



Elections  
Ontario

# Elections Ontario's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

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2022-26

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# Message from the CEO

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It is my pleasure to present Elections Ontario's 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, having now met all the deliverables of our 2017-2021 plan. In releasing this plan, I am also proud to note that Elections Ontario has met all legislated requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Our new five-year plan is an acknowledgment of our commitment to make voting easy for all Ontarians. It identifies, prevents, and removes barriers so that persons with disabilities can participate in our democratic processes in an accessible and inclusive manner.

I am grateful for the feedback we received from community agencies representing persons with disabilities as we developed this plan, and the ongoing support they give the Elections Ontario Accessibility Committee.

Together, we will continue to improve the voting experience across the province as we modernize Ontario elections to better meet the needs of voters.

Sincerely,

Greg Essensa  
Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario

# Overview of requirements

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As a public-sector organization, Elections Ontario complies with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the requirements in the Integrated Accessibility Standards, Regulation 191/11. These requirements cover five areas: customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces.

## Multi-year accessibility plan

Under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, Elections Ontario must have a multi-year accessibility plan that identifies the steps we are taking to comply with the accessibility standards. Our 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines these steps and our other initiatives to provide accessible and inclusive services. It is our third five-year plan under Ontario's accessibility legislation.

The 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan includes four applicable standards and their legislative requirements. Elections Ontario is not a transportation organization and does not have any legislated requirements with respect to the transportation standard.

- **Customer Service Standard** – provides accessible customer service to persons with disabilities so that they can access the same goods, services or facilities as everyone else
- **Information and Communications Standard** – creates and provides information and communications in ways that are accessible for persons with disabilities
- **Employment Standard** – includes and provides accessibility practices for employees across all stages of the employment cycle including recruitment, assessment, and selection
- **Design of Public Spaces Standard** - includes specific accessibility features in newly designed or renovated public spaces, that will make it easier for everyone (including persons with disabilities, seniors, and families) to use

## Commitment to the plan

Elections Ontario's 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan shows our commitment to continue to identify and remove barriers and improve accessibility.

Elections Ontario has adopted the four principles outlined in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* as part of our continued mission to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process.

The four principles are:

- Dignity – Persons with disabilities are treated as valued and as deserving of effective customer services as others
- Independence – Persons with disabilities have the freedom to make their own choices
- Integration – Persons with disabilities can fully benefit from the same goods, services or facilities as others
- Equality of opportunity – Persons with disabilities have the same opportunity to obtain, use and benefit from goods, services or facilities as others

## Planning in consultation

Elections Ontario takes a collaborative approach when creating a new multi-year accessibility plan. Our multi-year accessibility plans have all been created in consultation with organizations and individuals representing persons with disabilities.

We gather feedback through surveys and public outreach to determine how we can improve the voting experience, particularly for persons with disabilities.

After a by-election or general election, we gather feedback from:

- Feedback forms at voting locations
- Returning Officers
- Staff at Elections Ontario's headquarters
- Elections Ontario's internal Accessibility Committee
- Political entities (political parties, their candidates and constituency associations)
- Other stakeholders
- Public opinion surveys
- Community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities

On August 12, 2021, we met with community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities to gather their input for the 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

We acknowledge, and are grateful for, the continued input from the organizations that have supported our multi-year accessibility plans since 2016. Known as the MYAP community agencies, for multi-year accessibility plans, the following communities and agencies representing persons with disabilities have generously shared their time and expertise to help us develop and implement accessibility plans that meet legislative requirements and, most importantly, address the needs of voters with disabilities.

Elections Ontario meets and shares information regularly with the following stakeholders:

- Minette Samaroo, President, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Curtis Larade, Social Worker, Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Kendelle LaBella, Caregiver & Project Coordinator, Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Kelly Gorman, Director, Public Policy & Government Affairs, Arthritis Society
- Luke Fox, Education Specialist, Arthritis Society
- Jayne Leang, Director of Business Relations, Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf
- Michael Warburton, Director, Client Engagement, Canadian Hearing Services
- Mark Murray, Client Engagement Manager, Canadian Hearing Services
- Kevin McGregor, Director of Programs, Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario
- Kat Hamilton, Senior Manager, Ontario Eastern and Government Relations, CNIB, Ottawa
- Ramla Abukar, Coordinator, Advocacy and Community Engagement, CNIB
- Neisha Mitchell, Coordinator, Advocacy and Outreach, GTA & Ontario East, CNIB
- Shawn Pegg, Director, Social Policy and Strategic Initiatives, Community Living Ontario
- Yvonne Spicer, Client and Board Member, Community Living Ontario
- Cindy DeGraaff, Manager, Planning Services Program, Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy
- Debbie Gillespie, advocate for individuals who are blind or have low vision
- Amanda MacKenzie, National Manager, Public Affairs, March of Dimes
- Jess Mitchell, Senior Manager, Inclusive Design, Ontario College of Art & Design University (OCAD)
- Amanda Stanton, Director of Public Affairs and Partnerships, Parkinson Canada
- Richard McCallum, Employment Specialist, Spinal Cord Injury Ontario
- Gary Malkowski, advocate for individuals who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing

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## Looking to the future

This is Election Ontario's third multi-year accessibility plan and covers a five-year period from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2026. The plan serves as a roadmap for removing barriers as we continue to serve persons with disabilities.

We will be publishing annual status reports on the Elections Ontario website to show the progress we are making in our new five-year plan.

The 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and our annual status reports are available in alternative formats upon request.



# General requirements

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The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* has general requirements that apply across all applicable standards, including those related to customer service, information and communications, employment and design of public spaces.

Under the general requirements, an organization must:

- Establish accessibility policies
- Incorporate accessibility criteria and features when procuring or acquiring goods, services, facilities or a self-service kiosk
- Provide staff training

Elections Ontario has developed and implemented an [accessibility policy](#) that clearly defines how we achieve and meet these requirements and each of the accessibility standards.

## Meeting the general requirements for 2022-26

Elections Ontario remains committed to meeting the general requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* as part of our five-year plan from 2022-26.

### Establishing accessibility policies

Elections Ontario's accessibility policy informs staff about the importance of Ontario's accessibility legislation. The policy also includes guidance about complying with legislation and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities are always met.

We continue to monitor for any legislative amendments to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and to update our accessibility policies, practices and procedures to remain compliant with the legislation.

Changes to the policy are shared with staff as they come into effect and are posted to the Elections Ontario website. New employees are provided with a copy of the policy as part of their orientation.

### Procuring goods, services, facilities or self-service kiosks

Elections Ontario complies with legislation when purchasing goods, services or self-service kiosks.

We continue to incorporate accessibility criteria and features into our procurement processes when obtaining goods (e.g., computer equipment or devices, software programs), services (e.g., interpreters, voting by home visit),

facilities (e.g., voting locations, rental facilities, venues) or self-service kiosks (e.g., interactive electronic terminals) to ensure we continue removing barriers for voters and staff.

## Staff training

Elections Ontario trains staff at our headquarters on the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, with a focus on accessible customer service. This training is important as it helps staff to understand the needs of persons with disabilities and ensure that they are delivering services to voters with disabilities in a manner that is accessible for them.

For the 2022 general election, Elections Ontario will train approximately 65,000 staff, some of whom are working for just one day. As part of the training, election officials will be shown a 25-minute video on how to effectively communicate and provide services to persons with disabilities in a caring and accommodating manner.

Based on suggestions from community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities, we will be reviewing our training content for election officials in 2023.

Areas for review include:

- Accommodating and providing services to persons with invisible disabilities (e.g., heart disease, mental health, etc.)
- Understanding who can be a support person for a voter with a disability
- Providing customer service to those who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing
- Understanding and accommodating the employment needs of staff with disabilities

## Customer Service Standard

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Elections Ontario is committed to ensuring that we provide accessible customer service to persons with disabilities. We follow and apply the four core principles of accessibility: independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

The requirements under the customer service standard are as follows:

- Allow individuals to use their own assistive devices to access Elections Ontario goods, services or facilities
- Allow, and provide access for, service animals
- Permit the use of support persons

- Provide notice when services are disrupted
- Ensure that any emergency procedures, plans and public safety information is available in accessible formats upon request

## **Customer service for 2022-26**

Over the next five-year period, Elections Ontario will continue to provide accessible customer service and continue removing barriers to voting for Ontarians.

### **Assistive devices**

Individuals can use their own assistive devices to access Elections Ontario's goods, services or facilities. During a by-election or general election, persons with disabilities are permitted to use their phones or other assistive devices as an accessible tool to voting. Assistive devices can be used to look up voter information, magnify information, access interpreters, recall information needed to vote, or as a tool to communicate with an election official.

We continue to explore apps and electronic devices used by persons with disabilities, especially those that provide simultaneous translations for persons who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.

### **Elections Ontario app**

The new Elections Ontario app will give all users information about an upcoming election. Users who choose to create an account and link it to their voter registration will be able to quickly access information about when, where and how they can vote, including a scannable voter information card, and receive personalized notifications.

We are consulting with voters with disabilities through focus groups to ensure the Elections Ontario app is accessible and meets their needs. The platform will also accommodate the personal device settings and assistive technologies voters with disabilities already use.

The Elections Ontario app will go live during Provincial Voter Registration Month in March 2022 and be piloted during the 2022 general election. We look forward to receiving input on the app so that we can continue to improve and expand it.

### **Assistive voting technology**

We continue to provide assistive voting technology at returning offices during advance voting.

For the 2022 general election, voters will also be able to schedule appointments to use assistive voting technology on election day. Walk-in requests to use the technology will be accommodated, where possible.

Assistive voting technology allows voters to choose between three controller options to make their selection:

- Audio tactile interface: the controller has audio directions and features large, raised buttons, bright colours and braille inscriptions
- Paddles: the paddles can be pressed using hands, feet or elbows
- Sip and puff technology: the device allows voters to mark their ballot by "sipping" (inhaling) or "puffing" (exhaling) into a straw

## **Service animals**

Elections Ontario continues to permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal, unless otherwise excluded by law, in keeping with the Customer Service Standard. The service animal must always be under the care and control of the individual.

## **Support persons**

Elections Ontario continues to permit support people for persons with disabilities. The support person can assist with communication, mobility, personal care for medical needs or accessing goods, services or facilities during a by-election or general election.

## **Notice of service disruptions**

Elections Ontario understands the importance of knowing in advance when services are being disrupted for persons with disabilities, as it allows them to make alternative arrangements, if necessary.

Once an unplanned disruption has been identified, Elections Ontario posts a "notice of service disruption" that includes the reason for the disruption, how long it is expected to last, and what alternative facilities or services are available.

## **Emergency procedures and plans**

Should an employee or visitor to Elections Ontario require any emergency procedures or plans in an accessible format, we will work with the individual to provide them with a format that works for them.

## **Accessible tools and services for voting**

We will continue to offer the following accessible tools, services and facilities to voters during an election:

- Assistive voting technology is available at returning offices from the first day of advance voting
- Election officials can bring a ballot outside the voting location to make the process more accessible
- Voters can request a transfer to another voting location that better meets their accessibility needs
- Voters can request a home visit if they cannot go to their voting location because of a disability or if they need assistance to vote
- Voters who require an American Sign Language or Langue des Signes Québécoise Interpreter or Intervenor can book one and have Elections Ontario cover the cost
- Voters can use their mobile phones or other devices as an accessibility tool
- Voters can request magnifiers and ballot templates with braille numbering and cut-outs
- Service animals are permitted in returning offices, satellite offices and voting locations
- Voters can bring a friend or support person to assist with marking their ballot
- Voting locations must meet Elections Ontario's Site Accessibility Standards, where possible

Over the next five-year period, we will continue to research and provide accessible tools and services to voters across Ontario.

### **Accessible services offered during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Elections Ontario has been reviewing its plans for the 2022 general election, and any future elections, to ensure Ontarians will be able to vote safely during the COVID-19 pandemic or other health emergency.

We are also considering the following suggestions from the MYAP community agencies:

- Increase sanitation and the use of touchless surfaces, particularly for persons who are blind
- Ensure tools, such as assistive voting technology, braille ballot templates, secrecy folders and pens are one-time use or disinfected after each use
- Consider the use of clear masks for poll workers so persons who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing can lip-read
- Continuously update information about how to prepare for voting on the Elections Ontario website or voter information cards, with a focus on the supports and services available to persons with disabilities
- Provide timely updates in videos and on the website about the availability of key services, such as assistive voting technology and accessible voting options

- Create and embed American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise videos on Elections Ontario's webpages to enhance accessibility for persons who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing
- Accompany mail-in ballots with infographics or plain-language instructions to make materials easier to understand
- Explore use of live interpreters through remote video interpreting services
- Use community agencies to share information about accessible voting options

# Information and Communications Standard

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Elections Ontario understands how important it is for persons with disabilities to be able to receive the same information as others. This is especially true during an election. Elections Ontario works hard to ensure that the information we share, including flyers, social media posts, website postings, documents and signage, is understandable, easy to use and accessible.

Under the Information and Communications Standard, Elections Ontario must:

- Have an accessible feedback process
- Provide accessible formats and communication supports upon request
- Ensure its website and intranet, and all content, is accessible

## Information and communications for 2022-26

Elections Ontario will continue to communicate with voters in ways that are accessible and easy for all to use. We welcome all feedback about the accessibility of our communications as we work to ensure all voters have the information they need to vote.

### Feedback process

Elections Ontario gathers feedback from voters and other stakeholders as part of our ongoing efforts to modernize the electoral process to better meet the needs of voters. This includes identifying and eliminating barriers to voting for persons with disabilities.

We collect feedback through many channels, including regular consultations with our MYAP community agencies and stakeholder surveys. Persons with disabilities can also provide feedback in multiple ways, including by phone, email, fax, TTY, mail or through our [website](#).

Going forward, voters will also be able to provide feedback about their voting experience electronically. This process will replace the paper forms used at voting locations in the past.

### Accessible formats and communication supports

Elections Ontario recognizes the importance of an elector's need to understand the voting process, allowing them the ability to make informed decisions. We provide or arrange for accessible formats and communication supports upon request and work with persons with disabilities to determine the suitability of the format or support.

During elections, we cover the cost of an American Sign Language or Langue des Signes Québécoise Interpreter or Intervenor. Persons with disabilities can also use their phones or assistive devices to look up information or as a tool to communicate with election officials. We will continue to offer these services throughout the next five years.

All accessible formats and communication supports will continue to be provided in a timely manner and at a cost that is no more than the regular price charged to others.

## **Website and content**

Elections Ontario does an annual review of its website to ensure it meets the legislated levels of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Our website currently complies with WCAG 2.0, Level AA, but we are investigating meeting WCAG 2.1 guidelines. This would exceed the legislated requirements but provide more guidance for apps and websites accessed through tablets and mobile phones—tools that are now in greater use.

We also continue to test the website using screen-reading programs like JAWS and NVDA to confirm usability.

### **Content on website:**

We continuously review content on our website for clarity and ease of access. All files on the website are available for download as an accessible PDF and accessible formats are available upon request.

Going forward, videos on our website will be accessible and include American Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise interpretation, as well as audio descriptions or a separate audio track.

We will also be updating the website to use more infographics and plain language to make information easier to understand.

## **Outreach**

Elections Ontario conducts outreach and public engagement for communities facing barriers to voting on an ongoing basis. We will continue to share information about voting across a variety of communications channels, including social media, newsletters and in public spaces.

During an election, we will also work with community agencies to share information by having our banner and content posted to their websites.



# Employment Standard

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Elections Ontario recognizes that accessible accommodations allow persons with disabilities equal access to employment opportunities. Accessible accommodations are available throughout our hiring process and employees will be supported throughout their employment with Elections Ontario.

Under the Employment Standard, Elections Ontario must ensure that:

- Employees and the public are aware that accessible accommodations are available as part of the recruitment process for applicants with disabilities
- Applicants who are selected to participate in an assessment or selection process are offered accommodations upon request
- Successful applicants are informed about the policies on accessible accommodations for employees with disabilities when offers of employment are made
- Employees with disabilities are provided with materials in accessible formats, and communication supports, as determined through consultation
- Individualized workplace emergency response information is provided to employees with disabilities, as required
- Individualized, documented accommodation plans, and return-to-work plans are in place for employees with disabilities
- Performance management, career development and advancement, and redeployment consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as any individual accommodation

## Employment for 2022-26

Elections Ontario has a unique staffing model that is made up of three different types of employment:

- Full-time staff at Elections Ontario headquarters
- Field staff who work part-time on an as-needed basis, including Returning Officers and Election Clerks
- Election officials (approximately 65,000 for a general election) who work during a general election for a limited time, either a few weeks or a single day

We will continue to proactively remove barriers to employment with Elections Ontario by providing workplace accommodations during each stage of the employment cycle, including recruitment, assessment and selection.

## **Recruitment and selection process**

Elections Ontario will continue to inform its employees and the public about the availability of accessible accommodations for applicants with disabilities as part of our recruitment and selection process.

We will also continue to provide accessible accommodations to employees with disabilities. We are committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable and accessible work environment, where all employees feel valued, respected, and supported.

In response to recommendations from agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities, we will also expand our outreach so that persons with disabilities are aware of employment opportunities with Elections Ontario.

Employment outreach may include:

- Increasing outreach to community agencies representing persons with disabilities
- Working with large umbrella agencies that work to increase employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities
- Ensuring that there is a supportive environment for employees with disabilities through staff training

## **Accessible formats and communication supports**

Elections Ontario is committed to consulting with employees who have disabilities to provide them with the accessible formats and communication supports they need to perform their jobs effectively.

As part of our plan for the next five years, we will also ensure that information that is generally available to all employees is accessible for all staff.

## **Workplace emergency response**

We continue to create individualized workplace emergency plans for all employees with disabilities to ensure the health and safety of staff in the event of an emergency.

## **Documented individual accommodation plan**

Elections Ontario has a process in place for the development of a documented individual accommodation plan (IAP) for employees with disabilities.

All new employees at Elections Ontario are asked if they require a disability-related accommodation. Employees that need accessibility accommodations

are then asked to complete a form describing their accommodation needs and Human Resources will work with them to determine the appropriate accommodations and supports. These are then documented in an Individual Accommodation Plan.

### **Return to work and redeployment process**

Elections Ontario will continue to use its current return-to-work and redeployment process.

The return-to-work process is for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require disability-related accommodations to return to work. It outlines the steps Elections Ontario will take to facilitate the employee's return to work through the Individual Accommodation Plan process.

Should an employee with a disability be reassigned to another department or job, we will re-evaluate their accommodation needs to ensure their accommodation requirements are being met. The employee's Individual Accommodation Plan will be updated to include the new position and any accommodation or requirement changes.

### **Performance management and career development and advancement**

We will continue to consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as their individual accommodation plans, as part of performance management or when considering career development and advancement.

# Design of Public Spaces Standard

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Elections Ontario understands the importance of access to public spaces for persons with disabilities, especially voting locations during an election.

We will reference and incorporate the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard and the Ontario Building Code should EO build or lease any new buildings for its day-to-day operations or renovate any existing building.

During a general election, we source approximately 7,700 accessible voting locations across the province using our voting location accessibility checklist, which is based on the guiding principles of the Design of Public Spaces Standard and the Ontario Building Code.

## Public spaces for 2022-26

Elections Ontario continues to source accessible voting locations across the province based on the criteria set out in our Site Accessibility Standards.

The Voting Location Accessibility Checklist included in the standards sets requirements for:

- Exterior signage
- Accessible parking, when parking is available at locations
- Exterior pathways
- Accessible entrances
- Internal paths of travel
- Internal doors for the voting room
- Elevators

As outlined in Section 13.1 (3) of Ontario's *Election Act*, proposed voting locations must be posted at least six months before a provincial general election so that members of the public can provide feedback about the accessibility of the locations.

For the 2022 general election, we are also planning to introduce additional measures at our voting locations to better protect the health and safety of voters because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have been working with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other occupational health and safety experts to ensure that we protect the health and safety of staff and the public that we serve. We will continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and evolving public health information.

## In conclusion

Elections Ontario remains committed to removing barriers for persons with disabilities.

We look forward to implementing the 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan with continued support from our community agencies, individuals representing persons with disabilities and voters across the province of Ontario.