

Frequently Asked Questions:

The Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication

To request this information in an alternate format, contact 204-945-7613 or MAO@gov.mb.ca

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What is the Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication?

[The Accessible Information and Communication Standard Regulation](#) is the third regulation under [The Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#). The purpose of the regulated accessibility standard is to remove and prevent barriers that exist digitally, in print, or through interactions with technology or people.

The standard outlines what organizations must do, and by when, to provide information and communicate in a way that is accessible to all Manitobans. Similar to other regulated accessibility standards, the goal of this standard is to promote greater independence and inclusion for people with disabilities through the identification, prevention, and removal of information and communication barriers.

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Who needs to follow the Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication?

The standard applies to all organizations in Manitoba with one or more employees. There are different deadlines to meet the standard's requirements, depending on the sector your organization belongs to.

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When does my organization have to comply?

Some sectors have more time than others to comply with the standard. The sector you work in will determine when you need to comply.

- ✓ **May 1, 2023: The Manitoba government**
- ✓ **May 1, 2024: Public sector organizations, large municipalities, libraries and educational institutions**
 - Public sector organizations include Crown corporations, health authorities, Manitoba's 10 largest municipalities and government agencies, boards and commissions.
 - Libraries include municipal and regional libraries as well as libraries within educational institutions.

- Educational institutions include colleges, universities, adult learning centres, private vocational institutions, private and public schools.
- ✓ **May 1, 2025: Private sector and non-profit organizations, and small municipalities**
 - The private sector includes businesses and organizations with one or more employees, such as shops, restaurants and professional services.
 - Non-profit organizations include, but are not limited to, charities, places of worship, community organizations and member associations.

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Who benefits from the Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication?

The Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication requires organizations to remove barriers for people with disabilities who access information and communication. Almost one in four Manitobans have a disability, and nearly every Manitoban knows someone with a disability, or will acquire a disability at some point in their life.

There are many ways people access information and communication as a result of their differing abilities to see, hear and understand information or communicate with others. Presenting information in a variety of ways will make communication accessible for everyone.

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What does my organization need to do to comply with this standard?

Manitoba organizations must already meet the [Accessibility Standard for Customer Service](#) and its requirement to communicate in a way that meets customers' needs. The [Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication](#) provides more specific direction on how to meet customers' needs, including when they are students or library users.

The standard directs organizations to create and maintain accessible websites and web applications. Like the province of Ontario, and many jurisdictions around the world, the standard directs Manitobans to follow globally accepted Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG.

Manitoba organizations must also notify the public and its employees that information is available through communication supports and alternate formats, upon request. Other requirements include providing training, and having a feedback process in place about the organization's level of accessible information and communication supports. [For more information on collecting and responding to feedback, including complaints, see page 12.](#)

The Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication requires your organization to have measures, policies and practices in place to address barriers to information and communication. Organizations with 50 or more employees are required to document their policies on accessible information and communication and make those policies publicly available. This requirement also applies to libraries and educational institutions, as well as government agencies, health authorities and large municipalities, regardless of their employee size.

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My organization has a website. Do I have to update it to conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)?

Web Content

If your organization's web content is published **after** the standard comes into force for your organization, then yes. Also, if your existing web content is required for users to access your goods or services, then you would also need to conform to the [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 Level AA](#), at a minimum.

Also, once the standard applies to you, if your organization is launching or significantly refreshing a web application (accessed on a browser), your web application must meet, at a minimum, WCAG 2.1 Level AA.

Intranet Content

Public sector organizations (excluding small municipalities), educational institutions and libraries with intranet content, must conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA or greater guidelines.

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I don't have the skills to update my website and/or web applications to WCAG 2.1 Level AA. Does my organization still need to comply with the standard?

Yes. If your organization does not have the in house expertise to make updates, you are required to find outside sources, to ensure you comply with this legal requirement. The Manitoba government is unable to promote specific organizations that provide these services. A professional, such as a web developer, web designer, or digital designer may be best suited to assist your organization.

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Does the Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication include exceptions for organizations that may not be able to meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines for web content and web applications?

Under the standard, there are exceptions where an organization's web content or web applications do not need to meet or exceed WCAG 2.1 Level AA requirements.

If any of the following applies, you do **not** have to meet or exceed WCAG 2.1 Level AA requirements:

- it is not technically feasible for the content or application to meet the required level
- the technology required to publish the content or application is not readily available
- meeting the required level would result in demonstrable undue hardship to the organization
- the organization does not have direct control over the content or application
- the content or application relates to product labels or other product information

For more information on undue hardship, [please contact the Manitoba Human Rights Commission](#).

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My organization has recently updated its website, web application, or web content to meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA. Can I contact the Manitoba government to have an accessibility audit done?

The Manitoba government does not conduct accessibility audits of websites or web content upon request. If your organization would like to have an accessibility audit to ensure that your website, web content, and/or web application meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA, there are organizations in the private sector that offer this type of service. In the future, the [Accessibility Compliance Secretariat](#) will conduct planned audits of specific sectors for compliance purposes.

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Will mobile apps need to be made accessible under this standard?

No. The standard applies to web applications, which are defined as software applications that run on a web server and are accessed by a user through a web browser. This does not include mobile applications. Mobile application developers are still encouraged to keep accessibility in mind for their users when creating and updating mobile apps, as accessibility benefits everyone.

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My organization provides information to the public. If someone requests it, do we need to provide information in an alternate format or through a communication support?

Yes. Organizations need to consider the ways in which Manitobans interact with or access information they provide. If you receive a request for accessible information, first, consult with the person making the request to identify a support or a format that removes the barrier. Then, provide the format or support in a timely manner. Do not charge the person making the request more than what you would charge to someone who did not make that request. This includes information about emergency procedures and public safety.

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What are alternate (or accessible) formats?

Alternate or accessible formats are formats that present printed or electronic documents in different ways to ensure everyone has equal access to the information. People with disabilities may use adaptive or assistive technology that requires an alternate or accessible format so the technology can access the information in a specific manner for the user.

Examples of accessible or alternate formats include:

- large print
- recorded audio
- electronic or digital documents – for example, formatted to be accessible for use with a screen reader
- Braille
- writing in plain language
- text transcripts of visual and audio information – for example, a video transcript

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What are communication supports?

Communication supports facilitate communication between two or more people and help organizations to effectively communicate with a wide audience.

Examples of communication supports include:

- sign language interpretation
- screen reader technology
- captions used in video content or virtual meetings
- video relay services
- adaptive or assistive technology

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Is my organization required to arrange and pay for American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, as a communication support?

If you receive a request for a communication support, you need to consult with the person making the request to identify a reasonable accommodation that removes the barrier. In some instances, ASL will be the only way to effectively communicate and remove the barrier, whereas in other situations, communicating through text or handwritten notes, may work. It is important that you engage with the person making the request to find an appropriate solution that is dependent on the situation.

If ASL interpretation is necessary to remove a barrier, your organization is required to arrange for and pay for ASL interpretation in a timely manner.

Remember: Your organization's actions must be consistent with the purposes and principles of [The Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#) and its obligations, including the obligation to offer reasonable accommodations up to the point of undue hardship under [The Human Rights Code](#).

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What if my organization receives a request for information through a communication support or alternate format but cannot afford to meet the request?

Providing information in an alternate format or by using a communication support is often low or no cost to an organization. If you receive a request for information to be provided in an accessible format or using a communication support, first consult with the person making the request to identify a support or a format that removes the barrier. Then, provide the format that removes the barrier to accessing information or to communication in a timely manner, unless one or more of the following exceptions apply:

- it is not technically feasible to provide the information through the requested support or format
- the technology required to provide the information through a communication support or accessible format is not readily available
- providing the accommodation would result in demonstrable undue hardship to your organization

- your organization does not have direct control over the information; or
- the information relates to product labels or other product information

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My organization can't afford to provide a requested communication support or accessible format. Does that count as undue hardship?

Reasonable accommodation requires your organization to take responsibility for an accommodation, such as a communication support or accessible format, including bearing the costs up to the point of demonstrable undue hardship. Undue hardship may be met when there are extreme costs or significant health and safety risks to provide an accommodation.

Inconvenience, preferences or some costs do not usually qualify as undue hardship.

If a request creates undue hardship, you still need to explore other ways to provide the communication support or accessible format. Work with the person who is making the request to find another way.

For more information on undue hardship, [please contact the Manitoba Human Rights Commission](#).

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If my organization receives a request, can a cost or fee be applied to the person making the request?

No. Organizations are not permitted to impose a cost or fee on a person who makes a request for information to be provided in an accessible format or through a communication support.

If a cost or fee already applies for the information that has been requested in an accessible format or through a communication support, your organization is not permitted to impose an additional cost or fee on the person making the request.

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I work for an educational institution; do exceptions apply to requests received for educational materials to be provided in an alternate format or using a communication support?

No. If an educational institution receives a request for educational materials in an accessible way, the organization must consult with the person making the request to identify the support or format that would remove the barrier. The educational material must be provided through the identified support or format in a timely manner.

If the material cannot be reasonably provided using the identified support or format, the educational institution is responsible to provide a comparable resource through the identified support or format. Providing a comparable resource ensures that people who experience barriers communicating or accessing information are provided an equal opportunity in the educational environment.

Educational materials include textbooks, reference books, workbooks, educational kits, student records and details regarding classes, lessons, workshops and programs.

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Is my organization responsible for receiving and responding to feedback or complaints about the level of accessibility of our information and communication?

Yes. Your organization must have a process in place to receive and respond to feedback, including complaints, about accessible or inaccessible information and communication. The process for receiving and responding to feedback must be appropriate to the circumstances and suitable for people with disabilities. Also, your organization must document all resulting actions arising from the feedback or actions taken to resolve the complaint, and make that information available on request.

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I am a member of the public. What if an organization does not respond to my request for accessible information or to the feedback provided about accessible information and communication?

If you have made a request or provided feedback to an organization related to accessible information and communication and do not receive a response in a timely

manner, you may contact the [Accessibility Compliance Secretariat](#) to report alleged non-compliance with a requirement of [The Accessible Information and Communication Standard Regulation](#). Contact information for the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat is included on the last page of this document.

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Does my organization have to provide training on accessible information and communication? Who do I need to train?

All organizations in Manitoba are required to provide training on the standard to their employees, agents and volunteers who:

- communicate directly with the public or another Manitoba organization on behalf of the organization
- maintain or develop the organization's web content
- purchase or procure information technology or communication tools
- develop or implement an organization's measures, policies and practices on accessible communication

If your organization is an educational institution, you also need to train your educators.

Your organization must ensure that training is provided as soon as reasonably possible after the person is assigned the applicable duties. Ongoing training is also required whenever you update or change your policies, measures and practices related to accessible information and communication.

The Manitoba Accessibility Office will develop and offer free online training to assist your organization to meet the accessible information and communication training requirements.

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What does accessible information and communication training include?

Training content must include:

- how to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessible information and communication

- how to provide accessible information and communication, including through a communication support or alternate formats
- a review of [The Human Rights Code](#), [The Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#) and [The Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication](#).

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How will the Manitoba government monitor and ensure compliance with this regulation?

Once the standard is in force, Manitoba's [Accessibility Compliance Secretariat](#) will monitor and enforce compliance. Dedicated reviews to determine compliance with accessible web content, web applications and other requirements under this regulation, will also take place. When these are conducted, the aim will be to provide organizations with constructive feedback and, if applicable, a concrete plan to achieve compliance. If this approach is ineffective, activities may be escalated to include sanctions, such as director's orders to comply and the levying of administrative monetary penalties.

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Does meeting the requirements of The Accessible Information and Communication Standard Regulation protect my business or organization from human rights complaints?

No. While accessibility measures speak well of ensuring the minimum requirements for providing accessible information and communication, they do not rule out the possibility of discrimination as outlined in The Human Rights Code (Manitoba). [The Human Rights Code](#) takes priority over all other provincial laws and regulations, unless specifically noted.

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Contact Information

Accessibility Compliance Secretariat

If you have any questions about compliance please contact:

Accessibility Compliance Secretariat

Second Floor – 114 Garry Street

Winnipeg, MB, R3C 1G1

Phone: 204-792-0263

Email: AccessibilityCompliance@gov.mb.ca

Manitoba Accessibility Office

If you have require this information in an alternate format:

Manitoba Accessibility Office

630 - 240 Graham Avenue

Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0J7

Phone: 204-945-7613; Toll-free: 1-800-282-8069, Ext. 7613

Email: MAO@gov.mb.ca

Website: AccessibilityMB.ca

Visit AccessibilityMB.ca for information, tools and templates.

Legal disclaimer: This information complements the application of the regulations under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. It is not legal advice. For certainty, please refer to [The Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#) and [The Accessible Information and Communication Standard Regulation](#).

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