



Multi-Year Accessibility Plan



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Introduction

Oxford County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines the strategic actions that the County will work towards to remove barriers and improve opportunities for persons with disabilities. The Plan details the County's approach to building an accessible organization in a manner that respects dignity, independence, integration and equitable opportunity. The County is committed to complying with applicable legislation, including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Statement of organizational commitment

In alignment with its mission, Oxford County is committed to building equitable, barrier-free, and inclusive opportunities for persons with disabilities who live, work, and visit in the County of Oxford. The County strives to identify, remove, and prevent invisible and visible accessibility barriers, including attitudinal, systemic, informational and communicational, technological, and physical barriers, to ensure that a safe, welcoming, and accessible community exists for all citizens.

Oxford County acknowledges that persons with disabilities:

- represent a growing and diverse group that is dramatically increasing due to the demographic trends of a maturing population;
- form part of the workforce, and include our families, friends, customers, and members of the community at large;
- purchase goods and services and make important financial decisions on where they do business, enjoy recreation, and choose to live; and
- are valuable contributors to our society, and their full participation requires well-considered commitment from all levels of government.

Therefore, County services and facilities are to be available to people with disabilities in a manner that:

- is free from discrimination;
- strives at all times to respect the individual's dignity and independence;
- is integrated with the provision of service to others, except when alternative measures are necessary to meet the needs of people with disabilities; and
- takes individual needs into account to minimize barriers to access or participation and ensures that individuals with disabilities are treated equitably.

Background

One in seven people in Ontario has a disability. By 2036, the number of persons with disabilities will rise to one in five as the population ages. As such, persons with disabilities represent a significant and growing part of Ontario's and Oxford County's population.

Enhancing people with disabilities' ability to live independently and participate in the community will positively affect Ontario's, and subsequently the County's, future prosperity. Despite consistent efforts and strides toward compliance with the legislation, Oxford County

acknowledges that there is much more that can be done to eliminate barriers to persons with disabilities.

Legislative authority

There are currently two active pieces of legislation in Ontario that specifically address accessibility: the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2001 (the "ODA") and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005, S.O. 2005, c.11 (the "AODA"). The AODA and its associated regulations created mandatory accessibility standards further specified by way of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), O. Reg. 191/11.

Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The purpose of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001, was to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to full participation. Under the ODA, municipalities were required to have annual accessibility plans that would report on the measures taken by the organization to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities. Pursuant to the Act, the County established an Accessibility Advisory Committee to assist in developing an accessibility plan informed by consultation with persons with disabilities. Although the ODA has not been repealed, it has been effectively superseded by the AODA.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which became law in 2005, went a step further and advanced the goals of the ODA by introducing five mandatory standards and general requirements applicable to the public and private sectors. The five standards include:

1. Information and Communication
2. Employment
3. Transportation
4. Design of Public Spaces
5. Customer Service

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation

In 2011, the Province of Ontario released the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), which combined the five accessibility standards and included general requirements for policy, planning, and training. The general requirements are as follows:

- To develop, implement, and maintain accessibility policies, including a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and annual accessibility status reports;
- To incorporate accessibility design, criteria, and features when procuring or acquiring goods, services, or facilities, except where it is not practicable to do so; and
- To provide training on the requirements of the AODA and the Human Rights Code as it relates to persons with disabilities.

Both the five standards and the general requirements of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation must be complied with.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Oxford County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines how it intends to reach its goals of building an accessible, inclusive, and equitable organization as it continues to fulfill its obligations under the AODA, including the IASR. This Plan includes a review of its past goals, strategic actions, and accomplishments (see Annual Report Appendix) and highlights current and future goals and strategic actions. Objectives identified in this Plan are both long- and short-term, several of which are ongoing throughout the Plan's life. The County established an Accessibility Advisory Committee to assist in developing the required Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, informed by consultation with persons with disabilities from the community it serves. The County will report annually on the progress and implementation of the Plan, post the information on its website, and provide it in alternative formats upon request.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Oxford County's current Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) members have advised and made recommendations to the County on accessibility-related matters to achieve its vision. While fulfilling its mandate, AAC has revised the Statement of Organizational Commitment and a glossary of terms in Oxford County's Accessibility Policy. The AAC has also developed strategies for a more equitable and inclusive community in its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2026-2030. AAC members help the County raise awareness of the challenges, needs, and considerations faced by people with disabilities, to create and sustain action-focused, positive, and lasting systemic change within the County.

Accessibility Advisory Committee accomplishments to date

Oxford County's AAC members have played an active role in providing feedback and recommendations on accessibility initiatives in the community. Below is an overview of some of its accomplishments to date; however, the list is not exhaustive and should not be considered complete, as efforts to improve accessibility are ongoing. The accomplishments are as follows:

- Provided input on outer space and buildings to advance active living for adults 50+ through collaborating with Southwestern Public Health's Age-Friendly Committee
- Provided a letter of support for the Township of South-West Oxford for a funding application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the development of an accessible and inclusive playground in the community of Brownsville.
- Hosted the Joint Accessibility meeting, with attendees from lower-tier municipalities. A guest speaker provided training and conducted a mock building audit for educational purposes.
- Created an Accessibility Assessment Checklist as a guide to be consulted wherever possible for retrofits and new Oxford-owned buildings.
- Promoted Red Shirt Day and National Accessibility Week in 2025.
- Increased awareness around invisible disabilities and highlighted some of the invisible

disabilities, i.e., attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, moderate hearing loss, and others, as part of Invisible Disabilities Week.

- Reviewed and provided feedback to Zorra Township and the Township of South-West Oxford's draft Multi-Year Accessibility Plans.
- Endorsed ongoing accessibility learning through accessible washroom training. The series was made available to the staff of lower-tier municipalities.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan action items

The section below highlights the County's commitment and current and future action items in advancing accessibility.

Customer service

Oxford County is committed to ensuring that all staff and customers, whatever their ability, work in an accommodating environment and receive accessible goods and services in a timely manner. We aim to be proactive, inclusive, and welcoming to all County residents and understand that we all share responsibility for building accessible, responsive, and inclusive spaces. See the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy No. 9.3 available on the County of Oxford Website.

The County will focus on the following:

1. Technology and supportive devices are constantly evolving, and due to the County's commitment to accessible customer service, the County will maintain the resources available at customer service counters to proactively engage with the public and ensure seamless communication and customer service. Some examples of resources include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Personal amplifier
 - b. Hearing loops for service counters
 - c. Magnifiers, pen grips, and signature guide
 - d. An iPad with the Google Translate App to mitigate language barriers.
2. Upgrading customer service training as needed.
3. Highlight improvements and accomplishments in accessible customer service across the organization through a broader communication plan.
4. Evaluating the County's services and policies, reviewing customer feedback, and taking appropriate action to ensure inclusion and equitable participation for employees, residents, and visitors with disabilities.
5. Continue consultation with the County of Oxford Accessible Advisory Committee (AAC) on the County service delivery, programs, and initiatives.

Employment

The Employment standards under the IASR require the County to support the recruitment and accommodation of people and employees with disabilities. The County is committed to advancing accessibility and inclusion of people and employees with disabilities. See the County's Recruitment Policy 5.03.

The County will focus on the following:

1. Continue to provide training to managers and supervisors on accessibility related topics. Topics may include accommodations, inclusion, and anti-ableism in hiring, performance management, evaluation, and return-to-work.
2. Continue to integrate accessibility into talent management, employee development, performance management, promotion, retention, and return-to-work, while considering the best practices outlined in the County's DEI HR Best Practices Guidebook.
3. Review policies and procedures for job applicants and employees to identify, prevent, and remove barriers to employment and development opportunities. This review will also serve to ensure ongoing compliance with the legislation.
4. Utilizing the existing new hire survey method, ensure questions relevant to employees' experiences with accessibility and accommodations are included. Continue to monitor responses.
5. Continue to reduce barriers to professional development opportunities for employees with disabilities.

Information and communication

The Information and Communications standards under IASR require the County to communicate and provide information in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities.

The County will focus on the following:

1. Explore the feasibility of implementing a policy that encourages all County departments to accept only fully accessible reports/documents/presentations.
2. Collaborate with departments to develop templates to ensure accessibility standards are met during document creation, including public-facing documents.
3. Continue notifying the public about the availability of accessible formats and communication supports.
4. Ensure that any process for receiving and responding to feedback is accessible by providing or arranging accessible formats and communication supports.
5. Continue to ensure that County employees understand their role in providing accessible formats and communication supports, including consulting with the person requesting accommodation to determine suitable accessible formats or communication supports.
6. Ensure County employees have the tools and resources to develop and provide information in accessible formats.
7. Encourage staff to utilize available resources on the Intranet under Digital Content Accessibility at the beginning of their projects, when creating public-facing documents and accessible documents for common desktop applications such as MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

8. Ensure that emergency information, procedures, plans and public safety information that is available to the public is available in alternate formats, when requested.

Transportation

Many of the standards within Transportation do not apply to Oxford County as an upper-tier municipality. The County will, however, continue our ongoing commitment to accessible transportation.

The County will focus on the following:

1. Supporting its lower-tier municipalities in advancing transportation standards under IASR requirements.
2. Ongoing implementation and construction of the County's primary Cycling Network as noted in the 2024 Transportation Master Plan.

Design of public spaces

The County is committed to removing barriers in outdoor and shared-use spaces. The County will:

1. Provide accessible parking locations with adequate dimensions, signage, and pedestrian connections to Oxford-owned buildings.
2. Work towards increasing the number of accessible washrooms with adequate dimensions, amenities, and safety features in Oxford-owned buildings.
3. Apply best practices in the preventative maintenance of accessible elements with periodic checks, such as regular inspections, or after storms or events (such as vandalism or complaints) that might affect accessible elements.
4. When disruptions occur that will impact the accessibility of goods, services, or facilities provided by the County, make a reasonable effort to provide notice of disruption to the public indicating:
 - a. Description of the service disruption
 - b. Reason for the disruption
 - c. Anticipated duration of the disruption
 - d. Alternate routes, facilities, or services, if any, that are available
 - e. Contact information

Notice will be given by posting the information at public entry points and key locations around the service disruption, or by any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances, as soon as reasonably possible.

5. Promote the use of the Accessibility Assessment Checklist (as created by Oxford County's Accessibility Advisory Committee) for consideration when possible, during the design of retrofits and new Oxford-owned buildings.
6. Continue supporting the capital upgrades, operations, and maintenance of the walking trails.

General

General requirements are those that apply across the three standards in this regulation – Information and Communications, Employment, and Transportation.

The County will focus on the following:

1. Implementing the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, including strategies to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility, and reviewing the Plan once every five years.
2. Continue to incorporate accessibility criteria and features when procuring or acquiring goods, services, or facilities.
3. Continue to train employees and volunteers about the requirements of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, as well as the Human Rights Code, as it relates to people with disabilities.

Conclusion

Oxford County is future-focused and accountable. The County's accessibility planning supports compliance with AODA requirements, and weaves accessibility into key initiatives to help build a community that is inclusive and accessible for residents at every stage of life. Council, employees, volunteers, and service providers each play an important role in advancing the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and ensuring that the needs of people are considered and addressed. Providing a barrier-free County is a shared commitment.

Oxford County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan sets out the path to an accessible County by reducing and eliminating barriers, making it a community of choice, where persons of all abilities can actively participate and have a sense of belonging.