



ATSSC Accessibility Plan

December 2022

ATSSC·SCDATA

Service Excellence / L'excellence en service

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Message from the Chief Administrator and Accessibility Champion

We are pleased to share our first ATSSC Accessibility Plan. This document, which was created in consultation with ATSSC employees with and without disabilities, stakeholders and subject matter experts, summarizes our strategy for identifying, eliminating, and preventing accessibility-related barriers at the ATSSC.

As an organization that is dedicated to access to justice, we must strive to ensure that people do not face obstacles to exercising their rights. To respect this principle, we must also remove obstacles to an employee's full participation in the workforce.

Some of our previous initiatives have created a strong foundation for making the ATSSC an environment that is welcoming to all. Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee has provided valuable input on various initiatives to ensure a positive, safe and inclusive workspace. The Diversity Accreditation Program has helped employees integrate important principles into their daily work activities. The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and 2022-2025 Action Plan has created a pathway to challenging numerous systemic barriers.

But there is still more work to be done, particularly with regards to accessibility. This plan outlines how we will bring our internal and external forms and websites in line with accessibility standards, create a framework for helping managers easily equip their employees with the accommodations they need and provide recruitment, development and promotion opportunities to persons with disabilities at every level of the ATSSC workforce. This plan also identifies ways to support parties who access justice through the tribunals to easily obtain information on accommodation measures available to them.

These are just a few examples of the issues addressed in our Accessibility Plan. Each of the actions found within represent concrete steps to improving accessibility at the ATSSC. Fulfilling them will help us contribute to a barrier-free Canada.

Orlando Da Silva, LSM
Chief Administrator

Anab Ahmed
Executive Director, Social Security Tribunal Secretariat and ATSSC Champion for Accessibility, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

General

About the *Accessible Canada Act*

The *Accessible Canada Act* (the Act) came into force on July 11, 2019, to help “realize a Canada without barriers especially for people with disabilities.” The overarching goal of the Act is to bring about a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

The Act defines disability as any impairment or functional limitation that interferes with a person’s full and equal participation in society. It applies to visible and invisible health challenges, whether temporary (such as a broken arm) or permanent (such as a chronic illness). Impairments can be physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory.

Barriers that hinder a person’s full and equal participation in society can be anything. They can be physical, architectural, technological, or attitudinal. They can be based on information, communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice. The Act applies to Parliament, Government of Canada departments and agencies, Crown corporations, and private sector businesses that fall under federal jurisdiction, such as banking, telecommunications, and transportation. This Plan focuses on the ATSSC’s environment, employees, and the operations and services under its control. The Act creates the new position of Chief Accessibility Officer who serves as a special advisor to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. This individual will provide advice on wide-ranging accessibility issues and will monitor and report on progress made under the *Accessible Canada Act*.

The Act requires federally regulated entities to:

- prepare and publish an accessibility plan, by December 31, 2022, to identify, remove and prevent barriers, that must be updated every three years
- consult people with disabilities when creating and updating their plan
- set up a process to receive feedback on its accessibility plan and the entity’s level of accessibility
- prepare and publish progress reports that outline what results have been achieved to identify, remove, and prevent barriers

About the ATSSC

Mandate

The Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada (ATSSC) provides support services and facilities to 12 federal administrative tribunals by way of a single, integrated organization.

These services include the specialized services required by each tribunal (for example, registry, research and analysis, legal and other mandate or case activities specific to each tribunal), as well as internal services (for example, human resources, financial services, information management and technology, accommodations, security, planning and communications). Through these specialized services, the ATSSC supports improving access to justice for Canadians.

2022-2025 Strategic Pillars

Collaborating with tribunal leadership and one another

The ATSSC will collaborate with tribunals and across secretariats and business lines to align accountabilities to address overall business needs—ensuring that decisions and investments are made collectively in support of the ATSSC’s mandate.

Delivering business excellence through innovation at work

The ATSSC recognizes that access to justice and the business of government are changing in foundational ways. In response, it will be a model of administrative support to the tribunal sector by adapting its current practices to embrace the changing realities that affect the workplace. The ATSSC will transform and shape the future of the ATSSC’s work by securely creating, sharing, and managing our work using modern tools, and by contributing to public service-wide transformation efforts.

Supporting our people

The ATSSC will ensure that it is a place where people feel valued and respected—where they can grow and evolve—by inspiring personal and professional fulfillment.

Recognizing that people are its greatest resource, the ATSSC will implement programs that strengthen diversity, emphasize the importance of mental health and that contribute to leadership competencies, mentorship, and career development.

Overview of the ATSSC’s equity, diversity and inclusion achievements

The ATSSC is committed to working with persons with disabilities and the disability community to help bring about an accessible Canada.

The ATSSC has already put into place several initiatives to become barrier-free, including:

- creating a dedicated Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee to give its employees a voice (led by the ATSSC Champion for Accessibility, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, the Committee, which has participants from all levels and areas of the organization, was established in December 2020 and serves as a consultative body on initiatives being put into place or considered to address equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.)
- developing and implementing the Equity, diversity and inclusion Strategy and 2022-2025 Action Plan which affirms the organization's commitment towards EDI, including accessibility. Along with it, the ATSSC launched the Talent Acquisition Strategy and three-year action plan which reinforces the ATSSC's commitments. They work together to support the ATSSC's goal of promoting a supportive work environment and a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- completing a review of its employment systems, such as voluntary and involuntary terminations, performance management and training and hiring to identify and remove barriers to inclusion
- implementing the option for name-blind screening assessments in staffing processes to remove potential biases
- implementing mandatory training on unconscious bias and on inclusive hiring for managers and human resources professionals
- subscribing to the services of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, which provides ATSSC employees with access to a large amount of research, reports, and tools as well as many webinars and trainings on various diversity topics
- developing an ergonomics course which was made mandatory for any employee authorized to telework
- implementing the Diversity Accreditation Program that required employees to take three diversity-related courses of their choice offered by the Canada School of Public Service. In 2022, the accreditation was replaced by the Diversity Learning Pathway which provides employees and managers a wide variety of EDI-related learning activities to complete their mandatory six hours of EDI training per year (eight hours for managers).

Contact information

Members of the public are encouraged to provide feedback on this Accessibility Plan and/or to contact the ATSSC to request alternate formats of this Accessibility Plan or progress reports.

The ATSSC can be contacted through its website, email, phone or by ground mail.

- **Email:** communications@tribunal.gc.ca
- **Phone:** 613-954-6350
- **Mailing address:**
Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada (ATSSC)
Attention: Director General, Corporate Services and CFO
240 Sparks Street, 4th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1A1

The ATSSC's Accessibility Plan is available in the following formats:

- Print
- Large print
- Braille
- Audio
- Electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technologies intended to assist persons with disabilities

The ATSSC must provide its Accessibility Plan in alternate formats, upon request.

- Requests for documentation in braille or audio format must be fulfilled within 45 days of the request
- All other requests must be fulfilled within 15 days

Areas described under Section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act*

Over the next three years, the ATSSC will focus on actions under the following six pillars:

1. Employment
2. Making the built environment accessible
3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
4. Accessible communications other than ICT
5. Accessible procurement of goods, services and facilities
6. Design and delivery of barrier-free programs and services

Pillar 1: Employment

Employment refers to processes, practices, and services that the ATSSC follows across every stage of an employee's employment journey. It includes recruitment through to hiring, onboarding, accommodations, career and talent development, performance management and job exit.

The ATSSC is committed to creating, promoting, and maintaining an equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible workplace. It plans to increase the number of persons with disabilities within the ATSSC workforce. As of March 31, 2022, 6.4% of ATSSC employees self-identify as having a disability. This percentage is based on current self-identification definitions provided by the Treasury Board of Canada (TBS), which is narrower than the one used for the Statistics Canada Census and on which the representation targets are based. In February 2023, TBS will be launching its new self-identification questionnaire. This will give the organization a better measure of the representation of people with disabilities. Nonetheless, the ATSSC aims to go beyond representation numbers by ensuring that all its employment systems are barrier-free.

In July 2022, the ATSSC launched its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and 2022-2025 Action Plan. The strategy was co-developed by the EDI Committee and the human resources team following extensive consultations with employees and managers. The main areas of focus are leadership, representation, a safe work environment, training and awareness, service to the public, and accessibility.

Furthermore, in November 2022, the ATSSC endorsed and launched a Talent Acquisition Strategy. Throughout the objectives of the three-year action plan, there is a strong focus on increasing representation at all levels of the organization, removing barriers from all employment systems, and building accessible tools.

Summary of key barriers

Recruitment, onboarding and retention

- Persons with disabilities may face barriers to accessible employment at every phase of their employment journey. This includes recruitment (from job posters to final job offers), hiring, onboarding, accommodations, career and talent development, performance management, and departure.
- Information on various topics is challenging to find on the ATSSC intranet as it is not user-centric and is not fully accessible. For example, the process to obtain in-person, rather than virtual, ergonomic assessments for their home office.
- Persons with disabilities may feel that disclosing their disability may prevent them from moving forward in their careers
- There is stigmatization associated with discussing disabilities during the employment process (from recruitment to job exit)

Inaccessible software

- Some software at the ATSSC is not accessible for those with certain disabilities
- There is a lack of access to a greater variety of assistive tools, software and devices to help in daily work

Awareness and representation

- People frequently base “disability” on the narrower definition in the Employment Equity Act. There is little awareness that the definition of disability used in the Accessible Canada Act is broader. It includes a full range of abilities and impairments such as:
 - visible disabilities
 - "invisible" disabilities (learning or mental health issues)
 - periodic disabilities, such as multiple sclerosis or epilepsy
- The reality of individuals with disabilities may not always be understood and barriers may inadvertently be created
- There is no in-house expert to assist employees in creating accessible documents or to raise accessibility questions with
- Employees are not aware of recourses available to them in cases where they may have been discriminated against based on their disability
- Managers need more information about accessibility and there is a perception that accommodations are costly

Actions

In response to identified barriers, the ATSSC has established the following actions:

Action 1: Contribute to meeting the Government of Canada's commitment to hiring at least 5,000 people with disabilities by 2025

To help achieve the Government of Canada's goal, the ATSSC will:

- Work on removing barriers from all employment systems which will increase the representation of persons with disabilities within the ATSSC workforce at all levels as described in both the EDI and the Talent Acquisition action plans.
Actions will focus on:
 - Implementing positive inclusive hiring measures such as restricting area of selection
 - Reviewing recruitment evaluation tools to ensure they are barrier-free
 - Launch the new Self-identification Questionnaire
 - Invest in continuous training and awareness of HR professionals and hiring managers on topics related to unconscious biases and barriers
 - Partner with external organizations and associations whose mandates are relevant to equity-seeking groups
 - Review all employment systems and gather data and information to measure success at every step of the employment journey
 - Promote and encourage candidates and employees to fill out the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport to ensure people are provided with the tools and measures needed to succeed

Action 2: Raise organizational awareness to the culture and reality of equity-seeking groups

- Organize and promote activities (experience sharing, conferences, tips and tricks) to inform and sensitize employees and keep the subject present throughout the year
- Invite people who are part of a designated group to speak about their lived experience at organizational meetings or other platforms
- Develop, provide, and promote a toolkit for managers to support them in creating a space for discussion and exchange on EDI and to increase their awareness on this topic
- Raise awareness amongst hiring managers, employees and tribunal members on accessibility needs, including debunking myths around accessibility

Action 3: Ensure that all ATSSC staff and tribunal members have access to the tools, devices, and support measures required to succeed

- Identify, acquire and release software and tools where needed
- ensure that the ATSSC intranet is fully compliant with current accessibility standards and focuses on the user experience

- Raise awareness among hiring managers, employees and tribunal members on accessibility needs and how to obtain accommodations, and employee's rights and responsibilities with respect to accommodations
- Inform employees of the recourses available to them if they feel they are being discriminated against for their disability
- Provide training and support to all hiring managers and supervisors to understand their responsibilities to support persons with disabilities
- Improve procedures for workplace accommodation requests to better help employees and their managers identify and obtain the tools, devices, and support needed
- Proactively offer ergonomic equipment and furnishings to new and existing employees
- Adopt the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport to improve workplace accommodations so that employees have the tools they need to succeed
- Expand partnership with the Shared Services Canada's Accessibility Centre which offers training, tools and testing services to help departments create accessible digital content that is inclusive by design such as documents, presentations and web content.
- Promote current accommodation services and proactively offer accommodations to new employees

Action 4: Work in collaboration with equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) committees, employees and their managers, and other stakeholders to complete a gap analysis of current accommodations process for new and existing employees

- Evaluate how the accommodations requests for new and existing employees process is managed, and provide recommendations to subject matter experts on how to improve it if required.
- Encourage managers to examine accommodation requests among their staff on a regular basis to identify any new or evolving requirements for current employees
- request feedback on the accommodation needs monitoring process to identify further areas of improvement

Action 5: Ensure information on available workplace accommodations is accessible to all existing employees

- Review and update the ATSSC intranet page for workplace accommodation where all staff can access information related to workplace accommodations and procedures, including workplace accommodation request forms
- Make all intranet and communications product accessible by default

- Review existing information on the ATSSC intranet to remove redundant, outdated, and trivial (ROT) content and conduct a gap analysis of missing information and resources
- Ensure that all content related to accommodations is available in different formats so that employees with disabilities do not have to request alternate formats or delay receiving an accommodation while waiting for documents to be provided in alternate formats
- Assess the feasibility of maintaining comprehensive data on workplace accommodations. This will let the ATSSC improve existing strategies, procedures, and experiences for the entire ATSSC workforce and for tribunal members

Pillar 2: Making the built environment accessible

The built environment refers to all structures and objects that make up ATSSC's workspaces. This includes entrances, elevators, meeting rooms, hearing and mediation rooms, offices, and lighting.

In 2019, in collaboration with design consultants and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) project managers, the ATSSC completed a significant space optimization project. This project ensured accessibility standards were respected. During the assessment phase, it was noted that more than two-thirds of the ATSSC's workforce benefitted from an office environment and ergonomic furnishings that met the PSPC's accessibility standards. All new workstations purchased for this project were height adjustable and wheel-chair accessible. Employees working in older office spaces that did not meet the PSPC accessibility standards received access to ergonomic office equipment and furnishings upon request (after an ergonomic assessment, if needed). The ATSSC has remained flexible in adapting its existing workspaces as needed to adapt to other mobility needs.

Given PSPC's built-environment standards are already in place, individuals attending a hearing or mediation benefit from fully accessible premises. For example, interpretation booths and services are available in ATSSC hearing rooms to support individuals with hearing limitations. The ATSSC occasionally holds hearings and mediations outside of its facilities in locations across Canada. In remote areas of Canada, the ATSSC's ability to use accessible buildings is sometimes limited.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, the ATSSC offered virtual hearings. These increased peoples' access to administrative tribunals by reducing the need to travel to ATSSC offices or other locations across Canada, and by enabling individuals to connect to the organization using their personal IT equipment.

Summary of key barriers

- External facilities used to host hearings and mediations across Canada may not be fully accessible

- Employees may not be aware that adjustable/ergonomic office furniture can be provided or may not feel at ease to request it
- There are no push buttons for accessibility for doors to some hearing rooms and not all door frames are of sufficient width for wheelchair accessibility
- Overhead lighting in some ATSSC buildings is not adjustable or dimmable
- First aid kits, defibrillators and signage are not all at an accessible height where they can be reached easily
- Equipment and furnishings that are not recessed into the wall, such as drinking fountains, are a navigation challenge for those with visual impairments

Actions

In response to identified barriers, the ATSSC has established the following actions:

Action 1: Ensure that all refit and modernization projects under the control of the ATSSC respect PSPC built-environment accessibility standards

- Hire an accessibility expert to evaluate the ATSSC's built environment and review new accommodation and space optimization projects to ensure that workspaces are accessible
- Implement a new space reservation system to support employees working in unassigned workspaces, including identification and reservation of accessible workstations and work areas, and workstations where food is not allowed for those with allergies
- Ensure accessibility awareness training is completed by new Accommodations and Facilities and Workplace Management Unit staff within six months of starting at the ATSSC and by December 2023 for existing staff (if not already completed)

Pillar 3: Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Information and communication technologies (ICT) refers to the ways users share and access information. It can include emails, meetings, visual communications, and documents. It also includes how content is written and presented on websites like Canada.ca or on tribunal websites. The ATSSC currently supports twelve tribunal websites, the ATSSC website on Canada.ca and an intranet site.

The ATSSC is committed to using plain language in its communications with Canadians. It is also exploring alternate ways to communicate information through graphics, audio, video and infographics. It works to have jargon-free and easy-to-understand communication items such as e-mails, letters, forms, and guides.

The ATSSC's Information Services and Solutions Team (ISST) and Occupational Health and Safety units provide software and hardware for any employee with specific accessibility requirements.

Summary of key barriers

- Some internal and external webpages do not meet accessibility standards
- Some internal and external forms do not meet accessibility standards
- Simultaneous interpretation and videoconferencing make hearings and mediations more complex or longer, which may be difficult for those with chronic pain
- IT technician are not always present on-site to assist appellants videoconferencing from various locations across Canada
- Not all parties have access to an internet connection, computer, webcam or microphone to participate in videoconferencing hearings or mediations
- Digital hearings that only use a telephone are challenging for tribunal members and for the parties
- Headsets currently provided to employees and tribunal members may not be adequate for those with auditory distraction or those with hearing impairments
- Some assistive technologies are disabled or blocked due to security concerns but are available in other government departments
- Employees find it challenging and discouraging to go through the process to obtain a printer. Printers can be beneficial for those with visual impairments
- Quality of scanned documents are challenging to read as the reader cannot control the size and type of fonts to improve their reading experience

Actions

In response to identified barriers, the ATSSC has established the following actions:

Action 1: All ATSSC internal and external webpages (including those of the administrative tribunals it supports) are compliant with Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) *Guidelines on Making Communication Products and Activities Accessible* (WCAG 2.1 AA Standards)

- Complete a gap analysis of all ATSSC and tribunal webpages and intranet for compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA Standards
- Create an implementation plan to update the accessibility standards for all internal and external webpages supported by the ATSSC
- Implement the plan with priority given to the forms, templates, and guides that will have the biggest impact
- Reduce the number of clicks required to obtain information on accessibility and accommodations on websites

Action 2: Ensure all internal and external forms, templates, and guides used by employees, tribunal members and those accessing justice are accessible

- Complete a gap analysis of all internal and external forms, templates, and guides for compliance with accessibility guidelines

- Create an implementation plan to update the accessibility standards for all internal and external forms, templates, and guides
- Implement the plan with priority given to the forms, templates, and guides that will have the biggest impact
- Review and establish norms and guidelines regarding scanned documents to improve the reading experience

Action 3: All newly procured hardware and software will be accessible and meet EN 301 549 standards

- Continue to require that all newly procured hardware and software meet EN 301 549 standards
- Ensure training related to software and hardware standards for accessibility is completed by new ISST and Procurement staff (with hardware and software procurement responsibilities) within six months of starting at the ATSSC and by December 2023 for existing staff (if not already completed)

Action 4: Review requirements regarding the prevention and blocking of assistive or adaptive technologies, software or equipment

- Review the process regarding the request for printers for employees
- Establish a standard for procuring headsets that meet accessibility requirements
- Review and assess the electronic security environment for the potential inclusion of a broader variety of assistive and adaptive technologies, software and equipment

Pillar 4: Accessible communications other than ICT

Communications other than ICT includes all the ways in which the ATSSC communicates such as letters, e-mails, forms, templates, procedures, instructions, verbal communications, and images, among other methods.

The ATSSC's Communications division plays a fundamental role in accessibility, overseeing internal corporate messaging to all staff, and external messaging to other stakeholders who operate outside of the federal public service. The Communications division has begun a gap analysis into all products under its responsibility to assess accessibility shortcomings.

ATSSC employees outside of the Communications team play a crucial role in everyday communications with Canadians and other parties accessing justice. They communicate complex ideas and information in clear and direct ways to those accessing justice.

Summary of key barriers

- Not all internal and external webpages are written in an accessible way

- Lots of jargon used in external communication products (forms, guides, etc.) for the intended use of Canadians
- Plain language is not broadly used across the organization

Actions

In response to identified barriers, the ATSSC has established the following actions:

Action 1: Ensure that the content of all documents, forms, templates, messages (internal and external), hyperlinks, images, and web content are accessible and meet TBS Guidelines on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible

- Initiate a gap analysis of all communication products to assess accessibility shortcomings
- Create an implementation plan to adjust the accessibility of all content under the Communication's division and each secretariat's responsibility
- Implement the plan with priority given to content that will have the biggest impact on users
- Develop and begin implementing a plan to update the ATSSC's intranet content to meet accessibility standards
- Publish an accessibility statement on all websites by March 31, 2023
- Work collaboratively with TBS and other relevant stakeholders to develop and publish guidance for web standards for federal administrative tribunals
- Ensure all new hires in the Communications division complete plain language training within six months of starting at the ATSSC and by December 2023 for existing staff, if not already completed (participation in the training will also be extended to those working in the secretariats with responsibilities for drafting materials for the intended use of Canadians)
- Ensure all written communications use inclusive and gender-neutral writing practices, and are written in plain language
- Provide training for all employees on how to make documents (Word, Power Point, Excel, Power BI) accessible
- Create an accessibility checklist for all documents used for presentations, published on the intranet or distributed to all employees

Action 2: Explore alternative ways of communicating information

- Continue to expand the usage of videos, audio, graphics and infographics and other alternate formats to communicate information

Pillar 5: The accessible procurement of goods, services, and facilities

Accessibility in **procurement** means meeting the broadest set of user needs possible from the start of a procurement process. ATSSC procurement staff are responsible for

ensuring that accessibility requirements and considerations are included in the procurement and decision-making processes.

In July 2021, the ATSSC's Procurement division completed training to better describe any applicable accessibility requirements that may become mandated across the federal public service. They also provided ATSSC employees with an accessibility information placement, *Accessible Procurement: Inclusive by Design, Accessible by Default*, to assist employees make the best procurement decisions with accessibility in mind.

Comprehensive measures have been taken by the ATSSC Procurement division to discuss accessibility for every procurement requirement with the requester, and help with incorporating accessibility elements, when appropriate. Overall, the ATSSC has increased accessibility in procurement by roughly 30% since 2021.

Summary of key barriers

- Some requesters may not be using the tools provided to increase accessibility in procurement
- Depending on the procurement approach, there are limitations to how compliance to the EN 301 549 standards can be enforced

Actions

In response to identified barriers, the ATSSC has established the following actions:

Action: Ensure that all procurement-related decisions are made with accessibility considerations in mind

- Create a checklist of accessibility-minded issues related to procurement that clients can use in their decision-making process
- Promote awareness about accessibility requirements among those making decisions about procurement

Pillar 6: The design and delivery of barrier-free programs and services

The ATSSC's design and delivery of programs and services is rooted in its operational mandate of providing core support services to federal administrative tribunals. The scope of its programs and services is limited to the proper functioning of the day-to-day operations of the tribunals it supports as well as internal services.

The ATSSC provides services in several areas, of which registry services are most commonly used by those accessing justice. Registry services include:

- processing tribunal documents
- maintaining and safeguarding tribunal records
- providing information to the public regarding tribunal procedures

- assisting in the scheduling and proceedings of tribunal hearings
- assisting in communicating tribunal decisions to the parties and the public

These services are provided by ATSSC employees including registry and case file experts.

Summary of key barriers

- Parties must fill out multiple forms, some of which request repetitive information
- Opportunity for accommodations is not readily available on forms or proactively offered and parties do not always know that they can request accommodations
- Employees do not have the tools or training to assist them in identifying individuals who may need accommodations and do not always feel comfortable raising accessibility issues with members of the public
- Parties do not always feel that the interpreter assigned to the hearing can adequately speak their language or dialect
- Forms do not always allow the parties to decide how they would like to be addressed with respect to their gender
- Guiding documents are not available in languages other than English or French

Actions

In response to identified barriers, the ATSSC has established the following actions:

Action 1: Ensure any changes to its programs and services, including design and delivery elements, are done with greater accessibility considerations in mind

- Complete an assessment of accessibility standards for key registry services delivered by the ATSSC to the administrative tribunals it supports
- Update existing procedures to include accessibility accommodation requests and the needs of tribunal members and the public
- Complete an assessment of accessibility standards for all services provided to the public such as the Social Security Tribunal information line, ATSSC General Inquiries Hotline, The ATSSC Library Services, and ATSSC Access to Information and Privacy Services (an implementation plan will be developed and initiated to address all identified accessibility gaps)
- Provide accessibility measures and accommodations at all events, including mediations and hearings (held in-person, via videoconference or teleconference)
- Assess the impact of offering key documents in languages other than English and French

Action 2: Ensure ATSSC employees have the knowledge and support necessary to include accessibility in the development and delivery of tribunal operations and services to the administrative tribunals and those accessing justice

- Research and explore accessibility learning resources to develop a training plan for all registry officers (or any staff who work on development and/or delivery of services)

Action 3: Ensure all parties are aware that accommodations are available to them

- Proactively offer accommodations to parties, including on forms and in guidance materials
- Ensure a minimal number of clicks on websites to access accessibility and accommodations information
- Reduce the number of forms to be completed, where possible
- Ensure parties are satisfied with the quality of the interpreter prior to beginning a hearing or mediation

Transportation

Transportation refers to the federally regulated transportation network and only applies to entities that must comply under the *Canada Transportation Act* (CTA).

This area is not applicable to the ATSSC because it is related to the national transportation network; however, tribunal members and ATSSC employees are required to travel for hearings and mediations. Transportation accommodations and accessibility considerations are typically assessed on a case-by-case basis, and granted where warranted.

Consultations

In November 2022, the ATSSC held two types of consultations: one for employees and one for external users who interact with our employees, materials, or services.

Tribunal consultations

The ATSSC supports 12 different tribunals. The organization invited their members to provide feedback on the ATSSC's Accessibility Plan.

Members participated in virtual consultations and in online surveys. Chairpersons and members were also consulted via the Executive Directors responsible for the operations of their respective tribunals.

Members were asked the following questions:

- What do you feel are the main barriers to accessibility that you face when contacting or communicating with tribunal services? Contact includes things like phone calls, emails, letters, forms, electronic filing, in-person visits.
- What do you think would fix those barriers?
- What services or supports should be in place for persons with disabilities that would help them fully engage with tribunal processes? Processes can include using websites, filling out forms, attending or participating in a hearing.
- Have you had issues in accessing information about available disability related services and programs OR in receiving accommodations for your personal situation? If so, what issues did you have?
- Are there any other areas and/or issues that persons with disabilities experience that you feel this questionnaire has missed and that should be included? Please share your comments below.

Summary of consultations

The information below is a summary of what was heard at the consultations with tribunal members. It reflects the input and views of persons with disabilities and their allies.

- Tools and services were not originally built in consultation with persons with disabilities
- Parties have faced physical barriers in accessing hearing and mediation rooms
- Aging populations are not always comfortable with using technology and may not be comfortable expressing it
- The quality of scanned documents makes it challenging for the user to read
- Parties have expressed that the interpreters they receive cannot adequately speak their language or their dialect to their satisfaction
- Need to be mindful of different literacy levels of parties

Actions

This Accessibility Plan was informed by what was heard during consultations and the barriers that were previously identified during the reviews. The feedback was used to identify barriers and solutions to accessibility elements to ensure that all individuals can fully participate in society.

Employee consultations

The ATSSC held virtual consultations and invited employees to participate and provide feedback on accessibility within the ATSSC. Specifically, employees were asked:

- What barriers to accessibility have you noticed or experienced at the ATSSC?

- In your opinion, what solutions should be in place to address these barriers?
- What services or supports should be in place for persons with disabilities that would assist them in their ability to fully engage in the workplace?

Employees who did not feel comfortable voicing their thoughts in a group setting or who were unable to participate in the virtual consultations were invited to provide their feedback either via one-on-one discussions with the individual leading the file or in writing. Employee privacy was respected, and no names were attributed to comments. Approximately 100 employees participated in the consultations and three employees provided feedback in writing.

Summary of consultations

The information below is a summary of what was heard from the consultations with ATSSC employees. It reflects the input and views of persons with disabilities and their allies.

- Some disabilities are invisible and require the same diligence of accommodations as invisible disabilities
- The ATSSC has a lot of work ahead of itself to incorporate plain language in its workplace culture
- There have been many successes in the implementation of accessibility initiatives and the ATSSC must continue with this momentum
- Hearings and mediations increase in complexity when using videoconferencing technology or interpretation services
- Videoconferencing is generally very well-liked but it can be a barrier for those preferring in-person hearings
- Training initiatives regarding accommodations and accessibility could be improved
- Employees would like access to experts to assist them in creating accessible documents and work environment
- The ATSSC should use alternative ways of communicating information such as video, audio and infographics. Infographics have been well received.
- Employees and managers need more information on their rights, responsibilities and recourses regarding disabilities
- ATSSC should be more proactive in offering accommodations to employees
- Employees felt there was still a taboo or level of discomfort in discussing disabilities
- ATSSC should continue to broaden its view of accessibility to keep in mind a broader spectrum of communities that could benefit from accessibility initiatives
- Some adaptive and assistive technologies and software are blocked at the ATSSC but are used in other government departments. Employees would like to access an increased variety of technologies, equipment and software.
- The ATSSC's intranet is not fully accessible and difficult to navigate as it is not user-centric

- Sometimes barriers are created without knowing. Employees noted that they don't know what they don't know. They would like to hear more from people with disabilities to better understand their lived experiences.
- There are physical barriers for some ATSSC facilities
- Some employees are afraid to ask for accommodations due to fear of discrimination

Actions

This Accessibility Plan was informed by what was heard during consultations and the barriers that were previously identified during the reviews. The feedback was used to identify barriers and solutions to accessibility elements to ensure that all individuals can fully participate in society.

Public consultations

The ATSSC posted key questions on its website to get feedback from those who interact with ATSSC employees, services, or materials.

Users were invited to answer questions and provide their feedback on their experience using ATSSC services or materials. Specifically, users were asked:

- What do you feel are the main barriers to accessibility that you face when contacting or communicating with tribunal services? Contact includes things like phone calls, emails, letters, forms, electronic filing, in-person visits.
- What do you think would fix those barriers?
- What services or supports should be in place for persons with disabilities that would help them fully engage with tribunal processes? Processes can include using websites, filling out forms, attending or participating in a hearing.
- Have you had issues in accessing information about available disability related services and programs OR in receiving accommodations for your personal situation? If so, what issues did you have?
- Are there any other areas and/or issues that persons with disabilities experience that you feel this questionnaire has missed and that should be included? Please share your comments below.

To maximize the impact of the public consultation, the ATSSC reached out to specific groups representing the interests of persons with disabilities for feedback. These groups were directed to the plan on the ATSSC's external website and encouraged to share the information with their members and networks. The ATSSC invited the following groups to participate:

- Barrier Free Canada
- Canadian Association of the Deaf
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- National Pensioners Federation

- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
- People First of Canada
- Council of Canadians with Disabilities
- Spinal Cord Injury Canada
- Rick Hansen Foundation
- Autism Ontario
- COPHAN - La Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec
- Regroupement des aveugles et amblyopes du Québec
- Réseau québécois pour l'inclusion sociale des personnes sourdes et malentendantes
- The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB)
- 14 provincial and territorial Law Societies across Canada

The ATSSC chose to invite organizations that represent or are allies for people with disabilities to participate in the consultation because the ATSSC could not contact parties directly. It would violate the privacy of individuals who had appeared before a tribunal or participated in a mediation. Additionally, the contact information of parties was not collected for the purpose of consultations—only for proceedings with tribunals—and it would be inappropriate to use the information for a purpose other than its original intent.

Participants were able to provide their feedback electronically via online form, via e-mail, and by mail.

A total of five individuals submitted feedback to the ATSSC.

Summary of consultations

The information below is a summary of what was heard from the consultations with members of the public, individuals with disabilities and their allies, and stakeholder organizations. It reflects the input and views of persons with disabilities and their allies.

- Tools and services were not originally built in consultation with persons with disabilities
- Parties have faced physical barriers in accessing hearing and mediation rooms
- Parties have expressed that the interpreters they receive cannot adequately speak their language or their dialect to their satisfaction
- There can be too many website clicks to obtain information about accessibility and accommodations
- Members of the public don't know that they can obtain accommodations
- Members of the public are concerned that requesting an accommodation will impact their case in a negative way
- Members of the public are not always comfortable with the use of technology

Social Security Tribunal Consultations with Stakeholders

The Social Security Tribunal's (SST) Fall 2022 stakeholder table meeting with their Employment Insurance Appeals Consultative Committee (EIACC) took place on November 2, 2022. Participants were consulted on the update to the Tribunal's Accessibility and Accommodation Policy. They sought feedback on what the policy may be missing and how SST can improve accessibility and accommodations for those they serve.

Specially, participants were asked the following questions:

- We've identified how we think the policy should be updated. Can you identify any gaps? Have we included items that we should not?
- Can you help us by identifying barriers you or your clients face at the SST and specific ways we can address those barriers (either improvements to what we currently offer, or new ways) when:
 - getting ready for an appeal (for example, how we get supporting documents, documents in different formats)
 - getting ready for the hearing (for example, timing or length of a hearing)
 - participating at the hearing (for example, testimony versus written statements)
- Is Zoom videoconferencing working for you and your clients? Can you identify ways we can improve accessibility of videoconference hearings? If you or your clients haven't tried Zoom videoconferencing yet, can you tell us why?
- What kinds of locations are most accessible for you or your clients – other federal, provincial or municipally owned buildings (recreation centres, libraries), social service or community agencies, or other public spaces like hotels? Are there any additional factors that we should consider when working with service partners?
- What are other ways we can address digital access?
- We want to ensure our information about accessibility and accommodation is easy to find. Right now we use links on our website and on our forms, social media (Tweets and LinkedIn posts). Can we improve how we communicate this information? Are there social media platforms we may consider using and why? Right now we ask people to request accommodation by phone or email. Would a form be helpful?
- The SST currently offers a teletypewriter (TTY) service for people who are deaf, speech-impaired, or hard-of-hearing to use a phone to communicate but it is very rarely used. If you work with clients with this type of barrier, do they use TTY? Is there a different preferred method of communication (for example, email)?
- To help parties understand what accommodation means, we are using the plain language term “alternate arrangements” rather than the term “accommodation” in our communications. Is this helpful for you and your clients or does it cause confusion? Is there terminology that is more commonly used in the disability community?

- Do you have any other thoughts on this topic to share that may assist us? Are you aware of any best practices from other tribunals or organizations you think we should consider? We want to consult people who have lived experience with needing accommodation. Do you have any suggestions about who we need to speak to (groups or individuals) and how we might reach them?"

Summary of consultations

- There are many reasons why people may not make a request for an accommodation (e.g. they may not know about their rights and ability to make a request, stigma etc). The Tribunal and stakeholder and community organizations need to make a collective effort to address this.
- One stakeholder noted that they haven't had any clients express dislike for zoom while another noted that zoom is always smooth.
- One stakeholder noted that when there's an issue of credibility, in-person hearings are preferred to reduce the stress of appellants. This is because it's more reassuring to appellants to have their representative by their side. In-person hearings also provide appellants with a better opportunity to state their case.
- Digital literacy and cell phone literacy is an issue for clients. Some prefer in-person hearings because they're not comfortable with technology.
- One organization noted that many of their members don't like zoom because of issues with technology and that they prefer in-person hearings.
- One stakeholder commented that technology has the ability to bridge a gap for persons who need it; however, it can also present challenges.
- One stakeholder questioned whether using public facilities could raise confidentiality concerns.
- Another noted that it may be difficult to find public facilities that have all the technological equipment required.
- One stakeholder commented that we should prioritize the use of public facilities over private ones. One of the reasons provided was that this approach could prevent issues related to conflict of interest (e.g. if an employer involved in an appeal owns the hotel rented for a hearing).
- It was noted that having community organizations take on the role of providing an alternative space for clients to do tele or videoconference hearings was "shot down" due to capacity issues for organizations; however, that some form of compensation may entice organizations to provide that service.
- One stakeholder commented that the TTY system failed for an appellant. He had a lot of difficulty getting information and a lot of intervention was required from the organization representing him. The challenges encountered were mitigated with the use of emails and text messages. In short, the service didn't work as it should.

Actions

This Accessibility Plan was informed by what was heard during consultations and the barriers that were previously identified during the reviews. The feedback was used to identify barriers and solutions to accessibility elements to ensure that all individuals can fully participate in society.

Reporting

The Accessible Canada Act and the Accessible Canada Regulations established a three-year planning and reporting cycle:

1. **first year:** publish an accessibility plan
2. **second year:** publish a progress report on the implementation of the accessibility plan, including information on feedback received and on how that feedback has been taken into consideration
3. **third year:** publish another progress report
4. **fourth year:** publish an updated version of the accessibility plan

This cycle repeats itself, which means that a progress report will be published in years five and six, and an updated accessibility plan is required for year seven, and so on.