

2023

Health Canada Accessibility Progress Report



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Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health. Health Canada is committed to improving the lives of all of Canada's people and to making this country's population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle and effective use of the public health care system.

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Foreword

Message from the Deputy Ministers

We are pleased to share with you Health Canada's first Accessibility Progress Report. This report outlines the progress made in year one of the implementation of the Health Canada 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan. It demonstrates the Department's ongoing commitment to improving the lives of all Canadians by taking action to meet its responsibility as part of the Government of Canada's goals to make Canada barrier free by 2040.

In this report, you will learn about initiatives underway to address barriers through new ideas and concepts. The work of Health Canada has relied on the collaboration and consultation with persons with disabilities, the Health Canada Persons with Disabilities Employee Network and our program partners; all of whom have shared valuable insight into addressing or removing barriers to accessibility.

We invite you to read the Progress Report and encourage you to share your thoughts or feedback with us as we move toward a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

Thank you.

Stephen Lucas, PhD
Deputy Minister, Health Canada

Eric Costen
Associate Deputy Minister, Health Canada

About Health Canada

Health Canada (HC) is the federal department responsible for helping Canadians maintain and improve their health. HC is committed to improving the lives of all Canadians and to making this country's population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle, and effective use of the public health care system. The [raison d'être, mandate and role](#) are available on the HC website.

General

The Accessibility Readiness Team (ART) at HC is responsible for reporting on the feedback received about the Accessibility Plan, and progress made in its implementation, in accordance with regulations under the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and direction provided in the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#).

To request a copy of this Progress Report, the [2022–2025 Accessibility Plan](#), or a description of the feedback mechanism tool, in an alternate format, or to provide feedback, please contact the Director of ART, in one of the following ways:

Contact: Director of Accessibility Readiness Team

Mail: Health Canada Accessibility Feedback
70 Columbine Dr; Brooke Claxton Building
Address Locator 0913B
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9

Email: art-epa@hc-sc.gc.ca

Toll free telephone: 1-833-725-2751

Facsimile: 1-613-941-5366

Teletypewriter: 1-800-465-7735 (Service Canada)

In 2022, HC launched a feedback mechanism to receive, acknowledge and address feedback received about accessibility. Internal processes are also in place to monitor, report on, and incorporate the feedback related to accessibility barriers. Feedback received will be acknowledged in the same manner in which it was received unless it was submitted anonymously.

To submit feedback related to the Plan, Progress Report, feedback mechanism or about any barriers faced when interacting with HC, visit the [Accessibility Feedback Form page](#).

Summary

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (the Act) requires all organisations under federal responsibility to publish an Accessibility Plan every three years that outlines how they will identify, remove and prevent barriers in their policies, programs, and services. A Progress Report, outlining progress made towards meeting HC's actions to removing barriers must be published annually between plans. This is HC's first Progress Report, and it charts the progress to removing barriers in the eight priority areas listed in the [Accessibility Plan](#).

In keeping with the Federal Public Service's ['Nothing Without Us' accessibility strategy](#), which aims to build to Public Service into a model of an inclusive and accessible employer, HC, with the Offices of Primary Interest (OPIs), consulted and collaborated with the Persons with Disabilities Network (PWDN) to establish realistic, achievable activities to address barriers in the Department. Themes emerged around access to training, internal resourcing support, subject matter expertise, and accommodation requests. These themes were incorporated, where possible, into the development of the activities, many of which are underway.

HC also established a mechanism for employees and Canadians to share feedback on barriers faced when interacting with the Department or on the HC Accessibility Plan. Given the legislated deadline for publication, the feedback data included in this Progress Report is for the first eight months of 2023; feedback for the remainder of the year will be included in next year's report. Feedback shared was on barriers under each of the eight priority areas. Suggestions for improvements based on this feedback, and correspondence from the Office of the Accessibility Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, will guide HC's work to improve accessibility in the workplace, and within policies, programs and services. This feedback will also guide the development and implementation of the next Accessibility Plan, which will be published in 2025.

Areas in Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act

In early 2023, ART held consultations with the PWDN on each of the following eight priority areas in the Accessibility Plan to review and seek feedback on proposed activities. Through these consultations, and input received from the feedback mechanism, HC challenged itself to design, experiment and innovate with realistic and achievable activities for year one — many of which are in progress or on-track, and are outlined in this report.

Employment

HC's employment objective is centered on ensuring access to HC jobs and long-term career prospects for persons with disabilities. Commitments focused on working collaboratively with stakeholders on inclusive and accessible staffing approaches, enhancing the recruitment experience of persons with disabilities and managers alike, and providing an accessible and barrier-free workplace to enable career success and progression for employees with disabilities. In addition, the Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) results guide the work for all priority areas of accessibility and will be used to measure Departmental progress in achieving the goals and commitments outlined in the Accessibility Plan. The PSES is a critical tool that provides information to help improve people management practices in the federal public service.

Commitment: Working with the HC PWDN and key disability stakeholders, revise staffing and assessment tools, approaches and resources to ensure they are accessible and inclusive.

- The Public Service Commission's *Guide to Mitigating Biases and Barriers in Assessments* is being applied to all staffing processes and HC implemented mandatory training for hiring managers on impartiality. This guide explains how hiring managers can evaluate their assessment methods to identify, remove or mitigate any potential biases or barriers to ensure fair assessments. HC continues to make progress in increasing the overall representation of persons with disabilities.

Commitment: Support managers in meeting or exceeding HC hiring targets using an enhanced recruitment experience.

- The Department continued to focus on meeting its share of the 5,000 net new hires of persons with disabilities, which equates to approximately 162 hires for the 2023–24 fiscal year. In the first half of 2023–24 fiscal year, HC had achieved 32% of its hiring target. A redoubling of efforts are underway to achieve the yearly hiring target.
- In 2023, the Department launched a recruitment pilot project to help address gaps in hiring persons with disabilities. A large inventory of candidates identifying as a person with a disability is also available to hiring managers seeking candidates at various groups and levels, and locations.

Commitment: Enable career success and progression of employees with disabilities through onboarding, training, access to accommodations, talent management and mentorship.

- HC has also added resources to support career mobility for employees with disabilities, including the launch in May 2023 of the Mentorship Plus Program matching candidates with sponsors. The program provides one on one advice on career development for candidates with disabilities.

The Built Environment

HC is working to modernize all physical spaces to meet or exceed accessibility standards by 2040. With many HC public servants returning to the office, this includes collaboration with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) regarding new facility accessible fit-ups and new construction; as well as engaging with internal and external stakeholders to identify and remove any barriers.

Commitment: Work with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to ensure that all new facility fit-ups/construction are accessible; implement an assessment process for existing facilities to identify potential accessibility upgrades to be incorporated into planned/future projects.

- In 2023, work was initiated to ensure that all new facility projects and renovations planned for HC locations will meet the requirements of the Act (and also additional above-code standards wherever possible). For existing HC facilities, an Accessibility Condition Review Program is being developed to identify opportunities for improvement. This program reviews the current accessibility measures at HC facilities, and will identify areas, and associated actions, for improvement.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

The ICT Accessibility Team at HC has committed to strengthening the level of accessibility of new systems and applications for all users, improving support for the development and procurement of new software, and promoting accessibility awareness. The HC ICT Accessibility Team continues to collaborate with the branches of HC to educate on requirements for sites and training for developers. The Team is also committed to strengthening internal policies and procedures to support accessible ICT.

Commitment: Strengthen the current level of accessibility of ICT at HC by continuing to ensure new (internal and public facing) systems, including internally developed or procured hardware and software, meet modern accessibility standards.

- The ICT Accessibility Team is addressing these important commitments by continuing work to ensure all IT tools are accessible and available for all by default, starting with the inclusion of accessibility in the Authority to Operate for new systems. This means that new ICT systems will be assessed for accessibility, and will help identify any accessibility issues and their severity. This assessment will result in an Accessibility Impact Assessment that outlines the issues, risks and provides a recommendation to the Chief Information Officer on whether to move forward with implementation.

Commitment: Improve accessibility support (guidance and advice) to users in the development and procurement and acquisition of new software.

- The ICT Accessibility Team has been engaging with other areas to provide guidance and advice regarding the procurement and acquisition of new software. This includes actively working with Information Technology Procurement to help them understand the requirements. This Team is also working to increase awareness and encourage vendors to integrate accessibility into their software development to comply with the accessibility standards moving forward. HC has already advanced this approach for the redesign of the Recalls and Safety Alert website and an enhancement to the information management system software used for the Employee Assistance Program. This is in alignment with PSPC rules of ensuring all new software is accessible.

Commitment: Promote accessibility awareness across the Department by providing training and raising awareness to foster an accessibility-first mindset for all IT projects.

- The ICT Accessibility Team presented to senior executives, providing information and next steps for branches with regards to ICT Accessibility. The ICT team has also provided training sessions for users in areas such as the interpretation of Accessibility Conformance Reports and the use of screen readers. The Team continues to develop new courses and have also started creating buildbooks to put accessibility at the front end of the development process. These books provide developers with solutions to common accessibility problems found when using the technology, as well as instructions on how to build accessible solutions if it does not exist.

Commitment: Strengthen the accessibility governance and process by developing internal policies and procedures for accessible ICT.

- HC is working to grow its ICT Accessibility Team to increase service and continue identifying accessibility gaps in policies and procedures, and to engage with the appropriate teams to address them. For example, HC is working with the Technology Portfolio Office to introduce accessibility verification in the selection of tools via the Options Analysis process. In addition, the Department is working with various teams to include a review for accessibility compliance in requests for software. This review would restrict the procurement of software that does not conform to the accessibility standard.

Communication, other than ICT

HC envisions an environment where everyone can readily access and understand communication materials; this means that content is accessible by default, wherever possible. To that end, HC is committed to providing products and organizing events in accessible formats.

Commitment: Ensure HC external digital content and new internal digital content are accessible by default.

In 2023, HC implemented several measures to support this vision, including:

- Providing closed captions, described video, web equivalent information videos on social media, and incorporating sign language when possible;
 - » 100% of videos produced have closed captions
- Supporting its teams through usability advice and guidance;
- Tracking web and social media content for accessibility and usability standards (part of ongoing implementation and regular business).

Commitment: Provide Departmental communications products and events in accessible formats.

- HC will continue to work on building accessible templates and tools for public engagements, including providing sign language and/or simultaneous interpretation for ministerial and other events.

The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

Implementing modern procurement practices for accessible goods, services, and facilities for HC is the objective. HC is committed to incorporating accessibility into processes and documents, as well as increasing awareness of accessibility through training and guidance.

Commitment: Incorporate accessibility into procurement and contracting documents, templates, and guidance.

- In 2023, HC is conducting an accessibility assessment of procurement tools and templates and ensuring that procurement officers are informed of changes to the pending PSPC procurement tools.

Did You Know?

Health Canada's Office of Grants and Contributions has developed an Accessibility Framework and action plan to improve the accessibility of programs, such as the HC transfer payment programs.

The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

HC's objective is that programs and services are accessible and designed in consultation with persons with disabilities. HC committed to building internal capacity to better design and deliver accessible programs and services.

Commitment: Build capacity to consult, develop, design, deliver and evaluate accessible and inclusive programs and services.

- To improve the accessibility of HC's internal and external programs and services, the lead OPI focused on building internal capacity by identifying the teams within HC that deliver programs and services, with the goal of creating a community of practice which will ensure strong collaboration, learning opportunities and sharing of best practices. In particular, programs and services accessibility practices already in place include:
 - » The development of a Grants and Contributions Accessibility Framework focussing on culture, programs, materials and technology;

- » The enhancement to the information management system software used for the Employee Assistance Program and the redesign of the Recalls and Safety Alert website by the Digital Transformation Branch; and,
- » HC's Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) and the Office of Grants and Contributions converted a large portion of inaccessible templates into accessible versions for use by applicants, recipients and HC staff. Development of new materials will be accessible to SUAP clients and employees.

Commitment: Integrate accessibility features into new and existing programs and services.

- HC has conducted consultations on this topic. More specifically, there was a virtual consultation session in March 2023 with persons with disabilities and they were given an option to provide written feedback as well. For the first year, HC focused on the coordination of the activities and steps needed and associated timelines to advance the workplan for programs and services priority area.
- HC has also had discussions with corporate partners to determine the approach to integrating a proposed requirement on accessibility-related considerations into HC Treasury Board submissions and Memorandum to Cabinet submissions. Existing attestation processes have been identified, such as the Sex and Gender-based analysis plus (SGBA+) attestation group for integrating accessibility considerations. For ongoing processes, discussions with corporate partners were initiated to include accessibility considerations into audits and evaluations.

Transportation

Assessing accessibility requirements for HC fleet vehicles, focusing on current and future accessibility standards, and ensuring fleet purchases meets those standards were all identified as HC priorities in the Accessibility Plan.

Commitment: Identify any potential accessibility features available that can be included in new fleet vehicle acquisitions.

- In 2023, HC implemented a process for employees to access accommodations support when accessibility barriers are identified with the HC fleet in order to address and resolve them.
- HC continues to be committed to identifying potential accessibility features for new fleet vehicle acquisitions and implementing new accessibility standards as prescribed by the Treasury Board Secretariat and PSPC.

Culture

HC envisions a culture that supports all persons with disabilities, proactively eliminates and prevents barriers, and creates greater opportunities for persons with disabilities through a ‘Nothing Without Us’ approach. As a priority area in the 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan, HC committed to the promotion of an accessibility-informed culture that fosters an accessible work environment through trainings that cover topics such as document accessibility, accessible meetings and events, and how to best support accommodation needs. The Department also committed to supporting all HC employees so that they have the knowledge and tools to become accessibility confident which is defined as the ability of organizations to manage disability as a business priority related to customer experience, talent, productivity, innovation, new product development, brand reputation and investment in human potential.

Commitment: Ensure all HC employees have the knowledge and tools to become accessibility confident through training and engagement.

- To support this vision, HC is in the process of developing and launching key activities, for instance, HC is creating an accessibility Playbook and is seeking feedback from key stakeholders on this tool. The Playbook, a digital book, aims to increase accessibility awareness, knowledge and skills among employees, and to serve as a reminder that accessibility awareness is about more than compliance with the Act, it is everyone’s responsibility.
- HC is also developing an Accessibility Hub on the Intranet (internal website for HC employees), and launched an accessibility icon on every employee’s desktop, which directly links to the Hub, a centralized repository allowing quick and easy access to accessibility resources and tools.
- Further, HC developed a digital banner to broadly promote this new icon across Health Television (HTV) which broadcasts to 19 televisions located in various HC offices across Canada. This banner mirrors a similar one promoting accessibility on the HC intranet.

Did You Know?

In the Fall of 2023, HC piloted a course called “Introduction to neurodiversity in the workplace”. This training for employees is designed as an introduction to the subject, enabling participants to review their perceptions and question their stereotypes. It also provides a grounding in the high-level universal inclusion model, and identifies how these principles can be applied to a neuroinclusive approach.

- HC's Controlled Substances and Cannabis Branch established a temporary role for a Special Advisor on accessibility who conducted an accessibility audit. The advisor provided recommendations on next steps for improving accessibility within the Branch, such as hiring a full-time employee to develop workshops and training, to increase awareness and accessibility knowledge for employees.

Commitment: Promote an accessibility-informed culture that creates a positive, inclusive workplace.

- HC is in the final stages of completing a communications and engagement strategy. The next steps will be to implement the strategy which will guide how the Department engages with internal and external stakeholders, such as the PWDN internally and disability-focused organizations externally. HC looks forward to building on lessons learned and equipping teams for success.
- HC is collaborating with the PWDN to deliver a yearly event for all employees, in recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which occurs every year on the 3rd of December.

Consultations

HC is proud to have collaborated, and continues to collaborate, with the HC PWDN for the development and publication of this first Progress Report. The HC PWDN has recurring meetings with its membership at large. These meetings are open to all HC employees.

In this inaugural year of the implementation of HC's Accessibility Plan, consultations with persons with disabilities have guided efforts to address accessibility barriers through the co-development and implementation of meaningful and impactful activities with OPIs. In keeping with the 'Nothing Without Us' strategy, there were a series of consultations and touchpoints, for example:

- ART and HC PWDN meet monthly to establish common goals and objectives, to gather feedback, and to outline and solidify engagement opportunities.
- ART hosts a monthly director-level Forum for the PWDN and OPIs to collaborate, advance commitments and provide feedback.
- The PWDN executive are also active participants in various corporate working groups focussed on accessibility.
- ART supported the delivery of a consultation on a draft implementation plan, which outlines activities to meet the commitments in the Accessibility Plan and indicators to measure progress, in order to capture and address feedback on possible barriers, including activity measurement.
 - » Attendees were provided with the draft working document in advance of the consultation session; they were encouraged to submit feedback via their preferred medium of choice.
- The PWDN executive committee were included in the governance approval process for the publication of this report.

Themes that emerged in 2023 were centered on knowledge about accessibility; including, access to training, internal resourcing support, subject matter expertise, and accommodation requests or inquiries, to name a few. This feedback was considered, and incorporated where possible in the development of strategic activities — HC recognizes that addressing barriers is an ongoing process and will be key to developing accessibility competence, and future commitments and activities.

Health Canada Persons with Disabilities Network

HC has a very active persons with disabilities employee network, which plays an important role in outreach and raising awareness of accessibility needs and is integral in addressing them. At HC, the PWDN consists of a full time Chair, a Vice-Chair and ten employees in the Executive Committee who each dedicate 5 hours per week towards Network activities as well as a communications officer who works part-time. These passionate members work on departmental and government wide events, support the persons with disabilities community and develop proposals to improve the working conditions of employees with disabilities.

The HC PWDN works closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) PWDN to help advance accessibility within both organizations. The two Networks hold monthly listening sessions to hear from employees on challenges and objectives they'd like the Networks to address. The Networks co-led two events for National Accessibility Awareness Week, the first on the built environment, which showcased the PHAC inclusive meeting space and promoted the ongoing initiatives to make the workplace more accessible throughout both organizations. The second event was focused on raising awareness of neuro-diverse employees and how colleagues could best support them.

The HC PWDN organized a series of events for National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October 2023. These events raise awareness to managers and employees on challenges faced by the persons with disabilities community and best practices for supporting employees. Each year the Networks organize an event for International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

The HC PWDN has put forward several proposals this year to improve the accessibility of the Department and make the workplace more inclusive. They have proposed to make accessibility related training mandatory for all staff, which is currently being finalized. They have recommended that all senior management meetings include a requirement that all supporting documents be provided in an accessible format and have received support from the Deputy Minister on this. A proposal has been developed to request funding for a career navigator and development program. This navigator will help employees with disabilities with career advancement through coaching for the application and interview process as well as help connect candidates to managers with open positions. The PWDN receives many requests to be consulted and the Network is developing a dedicated advisory committee for these, so that they are not only relying on volunteers from their Network on an ad hoc basis. The Network also sends out biweekly accessibility newsletters and launched a Microsoft Teams channel for members and allies.

The PWDN is crucial in advancing accessibility within the department and their expert advice is indispensable for the Department to meet accessibility commitments and objectives.

Accessibility Steering Committee

The Accessibility Steering Committee is a forum of senior executives from both HC and PHAC, as well as the PWDN Chairs and Champions (an executive from each PHAC and HC), that oversees, supports and provides guidance on the implementation of the *Accessible Canada Act* and the Accessibility Plans to advance accessibility within both organizations.

Feedback

Along with its Accessibility Plan, HC also launched a feedback mechanism tool to enable employees and Canadians to share feedback on barriers faced when dealing with the Department, or on the plan itself. This feedback is integral in guiding the development and implementation of the next Accessibility Plan.

How Feedback was Collected

HC can receive accessibility feedback from the public and employees through different channels. Both employees and Canadians were able to share accessibility feedback via an [online form](#) available to the public on Canada.ca, or by email, telephone, letter mail, or fax. In addition, HC employees are able to submit their accessibility feedback via an online form posted to the intranet, or by emailing ART directly.

To raise awareness of the various ways to provide accessibility feedback, HC's outreach initiatives included a January 2023 social media campaign on the government's [Healthy Canadian's Facebook page](#) and HC LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter) accounts. Additional outreach to employees included ongoing promotion of the internal feedback process in the departmental news bulletin and internal emails.

What We Heard

For this reporting period, starting from publication date of the Accessibility Plan in December 2022 through to the end of the first eight months in 2023, HC received a total of 27 individual feedback submissions. The balance of the feedback for the last 4 months of 2023 will be included in the 2024 Progress Report. For this first year, all of the feedback was received electronically either via the employee or public online feedback forms or by email directly to ART. It is anticipated that, with greater awareness of the Accessibility Plan and the Progress Reports, HC will receive feedback through the other channels.

Feedback received often targets multiple priority areas. For example, the feedback mechanism received feedback concerning barriers to both built environment and culture, which are two different priority areas. This would be counted as one piece of feedback concerning built environment as a barrier, and another concerning culture as a barrier. As a result, the count of feedback for each priority area will be higher than the count for barriers received by the mechanism.

For this reporting period, of the 27 individual feedback submissions received by HC, 17 were from HC employees (internal sources) and 10 were received from the public (external sources). Of the 17 employee submissions, 14 were received via the online form, and 3 via email. From these 27 individual submissions a total of 38 barriers were identified. The breakdown of the number of barriers per priority area from all sources is shown in the following table:

Barriers identified by priority area

Pillar	Number of Barriers Identified
Employment	9
Built Environment	9
Information Technologies	8
Communication	2
Procurement	1
Transportation	0
Programs and Services	5
Culture	4
Total	38

After reviewing the feedback, given that accessibility concerns crossed multiple priority areas and that barriers impacted persons with disabilities in different ways, this first Progress Report groups the feedback according to themes.

One of the challenges of grouping the feedback into themes was that most of the feedback for the eight priority areas were general opinions or comments about nonspecific barriers at the Government of Canada and were not specific to HC. ART shares all feedback with the appropriate OPIs, however if comments were high-level, generic or came anonymously, the OPIs were unable to fully address the barriers. Below is a summary of key themes identified as barriers for each pillar and commitments to address the barriers.

Employment

HC is committed to building and supporting a diverse, accessible and inclusive workplace. The comments about employment barriers were reviewed and grouped into the following themes:

- Return to office policy (33% of the comments were related to the return to office)
 - » Remote work is a great equalizer for accessibility; lack of accommodation
- Accessible workplace and accommodation measures
 - » Difficult to get accommodations in the workplace if sharing spaces
- Career development opportunities/retention/talent management
 - » Difficult for persons with disabilities to get promotions; some people feel uncomfortable self-identifying
- Inaccessible processes
 - » Better support for persons with disabilities on leave and who want to return to work
- Management needs the proper tools and resources to hire persons with disabilities
 - » Better hiring practices

Actions:

- Actively include the [Government of Canada Accessibility Passport](#) in process for accommodating injury, illness or disability. HC's [Workplace Wellness Service Centre](#) is a leader in the public service in providing advice and guidance to employees and their managers in the accommodation process. This includes accommodation requests that are due to the return to the office.
- Support the public service commitment to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities. The Specialized Recruitment Team for persons with disabilities will do this by managing an inventory of persons with disabilities applicants available to all hiring managers and working with external partner organization to source talent.
- Develop tools to enhance the recruitment, retention and promotion of persons with disabilities, including delivery of training and information sessions to hiring manager to demystify any barriers or concerns.

Built environment

HC strives for accessible and inclusive design solutions so that all persons can use physical spaces. With this feedback, 56% of the comments were about inaccessible facilities or spaces.

The comments for built environment were summarized and grouped into the following themes:

- Inaccessible facilities
 - » Design of buildings, rooms, retrofits, wheelchair accessible bathrooms
- Inaccessible spaces
 - » In workspace layout, lighting, air quality

Actions:

- The standards for Government of Canada office spaces are mandated and managed by PSPC. All federal departments must adhere to these standards in any facility accommodations project. At HC, most fluorescent lighting has been, is being, or is planned to be switched to LED lighting.
- Washrooms within HC facilities (owned and managed by HC) are all wheelchair accessible. In buildings which are owned or operated by a private landlord or by PSPC, and where there are washrooms outside of HC space, HC actively advocates (to PSPC or the landlord), for updates to these washrooms. It is up to the landlord or PSPC as to whether these washrooms are updated.
- HC facilities with planned retrofits will be constructed to the standards of the Act by 2040.
- Air quality assessments are conducted regularly and also on an as required basis. Results of air quality tests are provided to Facility Occupational Health and Safety Committees where possible.

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

HC is working towards identifying accessibility barriers in the purchasing process.

Procurement received one comment in the following area:

- Accessible procurement practices
 - » Consider including companies that have accessible hiring practices.

Actions:

- The hiring practices of external companies on the pre-qualified supplier lists are outside of the control of the Department. The OPI will share this feedback with PSPC, suggesting that they consider an accessibility rating when reviewing companies for the pre-qualified suppliers lists that they manage.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Technologies must be accessible to all employees. The comments for ICT barriers were reviewed and grouped into the following themes:

- Digital applications and website accessibility (86% of feedback received)
 - » Government of Canada external and internal applications are not accessible
- Improve accessibility support in the development and procurement of new software
 - » Catalogue of devices that describes how the device can help a person with a disability.

Actions:

- Continue to collaborate with IT Service Management Systems and Assets to explore options for producing a catalogue of accessible software.
- HC is not the business owner for many of the external and internal applications used by the public and employees. HC is working with those business owners so they are aware of the Government of Canada's obligations under the Act. For example, one submission noted that the internal Peoplesoft application had accessibility issues. PSPC is the owner of this application. A software update is scheduled for fall 2023, and HC's Director of Human Resources Reporting, Analysis and Systems remains in touch with the PSPC service provider for regular updates.
- Participate in the development of the Government of Canada's [ICT Accessibility Standard and Accessibility Scorecard](#) which collects data about the level of integration of accessibility in Government of Canada technology. It also measures compliance with the new Treasury Board Standard on accessible ICT.

Communication

HC is committed to ensuring all internal and external communication products meet accessibility standards. The two comments about communications barriers were reviewed and were equally split into the following themes:

- Accessible formats for documents
 - » Training on basic use of accessibility features in MS Office.
- Accessible meeting and events
 - » Central funding for sign language and official language simultaneous translation for in person or web consultations.

Actions:

- Continue to adhere to all Government of Canada's policies and directives when putting content on government webpages to ensure that there are no barriers to accessibility. These include: [The Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#) that states content must meet web accessibility guidelines. HC follows the [Directive on the Management of Communications](#) which specifically states that HC should use plain language. HC also follows the [Canada.ca Content Style Guide](#), which was written to complement [The Canadian Style](#).
- HC promotes accessibility training and is working on growing its portfolio of learning so employees have the tools to make all communications accessible.

Transportation

Transportation at HC refers to the fleet of vehicles it owns, leases, or rents that are used by employees to carry out their work. No feedback was received for this reporting period.

HC will continue to support and adhere to accessibility standards for the HC fleet.

Programs and Services

To be effective, programs and services must be accessible to all Canadians. The comments about programs and service barriers were reviewed and grouped into the following themes:

- Policies relating to programs and service accessibility
 - » Better supports for persons with disability returning from leave, include self-advocacy networks in the policy phase.
- Development of the HC Accessibility Plan
 - » More specific details required in the plan
- Identify barriers and how to improve/or prevent them
 - » Government of Canada Accessibility Passport process should have less barriers

For the programs and services feedback, 40% of the comments were related to policies and 40% was regarding the development of the HC Accessibility Plan.

Actions:

- Review the channels used by clients to better identify gaps in program and service standards and improve accessibility.
- Explore options to develop a programs and services distribution list to quickly share best practices and current standards around accessibility.
- Work with the HC programs to ensure they understand the Department's obligations under the Act when providing services to employees and the public.

Culture

The ART offers guidance on the development and implementation of the HC's Accessibility Plan and Progress Report to support a HC culture that is accessible by default. The culture barrier comments were grouped into the following themes:

- Increase awareness of accessibility
 - » Employees lack awareness of obligations under the Act
- Areas of improvement for HC
 - » Continue to address barriers

For the culture feedback, 75% of the comments were related to increasing awareness about accessibility.

Actions:

- Develop a communications and engagement strategy in support of the HC Accessibility Plan, Progress Report & commitments to raise awareness about accessibility.
- Coordinate the development of the Accessibility Plans and the Progress Reports with HC branch champions, the OPIs and the PWDN.
- Explore and support options to establish mandatory accessibility training for all HC employees. In the fall of 2023, ART reviewed an in-house course named Accessibility Matters, to evaluate its relevance to HC employees as a mandatory course.
- Tools were developed and disseminated among managers and employees, such as the digital Playbook, and the Accessibility Hub, a centralized source of information available on the HC intranet, which can be easily accessed through a desktop icon.

Did You Know?

In May 2023, the HC PWDN collaborated with the Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch to deliver a highly engaging event on neurodiversity in the workplace. It featured employees sharing their lived experience, and a recording was made available for those unable to attend.

Canadian Human Rights Commission, Accessibility Commissioner

In addition to feedback from the public and employees, HC received correspondence from the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) — Accessibility Commissioner’s Office, identifying areas of improvements in the consultation process for the Accessibility Plan, as well as the formatting thereof.

The CHRC also conducted a Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) inspection of the web pages containing the Accessibility Plan and feedback tool. CHRC produced a Findings Report, and found that the URLs for the Accessibility Plan and feedback process description meets [WCAG 2.1 Level AA](#) conformance.

HC was pleased to have participated in both of these assessments and looks forward to learning about best practices and ongoing advancement of accessibility within the public service. The Department will take all feedback from the CHRC to continually improve the way in which HC plans for, and reports on, accessibility.

HC is committed to working with its partners and the CHRC to improve upon the following:

- Expanding strategies to include more consultations with both internal and with external stakeholder groups, representing Canadians with disabilities, in order to learn about the barriers they face.
- Carefully reviewing all policies, practices, programs and services to remove existing or potential barriers in the eight priority areas.
- Clearly outlining the benchmarks in the Accessibility Plan that would enable progress in the implementation of the plan to be tracked.
- Further clarifying that feedback contributors will receive a response in the same method in which their feedback was submitted.
- Improving clarity on the feedback mechanism process.
- Working with the OPI leads and the PWDN to address the barriers and gaps identified in this report.

Reflecting upon the feedback received in the development of this report, it is clear that HC has more work to do to improve upon accessibility in the workplace, and on policies, programs and services. HC aims to continually improve the feedback mechanism process to ensure transparency and accountability in data collection and interpretation.

Conclusion

This first Progress Report is the first step in a journey of learning and improvement, and supports HC's ongoing goal of being barrier free by 2040. HC thanks all respondents for providing comments and feedback on the HC Accessibility Plan and barriers faced, through the feedback mechanism tool. With future consultations and ongoing feedback and collaboration with partners, HC will continue to strengthen and improve upon the commitment of an accessible by default workplace where inclusion and acceptance is paramount.