

Minister's Annual Report

2018/19

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act



Province of Manitoba

Approved: July 2019

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Please contact the Disabilities Issues Office at DIO@gov.mb.ca or 204-945-7613
or toll free at 1-800-282-8069, extension 7613.

Message from the Minister of Families

As Minister responsible for [The Accessibility for Manitobans Act \(AMA\)](#), I am pleased to present the 2018/19 Annual Report. The report offers a summary of the activities that took place from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019 to advance the development and implementation of the AMA.

November 1, 2018 marked a significant milestone for the AMA. It was on this date that the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service came into effect for thousands of Manitoba businesses and non-profit organizations with at least one employee. To support these organizations, the Manitoba government introduced a variety of tools, templates and checklists, as well as free online training.

Another highlight in 2018/19 was the release of the four-year independent review of the effectiveness of the AMA. Our government has already taken action on many of the review's 52 recommendations. We remain committed to developing all five standards under the AMA by the end of 2020. We will begin almost immediately by enacting a second accessibility standard on employment.

The progress made in 2018/19 was the result of a commitment to accessibility that extends well beyond government. As Minister responsible for the AMA, I wish to thank the Accessibility Advisory Council for its ongoing leadership. My gratitude also goes to the dedicated standard development committees, whose subject matter expertise sets a strong foundation for each of the AMA standards.

The real test for Manitoba's accessibility legislation lies in the citizens who come to expect accessible goods and services and the businesses and organizations prepared to meet those expectations.

Together, we will attain our vision of a Manitoba that is accessible and inclusive for all.

Sincerely,

Heather Stefanson

Minister of Families

Accessibility Standard Development

Accessibility standards are the building blocks of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA). The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service has already set the stage for raising public awareness and providing training to the thousands of businesses that must comply by offering accessible goods and services.

The remaining four standards will build on this awareness and provide requirements for other key areas of daily living. In 2018/19, the Manitoba government and the Accessibility Advisory Council (Council) were at various stages in developing these standards with an ultimate goal to enact all five standards by the end of 2020.

Standard Development Progress by March 31, 2019

- Customer Service: enacted November 2015, with private sector deadline to comply three years later, November 1, 2018
- Employment: Cabinet is preparing to enact the standard
- Information and Communications: Council is preparing for public consultation and feedback
- Design of Public Spaces: standard development committee is creating foundational report to Council
- Transportation: standard development committee is creating foundational report to Council



Final Preparations of the Accessibility Standard for Employment

During 2018/19, the Manitoba government's legal analysts finalized the wording of the second accessibility standard targeting employment before introducing it to Cabinet in Spring 2019. At the same time, Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office began its work on public awareness and tools to support compliance with the [Accessibility Standard for Employment](#).

The aim of this standard is to identify and remove employment-related barriers that can prevent individuals from accessing recruitment, hiring or return-to-work processes. The proposed standard will also help keep employees safe by requiring employers to consider accessibility during emergencies, particularly evacuations.

The Accessibility Standard for Employment promises to enhance Manitoba's economy by removing barriers to employment for skilled and dedicated workers affected by disability, temporary injury and illness, or aging into disability.



Progress on the Three Remaining Accessibility Standards

In 2018/19, the Manitoba government and the Council made substantial progress on the remaining three standards affecting information and communications, the design of public spaces and transportation.

In September, the Information and Communications Standard Development Committee submitted its report to Council. The Council has since focussed most of its 11 meetings on how to create a regulation that will ensure evolving technologies affecting information and communications enhance, rather than limit, accessibility for Manitobans with disabilities. The outcome of the Council's deliberations were put in a discussion document that will act as the basis for public consultation in early 2019/20.

In the meantime, the Manitoba government provided the Council with Terms of Reference to guide the creation and development of standards affecting the design of public spaces and transportation. The Council created two nine-member committees that include stakeholders with technical expertise and others with lived experience. These committees began their work in the fall and were still meeting regularly at the end of the fiscal year, with a goal to provide the Council their reports in 2019/20.

[Summaries of meeting discussions](#) are available for public review on AccessibilityMB.ca.

Public Awareness and Training

Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) is responsible for creating public awareness of our accessibility legislation and the tools and training required to help affected organizations comply with the law. In 2018/19, the primary focus was on introducing the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service to over 41,000 Manitoba businesses and non-profit organizations.

Promoting the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

As part of year two of a three-year communications strategy, the Manitoba government posted seven print ads in September and October 2018, including one in French, informing businesses about the upcoming implementation date for the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service.

In addition to the print ad, a social media ad campaign reached many individuals and resulted in thousands of new visits to AccessibilityMB.ca to learn more. Between April 1, 2018 and March 31, 2019, the website had 116,239 views.



To facilitate access to targeted tools and training, the ads direct visitors to a new business and non-profit page. The page lists the eight requirements of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service and offers a variety of user-friendly guides, templates and checklists. Most of these were revised or created in 2018/19.

List of Bilingual Tools to Support Accessible Customer Service

- Employers' Handbook on Accessible Customer Service ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Sample Accessible Customer Service Policy ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Checklist: The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- Tips for Employees on Accessible Customer Service ([PDF](#)) ([Word](#))
- FAQ's about the Customer Service Standard ([Word](#))

The same tools have also been adapted for the public sector, which has a separate area on the website. Visitors to the site will find a large resource section with tools designed to help users understand, promote and create accessibility. The resource section also lists local accessibility services, such as Braille creation.

In response to requests from Manitoba employers for free accessible customer service staff training, a 20-minute narrated [online training video](#) was created. This tool is complemented by a facilitator's guide to support discussion about accessibility priorities in individual workplaces, as well as a knowledge check for learners. Launched in November 2018, the video had 3,824 views by March 31, 2019.



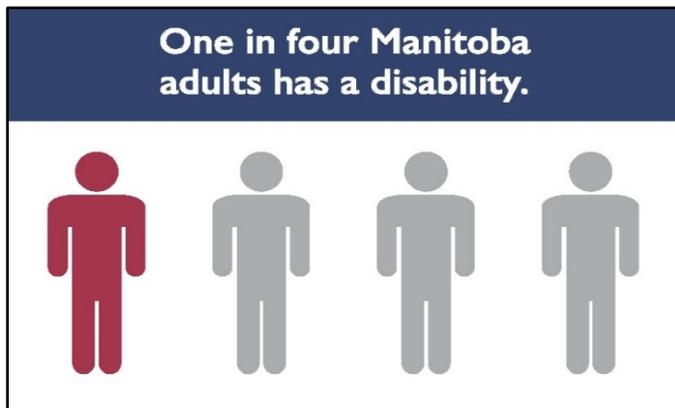
[AccessibilityMB.ca](#) website provides a great source of independent access for businesses and organizations throughout Manitoba. However, many organizations prefer in-person consultation and training to help customize the information for their needs. The DIO provides this training to employers who want to learn how to introduce new accessibility policies and practices in their workplaces.

In 2018/19, over 400 individuals attended the workshops held monthly in Winnipeg and by request in regions throughout Manitoba. In addition, approximately 2,500 individuals attended presentations and tradeshow in which DIO staff participated, including during Manitoba's Small Business Week and the Manitoba Hotel Association and Manitoba Restaurant & Foodservices Association Trade Show.

A number of local disability organizations have also developed expertise and training to help businesses and other organizations comply with the AMA. These include the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities, the Independent Living Resource Centre and Community Futures (the latter operates throughout rural Manitoba). A listing of community organizations and services is available by visiting "disability awareness" at [MB.211.ca](#).

Creating Awareness about Accessible Employment

While the next standard for employment was being finalized, the department began work on tools to help create public awareness. An information sheet called “*Discussing Accessibility in the Workplace*” was developed and employers are encouraged to post this on workplace bulletin boards and other spaces where employees gather. The goal is to get employees talking about the importance of workplace accommodations, and to counter false assumptions about the individualized supports that the employers may offer. In addition, the DIO created an infographic poster that uses statistics and factual research to promote accessible employment.



Other Public Awareness Initiatives

In an effort to maintain contact with interested organizations and individuals, six issues of Accessibility News were produced in 2018/19. This concise update provides email subscribers with up-to-date information about progress on the standards, examples of excellent local accessibility practices, new tools and upcoming events. Unveiled in December 2017, subscriptions grew from 290 to 788 during 2018/19. New subscribers can sign up by visiting the [newsletter page](#) of AccessibilityMB.ca, or by contacting the DIO directly.

Building on a successful and practical public awareness opportunity, in March 2018, 1,500 bilingual signs were printed to encourage requests for accessible services: “How can we help? Comment pouvons-nous aider?” The 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 signs are available [online](#) or in print from the DIO.

Manitoba Access Awareness Week (June 10-16, 2018) featured a symposium that focused on the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service. Keynote presenter Alfred Spencer, of the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, shared the lessons learned after a decade of accessible customer service in that province. Mr. Spencer spoke about how municipalities are leading the way to creating a more accessible Ontario. He also explained how government, municipalities and other organizations are encouraging businesses to introduce barrier-free products and services by inserting clauses that insist on accessibility into contracts. Following his presentation, two panels of businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals with disabilities discussed the challenges and successes of removing barriers to customer service in Manitoba. Notably, of the almost 200 individuals who attended the event, half were new to Manitoba Access Awareness Week and promised to return in 2019!

Another important public awareness opportunity for accessibility legislation is Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM), which is celebrated in many American states and Canadian provinces during October. The DIO assisted in coordinating the AbilityExpo that featured a keynote address by champion inclusive employer, Home Depot Canada Inc. A panel of local business leaders also offered insights from their experiences in hiring employees with disabilities.

Compliance

Manitoba is working to strike the right balance to ensure effective enforcement of the AMA, while carefully considering options to encourage compliance. In 2018/19, compliance efforts focused on “educating into compliance.” Educating into compliance means providing support to organizations in ways that best encourage and promote their compliance with the AMA, its standards and deadlines. This includes targeted outreach, awareness raising, and developing and refining tools, resources and training that are tailored for each sector.

By way of example, the Director of the AMA led a direct mailing campaign in October to remind 41,000 businesses about their November 1 deadline to meet their obligations under the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service. This letter was emailed to over 3,500 professional associations, business and community member organizations, many of whom agreed to share the letter with their memberships. The letter included a variety of tailored, user-friendly tools and resources. This proactive approach to supporting organizations will be applied as each new standard comes into effect.

Public sector organizations are required to have accessibility plans and to comply with the Customer Service Standard Regulation. To support, assess and track their compliance, in 2018/19, the DIO continued regular outreach and awareness raising to

remind them about their obligations under the law and to provide them with tools, resources and training to assist them in complying. Nearly all large public sector organizations were in compliance with posting their first accessibility plans.

Issues raised by members of the public were documented to inform future compliance actions. When a concern was reported, the involved organizations were contacted to help educate and facilitate compliance with the AMA. The focus is on education and working with organizations and people with disabilities to find solutions.

As work continues over time, compliance and enforcement initiatives, processes and timelines will be reviewed and refined.

Government Leadership

In 2018/19, the government updated the [Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan](#) (MGAP) to strengthen current policies and program initiatives and to set out new strategies to lead the way on accessibility in 2019 through 2020. This government-wide plan addresses activities affecting all provincial government departments, such as mandatory training of civil servants in accessible customer service. All departments have accessibility coordinators who act as a resource for managers and staff regarding any department-specific initiatives and measures to improve accessibility. Networking among accessibility coordinators encourages the sharing of best practices among departments.

One of the highlights of the 2019 and 2020 MGAP is the appointment of the Civil Service Commissioner as the Manitoba government's Accessibility Champion. As Champion, the Civil Service Commissioner 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) provides support to the Commissioner and to the departmental accessibility coordinators in implementing MGAP. The Commissioner met the coordinators in February 2019 to emphasize the importance of their role in supporting the government's accessibility priorities.

Departments are expected to support the overall plan and may have complementary plans for their specific operations and priorities. One example of a departmental initiative is the accessible beach pathways introduced in Manitoba parks by the Department of Sustainable Development. As illustrated below, the heavy mat allows easy lake access to beach-goers who need firm footing or who use assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and walkers. Signage also serves public awareness.



All public sector organizations show leadership in accessibility through the creation and implementation of accessibility plans. In 2018/19, as required by the AMA, 66 larger public sector organizations began updating their plans. These organizations include regional health authorities, Crown corporations, school divisions, post-secondary institutions and Manitoba's 10 largest municipalities. The updated plans of the 127 smaller municipalities and Agencies, Boards and Commissions are due in 2019/20.

To help support public sector leadership, the DIO offers targeted information and resources on [AccessibilityMB.ca](http://www.AccessibilityMB.ca), including a new template on how to update accessibility plans.

Four-Year Review of the AMA

Section 39(1) of the AMA, mandates the Minister to undertake an independent review of the legislation every four years with an aim to more effectively implement the AMA. Accordingly, Ms. Theresa Harvey Pruden, who undertook the review, met with numerous stakeholders from government, the disability community, the public sector and representatives from business and non-profit organizations. She conducted a public consultation on June 20, 2018 and invited additional feedback via a dedicated email address posted on the AMA website.

In February 2018, the Manitoba government publicly shared the review, confirming that organizations in all sectors are working hard to make Manitoba a more inclusive and accessible province.

The review included 52 recommendations targeting improvements to the standard development process and accessibility plans, enhanced compliance, increased public awareness, strengthened leadership from the Manitoba government, and clarified roles of the DIO and the Council.

The government has formed a committee to plan and monitor action on the remainder of the review's recommendations. By March 31, 2019, 10 of the 52 recommendations made in the AMA review report had been completed (19%) with progress being made on implementing another 26 recommendations (another 50%).

Additional Activities

In addition to the above activities, the DIO represented the Manitoba government on the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Network of Offices for Disability Issues and Premiers' Councils, on the City of Winnipeg's Access Advisory Committee and in numerous community and stakeholder meetings. The DIO also responded to more than 2,500 telephone inquiries and approximately 1,000 electronic inquiries regarding the AMA and access to disability-related services.

Looking Forward to 2019/20

The four-year AMA review confirmed that Manitoba businesses and organizations want to be accessible. The review lauded past efforts, but offered many recommendations to increase the pace of standard development and improve public awareness about accessibility legislation in Manitoba. With consideration to the review's recommendations, in 2019/20 Manitoba will:

- √ Enact Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Employment.
- √ Create discussion documents and hold public consultations on the remaining standards affecting Information and Communications, the Design of Public Spaces and Transportation, before Council submits its recommendations to government.
- √ Develop and widely distribute tools and resources on the existing Accessibility Standard for Customer Service and on the Accessibility Standard for Employment.
- √ Integrate information about the Accessibility Standard for Employment into monthly workshops to support compliance among affected organizations.

- √ Complete the final year of a Three-Year Communications Strategy to support public awareness of the AMA.
- √ Continue to promote public awareness initiatives such as MAAW and DEAM.
- √ Integrate accessibility into the procurement practices of the Manitoba government and other public sector organizations. Introduce Manitoba government employee training in accessible document creation.
- √ Work with the Department of Municipal Relations to support awareness among the smaller public sector organizations, particularly municipalities, and to help them with their accessibility plans.
- √ Monitor compliance of public sector organizations that require an accessibility plan, including updated plans for the 66 largest public sector organizations.
- √ Advance and expand on compliance activities in the private sector.
- √ Consider all the findings and continue to act on the four-year AMA Review's recommendations.

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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