

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

Annual Report 2023-24

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Introduction

This annual report covers the period of April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024. 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**.

Action 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 made subject to accessibility standards are consulted in the development of the accessibility standards.

As set out in section 7, the Minister is required to prepare an annual report that describes the actions taken in that year by the Minister to fulfill the requirements of section 6 mentioned above. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD) worked diligently toward completing these actions in order to improve accessibility during 2023-24. Highlights include developing a Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan; supporting public bodies to develop their Accessibility Plans; providing on-going support to the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board (the Board); supporting the Board with the recruitment of the first accessibility standard development committee; engaging with individuals, organizations, and public bodies; and improving existing accessibility related grants.

Accessibility Plans

Section 22 of the **Accessibility Act** requires all public bodies, including Provincial Government departments; agencies, boards, and commissions; provincial courts; public and private educational institutions; Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services; and, municipalities to prepare an accessibility plan. Accessibility plans were required to be made public by December 31, 2023.

In December 2023, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador published its first accessibility plan covering the period of January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2026. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan 2024-26 satisfied the requirements set out in section 6 by promoting the prevention, identification and removal of barriers in policies, programs, and practices; and by raising awareness of how barriers impact persons with disabilities by collaborating with key stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, representatives from the Network of Disability

Organizations, and all Provincial Government departments. The plan also highlights some of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's accessibility advancements to date and outlines goals to improve accessibility.

A copy of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan 2024-26 can be found at [Accessibility Act - Social Supports and Well-Being](#).

In addition to facilitating the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan 2024-26, the Department held a number of education and awareness sessions and provided templates and guides to aid public bodies in completing their own accessibility plans. Public bodies that participated in these education sessions included:

- municipalities;
- Professional Municipal Administrators NL;
- agencies, including Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro Corporation and Workplace NL;
- boards, such as the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities;
- commissions, including the Human Rights Commission; and
- post-secondary institutions, such as Memorial University of Newfoundland and the College of the North Atlantic.

In total, there were approximately 128 attendees for these educational sessions. Furthermore, additional support was provided to various entities in the form of one-on-one meetings, and other correspondence, to answer inquiries regarding the development of accessibility plans.

Accessibility Standards

To oversee the development and implementation of accessibility standards as per the **Accessibility Act**, the Board used jurisdictional and best practice information gathered in 2022 to identify priority areas. By January 2023, the Board had written a letter to the Minister recommending Accessible Customer Service and Information and Communication as the first two standards for development and implementation. Both accessibility standards were approved by the Minister in February of 2023, and it was decided that Accessible Customer Service would be the first standard for development. The Board then drafted a Terms of Reference for the first Standard Development Committee, which was approved in December 2023.

Between August 2023 and December 2023, the Board advertised, screened and selected potential members for the first advisory committee. Potential candidates for the Accessible Customer Service Standard Development Committee were put forward for recommendation, and subsequently approved in December 2023. With support from Disability Policy Office (DPO), the Board chairperson prepared approval letters for the recommended candidates, as per section 11 of the **Accessibility Act**. This process has been delayed, however, due to Board vacancies.

Engagement with Individuals, Organizations, and Public Bodies

To ensure individuals, organizations, and public bodies that may be made subject to accessibility standards are consulted in the development of these standards, DPO supported the Board by ensuring committee members would include persons with disabilities with lived experience receiving and/or delivering customer service; individuals from disability organizations; individuals from business and industry sectors with experience in the provision of customer service; individuals who work within core government, agencies, boards or commissions, who have responsibilities related to customer service standards; and, individuals with organizations or public bodies that are impacted by customer service standards. Having committee members from various backgrounds, organizations, and public bodies will allow for meaningful consultations when accessibility standards are being developed. In order to maximize diversity of committee members, an Expression of Interest for the Accessible Customer Service Standard Development Committee was shared widely with disability organizations in the province, on the department's website, through a Government of Newfoundland and Labrador news release, and internally with all core public service employees.

Additionally, consultations occurred throughout the past fiscal year between DPO and Accessibility Standards Canada to share information and resources regarding standards development.

Further consultations will take place with individuals, organizations, and public bodies, however, due to vacancies on the Board, there have been delays in appointing the first standard development committee. Work is underway to fill these vacancies and the Standard Development Committee for Accessible Customer Service will be announced once this process is complete.

Improving Accessibility Grants

The Department has taken action to promote and encourage the removal of barriers by making changes to the Accessible Vehicle Grant funding criteria. This grant was established to reduce costs associated with disabilities and support individuals or families to acquire or adapt personal vehicles for accessibility. Changes to this grant to enhance accessibility and remove barriers included removing the income test and increasing the maximum funding amount from \$25,000 to \$50,000. These changes in criteria will increase eligibility and applicants may be eligible for increased grant amounts.

Summary

Throughout 2023-24, the Department met the requirements set out in sections 6 and 7 of the **Accessibility Act**. Requirements relating to awareness of barriers and the prevention, identification, and removal of barriers, were achieved through the creation of

the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan 2024-26, and modifications to existing grant programs.

The Department also met requirements to aid in overseeing the development and implementation of accessibility standards by supporting the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board in preparing to establish the first standard development committee responsible for developing accessibility standards for implementation.

Finally, the Department worked toward ensuring individuals, organizations, and public bodies were consulted in the development of accessibility standards by supporting the Board in ensuring diversity among members for the Accessible Customer Service Standard Development Committee, and consulting with organizations such as Accessibility Standards Canada.

There were no accessibility standards implemented in 2023-24. Therefore, providing information to assist individuals, organizations, and public bodies with integrating applicable accessibility standards into their activities and undertakings will commence once accessibility standards are implemented.