

Introducing

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act





Accessibility for All Manitobans

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) became law December 5, 2013. Under this landmark legislation, the Manitoba government will develop mandatory accessibility standards. Each standard will address barriers for Manitobans in key areas of daily living. Standards will apply to Manitoba's private and public sector organizations.

The province is working with representatives from the disability community, as well as public and private sector organizations, to develop five accessibility standards.

The standards will be developed to achieve real results, in stages. Each standard will be introduced with a timeframe for implementation, which will be determined by the complexity of the area. The standards and timelines will be established with consideration to all affected sectors.



We All Need Accessibility

Disability affects the lives of many Manitobans. According to Statistics Canada, in 2012, nearly one in six Manitobans had a disability. This number will continue to grow as our population ages.

Nearly every Manitoban either has a disability, knows someone with a disability, or will have a disability in the coming years.

Improving accessibility is the right thing to do. It's also the smart thing to do. According to the Royal Bank of Canada, people with disabilities have an estimated annual spending power of about \$25 billion across Canada. People with disabilities also represent a large pool of untapped employment potential. When we make Manitoba accessible to people with disabilities everyone benefits.

Disability

- has no social, economic or educational boundaries
- can occur at any stage of life
- may be temporary or permanent



Consider the Broad Range of Abilities

When we think of barriers to accessibility we tend to think of people with physical disabilities that are visible and apparent. But we can't always tell who has a disability.

There is a very broad range of disabilities. Examples: blindness or visual impairment, Deafness or hearing impairment, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health issues and chronic illness.

By removing barriers to participation, this new act will benefit all Manitobans.

Making Progress

Over the past two decades, a tremendous amount of progress has been made in creating a more inclusive society. Streets with accessible curbs, inclusive schooling and TV closed captioning are just a few examples.

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act will build on that progress. For 2016, and every second year after that, the act will require Manitoba government and broader public sector organizations to prepare accessibility plans that address the identification, prevention and removal of barriers. Public sector organizations include municipalities, public transportation organizations, colleges and universities, hospitals and school boards.



How Manitoba will Introduce Accessibility Legislation

Creating Standards

Accessibility standards are the building blocks Manitoba government will use to make real, measurable and effective changes to accessibility.

The Accessibility Advisory Council is responsible for developing proposed standards that could become regulations under *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*. The advisory council is made up of members of the disability community and other affected stakeholders, including representatives of business, municipalities, and other organizations. It has been designed to represent the interests of stakeholders most affected by measures aimed at achieving greater accessibility.

In developing a standard, the council may establish committees of technical experts and other parties familiar with specific issues to provide input. The committees might include representatives of sectors or organizations that will have obligations under the standard being developed.

Public consultations are essential to the process. Standards will only be realized by extensive and transparent consultations with persons with disabilities, organizations with a responsibility to eliminate barriers and the general public.



Standards will Focus on 5 Key Areas

1. The **Accessible Customer Service** standard will be the first standard to be developed. It will address business practices and training needed to provide better customer service to people with disabilities.
2. The **Accessible Information and Communications** standard will address the removal of barriers in access to information. The standard could include information being provided in person, through print, websites or other means.
3. The **Accessible Built Environment** standard will address access into and within buildings and outdoor spaces and is expected to build on *Manitoba's Building Code*. The standard could include things like counter height, aisle and door width, parking and signs.
4. The **Employment Accessibility** standard will address paid employment practices relating to employee-employer relationships, which could include recruitment, as well as hiring, and retention policies and practices.
5. The **Accessible Transportation** standard will address aspects of accessible public transportation. Access to transportation is needed for going to work or school, shopping and other aspects of daily life.



Look to the Future – Act Now

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act provides a long-term, systemic and pro-active approach to dealing with accessibility issues. A commitment to achieve significant progress by 2023 will make Manitoba more inclusive for everyone.

Accessibility standards will establish what has to be done by when, by developing clear, specific and achievable goals. The act allows standards to be developed so organizations, both public and private, can spread out accessibility investments over time. They can plan ahead and incorporate capital expenditures into normal business plans and strategies.

How Standards Become Law

Once an initial standard has been developed, the Accessibility Advisory Council puts it forward for public review. After public review is complete, the council considers this feedback as it finalizes the standard for submission to the minister responsible for persons with disabilities.

The minister reviews the final proposed standard, and decides whether to recommend that it be enacted as a regulation – either in whole, in part, or with changes. When the standard is enacted as a regulation, it becomes law.



Who Must Comply

Accessibility standards will set out measures, policies, practices, or other requirements to identify, prevent and remove barriers. The standards will outline the persons and organizations that are subject to the standards and the time period for compliance. Different requirements and timelines for different types and sizes of organizations may be proposed. Each standard must take into account the type of barriers being addressed and any technical or economic factors that may be involved in its implementation.

Once the government has approved a standard and it becomes a regulation, all organizations identified in the standard must comply within the timelines that have been set out. Non-compliance with an order and other infractions may result in penalties.

Since the *Human Rights Code* is the most powerful act in Manitoba, individuals whose specific needs are not met by accessibility legislation will still be able to file a complaint with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.



Be Aware of Barriers to Accessibility

A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from participating in the social or economic life of our communities.

When you think about making your organization accessible, it is important to be aware of both visible and invisible barriers.

Architectural or structural barriers may result from the design of a building, such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and even room layout.

Information and communications barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. Things like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background, confusing design of printed materials and the use of language that is not clear or plain can all cause difficulty.

Technology, or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers.

Systemic barriers can occur through policies and procedures. These are any practices or rules that restrict people with disabilities. Example: denying access to a person with a service animal.

Attitude is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome. Some people don't know how to communicate with those who have visible or invisible disabilities. They may feel that they could offend the individual with a disability by offering help. Others might ignore or avoid people with disabilities altogether.

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness is an important part of making our province accessible for all Manitobans. Under the act, Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) will develop and conduct public education activities to increase awareness about the purpose of the act.

As standards are introduced and regulations become law, the DIO will provide tools and other resources to help organizations understand and comply with accessibility regulations.

We all need to be aware of the benefits of accessibility – to our lives and to our economy.

Find out more about
The Accessibility for Manitobans Act

Visit our website:

www.manitoba.ca/dio

- Frequently asked questions and answers about the act
- Updates on standards development
- Announcements about public consultations

To read *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* go to:
www.manitoba.ca/legal/mb_laws.html

This publication is
available in alternate
formats upon request.

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