible Customer Service Standards in 2025-26 for consideration. This will align with proposed timelines within the Accessible Customer Service Standard Development Committee work plan.

The Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities continues to support the Board in preparing for the next standard approved for development, which is Information and Communication. It is anticipated an expression of interest for the Information and Communication Standard Development Committee will be open for applications in 2025-26. The Minister received the Board's advice on recommendations for the next accessibility standards to be considered for future development and implementation. Further consideration and dialogue are expected in 2025-26.

Engagement with Individuals, Organizations, and Public Bodies

The Department continues to engage individuals, organizations and public bodies that are subject to future accessibility standards, as the standards are being developed. Key activities in the 2024-25 fiscal year included:

- The Board, with the secretarial support of DPO, set up the Accessible Customer Service Standard Development Committee to provide technical expertise on standard development. The Board continues to ensure current and future committees are comprised of:
 - Persons with disabilities with lived experience and technical expertise.
 - Individuals from disability organizations with technical experience.
 - Individuals from business and industry sectors with technical experience.
 - Individuals who work within core government, agencies, boards or commissions, who have responsibilities related to the standard under development.
 - Individuals with organizations or public bodies (e.g. government agencies, boards or commissions) that will be impacted by future regulations.
- Ongoing engagement with public bodies on the development, compliance and implementation of their accessibility plans. This includes providing guidance and input on the plans upon request.
- Continuous dialogue with Accessibility Standards Canada and other provinces and territories to learn from their experiences in the development, implementation and evaluation of their accessibility legislation and standards.

Improving Accessibility Grant

In 2024-25, DPO hosted and facilitated an engagement session with the Network of Disability Organizations to gather feedback on how to improve the application process and increase interest from disability organizations in the Accessibility Grant Program.

Feedback received on subjects such as improving communications, application process improvements and collaboration opportunities are anticipated to be integrated in the grant program in the coming fiscal year. DPO continues to seek feedback to ensure the program is inclusive and accessible.

Summary

The Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities continues to meet the requirements in sections 6 and 7 of the **Accessibility Act**. The Minister promotes the advancement of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan 2024-26; supports the Board in establishing standard development committees and provides oversight to the development and implementation of the NLDB; and facilitates ongoing engagement with the community of and for persons with disabilities, as well as public bodies, agencies, boards and commissions to enhance accessibility, remove and prevent barriers experienced by persons with disabilities.