
Working Toward an Accessible Nova Scotia

Welcome

Imagine a province where protections under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are realized for all Nova Scotians. Where our individual differences are celebrated and valued, and our participation in the life of our communities is adequately supported. Where we recognize that abilities do vary, but our capacity to participate in all this province has to offer is not defined by intentional or accidental barriers. Where prosperity and democracy thrive because of fair and equitable treatment of everyone. Where there is equal, and perhaps more importantly equitable, opportunity for all Nova Scotians.

The new Accessibility Act is intended to create standards that will ensure our communities are welcoming and supportive of all who want to participate, and to ensure the commitments made are embedded in law. The Act covers the built environment, employment, transportation, education, communications and the provision of goods and services.

Important as this piece of legislation may be, no law can succeed without the commitment of government, organizations, businesses, and community members. Attitudes towards any marginalized person are transmitted through various bodies and individuals. When the leaders in our communities project an attitude that highlights the importance of equity and equality, and encourages a commitment to inclusion, that attitude will become pervasive.

The Accessibility Act recognizes accessibility as a human right, and sets a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.

It will take all of us, working together, to achieve this goal. We want to hear from you. Where do you think we need to focus our efforts to become an accessible province?

But first, we would like to provide a snapshot of where we are and what we have heard to date from Nova Scotians with disabilities and organizations that support them.

Gerry Post
Executive Director,
Accessibility Directorate

Douglas Foster
Chair,
Accessibility Advisory Board

Achieving Accessibility in Nova Scotia

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

Almost 1 in 5 (19%) Nova Scotians age 15 years and older identify as having a disability, representing about 144,000 Nova Scotians¹. This is the largest percentage of any Canadian province. Nova Scotia also has the highest percentage of adults older than 65 – 20%² or 1 in 5. This percentage will increase to about 25% of the population, or 1 in 4, by 2030³. Because older adults are more likely to have disabilities than younger people, the number of Nova Scotians with disabilities will rise as our population ages.

The Accessibility Act outlines how we plan to improve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers that restrict persons with disabilities from fully participating in society.

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*.

The principles of the act align with:

- the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Act established the Accessibility Directorate to oversee how the law is put into practice, and to address other issues related to disability. It also established the Accessibility Advisory Board. There are twelve community members on the board, a majority of whom are persons with disabilities.

The board will provide input into the province's strategy for achieving accessibility by 2030. It will also advise the government on the development of accessibility standards.

The government will develop accessibility standards in the following six areas:

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

Standards in this area will help to create barrier-free learning environments for all students. These standards could address how students with disabilities get the instruction and learning materials they need. The standards will apply to students from grade primary through college and university.

Employment

Standards in this area 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 several things, including:

- how service providers interact with persons with disabilities
- use of assistive devices when accessing services
- how persons with disabilities obtain goods and services
- how service providers are trained to serve persons with disabilities

Information and Communication

Standards in this area will help to ensure all Nova Scotians can receive and share the same information. They may consider accessible formats (for example, braille, American Sign Language, or large print), accessible websites and technologies, and standards for communicating with persons with disabilities.

Transportation

Standards in this area will help make it easier for everyone to travel in both rural and urban Nova Scotia. The federal government regulates some forms of transportation, such as travel by air and rail. Such transportation would not fall under provincial standards.

What We Heard

In the fall of 2018, the government will release a strategy for making Nova Scotia accessible by 2030. This strategy will outline the government's priorities, timelines, and actions.

We want to hear from Nova Scotians before we develop our strategy. We want to know

- what you see as the challenges and opportunities that may arise as we work to make the province accessible
- which accessibility standards should be addressed first
- how different sectors can help to create an accessible Nova Scotia

We have already heard from people through targeted focus groups and an online questionnaire. These were open to persons with disabilities and the organizations that serve them.

More than 40 people attended the five focus group sessions held across the province in December 2017. About 1,200 Nova Scotians answered the online questionnaire released in March 2018.

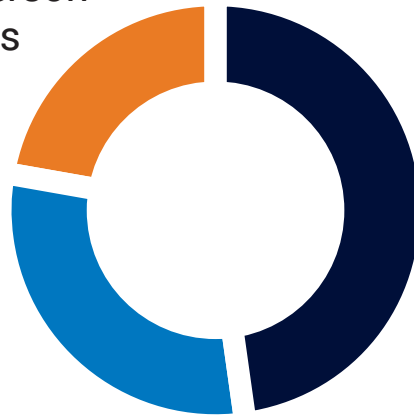
Survey Participants

22%

on behalf of person
with disabilities

30%

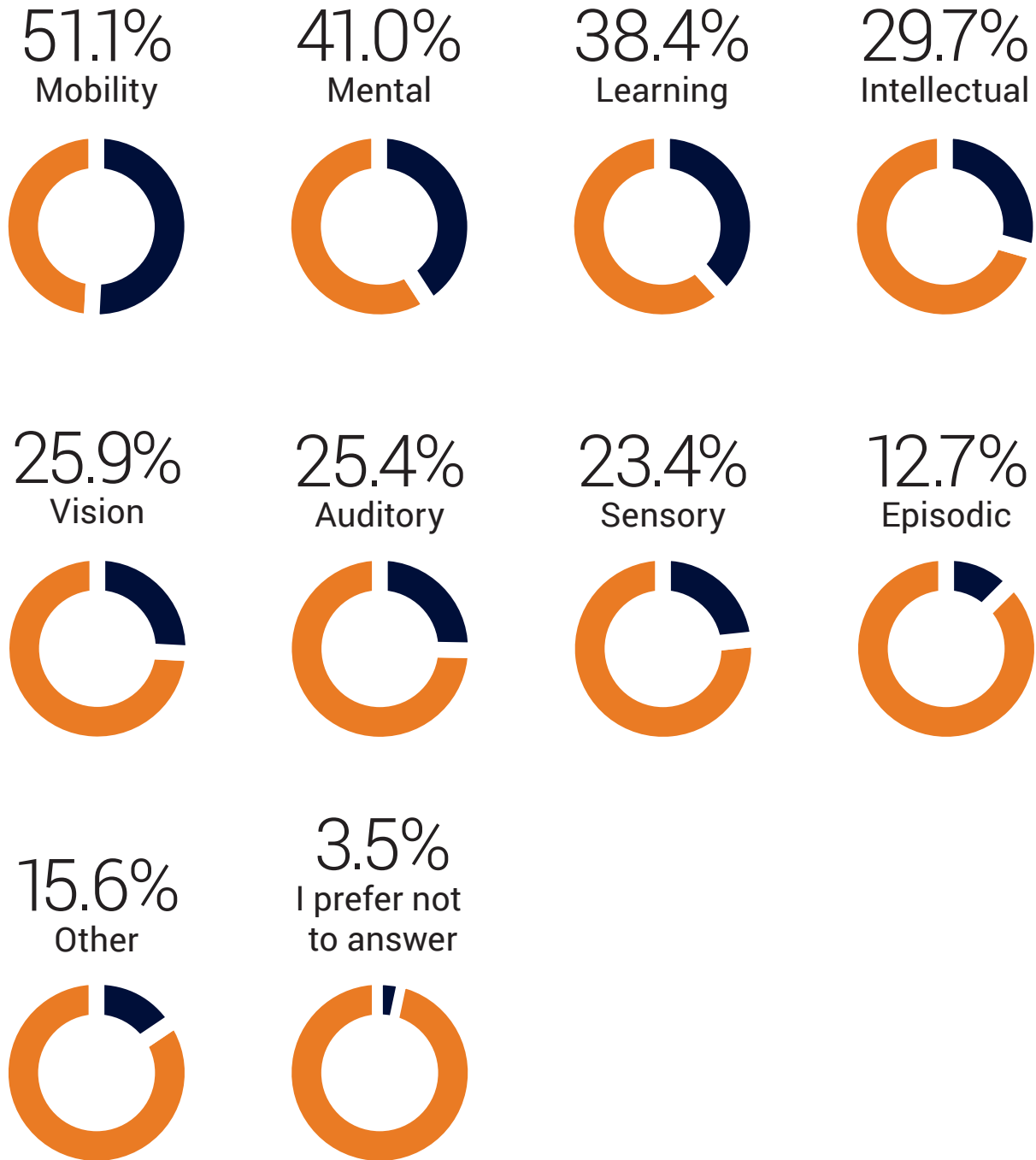
representing an
organization that provides
services to persons with disabilities



48%

person with disabilities

What type(s) of disability do you or does the person you are representing have?*



*Self-identified. Respondents could choose all that apply.

The Meaning of Accessibility

Focus group participants and questionnaire respondents described an accessible Nova Scotia this way:

- **Inclusive and Equitable** – Persons with disabilities have access to the same resources, services, and infrastructure as other Nova Scotians. They are able to participate in society, and lead meaningful, fulfilling lives.
- **Barrier-Free** – Persons with disabilities do not face barriers to buildings, streets, sidewalks, or shared spaces. They have the same access to affordable housing, education, health care, employment, communications, and transportation as other Nova Scotians. 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.

Accessing Nova Scotia Government Services

Some respondents said it can be hard to get the Nova Scotia government services they need. They suggest the following improvements:

- **Government Resources** – Ensure services meet the needs of all Nova Scotians with disabilities.
- **Policies and Processes** – Improve the way people receive the services they need. For example, make it easier to apply for services, and open up those services to more people.

- **Accessible Infrastructure** – Make the places in which government services are located accessible. Ensure there is accessible transportation to get to them.
- **Communications** – Ensure information about government services is easy to find and understand. Make information available in accessible formats. This includes signs, websites, documents, and videos.
- **Attitudes and Understanding** – Educate staff about the barriers faced by persons with disabilities. This will help staff to be respectful and more able to help the public they serve.

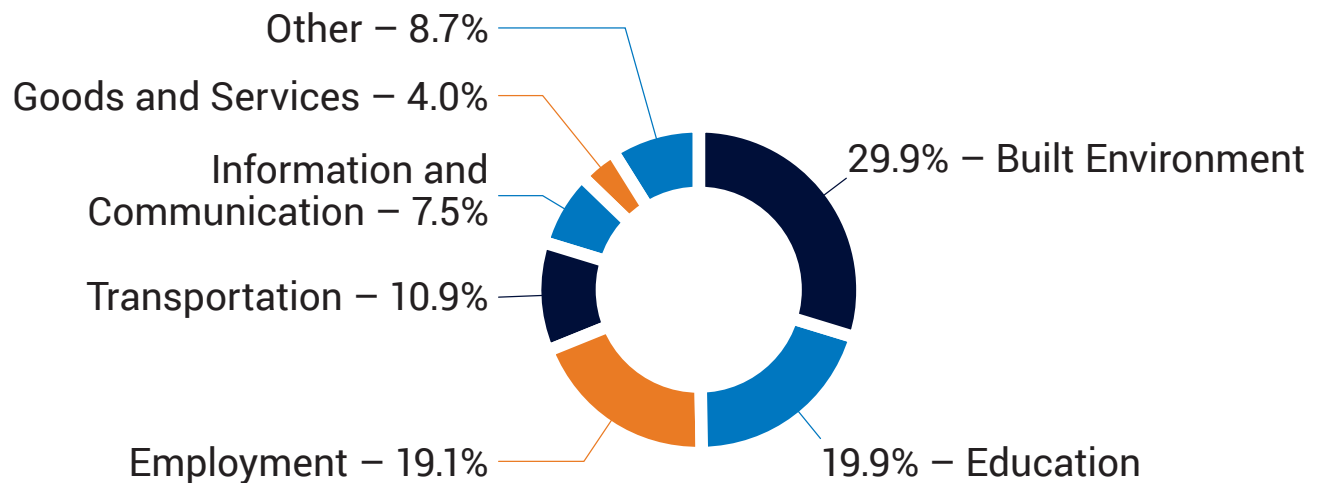
Priorities for Accessibility Standards

Focus group participants told us that the most immediate results would come from developing standards in the following areas:

- goods and services
- information and communication
- built environment

29.9% of questionnaire respondents said standards should be developed for the built environment first, followed by education (19.9%) and employment (19.1%).

The Government of Nova Scotia will be developing standards (rules and regulations) for accessibility in the following areas. Which one standard area would you choose to be developed first?

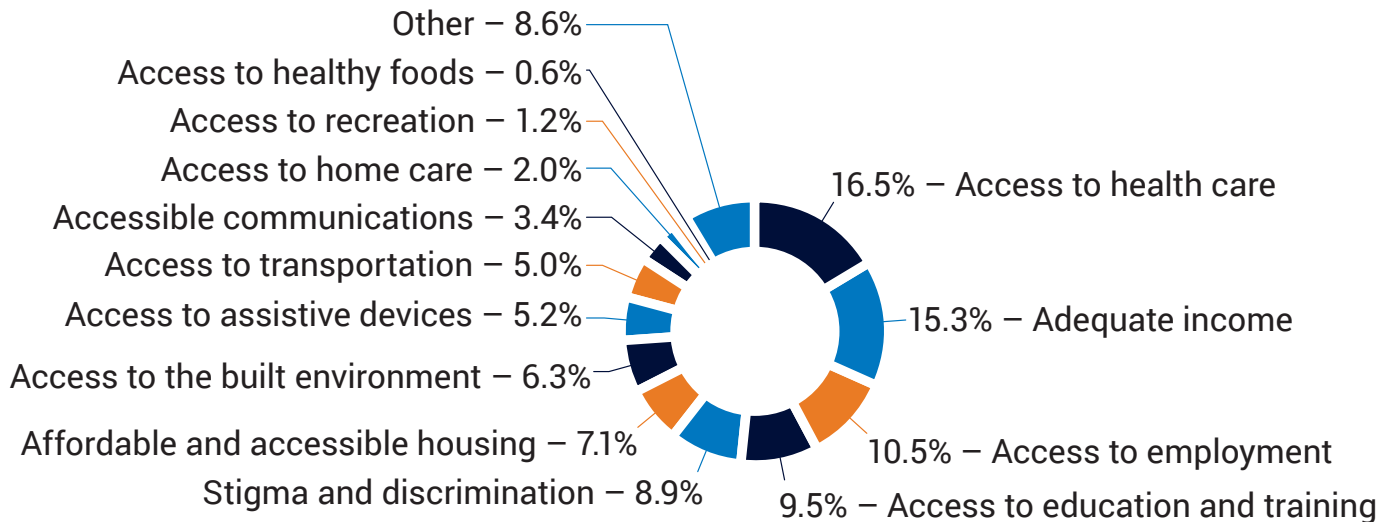


Issues of Importance to Persons with Disabilities

Part of our mandate is to address disability-related issues that may fall outside of the standards areas. Respondents told us that the top two issues for persons with disabilities are:

- access to health care
- having enough income

Of the issues listed, which one is most important to persons with a disability in Nova Scotia?



How to Achieve Accessibility

Focus group participants told us that achieving accessibility in Nova Scotia requires:

- a change in culture, attitudes and behaviors
- investments of time, energy, and resources by all sectors
- a continued commitment by government to advancing an accessible Nova Scotia, and an understanding that accessibility is not a political issue

What's Next?

We are continuing to consult Nova Scotians as we prepare the accessibility strategy for the fall of 2018.

Public Engagement Sessions

We are holding a series of in-person public engagement sessions. Nova Scotians are invited to attend and offer their views on the following:

- How should government decide which standards to develop first?
- How can communities help us meet our goal of an accessible Nova Scotia?
- What other issues should government consider as we make Nova Scotia accessible?

You can find information about these sessions at novascotia.ca/accessibility.

Nova Scotians who cannot attend may offer their ideas by emailing us at accessibility@novascotia.ca.

Additional Consultations

We will continue to meet with our colleagues across government, businesses, municipalities, post-secondary institutions, and community organizations to get their views on how best to put our new accessibility law into practice.

We are looking forward to receiving your ideas as we work together to create an accessible Nova Scotia.


NOVA SCOTIA