

# Summary of the Draft Recommendations for an Accessibility Standard in Information and Communication

## Information and Communication Standard Development Committee

### Introduction

Nova Scotia has a law called the *Accessibility Act*. This law helps the government make standards, or rules, about accessibility in different areas. One of these areas is information and communication.

Information and communication needs to be free of barriers for all people. This means that people can find, understand, and use information. It means that people are able to communicate in person or through other methods without barriers.

The Accessibility Advisory Board develops recommendations on accessibility rules. The Board gives these to the Minister responsible for the Accessibility Act. A committee was created to help the Board. It is called the Information and Communication Standard Development Committee. The Committee makes recommendations to make this area more accessible.

The Committee must then get feedback on the recommendations. They must consult with the following groups.

- people with disabilities
- public sector bodies
- other affected sectors

The feedback the Committee gets will help them make their final recommendations.

The recommendations are meant to address barriers that make it hard to find, understand, and use information.

Below is a short summary of each recommendation.

## Recommendations

### 1. Who has to follow the standard?

There are different rules about who has to follow the standard. The rules depend on the size or type of organization.

Here are the recommendations in this area.

- All organizations with at least 1 employee must follow the standard.
- Some rules will only apply to organizations with more than 20 staff.
- Some rules will only apply to government and public sector bodies.

The standard will be introduced in steps. Organizations will have time to make changes.

### 2. Using plain language

Plain language is a way of communicating information. It uses clear design, wording, and structure. It makes information easy to find, understand, and use. Only the people using a communication can say if it is in plain language for them. The federal government has a standard for plain language. It was created by Accessibility Standards Canada.

Here are the recommendations in this area.

- Government must adopt and use the federal Plain Language Standard.
- Government and public sector bodies must use plain language for information about the following areas.
  - health

- safety
- security
- justice
- human rights
- Government and public sector bodies must use plain language for emergency information.
- Government and public sector bodies must use plain language for new laws and policies.

### 3. Requesting and providing accessible formats and communication services

Accessible formats and communication services help to remove barriers.

- Accessible formats means that information is available without barriers. This could be information that is printed, electronic, audio, or visual.
- Accessible communication services help people communicate in a way that works for them. This could be communication in sign language or through video or text.

These formats and services help people to find, understand, and use information in ways that work for them.

Here are the recommendations in this area.

Government and public sector bodies must be prepared ahead of time. They must be ready to provide these formats and services when they are needed.

A person may need these formats and services at any time. They may need these formats and services if they are at risk in any of the following areas.

- health
- safety
- security

- justice
- human rights

Government, public sector bodies, and organizations must respond to requests for formats and services. They must all provide for requests in the following ways.

- The format or service must be free to get or use.
- There must be a reply to a request within 5 business days.
- There must be direct contact about the request within 10 business days.
- The timeline for the request must be agreed upon.

There are also rules about using artificial intelligence, or AI. Organizations must follow these rules if they use AI to provide formats or services.

- Humans will review AI formats and services to make sure they are correct.
- Humans will be the first choice to make captions. Captions are text versions of spoken language.
- People have to agree to using AI sign language interpretation rather than human sign language interpretation.

All organizations need to let the public know which communication services and accessible formats they offer. They need to take the following actions.

- Inform the public about which formats and services are available right now.
- Inform the public that they will provide other formats and services if asked.

## 4. Supporting assistive technology

The government must make sure people have the assistive technology they need for accessible communication. This helps to remove barriers so people

can find, understand, and use information. Here are the recommendations in this area.

The government needs to provide support in the following ways.

- Pay for assessments.
- Provide funding to help pay for assistive technology items.
- Provide training on how to use the items.
- Provide support to people no matter their age, education, income, or job status.

## 5. Making digital content accessible

Digital content means things like websites, apps, and documents. Digital accessibility means that all people can find, understand, and use this content. The federal government has a standard for digital accessibility. These rules make sure that digital content is accessible to everyone.

All organizations must make sure their digital content is accessible.

Here is what they must do.

- Follow the federal standard for digital accessibility.
- Make sure that accessibility features are turned on.
- Train staff and volunteers to help people use these features.

Government, public sector bodies, and organizations with more than 20 employees must also evaluate. They must review, test, and improve the digital content that people need to access programs and services.

This section also covers kiosks used for self-service. Kiosks must be accessible. Kiosks are devices that are used to give information or to do self-service. Any new kiosks need to meet federal accessibility rules. Government and public sector bodies need to update older kiosks.

This does not apply to kiosks controlled by the federal government, such as bank machines.

## 6. Providing sign language and visual access to language

Access to sign language and visual language are important services. A person may need these at any time. They may need these services if their health or safety or human rights are at risk. They may need these services to get emergency information. They may need them to access a live press conference. They may use the service to access a website or video or to understand a sign.

These services include sign language interpretation, intervenor services, and providing captions.

Here are the recommendations for government and public sector bodies.

- Provide sign language interpretation and captions when they are needed.
- Have access to people who coordinate sign language services. This can be a staff member. It can also be someone outside of the organization who is on contract for the role.
- Provide the services for free.

Organizations with more than 20 employees must also provide these services for free when requested.

All organizations that interact with the public must have a way to request and provide these services.

## 7. Accessible emergency information and communication

Communication during an emergency is very important. People may need to know what to do quickly. Government must communicate about emergencies

in plain language. They must make sure that communication services are available. They must make sure information is available in accessible formats. They must make emergency plans in plain language.

Here are the recommendations in this area.

- Prepare ahead of time. Communications can be ready in advance. This helps with any emergency situations that happen often, like floods or forest fires.
- Make sure everyone can get information during an emergency. Information must be accessible. Communications services and accessible formats must be available. Messages must be in plain language.
- Review the communications after the emergency. Find out how accessible they were.
- Make any changes to improve the process.

Other organizations must also make emergency plans in plain language. This includes city, town, and village governments. It includes those who work in the area of emergency management. They must plan for accessible communication during an emergency as well.

## 8. Wayfinding and signage

Wayfinding and signage help people find their way through spaces like buildings or parks or other places. Signs can give directions. Signs can have warnings. Signs can have information about the space and how it can be used.

There are already rules about signs in the building code. The recommendations in this area are only for signs that are not already covered in the building code.

Here are the recommendations in this area.

- Use plain language in all signs.
- Remove the word “handicapped” from all signs.
- Start using the same set of symbols on all signs in the province. The signs must not use gender symbols if they are not needed.
- Make and install signs based on the rules in the federal standard for accessible built environment. These rules cover things like the font and the size of letters, numbers, and symbols. They also cover things like contrast, lighting, and rules for tactile signs. Tactile signs are meant to be touched.
- Develop guidelines for accessible signage practices. Make sure there is input from people who experience accessibility barriers.
- Include wayfinding and signage in accessibility plans.

## 9. Buying accessible products and services (Procurement)

Government and public sector bodies have to buy things. These are often called goods and services. Some of these items are information and communication products. Organizations must consider accessibility when they are buying these products and services.

Here are the recommendations for this area.

- Buy products that follow the federal standard and rules for digital accessibility.
- Use plain language when asking for proposals for these kinds of products.
- Hire people who know about accessible information and communication rules.
- Hire people who have real experience with accessibility of these products and services.

## 10. Getting and responding to feedback

All organizations must get feedback on the accessibility of their information and communication. The feedback process must be accessible to everyone. People who face barriers must have a way to find, understand, and use the feedback process.

Here are the recommendations for this area.

- Develop a way to get feedback and respond to it.
- Make sure the feedback process is accessible.
- Offer more than one way to give feedback.
- Confirm that feedback has been received within 5 business days.
- Consult with the person on a plan to fix the issue.
- Share updates on progress with the person who gave the feedback.

## 11. Training on accessible communication

Staff and volunteers must be trained. All organizations must provide the training. Training must be related to the work of the staff or volunteer. Training must be provided within 3 months of the duties in this area beginning. Refresher training must be provided every 2 years.

Here are the recommendations for training topics.

- How to find, prevent, and remove barriers.
- How to use plain language.
- How to use universal design.
- How to work with sign language services.
- How to share information in accessible formats.

- How to share information through communication services.

People with lived experience must be involved in training. This must include people who face communication barriers.

## 12. Required accessibility policies

A policy is a set of ideas or plans. Policies are used to help staff know what to do or how to make a decision.

Here are the recommendations in the area of policies.

- All organizations must have clear policies about accessible information and communication.
- Policies must cover the following topics.
  - plain language
  - accessible formats and communication services
  - digital accessibility
  - sign language
  - emergency communication
  - wayfinding and signage
  - feedback
  - training
  - procurement
- Policies must be shared with the public.
- Policies must be in plain language.
- Policies must be available in accessible formats.
- Policies must be reviewed and updated every 3 years.

## 13. Resources, tools and support for organizations

The government must provide helpful resources. These include items like templates, guides, and training materials. These must be easy to find. They must be in one central place.

## 14. Other important recommendations (non-regulatory)

### Oversight and coordination

A director of accessible information and communication must be appointed. This position would help to guide and coordinate the work across government.

### Digital inclusion

The government must fund digital inclusion. This means funding for affordable internet and devices. Everyone needs to be able to connect to and use the internet. Government must fund and support training in basic digital skills.

### Improving sign language access

There are recommendations to increase access to sign language so more deaf people are represented. Here are the recommendations to make that happen.

- Make a plan to address interpreter shortages.
- Create an intervenor program for the province.
- Make rules for the sign language and interpreter professions.