

2023 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Accessible Formats and Feedback

Accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request. Should you require an accessible format or communication support or wish to provide feedback, please contact us in one of the following ways:

- **Email:** info@elections.on.ca
- **Phone:** 1-888-668-8683
- **TTY:** 1-888-292-2312
- **Fax:** 1-866-714-2809
- **Mail:** Elections Ontario, 26 Prince Andrew Place, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 2H4
- **In person** at 26 Prince Andrew Place, Toronto

Your feedback is important to us. Elections Ontario recognizes that feedback is critical to the process of identifying and removing barriers to participation, as well as improving how we deliver our services to persons with disabilities.

All questions and feedback will be processed within 24 hours.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plans and Annual Status Reports

Current and past Multi-Year Accessibility Plans and annual status reports are available on the [Elections Ontario website](#).

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Message from the CEO

I am pleased to present the 2023 Status Update to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This report highlights the activities and developments from January 1 to December 31, 2023 to promote elector accessibility and inclusion in the electoral process during the second year of our five-year Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

At Elections Ontario, our mission is to uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process by managing elections in an efficient, fair, and impartial manner. We place great importance on the dignity, independence, and equal opportunity of all electors in casting their vote in Ontario elections. We also ensure that we are fully compliant with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

In 2023, we delivered four accessible by-elections, ensuring all eligible Ontarians could exercise their democratic right to vote in an inclusive and barrier-free environment.

In addition, Elections Ontario developed a new provincial Register to meet the legislated responsibility to make the Preliminary List of Electors available for all 444 municipalities in Ontario to support local electoral events, commencing in January 2024. The new Election Portal will allow municipal clerks, district social services administration board members, and school board administrators to request Register elector information from Elections Ontario to plan and run their elections, suggest changes to address and elector data in the Register, and communicate directly with the Register team. Most importantly, it will give electors the opportunity to register and update their voter information electronically for both local and provincial elections, all in one place.

We continually strive to improve services and remove barriers to accessibility as we work towards our goals outlined in the 2022-26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. We continuously collaborate with community organizations that represent persons with disabilities as well as our internal Accessibility Advisory Committee, while acting upon the feedback we receive from the public. Working together, we continue to make voting accessible and easy for all electors

Greg Essensa

Chief Electoral Officer

Overview

This annual status report describes the actions Elections Ontario (EO) has undertaken to identify and remove barriers to voting that are faced by electors, and the progress made in the second year of implementing the 2022–26 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP).

Background and Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) was enacted for the purpose of creating accessibility standards to ensure that Ontarians with disabilities can access goods, services, spaces and employment opportunities. The specific standards are consolidated under the AODA's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), which establishes accessibility requirements for the five legislative standards: customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces. EO is not required to comply with the Transportation Standard of the IASR, as it is not applicable.

Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC), EO has ongoing obligations to accommodate persons with disabilities and to ensure they are not subject to undue hardships. The AODA and its requirements are incorporated into election administration at EO, and we recognize that the need for additional accommodation measures that go beyond the AODA may be required in accordance with the OHRC.

Commitment to the Plan

EO has embedded AODA's principles into all areas of our work, both internally for staff and externally for the more than 10.7 million eligible Ontario electors we serve.

EO's policies, practices, and procedures are guided by the core principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equality as described in the Customer Service Standard under the IASR. In addition, the following overarching principles guide EO:

- Goods and services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- The provision of goods and services or facilities to persons with disabilities and others is integrated, unless an alternate measure is necessary (either temporarily or on a permanent basis).

- Persons with disabilities are given opportunities equal to those given to others to obtain, use, and benefit from the goods and services or facilities provided.
- The method of communicating with persons with disabilities takes into consideration a person's individual preferences and/or needs.
- Equal opportunity, diversity in employment, and an accessible work environment are provided.

Staff are provided with accessibility training, guidelines, best practices, policies and procedures to continue incorporating accessibility across the organization.

Community Agencies and Individuals Representing Persons with Disabilities

We recognize and appreciate the input and continued support from individuals and community agencies representing persons with disabilities across the province. Their expertise has helped guide EO as we continually identify, prevent and eliminate barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

The following organizations helped us create the 2022–26 MYAP and continue to provide support through our Accessibility Advisory Committee:

- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
- Alzheimer Society of Toronto
- Arthritis Society Canada
- Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- CNIB Foundation, Toronto & Ottawa
- Community Living Ontario
- March of Dimes Canada
- Ontario College of Art & Design University
- Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy
- Parkinson Canada
- Spinal Cord Injury Ontario

Internal Accessibility Advisory Committee

EO's internal Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) continues to meet regularly to consider accessibility in every aspect of our service delivery, including products, policies, processes and protocols. The AAC works to ensure that our services are inclusive of, and accessible to, all Ontarians; this includes EO employees and members of the public.

Our key deliverables for the 2022–26 MYAP include:

- continuing our research and our provision of accessible tools and services; and
- increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities at EO headquarters and in positions that become available during elections.

To do this, we plan to strengthen our connections with agencies that work to increase employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities. We will also review and refresh staff training content and include more content about interacting with and accommodating persons with less known and understood disability types, including those that are invisible or less visible.

The AAC continues to strengthen and streamline services by identifying and exploring possible barriers to voting in the next general election in 2026. We are exploring the following possible barriers:

- Using paper versus digital materials to vote
- Not being able to physically get to a voting location
- Not being able to vote in person
- Not being able to access information about where, when, and how to vote
- Not being able to get to a voting location during voting hours
- Not being able to vote independently and privately
- Not having standard type identification
- Not being able to upload and show identification
- Not feeling safe to vote in person
- Not being able to access and research candidates' information
- Not finding employment opportunities during elections
- Staff training content not being accessible

The AAC incorporates a standing agenda component that explores trends and signals to stay aware of future changes affecting persons with disabilities and their voting experiences.

Below is a list of some of the topics relating to accessible voting that we explored in 2023:

- Future requirements to make web content more accessible to persons with disabilities, as per the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2.
- New accessibility adaptors and assistive voting technology, such as chrome plug-in adaptors for ePoll books.
- Biotechnology and the aging process (i.e. people living longer, which means more electors and a wider range of abilities to accommodate).
- Earth observation data (i.e. a collection of information about planet Earth gathered in real time, including data about forest fires, floods, and natural

disasters) that would allow EO to better manage voting locations and deployment during voting.

- Millennials and Gen Z becoming full-time caregivers of their parents and the effects of this on voting behaviours.
- Robot information assistants used to enhance services that could pose security risks and/or other concerns.
- Online voting and its potential to increase accessibility, convenience, and potentially voter turnout, as well as the concerns it presents related to security, privacy, and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.
- The influence of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) on democratic processes and the spread of misinformation and disinformation.
- Creating public awareness in promoting critical thinking relative to technological literacy and collaboration with social media platforms to identify and address misinformation and disinformation.
- The push for government digitalization and digital solutions that could improve efficiency and enhance accuracy with digital security.
- The opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI).

The AAC continues to strategically outline and advise on the management of accessibility issues and the options to resolve them.

General Requirements

There are several deliverables that EO must implement in accordance with the general requirements of the AODA, including the creation and maintenance of accessibility and procurement policies, the development of a multi-year accessibility plan, the publishing of an annual accessibility compliance and status report, and the provision of staff training.

Accessibility and Procurement Policies

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

We remain committed to meeting the accessibility standards stipulated in the *Election Act, 1990*, the AODA, the IASR, and the OHRC. In providing the overall strategic direction for EO's commitment to providing accessibility supports to Ontarians with disabilities, this policy addresses the mandatory requirements and standards under the IASR for information and communications, employment, design of public spaces, and customer service.

Staff are provided with a copy of the accessibility policy as part of their orientation process. Policy and procedures are reviewed continually, and any changes are communicated to all EO staff. EO's accessibility policy continues to be publicly available in an accessible format on our website and can be provided in alternative formats upon request.

EO has developed a procurement policy for procuring goods and services that incorporates accessibility design, criteria and features. Our request for proposals (RFP) process requires all contractors or service providers working on our behalf to understand and be previously trained on the standards applicable to the procurement request. We also incorporate accessibility features when designing, procuring, or acquiring self-service kiosks.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

EO's [2022-26 MYAP](#) was developed in consultation with community agencies and individuals representing persons with disabilities and EO's internal AAC. The five-year plan was created in 2022 to meet the legislative requirements of the AODA. It demonstrates our commitment and outlines our strategy to ensure our services are inclusive of, and accessible to, all Ontarians; this includes EO employees and members of the public that have disabilities.

The MYAP is established, reviewed, updated and posted on EO's website as an accessible PDF document. It is also available in alternative formats upon request, as per the AODA legislation.

Annual Accessibility Compliance and Status Reports

Under the AODA, EO must file an annual accessibility compliance report with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. The most recent report, filed in October 2023, outlines how EO successfully met each of its deliverables.

The AODA also requires EO to prepare an annual status report, post it to EO's website, and make it available in alternative formats upon request. The 2023 MYAP status report documents the activity planning and implementation undertaken by EO that are related to the deliverables outlined in the MYAP from January 1 to December 31, 2023.

The following is an update on the MYAP initiatives undertaken in 2023 to meet the AODA's general requirements, as well as those specific to each of the four applicable standards: information and communications, employment, design of public spaces, and customer service. It has been designed to be accessible and will be posted to EO's website and available in alternative formats upon request.

Staff Training

EO ensures that training is provided to all staff on how to provide accessible customer service, the OHRC as it pertains to persons with disabilities, and each of the AODA standards as applicable to the duties of the employee's position. New staff are trained on accessibility during their first week of employment.

All current headquarters staff have been trained on the Customer Service Standard, the IASR, and the OHRC in accordance with the requirements of the AODA. Staff training materials for poll workers can be converted to accessible documents, should an employee require them.

All poll officials and election staff are thoroughly trained on how to provide accessible customer service, prior to the beginning of an election or by-election.

By-Elections - Staff Training

Four by-elections took place in 2023:

1. Hamilton Centre, Electoral District 036
2. Kanata—Carleton, Electoral District 043

3. Scarborough—Guildwood, Electoral District 095
4. Kitchener Centre, Electoral District 047

Training election staff on how to provide accessible customer service to a voter is extremely important. All poll officials and staff in each electoral district were trained to ensure responsiveness to electors with disabilities in accordance with the requirements of the AODA. In addition to in-person training, we used our award-winning training video to teach staff the ways they can better serve electors with disabilities.

Manuals and poll kits that were provided to poll officials included instructions on how to assist electors with disabilities, specifically at the voting location. A section in each manual called “Electors Who Require Assistance” was revised to be more concise and user-friendly for poll officials. This section addressed how to assist individuals with voting, how to accommodate the use of an interpreter or intervenor services, how to support electors with a variety of disabilities, and how to use assistive devices. Electronic versions of training materials have been created to be accessible, and alternative formats can be provided to a poll workers or members of the election staff where requested.

Staff training videos have become more accessible as we have begun to incorporate American Sign Language (ASL) and langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) interpretation within them. Additionally, audio descriptions will be embedded in all new videos, or a separate audio track will be provided upon request.

Training and Onboarding for Political Party Stakeholders

Training and onboarding are provided to political party stakeholders through virtual training on as many as 50 different topics. Most of our stakeholders are volunteers, many of whom work full-time jobs, so their availability can be limited; we received several requests to provide a pre-recorded session that could be viewed at any time. The Compliance division is working on creating a series of single-topic virtual training videos that will help stakeholders access learning at any time. These single-topic videos will be available with closed captioning as well as French translation and narration to ensure accessibility.

Information and Communications Standard

The Information and Communications Standard requires service providers to create, provide and receive information and communications that persons with disabilities can access.

To help persons with disabilities access sources of information and communications, EO provides or arranges accessible formats and communication support upon request, has an accessible feedback system, and ensures that the EO website and its content is accessible.

Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

When EO receives a request for a copy of a document in an accessible format or for communication support, the request is fulfilled as soon as practicable at a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons. EO continues to consult with the person making the request to determine the suitability of an accessible format or communication support based on their accessibility needs. We also communicate to the public about the availability of accessible formats and communication support on our website.

By-Elections - Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

During the four by-elections that were held in 2023, EO worked to ensure that all public-facing products and materials were accessible and complied with the requirements of the AODA. We continually made enhancements to our websites, advertising and marketing plans, media relations, and outreach and public education initiatives to support the needs of electors.

Accessible documents in both English and French were posted to EO's website and made available in alternative formats upon request.

The following is a list of EO initiatives that were carried out for the 2023 by-elections:

- We continued to update and enhance outreach initiatives for electors facing barriers (e.g. incarcerated electors and electors without a permanent residence).
- We redesigned and updated the *Guide to Accessible Voting in Provincial Elections* handout to make it more visually appealing, up to date, and easier for electors to learn about our accessibility services.

- We redesigned the voter information card (VIC) based on feedback received from the CNIB and their style guide, with respect to contrast, colours, spacing, etc.
- We provided general information on elections and the voting process in a range of formats to ensure that all Ontarians could understand when, where, and how to vote.
- We drafted all communication materials (including advertising and public education), in plain language to be accessible to all Ontarians.
- Electors could arrange for registered ASL and LSQ interpreters or intervenors at our expense.
- A VIC was sent to each elector on the voters list to provide information on when and where to vote.
- TTY was available at our headquarters leading up to and during each by-election. This audio service enabled people with hearing loss to access information by telephone.
- Tools and services were available at voting locations during the by-elections and on each election day. These included magnifiers, braille ballot templates with raised numbers and cut-outs to assist electors with reduced visibility or vision loss, and writing pads and pens for communicating with electors with hearing loss.
- Assistive voting technology (AVT) was available at all returning offices but was not used by any electors during any of the four by-elections.
- High-contrast directional arrows were used to direct electors to accessible pathways and entrances at the voting locations.
- Electors could use their mobile phones as assistive devices to better align with their expectations and daily use of technology.
- The EO mobile app was available with by-election-specific information on when and where to vote and provided notifications to electors who signed up for the service.

Accessible Feedback System

EO has a feedback process that is accessible for persons with disabilities. Feedback can be provided in multiple ways, including by phone, email, fax, TTY, mail, or through our website. All questions and feedback are processed within 24 hours.

Voter Feedback, QR Codes and Accessibility

EO has been exploring ways to increase the accessibility of its collection of feedback from electors who have cast their ballots. Historically, feedback collection has relied on pen-and-paper surveys, a method that may have

unintentionally presented obstacles for some electors, especially those with mobility or visual impairments.

Attempts to modernize the process through the introduction of tablets may have also created barriers, including challenges related to technological literacy and manual dexterity. Recognizing these challenges, EO piloted a QR code approach during the Kitchener Centre by-election, enabling voters to use their personal devices to provide feedback.

QR codes are scannable graphics that lead users to online content or initiate specific actions when scanned by a device's camera. Their effectiveness depends on size, clarity, scanning distance, and the QR code version used. To guarantee a smooth user experience, it is important to ensure compatibility with various devices and software, necessitating regular updates and testing.

QR codes provide easy access to digital content but can pose challenges for users with disabilities, particularly in locating and scanning them. EO's approach includes providing easy-to-follow scanning instructions, using high-contrast QR codes for better visibility, using well-considered physical placement to accommodate every elector, and consistently maintaining the appearance of the QR code poster to foster familiarity and ease of use over time.

Understanding that accessibility is multifaceted and acknowledging the existing limitations of QR codes, particularly for voters with visual impairments, EO is committed to ongoing improvements in our feedback process. We continue to work with community organizations, accessibility experts, and our feedback platform to make it more accessible and user-friendly for every voter.

Accessible Websites and Web Content

EO's website and its content is compliant with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#), Level AA, as per the legislative requirements of the Information and Communications Standard of the AODA. Designing the EO website using the WCAG allows people who use computers or mobile devices to navigate the website using technologies that make browsing possible without certain actions, such as looking at the screen or clicking a mouse.

The videos on our website, including staff training videos, have ASL and LSQ interpretation embedded within them. Additionally, audio descriptions will be embedded in all new videos, or a separate audio track will be provided.

The EO website is continually checked and tested for accessibility. All new content is designed to be accessible before being posted to the website. We are also researching possible future requirements of WCAG 2.2 and its impact.

By-Elections - Accessible Websites and Web Content

For the four by-elections in 2023, the following initiatives were undertaken to ensure the accessibility of EO's website and its content:

- EO's website and all materials were AODA compliant, and enhancements were continually made to improve user experience.
- Election materials such as the *Ontario Election Voting Guide*, Identification Requirements and voting instructions in English, French and 36 other languages, were made available for download from our website., as well as.
- EO's Voter Information Service (VIS) and related applications underwent ongoing testing to meet AODA compliance.
- A new Register to Vote website was created and the voter registration web application was updated to allow electors to register once for both provincial and local elections, all in one place.
- eRegistration was updated and renamed "Voter Registration". The updated tool allows eligible Ontario electors to confirm, update, add or remove their voter information for Ontario provincial and local elections, including elections for municipal council members, district social services administration board (DSSAB members, and school board trustees. The EO website has also been updated to align with changes made to the Voter Registration web app.
- An Ontario photo card automated flow was added to the voter registration process to accommodate citizens with the photo card (in the past, only those with a driver's license could leverage an automated flow).
- A new EO mobile app, designed to work with the accessibility settings enabled on one's mobile device, allowed users to view personalized information specific to their electoral district and voting location. The app also provided information to electors about when, where, and how they could vote and gave them electronic access to their voter information card.

International Electoral Awards 2023 - Citizens' Engagement Award

The EO mobile app was recognized with the Citizens' Engagement Award at the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies' 2023 International Electoral Awards Ceremony in Portugal on November 15, 2023,. The Citizens' Engagement Award recognizes stakeholders for putting citizens at the heart of the electoral process and maximizing their engagement and satisfaction.

The EO mobile app was designed to make voting easier for persons with disabilities by:

- Providing essential information directly to their personal mobile devices where personalized settings, such as enlarged text, higher contrast brightness, and text-to-audio features, could be leveraged.

- Including a digital version of the VIC that compartmentalized the information into key sections to facilitate easier understanding. The digital VIC provides the final list of candidates for the individual's electoral district, where and when to vote on any given day in the writ period, and address confirmation so electors only need to provide proof of identity, not residency.
- Providing personalized notifications sent directly to an elector's personal device through the channel they choose (email, SMS, or push notifications) on topics of interest to them, such as accessibility accommodations, emergency notifications (e.g. polls closed due to storm), and voting reminders.

One Register for Local and Provincial Elections

As of January 1, 2024, EO became responsible for provisioning the Preliminary List of Electors for local elections. This gives us the ability to maintain the database of electors for both local and provincial elections.

The new Election Portal will allow municipal clerks, DSSAB members, and school board administrators to request Register information from EO to plan and run their elections, suggest changes to address and elector data in the Register, and communicate directly with the Register team. Most importantly, along with the new Register to Vote website and redesigned the voter registration app, it will give electors the opportunity to register and update their voter information for both local and provincial elections, all in one place.

As part of this mandate change, we expanded our online registration services to local electors. Previously, these electors had to maintain their information separately with both EO and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Combining EO's and MPAC's services simplifies the process and makes electoral registration more accessible.

We have also added an automated flow to voter registration for electors with an Ontario photo card number, so that they no longer need to upload documentation to prove their identity and eligibility. The Register to Vote website will combine voter information from the Election Portal and will result in better voters' lists for all local and provincial elections in Ontario.

Employment Standard

The Employment Standard requires employers to provide accessible accommodation across all stages of the employment life cycle for an employee with a disability. By proactively removing barriers, employers can help to create workplaces that are accessible and that allow employees to reach their full potential.

EO is an equal opportunity employer. We are committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and accessible environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and supported.

EO continues to:

- inform applicants and employees of accessible hiring practices and policies;
- provide accommodations during the recruitment, assessment, and selection process;
- provide individual accommodation plans and related accommodations required for an employee to perform their job;
- provide a return-to-work process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability;
- consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities for performance management, career development, and redeployment;
- consult with employees who have disabilities to ensure the individualized workplace emergency response information meets the employees' needs;
- review all new and revised job advertisements and job descriptions for content, language, and accessibility before posting as an accessible PDF;
- ensure all external-facing Human Resources documents are accessible and that staff follow EO's Employment Standard procedures to create an accessible work experience for persons with disabilities; and
- include the following accessibility statement on all job postings:
“Under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, we provide accommodations to applicants with disabilities throughout the recruitment and selection process. If you require a disability-related accommodation to participate, please call 1-888-668-8683, send a fax to 1-866-714-2809, TTY at 1-888-292-2312, or email hr@elections.on.ca.”

By-Elections - Employment

EO employed several individuals with disabilities in the four by-elections that we held in 2023. For the Scarborough—Guildwood by-election, there were three hired staff that identified as having a disability, and for the Kitchener Centre by-election, there were five.

Not all EO staff wish to identify as having a disability, nor do they necessarily require accommodations, making it difficult for us to assess exactly how many people with disabilities are employed during an election. We promote that EO is an equal opportunity organization and provide accommodations as necessary. We encourage people with disabilities to disclose and request accommodations should they need them, so that they can perform their jobs with the tools and/or support that they require.

We will continue to work with employment agencies that provide support for persons with disabilities with the goal to employ more of these individuals during elections.

Design of Public Spaces Standard

The Design of Public Spaces Standard provides requirements to make public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped easier for everyone to access. This includes outdoor spaces such as accessible parking spaces, outdoor paths of travel, sidewalks, ramps, stairs, curb ramps, and rest areas. It also includes service-related elements such as service counters, fixed queuing lines, and waiting areas with fixed seating. For all other spaces, the accessibility requirements of the Ontario Building Code are followed.

Headquarters

EO follows the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard and the Ontario Building Code for the physical location of its headquarters.

In 2023, a new office space was proposed. An accessibility audit was performed prior to leasing to ensure the office space was accessible for employees and any members of the public or stakeholders visiting the premises. The reception area, internal office surroundings, washrooms, shower stalls, seating areas, and conference and training rooms far exceeded the legislated requirements for accessibility. A few external remediations were required and implemented in preparation for staff to move into the newly leased and fully accessible office space in late 2023.

Voting Locations

When EO holds an election or by-election, all voting locations are audited to ensure they meet the accessibility requirements of both the Design of Public Spaces Standard and the Ontario Building Code. Voting locations include returning offices, satellite offices, advance vote locations, and election day voting locations.

An internal document called the “Voting Location Inspection Checklist” is used to audit the approximately 7,000 accessible voting locations that are required for an election. EO’s checklist has stringent requirements to ensure that a proposed voting location meets optimal accessibility before being approved as a voting location for electors.

The Voting Location Inspection Checklist includes specific measurements, sizes, and criteria that must be met for each of the following areas:

- Lighting and surfaces: well-lit, stable, firm, slip resistant, and glare-free
- Overhanging/protruding objects: sufficient head space, no protruding objects

- Signage: exterior and interior
- Accessible parking: availability, width, surface, and proximity to entrance
- Exterior pathway to entrance: width, slope, and surface
- Entrance door: width, threshold, hardware, and automation
- Hallways: width and surface
- Interior ramps: slope, width, and handrails
- Interior door to voting room: width and threshold
- Ground floor access and/or elevator: signage, door width, door closure time, raised or braille, and emergency alarm
- Accessible washrooms: door width, stall size, seat height, and grab bar

In situations where the proposed voting location does not meet the mandatory criteria, remediations can be applied so that the voting location becomes accessible. The final list of approximately 7,000 proposed voting locations is posted on EO's website six months prior to an election, and the public is encouraged to provide feedback on the accessibility of the site selection. Once deemed accessible, a proposed site can be used as an accessible voting location.

By-Elections - Accessible Voting Locations

EO ensures that all voting locations meet our Site Accessibility Standards and comply with the AODA. In some cases, facilities that meet these standards cannot be found within a geographical location, and exemptions or remediations are necessary.

During the four by-elections held in 2023, each potential voting location was audited for accessibility using EO's Voting Location Inspection Checklist.

Hamilton Centre, Electoral District 036

Of the 50 voting locations (three advance voting locations and 47 on polling day) required for the Hamilton Centre electoral district, 33 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and 15 sites were remediated to become accessible. Two sites required exemptions.

Scarborough—Guildwood, Electoral District 095

Of the 61 voting locations (5 advance voting locations and 56 on polling day) required for the Scarborough—Guildwood electoral district, 59 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and two sites were remediated to become accessible.

Kanata—Carleton, Electoral District 043

Of the 48 polling stations (three advance voting locations and 45 on polling day) required for the Kanata—Carleton electoral district, 44 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and four sites were remediated to become accessible.

Kitchener Centre, Electoral District 047

Of the 59 polling stations (three advance voting locations and 56 on polling day) required for the Kitchener Centre electoral district, 16 of the sites met the Site Accessibility Standards and 33 sites were remediated to become accessible. Ten sites required exemptions.

By-Elections - Home Visits

Not all electors are physically able or capable of voting at a voting location. Should an individual find it impossible or unreasonably difficult to personally go to the returning office or a voting location to vote, or they require assistance due to a disability or an inability to read or write, they can request a home visit.

During a home visit, a team of two Special Ballot Officers visits the elector at their place of residence or another location within the electoral district, where they assist the elector in completing an application and a voting kit.

During the four by-elections in 2023 a total of 85 home visits were conducted. There were 32 home visits for the Hamilton Centre by-election, 18 for Scarborough—Guildwood, 7 for Kanata—Carleton, and 28 for Kitchener Centre.

EO piloted the use of tablets as part of the home visit process in the Kitchener Centre by-election in November 2023. This pilot program will help to inform how we can streamline and simplify the process for electors voting at long-term care facilities or in hospitals in the 2026 general election.

Customer Service Standard

EO continues to ensure that all staff are trained and understand how to provide accessible customer service to persons with disabilities. Through the development of and adherence to policies and procedures and exemplary staff training on both the Customer Service Standard and other applicable standards, including the Information and Communications Standard, the Employment Standard, and the Design of Public Spaces Standard, staff can feel comfortable in providing accessible customer service. All polling and electoral staff are trained on how to provide accessible customer service prior to an election.

In addition, we understand the importance of allowing the use of service animals and support persons, and of providing notice when temporary service disruptions occur. Below are legislated requirements that EO continues to implement under the Customer Service Standard.

Use of Service Animals and Support Persons

Service animals are permitted to enter all EO premises including voting locations during elections. If a service animal is excluded by law from the premises, alternative access to EO's goods, services, or facilities shall be provided (e.g. curbside voting).

Similarly, EO permits support persons to accompany persons with disabilities and enter EO premises and voting locations to assist in ways such as communication, mobility, or personal care for medical needs. Staff are trained on proper etiquette surrounding service animals and support persons.

Notice of Temporary Disruptions

It is important for persons with disabilities to be informed when services are being disrupted so that they can make alternative plans. Our policies instruct staff to provide a notice of disruption to the public whenever there is a temporary disruption in service. Such notices include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative access that may be available.

By-Elections - Notice of Temporary Disruptions

Should there be a disruption in services during an election or by-election, physical notices are posted at all major entrances to the voting locations. The service disruption is also communicated to the electors via our website and the mobile

app. In the four by-elections that took place in 2023, there were no disruptions in service.

In Closing

Elections Ontario remains committed to ensuring that we identify, remove, and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities. Our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan demonstrates our commitment in each of the four related areas of the standards for the AODA.

Information and Communications

EO will provide messaging through multiple integrated channels and formats. We will ensure that all information provided to electors is available in formats that are accessible, either directly or via assistive technologies, in a dignified way that facilitates independence.

Employment

EO recognizes the importance of an accessible, inclusive, and diverse workforce. We will ensure the EO team represents these qualities by continuing to offer broad opportunities, considerate hiring processes, appropriate employee accommodations, and flexible working arrangements.

Design of Public Spaces

EO will create inclusive, barrier-free environments. We will ensure that EO headquarters, returning offices, voting locations, and digital spaces are free of barriers, either in their original state or through accommodations, for both EO employees and Ontarians of all abilities.

Customer Service

EO will provide accessible products, services, and facilities. We will ensure that all goods, services and facilities provided by EO are barrier-free and include integrated opportunities for access by persons with disabilities in ways that respect their dignity and independence.