

Region of Waterloo
Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
2023-2027



Region of Waterloo

Executive Summary

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, 2005 (AODA) requires the Region of Waterloo (the Region) to review and update its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) at least once every five years. The 2023-2027 MYAP outlines how the Region will continue to identify, prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities. This plan builds on the previous accessibility work accomplished in the 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

The plan is organized around the five standards of the AODA:

- Design of Public Spaces
- Customer Service
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation

The 2023-2027 MYAP outlines the approach to achieving accessible programs, services and facilities over the next four years. It identifies goals to improve the accessibility of our programs and services for the community. The plan is based on input from the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC), Department Directors and program leads and the ongoing feedback the Region receives from residents who access our services.

GRAAC was established to advise Regional Council and staff on identifying, preventing, and removing barriers for people with disabilities in Regional services, programs, and facilities. More than 50 per cent of the members of GRAAC have a disability. GRAAC is made up of 13 citizen members, 2 agency members representing individuals with disabilities, and staff representatives and members of Councils from the Cities of Kitchener and Waterloo, and the Townships of Wilmot, Wellesley, Woolwich and North Dumfries. These entities seek the advice of GRAAC in matters of accessibility. The City of Cambridge manages its own Advisory Committee.

Accessibility at the Region

The Region is committed to improving accessibility in our programs and services, and understanding and meeting the needs of people with disabilities. The Region will meet the needs of people with disabilities in a manner that:

- Is free from discrimination;
- Uses reasonable efforts to ensure that there are equal opportunities for people with disabilities to obtain, use or benefit from the Region's goods, services, programs and facilities;
- Protects the dignity and independence of all people, and;
- Strives to provide responsive and integrated services.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

The Region's 2023-2027 MYAP will support the organization to be more coordinated, aligned and strategic in addressing accessibility barriers that exist in programs, services and facilities. The goals identified through the plan build on existing processes and where applicable, identify new areas of focus based on community trends and input, feedback from GRAAC and Regional staff responsible for implementing the accessibility standards.

Commitments and Goals

Design of Public Spaces Standard

The Region strives to remove barriers to accessing our public spaces to ensure that residents and staff feel welcomed and safe in Regional facilities.

Goals

- Continue auditing Regional facilities for accessibility, prioritizing facilities with highest occupancy and public visitors.
- Update the Region of Waterloo Accessible Design Standards and inform applicable program areas of changes made to the design standards.
- Incorporate accessibility practices and principles into the optimization and redesign of our Regional buildings for office and public spaces.

Customer Service Standard

The Region strives to deliver services that meet the needs of our residents. The Region plans to rethink and redesign our services using human-centred and equity-based principles, and by leveraging digital capabilities to better meet the community's service expectations and needs.

Goals

- Evolve the existing Client Experience Program based on human-centred and equity-based design principles for a consistent approach for service delivery across the organization and to better meet the needs of residents in our community.
- Continue supporting Community Services clients with improving employment opportunities through distribution of refurbished computers, referrals to community agencies for technology literacy, and increasing access to chiropractic care for musculoskeletal illness in the Health2Work project.
- Increase the number of accessible housing units available for people with disabilities through the Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan that goes beyond the minimum requirements.

Information and Communication Standard

The Region strives to meaningfully engage diverse members of the community for feedback and advice on Regional programs, services and facilities, and ensures that information provided by the Region to the public is accessible.

Goals

- Review, evaluate and update guidelines on creating accessible social media content (e.g. text, images, videos) on an ongoing basis to stay current on best practices.
- Continue auditing communication distribution channels (e.g. Canva, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook) and documents for accessibility and plain language.
- Review, update and continue training communications staff on accessible social media content, writing in plain language and creating accessible PDF documents (e.g. Adobe) to stay current on best practices.

Employment Standard

The Region strives to recruit and retain diverse staff who feel that their knowledge and skills are valued.

Goals

- Review, evaluate and update Human Resources policies to embed accessibility into the policies for each stage of the employee lifecycle.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing Abilities Management processes, including short and long term abilities management protocols and work accommodation program to provide a seamless employee centric service when disability management support is required.
- Review and expand Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) training, including accessibility, for Regional staff to increase knowledge, awareness and practical application of concepts.
 - Implement disability, neurodiversity and accessibility training which includes introductory concepts, a review of the AODA, and frameworks for disabilities, neurodiversity and enhancing accessibility in the workplace.
- Continue to implement a comprehensive mental health strategy for employees, which includes:
 - Delivering the Working Minds Training through the Mental Health Commission of Canada to create a supportive work environment.
 - Continuous assessment of mental health benefits.
 - Access to resilience and coping sessions, skill-building sessions focused on mental health and a wellbeing app.
 - Implementing the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace for employees.

Transportation Standard

The Region strives to prevent and remove barriers to transportation services for residents and visitors.

Goals

- Develop and implement a plan for accessible taxi vans provided by local taxi services for the community, including assessing the number of accessible vans required in the bylaw to meet local needs, conducting a safety audit of accessible vans and evaluate and update driver training.
- Implement the Grand River Transit (GRT) Business Plan recommendations to determine service levels, expansion plans and update the bus stop design guidelines to improve accessibility features.
- Assess the wheelchair curbside to airport terminal entrance gate service at the Region of Waterloo International Airport and transfer responsibility from the airline providers (e.g. West Jet) to the airport authority (the Region) when there are at least 200,000 passengers at the airport per year for two years.

Closing Statement

As a responsible and forward-looking government, the Region of Waterloo prioritizes accessibility planning and compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) to support its long-term strategic goals. Accessibility is integral to the Region's key strategies to create an inclusive community that accommodates the needs of all residents throughout their lifetimes.

The Region of Waterloo 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan sets out the path to an accessible community by reducing and eliminating barriers, making Waterloo Region a community of choice, and one where persons of all abilities can actively participate and have a sense of belonging.

MYAP Addendum

This addendum to the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) outlines additional goals to be included following further consultation with the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC). The added goals are grouped under three of the five accessibility standards in the AODA legislation. There was no further feedback for the Design of Public Spaces and the Transportation standards.

Customer Service

- Review and update the Region's interpreter and translation guidelines, which include American Sign Language (ASL), to improve service experiences for residents.
- As part of evolving the Client Experience Program, ensure that payment processes and payment machines are reviewed to improve service delivery, where applicable.

Information and Communications

- Participate in updating the GRAAC Terms of Reference with the local municipalities represented on the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Employment

- Review the hiring process to ensure accessibility requirements are built into key recruitment steps to improve the candidate hiring experience.

This addendum was reviewed and approved by the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).

Looking Forward

Accountability and Reporting Compliance

The Region has developed an organization-wide plan that is used to direct actions and support departments as they implement accessibility initiatives and meet the accessibility standards. The Client Experience Team in Human Resources and Citizen Service provides advice on meeting compliance with the AODA and accessibility standards to the organization and completes the annual compliance reports.

Reviewing and Monitoring the Plan

The 2023-2027 MYAP will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years. [Annual status reports](#) are completed and posted to the Region's website to document progress and measures taken to implement actions in the MYAP and meet the requirements of the accessibility standards.

Feedback

The Region welcomes feedback on the MYAP, and on the accessibility of our programs, services and facilities. If you have any ideas or suggestions, please contact us.

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Availability of the Plan

The MYAP is available online at www.regionofwaterloo.ca/accessibility in accessible PDF.

Alternate formats, including paper copies or full-text Word, of the Accessibility Plan are available at no charge from: Human Resources and Citizen Service

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