



# Discussion Paper: Accessible Canada Roadmap

**For Online Engagement**

2024



## **Discussion Paper: Accessible Canada Roadmap**

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## List of abbreviations

**ACA**      *Accessible Canada Act*

**CRTC**      Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

**CTA**      Canadian Transportation Agency

**ESDC**      Employment and Social Development Canada

**ICT**      Information and Communication Technologies

**P/Ts**      Provinces and territories

**UNCRPD**      United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities







# 1. Introduction

Advancing accessibility and disability inclusion are priorities for the Government of Canada. And all of society benefits when everyone can participate fully.

In 2019, the Government of Canada passed the landmark *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA) with the goal of advancing accessibility through the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers to accessibility. The disability community's contributions and advocacy were instrumental in helping shape the ACA and continue to help advance accessibility across Canada. The ACA provides the Government of Canada a wide-ranging mandate to develop and implement regulations, policies, programs and initiatives to advance accessibility and inclusion.

Although the scope of the ACA is federal, in that it applies to a wide range of federally regulated entities (see Section 3), it also sets the aspirational goal of realizing a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This goal goes beyond the federal jurisdiction and requires collaborative action across the country. Advancing accessibility is everyone's responsibility.

As we reflect on the 5-year anniversary of the ACA coming into force, now is the right time to ignite a dialogue on how we can collectively strive towards achieving a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

As the focal point for the implementation of the ACA, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is well positioned to bring various accessibility stakeholders for a national discussion on a path forward – a roadmap – to guide our collective efforts into the future. While many accessibility initiatives are also being undertaken by provinces, territories, municipalities, civil society and disability organisations, a roadmap would help ensure that the outcome of our combined efforts is more than the sum of each individual contribution.

The purpose of this document is to seek your views on what a draft Accessible Canada Roadmap could look like. It presents a series of questions to help guide your thinking about various aspects of the draft Roadmap. These are summarized in Section 5.

Over the coming months, there will also be the opportunity to participate in virtual engagement sessions where we can continue the dialogue. ESDC is looking forward to your input!

## 2. Why a Roadmap?

Advancements in accessibility are happening all around us. Other levels of government such as provinces, territories and municipalities are advancing accessibility through new policies and plans relevant to their realities. An increasing number of businesses and organizations are identifying and removing barriers to accessibility so they can be better employers of persons with disabilities and/or enrich the level of service they provide to their clients and customers.

And of course, civil society, particularly disability organisations and communities, continue to lead advocacy towards an accessible Canada and to participate actively in advancing accessibility efforts.

That said, no one party or jurisdiction can do it alone. A barrier-free Canada requires a national vision for moving forward through coherent and complimentary efforts. It requires a national conversation, leveraging existing knowledge and expertise, identifying gaps, and setting nationally agreed-upon priorities and goals. This will help reduce duplication and efforts at cross-purposes, ignite partnerships and spark new meaningful actions and innovative collaborations that can get Canada closer to its goals.

**The draft Accessible Canada Roadmap (the Roadmap) seeks to articulate a national vision to anchor and guide efforts by accessibility change agents.**

The draft Roadmap set out in this document proposes over-arching themes, areas for action and accompanying 5-year goals. ESDC is also keen for stakeholders and partners to provide input on how to promote awareness of the Roadmap. Everyone who is involved in removing barriers to Canada should know about it, have access to it and/or apply it in their work.

After the launch of the final Roadmap, ESDC will publish a plan highlighting how the Department is working to meet the goals set out in the Roadmap.

### 3. The Accessible Canada Act – Laying the Foundations for a Barrier-Free Canada

The ACA supports the realization of a barrier-free Canada by requiring regulated entities to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility in seven priority areas.

The ACA applies to all federally regulated entities, which includes federal departments and agencies, Crown corporations, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Armed Forces, Parliament and First Nations band councils. It also applies to private sector businesses that are regulated by the federal government, such as banks, transportation service providers that cross inter-provincial borders as well as broadcasting and telecommunication service providers.

The ACA establishes a framework, with regulatory responsibilities distributed between the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA), the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC), and ESDC. ESDC is responsible for making regulations in relation to federally regulated entities outside of the responsibilities of the CTA and the CRTC.

New roles and structures were established under the ACA. The Accessibility Commissioner, housed within the Canadian Human Rights Commission, is responsible for compliance and enforcement of ESDC regulations. The Chief Accessibility Officer, a special advisor to the Minister responsible for the ACA, reports on systemic and emerging accessibility issues and

outcomes achieved under the ACA. Finally, Accessibility Standards Canada was created with the mandate to develop national accessibility standards that support the prevention, identification, and removal of barriers to accessibility in the seven priority areas. Annex A provides more detail on the ACA.

While these roles and structures are important, implementation of the ACA has not stopped there. Other key accomplishments by the federal government include:

### Regulations and Standards

- The coming into force of regulations in 2021 that operationalize the planning and reporting requirements set out in the ACA; these include the *Accessible Canada Regulations*, the *Accessible Transportation Planning and Reporting Regulations* and the *CRTC Accessibility Reporting Regulations*;
- Developing the regulations under the ACA, in the priority area of information and communication technologies (ICT);
- Publication of several national accessibility standards for public comment and establishment of many other technical committees who are currently working on additional standards.

### Data and Measurement

- Publication of the [\*Federal Data and Measurement Strategy on Accessibility\*](#) in June 2022 and performance indicators for employment, transportation and ICT in August 2023, to support the collection of data and measurement of progress in the identification and removal of accessibility barriers over time;
- Updating the Accessibility Statistics Hub.

### Building Capacity

- Supporting the disability community to build capacity and foster key partnerships between the disability community and federally regulated and other sectors through the Accessible Canada grants and contributions program;
- Raising awareness of accessibility and celebrating the contributions of persons with disabilities in Canada during annual National AccessAbility Week activities and the annual Canadian Congress on Disability and Inclusion;
- Establishing the Office of Public Service Accessibility in 2019 to provide advice and leadership to federal departments and agencies to advance accessibility across the public service.

### Federal, Provincial and Territorial Collaboration

- Collaborating with provincial and territorial governments to build consensus and momentum towards advancing accessibility across Canada.

## 4. Other Entities Involved in Helping Realize a Barrier-Free Canada

Creating a barrier-free Canada goes beyond federal jurisdiction. It is a shared responsibility among all Canadians. Each of us have unique roles based on who we are, what we do and where we live. Some have formal obligations due to laws, regulations or standards, while others contribute in meaningful ways through inclusive attitudes and actions. Ultimately, accessibility benefits everyone and is a responsibility we all share.

Even before the ACA came into force, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia already had accessibility legislation in place. Since 2019, Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick have passed accessibility legislation. Municipalities and organizations across Canada are similarly invested in advancing accessibility.

The disability community continues to play an instrumental role in helping advance accessibility in all jurisdictions across Canada. Its longstanding advocacy is a testament to driving change.

Figure 1 below, illustrates the different entities involved and describes the different roles each plays in advancing accessibility. These roles are interconnected in many ways, and different entities can even share the same role.

### 4.1 Federally Regulated Public Sector

The federally regulated public sector includes Government of Canada departments and agencies and Crown corporations. As large employers with public-facing services and programs, this group can lead by example in identifying and removing barriers to accessibility.

### 4.2 Disability Community

The disability community includes Canadians with disabilities and the organizations that represent them. The richness of the combined lived experiences and diversity within the disability community translates into a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Abiding by the principle of "nothing without us" is critical when developing policies, products, programs and services that affect persons with disabilities.

### 4.3 Private Sector

While the ACA applies to a subset of the private sector including companies in the financial, transportation, broadcasting and telecommunications sectors, all businesses and private organizations are key players in advancing accessibility in Canada. This includes both as

current and potential employers of persons with disabilities, and as providers of accessible services and products. Regardless of size, the private sector is pivotal in driving innovation and can therefore be a leader in establishing an inclusive design culture.

## **4.4 Other Levels of Government**

Other levels of government, including provinces, territories and municipalities, are advancing accessibility accordingly to their jurisdictions' mandate and priorities. They also have a role to play as leaders in accessibility.

## **4.5 Indigenous Peoples**

Indigenous peoples have unique perspectives on disability. As a result, identifying and removing barriers to accessibility in Indigenous communities must be culturally appropriate and community-led.

## **4.6 General Public**

All Canadians have an important role to play in improving accessibility and promoting a culture of inclusion. Individual Canadians can help identify barriers, reduce the stigma associated with disability and raise awareness of how a culture of inclusion benefits society.

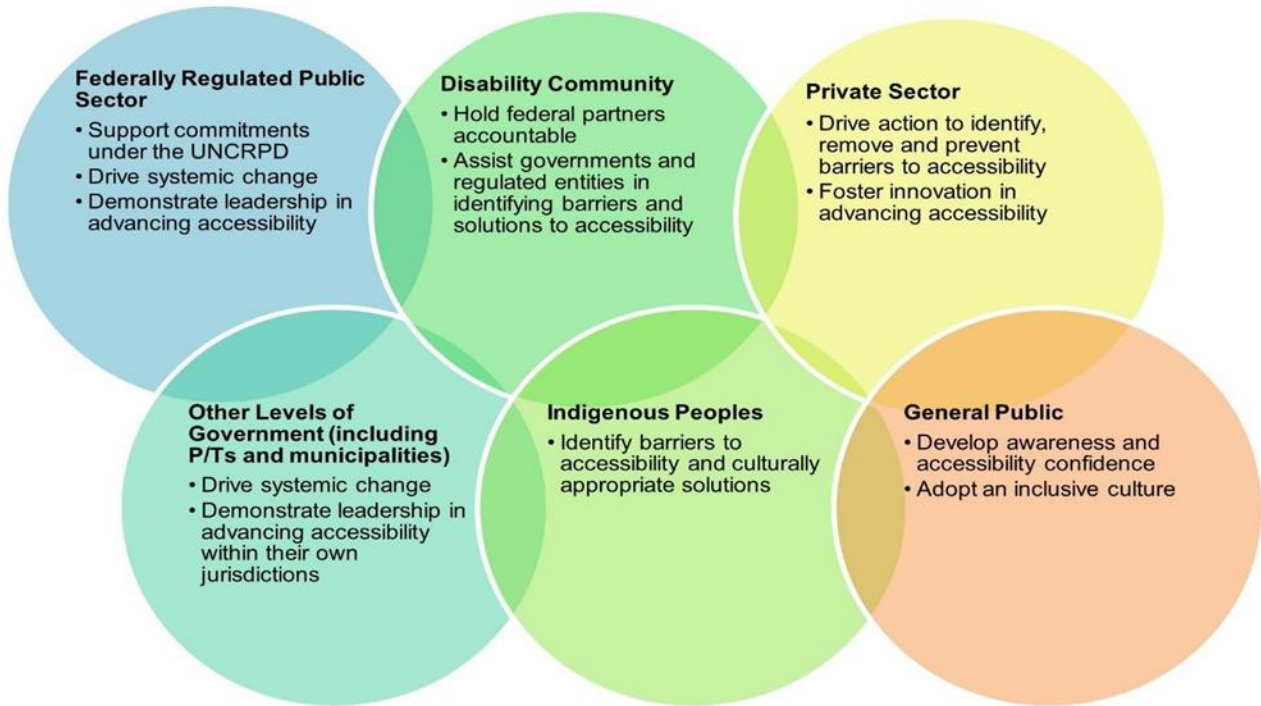


Figure 1: Parties involved in realizing a barrier-free Canada

## 5. Core Elements of the Roadmap

As set out in Figure 2 below, the Roadmap is composed of four themes, each with its own areas of action and 5-year goals. The areas of action are intended to be straightforward and breakdown ongoing accessibility efforts into manageable pieces.

The five-year goals are intended to help readers and users of the Roadmap see incremental progress towards the ultimate goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040. The areas of action and five-year goals bring transparency to the collective effort and can be adjusted over time as required.

The Roadmap is anchored in guiding principles and outcomes that are relevant to its objective of supporting a national vision for a barrier-free Canada.



## 5.1 Guiding Principles

The proposed guiding principles were chosen to help connect the Roadmap closely with the spirit of the ACA as a significant driver of change:

- "nothing without us"
- knowledge mobilization
- innovation
- collaboration and partnerships
- intersectionality

### 5.1.1 “Nothing without us”

This principle, which echoes a central principle of both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the ACA, calls for persons with disabilities to be consulted when developing policies, programs and services that affect them.

### 5.1.2 Knowledge Mobilization

It is hoped that the release of the Roadmap will foster a new level of transparency with respect to ongoing efforts to advance accessibility across the country. As more people share what they are doing, it can inspire new action or reinforce the actions of others.

### 5.1.3 Innovation

Realizing a barrier-free Canada is dependent on system-wide change and continuously challenging the status quo through the identification and widespread adoption of innovative best practices.

### 5.1.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

The concepts of cohesion and complementary actions are at the heart of the Roadmap, which values collaboration and learning from each other to avoid re-inventing the wheel wherever possible.

### 5.1.5 Intersectionality

The widespread adoption of intersectional analysis, i.e., the consideration of how an individual's experience may vary considerably based on a range of factors including but not limited to age, race, sex, sexual orientation, income, geography, etc., will ensure that the complex identities and needs of persons with disabilities are considered in actions to advance accessibility.

## 5.2 Outcomes

Four outcomes have been proposed in the draft Roadmap as follows:

- Accessibility for everyone
- Equal opportunities
- Accessible by design

- Inclusion



**Figure 2: Inter-relationships between the proposed themes, areas of action and 5-year goals with the guiding principles and outcomes**

Tables setting out the proposed themes, areas of action and 5-year goals in greater detail can be found in [Annex A](#).

### 5.3 Themes

The four themes of the Roadmap represent the high-level key activities that are required to realize a barrier-free Canada:

- driving systemic change
- expanding the strength of the disability community
- leveraging data and information
- driving inclusive culture

A brief description of each theme along with its associated areas of action is presented below.

#### 5.3.1 Theme 1: Driving Systemic Change

The first theme recognizes that federal, provincial and territorial governments are in a unique position to drive change because they can use levers such as legislation, regulations and standards. While many jurisdictions already have adopted legislation and/or standards, others may follow different strategies to achieve their respective objectives. The private sector also has an important role to play by complying with legislation and regulations that may exist, and adopting standards where appropriate – even those that are voluntary.



The proposed areas for action under this theme include:

- **legislation and regulations** – legislation and regulations are concrete levers that governments use to effect change
- **accessibility standards** – standards can help guide actions to remove and prevent barriers. They can also foster coherence and contribute to seamless accessibility experiences across jurisdictions
- **compliance and enforcement** – compliance and enforcement activities help regulated entities meet regulatory requirements and hold them accountable when they do not.
- **early consideration of accessibility** – improving the ability of policy makers to consider accessibility in their work means that accessibility will be built into policy, program and service development from the outset
- **advancing accessibility in Indigenous communities** – approaches to supporting the removal of barriers to accessibility must be culturally appropriate and aligned with the Government of Canada's commitment to truth and reconciliation

### 5.3.2 Theme 2: Expanding the Strength of the Disability Community

The second theme recognizes how central the disability community has been to advancing accessibility. This theme calls for further empowerment of the community so that they can continue to lead and participate in wide-ranging efforts to advance accessibility. But the disability community expects and deserves that all parties contribute to further empowering the community. Practically, this means all levels of government, the federally regulated private sector and the general public must commit to building stronger relationships with the disability community in the spirit of nothing without us.

The proposed areas for action under this theme include:

- **building capacity** – it is important to continue supporting the disability community, including through funding, to further boost their efforts to improve accessibility and cultivate partnerships with other organizations in the community
- **fostering partnerships and collaboration** – intersectoral and non-traditional partnerships and collaboration are essential to drive innovative accessibility solutions
- **increase accessibility support services** – support services, for example, sign language interpretation, captioning, alternate print formats, adaptive technologies, etc. facilitates the participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and allows them to meaningfully engage with governments and regulated entities

### 5.3.3 Theme 3: Leveraging Data and Information

The third theme recognizes the critical importance of data collection and knowledge mobilization to better understand the impact of advancing accessibility and to inform further evidence-based decision-making. As large collectors of data, all levels of government and the private sector should improve the sharing of data amongst each other, and expand its access, whenever possible.

The proposed areas for action under this theme include:

- **measuring progress in implementing legislation** – it is important to measure if legislative instruments, policy frameworks and/or standards are having the intended effect, and adjust accordingly
- **knowledge mobilization** – making information widely available for all to freely use will help drive results in accessibility
- **innovative research** – stimulating research in the new policy area of accessibility will help drive innovation and the application of new solutions

### 5.3.4 Theme 4: Driving Inclusive Culture

The fourth theme recognizes the importance of continuing to encourage attitudes that support accessibility and foster a more inclusive society. Realizing a barrier-free Canada requires that inclusive design becomes the norm and that accessibility is considered at the beginning when developing all policies, programs and services. This theme requires the combined participation of all levels of government, the private sector and the general public.

The proposed areas for action under this theme include:

- **changing attitudes and behaviours** – dispelling misconceptions about disability and accessibility drives advances in accessibility for generations to come
- **inclusive design** – when accessibility is thoughtfully built into design from the beginning, barriers to accessibility cease to become an issue
- **engagement with other jurisdictions** – understanding and learning from the innovative accessibility approaches in other jurisdictions will help us achieve a barrier-free Canada

## 6. Discussion Questions

Your feedback and perspectives on the draft Roadmap will inform the development of the final Roadmap. The following questions are designed to guide your feedback:

1. Do the themes identified in the Roadmap reflect your lived experiences navigating accessibility barriers? What other accessibility themes are needed to realize the goal of a barrier-free Canada?
2. Do the themes address the roles and actions required from different levels of government, partners and stakeholders to reach a barrier-free Canada? What are your suggestions for improving them?
3. The areas of action in the Roadmap serve as examples. What other areas of action should be included under each accessibility theme? Should any of them be removed?
4. How do you think the Roadmap can drive collective change? Do you have any suggestions on how to promote it and encourage buy-in?
5. Do you have any other feedback on the Roadmap?

You can provide your feedback on the questions above and any other thoughts you would like to share on the Roadmap **until January 8, 2025**. Your input will help shape the final Roadmap.

## 7. How to Provide Your Feedback

We invite you to submit your feedback through one of the following methods:

- **Online via the [online engagement tool](#):** It's anonymous. You won't need to sign up for an account or give any personal information. The questions are also available in American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ)
- **By email** at the following email address:
  - [accessible.canada.directorate-direction.canada.accessible@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca](mailto:accessible.canada.directorate-direction.canada.accessible@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca)
- **In American Sign Language or Langue des signes québécoise by [video relay service](#):**
  - please send an email to the above email address with the subject line "Sign language response"; we will contact you to set a date and time for you to provide your comments via a video call with interpretation.
- **By transcript:** Contact us using any of the methods listed here. We will then arrange for you to speak to someone who will transcribe your input and submit it to us.
- **By mail to:**
  - Accessible Canada Directorate  
Employment and Social Development Canada  
1st floor  
105 Hôtel-de-Ville Street  
Gatineau QC, J8X 4H7

## 8. Appendix A: Background on the Accessible Canada Act

The *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA) supports the realization of a barrier-free Canada by requiring regulated entities to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility in seven priority areas:

- employment
- the built environment
- information and communication technologies (ICT)
- communication other than ICT
- the design and delivery of programs and services
- the procurement of goods, services and facilities, and
- transportation

The ACA applies to all federally regulated entities, which includes federal departments and agencies, Crown corporations, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Armed Forces, Parliament and First Nations band councils. It also applies to private sector businesses that are regulated by the federal government, such as banks, transportation service providers that cross inter-provincial borders as well as broadcasting and telecommunication service providers.

The ACA establishes a framework, with regulatory responsibilities distributed between the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA), the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC), and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The CTA and the CRTC make and enforce accessibility regulations in the passenger transportation sector and the broadcasting and telecommunications sector respectively. ESDC is responsible for making regulations in relation to all other federally regulated entities. Compliance and enforcement of regulations made by ESDC is the responsibility of the Accessibility Commissioner, a new position created by the ACA and housed within the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

The ACA also created the position of Chief Accessibility Officer, a special advisor to the Minister responsible for the ACA and who reports on systemic and emerging accessibility issues and outcomes achieved under the ACA.

In addition, the ACA also expanded the existing duties and functions of two other Government of Canada entities:

- The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, which handles appeals of decisions made by the Accessibility Commissioner in relation to complaints regarding violations of regulations made by ESDC and
- The Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board, which handles accessibility-related complaints from federal public servants and parliamentary employees.

Finally, the ACA created Accessibility Standards Canada with the mandate to develop national accessibility standards that support the prevention, identification, and removal of barriers to accessibility in the seven priority areas, and to fund research to support standards development.

## 9. Appendix B: Tables of the proposed themes, areas of action and 5-year goals

### Theme 1: Driving systemic change

Table 1 shows the proposed areas of action and 5-year goals for Theme 1 which focuses on maximizing accessibility through Government levers such as legislation, regulations, standards and programs.

**Table 1: Driving systemic change**

Areas of action	5-year goals
Legislation and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop accessibility regulations, including those adopting standards</li><li>• Develop regulatory guidance that helps regulated entities meet or exceed the regulations</li></ul>
Accessibility standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and publish accessibility standards</li><li>• Identify future standards for development</li></ul>
Compliance and enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and implement compliance and enforcement regimes including tools and guidance materials</li></ul>
Early consideration of accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop tools that consider accessibility and inclusion early in the design and development of policy, program, and services</li></ul>
Advance accessibility for Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborate with First Nations on tailored approaches to advancing accessibility</li></ul>

### Theme 2: Expanding the strength of the disability community

Table 2 shows the proposed areas of action and 5-year goals for Theme 2 which is about empowering the disability community to foster meaningful participation in efforts to advance accessibility.

**Table 2: Expanding the strength of the disability community**

Areas of action	5-year goals
Building capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create mechanisms to support meaningful engagement of the disability community in activities related to the implementation of the ACA</li> <li>• Use intersectional approaches to increase inclusion of underrepresented communities (that is 2SLGBTQQIA+, Indigenous persons with disabilities, etc.)</li> </ul>
Fostering partnerships and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster the establishment of effective partnerships across the disability community</li> <li>• Create mechanisms to better connect the disability community and federally regulated entities, in line with the principle of "nothing without us"</li> </ul>
Increase accessibility support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen resources and expertise across service providers</li> </ul>

### Theme 3: Leveraging data and information

Table 3 shows the proposed areas of action and 5-year goals for Theme 3 which requires the open and transparent sharing of accessibility data and information. Data and knowledge mobilization are critical to understanding the impact of efforts made and inform evidence-based decision making by others involved in advancing accessibility.

**Table 3: Leveraging data and information**

Areas of action	5-year goals
Measuring progress in implementing legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the Federal Data and Measurement Strategy</li> <li>• Establish performance indicators to facilitate measurement</li> </ul>
Knowledge mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find ways to facilitate accessibility data and information generated by the federal government</li> </ul>
Innovative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build collaborative relationships with organizations involved in innovative accessibility-related research</li> </ul>

## Theme 4: Driving inclusive culture

Table 4 shows the proposed areas of action and 5-year goals for Theme 4 which involves changing perceptions and attitudes towards a culture of inclusive design and accessibility from the outset.

**Table 4: Driving inclusive culture**

Areas of action	5-year goals
Changing attitudes and behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop initiatives that increase awareness of the need for and benefits of accessibility and inclusion, including dispelling misconceptions (for example, in relation to cost, effort)</li></ul>
Inclusive design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find innovative ways to increase adoption of an inclusive design mindset</li></ul>
Engagement with other jurisdictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase inter-jurisdictional collaboration as a means of driving collective action</li></ul>