
MINISTER'S ANNUAL REPORT ON ACCESSIBILITY 2017–2018

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The passing and proclamation of the Accessibility Act made 2017–2018 an exciting year for government. We also saw the establishment of an Accessibility Directorate and the appointment of a new Accessibility Advisory Board.

The significance of this cannot be overstated. We now have a law in place that commits us to be a more equitable and barrier-free province; a province where everyone has equal opportunity to work and succeed, and to contribute to their communities.

The Accessibility Act sets a goal of Nova Scotia becoming an accessible province by 2030; although it's an ambitious goal, it is one that we can accomplish if we all work together.

We have seen a lot of progress already.

With the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, we launched new grant programs to support businesses in becoming more accessible through education and training, the purchasing of assistive devices, and building renovations.

We have also begun the development of a strategy for how the province will achieve its accessibility goal.

Our direction for this strategy will be informed by ongoing discussions with Nova Scotians, including persons with disabilities, municipalities, and representatives from the non-profit, education, health, and business sectors. I've had the honour of participating in some of these discussions, and I very much look forward to continuing the dialogue so that I can better understand the barriers that exist and how, together, we can advance this important work.

This year, we also made significant progress on government's plan for achieving a barrier-free workplace for our public servants, and for ensuring our programs and services are accessible to all Nova Scotians.

We also developed a program that introduces children to the challenges of living with a disability. We also helped to bring the Rick Hansen Foundation accessibility certification program to the province so that we can build a community of individuals with the skills needed to assess buildings and sites for accessibility.

These, and other initiatives, are having positive impacts for persons with disabilities, their families, and the province.

I look forward to working with you as we continue to advance toward an accessible Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Furey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

The Honourable Mark Furey
Minister Responsible for the Accessibility Act

AN ACCESSIBLE NOVA SCOTIA BY 2030

On September 18, 2017, Nova Scotia became the third Canadian province to pass accessibility legislation, called the Accessibility Act. This act commits our province to being more equitable and barrier free. It also recognizes that accessibility is a human right and sets a goal of Nova Scotia being accessible by 2030.

Almost one in five (19 per cent) Nova Scotians age 15 years and older identifies as having a disability. That's approximately 144,000 Nova Scotians. This is the largest percentage of any Canadian province.

Nova Scotia also has the highest percentage of adults older than 65 (20 per cent). This percentage will increase to about 25 per cent of the population by 2030. Since rates of disability are higher in older adults, the number of Nova Scotians with disabilities will rise as our population ages.

The purpose of the Accessibility Act is to:

- achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers with respect to:
 - the delivery and receipt of goods and services
 - information and communication
 - public transportation and transportation infrastructure
 - employment
 - the built environment
 - education
 - other activities
- involve persons with disabilities and other stakeholders in the development of accessibility standards
- implement accessibility standards, with a goal of achieving an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030
- monitor, review, and enforce compliance with accessibility standards
- establish an Accessibility Directorate that is responsible for supporting accessibility initiatives and advancing broader disability-related issues

Under the Accessibility Act, the Minister of Justice has a mandate to:

- raise awareness about barriers to accessibility
- promote and encourage the prevention and removal of those barriers
- oversee the development and implementation of accessibility standards
- assist in the integration of accessibility standards into the activities of Nova Scotians
- ensure Nova Scotians are consulted in the development of the accessibility standards and are informed about their duties and responsibilities under those standards

ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 2017–2018

The accessibility priorities for 2017–2018 included:

- building capacity to manage and implement the Accessibility Act, including establishing the Accessibility Directorate within the Department of Justice and establishing the Accessibility Advisory Board
- beginning development of an accessibility implementation strategy that sets out how the province plans to become accessible by 2030
- beginning development of the first Government of Nova Scotia accessibility plan
- establishing initiatives to raise awareness about accessibility and disability issues, and to educate the public about those issues
- working with partners across Nova Scotia to encourage the prevention and removal of barriers

ACCESSIBILITY DIRECTORATE

The Accessibility Directorate was established within the Department of Justice in Spring 2017.

The Accessibility Directorate is responsible for:

- supporting the implementation and administration of the Accessibility Act and future accessibility regulations
- addressing broader disability-related initiatives
- acting as the central mechanism for ensuring the concerns of persons with disabilities are heard and acted upon by government

By March 31, 2018, Accessibility Directorate staff included:

- one Executive Director
- two Senior Policy Analysts
- two Research and Statistical Officers
- one Administrative Assistant

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY BOARD

The Accessibility Advisory Board advises and makes recommendations to the minister about accessibility.

The first Accessibility Advisory Board was announced in February 2018 and the first meeting was held in March 2018. Meeting summaries are posted publicly on the Accessibility Directorate website.

The majority of board members are persons with disabilities. Board members have expertise in a broad range of areas of accessibility and come from various communities across the province.

Accessibility Advisory Board Members (2017–2018)

Douglas Foster, chair

David Caswell

Rosalind Penfound,
vice-chair

Amy Parsons

Alexander Peeler

Anne Sinclair

Warren (Gus) Reed

Barry Abbott

Kevin Russell

Cynthia Bruce

Marcie Shwery-Stanley

Irene Campbell-Taylor

ACCESS BY DESIGN 2030 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

One of our key priorities for 2017–2018 was leading the development of Access by Design 2030, an implementation strategy for an accessible Nova Scotia.

This year, we focused on talking to Nova Scotians about accessibility, to inform development of the strategy. We wanted to understand the challenges and opportunities that may arise as we work to make the province accessible, which accessibility standards we should develop first, and how different sectors can help to create an accessible Nova Scotia.

Focus Groups

Five focus group sessions were held in Nova Scotia communities in December 2017. These were attended by 44 people, including persons with disabilities, family members of persons with disabilities, and representatives of organizations that provide services to persons with disabilities.

Online Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was released in March 2018 for persons with disabilities (or those responding on behalf of a person with disabilities), and representatives of organizations that provide services to persons with disabilities. One thousand, one hundred and eighty-five (1185) individuals responded.

Consultations will continue in 2018–2019 as we work toward the development of the implementation strategy.

GOVERNMENT OF NOVA SCOTIA ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Accessibility Act requires that the Government of Nova Scotia be the first organization in the province to develop an accessibility plan. In 2017–2018, the Accessibility Directorate began the process to lead the development of that plan, for release next fiscal year.

The Accessibility Directorate worked with many groups and people to develop the plan. They consulted with representatives across departments, had discussions with employees with disabilities, and received input from a broader survey on accessibility issues in Nova Scotia. The process included:

- identifying achievements, barriers, and opportunities for improving accessibility across government
- developing long-term outcomes for achieving an accessible Government of Nova Scotia
- determining priorities and key actions for the first multi-year accessibility plan

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

One of the Accessibility Directorate's core roles is to promote accessibility by raising public awareness and by developing initiatives that promote accessibility in Nova Scotia. In 2017–2018, the following initiatives were launched to help foster a culture of accessibility in Nova Scotia:

Read.Ability

Read.Ability introduces children to the concept of living with a disability and the importance of accessibility. In these presentations, young children learn how people with disabilities live independently, enjoy hobbies, work, go to school, and explore their community. They do so by interacting with volunteer presenters who have disabilities, and by trying assistive devices used by people with disabilities.

Three Read.Ability sessions were held in 2017–2018.

- **Halifax Central Library (October 2017)**
Barry Abbott, Maria Alley, and Judith Bonnell introduced children to the experience of blindness and visual impairment. Children sang songs, learned about guide dogs and braille, and used a magnifier to enlarge print.
- **Keshen Goodman Library (March 2018)**
Will Brewer and Marie Webb, young adults with Down syndrome, read stories to children about diversity and inclusion. Marie is an accomplished artist and showed examples of her art, textiles, and fashion designs. Will spoke about his work as a Town Crier.
- **Halifax North Library (March 2018)**
Amy Parsons and Chrissy MacNeil introduced children to what it is like to be deaf and hard of hearing. They read books, led games, and taught the children basic American Sign Language (ASL) signs.

Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events

The Accessibility Directorate released A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events with tips on how to host an accessible event. This guide includes information on how to schedule meetings, select venues, and be aware of the needs participants may have for accommodations and communications.

Community Presentations

Between April 1, 2017, and March 31, 2018, Accessibility Directorate staff delivered over 70 presentations about the Accessibility Act to organizations across Nova Scotia.

COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

Creating an accessible Nova Scotia will take commitment from all levels of government, organizations, and the private and public sectors. In 2017–2018, the Accessibility Directorate helped create partnerships among stakeholders and collaborated with partners on projects to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility.

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ Assessor Training Course

In February 2018, the Rick Hansen Foundation and Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) announced a partnership to deliver the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Assessor Training Course, with funding from the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage's Business ACCESS-Ability Program. The program trains participants to become accessibility assessors so they can assess buildings and sites for accessibility for those with physical, sensory, learning, and developmental disabilities.

Business ACCESS-Ability Program

In December 2017, government announced \$1 million for a new Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program, administered by the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. The program provides funding to eligible businesses for improvements in information and communications, public transportation, education and training, assistive devices for employees and customers, and renovations to improve accessibility of the built environment.

Municipalities

The Accessibility Directorate partnered with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, the Association of Municipal Administrators Nova Scotia, and the Department of Municipal Affairs to build capacity within the municipal sector. Work included

- forming a Provincial/Municipal Accessibility Framework Working Group, which will develop an accessibility framework for municipalities to prepare accessibility plans, and an accessibility awareness and education program

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- partnering with the Town of Wolfville to pilot the development of a municipal accessibility plan; lessons learned from this pilot will be documented and shared with other municipalities

Businesses and Post-secondary Institutions

The Accessibility Directorate established relationships with the business community and post-secondary institutions by attending meetings and presentations about improving accessibility in these sectors.

Accessibility Research

The Accessibility Directorate initiated two research initiatives:

- **Job Access Mobile (JAM) Research Project:** Conducted by the Inclusive by Design Partnership (IDP), this research is developing a mobile application for employers to help them navigate through the workplace accommodations available for employees with disabilities. The IDP is a community-university research partnership based at Saint Mary's University. The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage provided funding.
- **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) Benchmarking Tool:** Dalhousie's School of Architecture and Planning is collaborating with the Rick Hansen Foundation and the Accessibility Directorate to establish a national benchmarking tool to measure the economic and non-economic benefits of certification by the RHFAC. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded this project.

MOVING FORWARD: 2018–2019

In 2018–2019, the Accessibility Directorate will continue to take the lead on accessibility and disability issues within government.

Key initiatives for 2018-2019 include

- continuing to consult with the public, and to develop, release, and implement Access by Design 2030, the strategy for how Nova Scotia will be accessible by 2030
- continuing to develop, release, and implement the first Government of Nova Scotia multi-year accessibility plan
- starting development of the first accessibility standards
- working with municipalities, post-secondary institutions, and other public sector bodies to develop accessibility planning frameworks and implementation processes
- developing and implementing awareness programs that will increase the understanding of accessibility, human rights, accessibility standards, and barriers to participation