

# Minister's Annual Update 2023

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## Implementing Recommendations from Accessibility Advisory Council's Five-Year Review of the Accessible Customer Service Standard

December 2023

This report is available in alternate formats, upon request. Please contact the Manitoba Accessibility Office:

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## Background

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All accessibility standards enacted by regulation under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) must be reviewed after a period of five years. The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service came into force on Oct. 19, 2015.

Between spring 2020 and Sept. 2021, the Manitoba Accessibility Advisory Council (Council) conducted a robust engagement process that:

- examined the accessibility objectives and the measures, policies, practices or other requirements set out in the standard, and how and by whom they are being implemented; and
- developed a set of recommendations respecting any updates to the standard for consideration by the Minister responsible for Accessibility.

In Sept. 2021, Council published a public [What We Heard Report](#) that identified main themes and areas of concern from the disability community, businesses and other organizations that participated in the engagement process. A [final report](#) containing Council's formal recommendations was submitted to the Minister responsible for Accessibility during this month, and then announced in a [news release](#) on Nov. 10, 2021.

In response, the Minister responsible for Accessibility directed that an inter-departmental implementation team be created to ensure that Council's recommendations to improve accessibility in the area of customer service are successfully addressed over the next two to three years.

This report highlights the work of the implementation team from Oct. 2022 to Oct. 2023 and offers a status update on progress.

## Interdepartmental Implementation Team

In Nov. 2021, an interdepartmental implementation team of government staff was created with representatives from the Public Service Commission, Department of Families, Manitoba Accessibility Office (MAO), Accessibility Compliance Secretariat, and Communications and Engagement Division (Department of Finance). The team is formally led by the Department of Families Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and project managed by staff from the Manitoba Accessibility Office (MAO).

### Implementation Team Members – Oct. 2022 to Oct. 2023

**Heidi Wurmman** – assistant deputy minister, Corporate Services Division, Families (**Chair**)

**Charissa McIntosh** – senior policy analyst, Legislation and Strategic Policy Unit, Corporate Services Division, Families (**project manager**)

**Darren Macdonald** – executive director, Manitoba Accessibility Office, Families

**Maria Ferraro** – senior policy analyst/secretary to council, Manitoba Accessibility Office, Families

**Lucia Madariaga-Vignudo** – assistant director, Accessibility Compliance Secretariat, Families

**Darlene Hedgecock** – equity, diversity, inclusion consultant, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Public Service Commission

**Laura Nickel** – equity, diversity, inclusion consultant, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Public Service Commission

**Chris Rootsaert** – accessibility consultant, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Public Service Commission

**Erin McKay** – director of Strategy and Governance Branch, Communication and Engagement Division, Finance

**Leah Cole** – practice and project lead, consultation and research, Strategy and Governance Branch, Communication and Engagement Division, Finance

Over this period, the implementation team held regular meetings, on a roughly quarterly basis and prepared status updates at the request of the Minister (Oct. 7, 2022, Jan. 12, 2023, Apr. 21, 2023, Jul. 6, 2023, and Oct. 10, 2023, respectively), which were approved and then posted on the MAO website ([www.AccessibilityMB.ca](http://www.AccessibilityMB.ca)).

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# Implementing Recommendations

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Council's Five-Year Review of the Accessible Standard for Customer Service included a set of 22 recommendations to help enhance customer service for those with accessibility issues and strengthen the understanding and implementation practices for those obligated under the regulation.

## Summary of Progress at Oct. 1, 2023

- **16** recommendations were **completed/resolved**
- **Five** recommendations are **in progress**. Concrete activities have occurred to advance these recommendations during 2023.
- **One** recommendation is **on pause** and will be undertaken in 2024.

It is important to note that the majority of recommendations that have been completed/resolved to date can be considered as **ongoing** in that the Government of Manitoba has set up concrete processes and activities to continue to address Council's recommendations.

This section will identify highlights and activities that were undertaken across the Manitoba government to support successful implementation of these recommendations for the period Oct. 2022 to Oct. 2023.

## Recommendation 1 – Completed and Ongoing

**Conduct a review of all departments to ensure the Manitoba government consistently meets or exceeds Standard requirements and acts as a leader and champion for accessibility legislation.**

### **Actions:**

- An internal review of all government departments was conducted, and information related to the implementation of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) and its accessibility standards was sought from senior leaders of numerous departments. Deputy Ministers completed an accessibility compliance form by fall 2022.
- By March 2023, the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat had conducted eight focus groups with assistant deputy ministers, department accessibility coordinators (DACs), Civil Servants with Abilities Network members (now ASPIRE) and front-line service providers across numerous departments.
- A report outlining project findings of the internal accessibility review was delivered to the Government of Manitoba's Accessibility Steering Committee in Mar. 2023 and deputy ministers in Apr. 2023.
- Data gathered from the internal review will help inform future enhancements to government policies and processes, with the aim of making the Manitoba government a more accessible service provider and employer.
- In Sept. 2023, departmental liaisons were assigned to provide periodic reports to the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat regarding progress made on meeting the recommendations stemming from the 2022/23 internal accessibility review of government departments.
- The Public Service Commission (PSC) supports efforts in government's compliance with Standard requirements and tracks progress on the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan (MGAP) through quarterly updates by departments. The tracker is comprehensive and seeks updates from departments on their efforts to respond to commitments under each priority area.

### **Timelines:**

- The accessibility compliance form will be issued to deputy ministers of departments to complete every two years.
- Departmental reports on implementation of recommendations from the 2022/23 internal accessibility review are due to the ACS semi-annually.
- Progress reporting on MGAP is required every two years (in the second year). Renewal of the MGAP will occur by Dec. 31, 2024.

## **Recommendation 2 – Completed and Ongoing**

**Review the role of department accessibility coordinators (DACs) as an important strategy for revitalizing accessibility awareness and communication commitments within departments.**

### **Actions:**

- The PSC oversees the support for the role of DACs and ensures it is an important part of advancing accessibility initiatives across government. Over this period, PSC has ensured that each department has a DAC, including a DAC for the Communication and Engagement Division. Meetings of the DAC network are held on a quarterly basis.
- In spring 2023, an updated DAC Roles and Responsibilities document was shared with DACs and Diversity and Inclusion Champions
- Onboarding materials for new DACs were finalized and shared with the department accessibility coordinators in Jun. 2023.
- An Accessibility Toolkit was developed by PSC, providing information to DACs and human resource consultants and departments on technology/services that are available. This toolkit was distributed and communicated to all public servants through the CONNECT bulletin at the end of May 2023.

### **Timelines:**

- DAC meetings occur on a quarterly basis, with the most recent meeting held in Oct. 2023.
- Ongoing onboarding will take place as new DACs are identified and/or replaced.

## **Recommendation 3 – In Progress**

**Ensure communications and services are consistently accessible to all members of the public.**

### **Actions:**

- Government’s Learning & Development Unit (formerly OSD) offers three courses to staff on creating accessible digital office documents:
  - Adobe Acrobat Pro
  - MS Word
  - PowerPoint

This is in addition to the mandatory AMA training for all government employees which is tracked by the PSC.

- In 2023, MAO's online learning modules (accessible customer service and accessible employment) were added to the government's Learning Management System.
- Work is underway by Communications and Engagement Division (CED) (of Manitoba Finance) to refresh the Manitoba Government Writing Style Guide, which includes sections on accessibility.
- Quarterly meetings are held by an inter-departmental Information and Communication (IC) Standard Working Group, which includes representation from CED, Manitoba Families and PSC, to ensure that the Government of Manitoba has implemented the IC Standard and to ensure that internal/external communications are accessible.
- The IC Standard Working Group has compiled accessible communications resources, which are shared by the PSC to DACs to be cascaded throughout their departments. This includes training on how to create accessible documents, coordinate accessible events, and learn about accessibility legislation. Examples of resource documents for all staff include:
  - Guide to Accessible Webinars and Virtual Meetings (Jul. 2023)
  - Tip Sheet for Accessible Emails (Oct. 2023)
- In early Jan. 2023, CED shared a set of communications messages for public servants about the IC Standard requirements via the CONNECT online bulletin. Content included information about offering alternate formats and offering accommodations.
- In 2023, MAO met with Digital and Technology Solutions (Manitoba Consumer Protection and Government Services), as well as the Employment and Income Support Division (Manitoba Families) to discuss how digital accessibility requirements under the IC Standard will be integrated to internal and outward systems and processes.

**Timelines:**

- Additional courses and a new learning module on the IC Standard (developed by MAO) will be added to the Learning Management System and delivered by Learning & Development in 2024.
- The refreshed Manitoba Government Writing Style Guide will become available in early 2024.



## **Recommendation 4 – In Progress**

**Expand the provision of materials and information for the public in American Sign Language (ASL).**

### **Actions:**

- Work is underway by CED to develop a draft ASL interpretive services policy to guide all Manitoba public servants and members of Manitoba Government's Agencies, Boards and Commissions in their communications and in their considerations of best practices.
- Manitoba Accessibility Fund (MAF) grant program intake materials for 2023/24 included ASL recordings of the MAF preview, guidelines, application and budget forms, and frequently asked questions. These materials were posted online during the intake period in Mar. 2023.

### **Timelines:**

- A government-wide ASL policy is anticipated to be put in place by end 2024.
- Annual MAF grant program intake materials will continue to be made available as ASL recordings for grant applicants.

## **Recommendation 5 – In Progress**

**Integrate accessibility during initial stages of project and program development, especially in procurement processes.**

### **Actions:**

- A draft of government's new Procurement Administration Manual (PAM) has been completed and reviewed. The PAM provides direction on procurement policy to all employees and organizations involved in procurement. The manual applies to the end-to-end procurement process.
- A procedure page is being developed to help all PAM users to understand what The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) is and how it should be considered in procurement. The plan is to publish the new procedures at the same time as the new PAM.

### **Timelines:**

- Government is aiming to launch the new PAM and procedures page about accessibility in late 2023/early 2024.
- The MAO will continue to work with the Department of Consumer Protection and Government Services to explore how to best include accessibility in the Manitoba government PAM to raise awareness of the AMA standards and highlight the need to reflect them in tender requirements as applicable.

## **Recommendation 6 – Completed and Ongoing**

**Enhance transparency of government compliance and improve collaboration with Council.**

**Actions:**

- The Accessibility Compliance Secretariat (ACS) continues to share information with council members on activities undertaken, compliance trends and figures, and to discuss ideas related to future compliance projects.
- In fall 2022, ACS consulted with Council on potential future compliance-focused projects to include in the Minister’s Annual Plan 2023/24 and 2024/25.

**Timelines:**

- The ACS meets with Council every six months, on an ongoing basis.
- In 2023/24 and 2024/25, the ACS will consult the Accessibility Advisory Council, Manitobans experiencing barriers, and affected organizations to gather input on the development of a new regulation under the AMA, to provide a framework on monetary penalties for non-compliant organizations.

## **Recommendation 7 – Complete & Ongoing**

**Provide adequate resources to the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat.**

**Actions:**

- In Sept. 2022, a full-time accessibility compliance officer joined the secretariat.
- A second full-time accessibility compliance officer started working with the Secretariat in Sept. 2023.

**Timelines:**

- Resource needs are reviewed regularly as part of the annual budget process.

## Recommendation 8 - Completed and Ongoing

**Ensure compliance activities are more transparent through annual reporting.**

### **Actions:**

- Compliance data was incorporated in the Minister's Annual Report on Accessibility, starting in 2021/2022.
- The 2022/23 Annual Report provides comparison data for 2021/22 and 2022/23, including:
  - number and percentage of large companies with an Achieving Compliance Plan by March 31 that had achieved compliance
  - percentage of large companies that were audited as compliant with having a written accessible customer service policy
- The 2022/23 Annual Report also provides data about the following:
  - number of large and small public sector organizations with original accessibility plans, respectively, and those with updated plans
  - number of visits to the ACS homepage per year
  - number of inquiries by phone/email to the ACS Office per year
  - number of inquiries in 2022/23 by sector and by type of questions and concerns addressed within the scope of accessibility legislation

### **Timelines:**

- The Ministerial 2022/23 Annual Report for The Accessibility for Manitobans Act includes reporting about compliance and the work of the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat. The report was tabled in the Manitoba Legislature on November 23, 2023.

## Recommendation 9 – In Progress

**Measure and report on the impact that the Standard is having on improving accessibility.**

### **Actions:**

- The Five-Year AMA Review was completed in Jul. 2023. An implementation plan for the recommendations from the review has begun.

### **Timelines:**

- The Five-Year AMA Review Report was made public in Dec. 2023.
- Further work on this recommendation will occur in 2024 and beyond.

## **Recommendation 10 – Completed**

**Establish Accessibility Compliance Secretariat protocols to report and resolve accessibility standard complaints.**

**Actions:**

- Policy and procedures to handle complaints regarding alleged non-compliance were uploaded on the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat website in 2022 and are available for public viewing.

**Timelines:**

- The ACS will continue to review and update the policy and handle accessibility standard complaints, as required.

## **Recommendation 11 – On Pause**

**Return to the lower threshold of 20 employees or more that must document policies and make these available to the public.**

**Actions:**

- Recommendation 14 of the Five-year Review of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (tabled in November 2023) supports Council's recommendation. It states:  
That the minister propose a regulation amendment returning to the lower threshold of 20 employees for documenting and reporting obligations under the Customer Service Standard, to be accompanied by resources and a communication plan designed to ease and simplify compliance.
- Between Oct. 2022 and Oct. 2023, implementation of this recommendation was paused.

**Timelines:**

- Government's formal response to the recommendations in the Five-Year Review of the AMA, which includes this specific recommendation, is being developed. More analysis is required to determine the impact of the lower threshold. Work to address this recommendation will occur in 2024.

## **Recommendation 12 – Completed and Ongoing**

**Substantially improve outreach and awareness to obligated businesses and organizations.**

### **Actions:**

- In Oct. 2022, Accessibility News switched from a quarterly to a monthly publication to increase awareness efforts. Over 1,800 subscribers receive the monthly newsletter.
- The MAO hosted online engagement sessions during disability and accessibility awareness weeks, including Manitoba Access Awareness Week and International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
- MAO improved outreach by hosting trade show booths and presenting on the AMA Act and Standards at events such as the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Commitment to Opportunity, Diversity and Equity (CODE) tradeshow, University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine, Manitoba School Boards Association Convention, Association of Manitoba Municipalities Spring Convention, and the Chartered Professional in Human Resources (CPHR) Manitoba Human Resources Conference 2023.
- The Accessibility Compliance Secretariat delivered presentations on accessibility requirements to the Manitoba Hotel Association, Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Manitoba Massage Therapy Association, Manitoba Library Association, Manitoba School Boards Association, Family Violence Consortium of Manitoba, and directors of school divisions.
- The ACS and MAO partnered to do a social media campaign focused on accessible employment in Feb./Mar. 2023.
- A social media and print/electronic ad campaign about the Manitoba Accessibility Fund grant program and intake 2023 was held from Dec. 2022 to Feb. 2023. The campaign ran in advance of, and during, the second intake period to inform communities, businesses, non-profits, municipalities, and public sector organizations about the funding opportunity.

### **Timelines:**

- A new MAO communication strategy will be drafted in 2024/25, which will continue to focus on increased public awareness of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act and its standards.

## Recommendation 13 – Completed and Ongoing

**Improve education, outreach and awareness in communities outside of Winnipeg.**

### **Actions:**

- MAF intake materials and information were added to Manitoba Grants Online in advance of the 2023 intake period in Jan. 2023. Manitoba Grants Online is a one-stop portal for non-profit organizations from all communities to access a variety of provincial government grant opportunities.
- A redesign of the Manitoba Accessibility Awards program is underway. It will include organizational collaboration where organizations themselves provide awards that recognize accessibility champions.
- The ACS has been working with school divisions and municipalities outside of Winnipeg to ensure they update their accessibility plans, as required under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

### **Timelines:**

- MAF will continue to use social media and run print/electronic ad campaigns with local community news to promote and advise Manitobans about the MAF grant program intake in 2024 and future years.
- The second Manitoba Accessibility Awards will be planned and presented in 2024.
- The MAO and ACS have this as a permanent work objective to boost reach and awareness of the AMA and standards, including compliance.

## Recommendation 14 – Completed and Ongoing

**Ensure the Manitoba Accessibility Office meets its French language commitments.**

### **Actions:**

- A new French-language version of [AccessibilityMB.ca](https://www.accessibilitymb.ca) / [AccessibiliteMB.ca](https://www.accessibiliteMB.ca) was developed as part of the MAO website refresh project, and launched in Jun. 2023.
- MAO continues its commitment to provide information about accessibility standards, resources and training in French, including posting new website content in both languages simultaneously.
- French language materials were available as part of government's 60-day public engagement for the Manitoba's Accessible Transportation Standard (March – May 2023).

- MAO is able to deliver presentations on the AMA and accessibility standards in French at the request of organizations and Manitoba's bilingual and French-speaking regions. Recorded presentations may be posted to the website for future viewing.

**Timelines:**

- Work is underway to ensure that French resources on the new MAO website are available and consistent with the resources posted to English site.

## **Recommendation 15 – Completed**

### **Change name of the regulation to Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation, in line with other accessibility standards.**

**Actions:**

- Revision of the name of the regulation was made and the amended regulation has been in force since Aug. 25, 2023.

**Timelines:**

- This recommendation has been fully implemented.

## **Recommendation 16 – Completed and Ongoing**

### **Ensure organizations have access to resources and funding support to implement this Standard.**

**Actions:**

- MAO has drafted guidelines, selection process and criteria, an application form, training materials and communications plans to inform Manitobans about the new Manitoba Accessibility Fund grant program, launched in Feb. 2022.
- By Oct. 2023, 28 out of 30 MAF projects from the pilot year (2022/23) were completed. Two MAF projects were still underway.
- The MAF 2023/24 grant program intake (Jan. to Mar. 2023) received over 160 project applications. A set of 42 projects were awarded grant funding totaling \$890,000 in 2023/24. A formal launch event was held at Fort Whyte Alive in Jul. 2023.

**Timelines:**

- The Manitoba government will continue to award MAF grants based on the investment income accrued annually by the fund, which is managed by the Winnipeg Foundation.
- Ongoing stakeholder engagement and outreach will occur in 2024.

## Recommendation 17 – Completed and Ongoing

**Enhance the profile and content of AccessibilityMB.ca to make it easier to access tools and resources.**

### **Actions:**

- The new MAO website, [www.AccessibilityMB.ca](http://www.AccessibilityMB.ca) was audited by Access Changes Everything during development of the English and French websites to ensure it conforms to World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA.
- Work is underway to ensure that most of the resources on the new website are fully accessible documents in French and English.
- A plan for yearly site audits is underway, to ensure continued accessibility.

### **Timelines:**

- CED is engaging a vendor to help with accessibility on Manitoba.ca websites including AccessibilityMB.ca in 2024.

## Recommendation 18 – Completed and Ongoing

**Modernize MAO resources and awareness raising campaigns to keep them relevant and useful.**

### **Actions:**

- MAO celebrated the International Day of Persons Disabilities (Dec. 2022) and the Manitoba Access Awareness Week (May 28 – Jun. 3, 2023) by hosting public webinars for these occasions, as well as celebrated awareness months including Disability Employment Awareness Month (Oct.) and Indigenous Disability Awareness Month (Nov.).
- MAO posted social media campaigns for these awareness events on GOM social medial channels.
- Banners for the Manitoba Accessibility Fund were created in English and French to use to promote the grant program at tradeshow and events.

### **Timelines:**

- MAO is exploring using Government of Manitoba social media channels on a more regular basis to increase awareness of the AMA.
- Updating resources and awareness-raising campaigns, including social media campaigns, is continuous.



## **Recommendation 19 – In progress**

**Ensure Manitoba’s commitment to accessibility is adequately administered.**

**Actions:**

- The ACS hired a second full-time accessibility compliance officer in Sept. 2023, joining the accessibility compliance officer hired in Sept. 2022.
- The PSC hired a full-time accessibility consultant in April 2023 to manage the DAC Network and advise on accessibility best practices for the Government of Manitoba.

**Timelines:**

- Complete the hiring competitions for any vacant positions as soon as possible.
- This recommendation is reviewed regularly as part of the annual budget process.

## **Recommendation 20 – Completed and Ongoing**

**Continue to monitor financial implications of recommendations on stakeholders.**

**Actions:**

- Cost analyses are completed as part of the development of each new accessibility standard.
- A cost analysis for the Accessible Information and Communication Standard and the Accessible Transportation Standard were completed in 2022. An economic analysis, including cost estimates, for the Design of Outdoor Public Spaces Standard is underway.

**Timelines:**

- Financial implications of recommendations on stakeholders are considered by government staff on an ongoing basis.

## **Recommendation 21 – Completed**

**Appoint an additional member to Council to increase the diversity of viewpoints.**

**Actions:**

- A ninth member, who identifies as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, was appointed to Council on Feb. 15, 2022, for a three-year term.
- A Council member with a disability resigned in the summer of 2023.

**Timelines:**

- A process is underway to fill this vacancy on the Accessibility Advisory Council.

**Recommendation 22 – Completed**

**Ask all members of Agencies, Boards and Commissions to identify disability status during the appointment process.**

**Actions:**

- The Agencies, Boards and Commissions Office updated inclusive language on the application form for new government ABC appointments.

**Timelines:**

- Work to include accessibility training as part of standardized onboarding process for all new members on ABCs is underway.

**Measuring Progress**

In 2024, the interdepartmental implementation team will continue its efforts to implement the five outstanding recommendations that are “in progress” and revisit one recommendation pending further analysis and discussion with the Accessibility Advisory Council.

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## Contact Information

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If you have any questions, require this information in an alternate format, or wish to subscribe to Accessibility News, please contact the Manitoba Accessibility Office.

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