



# Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan

2018-2021

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2018-2021  
Department of Justice, September 2018.  
ISBN 978-1-55457-880-1

# Welcome Message

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Last year, we passed the Accessibility Act. This important piece of legislation outlines what we need to do as a province to ensure that every Nova Scotian can participate in our society.

It sets an ambitious goal - to become an accessible province by 2030. It will take all of us working together to achieve this.

As an employer, and as Nova Scotia's largest program and service provider, it is important for government to lead by example. This begins with setting our priorities for accessibility over the coming years. Priorities that focus on creating an inclusive, responsive, and barrier-free workplace for Nova Scotia public servants, and that ensure our services to Nova Scotians are accessible to all.

The Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan 2018-2021 was developed with input from Nova Scotians, and in collaboration with staff from across our organization who work directly on the development and delivery of our programs. They provided insight into ways we can improve access for persons with disabilities to our information, infrastructure, workforce, programs, and services.

That insight was further developed into actions – what we will do over the next three years to ensure that accessibility is considered in the development and delivery of our policies, programs and services, and in our workplace.

This work does not belong to any one government department or program area - we are all responsible for its implementation and its success. All employees are encouraged to become involved, and to actively think about how we can make the work we do on behalf of Nova Scotians more accessible.

Together, we will drive the changes needed to create a more equitable and inclusive province.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Stephen McNeil  
Premier of Nova Scotia

The Honourable Mark Furey  
Minister Responsible for the Accessibility Act

# Our Commitment to Accessibility

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The Government of Nova Scotia is committed to being accessible in the way we work, do business, and provide services to Nova Scotians.

Under the Accessibility Act, public sector bodies, like government, are required to develop multi-year accessibility plans to help make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030.

The Government of Nova Scotia plan will help us meet the needs of people who face barriers and will treat persons with disabilities in ways that demonstrate respect for difference, dignity, independence and autonomy, equitable access and opportunity, and non-discrimination. We will ensure equitable access and demonstrate leadership in developing accessible policies, programs, and services.

Our plan was developed collaboratively by staff across Government of Nova Scotia departments, through discussions with employees with disabilities, and through input gathered from community engagement sessions. Specifically, we would like to thank members of the Nova Scotia Disability Employee Network (NSDEN) for their input and insights into development of this plan.

Read this document to learn more about

- Our organizational commitment to accessibility;
- Long-term outcomes for being an accessible organization;
- Priorities for our first multi-year accessibility plan;
- Actions for immediate results – what we will do over the next three years to ensure we are an accessible organization

# Barriers to Accessibility – What we heard

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Nova Scotians with disabilities still face barriers to accessibility. These barriers may be attitudinal, organizational or systemic, architectural or physical, or within the design of information, communications, and technology systems.

In developing Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Plan, we heard about ways to improve accessibility across our organization:

- Increase awareness about the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, how to better help the public we serve, and how to recognize and remove barriers to accessibility.
- Improve resources for helping persons with disabilities to find and access information on programs and services (i.e., services for persons with disabilities). Additionally, make more communications available in alternate formats (signs, websites, documents, videos).
- Strengthen supports for employees using assistive technologies, and build capacity to remedy technical issues with assistive technologies.
- Improve access to government buildings and offices to ensure clients and employees are able to receive services.
- Improve availability of accessible washrooms, workspaces, common rooms, boardrooms, and kitchens (for employees).
- Enhance accessibility for persons who are visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing (such as visual fire alarms).
- Ensure Government of Nova Scotia recruitment, hiring, and career development processes are accessible. Within the 2016 How's Work Going employee survey, persons who identified as having a disability were the least engaged among all diversity groups.

# Our Outcomes and Priorities

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An accessible Government of Nova Scotia means:

- Persons with disabilities (including employees, residents and visitors) receive equitable access to:
  - o Government of Nova Scotia owned and leased buildings, and public spaces
  - o Programs and services delivered by the Government of Nova Scotia
  - o Government of Nova Scotia information and communications
- Persons with disabilities are employed, engaged, and advancing within the Government of Nova Scotia public service and have appropriate accommodations
- Government of Nova Scotia employees are aware of the rights of persons with disabilities, are able to identify barriers to accessibility and their impacts, and actively seek solutions to prevent and remove them

## **Priority: Awareness and Capacity Building**

We will create a culture of accessibility across our organization. This includes increasing awareness of the Accessibility Act and building capacity for government staff to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to equitable participation.

## **Priority: Information and Communications**

We will ensure persons with disabilities can equitably receive and understand information and communications delivered by the Government of Nova Scotia.

## **Priority: Buildings, Infrastructure and Public Spaces**

We will ensure government-owned, leased, and operated buildings, offices, and public spaces are accessible..

## **Priority: Employment**

We will remove barriers to employment for persons with disabilities seeking a career within the Government of Nova Scotia. This includes ensuring our workforce reflects the province's diverse population and that we are making our employment practices and workplaces more accessible for new and existing employees with disabilities.

## Priority: Delivery of Goods and Services

We will ensure people with disabilities have equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Government of Nova Scotia. This includes ensuring there are policies, procedures, and tools in place to promote accessibility in customer service.

# Our 2018-2021 Commitments

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The commitments below represent our first actions in creating an accessible Government of Nova Scotia. They are the things we will do now to initiate change across the organization and set the stage for creating a culture of accessibility. The commitments identified in this plan will be undertaken between 2018 and 2021. We will report annually on progress toward achieving them.

Central to this is ensuring our policies, programs, and services are designed with accessibility at the forefront. To move in this direction, we will initiate a review of Government of Nova Scotia legislation, regulations, and policies from an accessibility perspective and develop an approach to address gaps with respect to accessibility.

## Awareness and Capacity Building

1. Strengthen capacity within Departments to champion diversity and inclusion, including accessibility and disability issues across government. This work will align with development and implementation of the Public Service Commission's new diversity and inclusion strategy. **Lead(s): [Public Service Commission/Department of Justice]**
2. Develop new training offerings within the Public Service Commission Learning Environment specific to accessibility and disability issues. Make training compulsory for managers and staff across the provincial public service. **Lead(s): [Public Service Commission/Department of Justice]**
3. Continue to enhance policy analysis and program development, including building an accessibility framework for assessment of policy/program development initiatives. **Lead(s): [Executive Council Office/Department of Justice]**
4. Build capacity among Communications Nova Scotia staff to ensure they can support Departmental clients to build accessibility into their communications products and deliverables. **Lead: [Communications Nova Scotia]**
5. Develop and implement public awareness programs (internal and external), to build awareness around the Accessibility Act, barriers to accessibility and what an accessible Nova Scotia means. **Lead(s): [Communications Nova Scotia/Department of Justice]**

6. Work with (support) public sector organizations prescribed under the Accessibility Act, to develop and implement accessibility plans and accessibility advisory committees. **Lead: [Department of Justice]**

## **Information and Communications**

1. Complete a review of communications policies, procedures and practices to improve accessibility and ensure they are not creating barriers to accessibility. This will include: Government of Nova Scotia Communications Policy and supporting guidelines; Government of Nova Scotia brand standards; communications platforms including print, electronic and digital (i.e. video). **Lead: [Communications Nova Scotia]**
2. Implement a phased launch of more user-centric government website, beginning in 2018-2019. The website will be accessible in line with the international standards (WCAG 2.0 AA), and augmented with user experience best practices. Future phases will include transactions (e.g., Adobe PDF forms) documents and other web assets that were produced separate from the new website (e.g., video, live webcasts). **Lead: [Communications Nova Scotia]**
3. Conduct a review of industry standards for ICT services, policies, practices and procedures and leverage this information to promote accessibility in the design, development and implementation of new ICT services, products and systems. An example of this, ICT Services will consider accessibility requirements in the upcoming tender for laptop and desktops devices used by Government of Nova Scotia employees. **Lead: [Internal Services]**

## **Buildings, Infrastructure and Public Spaces**

1. Conduct a review of existing occupied spaces to determine accessibility issues and priorities and develop an action plan to achieve accessibility in Government of Nova Scotia owned and leased premises by 2030. **Lead: [Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal]**
2. Incorporate clauses into new Government of Nova Scotia leases for occupied spaces that stipulate that landlords must meet the current Nova Scotia Building Code accessibility requirements. **Lead: [Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal]**
3. Initiate standards development processes and develop initial accessibility standards for Nova Scotia (built environment) **Lead: [Department of Justice]**
4. Make improvements to provincial parks, beaches, and campgrounds to ensure that more services are accessible. **Lead: [Lands and Forestry]**

5. Increase the number of barrier-free sport-fishing sites across the province, and advertise sites to the public. This includes expanding support under the Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund for projects that improve public access to sport-fishing areas, including barrier-free access to fishing sites. **Lead: [Fisheries and Aquaculture]**

## Employment

1. Investigate establishment of a centralized system within the Government of Nova Scotia to better support to managers and employees across the public service with respect to accessibility and disability. This will also include analysis of re-establishing a centralized accommodations fund within the Government of Nova Scotia **Lead: [Public Service Commission]**
2. Review recruitment and selection training materials for hiring managers and ensure that content reflects topics specific to the recruitment, selection and hiring of persons with disabilities into the public service of Nova Scotia. **Lead: [Public Service Commission]**
3. Work with the Nova Scotia Works employment services system to develop a Diversity and Inclusion Plan that will incorporate accessibility into the provision of employment programs and service delivery. In addition, build the capacity of Employer Engagement Specialists to provide support to employers in developing inclusive and accessible workplaces. **Lead(s): [Labour and Advanced Education + partners (Nova Scotia Works, Community, employers)]**
4. Support the development of an Accommodations Application for employers, developed by Saint Mary's University's Inclusion by Design partnership. **Lead(s): [Department of Justice/Public Service Commission]**

## Delivery of Goods and Services

1. Develop a government-wide Accessible Customer Service Policy with aim to ensuring consistency in accessible customer service across Government of Nova Scotia. **Lead(s): [Executive Council Office/Department of Justice]**
2. Ensure our public enquiries operators are equipped with information on services related to accessibility and disability. **Lead(s): [Department of Justice/Service Nova Scotia/211]**
3. Embed inclusion and accessibility into digital service design processes and ensure an inclusive and accessible by design approach. **Lead: [Service Nova Scotia]**

4. Promote accessibility in procurement processes undertaken by the Government of Nova Scotia. This will include developing resource materials for Departments to assist in identifying and including accessibility requirements in tenders for goods and services purchased by the Government of Nova Scotia. **Lead(s): [Internal Services/Department of Justice]**
5. Explore the establishment of accessibility navigators to assist persons with disabilities in accessing information and services. **Lead: [Department of Justice]**

## Moving Forward – Review and Updates of the Accessibility Plan

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We will review and report annually on progress towards meeting the commitments identified within this plan.

We will continue to identify further opportunities for becoming a more accessible employer, service provider and policy-maker.

## Our Accessibility Achievements - Leading by Example

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The Government of Nova Scotia has a long-standing commitment to diversity and inclusion. Numerous policies, programs and initiatives are already in place to ensure accessibility and support for persons with disabilities across the organization.

### **Achievements**

- Nova Scotia Disability Employee Network (NSDEN) – established in 2014, the NSDEN is a network of Government of Nova Scotia employees that works to promote a culture that respects, values and supports employees with disabilities in the Nova Scotia Public Service.
- Diversity and Inclusion training as part of orientation for new employees and new managers.
- Duty to Accommodate Physical and Mental Disability Guidelines - Updated guidelines for managers to help in meeting obligations to provide reasonable accommodations needed by employees with disabilities.

- Promoting and supporting mental health and wellness via the new Office of Workplace Mental Health.
- Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events – developed by the Department of Justice (Accessibility Directorate) this guide provides information and guidelines on how to organize accessible meetings.
- Sign Language Interpreter Services Policy for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Nova Scotians – ensuring that Sign Language interpreter services, when needed, are provided to persons who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing to enable equitable access to services offered by the Province of Nova Scotia.
- Ongoing efforts to improve accessibility of Government of Nova Scotia information and communications including updating government brand standards to ensure readability and ensuring that Government of Nova Scotia videos are closed-captioned.
- Ongoing renewal and revitalization of Access Nova Scotia centres to ensure accessibility for clients and employees.

**Other initiatives in support of making Nova Scotia accessible include:**

- Improving the accessibility of courts in Nova Scotia, including barrier-free access improvements to Amherst Supreme Court, Digby Justice Centre, Halifax Law Courts, and Annapolis Royal Court House.
- Improving accessible recreation opportunities by making at least one provincial beach in every region barrier free within three years and increasing the number of accessible sport-fishing sites.
- Delivering Community Transit Grants, specifically the Accessible Transportation Assistance Program. This program provides assistance for communities to purchase accessible vehicles.
- Delivering the Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program and the Community Accessibility Grant (CCH), to ensure that community organizations and businesses have financial support to improve accessibility.
- Delivering the Rick Hansen Foundation/CSA Accessible Building Certification Training Program in partnership with the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) and the Rick Hansen Foundation. Nova Scotia is the second province to offer this program.

