

Ministerial 2019/20 Annual Report

# The Accessibility for Manitobans Act



**Available in alternate formats, upon request.**

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## Message from the Minister of Families

I am pleased to submit this 2019/20 Annual Report of Manitoba's accessibility initiatives under my new title, conveyed by Cabinet, of Minister responsible for Accessibility. The report provides a summary of initiatives to support the implementation of [The Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#) (AMA) from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020.



On May 1, 2019, our government was proud to enact the second accessibility standard under the AMA: the [Accessible Employment Standard Regulation](#). This standard will help more than 41,500 Manitoba organizations and businesses identify and remove workplace barriers. This annual report outlines the variety of resources, training and other initiatives that took place to create public awareness and encourage early compliance with this new standard, along with the [Customer Service Standard Regulation](#), enacted in 2015.

The first priority of the Accessibility Standard for Employment is to ensure the safety of employees affected by barriers during an emergency, as explained in the [Workplace Emergency Response Toolkit](#). The government set a one-year, May 1, 2020, deadline to meet the two safety requirements out of concern for employee safety, for instance, during emergency evacuations. We did not anticipate the province itself would soon be in a state of emergency.

By early 2020, there was growing awareness that COVID-19 would force organizations around the world to adjust how things are normally done to keep their employees and customers safe. For example, employers supported having employees with compromised immune systems continue to work from home, even when other colleagues returned to the office. In effect, Manitoba employers are already complying with the essence of the new Accessibility Standard for Employment.

Similarly, some people with physical disabilities have been impressed by how quickly businesses removed pandemic-related barriers to customer service, in a way that supports the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service. These individuals welcome curbside pickup, home delivery and online shopping.

Nonetheless, the Manitoba government is aware that the impact of the pandemic is particularly harsh for people with disabilities. This annual report includes some highlights of our response in the section called Government Leadership. We are grateful for the

vigilance of our long-term care facilities, support workers, as well as the efforts of families, friends and neighbours to support our fellow Manitobans.

The 2019/20 initiatives to enhance accessibility and inclusion are integral to a broader effort to keep everyone safe. In Manitoba, we will continue to rise to the challenges of the pandemic, thanks to hard work, resilience and kindness. We are all in this together.

Sincerely,

*Heather Stefanson*

Minister of Families, and Minister Responsible for Accessibility

# Priority Area #1: Accessibility Standards

## Standard Development

One of the highlights of 2019/20 was the progress made in standard development. At the outset of the year, the government directed the [Accessibility Advisory Council](#) (council) to consult and prepare draft proposals for each of the three remaining accessibility standards, including Information and Communications, Transportation, and the Design of Public Spaces. By March 2020, when COVID-19 disrupted operations, the council was very close to meeting this target.

### Standard Development Progress by March 31, 2020:

- Customer Service: enacted November 2015 and fully in effect for all organizations with at least one employee.
- Employment: enacted May 1, 2019, with two safety requirements affecting all Manitoba employers, and government leading the way with full compliance by May 1, 2020.
- Information and Communications: public consultation took place in May 2019, and council submitted its recommendations to government in September 2019.
- Transportation: public consultation took place in November 2019, and the council submitted its report to government in January 2020.
- Design of Public Spaces: public consultation took place in January 2020, and the related standard development committee is finalizing its recommendations for review by the council.

Over 100 Manitoba organizations and individuals participated in the public consultation about the Information and Communications Standard in May 2019. Stakeholder comments helped shape the council's final recommendations to government. Based on council's recommendations and input from representatives from several government departments, the government is currently preparing a proposed standard for a second period of public consultation.

The council appointed a group of expert stakeholders to develop the fourth accessibility standard in public transportation. The council made minor changes to the standard development committee's recommendations before the public consultation period in

November 2019. A broad range of Manitoba interest groups participated, including smaller municipalities without public transportation infrastructure, seniors and supporters of active transportation.

In 2019/20, the council also created a standard development committee to lend its expertise to the development of a final standard affecting the design of public spaces. The new regulation will fill a vital role, because existing accessibility standards affecting the design of public spaces are non-binding. The twenty times the committee met is only a fraction of the time spent analyzing and determining the best practices from accessibility standards established by the City of Winnipeg, Ontario, the United States and Europe. The public consultation period in January 2020 raised further areas for consideration. COVID-19 disrupted this work in March 2020, but it has now resumed.

The three proposed accessibility standards targeting Information and Communication, Transportation, and the Design of Public Spaces, have enormous potential to improve daily living for Manitobans disabled by barriers. The Manitoba government is indebted to the members of the standard development committees and the council for their important work. Likewise, the quality of public participation in the various 2019/20 consultations has been remarkable. Following further analysis of the council's recommendations, the government will offer a second, 60-day consultation period for each of the three standards. The government will consider this input before introducing the standards to Cabinet for enactment.

## Launch of the Accessibility Standard for Employment

On May 1, 2019, Manitoba enacted a second accessibility standard targeting employment. By removing barriers to employment, people with disabilities and Manitoba employers will benefit from a broader pool of skilled and diverse employees. Because safety comes first, the Accessibility Standard for Employment sets a May 1, 2020 deadline for all Manitoba employers to:

- 1) Create emergency response information for employees with disabilities.
- 2) Seek their agreement in informing and assigning individuals, who agree to assist.



The Accessibility Standard for Employment calls on Manitoba's employers to provide reasonable accommodations at all stages of employment. This includes during recruiting, hiring, and while on-the-job, and also includes barrier-free training and advancement, as well as during a return-to-work process. The standard offers progressive deadlines to meet these requirements:

- May 2020: Manitoba government
- May 2021: public sector organizations, including Crown corporations, regional health authorities, school divisions, universities, colleges and larger municipalities
- May 2022: business, non-profit organizations and small municipalities

## Priority Area #2: Educating into Compliance

### Tools and Training

Like other regulations, accessibility requirements may be enforced in the future by penalties. For now, the Manitoba government is committed to educating into compliance by creating tools and training resources that make the new regulations easy to follow, and that help Manitoba organizations understand and embrace accessibility. Everyone benefits.

In 2019/20, much of the focus on new tools and training was on the Accessibility Standard for Employment. The government created the following resources in English and French and posted these for easy access at [AccessibilityMB.ca](https://www.accessibilitymb.ca) and [AccessibiliteMB.ca](https://www.accessibiliteMB.ca):

- Introduction to the Accessibility Standard for Employment ([PDF](#))
- Checklist for Business and Non-Profit Organizations ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Checklist for Public Sector Organizations ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Checklist for Small Municipalities ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Toolkit to Keep Employees with Disabilities Safe ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Guide to Create an Individualized Accommodation Plan Process and Policy ([Word](#))

To encourage discussion in organizations about the benefits of inclusion in the workplace, the government also continued to promote the [Accessibility Works Infographic](#) and the [Discussing Accessibility in the Workplace](#) information sheet.

Online and in-person training is an integral part of our efforts to create awareness and compliance with accessibility legislation. In response to the [Four-Year Review of the](#)

[Effectiveness of the Implementation of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#), the Disabilities Issues Office enhanced its online training by collaborating with local experts to produce the video, [Accessibility is Good for Everyone](#). In the short video, a variety of Manitobans with disabilities and businesses offer advice on how to create accessibility for customers with disabilities. This tool complements individualized learning with an opportunity for group discussion. Between the launch of the video in October 2019 and March 31, 2020, it had been viewed over 7,000 times.



By early 2020, work began on developing a video for the second standard, targeting employment. A number of employment agencies and disability organizations participated in developing the plan for the video and in identifying participants. In addition, government invested in a new online learning platform to enhance the interactivity of its web-based, learning modules. Stay tuned for free access to the new video and online learning that will be posted on [AccessibilityMB.ca](#).

In addition to online resources and training, the government continued to offer workshops and presentations for employers who must comply with accessibility legislation. The latter group included diverse organizations, such as Occupational Safety and Health Professionals, the Canadian Public Relations Society, Physiotherapy Association of Manitoba, North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH), and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba.



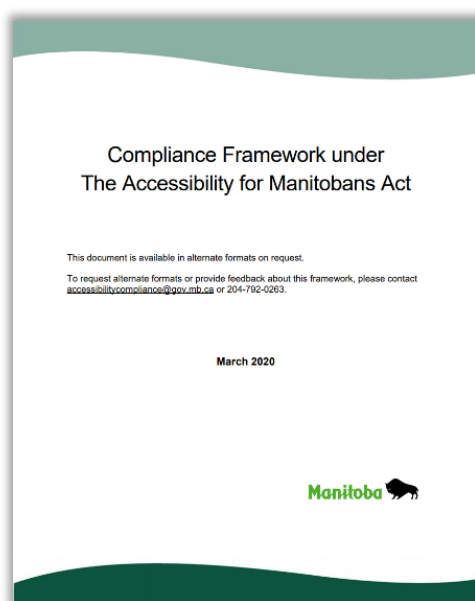
The government also collaborated with a number of local disability organizations that offer training and consultation to businesses and non-profit organizations throughout the province, such as Manitoba Possible (previously called the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities), the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, and Community Futures. A listing of community organizations and services is available on [MB.211.ca](http://MB.211.ca) by selecting People With Disabilities.



## Compliance

In response to a recommendation made in the [2018 review of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act \(AMA\)](#), a new office was created in 2019/20 to oversee compliance of requirements under the legislation, as well as accessibility standards. This office was named The Accessibility Compliance Secretariat and is located within Manitoba Families. The secretariat functions independently from the Disabilities Issues Office. While the latter supports the Manitoba government and external stakeholders in a variety of accessibility-related issues, the secretariat:

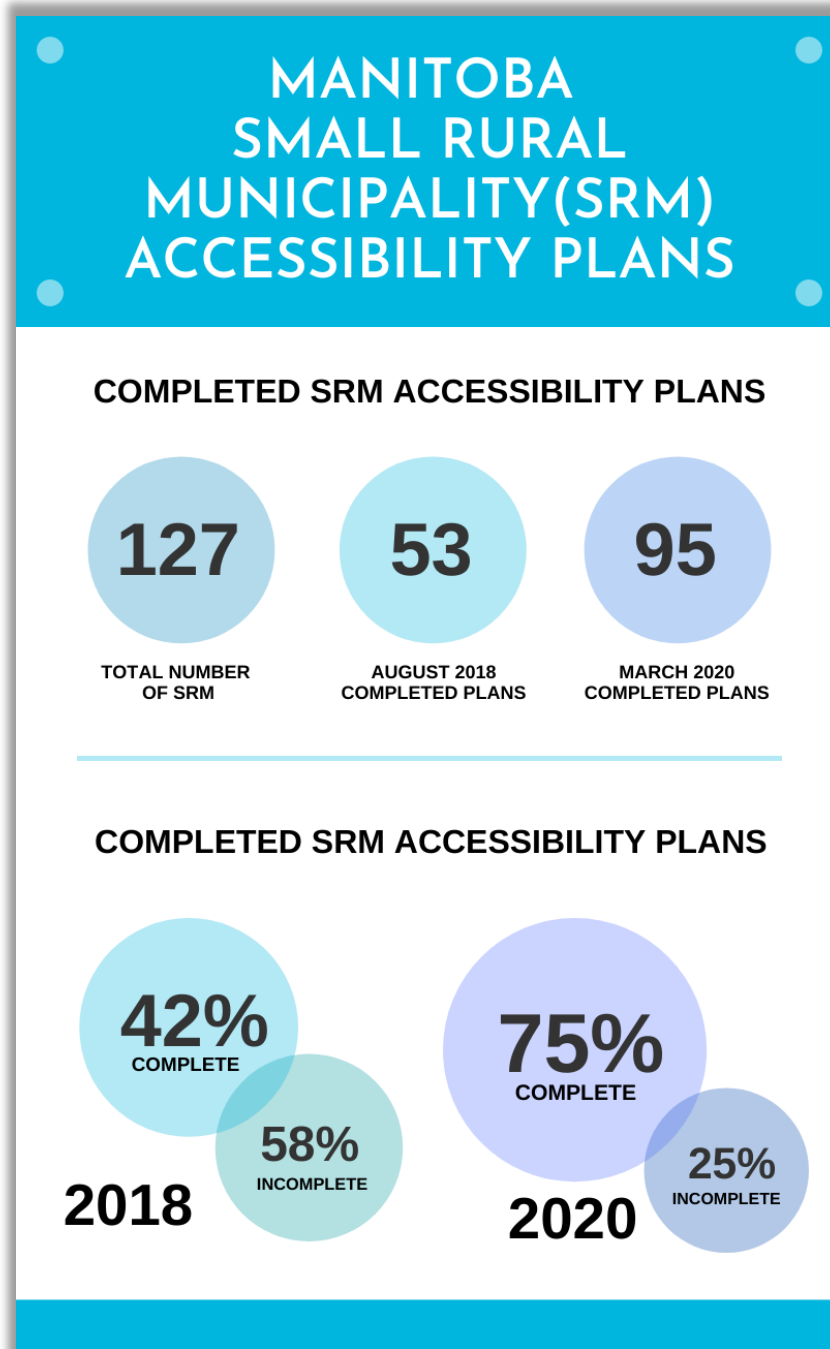
- monitors compliance of accessibility requirements among organizations and businesses in the private and public sectors
- works with organizations to answer questions related to accessibility requirements
- enforces compliance



In March 2020, the Secretariat released an [accessibility compliance framework](#) that describes the different steps in the compliance process, including education and awareness raising, conducting reviews and inspections, and issuing sanctions, such as penalties. The accessibility compliance framework places a strong emphasis on education and providing guidance to help organizations achieve and return to compliance before orders and penalties are issued.

In 2019/20, the secretariat worked with small municipalities to promote compliance with the requirement to develop accessibility plans. The plans aim to engage organizations to

identify and then plan for the removal of barriers in policies, processes and practices. As of March 31, 2020, there were 127 small municipalities in Manitoba. The number of small municipalities that had written accessibility plans increased from 42 per cent (n = 53) in August 2018 to 75 per cent (n = 95) on March 31, 2020. The secretariat will continue to work with municipalities in a collaborative way that promotes practical and proactive accessibility planning in all of Manitoba's diverse communities.



[The Accessibility Standard for Employment Regulation](#) came into effect May 1, 2019.

All Manitoba employers were required to comply with the following two requirements by May 1, 2020:

1. Create emergency response information to help employees with disabilities stay safe during emergencies.
2. Ask employees who require assistance during an emergency for permission to share information with individuals who agree to help.

To ensure employers had time to prepare to comply with the important emergency-related requirements, the secretariat sent multiple notices to over 3,800 recipients about upcoming compliance deadlines related to accessible emergency planning in the workplace. The letters included links to practical tools for organizations to adapt as they saw fit, including [The Workplace Emergency Response Information Toolkit](#).

In 2019/20, the secretariat also answered calls and emails associated with compliance concerns, and assisted members of the public and regulated organizations to understand requirements under accessibility legislation.

## Priority Area #3: Government Leadership

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act requires public sector organizations to create and integrate accessibility initiatives into an accessibility plan. Affected organizations include Crown corporations, school divisions, colleges and universities, regional health authorities and municipalities. By 2019/20, it was time for these organizations to review and update their two-year plans. The government assisted by creating a [template](#) for updating an organization's accessibility plan – mandatory for public sector organizations, but useful for all organizations.

The updated [Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan](#) (MGAP) sets out strategies to spearhead policy and program initiatives across government through to December 2020. All departments have accessibility coordinators who act as resources for managers and staff on department-specific initiatives and measures to improve accessibility. Networking among accessibility coordinators encourages sharing best practices and adapting government-wide initiatives to meet departmental services and priorities. All civil servants across government must complete online training in accessible customer service.

One of the highlights of the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan is the appointment of the civil service commissioner as the Manitoba government's accessibility champion. As champion, she chairs the Manitoba government's Accessibility Steering Committee

that provides overall direction for advancing accessible and inclusive Manitoba government services. The Civil Service Commission (CSC), the accessibility coordinator for Manitoba Families, and the Disabilities Issues Office, provide support to the commissioner and to the departmental accessibility coordinators in implementing the government’s accessibility plan.

Year	Government of Manitoba AMA Online Course Completion Rate (%)
As at March 31, 2019	68.5%
As at March 31, 2020	85.7%

Figure 1. March 2019 and 2020 Manitoba Government AMA Online Course Completion Rate (%).

When COVID-19 disrupted the lives of Manitobans in March, the pandemic’s impact introduced new challenges for Manitobans disabled by barriers. For instance, social distancing is not possible for Manitobans who rely on support workers for daily living, whether at home or in a care facility. Conversely, for individuals who are already living in isolation, additional distancing measures can have detrimental mental health consequences. The Manitoba government recognized these issues as it developed strategies to address the needs of Manitobans with disabilities, and ensured all information related to COVID-19 was communicated in an accessible way, including American Sign Language.

The Disabilities Issues Office collaborated with [SAFE Work Manitoba](#) and was featured in their [COVID-19 toolkit](#), helping ensure the safety of employees during this emergency, as required by the Accessibility Standard for Employment. The office also provided tips to Manitoba businesses and organizations on how to provide accessible customer service during COVID-19.



## Priority Area #4: Raising Public Awareness

Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office is responsible for creating public awareness, tools and training to support accessibility legislation. In 2019/20, it focussed its efforts on introducing the Accessibility Standard for Employment and expanding awareness about accessible customer service.

During 2019/20, the government posted a series of ads and articles in city and regional newspapers and newsletters geared to affected businesses and organizations. Besides traditional printed ads, the Accessibility Works campaign appeared on Tim Horton's television screens and was also printed on reusable cloth shopping bags. A second theme alerted Manitoba employers about the requirements to keep employees safe prior to the May 1, 2020 deadline.

Government continued its efforts to create awareness about the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service by reprinting placards that promoted requests for accessible services by asking: How can we help? Comment pouvons-nous aider? The counter and wall signs come with a brief overview of how to create accessibility for specific types of barriers, for instance, affecting mobility, vision, hearing or understanding. The understanding of the four accessibility icons was reinforced by printing small decals for application on print materials (see report cover). Finally, in response to a request from Manitoba restaurants, government produced decals and postcards telling patrons that their service animals are welcome, but pets are not. Posters, signs and other accessibility tools are available [online](#), or in print from the Disabilities Issues Office.



In 2019/20, the Disabilities Issues Office welcomed the opportunity to offer presentations to specific sectors and to participate in tradeshows, such as the MHA MRFA Show, co-hosted by the Manitoba Hotel Association and the Manitoba Restaurant and Food Services Association.

In an effort to maintain contact with interested organizations and individuals, the government encourages subscriptions to [Accessibility News](#), a newsletter that informs subscribers on a quarterly basis about progress on the standards, local accessibility practices and champions, new tools and upcoming events. In 2019/20, the subscriber list grew from about 800 to 1,100.

From April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020, there were **78,716** visits to [AccessibilityMB.ca](#).

All public awareness initiatives direct Manitobans to [AccessibilityMB.ca](#) or [Accessibiilte.MB.ca](#). In response to visitor feedback, in September 2019, the government added a search engine to assist with navigation. In 2019/20, the website had almost 80,000 visits.

## Other Public Awareness Initiatives

In June 2019, the annual celebration of Manitoba Access Awareness Week (MAAW) featured a symposium about accessible and inclusive employment. Special guest Maureen Haan, Executive Director of the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, provided a keynote presentation about the business case for hiring persons with disabilities. The Disabilities Issues Office built upon her message with an introduction to the Accessibility Standard for Employment. As always, the panel participation of Manitobans with disabilities was a highlight of the symposium. Many thanks to Winnipeg's Independent Living Resource Centre for coordinating the panel discussion that included a variety of insights and recommendations on how employers and employees can collaborate to keep everybody safe. The symposium was a big success, based on the response of approximately 200 people in attendance, at least half of whom were new to Manitoba Access Awareness Week.



Another important public awareness opportunity is Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM), which many American and Canadian employers celebrate annually during October. The 2019/20 AbilityExpo breakfast keynote presenter was Costco manager, Anthony Taza, who shared convincing personal and work experiences about the value added through inclusive employment practices. His message was echoed by a variety of local business panelists



representing manufacturing, customer service and human resource management. The Disabilities Issues Office used this opportunity to offer a presentation on the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service and to launch the video [Accessibility is Good for Everyone](#).

## Priority Area #5: Accountability and AMA Review

In February 2019, the final report of the first independent review of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act was released. The mandated review included:

- 52 recommendations targeting improvements to the accessibility standard development process
- compliance on the development of accessibility plans
- increased public awareness on accessibility, strengthened leadership from the Manitoba government
- clarified roles of the Disabilities Issues Office and the Accessibility Advisory Council

The Manitoba Government Accessibility Steering Committee monitored action on the implementation of the review's recommendations. As of March 31, 2020:

- 69 per cent or 36 of the 52 recommendations had been completed
- 23 per cent or 12 of the 52 recommendations were in progress

The government is committed to continuing its work to implement additional recommendations from the review in 2020/21. Highlights of recommendations that were fully implemented in 2019/20 include:

- establishing concurrent committees for the development of accessibility standards, to ensure steady progress in this area
- finalizing and making publicly available an accessibility compliance framework
- designating the Minister of Families as the Minister Responsible for Accessibility
- raising the threshold of organizations required to document policies under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act standards from 20 to 50 employees, in line with Ontario

## Looking Forward to 2020/21

Despite the pandemic, the Manitoba government continues to be ambitious in planning the way forward. The website [AccessibilityMB.ca](http://AccessibilityMB.ca) already acts as the centre for feedback and learning to support the development and implementation of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. As a result of COVID-19, the focus on online consultation, learning and social media engagement has taken on new significance. In 2020/21, Manitoba will:

- √ Continue to make progress towards passing the remaining three standards affecting Information and Communications, Transportation and the Design of Public Spaces.
- √ With leadership from the Accessibility Advisory Council, begin a review of the implementation of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service.
- √ Create and distribute a handbook and policy template to facilitate organizational compliance with the Accessibility Standard for Employment.
- √ Produce and distribute a video to explain and support inclusive and accessible employment practices.
- √ Introduce a new online training platform to help employers meet the employee training requirements of the Customer Service and Employment standards.
- √ Celebrate Manitoba accessibility champions with accessibility awards, as recommended by the independent review.
- √ Celebrate events such as Manitoba Access Awareness Week and Disability Employment Awareness Month (using webinars if required due to COVID-19).
- √ Build strategic alliances with organizations such as SAFE Work Manitoba.
- √ Update the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan for 2021/22.
- √ Conduct a review of a sample of accessibility plans among large public sector organizations, and continue to support small municipalities and school divisions to develop and implement their accessibility plans.
- √ Monitor and support compliance with current requirements of the accessibility standards.



Given the evolving impact of COVID-19, some adjustments to programming priorities may be necessary in the coming year. Nonetheless, we will continue to strengthen our connections to communities and engage with the public in new and innovative ways. Moving forward, the pandemic has only reinforced our commitment to achieving a fully accessible Manitoba for everyone. We look forward to the year ahead and the new opportunities it brings.

## Contact Information

If you have any questions, require this information in an alternate format, wish to subscribe to Accessibility News, or are interested in attending a training workshop, please contact the Disabilities Issues Office.

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