

Legal Aid Ontario *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* Multiyear Plan



LEGAL AID ONTARIO

AIDE JURIDIQUE ONTARIO

Table of contents

Statement of commitment from LAO	1
Guiding principles	1
LAO AODA highlighted accomplishments	2
AODA accessibility requirements	3
Customer service standards	4
Information and communications standards	6
Employment standards	7
Design of public spaces	9

Legal Aid Ontario Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Multiyear plan

December 2021


Legal Aid Ontario

40 Dundas Street West,
Suite 200
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2H1

Toll-free: 1-800-668-8258
Email: info@lao.on.ca
Website: www.legalaid.on.ca

Ce document est disponible
en français.

Legal Aid Ontario receives
financial assistance from the
Government of Ontario, the
Law Foundation of Ontario,
and the Government of
Canada.



The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) Multi-Year Plan outlines the work Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) has underway to improve opportunities and create inclusive environments for persons with disabilities. The current plan is for 2021-2026 and aligns with LAO's strategic plan.

Statement of commitment from LAO

LAO is ensuring a proactive approach to accessibility by developing and implementing policies and procedures in accordance with the [*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\), 2005*](#). This accessibility plan sets out LAO's policies and procedures with the goal of promoting dignity, independence, inclusion, integration, responsiveness and equality of opportunity for persons with disabilities.

Guiding principles

LAO serves a diverse group of people. LAO is committed to ensuring that all individuals have equal access to and can effectively use LAO services and facilities.

LAO is obligated and committed to resolving, where possible, any barriers to access or effective use of LAO services and facilities.

LAO is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities in a timely manner including identifying, assessing and removing physical, informational and communication barriers for employees and the public who use LAO's services and facilities.

LAO will use reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:

1. Services and facilities are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities;
2. Services and facilities are provided to persons with disabilities in a manner that is integrated with the provision of services and facilities to others, unless an alternative measure is necessary, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the services or facilities; and
3. Persons with disabilities have equal opportunity to obtain, use and benefit from LAO's services or facilities.

LAO AODA highlighted accomplishments

- LAO has an accessibility committee to ensure that accessibility is at the forefront of all business.
- LAO continually communicates its commitment to accessibility and encourages feedback.
- In 2021, LAO conducted an all-staff survey about diversity demographics and inclusion. The survey provided insight on areas of improvement for better inclusion practices, accommodation needs, and the demographics of employees with disabilities working at LAO.
- LAO completed focus groups for persons with disabilities to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs at work.
- In 2019, LAO required all employees, board members, volunteers and contract employees to complete or refresh training on accessibility standards and the *Human Rights Code*. All new employees, volunteers and contract employees will complete this same training within 30 days of commencement of employment or as soon as practicable.
- In 2021, LAO provided all-staff training on how to create accessible documents and communications.
- In 2019, LAO completed an assessment of physical spaces to ensure employees and clients have accessible spaces. LAO will continue to survey accessibility of its physical spaces.
- LAO acknowledges national awareness days such as National Accessibility Week and White Cane Day. LAO uses these awareness days/weeks for learning, growth and activism.
- LAO created a Diversity Officer position within the organization to focus on diversity and accessibility.
- Clients with disabilities can contact LAO through Bell Relay, this service supports communication by phone between hearing people and people who are deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, or those with speech disabilities. Professionally trained operators act as intermediaries to facilitate the call.
- Materials are available upon request in accessible formats such as large font, Braille, audio, etc.
- LAO's external website meets the AODA requirements of WCAG 2.0 Level AA.
- LAO will provide (and fund) an interpreter for eligible clients meeting with LAO staff.

For more on LAO accessibility accomplishments please check out [LAO's Accessibility Roadmap](#)

AODA accessibility requirements

General requirements

- **Accessible emergency information**

Emergency procedures are posted internally (on LAO's employee website): [Emergency procedures \(lao.on.ca\)](#)

Information will be made available to the public, in an accessible format or with appropriate communication supports, as soon as practicable, upon request.

- **Accessibility policy and plans**

LAO reviews its [Accessibility Policy](#) and [Human Resource Accessibility Policy](#) annually and posts them online.

- **Training**

LAO provides training to employees and volunteers on accessibility standards and on the *Human Rights Code*, including as it relates to people with disabilities.

Training of all staff and volunteers will be completed within 30 days or as soon as is practicable and recorded in LAO's HR database.

LAO values ensuring an accessible and inclusive environment for staff, volunteers and clients.

LAO is committed to providing:

- additional training for staff and volunteers
- specialized training for managers
- learning opportunities through lunch and learn sessions for all staff and volunteers

Customer service standards

Establishment of policies, procedures and practices

LAO ensures that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:

- Our services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are given an opportunity equal to that given to others to obtain, use and benefit from the goods or services.
- Persons with disabilities may use assistive devices and/or support persons in the access of LAO services.
- Persons with disabilities and their service animals are accommodated in all aspects of service provision unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law.
- When communicating with a person with a disability, LAO employees will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

LAO's [Accessibility Policy](#) provides detailed information about procedures and practices. LAO values the importance of treating all clients with dignity and respect.

Through the Accessibility Policy, LAO outlines the acceptable procedures, which include:

1. Employees are aware of their roles and responsibilities under the LAO accessible customer service procedure;
 - a. accommodation and accessibility with LAO's services are addressed to facilitate effective access to, and participation in, LAO services;
 - b. sensitivity and responsiveness to any accommodation or accessibility issues is demonstrated during service delivery, including broader public communication and interaction.
2. Whenever a person identifies a barrier to LAO services, the employee will promptly communicate LAO's commitment to address the relevant accommodation and/or accessibility issue(s).
3. When the employee identifies a barrier that limits an individual's ability to participate in LAO services, the employee will raise the issue with the person experiencing the barrier and confirm LAO's commitment to resolving the situation.

4. Where barriers are reported or identified, the employee will have a discussion with the person to understand:
 - a. the precise nature and source of the barrier;
 - b. the barrier's impact on the person's ability to participate in LAO services.
5. Once the specific impact of the barrier is understood, the employee will consult with their immediate supervisor to resolve the barrier, and where appropriate, the supervisor will seek advice from relevant departments and develop proposed steps for addressing the identified barrier.
6. The employee or the supervisor will communicate the proposed next steps to the person experiencing the barrier.
7. If the person experiencing the barrier is satisfied, implementation may proceed.
8. Where the person experiencing the barrier does not agree with the proposed measures, further consultation with the supervisor and/or appropriate department should occur prior to confirming a final decision to the individual.
9. The supervisor and the employee involved will keep a record of the above, making notes as appropriate for future reference.
10. LAO agrees to examine needs on a case-by-case basis and make every effort to accommodate these needs.

Use of service animals and support people

LAO's [Accessibility Policy](#) outlines its commitment and procedures for employees interacting with clients who require and use service animals and support people.

Customer service training

LAO is committed to introducing learning opportunities on accessibility and accommodations for accessibility.

LAO will:

- develop training specific to customer service;
- develop focused customer service lunch and learn sessions;
- create resources and best practice guides for employees.

Information and communications standards

Ensuring the communication needs of persons with disabilities is a priority at LAO. Our goal is to ensure access to information for all LAO users is efficient and accessible.

LAO is committed to working closely with persons with disabilities to determine their information and communication needs and to ensure they are met.

Accessible formats and communication supports

When communicating with a person with a disability, LAO will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

LAO will offer, as necessary and where appropriate, to communicate with service recipients and stakeholders by email, mail, or other agreed upon methods if telephone is not suitable to their communication needs, or is unavailable.

LAO will continue to review the nature, manner and methods used to communicate to persons with disabilities in an attempt to improve the accessibility of information and services.

Upon request LAO will provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for with disabilities, at a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other people.

This includes:

1. all organizational information and communications made available to the public, including this plan;
2. any publicly available emergency procedures, plans or public safety information to the public; and
3. access to any processes for receiving and responding to feedback,

LAO will consult with the requestor to determine the suitability of any accessible format or communication support provided. This information and documentation will be provided as soon as is practicable, but specific timeframes may vary depending on the format requested.

Feedback methods may include:

- in person

- by telephone or TTY
- in writing
- by email, or
- by any other communication technology as required

If a member of the public with disabilities would prefer to give their feedback, and receive a response to it, using an alternate method than the ones offered, they may request it.

Accessible websites and web content

LAO will add content to websites that meets the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. As of 2021, LAO's website conforms to WCAG 2.0 Level AA, except where this is impracticable or an exception applies.

LAO will conduct a review of our intranet pages for WCAG 2.0 Level AA. LAO will work to upgrade any issues within its abilities.

Employment standards

LAO's [Human Resources Accessibility Policy](#) outlines the commitment to accessibility and accommodation.

Specifically LAO provides:

- Accommodations for applicants with disabilities in the recruitment process.
- Notification to job applicants that accommodations are available upon request when applicants are invited to participate in the selection process.
- Notification to successful applicants of LAO policies for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Recruitment

LAO is committed to inclusive and accessible employment practices that attract and retain individuals with disabilities. LAO ensures that the public and employees are aware that, when requested, it will accommodate people with disabilities throughout the recruitment and onboarding process.

Diversity demographic and inclusion survey

LAO conducted a diversity demographic and inclusion survey through the Canadian Centre of Diversity and Inclusion with the goal to gain insight on the needs of our diverse staff. The survey provided an avenue to learn employees' perceptions on career opportunities for people with disabilities, gaps in accommodation procedure and areas of focus for accessibility training.

Focus groups were conducted with employees with disabilities to gain greater details, and to hear feedback on their experiences and recommended improvements to the accommodation process.

Diversity demographic and inclusion survey and focus group results confirmed LAO's commitment to:

- continuing to survey staff on diversity demographics and feelings of inclusion, specifically for the needs of persons with disabilities
- developing targeted recruitment practices with the goal of increasing the number persons with disabilities in various roles across the organization
- providing accessibility and accommodation training as identified in the survey for staff and managers and
- reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of our accommodation process.

Documented individual accommodation plans

Every accommodation is unique and requires working with the individual to ensure the correct accommodation is in place.

LAO's [Human Resources Accessibility Policy](#) outlines how employees can request individual accommodation plans.

Additionally, LAO will continue to support accommodation through:

- focus groups with staff to streamline processes for ensuring Human Resources and management are working with staff to create the best plans possible.
- specialized training for LAO Human Resources staff and managers who help to create and maintain accommodation plans.

Workplace emergency response information

LAO will provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees with a disability. This information will be gathered through the Evacuation Assistance Self Identification (EASI) form, which will go out to staff twice a year from the chief emergency warden(s) (PO)/emergency response coordinator (regions) upon return to the physical workspaces.

With the employee's consent, the EASI form will be shared with the designated zone marshals/emergency response coordinators and the manager in each area designated to provide assistance during a workplace emergency. New staff receive the EASI form, which is part of an individualized accommodation plan.

Design of public spaces

The design of public spaces provisions in the AODA regulation outlines expectations when constructing new, maintaining or redeveloping existing built-environment structures such as the areas outlined below:


1. exterior paths of travel including ramps, landings, stairs, curb ramps and depressed curbs
2. accessible parking, access aisles and signage
3. service counters
4. cuing guides
5. waiting areas

LAO allocates funds every year to address any accessibility-related emergency maintenance that may arise.

All emergency maintenance and temporary disruptions to accessible elements are addressed as soon as possible through a work order with building maintenance.

LAO will continue to conduct bi-annual assessments of the above mentioned work spaces to ensure work environments are accessible.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, LAO has not opened up physical spaces and assessments therefore have not been done. Once LAO staff resume in-person work the accessibility committee will continue the assessments of physical spaces.



LAO is continuing to develop procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of the accessible elements in public spaces and for dealing with the temporary disruptions when accessible elements of physical spaces are not in working order.

LAO will incorporate accessibility into its newly constructed or redeveloped public spaces. LAO will follow the requirements under the Design of Public Spaces Standards (Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment).

LAO is committed to reviewing this accessibility plan on an annual basis.

For more information on this accessibility plan or to request for an accessible format of this document, please contact:

Diversity Officer

Legal Aid Ontario

40 Dundas Street West, Suite 200

Toronto, ON

M5G 2H1

Tel: 416-979-2352

accessibility@lao.on.ca

Legal Aid Ontario

40 Dundas St. West, Suite 200

Toronto, ON M5G 2H1

1-800-668-8258

media@lao.on.ca

www.legalaid.on.ca



LEGAL AID ONTARIO

AIDE JURIDIQUE ONTARIO