



# Health Canada Accessibility Plan

## 2022–2025

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 Minister**

I am proud to present Health Canada's first Accessibility Plan – a plan that meets our legislative requirements under the *Accessible Canada Act*. More importantly, it demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that all new and existing programs, services and policies are developed and implemented with accessibility in mind.

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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.

This Accessibility Plan outlines the actions Health Canada will take over the next three years to meet its responsibility as part of the Government of Canada's goals to make Canada barrier free by 2040. The Plan has been developed in close consultation with our Persons with Disabilities Employee Network under the principle of "Nothing Without Us."

I invite you to read our Accessibility Plan to learn more. We welcome your feedback on this plan and our annual progress reports, as we move toward to a barrier-free Canada.

Thank you.

Stephen Lucas, PhD

Deputy Minister, Health Canada

# Introduction

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (the Act) requires all Government of Canada departments and agencies to publish an Accessibility Plan that outlines how they will remove barriers to make their organizations more accessible by 2040.

An Accessibility Plan must be published every three years. This is Health Canada's (HC) first plan and it outlines our strategy and commitments to remove barriers to accessibility in the seven priority areas outlined in the Act.

HC has chosen to include an eighth priority area, culture, to reflect feedback received during employee consultations, along with federal public service guidance. Together, the actions, commitments and activities in all eight areas of this plan should lead to improvements in accessibility at HC by the end of the first three-year cycle. They will also help the department stay on track to reach the goal of being barrier free and fully accessible by 2040.

## About 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](#) is available on the HC website.

While the provinces and territories are responsible for delivering healthcare to the majority of Canadians, as a partner in health, HC:

- protects Canadians from unsafe food, health and consumer products;
- promotes innovation in health care; and,
- informs Canadians to make healthy choices.

HC recruits scientists and researchers, inspectors, doctors and nurses, policy analysts, administrative professionals, and many others. The department is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the population of Canada and a workplace that supports all of the employees. The department strives to deliver programs and services that recognize the diverse needs of Canadians, including persons with disabilities.

HC has been named one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers thanks to progressive programs and an organizational culture that promotes diversity at all levels.

## General

The Accessibility Readiness Team at HC is responsible for the development and coordination of this Accessibility Plan in accordance with regulations under the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and direction provided in the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#). The Team is also responsible for the feedback process and progress reporting on this Plan.

To request a copy of this Accessibility Plan or the feedback process description in an alternate format, or to provide feedback, please contact us in one of the following ways:

**Contact:** Director of the Accessibility Readiness Team

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**Accessibility Feedback Form**

## Accessibility Statement

Advancing accessibility has been an important long-term organizational goal for HC. In 2016, HC collaborated with the department's Persons with Disabilities Network to put in place an Action Plan with specific objectives to support employees with disabilities throughout their career.

In order to support this necessary culture shift, HC has adopted a 'yes by default' approach to accommodations, established a single window for employees and managers to access services under duty to accommodate and developed the Workplace Accommodations Passport, which is used in many federal departments.

These mark important steps forward in the Department's accessibility journey, and HC will continue to expand on these actions through this Accessibility Plan.

HC is also committed to ensuring the programs and services delivered to Canadians are accessible, and that persons with disabilities communities are consulted as those programs and services are developed.

### Did You Know?

HC developed their own Accessibility Passport in 2019 and became early adopters of the [GC Workplace Accessibility Passport](#) in 2020. The Passport, owned by the employee, outlines their accommodation needs, and identifies their work barriers. Employees and Managers work with the HC Workplace Wellness Service Centre and a case manager, to address their accommodation needs. The Passport follows the employee throughout the duration of their public service career.

# Consultations

Engagement with employees with disabilities and allies was central to the identification of barriers to accessibility at HC and led to the development of the commitments for this Accessibility Plan. Following the principle of “Nothing Without Us,” we remain committed to continued consultation and collaboration.

HC shared surveys and led virtual engagement sessions with employee networks. The objective of these sessions was to raise awareness while also identifying barriers to accessibility.

Consultation with the HC Persons with Disabilities Network took place in the form of virtual presentations and round table discussions on this Accessibility Plan, and the feedback mechanism. Members were given the opportunity to provide input during consultations, or provide feedback via email anonymously. HC is committed to ongoing collaboration with the Network to identify activities and implementation strategies.

# Employment

The goal of the Employment area under the *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure access to employment opportunities and accessible workplaces.

Ensuring HC is a diverse workplace that includes persons with disabilities, both visible and invisible, is a departmental commitment reflected in the Multi-Year Diversity and Equity Plan.

## HC's Objective

Provide access to HC jobs and long-term career prospects for persons with disabilities, focussing on:

- Recruitment, retention, and promotion of persons with disabilities; and
- Ensuring an accessible workplace with no barriers to employee accommodations.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** Working with the HC Persons with Disabilities Network and key disability stakeholders, revise staffing and assessment tools, approaches and resources to ensure they are accessible and inclusive.

**Commitment 2:** Support managers in meeting or exceeding HC hiring targets using an enhanced recruitment experience.

**Commitment 3:** Enable career success and progression of employees with disabilities through onboarding, training, access to accommodations, talent management and mentorship.

### Did You Know?

In 2018, the HC Workplace Wellness Service Centre was created to promote and support a client-service approach to accommodations for persons with disabilities in the workplace. The Centre has been recognized for its innovative practices and serves as a blueprint for other accommodation programs across the Government of Canada.

# The Built Environment

The goal of the Built Environment area under *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure all people can move freely around federal buildings and public spaces.

HC buildings and facilities are a combination of owned and leased spaces, and include laboratory facilities, office accommodations, medical clinics, warehouses and storage spaces.

In all HC building and facilities projects, whether in owned or leased spaces, the plans, designs and construction or fit-up meet or exceed current accessibility standards. HC looks at ways to incorporate features such as adaptable lighting, wayfinding technology and continues to reinforce scent free work environments to address environmental sensitivities.

## HC's Objective

Modernize all HC spaces to meet or exceed accessibility standards by 2040 by focussing on:

- Instituting an accessibility review for all new designs, builds and refits; and
- Consulting and incorporating feedback of persons with disabilities who access the facilities at the planning and design stage and throughout any project.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** Work with Public Services and Procurement Canada to ensure that all new facility fit-ups/construction are accessible; and implement an assessment process for existing facilities to identify potential accessibility upgrades to be incorporated into planned/future projects.

**Commitment 2:** Continuously engage internal and external stakeholders to identify and remove barriers to the built environment and use innovative or novel technologies to support accessibility.

## Did You Know?

In new and renovated office spaces, HC will include new accessibility features such as selecting accessible contrasting colour schemes, adding wayfinding floor surfaces for contrasting visible pathways, larger bar type automatic door opener switches, and adjustable height work surfaces.

# Information and Communication Technologies

The goal of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) area under the *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure accessible digital content and technologies.

ICT includes hardware, software, applications and websites for both external and internal facing systems for clients and employees.

## HC's Objective

All HC's ICT meet accessibility standards by focussing on:

- New systems and applications are accessible for all employees and external users
- Accessibility of existing information technology (IT) systems is assessed and areas are identified for short and long-term improvement.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** 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.

**Commitment 2:** Improve accessibility support (guidance and advice) to users in the development and procurement and acquisition of new software.

**Commitment 3:** Promote accessibility awareness across the Department by providing training and raising awareness to foster an accessibility-first mindset for all IT projects.

**Commitment 4:** Strengthen the accessibility governance and process by developing internal policies and procedures for accessible ICT.

## Did You Know?

As part of its Transformation Agenda, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is increasing the transparency of its regulatory review process. PMRA is revising the [Public Registry homepage](#), with a focus on accessibility and readability, to improve participation in the regulatory process and ensure regulatory decisions are more accessible to Canadians. PMRA is also considering how to modernize its communications and information management to meet Government of Canada Accessibility standards.

# Communication, other than information and communication technologies

The goal of the Communications area of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure barrier-free services and spaces for persons with disabilities.

HC has taken steps to ensure barrier-free communications for employees. For example, through the provision of sign language interpretation at town halls and other events, as well as by providing guidance and resources on leading accessible meetings and creating accessible documents. For external communications with the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives, the Department adheres to Government of Canada accessibility guidelines and policies for advertising, social media, multimedia and web content.

## HC's Objective

Both the public and employees of HC can readily access and understand all communication materials whether they have a visible or invisible disability.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** Ensure HC external digital content and new internal digital content are accessible by default.

**Commitment 2:** Provide departmental communications products and events in accessible formats.

## Did You Know?

Any HC videos published on social media and to the web video gallery, as well as internal videos, meet accessibility requirements, such as transcripts, closed captioning, and described video, where necessary.

# The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

The goal of the Procurement area of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure the purchasing of goods, services and facilities is accessible.

HC procures most of the goods, services and facilities needed for the Department through a relationship with Shared Services Canada and Public Services and Procurement Canada.

## HC's Objective

Implement modern procurement practices so that the goods, services and facilities procured by HC are accessible.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** Incorporate accessibility into procurement and contracting documents, templates and guidance.

**Commitment 2:** Increase awareness amongst procurement officers and cost center managers to consider accessibility from the start of a procurement process through training, information sessions, or guidance documentation.

### Did You Know?

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) has moved its tendering opportunities to CanadaBuys to ensure the digital platform will align with emerging new standards for Information and Communications Technology accessibility. HC works with PSPC to use this platform for its procurement processes.

# The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

The goal of the Design and Delivery of Programs and Services area of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure Canadians receive services that are accessible to all.

HC manages and offers programs and services that support Canadians in maintaining and improving their health.

HC is committed to engaging those with lived experience in the development of policies and the design and delivery of programs.

## HC's Objective

HC programs and services are designed in consultation with persons with disabilities and are both accessible to and take into account the needs of persons with disabilities.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** Build capacity to consult, develop, design, deliver and evaluate accessible and inclusive programs and services

**Commitment 2:** Integrate accessibility features into new and existing programs and services.

## Did You Know?

In April 2022, Health Canada established the Chronic Pain Policy Team to coordinate the federal response to the [Canadian Pain Task Force's recommendations](#). Through this team, Health Canada collaborates closely with people living with chronic pain to ensure that federal actions to enhance the prevention and management of chronic pain are reflecting their voices and needs.

# Transportation

The goal of the Transportation area under the *Accessible Canada Act* is to ensure a barrier-free federal transportation network.

HC has a limited role in this area. HC maintains a fleet of vehicles for specific operational purposes, such as inspections, security monitoring, mail services, and mobile labs. The fleet is composed of standard passenger vehicles such as sedans and sport utility vehicles which have no modifications related to accessibility. In cases where an employee requires accessibility features in order to operate a fleet vehicle, an accommodation would have to be made.

At this time, HC does not have any fleet vehicles which would meet the technical definition of accessible, namely, a motor vehicle designed and manufactured, or converted, for the purpose of transporting persons who use mobility aids.

## **HC's Objective:**

Assess the accessibility requirements for HC's fleet by focussing on current and future accessibility standards, and ensuring fleet purchases meet those standards.

## **Commitments**

**Commitment 1:** Identify any potential accessibility features available that can be included in new HC fleet vehicle acquisitions

**Commitment 2:** Implement any new accessibility standards relating to fleet vehicles as prescribed by Treasury Board Secretariat and Public Services and Procurement Canada.

# Culture

The *Accessible Canada Act* also focusses on building accessibility confidence and creating a culture of accessibility within the federal public service.

At HC, through the Persons with Disabilities Network and allies, work has been underway to increase awareness of barriers, to create a ‘yes by default’ and ‘Nothing Without Us’ culture.

HC has raised awareness of the barriers faced by people with disabilities, through the engagement of the Network, by proactively responding to feedback from the persons with disabilities community, and through the development of this Accessibility Plan. HC has begun to put in place programs and supports to enable the full participation of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

More progress is required to ensure a representative workforce and to increase the hiring of persons with disabilities at all levels and in all functions.

Ongoing consultations with stakeholders in the persons with disabilities community will be required to inform research, policy and program development and design.

## HC's Objective

HC has a departmental culture which supports the inclusion of persons with disabilities and a vision to proactively eliminate and prevent barriers and to ensure greater opportunities for persons with disabilities, with emphasis on understanding and implementing a ‘Nothing Without Us’ approach.

## Commitments

**Commitment 1:** Promote an accessibility-informed culture that creates a positive, inclusive workplace.

**Commitment 2:** Ensure all HC employees have the knowledge and tools to become accessibility confident through training and engagement.

## Did You Know?

In 2020, HC launched the Leadership Council on Diversity and Inclusion. The Council is chaired by the Deputy Minister and Associate Deputy Minister, and is composed of representatives from employee networks and volunteers across HC. Working collaboratively with employees, the Council co-develops initiatives to promote a more diverse workforce and inclusive workplaces.

# Persons with Disabilities Network

The HC Persons with Disabilities Network was created in September 2002 as one of many initiatives to promote and support diversity. The volunteer network is made up of employees who have self-identified as a person with a disability. The Network is responsible for ensuring that the voice of persons with disabilities is considered in the development of policies that have direct impact on the work environment of persons with disabilities and their ability to perform their duties at HC. The Network includes a Chair, or co-Chairs, and a Deputy Minister-appointed senior-management level Champion. The chair, or co-chairs, and champion play a key role in advocacy and awareness raising for accessibility at HC.

**Email:** [pwdn-rph@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:pwdn-rph@hc-sc.gc.ca)

# Planning and Reporting Framework

This Accessibility Plan represents a continuation of HC's commitment to accessibility and marks the beginning of our commitment to publicly monitor and report on progress. The planning and reporting cycle will meet or exceed the requirements under the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#).

## Progress Reports

Progress reports must be published each year on the anniversary of the initial plan's publication to provide updates, refine commitments, and include any feedback received by the public.

HC is committed to continuing to consult as we prepare progress reports and future updates to the Accessibility Plan. Both the Accessibility Plan and the progress reports will outline how consultations occur.

## **Feedback Mechanism**

The primary method for monitoring barriers to accessibility and collecting input from employees and the public is through a feedback mechanism, a required component of the *Accessible Canada Act*. HC's feedback mechanism is a process for receiving and handling input on our Accessibility Plan and any accessibility barriers encountered when interacting with HC. The form to provide feedback is published on HC's page on Canada.ca, with a description of the process to submit the form.

The feedback received will be instrumental in refining HC's commitments and activities to align with the needs of persons with disabilities, and be reflected in the feedback section of future progress reports.

## **Performance Measurement**

In order to track progress on the accessibility commitments and activities, key performance indicators will be identified, encompassing the eight areas highlighted in this Accessibility Plan. Results will be updated as indicators are tracked within the Department over time. Progress on departmental accessibility levels will also continue to be assessed through the annual Public Service Employee Survey results.

# Conclusion

This Accessibility Plan is part of the ongoing efforts and commitment to the long-term goal of a barrier free Canada by 2040. Every HC employee has a role in increasing accessibility awareness and contributing to an accessible by default workplace of inclusion and acceptance. At the same time, the department must ensure programs and services are accessible by design and developed in consultation with persons with disabilities.