

Minister of Families

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act 2017/18 Annual Plan

Introduction

As Minister responsible for The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), I am pleased to present the 2017/18 Annual Plan. As required by the AMA, this Annual Plan outlines the activities our government will undertake in 2017/18 to advance Manitoba's accessibility legislation.

This third annual plan sets out the Government of Manitoba's plans to achieve significant progress in the development of accessibility standards. During 2017/18 the goal is to establish an Accessibility Standard for Employment as a regulation and develop the third of five accessibility standards in the area of information and communication. Our Government has committed to implementing five accessibility standards during our first mandate and these actions represent further progress towards achieving that objective.

The 2017/18 plan also prioritizes public awareness among the private sector businesses and organizations that must comply with the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service by November 2018. The Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) will take the lead in developing awareness initiatives among affected organizations with the goal of "educating for compliance." I am pleased to report that the Government of Manitoba has increased the 2017/18 resource allocation to the DIO to undertake this important work.

Another priority for 2017/18 is to complete and implement a framework for monitoring compliance with the AMA. This will become increasingly important as the additional standards are put into place. In December of 2017 I appointed the Deputy Minister in my Department as the Director of the AMA and the development of the compliance framework is being led through that office working in close collaboration with the DIO.

As in prior years, the 2017/18 Annual Plan targets the following six strategic priorities:

1. Development and Implementation of Standards
2. Government and Public Sector Leadership
3. Resource Development
4. Training
5. Public Awareness
6. Compliance

Looking beyond these annual strategic priorities, this year I will also be appointing a consultant to undertake an independent review of the implementation of the AMA since it was enacted in 2013. This analysis and related consultation will assist the Government of Manitoba to learn from its experience to assist in planning the way forward.

I look forward to working closely with the Accessibility Advisory Council, the Director, my colleagues within government and a variety of stakeholders as together we take concrete steps toward our vision of a barrier-free Manitoba.

Strategic Priority 1: Development and Implementation of Standards

(a) Accessibility Standard in Employment

Development of the Accessibility Standard for Employment will assist people with disabilities by removing barriers to recruiting, hiring and retaining employees. Business will gain by the increased access to skilled employees including the growing number of seniors affected by disability. We will all benefit from the successful participation of jobseekers in our economy and therefore the reduced reliance on publicly funded income supports.

The Accessibility Advisory Council (Council) has been guiding the process for developing the Accessibility Standard for Employment. The Council prepared a discussion paper that served as the basis for public consultations that occurred in January 2017. Based on public feedback, the Council submitted a report to me in April 2017 with their recommendations for developing the new accessibility standard. This document will be posted on www.AccessibilityMB.ca. Once I have reviewed the Council's recommendations, in the fall I will release a final proposal for the standard, which will be followed by a further 60-day period for public feedback. The Council will assist me in reviewing all of the public submissions and feedback we receive. The Council will provide advice on whether further amendments should be made to the standard before I present it to Cabinet for approval.

Our goal for 2017/18 is to have the standard enacted as a regulation before the end of this year.

(b) Accessibility Standard for Information and Communication

In consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Council, information and communication was identified as the next area for standard development. Communication is critical to ensuring equal access to important information and services whether this be in person, in print or electronically. Many businesses and organizations rely increasingly on electronic means of reaching their customers, clients or program participants. The proposed standard will outline requirements for organizations to create, provide and receive information and communication in ways that are accessible for persons with disabilities.

Early in 2017/18, the Council will create an Information and Communication Standard Development Committee as per section 16 of the AMA. The committee will be comprised of people with a thorough understanding of common barriers to communication, technical information and stakeholders who may have obligations under

the proposed standard. As Minister, I will provide the Council with terms of reference to guide the work of this committee.

Strategic Priority 2: Government Leadership

Last year, the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan (MGAP) and Manitoba Government Accessible Customer Service Policy were launched to ensure programs and services are delivered in a fully accessible manner in compliance with the AMA. Although not required by the AMA, in 2017/18 all government departments will have accessibility plans that are guided by MGAP but with priority actions in keeping with departmental priorities and programs. Through the Deputy Ministers' Council, a cross departmental consolidated implementation plan will be prepared and posted. This consolidated plan will set out government wide actions that will be taken in 2017/18 to implement the MGAP and ensure government is in compliance with the Customer Service Standard. The DIO will offer support to the departmental accessibility coordinators to ensure barrier-free policies, programs and services are in place across government, including in rural and northern Manitoba.

In 2017/18, the DIO will coordinate training and support to smaller municipalities, agencies, boards and commissions that must create accessibility plans in addition to complying with the Customer Service Standard by November 2017. Other government departments will assist the DIO to reach the smaller municipalities and organizations located outside Winnipeg.

I am also pleased by the ongoing partnership between the DIO and Manitoba's largest public sector organizations. There are far reaching benefits achieved by sharing information, policies and resources. A key example of this is related to on-line training in accessible customer service that was first created in Ontario by post-secondary institutes. This was adapted for Manitoba's post-secondary institutes and in 2017/18 will be tailored further to serve Manitoba's regional health authorities and the school divisions.

Strategic Priority 3: Resource Development

The focus of AMA resource development in 2017/18 will be on creating tools to help business implement the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, as the November 2018 deadline draws nearer. In addition, the DIO will develop an introductory brochure, fact sheets, policy samples and other documentation to support the future accessibility standard for employment. These will be launched when this standard becomes a regulation.

The DIO will advise other organizations in their resource development and will continue to build on its user-friendly accessible repository of information and resources at www.AccessibilityMB.ca. This website will be updated in 2017/18 to increase access to

valuable resources created in Manitoba and by accessibility champions in other jurisdictions.

Strategic Priority 4: Training

Every year, Manitoba celebrates Manitoba Access Awareness Week (MAAW) during the first week in June to raise awareness and to recognize the significant contributions of Manitobans with disabilities. In 2017, there will be an event focusing on the value of accessible customer service and employment. The primary target audience is the private sector that is required to comply with the Accessibility Standard in Customer Service by 2018. Our plan is for participants to learn about the business case for accessibility from keynote speaker Rachael Stafford of Rocky Mountain ADA in Colorado, where she is well known for assisting businesses to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Local businesses and organizations will also be on hand at this event and throughout the week and will profile actions that have been taken to enhance accessibility. Many thanks to all the businesses and organizations that will participate, including disability organizations that support the AMA with consultation, training and adaptive services.

In 2017/18, the DIO will continue to provide regular training in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba on how to create an Accessibility Plan and implement the Customer Service Standard. The intent is to train all organizations with 2017 compliance deadlines. The DIO will work in collaboration with the Civil Service Commission to ensure that all civil servants receive on-line training about the AMA and accessible customer

service. Departments will be encouraged to incorporate accessibility training into other related training (for instance targeting employers). Training and presentations will continue to be offered to business groups such as the various chambers of commerce and membership organizations. As requests continue to grow, it is expected the number of training opportunities and presentations during 2017/18 will be the highest since the AMA became law in 2013.

Strategic Priority 5: Public Awareness

In 2017/18 we plan to significantly increase awareness of the AMA among all businesses and organizations that must comply with the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service by the November 2018 deadline. The DIO will work in close collaboration with government departments and public sector organizations that have become champions of accessibility.

Private sector membership groups will also be approached to assist in reaching businesses and community organizations (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce, the United Way and different religious organizations). Unique opportunities will be sought out to create awareness among the public. One example involves including accessible customer service in the training program for the many volunteers expected to assist

athletes and spectators at the Canada Summer Games in July 2017.

In 2017/18, the DIO will also develop a marketing plan that initially focuses on what accessibility means and why it is important for everyone.

Strategic Priority 6: Development of Compliance Measures

In December 2016, I appointed Department of Families Deputy Minister, Mr. Jay Rodgers as the Director responsible for implementing the AMA. Since then the Deputy Minister has identified departmental staff to support his office in the development of an AMA compliance policy framework. The aim of the framework is to advance compliance with the accessibility legislation and its standards.

Partnerships, alliances and education activities focused on compliance will be in keeping with the spirit of the AMA. To support compliance the Manitoba Government will inform stakeholders about their duties related to the act and consult with them about existing and emerging standards.

The compliance priorities are to:

- educate all stakeholders on AMA requirements
- foster cooperative consultative relationships with stakeholders
- provide detailed information on how to meet compliance expectation;
- implement a compliance monitoring and assessment approach
- establish an enforcement strategy

Our goal is to have the compliance framework approved and in place by September 2017.

Concluding Comments

During 2017/18, we will continue our ongoing commitment to fully implement the AMA through the implementation of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service and the development of new standards in employment and in information and communication.

By increasing resources for the DIO, the Government of Manitoba will ensure that increased public awareness initiatives will be complemented by information, resource, tools and guidance on how to comply with the legislation.

Manitoba is proud to be a leader among Canadian jurisdictions that are introducing accessibility legislation. While Manitoba was the second province to establish an accessibility law in 2013 (Ontario was first), Nova Scotia has recently become the third province to enact legislation to remove barriers. We are also aware that the Federal Government is considering introducing accessibility legislation during 2017/18.

Manitoba will work with its colleagues across the country to share best practices and strategies that will result in equal opportunities and full citizenship for all.