

**Minister of Families 2016-17
ANNUAL PLAN WITH RESPECT TO
THE ACCESSIBILITY FOR MANITOBANS ACT**

Introduction

As Minister responsible for *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (AMA), I am pleased to present the 2016-17 Annual Plan. As required by the AMA, this Annual Plan outlines the activities our Government will undertake in 2016-17 to advance Manitoba's accessibility legislation.

Among the highlights in 2016-17 are public awareness activities focusing on the Customer Service Standard, which became a regulation in November 2015. New resources will be created to inform the public about the standard. The Government of Manitoba will lead the way by becoming the first organization to comply with the customer service standard in November 2016.

As an indication of our commitment to the timely implementation of the AMA, in 2016-17, the Government will work on two accessibility standards. This year, the Accessibility Advisory Council (Council) will begin public consultations on an accessibility standard for employment. I am also pleased to announce the development of a third accessibility standard, in the area of Information and Communication.

2016 marks the first deadline for large public sector organizations that are leading the way in planning for accessibility. The Government of Manitoba, crown corporations, post-secondary institutions, school divisions, regional health authorities and Manitoba's ten largest municipalities will all be launching their accessibility plans by the end of the year. These organizations are consulting with citizens, students, and a variety of "customers" to determine priorities for action.

The Government of Manitoba's 2016-17 AMA Annual Plan targets six strategic priorities:

1. Development and Implementation of Standards, including Consultation
2. Government Leadership
3. Resource Development
4. Training
5. Public Awareness
6. Compliance

I will be working closely with the Council and the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) in accomplishing these and other plans to implement the AMA.

Strategic Priority 1: Development and implementation of standards, including consultation

Accessibility Standard in Employment

The development of an accessibility standard for employment will assist people with disabilities to secure and retain employment. Jobseekers will not be alone in benefitting from eliminating employment barriers. By creating equal opportunity for gainful employment, the Province of Manitoba will benefit from the increased income and well-being of its citizens and a reduced reliance on publicly funded income supports.

The Council is guiding Manitoba's development of an accessibility standard for employment. Based on the recommendations to the Council of its Employment Standard Development Committee, a discussion paper will be created and serve as the basis for public consultation. Rather than represent the views of Council members, the discussion paper is intended to elicit public discussion and improvements on the current draft proposal regarding an accessibility standard for employment.

The discussion paper will be posted to the AMA website, www.AccessibilityMB.ca for a 60-day period. Feedback may be offered online, by phone or in person at a forum that will be organized by the DIO. Following a review of comments and recommendations from the public, including affected stakeholders, the Council will prepare a report and recommendations to government for the creation of an accessibility standard for employment.

As Minister responsible for the AMA, I look forward to reviewing this report and to using it as the basis for the government's proposal for an accessibility standard in employment. The government's proposal will be posted for a further 60-day period for public comment late 2016-17, or early in the new fiscal year.

Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication

In September 2016, the Council will begin work on the next area of standard development in the area of accessible information and communication. Many businesses and organizations rely increasingly on electronic means of reaching their customers, clients or program participants. This standard will ensure Manitobans disabled by barriers have equal access to information and communication in its many forms. It will also ensure that Manitoba businesses and organizations reach their full market potential.

The Council will begin the standard development process with the creation of a seed document that offers an overview of the areas to be addressed. The Council will also create terms of reference and identify members to serve on the Information and Communication Standard Development Committee, with approval from the Minister. The committee will be tasked with proposing recommendations to the Council for the content of the accessibility standard for information and communication.

Members will represent the Council and affected stakeholders and will include individuals with related expertise.

Strategic Priority 2: Government Leadership

The Government of Manitoba has a responsibility to deliver programs and services in a fully accessible manner. In 2016, the Government will meet two AMA deadlines: In November the Government will lead the way in implementing the Customer Service Standard. By the end of December, the Government will also publicly launch the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan. One highlight is our Government's commitment to reach all civil servants with online training about the AMA and accessible customer service. The DIO will support the Civil Service Commission and the departmental accessibility coordinators to ensure barrier-free policies, programs and services across government.

By demonstrating leadership in accessibility, the Government of Manitoba is encouraging all public sector bodies, such as schools, health authorities, municipalities, as well as private and non-profit organizations to create accessible organizations with barrier-free customer service.

Strategic Priority 3: Resource Development

The focus of AMA resource development in 2016-17 is to support understanding and implementation of the Customer Service Standard. The DIO will develop: tip sheets for employers, employees and customers; frequently asked questions on the AMA and the Customer Service Standard; a checklist for organizations affected by the Customer Service Standard and sample policies. In addition, the DIO will continue to support public sector organizations with tools to assist them in creating and implementing their accessibility plans, including PowerPoint presentations on the AMA, tools to involve organizational members in creating an Accessibility Plan and to conduct stakeholder consultations, among other resources. The DIO will continue to develop its user-friendly, accessible repository of information and resources at www.AccessibilityMB.ca

Strategic Priority 4: Training

Every year, Manitoba celebrates Manitoba Access Awareness Week (MAAW) during the first week in June to raise awareness and to celebrate the significant contributions of Manitobans with disabilities. In 2016-17, DIO is once again targeting public sector organizations in its awareness events. Training will focus on web accessibility, how to use surveys as a consultation tool, and lessons learned in introducing an accessibility plan into a large organizational structure. The DIO is grateful to its volunteer expert trainers from Everything Accessibility (Lisa Snider), Government of Manitoba (Guy Gordon) and University of Manitoba (Jackie Gruber). Our training events also offer an opportunity to network with disability organizations that have expertise related to implementation of the AMA.

In 2016-17, the DIO will continue to provide regular training to obligated sectors on how to create an Accessibility Plan in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba, including all

regions identified by Regional Health Authorities. The DIO aims to train all organizations with compliance deadlines of 2016 and 2017.

Strategic Priority 5: Public Awareness

With approaching deadlines for Accessibility Plans and compliance with the Customer Service Standard, the DIO will put increasing emphasis on new avenues for public awareness. In their significant efforts to consult with clients about accessibility priorities, public sector organizations will help the DIO reach the public in a variety of ways: Home owners will receive information about the AMA via their Hydro bills. During MAAW, every Liquor Mart receipt will request participation in an accessibility survey. Likewise print materials and signage at Manitoba Casinos will ask patrons how accessibility may be approved. Many municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg, as well as regional health authorities, colleges, universities and school divisions, will all assist in engaging their employees and clients in a discussion about accessibility. In most instances, survey respondents are also directed to www.AccessibilityMB.ca for more information. The engagement made possible through consultation is critical to creating both awareness and action about the AMA.

In 2016-17, the DIO will continue to create public awareness through established channels between government departments and businesses, organizations and individuals. The DIO will also reach out to associations representing businesses and organizations, including religious institutions that will be affected by the legislation in the coming years. PowerPoint presentations, posters, FAQs and other tools will assist these organizations to facilitate discussions with or without government representation. The DIO will continue to work with key organizations, like the United Way, to build accessibility into the culture of Manitoba businesses and not-for-profits.

The AMA and the topic of accessibility are quickly becoming one of the Government of Manitoba's leading points of interest on social media. Facebook and Twitter will continue to have a significant role in the DIO's media strategy. The DIO will also continue to be proactive in working with various media to share positive stories about the benefits of accessibility.

Strategic Priority 6: Development of Compliance Measures

Following up on an environmental scan of existing provincial inspection and enforcement regimes, in 2016-17 the DIO will take next steps to analyze the findings for further consideration by the new government. The aim is to support the accessibility legislation with inspection and enforcement as outlined in the legislation. Effective models in other areas of government will help guide the next steps in establishing a compliance regime for the AMA.

In Closing

2016-17 is a time of new beginnings in the Manitoba Legislature. The Progressive Conservative Party supported the enactment of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* when it was passed in December, 2013. As a Government, we will continue to support its implementation through the creation of new standards and by offering information and tools to facilitate compliance.

The Government of Manitoba is committed to strengthening our economy. We believe that by investing in accessibility, we are investing in new business opportunities, promoting innovative design and expanding Manitoba's market potential. By investing in accessible infrastructure, customers, employees and private and public sector employers will all benefit. Manitobans with disabilities are a valuable asset to current and future labor needs. The 2016-17 consultations on an accessibility standard for employment will offer you an opportunity to join government in considering how we can promote more accessible employment processes to ensure all employees – new and senior staff - will benefit.

By removing barriers in key areas of daily living, beginning with the implementation of the Customer Service Standard by November 2016, by engaging the public in discussions on accessible employment and by beginning the work to develop an accessibility standard in Information and Communication, 2016-17 will offer significant progress on the AMA. I am proud to assist in guiding the next steps in moving forward with this important legislation.

Signature