



2023–2024

Minister's
**Annual
Report**

on Accessibility



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2023–2024 Minister’s Annual Report on Accessibility
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Message from the Minister

I am pleased to share with you the Minister's Annual Report on Accessibility for 2023–2024.

Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility Act in 2017. To support the implementation of the Act, we are developing accessibility standards in six areas. These standards will help us to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility.

Accessibility is a human right and access includes everyone. Through the Accessibility Act and Access by Design 2030, the Government of Nova Scotia is leading by example to prevent and remove barriers. We are committed to making accessibility a part of everyday life for all Nova Scotians—at home, at work, and in community.

We appreciate Dr. Katie Aubrecht's work reviewing the Accessibility Act and for acknowledging the progress we have made. She completed and released her review in spring 2023. In March 2024, we released the Response to Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act Independent Review Report. This outlines actions government will take over the next three years to address recommendations in the Act Review.

We also recognize the important role of prescribed public sector bodies (PPSBs) and other partners to improve accessibility across the province. PPSB accessibility plans and updates on accessibility standards are available on the Accessibility Directorate website.

To help Nova Scotia become more equitable, we must approach this work using an intersectional accessibility lens. Key strategies, including the Equity and Anti-Racism Strategy, the Human Rights Remedy, and the Health Equity Framework, will help guide us.

We continue to make progress toward meeting commitments in our 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan. Together with our partners in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, we are advancing accessibility.

I encourage all Nova Scotians to take actions to prevent and remove accessibility barriers across our province and be part of this change.

Honourable Becky Druhan

Minister responsible for the Accessibility Act



Introduction – Toward an Accessible Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia passed the **Accessibility Act** in September 2017. The Act describes accessibility as a human right. It sets a goal of making Nova Scotia accessible through the prevention and removal of barriers and the implementation of accessibility standards.

The **Accessibility Directorate** was set up within the Department of Justice in 2017. It oversees the Accessibility Act, makes sure the Act is being carried out, and addresses disability-related initiatives.

The **Accessibility Advisory Board** was set up in 2018. It offers advice and recommendations to the Minister of Justice about accessibility and how accessibility standards are developed. Most board members are persons with disabilities. They have expertise and experience in many areas of accessibility. They live in communities from across Nova Scotia. Some board members have experience with groups, businesses, and organizations that will need to follow the accessibility standards.

Access by Design 2030 is Nova Scotia's roadmap to implementing the Accessibility Act. This strategy was released to the public in September 2018. It sets six priority areas to identify, remove, and prevent barriers, and to make Nova Scotia more inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities.





Accessibility Standards Development

Through the Accessibility Act and Access by Design 2030, the Government of Nova Scotia is committed to developing accessibility standards. These standards will identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility in the areas of

- built environment
- education
- employment
- goods and services
- public transportation and transportation infrastructure
- information and communication

Accessibility standards are regulations under the Accessibility Act. The Accessibility Advisory Board creates standard development committees. Most members of these committees are Nova Scotians with disabilities who bring lived experience to this work. Information about each committee is on the [Accessibility Directorate website](#).

The standard development committees help the Accessibility Advisory Board provide recommendations for standards to government. Government then develops the standards. These standards will become the sets of rules that tell organizations in Nova Scotia what they must do to be more accessible. Many organizations will be required to comply with the standards, including the Government of Nova Scotia, prescribed public sector bodies (PPSBs), businesses, and non-profit organizations.

In 2023–2024, the Accessibility Directorate made changes to the standards development process to make it more efficient. Timelines showing progress are now on the Accessibility Directorate's website. This information will be updated regularly. As of March 31, 2024, collaborative work had started on all six accessibility standards.

6

accessibility standards areas

Education

Government is reviewing the Accessibility Advisory Board's recommendations for the education standard. We are reviewing the recommendations and drafting a proposed standard for the education sectors.

Information and Communication

The Accessibility Advisory Board recruited members for the Information and Communication Standard Development Committee in winter 2024. The committee will start drafting recommendations for an information and communication standard in 2024–2025. Government has researched how other provinces are improving accessibility to information and communication.

Built Environment

Government released a proposed standard for the built environment for public comment in August 2023. Nova Scotians provided over 550 comments on the proposed standard through about 160 submissions. When finalized, the standard will prevent barriers to buildings and outdoor spaces.

Employment

In November 2023, the Employment Standard Development Committee consulted on its draft recommendations for an employment standard. The Accessibility Advisory Board expects to submit these recommendations to the Minister of Justice in spring 2024.

Goods and Services

The Goods and Services Standard Development Committee is developing recommendations for a standard on service delivery. It will ask for feedback on its draft recommendations in fall 2024.

Public Transportation and Transportation Infrastructure

In winter 2024, the Accessibility Advisory Board recruited members for the Public Transportation Standard Development Committee. The committee will start developing recommendations for a public transportation standard in 2024–2025. Government has researched how other provinces are improving accessibility to public transportation.



Awareness and Capacity Building

Access Includes Everyone Public Awareness Campaign

In the Accessibility Directorate's annual public opinion research, Nova Scotians with disabilities continued to report that stigma and discrimination are among the most common barriers they experience. To increase awareness of accessibility as a human right, government continued to promote the Access Includes Everyone campaign.

Our campaign showed Nova Scotians with disabilities at home, at work, and in community in advertisements on television, social media (such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit), and digital media (such as YouTube).

We also created a new advertisement featuring Nova Scotians with disabilities from L'Arche Antigonish enjoying the improved accessibility at Pomquet Beach.

Access Includes Everyone Website and Online Resource Hub

Government launched the [Accessibility Resource Hub](#) on the Accessibility Directorate's website in May 2023. The hub provides resources about accessibility awareness, disability awareness, and capacity building. It offers information and resources to help Nova Scotians prevent and remove accessibility barriers in organizations, workplaces, and communities, including

- video profiles of Nova Scotians with disabilities
- current data on disability in Nova Scotia
- webinars on introduction to disability, accessibility barriers, and solutions to barriers





Accessibility Foundations Training

Government developed the new Accessibility Foundations training workshop with PPSBs in spring 2023. The workshop included information on disability, accessibility, ableism, privilege, and barriers to accessibility. It is an interactive workshop with small group discussions and First Voice perspectives of Nova Scotians with disabilities.



Government also developed a train-the-trainer workshop. The workshop was created for PPSBs to help them deliver the Accessibility Foundations training to their organizations. It covered the training content, strategies for leading the training, and accessible training practices. The Accessibility Directorate offered more train-the-trainer workshops, created training materials in French, and developed a community of practice for the trainers.



Over 120 trainers have been trained, and over 500 people took part in Accessibility Foundations training across the province.

Awareness Events

Government promoted Access Awareness Week, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Disability Employment Awareness Month, and Indigenous Disability Awareness Month. We also developed a toolkit, resources, and an events guide to help government departments, PPSBs, and others promote these awareness events.



We developed a new webinar to provide information about emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities. The webinar supports the Are You Ready for an Emergency? Guide for Persons with Disabilities and Older Adults in Nova Scotia publication, which was released in 2022.

Collaboration and Support

Prescribed Public Sector Bodies

The Accessibility Directorate supported PPSBs to improve accessibility in their communities and organizations, and to carry out their accessibility plans. It offered workshops and webinars to PPSBs, with topics such as Accessible Social Media, Emergency Preparedness, Inclusive Employment, and Accessible Communications – Plain Language.

The Accessibility Directorate continued to work together with the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia to carry out the Municipal Accessibility Capacity Building initiative. The Accessibility Directorate also took part in and presented at sector conferences, including those held by

- the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia
- the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities
- the Nova Scotia Library Association
- the Association of Nova Scotia Museums

Disability Partnership

In spring 2023, the Accessibility Directorate provided grant funding to support renewing the Disability Partnership. The partnership is led by Easter Seals Nova Scotia, Autism Nova Scotia, and the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities. It developed its terms of reference and communication materials and began to engage with disability organizations across the province. The partnership will

- support capacity building in the disability non-profit sector
- develop a coordinated approach to communication and collaboration among disability organizations
- develop a coordinated approach to collaboration between government and disability organizations

Accessibility First Voice Experts Roster

The Accessibility Directorate launched the Accessibility First Voice Experts Roster. This initiative will engage a diverse group of Nova Scotians with disabilities in government’s accessibility work. Participants will form panels of experts to review and provide input on specific accessibility projects. They will receive a payment called an honorarium for sharing their expertise and lived experiences.





Compliance and Enforcement

The [Accessibility Act Compliance Framework](#) shows how government staff and organizations can use a collaborative approach to comply with the Act. It sets capacity building and awareness as priorities. Government was the first public sector body prescribed under the Accessibility Act. As of March 31, 2024, there were 107 more public sector bodies prescribed under the Act, including

- municipalities and villages
- universities
- Nova Scotia Community College
- regional libraries
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Regional Centres for Education
- Conseil scolaire acadien provincial
- Nova Scotia Health
- IWK Health Centre
- Nova Scotia Museum
- Nova Scotia Art Gallery
- some Crown corporations

All PPSBs are required to create accessibility plans and update them every three years. Almost all PPSBs have met this requirement. PPSB accessibility plans are required to be available online. Government developed a new web page with links to [PPSB accessibility plans](#), making the plans easily available to all Nova Scotians.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Accessibility Act Review

In May 2023, government released the [Nova Scotia Accessibility Act Independent Review Report](#), prepared by Dr. Katie Aubrecht. She consulted with almost 800 Nova Scotians and made 48 recommendations in her report.

The Accessibility Directorate consulted with the Accessibility Advisory Board and 23 government departments and offices to develop the [Government of Nova Scotia Response to Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act Independent Review Report](#). Government released the response in March 2024. To address the review, government committed to act in six areas over the next three years.

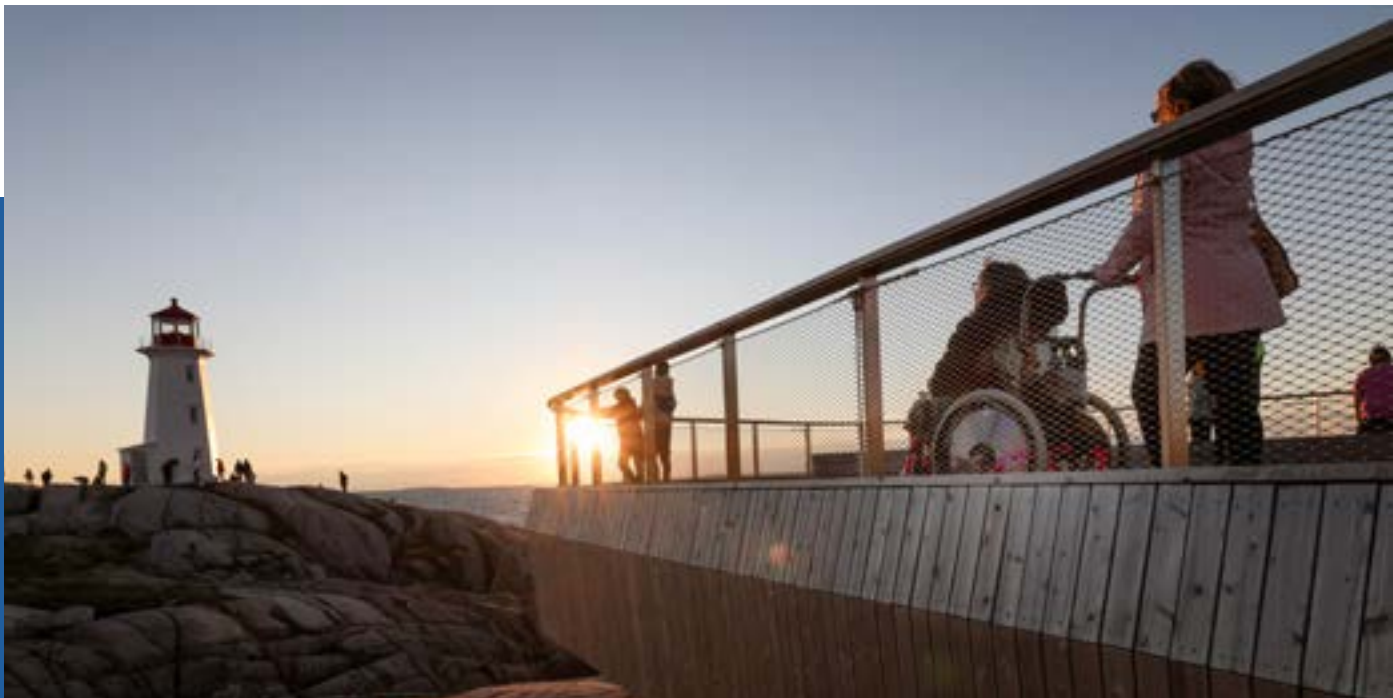
Canadian Survey on Disability – Nova Scotia Overview

The Canadian Survey on Disability is published every five years by Statistics Canada. It is Canada's primary source of data on persons with disabilities.

Nova Scotia has the highest rate of disability in Canada, at 37.9 per cent. The Accessibility Directorate website has an [overview of the 2022 Nova Scotia data](#) about disability type and severity, age, income, labour force participation, and barriers to accessibility.

Public Opinion Survey

In March 2024, the Accessibility Directorate took part in a public opinion telephone research survey. This was the sixth year in a row that the Accessibility Directorate took part. The survey asked Nova Scotians what they knew about disability and accessibility issues as well as their experiences with accessibility barriers.



What the Results of the Public Opinion Survey Told Us

- 9 out of 10 Nova Scotians know that accessibility is a human right
- 71% of Nova Scotians say that accessibility is very important to them
- 7 out of 10 Nova Scotians feel comfortable telling others they have a disability
- 9 out of 10 Nova Scotians know mental health conditions are a type of disability
- 94% of Nova Scotians know disabilities can be visible and invisible
- Nova Scotians with disabilities commonly experience systemic barriers
 - in the built environment
 - through stigma and attitudes
 - accessing health care and mental health services
- Nova Scotians with disabilities commonly experience activity barriers
 - attending festivals and events
 - getting around in winter
 - using parks, trails, playgrounds, and public transportation



Government of Nova Scotia – Leading by Example

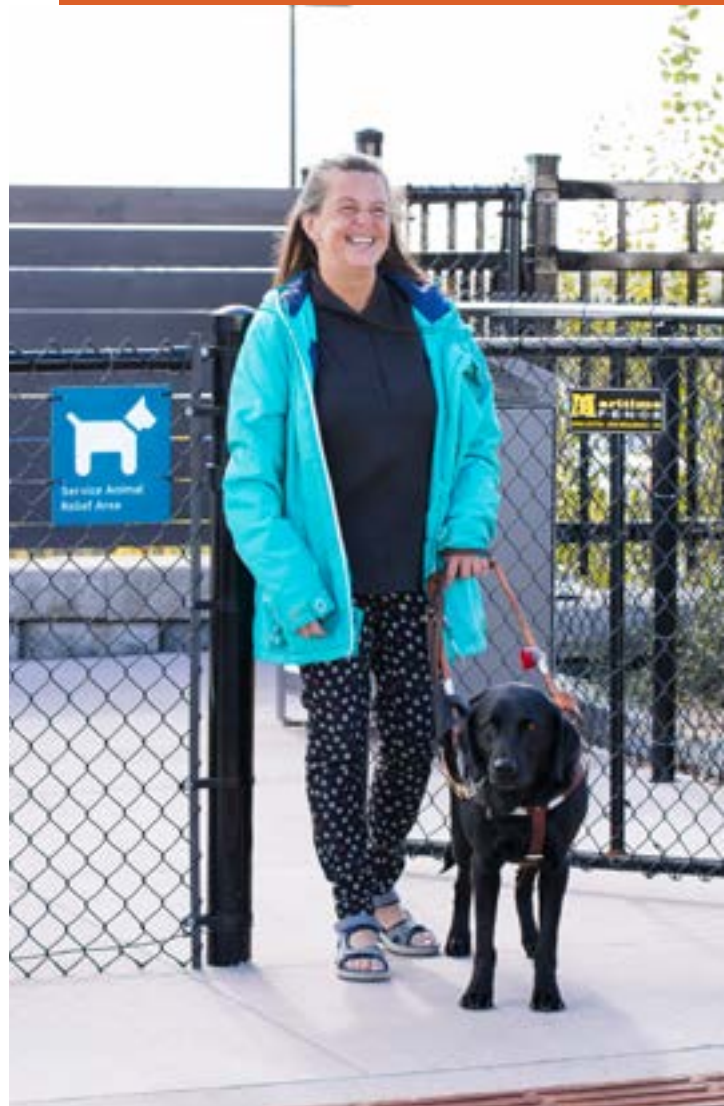
Government is the province’s largest program and service provider and its largest employer. To meet our goal of becoming an accessible province, we are committed to lead by example in preventing and removing barriers.

All government departments and offices have committed to be leaders in accessibility through the [2022–2025 Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan](#). In 2023–2024, departments continued to make progress and launch new initiatives to improve accessibility across Nova Scotia. Departments also continued to work toward commitments made in the Accessibility Plan. These commitments are reflected in work done by departments this year. Details can be found in their [accountability reports and business plans](#).

Staff and Manager Training

Government launched a new learning module in December 2023. Over 5,000 government employees have completed the Introduction to Accessibility Barriers and Solutions training. In addition, over 9,000 government employees have completed the Introduction to Disability training. These learning modules are also available to the public on the Accessibility Directorate’s online [Resource Hub](#).

The Accessibility Directorate developed Accessibility Confident Leadership training and ran a pilot program for government managers and supervisors. This training gives leaders the knowledge and skills they need to create inclusive workplaces for employees with disabilities. It will be offered through the Public Service Commission’s Learning Calendar in 2024–2025.



Accessibility in Tourism and Recreation

Government has made many accessibility improvements in tourism and recreation.

- In 2023–2024, we improved accessibility at provincial beaches and parks throughout the province, including
 - an accessible campsite at Caribou-Munroes Island Provincial Park
 - accessible washrooms at Lawrencetown Beach and Dollar Lake provincial parks
 - accessible beach mats at Rainbow Haven Beach, Dollar Lake, Point Michaud Beach, and Port Hood Station provincial parks
- We also supported accessibility improvements at the Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition grounds in Bible Hill, including
 - a fully accessible grandstand with a wheelchair lift
 - accessible seating
 - accessible washrooms
- Tourism Nova Scotia developed online resources to help tourism operators improve accessibility, including tip sheets about accessible accommodations, events and activities, food and beverage services, and transportation.





Accessibility at Service Nova Scotia Contact Centres

Government made accessibility improvements at Service Nova Scotia contact centres across the province and at Registry of Motor Vehicles locations in Shelburne and Middleton. These included accessible height and larger-size service counters, height-adjustable tables, universal washrooms, and accessible signage.

In 2023–2024, Service Nova Scotia

- developed and delivered training for employees working at its contact centres and at Access Nova Scotia locations
- led discussions with 60 managers about barriers to accessibility in their physical environments and ways to remove those barriers
- developed and tested the training module, and then promoted it to employees

As of March 31, 2024, 90 per cent of Service Nova Scotia employees have completed the training.

Celebrating Progress

In March 2024, the first Wabanaki Council on Disability Hearing Their Voices conference was held in Membertou. The conference's theme was "Let Us Help Each Other."

Participants included Indigenous persons with disabilities, community service providers, advocates, researchers, and government representatives working together to build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones.

The Government of Nova Scotia provided grant funding to help make the conference accessible. Staff from the Accessibility Directorate and members of the Accessibility Advisory Board attended the conference. Accessibility Directorate staff also presented on developing a built environment standard and barriers affecting accessible public transportation.



Access by Design 2030 Priorities	2023–2024 Status and Highlights
Accessibility Standards Development	Work has started on all six accessibility standards. Timelines showing progress are on the Accessibility Directorate website.
Awareness and Capacity Building	Government continued to promote the Access Includes Everyone public awareness campaign and launched the Accessibility Resource Hub.
Collaboration and Support	Government continued to support PPSBs and the Disability Partnership Forum and launched the Accessibility First Voice Experts Roster.
Compliance and Enforcement	Almost all PPSBs including municipalities have developed accessibility plans, as required under the Accessibility Act. A list of all PPSB plans is on the Accessibility Directorate website.
Monitoring and Enforcement	Government released the Response to Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act Independent Review Report.
Government of Nova Scotia – Leading by Example	Government continued to carry out actions from the 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan.

Key Priorities for 2024–2025

By 2024–2025, all six accessibility standard areas will be under development.

Government will continue to promote the Access Includes Everyone public awareness campaign. We will develop new resources to address ableism.

Government will continue to support PPSBs, including helping them to develop their second accessibility plans. We will support the Accessibility Advisory Board, including helping the board to develop its own website.

Government will implement the six priority areas outlined in our response to the Accessibility Act Review. We will continue to carry out the actions in our 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan and develop our third Accessibility Plan.

Accessibility Advisory Board Members as of March 2024

- Max Chauvin, Chair
- Ellen Johnson, Vice Chair
- Dr. Linda Campbell
- Birgit Elssner
- Denise Pictou Maloney
- Louise Gillis
- Amy Lam
- Melissa MacKenzie
- P. Earl Muise
- Dr. Sarah Moore
- Shellene Sparks

Terms for three members ended in 2023–2024 and one member left in February 2024:

- Rosalind Penfound
- Marcie Shwery-Stanley
- Anne Sinclair
- Lewis Pope

Accessibility Directorate Staff Positions as of March 2024

1 - Executive Director
1 - Administrative Assistant
1 - Director of Policy and Standards
1 - Director of Programs and Services
1 - Manager

2 - Program Specialists (1 part time)
1 - Research and Stats Officers (1 temporary)

1 - Policy Analyst
1 - Junior Policy Analyst

6 - Senior Policy Analysts (2 part time)

For more information visit:
novascotia.ca/accessibility



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