



# What We Heard:

## Accessibility in Nova Scotia





# Introduction

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In 2017, Nova Scotia became the third Canadian province to pass accessibility legislation, demonstrating a commitment to a more equitable and barrier-free province for all Nova Scotians. The Accessibility Act sets a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.

Almost 19 per cent of Nova Scotians age 15 and older identify as having a disability, representing approximately 144,000 Nova Scotians<sup>1</sup>. This is the largest percentage of any Canadian province. Nova Scotia also has the largest percentage of adults over the age of 65, at 20%<sup>2</sup>. This percentage will increase to approximately 25% of the population by 2030<sup>3</sup>. Since rates of disability are higher in older adults, the number of Nova Scotians with disabilities will rise as our population ages.

Under the Act, government will develop accessibility standards to prevent and remove barriers that restrict persons with disabilities from fully participating in society. Standard areas identified in the legislation include:

- **Built Environment** - Standards in this area will address how to make buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared spaces accessible to all. These standards may address gaps in current regulations.
- **Education** – Education standards will help to create barrier-free learning environments for all students in public schools, colleges and universities. These standards could address how students with disabilities get the instruction and learning materials they need.
- **Employment** – Employment standards will support persons with disabilities in finding meaningful employment. The goal is to ensure equal access to employment for persons with disabilities.
- **Goods and Services** - Standards for delivering and receiving goods and services may address the use of assistive devices when accessing services, how goods and services are obtained, and training on how to serve persons with disabilities.
- **Information and Communication** - Information and communications standards will help to ensure all Nova Scotians can share and receive the same information. They may consider alternative formats (for example, braille, American Sign Language, or large print), accessible websites and technologies, and standards for communicating with persons with disabilities.
- **Transportation** - These standards will help make it easier for everyone to travel in both rural and urban areas of Nova Scotia. Transportation that is regulated by the federal government, such as air and rail travel, would not fall under provincial standards.

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1 Statistics Canada (2012). Canadian Survey on Disabilities.

2 Statistics Canada (2017). Population by broad age groups and sex, percentage distribution (2016) for both sexes, Canada, provinces and territories, 2016 Census.

3 Nova Scotia Department of Seniors. (2017). SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population.

# Consulting with Nova Scotians

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In the fall of 2018, the Government of Nova Scotia will release an implementation strategy, outlining how the province will meet the goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. This strategy will outline priorities, timelines, and key actions.

To inform the implementation strategy, government consulted with over 1,500 Nova Scotians from December 2017 to June 2018. Focus group sessions, an online questionnaire, public engagement sessions, and stakeholder meetings were held.

The objective of these consultations was to receive input on:

- Issues and barriers faced by Nova Scotians with disabilities
- How communities and sectors can contribute to an accessible Nova Scotia
- Priorities for the development of accessibility standards
- Key actions for becoming an accessible province

**Focus Groups** - Five focus group sessions were held in Nova Scotia communities in December 2017, attended by 44 persons with disabilities, family members, 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. 1185 individuals participated.

**Public Engagement Sessions** – Six public engagement sessions were held in Nova Scotia communities in May and June 2018, attended by 230 individuals. Participants included persons with disabilities and their families, representatives of the non-profit, education, health, and business sectors, and municipal and provincial staff and elected officials.

**Stakeholder Meetings** – Meetings were held with stakeholder groups from a variety of sectors, including businesses, municipalities, post-secondary institutions, community organizations, and colleagues across the provincial government.

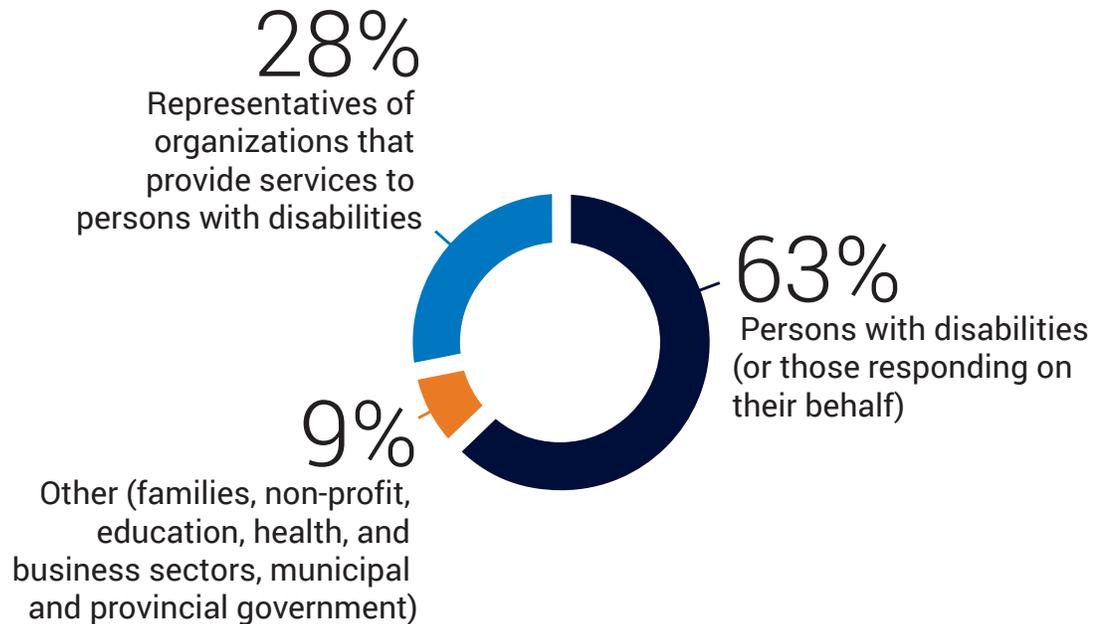
**Direct Submissions** – Nine individuals submitted input by email or phone.

This document summarizes what we heard during these consultations.

## Consultation Participants

(focus groups, questionnaire and engagement sessions)

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## What Does Accessibility Mean?

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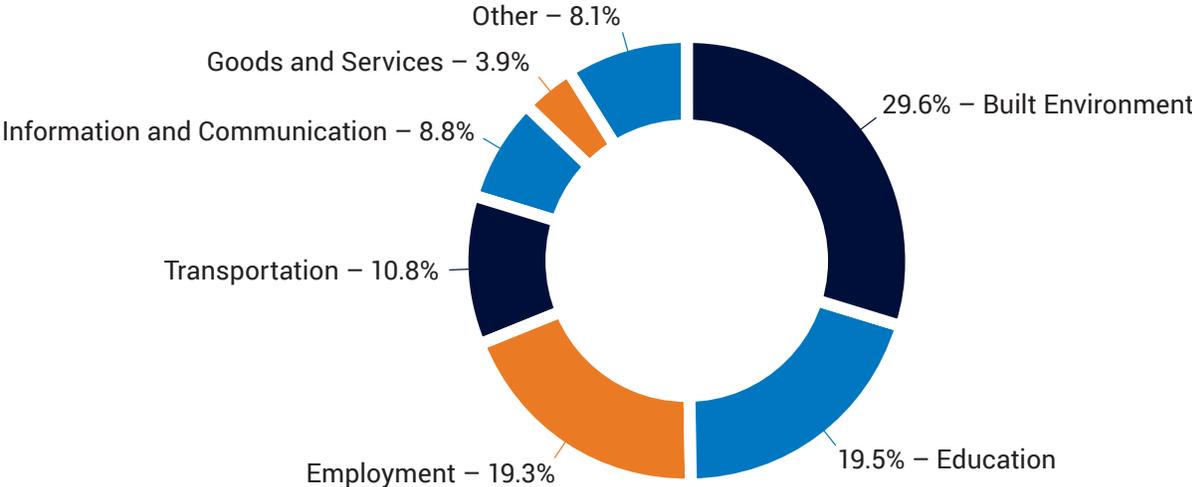
Consultation participants described an accessible Nova Scotia as:

- **Inclusive and Equitable** – Persons with disabilities have access to the same resources, services, and infrastructure as other Nova Scotians, are able to participate in society, and lead meaningful, fulfilling lives.
- **Barrier-Free** – Persons with disabilities do not face barriers to buildings, sidewalks, or outdoor spaces. They have equitable access to education, health care, employment, affordable housing, communications, and transportation. There are enough services for the people who need them.
- **Safe and Respectful** – Persons with disabilities feel safe in their communities. They do not face stigma or discrimination.
- **Educated and Aware** – Nova Scotians are aware of issues related to accessibility and disability.
- **Proactive** – Accessibility is considered at all stages of developing a program or policy.

# Prioritizing Accessibility Standards

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When asked which standards area they would choose to be developed first, consultation participants chose the built environment as the first priority, followed by education and employment.



Questionnaire and engagement session responses

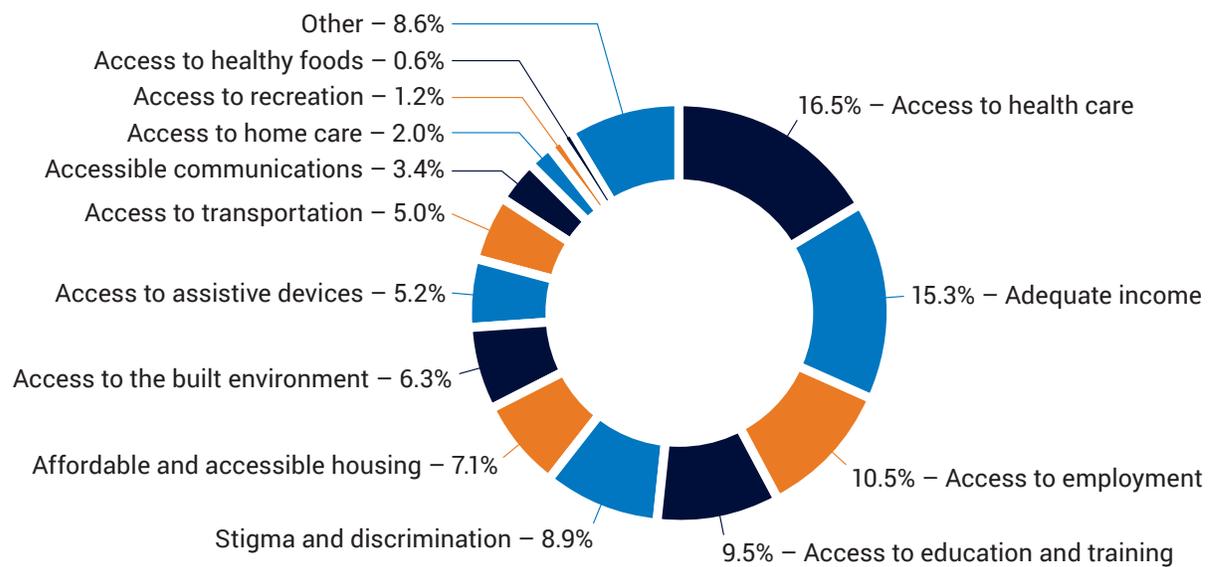
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# Issues of Importance

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Part of the work of the Accessibility Directorate is to address broader disability-related issues that may fall outside the accessibility standards areas outlined in the Act. Questionnaire respondents indicated that two of the most important issues for persons with disabilities are access to health care and having enough income. The Directorate will continue working with other government departments and external partners to help address these and other issues of importance to persons with disabilities.

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# Actions to Achieve Accessibility

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Consultation participants shared their ideas for actions and priorities to achieve accessibility, including:

- Develop a public awareness campaign and tools to increase understanding of the Accessibility Act, barriers to accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Provide training in accessibility to those serving persons with disabilities.
- Simplify how persons with disabilities can find information and access programs and services.
- Provide training to educators in accessibility and inclusive education.
- Improve access to supports for post-secondary students with disabilities.
- Improve availability and options for accessible, affordable transportation, especially in rural areas and small towns.
- Provide support and training for employers to hire and accommodate persons with disabilities, and improve access to supports for employees with disabilities.
- Improve access to assistive devices and technology.
- Support the ongoing, impactful work of non-profit organizations, community-led initiatives, volunteers, and advocates.
- Improve access to health care for persons with disabilities.
- Enforce compliance with accessibility regulations.
- When undertaking work to improve accessibility, be sure to:
  - Recognize that rural communities and small towns have unique challenges to accessibility that urban areas do not face
  - Show creativity, leadership and innovation
  - Prioritize the involvement of persons with disabilities at all stages
  - Recognize the diversity of disabilities among Nova Scotians
  - Understand that areas of accessibility are interconnected and interdependent

# What's Next?

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The feedback received from these consultations, and recommendations provided by the Accessibility Advisory Board, will inform the province's accessibility implementation strategy to be released in the fall of 2018. Work will then begin on the development of the first set of accessibility standards, and other priorities identified in the strategy. Government will continue to collaborate with persons with disabilities, and others impacted by this legislation, as we work together to achieve accessibility in our province.

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**For more information about accessibility in Nova Scotia,  
please visit [novascotia.ca/accessibility](http://novascotia.ca/accessibility)**

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**NOVA SCOTIA**