

Manitoba Access Awareness Week
(MAAW) 2021 May 30 - June 5

Beyond COVID-19: Creating a Culture of Accessibility in the Workplace



FREE WEBINAR

Keynote Speaker

Featuring **Yazmine Laroche**

Deputy Minister, Public Accessibility,
Government of Canada

Panel Discussion

Featuring **Manitobans with Disabilities**

A discussion on workplace barriers & solutions

Thursday, June 3, 2021

2 to 3:30 PM. CDT.

MORE INFORMATION: AccessibilityMB.ca

Manitoba Access Awareness Week – Keynote Speaker

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For more information, please visit www.accessibilitymb.ca

Speakers

- Yutta Fricke (MAO)
- Deputy Minister Yazmine Laroche (Government of Canada)

[Clip Begins]

Yutta Fricke (MAO) at 00:07

Next, it is my pleasure to introduce to you, someone who I heard speak and found incredibly passionate and knowledgeable. The deputy minister Yazmine Laroche. Who is the deputy minister of public service accessibility, since 2018 and is the Deputy Minister champion for federal employees with disabilities. She's responsible for overseeing the efforts of the Canadian public service to meet the requirements of the accessible Canada act. Ms. Laroche has over 25 years of experience in public policy program design and delivery, communications, strategic planning, and corporate management, having served in a variety of federal government departments. She's also

Manitoba Access Awareness Week 2021 – June 3rd Deputy Minister Yazmine Laroche Transcript

an alumnus of Carleton University, which is known for its accessibility, and the past chair of the Board of Muscular Dystrophy Canada. She was awarded the Queen Elizabeth second diamond jubilee medal in recognition of returnable work and your efforts on behalf of people with disabilities welcome Deputy Minister Laroche.

Yazmine Laroche at 1:10:

Thank you so much Yutta. Je suis ravie d'être ici avec vous aujourd'hui. I'm really honored, let me first acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from Ottawa. Which is on the traditional unseated territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people's. This matters hugely. I think it's important for all of us to think about the terrible consequences of colonialism, particularly in a discussion around accessibility and disability inclusion. When we know that even though 20% of Canadians identify as living with one or more disabilities that percentage is much higher in indigenous communities and so it's really important for us to acknowledge, acknowledge that, and think about the land that we occupy.

I'd also like to recognize off the top that Manitoba was the second province in Canada to have an act, the Accessibility for Manitobans Act that provides a process to remove barriers affecting people with disabilities. So this morning, this afternoon I should say. I'd like to bring you up to date on some of the things that we're doing in the Canadian public service to eliminate barriers. Both inside our public service, and in other federally regulated workplaces.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself and my role. I am the first Deputy Minister of Public Service accessibility in the federal government. I'm also the first federal deputy minister with a visible disability. In a very long time, I'm the only one. So I'm very proud to be in this role. I'm honored to be able to have this job and to have these responsibilities, it makes me think back to when I was a little girl and my wonderful father who used to tell me that I could be anything that I wanted to be. Now I can't say that my childhood dream was to become a deputy minister. But I didn't know I wanted to make a difference. And here I am a few decades later and I'm a deputy minister in the federal government. And my job is all about advancing disability inclusion right across the federal public service and federally regulated organizations across the country.

And yes, I still want to make a difference and I'm really happy that I get the chance to do that in this job.

I bet that many of you also have stories about overcoming obstacles about changing people's perspectives. Maybe you were once told by your parents that you could be anything you wanted to be and here you are making a difference so congratulations on the great work that you're doing.

In the Federal Government, a lot has happened in the last few years, with accessibility and inclusion moving up on the agenda. I'd say in general we've moved beyond a, I'm using air quotes here a duty to accommodate mindset. To thinking about how do we remove barriers to participation, so that people can participate fully and this isn't just about our employees it's also about clients. My office, the office of public service accessibility was established in 2018. With a mandate to get the public service ready to meet or exceed the requirements of the accessible Canada act and its landmark legislation I really believe it's going to create the most significant progress for people with disabilities across the country. It mirrors provincial legislation like Manitobas because it requires organizations to remove barriers to full and equal participation in society.

But we're a federation, and so the federal law applies to what we call the federally regulated sectors so who does that include. Starts with the government of Canada, including department agencies and crown corporations, it includes the Canadian forces and the RCMP. It includes parts of the private sector that are regulated by the Federal Government. Well, that includes the banks, the Federal transportation network, such as airlines rail, road, and marine transportation providers across provincial or international borders. As well as the broadcasting and the telecommunications sectors so that's big that's a big chunk of our economy. That's a big chunk of business across the country.

This is a very powerful and far-reaching piece of legislation it's actually going to change the way we do business as a federal government and my hope that is going to lead to an improvement of the lives of people with disabilities right across the country. And my office is set up in an organization called the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and why this is important is that it's a central agency that radiates policies and procedures that affect the government and some of the federally regulated sectors.

So, what did we do when we were created well the very first thing we did was to engage with employees with disabilities and allies. To listen to understand where the biggest barriers and challenges were and to go develop a plan that would guide our work. Then, two years ago really just two years ago, last week we launched nothing without us, which is the accessibility strategy for the public service of Canada. And it has five goals that are designed to help us achieve our modest and ambitious vision to become the most accessible and inclusive public service in the world.

So, these goals really focus in on the five biggest issues that were identified through our engagement process, the first is all about employment, not surprisingly. You know, when I said 90% of Canadians live with a disability, the representation rate right now in the Canadian public service is 5.2%. And we know we need to do better, we need to do better to recruit, we need to do a better job of retaining. And we also need to do a better job of promoting people with disabilities, as I mentioned I'm the first person with a visible disability to be at this level. And we want to make sure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to have the best possible careers.

The second pillar is all about the built environment. We own a lot and we lease a lot of buildings across the country. And I can tell you from personal experience, their accessibility varies considerably. And so, if we're going to try and recruit people, we need to make sure that our buildings work for them.

The third pillar is about making information and communications technology usable by everybody. We purchase, we design, we run a lot of technology, and not surprisingly, a lot of it doesn't mean basic accessibility standards and again that sends a message about whether we believe people belong. Whether we think they matter The fourth is all about how do we help public servants to design and deliver accessible programs and services.

We know from surveys that we've done that Canadians with disabilities, give us lower scores on service delivery. And so we're working hard to change that to make sure that, that people will be happy with the kinds of services that they get, that we are providing accessible programs and services.

The fifth pillar is probably the hardest and it's, the most important and it's called building

a culture of accessibility within the public service. We know from our public service employee surveys that employees with disabilities report, the highest levels of harassment and discrimination. Really feeling that they don't belong, we need to change that if we're ever going to be able to attract and retain great talent into the public service.

So we have started some initiatives I've been on the job for two and a half years, and I can say that progress is being made, but much more needs to be done. I mentioned some of the work we're doing around employment I what I didn't mention was that the government also when they introduced the legislation committed to hiring 5000 new employees with disabilities by 2025 and so we've created an internship program we have a special program for summer students with disabilities.

We're making it easy to take students that are graduating and hire them right into the public service. We're doing very targeted recruitment and working with partners to identify top talent. And one of the things that we've done is to try and fix the experience for employees in the public service, were championing what we call the tell us once approach to deal with employees accommodation needs.

That was one of the biggest pain points that was identified in our surveys and in our research. It can be really hard for somebody to get just the basic tools and equipment that they need to do their job. What we discovered was that every time somebody changed jobs they had to kind of start from square one again. Because we didn't have a process that allowed people to take their equipment or their tools with them to their next job. So we've created something called the workplace accessibility passport and that makes it easier to identify the barriers and the supports that are needed. And it goes with the employee from job to job it's right now it's in its pilot project phase, but it's been adopted already by more than 20 federal government departments and agencies.

And our goal is to turn it into an online tool that will be available to everybody in the next two years. So that's a piece I'm very, very happy about other things that we're doing we've developed a catalog of the most commonly requested adaptive devices. And we're also streamlining the procurement process we're making it easier to get stuff that people need and we've created a centralized library of adaptive technologies that people can borrow, and this is specifically to support people who may not be coming on as

permanent employees, but maybe there's summer students, maybe they're coming in to do a contract it's a way of getting them the tools that they need, as quickly as possible.

And so I think we're making a considerable amount of progress there. And I have to say, though, that we still have a way to go, I mentioned the results on harassment and discrimination in our public service employee survey. One of the things that we just found because the 2020 results have just come out is that in this last survey. More people have identified as living with a disability in fact we've seen a 2% increase. Now that may be because we expanded the definition of people with disabilities to be consistent with the Federal legislation. I also think it's because we've done so much work in the last two years, around awareness-raising and talking about it. So the public service employee survey we got to almost 9% now our official measures come from a different, a different measurement tool so it's going to be interesting to see if the next time we do our formal self-identification survey if that 5.2% number has changed as well.

With respect to enhancing the built environment, one of the things that I find so interesting. Is that we're taking advantage of code so in our federal public service context, most of our employees are working remotely right now there are some, of course, you have to work in the physical office, but many don't. And so, our colleagues who are responsible for managing our built environment are taking advantage of these relatively empty offices to actually accelerate accessibility improvements. And they're already thinking about what do we need to do when people start coming back to the workplace to make sure that they'll have what they need.

The other interesting aspect of coven relates to our third pillar information and communications technology. So the people who manage all of our techs, had a very ambitious three-year plan to roll out Microsoft Office 365 across the entire public service now we're talking about 250,000 public servants across the country. There was a three-year plan then covid hit and everybody had to work from home and needed to be equipped to work from home that three-year plan turned into six weeks. And within six weeks they'd rolled out this new tool which has so many accessibility features built right into it, so all of a sudden. It made it so much easier for our employees with disabilities to collaborate and to participate. That same Organization has a really great program called the accessibility, accommodation, and adaptive computer technology Program.

We like acronyms and we call it triple-A CT that they're a wonderful resource and they have all kinds of services that are designed to help people with disabilities. And they're available to support any department or organization and they give workshops and seminars on how do you create accessible documents it's just a great group. We're also about to launch a new directive so as I mentioned I'm at the Treasury board and my colleague, one of my deputy colleagues, there is the chief information officer. And they're about to introduce a new directive that is going to align our IT standard, with the European standard, which is considered the gold standard in terms of acquiring or developing its solutions, and that is going to really make a difference because everybody's going to have to meet that standard.

I mentioned the challenges around service delivery well our big service organization called Service Canada they've actually developed an accessibility roadmap. That will help them meet or exceed the requirements of the Accessible Canada Act and they're making huge changes to their service centers their training staff on accessibility and they're reviewing the way they communicate so we're really seeing some very interesting changes happening, then I mentioned culture change, I talked about how challenging that is.

One of the things that we're doing is working with our Canadian school public service, so they provide a lot of the learning and training for federal public servants. And they, we've been co-hosting with them in a series called Spotlight on Accessibility and again here's the thing that COVID has changed.

So before COVID, we were doing them in person and you don't get a lot of people at in-person events well now we've switched to everything being virtual. And we've gone from maybe having a few hundred people well now we're having thousands of people participating, which is amazing, in turn, when you're really trying to change a culture you're trying to raise awareness and understanding. And the last thing that we've done is we've created an online accessibility hub. And that's run out of my office and it's where all federal public service employees can find tips guidance tools, best practices on how you remove barriers.

So that's just a few of the things that we're doing and, as I mentioned I'm pretty pleased with the progress we've made in just two and a half years. And so, the Foundation is definitely in place, and I think it's helping us to lead by example, to improve the conditions for people with disabilities.

I want to talk a little bit more about COVID because there are a lot of unintended consequences. When I look at what we've learned about COVID and what we've learned about how all of a sudden, a whole lot of people had to cope. With an environment where they didn't necessarily have the tools that they need to work, they were they didn't feel as equipped as they could be and they had to figure out how to do it. I think it started to create a greater understanding of some of the challenges that people with disabilities face. And as we now start to think about our transition eventually out of COVID and think about the kind of country kind of public service that we want to create we were increasingly aware that people with disabilities have to be a part of that effort.

So I want to talk a little bit about the numbers. Not just population but let's talk about this from an economic perspective, so a wonderful man called Rich Donovan. I don't know if you've heard of him he's a former Wall Street trader and he's the CEO of the return on disability group and he's estimated that within a worldwide population of about 1.85 billion around the world. People with Disabilities constitute a market, the size of China and the European Union combined. And then, when you add in friends and family to that's another 3.4 billion potential consumers who have some kind of connection to disability. Altogether when you put that together they control over \$13 trillion in annual disposable income.

Here in Canada, as I mentioned we're about 22% so that is a market think about those 6 million people that's almost the size of the populations of Manitoba Saskatchewan and Alberta combined. And this number according to a report from TD economics, and I quote here is set to rise to one in four over the next two decades fueled by aging. So think about that we're going to get up to 25% others say that will be up to 30% by 2030.

As our understanding of disability grows and, frankly, as many people start to age into disabling conditions. So, you know that in Manitoba almost one in four people have some kind of connection to disability. Now here's the other important statistic nationwide

only 59% of people with disabilities age 25 to 64 are employed and that's compared to about 80% of Canadians without disabilities that's a huge consequence when we think about under-employment. A conference Board of Canada noted the impact on the economy, it said that if we made some improvements to the workplace 550,000 Canadians with disabilities, would be able to work, and that would increase our GDP by 16 almost \$17 billion by 2030. So that's just a huge untapped potential, both from a financial perspective, but also from just a source of creativity.

You know when I look at people with disabilities and I know you're going to have a panel soon and you're going to hear from people with disabilities. They are the most creative resourceful and adaptable people, you will find you have to be when you work in an environment that a friend of mine says doesn't love you. You have to find workarounds so that you can survive, so if you're not including people with disabilities and your recruitment efforts you are missing out on a very rich pool of talent.

And you know it's something that some sectors of our economy have already figured out I look at the banks. We don't tend to think of the banks as charitable organizations right there during business they're there to make money. But they are really targeting the market of people with disabilities because they're looking for new markets and they're looking for inventive people to drive innovation and the economy of the future.

And our workplaces are changing another thing that we've learned from covid is that everybody has unique needs and managers, need to be very flexible in developing with their employees that work arrangements that are going to work best for them. I think, in the end, it just makes us stronger and better.

So I'd like you to think about these questions as you continue with your conversations. How are diversity, inclusion, and accessibility embodied throughout your organization? At your highest levels if you're in the private sector, how representative is your board, how representative is middle management, and the working level? If people don't see themselves in your organization, then, are they ever going to want to come and work for you so it's really important to think about it.

Not just the number of people, you have in your organization, who come from diverse backgrounds, but where are they when you get that you get such a bang, for your buck

in terms of that creativity that comes from people with very different lived experience and very different approaches to problem-solving.

So I want to maybe close because I'm conscious of time, and I think we want to get to the panel. I want you to think about how do you go about doing this everybody wants to do good everybody wants to improve lives. But too often, I find that really well-intentioned people end up wanting to do things for people, but too often we don't do things with people. And so that's why I have put so much emphasis on co-development and why, in fact, the name of our strategy is nothing without us, you will always get better results if you co-design with the people you're trying to help. And, that you know, working together and learning from each other's lived experience is really how you're going to get the best possible results.

And the other way is to not make accessibility, an afterthought, you have to bake it into what you're doing right from the start.

We like to say one of our catchphrases is accessible by default inclusive by design, if you do it right upfront, you are going to avoid costly do-overs in the future and you're going to make things better, not just for people with disabilities, but for everybody. So these are just a few of the examples of some of the stuff that we've done at the federal public service level.

I think I would just like to close and say. It really takes everybody. Being very deliberate and intentional about being accessible and inclusive and it's not about standards and legislation and rules it's about what each individual can do. One person in my life rented a ramp so that I could go to her house for the staff Christmas party. The first time somebody has ever done that, for me, and it made a huge difference another time somebody assistant called my office to say, could you ask her where are the accessible restaurants, so that we can book our next meeting in a place that works for her. A small act that makes a profound difference, and so I would encourage all of you to think about what are the small acts that you can do. That will make a profound and meaningful difference and have better results for everybody. Alors, je vous remercie une fois, pour tous que vous faites, et pour tous que vous allez faire, pour faire avancer notre cause.

[Clip Ends]

