

Minister's Annual Update 2022

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

October 2022

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

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Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk peoples.

We acknowledge that part of Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis.

We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

We remain committed to working in partnership with the Indigenous peoples in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration in accordance with their constitutional rights and human rights.

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Background

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 October 19, 2015.

Between spring 2020 and September 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 recommendations respecting any updates to the standard for consideration by the Minister responsible for Accessibility.

In September 2021, Council published a public [What We Heard Report](#) that identified main themes and areas of concern from the disability community, businesses and other obligated organizations who 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 November 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 October 2021 to October 2022 and offers a status update on progress.

Interdepartmental Implementation Team

In November 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 – October 2021 to October 2022

Heidi Wurmman – assistant deputy minister, Corporate Services⁹ division, Families (**Chair**)

Charissa McIntosh – senior policy analyst, MAO (**Project Manager**)

Darren Macdonald – executive director, MAO

Emily Walker – senior policy analyst/secretary to council, MAO

Lucia Madariaga-Vigñudo, assistant director, Accessibility Compliance Secretariat

Natasha Jainarine – manager, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Public Service Commission

Darlene Hedgecock – program coordinator, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Public Service Commission

Laura Funk – program coordinator, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Public Service Commission

Erin McKay – director of strategy and governance, Communication and Engagement Division, Finance

Over this period, the implementation team held regular meetings, on a roughly bi-monthly basis and prepared quarterly status updates at the request of the Minister, which were approved and then posted on the MAO website (www.AccessibilityMB.ca).

Implementing Recommendations

Council's Five-Year Review of the Accessible Standard for Customer Service included a set of twenty-two 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 October 1, 2022

- **4** recommendations were **completed**
- **11** recommendations completed initial activities and are considered to be **ongoing** for the implementation period of 2021 to 2024
- **6** recommendations are **in progress**
- **1** recommendation is **on pause** and will be revisited in April 2024.

This section will identify highlights and activities that were undertaken across the Manitoba government to support successful implementation of these recommendations for the period October 2021 to October 2022.

Recommendation 1 - 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.

- An internal review of all government departments is being conducted, and information related to the implementation of the AMA and its accessibility standards has been gathered from senior leaders of numerous departments.
- In fall 2022, focus groups will be conducted as part of the review, to ask public servants with disabilities, Departmental Access Coordinators (DACs) and Assistant Deputy Ministers about their familiarity with accessibility legislation and their experience offering accessible customer service to Manitobans.
- The data gathered from the 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.

- The Public Service Commission (PSC) tracks the government's compliance with the Standard requirements and the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan (MGAP) through quarterly departmental reports.

Recommendation 2 – In progress

Review the role of DACs as an important strategy for revitalizing accessibility awareness and communication commitments within departments.

- The PSC continues to ensure the role of DACs are an important component to advance accessibility initiatives across government. Over this period, PSC has ensured that each department has a DAC and holds quarterly meetings with all DACs.
- Development of an Accessibility Toolkit and Assistive Technology catalogue will be finalized by December 2022 and will be shared/distributed to Human Resource Consultants and departments through DACs.

Recommendation 3 - Ongoing

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

- Communications and Engagement Division (CED) is developing a project plan to advance implementation of the 5-year review recommendations and align with implementation of the Accessible Information and Communication Standard.
- Starting May 2022, quarterly meetings held between CED and Manitoba Families to ensure that internal/external communications are accessible.
- CED formed an accessibility working group to compile 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.

Recommendation 4 - Ongoing

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

- Five videos containing information about the AMA and accompanying standards have been produced for the Manitoba Accessibility Office (MAO) by Equality Communication Centre of Excellence (ECCOE) and will be posted on MAO's redesigned website once completed in 2023.
- CED has formed an accessibility working group that will look at guidelines and procedures for providing ASL.

Recommendation 5 – In progress

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

- The Accessibility Advisory Council intends to provide further advice and recommendations to the Minister about procurement. MAO would coordinate any follow-up work within government.
- The MAO is working with the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to explore how to best include accessibility in the Manitoba government Procurement Administration Manual to raise awareness of the AMA standards and highlight the need to reflect them in tender requirements as applicable.

Recommendation 6 - Ongoing

Enhance transparency of government compliance and improve collaboration with Council.

- Since October 2021, the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat (ACS) has met with Council on various occasions to share information with council members on activities undertaken, compliance trends and figures, and to discuss ideas related to future compliance projects. The ACS will meet with Council every six months, on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 7 - Ongoing

Provide adequate resources to the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat.

- A full time Accessibility Compliance Officer joined the secretariat in September 2022, and work is underway to augment the staffing complement of the secretariat in 2023/24.

Recommendation 8 - Ongoing

Ensure compliance activities are more transparent through annual reporting.

- The Accessibility Compliance Secretariat delivered a presentation to Council on June 8, 2022. Compliance data from 2021/22 was shared with Council, which recommended that it be published in the forthcoming annual report on accessibility. The data presented was incorporated in the 2021/22 annual report on accessibility, which was tabled by the Minister Responsible for Accessibility on September 29, 2022.
- ACS consulted with Council on potential future compliance-focused projects to include in the 2023 and 2024 Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan (MGAP).

Recommendation 9 - Ongoing

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

- MAO conducted a survey with businesses in 2021 that may be used as a baseline for future surveys to measure public awareness and perceived impact of the AMA.
- During this period, MAO conducted preliminary cross-jurisdictional research of other ways of measuring and reporting on impact, such as developing a quality of life index. Further work on this recommendation will occur in 2023 and 2024.

Recommendation 10 – Completed

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

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

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.

- This recommendation is on pause; will be revisited after April 2024.

Recommendation 12 - Ongoing

Substantially improve outreach and awareness to obligated businesses and organizations.

- During Manitoba small business week in mid-October 2022, MAO published print ads in 18 daily, weekly and community papers across the province to raise awareness about accessibility and Manitoba's accessibility standards.
- Between October 2021 and October 2022, MAO published and distributed six issues of Accessibility News to over 1,800 subscribers.
- Since May 1, 2022, MAO has developed new tools and resources to assist organizations to comply with existing accessibility standards, including the new Accessible Information and Communication Standard.
- In March 2022, MAO carried out a postcard direct mail campaign to over 52,000 urban and rural businesses and farms reminding them of their AMA responsibilities and encouraging them to apply for the Manitoba Accessibility Fund.

Recommendation 13 - Ongoing

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

- A direct mail campaign to over 52,000 urban and rural businesses and farms occurred in March 2022. MAO sent out two postcards to raise awareness about AMA responsibilities and to share information about the Manitoba Accessibility Fund (MAF), a new grant program to help organizations reduce barriers and comply with Manitoba's accessibility standards in place.
- In February 2022, MAO promoted MAF through an article in the Association of Manitoba Municipalities Municipal Leader magazine.

Recommendation 14 - Ongoing

Ensure the Manitoba Accessibility Office meets its French language commitments.

- Developing a new French-language version of www.accessibilityMB.ca is part of the website redesign process during 2022.

- MAO is committed to providing information about accessibility standards, resources and training in French and English, including posting new website content in both languages simultaneously.
- In March 2022, MAO gave a webinar on the Manitoba Accessibility Fund in French (in collaboration with the Bilingual Service Centre) as part of the inaugural intake of this new accessibility grant program.

Recommendation 15 – In progress

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

- This recommendation is part of legislative work to be undertaken in 2022/23 or 2023/24.

Recommendation 16 – Completed

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

- The Manitoba Accessibility Fund grant program was formally launched on February 14, 2022 and closed the first intake process on April 15, 2022.
- The Minister responsible for Accessibility approved 30 projects and a total of \$756.3K to be awarded to organizations in business, non-profit, and public sectors. These projects are to be completed by March 31, 2023.

Recommendation 17 – In progress

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

- MAO is working with a website designer and web developer with specialized expertise in accessible web design to ensure www.accessibilityMB.ca conforms with World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA, and enhances navigability of the site. This project will be completed in 2023.

Recommendation 18 - Ongoing

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

- MAO celebrated Manitoba Access Awareness Week in June 2022 with a webinar on the newly established Accessible Information and Communication Standard, which had the highest attendance in MAO history.
- MAO issued six organic social media messages in February 2022 to increase awareness of the Manitoba Accessibility Fund.

Recommendation 19 – In progress

Ensure Manitoba’s commitment to accessibility is adequately administered.

- Staff were seconded to fill positions of MAF Manager and Clerk 3 to coordinate the Manitoba Accessibility Fund; these positions will become permanent in fall 2022.
- A full-time Accessibility Compliance Officer joined the Accessibility Compliance Secretariat in September 2022.
- MAO welcomed a new Executive Director in April 2022 and a new Senior Policy Analyst to cover a maternity leave in October 2022.

Recommendation 20 - Completed

Continue to monitor financial implications of recommendations on stakeholders.

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

Recommendation 21 – Completed

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

- A ninth member was appointed to Council on February 15, 2022, for a three-year term. She identifies as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community and is a strong advocate for people with disabilities.

Recommendation 22 – In progress

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

- The Agencies, Boards and Commissions Office has updated inclusive language on the application form for new government ABC appointments.
- Work to include accessibility training as part of standardized onboarding process for all new members on ABCs is underway.

Next Steps

While progress on 18 recommendations will continue in 2023 and 2024, the following section identifies next steps for six recommendations that will specifically contribute to their successful implementation.

Recommendation 1

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.

- A presentation to the Accessibility Steering Committee outlining information gathered through the focus groups and the government-wide accessibility compliance report forms to all departments, will be delivered in winter 2023.
- The Public Service Commission (PSC) is developing the new Manitoba Government Action Plan for 2023 and 2024 (by December 2022), to support the government's leadership and championing of accessibility legislation.

Recommendation 2

Review the role of DACs as an important strategy for revitalizing accessibility awareness and communication commitments within departments.

- To continue supporting DACs, the PSC is updating the network's Terms of Reference and onboarding materials. The PSC shares accessibility-related resources with DACs to be cascaded throughout their departments.

Recommendation 8

Ensure compliance activities are more transparent through annual reporting.

- Going forward, the following performance measure will be included in the Minister's Annual Report on Accessibility: "Percentage of organizations that achieve compliance with accessibility requirements after being issued an "Achieving Compliance Plan."

Recommendation 13

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

- Over the next two years, MAO aims to expand its outreach and networking opportunities with organizations such as the Manitoba Association of Municipalities (AMM), Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA), Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and many others.

Recommendation 18

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

- MAO will be adding a web page to the AMA learning portal that will allow the public to download MAO's learning modules in a "zip" file format so that modules can be integrated into an organization's pre-existing training and as part of the Organization and Staff Development Learning Management System.

- A new training module on the Accessible Information and Communication Standard will be added to existing AMA learning portal in 2023.

Recommendation 19

Ensure Manitoba's commitment to accessibility is adequately administered.

- MAO has begun the process to hire a new Communication and Engagement Specialist. As well, a policy analyst position has been approved and will be hired in 2023 to focus on outreach to Indigenous populations.

Measuring Progress

In 2023, the interdepartmental implementation team will be exploring measurement of success and implementation of the sixteen recommendations identified as “ongoing” or “in progress.”

Contact Information

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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