



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

2023 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

December 7, 2023



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General

Message from the Speaker

I am proud to present the 2023 Progress Report on the [House of Commons Accessibility Plan 2023–2025](#). Prepared in accordance with the *Accessible Canada Act*, this report outlines the progress made since the plan was launched last December. The House of Commons has completed the initiatives it had planned for this year. It also continues to consult with experts and gather feedback on accessibility and the plan's implementation. In this, the House is paying particular attention to the input received from persons with disabilities. There is still progress to be made, and the House is committed to keeping the conversation on accessibility going and making the changes that are needed in the coming years.

The House of Commons completed many important initiatives related to accessibility in 2023:

- It deployed a live captioning system for visitors in the House of Commons galleries.
- It invested in making the House of Commons' public website more accessible.
- It developed two training sessions for Members, their staff, and House of Commons Administration employees: one on accessibility awareness and the other on accessible customer service.
- It made quick-fix improvements to buildings and made accessibility a priority for the Centre Block rehabilitation project.
- It revised its *Recruitment and Selection Policy* to reduce barriers and increase the recruitment of persons with disabilities.

I encourage you to read the 2023 Progress Report to learn more about these initiatives and others that were completed this year. House of Commons teams are already working on projects originally scheduled for the second year of the plan. Collecting feedback and information on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities is essential. I invite you to reach out to the [Accessibility Secretariat](#) with your comments or questions.

I hope you find the report informative.

The Honourable Greg Fergus, P.C., M.P.

Contact information and feedback

The Director of Accessibility Implementation is responsible for overseeing accessibility initiatives at the House of Commons.

Contact the Accessibility Secretariat for questions and feedback about accessibility and the House of Commons' plan or to obtain the plan or progress report in a different format.

Accessibility Secretariat
House of Commons
181 Queen Street
P.O. BOX 11
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
accessible@parl.gc.ca
613-995-1111 (Ottawa) or 1-833-725-2686 (toll-free)

Feedback about accessibility at the House can also be submitted anonymously [online](#), and forms in alternate formats can be obtained from the [Accessibility Secretariat](#). The House will review all the feedback it receives and take steps to address any barriers to accessibility identified.

Consultations

Consultations continued to be a major focus of the implementation of the House of Commons' Accessibility Plan. In keeping with the principle of “nothing without us,” we continued to listen to people living with disabilities and reflect on what they had to say. After the plan was published, Members, their staff, House Administration employees, and groups representing persons with various disabilities were consulted about existing barriers, ways of improving accessibility, and how the plan is being implemented.

Survey

In the spring of 2023, the House of Commons emailed a survey to Members, their staff, and Administration employees. As with the survey that was distributed in 2022, responses were anonymous. The 2023 survey asked respondents to describe barriers that they had encountered or observed; suggest ways of removing those barriers; and prioritize potential solutions. Respondents could self-identify as having a disability or as being close to someone with a disability. They could also provide contact information if they were interested in participating in consultations in the form of workshops. A total of 174 responses were received over a period of more than three weeks. More than 8% of respondents self-identified as having a disability and 6% as being close to someone with a disability.

Workshops

The House of Commons held small-group workshops with employees living with disabilities. The goal was to gather feedback to inform the preparation of different plan initiatives. The workshops had participants examine a proposal for a new workplace accommodation policy and the content of two accessibility training sessions. Some participants had mobility, visual or auditory impairments, while others were neurodivergent or close to someone with a disability.

Advocacy groups

The House of Commons also continued to consult with representatives of Inclusion Canada, Spinal Cord Injury Canada, and Disability Without Poverty through one-hour workshops to discuss barriers at the House and the implementation of its Accessibility Plan. In addition, working in close collaboration with Public Services and Procurement Canada, the House Administration continued its consultations with a committee made up of well-known disability advocacy groups on various projects and proposals aiming to support the implementation of the Parliamentary Precinct Universal Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan. The goal is to improve the built environment at the House.

Working group

The Accessibility Working Group was created in January 2022 and is comprised of directors, managers, and subject-matter experts from across the House Administration. Co-chaired by two senior executives—the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel and the Chief Information Officer—the working group continued the work it had started in 2022. The working group is also supported by the Director of Accessibility Implementation, who coordinates the implementation of the Accessibility Plan and all initiatives to improve accessibility at the House. The Accessibility Working Group meets once a month to track the plan’s implementation and to discuss the feedback received and any issues identified along the way.

During the same period, discussions and coordination continued with representatives of all organizations within the parliamentary precinct to share information and to ensure strategic alignment between Hill partners.

Feedback

The accessibility barriers identified by the 174 respondents to the 2023 survey were analyzed and grouped together according to the areas described in section 5 of the [Accessible Canada Act](#):

- employment;
- the built environment;
- information and communication technologies (ICTs);
- communication, other than ICTs;
- the procurement of goods, services and facilities;
- the design and delivery of programs and services; and
- transportation.

The three areas in which most barriers were identified are the built environment, employment, and information and communication technologies. The barriers mentioned most often were related to the following:

- for the built environment: entrance ramps, stairs, sitting areas, and doors
- for employment: telework, conditions of employment, awareness, and training
- for information and communication technologies: websites and digital documents

The top suggestions for priority improvement were websites and digital documents, accessibility training, and places to sit. Nearly 80% of the respondents who self-identified as having a disability or as being close to someone with a disability highlighted one or more positive aspects of the House's work on accessibility.

Between December 2022 and November 2023, the Accessibility Secretariat was formally contacted 30 times by email (at accessible@parl.gc.ca) (53%), through the [anonymous online form](#) (40%), and at the toll-free number (1-833-725-2686) (7%). People reached out to the Secretariat to provide feedback regarding the barriers they face in their interactions with the House (43%); to provide general feedback or suggestions (13%); to get information on a topic relating to accessibility (24%); or to request a document in an alternative format (20%). In terms of the topics raised by individuals, 43% of enquiries were related to ICTs; 20% to the built environment; 13% to services provided by the House; 10% to employment; 7% to communication (other than ICTs); and 3% to transportation.

All follow-up with individuals who provided contact information was done in accordance with the [feedback process](#) established by the House, and the relevant Administration services were tasked with assessing each request and following up where appropriate. The feedback we

received served to confirm the importance of certain initiatives already captured in the plan and expected to be implemented in the coming months, and helped us make adjustments to others. The House of Commons appreciates the time these individuals took to contact the Accessibility Secretariat. We will continue to solicit feedback related to accessibility at the House from all interested parties, with the goal of removing barriers and reviewing the implementation of the action plan on an ongoing basis.

Culture change and training: A strong foundation

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Training

General accessibility awareness training for Members, their staff, and Administration employees was developed and launched in the fall of 2023. The training is mandatory for all Administration employees and is now part of onboarding activities. The vast majority of the Administration's staff will have completed the training by the end of January 2024. The training is also part of the onboarding program for Members' employees. It helps participants to better understand disability in Canada and its impact on the workplace. It also provides participants with strategies to improve inclusion and address ableism. This training was shared with the Senate for internal use by Senators, their staff, and Senate Administration employees.

Training on accessible customer service was deployed for Members, their staff, and Administration employees in early December. The goal is to ensure that all clients, regardless of ability or circumstance, have equal access to quality customer service. A promotional campaign is planned for early 2024.

Communications and awareness strategy

Various activities took place as part of the awareness strategy, and the theme of accessibility was centre stage at the Administration's all-staff annual meeting. Interactive kiosks highlighting the House's work on diversity and inclusion and accessibility in the built environment and information technology provided an opportunity for all employees to learn more on the topic. In addition, awareness videos were published and an internal accessibility resources portal was launched during National AccessAbility Week. The portal includes a variety of tools to help Members, their staff, and Administration employees create accessible documentation.

In collaboration with all parliamentary partners, the House organized a virtual event for parliamentarians, their staff, and House Administration employees on December 6. Ms. Yazmine Laroche, the first person with a visible disability appointed federal Deputy Minister and the first Deputy Minister of Public Service Accessibility, led this presentation, entitled "Eliminating Barriers: Lessons Learned in Accessibility."

Governance

The Accessibility Secretariat was established in January 2023. The Secretariat was allocated a budget to fund the initiatives in the plan and tasked with the following:

- monitoring feedback;
- evaluating responses;
- overseeing the implementation and updating of the Accessibility Plan;
- conducting consultations with persons with disabilities; and
- providing leadership, advice, and coordination across the House.

Employment

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Recruitment

The Administration reviewed its Recruitment and Selection Policy and added inclusion as a guiding principle. The Policy puts emphasis on accessibility and the importance of creating a barrier-free environment. Staffing advisors are now receiving training on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and tools have been developed to make interview processes more inclusive and accessible. A new hiring portal was launched, and it has led to improvements in the accessibility of employment opportunities. In addition, job offer templates have been updated to give prominence to the House's commitment to accessibility and opportunities for requesting an accommodation. Work in this area will continue into 2024: the student hiring program (including for the Page Program) will be reviewed, as will documents related to the recruitment process to ensure the use of plain language. Targeted recruitment options and self-identification will also be examined.

Self-identification

A new online self-identification questionnaire was launched in November 2023. It allows Administration employees to confidentially self-identify and update their information at any time in the online HR system or via an accessible PDF form. The self-identification question for disability has been expanded to provide definitions for "disability" and "barrier" adapted from the Accessible Canada Act, with options for respondents to identify with one or more disability types. These changes align with best practices in this area. Anonymous, aggregate responses to the self-identification questionnaire will help guide the development of more inclusive services and programs at the House, including for the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities, while safeguarding confidential information.

Built environment

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Numerous initiatives related to the built environment are currently under way. While the first year of the plan includes no deliverables in this category, the Administration has made considerable headway planning and implementing a number of projects. For example, several projects under the category of common and public areas, interior doors and corridors that resulted in improvements were completed this year. In addition, modifications were made to the Table in the Chamber to meet universal accessibility requirements for personnel who support proceedings.

The House continued to work in close collaboration with Public Services and Procurement Canada and parliamentary partners on the Parliamentary Precinct Universal Accessibility Plan. The plan includes a practical, step-by-step approach to embedding universal accessibility into all new construction projects, big or small. In this regard, the Centre Block Rehabilitation Project continues to be a priority, with the goal of making it a model for universal accessibility in parliamentary buildings. An advisory committee with representatives of advocacy groups for persons with disabilities is part of the design and development process and is consulted on a regular basis. The work is supported by a Parliament buildings audit program. Eighteen audits were carried out between 2020 and 2023 and another six are scheduled to take place in 2023–2024.

Fire prevention and emergency preparedness

April 2023 saw the launch of an awareness campaign to facilitate the self-identification of building occupants in the precinct who need assistance in the event of an emergency. Some 20 individuals self-identified, and customized plans have been developed to assist them in emergency evacuations.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Websites

The House ramped up its work to ensure that its public and internal websites meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 (level AA). Websites were audited, issues were

analyzed and ranked in order of priority, and comprehensive work to resolve the issues identified has started. As of November 2023, more than 293 development days had been spent on this effort since April 2023, and more than 85% of issues that were prioritized in the spring of 2023 had been resolved (1,468 of 1,650) for the top 5 most visited sections of the public portal OurCommons.ca. Investments were made in training and tools for developers. More than 95% of the staff on technical teams in charge of web development and maintenance have received accessibility training. Also, new employees with specific expertise and lived experiences have been recruited to support digital product testing and improvement.

Live captioning for visitors in the galleries

A solution to give visitors access to live captioning of the proceedings in the House of Commons galleries was developed, tested, and deployed in December 2023. When the House resumes after the winter adjournment, in January 2024, visitors in the galleries will have access to tablets that can display live captioning during debates.

Non-web documentation

Work to improve access to non-web documentation, which was initially slated for 2024, is now under way. Documents are being audited to ensure that accessibility requirements are met, and corrective actions have been implemented where needed. Tools, templates and guides have been developed and made available on the intranet to help Members, their staff, and Administration employees develop accessible documents. Accessibility training was developed and provided to Administration employees.

Communication, other than ICT

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Sign language interpretation

An assessment of the resources required for providing sign language interpretation during some House proceedings is under way and will be completed by the end of 2023. This work includes reviewing recent experiences involving the use of Quebec Sign Language (QSL) and American Sign Language (ASL) during a committee study. The assessment will help determine the processes, resources, infrastructures, and investments required to provide sign language interpretation at parliamentary events on the precinct.

Plain language

Corporate Communications advisors received plain language training. Writers from Procedural Services, including those working on the fourth edition of House of Commons Procedure and Practice, also completed the training.

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Accessibility guidelines for the procurement of goods and services for the House are being developed and are expected to be implemented in 2024. Subject-matter expertise has been sought and research into best practices is ongoing to inform the development of training and tools for procurement officers.

Design and delivery of programs and services

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

Approval of programs and services

An “Accessibility Implications” section has been added to the template for submissions to the Board of Internal Economy to ensure that this aspect is taken into account when assessing new House of Commons programs and services.

Services to Members

A centralized, multidisciplinary contact centre providing a simplified and seamless experience to Members and their staff was launched ahead of schedule in September 2023 (the launch was originally planned for 2024). The centre has a single phone line (with a call-back feature) and offers extended hours of service, in-person appointments (by request), and a new web portal for online access.

Member events and activities in the precinct

The floor plans for Members’ parliamentary events and activities in the precinct were revised to be more inclusive and accessible.

Transportation

Report on short-term commitments (2023)

The House reviewed its accessible parking spaces to ensure that they are clearly identified, documented, and appropriately located. The process for allocating parking spaces to persons with disabilities was also reviewed to put in place quick and easy accommodation options.