



# Advancing Towards an Accessible Ontario

*Accessibility for  
Ontarians with  
Disabilities Act*  
Annual Report  
2020



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# A Message from the Minister

## Advancing Towards an Accessible Ontario

I am pleased to present the *2020 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) Annual Report*.

This report examines the implementation and effectiveness of the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\)](#) and is [a requirement under the act](#). The report also serves as an important tool to communicate on the progress of the implementation of the AODA, and to show the government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for everyone. It has been particularly challenging for seniors and people with disabilities.

Our government has continued to move forward with the Advancing Accessibility in

Ontario framework, which continues progress in four key areas:

- breaking down barriers in the built environment
- government leading by example
- improving understanding and awareness about accessibility
- increasing participation in the economy for people with disabilities.

The Advancing Accessibility framework was informed from feedback from stakeholders all across the province as well being informed by the Honourable David C. Onley's Third Legislative Review of the AODA.

To help ensure that Ontarians could continue to stay connected in our communities, we moved quickly to establish the Ontario [Community Support Program](#) (OCSP), and partnered with SPARK Ontario to help recruit thousands of volunteers to provide low-income seniors and people with disabilities with access to food, medicine and other essentials.

At the same time, we continued to educate stakeholders about accessibility, drive cultural awareness about the value and benefits of accessibility and support regulatory compliance.

Importantly, we continued to get first-hand insight from our [Standards Development Committees](#) (SDCs) on how to address accessibility barriers within specific sectors. Through these committees, municipal and sector experts work alongside those with lived experience to provide valuable recommendations to the government by developing and reviewing accessibility standards in Ontario.

Many of the ministry's program partners and their networks faced new challenges in undertaking their projects. Through persistence, flexibility and creativity, organizational practices were adapted to help deliver invaluable programs that make a positive impact on seniors, individuals with disabilities and communities across Ontario.

Accessibility is an ongoing journey, made by many working together. I want to thank all those helping to create a more open and inclusive province, including other levels of government, businesses, community organizations and interested individuals. Through our partnership we can help to create a province where the Ontario Dream is available to everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond Cho". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Raymond" and "Cho" being capitalized and prominent.

Raymond Cho,  
Minister for Seniors and Accessibility



# Advancing Accessibility in Ontario Framework

On January 28, 2020, the Government of Ontario announced a new cross-government framework to continue progress on accessibility and make a positive difference in the daily lives of people with disabilities.

The framework, called [Advancing Accessibility in Ontario](#), is structured under four key areas:

- **breaking down barriers in the built environment**
  - ~ working with partner ministries and businesses to improve inclusion of people with disabilities in physical spaces, facilities and environments
- **government leading by example**
  - ~ showing government leadership in its role as policy maker, service provider and employer to improve the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities
- **improving understanding and awareness about accessibility**
  - ~ improving understanding and awareness about accessibility by promoting education, increasing knowledge and changing attitudes
- **increasing participation in the economy for people with disabilities**
  - ~ working with partner ministries, stakeholders and businesses to promote and support inclusive employment and participation in the labour market

The Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework and its four key areas were informed by the recommendations made

by the Honourable David C. Onley in the third legislative review of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA), as well as input from key partners, organizations and people with disabilities across Ontario.

## Legislated Committees and Councils

Legislated committees and councils ensure that individuals, communities, organizations and businesses are closely involved in helping to make Ontario a more accessible province.

## Accessibility Standards Advisory Council

The [Accessibility Standards Advisory Council](#) (ASAC) is responsible for providing advice to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility on accessibility and matters related to the AODA. Council membership includes a majority of people with disabilities, as well as representatives from organizations that have to comply with Ontario's accessibility laws – including businesses, non-profit and public sector organizations. The ministry appreciates the work of the 2020 ASAC members and their commitment to helping advance accessibility in the province.

# Standards Development Committees

## [Standards Development Committees](#)

(SDCs) help ensure that Ontario's accessibility laws are working as intended through both the review of existing standards, and the development of new standards.

Through these committees, people with disabilities work with disability and industry representatives to provide recommendations to the government on ways to address, reduce and remove accessibility barriers.

## Information and Communications Standards Development Committee

In 2020, the [Information and Communications SDC](#) submitted its final recommendations to the government.

The information and communications standards address how businesses and public sector organizations handle information and communications to make sure they are accessible. This includes requirements for accessible websites, and the provision of accessible information upon request.

## Health Care Standards Development Committee

The [Health Care SDC](#) developed initial recommendations for public feedback on proposed accessibility standards that would reduce, remove, and prevent barriers in the delivery of health care in Ontario – starting in hospital settings. The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) works alongside the Ministry of Health to support the work of the committee.

The committee's areas of focus are administration and accountability, education and training and communication. Its members include people with disabilities, as well as representatives from disability organizations and the health care sector.

## Education Standards Development Committees

The [Kindergarten to Grade 12](#) (K-12) and the [Postsecondary Education](#) (PSE) SDCs continued their work to develop initial recommendations for public feedback on proposed accessibility standards that would reduce, remove and prevent accessibility barriers in the delivery of publicly funded education in Ontario.

To ensure the work of both the K-12 and PSE SDCs remains aligned, the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility asked both committee chairs to form a joint technical subcommittee representing members from both sectors and the disability community. This subcommittee ensures information is shared across the two committees and actions are aligned. A key priority for this subcommittee is ensuring plans to transition to any new standards are consistent across sectors, and within the broader education sector as a whole.

The ministry is working with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to support the work of these committees.

Initial Recommendations Reports for both the Health Care and Education SDCs will be posted for public feedback in 2021.

In 2020, the SDCs also provided recommendations to help address the unique challenges COVID-19 was posing for

persons with disabilities in the education and health care sectors.

SDCs play an invaluable role in helping to advance accessibility in Ontario, and the government relies on their expertise to help create a more equitable Ontario.

## Compliance and Enforcement

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility oversees compliance with the AODA and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the act. The ministry works to help ensure about 412,000 organizations fulfill their obligations. These are organizations that provide goods, services or facilities to the public.

### Building awareness

Each year, the ministry conducts targeted outreach and education campaigns to provide organizations with information to increase their awareness of provincial accessibility laws and requirements. In 2020, the ministry continued to design and prepare educational materials that will assist private and non-profit organizations to better understand the requirement to file their [2020 Accessibility Compliance Report](#). In addition, the ministry also communicates directly with organizations through email to advise of upcoming reporting deadlines, and updates to their reporting requirements – when applicable.

## Ensuring compliance

The ministry's Compliance and Enforcement Branch is responsible for ensuring compliance with accessibility standards under the AODA. It achieves this by providing information to increase organizations' awareness of provincial accessibility laws and requirements, auditing organizations to verify that they are in compliance with requirements, and enforcing the requirements if non-compliance persists – where appropriate.

The ministry also carries out a variety of projects that advance compliance with the AODA and its standards. For example, in 2020, the Compliance Assistance Materials Project highlighted the ministry's commitment to helping organizations comply with the AODA and its standards. To make the compliance process easier to understand and complete, the ministry developed and provided seven free, [user-friendly online tools](#). For example, the [Sample Multi-Year Plan](#) provides a guidance template that businesses can use to develop their own accessibility plans, and the [Accessibility Training Requirements Checklist](#) provides guidance on the training requirements outlined in the IASR.

## 2020 Compliance and Enforcement Activities

### Self-certified accessibility compliance reporting

The IASR establishes that businesses and non-profit organizations with 20 or more employees (about 42,000), all designated public sector organizations (about 800), as well as organizations from the Ontario Public Service and the Office of the Legislative Assembly (17) are required to



submit accessibility compliance reports. Organizations are asked to confirm that they have met their requirements by answering various questions. As outlined in the AODA, each organization must make its report available to the public.

Each sector has a different schedule to submit these reports:

- the provincial government reports every year
- all other designated public sector (DPS) organizations are required to report every two years
- all private and non-profit sector (BNP) organizations with 20 or more employees are required to report every three years.

The ministry recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for many of the businesses and non-profit organizations that must comply with its legislation. So, the accessibility compliance reporting deadline for private and non-profit organizations with 20 or more employees was extended from December 31, 2020, to June 30, 2021. Due to this extended reporting deadline, the results of compliance reporting from these organizations will be made available in the 2021 AODA Annual Report.

## Audits

The ministry conducts two types of audits to oversee compliance with the AODA:

- **attestation audits** are used to facilitate accessibility compliance reporting among organizations that had:
  - ~ reported previously, but failed to meet the most recent reporting deadline
  - ~ submitted a report indicating non-compliance
  - ~ have never filed in the past.

- **verification audits** are used to ensure that organizations that indicated compliance in their report are actually meeting requirements. Verification audits are conducted every year to obtain and verify evidence of compliance.

The ministry was aware of the adverse impact the COVID-19 pandemic was also having on obligated organizations in 2020. As a result, the ministry focused on making it easier for organizations to understand and meet their requirements through a variety of activities and projects that encouraged and supported compliance with the AODA.

Overall, in 2020, the ministry launched:

- 219 attestation audits (180 were completed by December 31, 2020)
- 230 verification audits (48 were completed by December 31, 2020).

An additional 193 audits that were carried over from previous years were also completed.

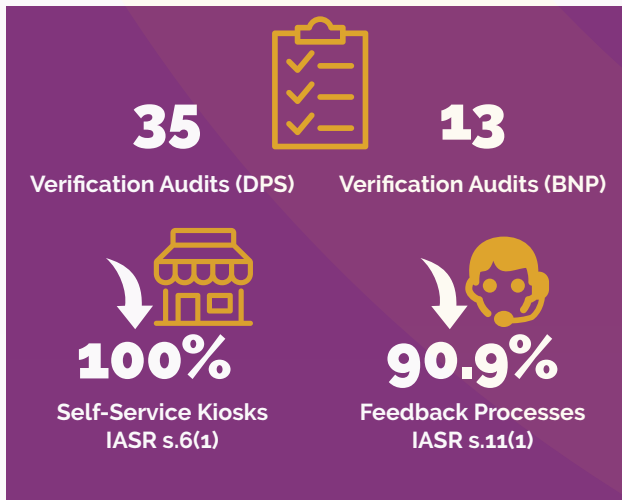
The 48 completed verification audits were conducted based on requirements from the Customer Service Standards, the Employment Standards and the General Requirements sections of the IASR. Thirty-five designated public sector organizations were audited for 75 requirements under these sections, and 13 business and non-profit organizations were audited for 29 requirements under these sections.

Based on the 48 completed verification audits:

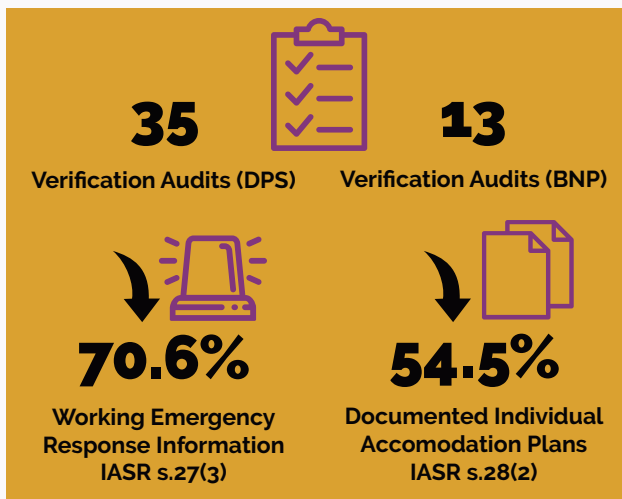
- The highest rate of compliance for the DPS sector was found to be under self-service kiosks (IASR section 6) with 100 per cent of those audited in compliance. The lowest rate of compliance for this sector was under workplace emergency response information (IASR section 27) with 70.6 per cent in compliance.

- The highest rate of compliance for the BNP sector was found to be under feedback processes (IASR section 11) with 90.9 per cent of those audited in compliance. The lowest rate for this sector was under documented individual accommodation plans (IASR section 28) with 54.5 per cent in compliance.

#### Highest Rates of Compliance



#### Lowest Rates of Compliance



## Enforcement

When audited organizations are found to be non-compliant, the ministry works with these organizations to establish compliance. If any organization is persistently non-compliant, the matter will be escalated to a ministry inspector who will determine appropriate enforcement measures.

Compliance extensions were granted to organizations adversely affected by COVID-19 public safety measures to allow them more time to respond and provide supporting evidence of compliance. As a result, escalations were fewer in 2020.

In 2020, 96.9 per cent of verification audits were resolved as compliant without needing to be escalated to an inspector for enforcement measures.

Three Director's Orders were issued in 2020 to address persistent non-compliance with AODA reporting requirements. These orders included a requirement for each of the three organizations to pay an administrative monetary penalty (the three penalties totaled \$24,000). Organizations that receive a Director's Order can appeal their order to the License Appeal Tribunal. However, no cases were brought before the tribunal in 2020.

# Programs and Initiatives

Every year, the ministry invests in a wide range of programs and initiatives to support persons with disabilities and help better their daily lives. This includes targeted programs for older adults and seniors with age-related and other disabilities.

In 2020, the ministry supported additional initiatives to help ease the extra challenges for people with disabilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Ontario Community Support Program – COVID-19 Response

In April 2020, the ministry established the [Ontario Community Support Program](#) (OCSP) to provide low-income seniors and people with disabilities with access to food, medicine and other essentials during COVID-19. The program expanded existing Meals on Wheels capacity to reach even more people in need, and also gave other community organizations and volunteers the support they needed to help deliver essentials to those in need.

The program was delivered through the [Ontario Community Support Association](#) (OCSA), and resulted in about 800,000 deliveries of meals and essential supplies to vulnerable individuals across Ontario in 2020.

## SPARK Ontario volunteer initiative – COVID-19 Response

As Ontarians practiced social distancing and self-isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people (especially seniors and persons with disabilities) were cut off from social connections. They also needed help accessing food, medication and other essentials.

Between March and June 2020, the Ontario government partnered with SPARK Ontario to combine volunteer opportunities and other resources into a single online platform, making it easy for volunteers to find volunteer opportunities, and for organizations to find volunteers. SPARK Ontario was Ontario's first bilingual online volunteer gateway, and is a legacy initiative of the 2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games.

In addition to system upgrades to the online platform, the partnership also focused on a marketing campaign to bolster volunteerism in Ontario. The campaign included promotional emails to over 30,000 community organizations and volunteer networks, social media postings and toolkits, as well as outreach to municipal, provincial and federal representatives.

The initiative resulted in approximately 90,000 users visiting the website, and over 5,200 Ontarians signing up for volunteer services in just four months.

## Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Program

Bolstered by the support of a \$1.3 million investment by the Government of Ontario, the [Rick Hansen Foundation](#) launched the [Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification program](#) in January 2020. The pilot project provides an opportunity for 250 Ontario property owners and managers to have a free, confidential assessment of their building to determine its level of accessibility. They also learn how to address identified barriers for people with both visible and invisible disabilities. Participating buildings are recognized through formal certification levels – including signage that can be displayed at the building. This is an information program for awareness and is not an official certification program under the AODA, which is limited in its built environment accessibility standards.

Specifically, the program measures the building's level of accessibility based on the nationally and internationally recognized Accessible Design for the Built Environment Standard developed by the [CSA Group](#). Ratings are conducted by trained accessibility professionals and are confirmed through an independent review process.

Through this partnership, the government is helping to raise awareness and educate organizations about accessibility in the built

environment, inspire change, and highlight and reward organizations that have accessible spaces.

Despite delays caused by safety measures put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot program is well underway. Program results are expected to be released in 2022.

## Seniors Active Living Centres Program

[Seniors Active Living Centres](#) (SALC) operators offer social, cultural, learning and recreational programs for seniors and those with age-related disabilities. These programs promote health, well-being and social connections.

Ministry investments made through the SALC Program help support non-profit organizations and municipalities in providing local community programming. Some SALC operators are small non-profits that offer programs exclusively for seniors, while others are larger and offer a variety of programs at community centres for people of all ages. Many of the larger SALC operators also connect seniors, including those with disabilities, to other services such as health care or Meals on Wheels.

In 2020, the ministry provided over \$14 million in funding to about 300 SALC programs across the province. This included virtual programs focusing on fitness, continuing education, health and wellness, and social recreation.

Due to public safety measures enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry encouraged operators to provide programs in flexible formats to increase accessibility and reduce isolation. These formats included phone-based, web-based, satellite or mobile programming.

# Inclusive Community Grants Program

In 2020, the ministry launched the new [Inclusive Community Grants](#) (ICG) Program and [invested \\$2 million over two years](#). This funding helps ensure local governments and community organizations consider Ontarians of all ages and abilities at every stage of community planning and development.

Inclusive communities respond to both the opportunities and challenges of an aging population by creating physical and social environments that support independent and active living. This enables older adults and people with disabilities to continue contributing to all aspects of community life.

Through the program, municipalities and local organizations across Ontario can receive up to \$60,000 for projects that foster inclusive community involvement for older adults and people of all abilities. The province's [Age-Friendly Community Planning Guide](#) acts as a reference to help them succeed.

Municipalities and local organizations can use the funding towards projects such as:

- undertaking local needs assessments to determine gaps in existing supports for seniors and people with disabilities
- developing action plans and implementing virtual programs
- retrofitting buildings with ramps and accessible washrooms
- installing self-serve kiosks with software that people with vision or hearing loss can use.

In developing the ICG Program objectives, priority was put on small urban or rural communities, as well as supporting diverse

populations of older adults or persons with disabilities (e.g., Indigenous, recent immigrants, Francophone, racialized and LGBTQ2S+). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, priority was also given to projects responding to the emerging needs of older adults, including those with disabilities.

Applications to the ICG Program will be evaluated and approved throughout 2021.

# Seniors Community Grant Program

The [Seniors Community Grant](#) (SCG) Program provides funding to non-profit community groups to deliver programs and services that encourage greater social inclusion, volunteerism and community engagement for older adults – including those with disabilities.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a greater need for these types of services. So the program was enhanced to focus on the health and safety of older adults and lessen the negative effects of greater social isolation. Targeted support projects were undertaken to enable seniors to connect with their community from the safety of their home, or another safe environment.

In 2020, the ministry [invested over \\$4 million in 185 SCG projects](#) across Ontario.

# Abilities Centre Support

In 2019-20, the Ontario Government [invested over \\$1 million to help the Abilities Centre in Whitby](#) advance inclusion and accessibility for people of all ages and abilities. The investment allows the [Abilities Centre](#) to expand its services and training, as well as engage with community, school board and



municipal partners to identify service gaps and design various pilot projects.

The initiatives that were supported included:

- researching social inclusion and social enterprise
- developing a pre-employment skills program
- piloting a twelve-week, pan-disability program for adults with disabilities
- supporting local private and non-profit sector organizations to develop inclusion and accessibility plans.

Some of the funding went towards the Abilities Centre's LEAD ON program, which supports organizations in embedding accessibility and inclusion into their organizational planning and processes. The LEAD ON (Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery) process guides organizations through a facilitated self-assessment of their current inclusion practices and helps them create an action plan to increase involvement and participation by persons of all abilities, ages and backgrounds in their business or community. LEAD resources were enhanced to better reflect AODA requirements, and the funding also helped forge more partnerships with organizations.

## EnAbling Change Program

The ministry provides funding through the [EnAbling Change Program](#) to non-profit organizations, industry organizations and professional associations to educate stakeholders about accessibility, drive cultural awareness about the value and benefits of accessibility and support regulatory compliance.

## Project highlights

### OneWorld Schoolhouse Foundation

[OneWorld Schoolhouse Foundation's Readable Fest](#) is a specialized reading program for students in grades three to five with the goal of creating more accessible school communities. The program features nine fiction and non-fiction titles with disability themes. Several resources were also created for the program – including student workbooks, teacher guides and lesson plans.

A full-day conference was also held in March 2020 where more than 750 student participants discussed ways to build more accessible school communities. Committees led by students produced unique action plans for their schools that supported the Ministry of Education's School Board Strategic Priorities and School Improvement Plans.

The initiative engaged more than 1,300 students and more than 55 classroom teachers in 17 schools, as well as teacher-librarians, school administrators and the greater school community in the Simcoe Country District School Board.

Feedback received from participants showed an increased understanding of representation, accessibility and inclusion in school communities.

### University Health Network (Toronto Rehabilitation Institute)

The ministry partnered with [Toronto Rehabilitation Institute](#), part of the University Health Network, to create the [Focus on Accessibility Awards](#) program for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Awards were given to students whose projects best contributed to achieving the four themes of accessibility – dignity, respect, integration and equal opportunity. In 2020, five researchers were recognized for their projects that will positively impact the lives of people living with the effects of disability, illness and/or aging. The award recipients were:

- **Julia Rybinka: Stopping Memory Decline in Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Patients**

This project focused on understanding the effectiveness of an intervention for MS patients that uses Google Street View to allow users to participate in cognitive exercises in the hope of stopping memory degeneration and improving brain health.

- **Katherine Bak: Older Adults and Safe Driving**

This research centred on accessibility barriers that are faced by older adults with age-related hearing loss while driving, and how these barriers affect their safety.

- **Lazar Jovanovic: Restoring Hand and Arm Function with the Power of your Brain**

This work looked at the development of a new generation of functional electrical stimulation technology, which delivers stimulation to paralyzed muscles and is controlled by the patient's brain power/activity.

- **Rebecca Greene: Preventing Dangerous Bathroom Slips and Falls**

This initiative examined the effectiveness of rim-mounted grab bars on balance, posture and safety. The research will be used to inform bathroom environmental design standards and recommendations.

- **Sina Mehdizadeh: Falls Prevention in Dementia Patients**

This research focused on helping to decrease the risk of dementia patients falling by collecting and analyzing data that estimated the fall risk of these patients. The study

used a vision-based monitoring system that included video cameras and radio frequency identification tags.

## Variety Village

[Variety Village](#) led an initiative to boost the accessibility awareness and knowledge of health, recreation, sport and elder care professionals who help seniors with disabilities stay active as they age and their abilities change.

Nine workshops were delivered across the province in 2020, and another nine workshops are planned for early 2021. Feedback showed that the workshops were well received by participants:

- *"People with disabilities should be treated like everyone else – my dad was a good athlete and could do more. Thank you for the workshop."*
- *"I did not think older adults with disabilities would want to be active – this workshop taught me more. I can teach games and sports to my parents and grandparents."*
- *"Please continue to offer these important workshops – my father is in long-term care and needs to be more active."*

# EnAbling Change Program Partners 2020

The ministry thanks EnAbling Change Program partners for their commitment, innovation, and leadership in accessibility during this difficult pandemic year:

[City of Pickering](#)

[Miles Nadal Jewish  
Community Centre](#)

[OneWorld  
Schoolhouse  
Foundation](#)

[Ontario Building  
Officials Association](#)

[Ontario Business  
Improvement Area  
Association](#)

[Ontario Chamber of  
Commerce](#)

[Ontario Public Transit  
Association](#)

[Ontario Restaurant  
Hotel and Motel  
Association](#)

[Ontario Secondary  
School Teachers'  
Federation](#)

[University Health  
Network \(Toronto  
Rehabilitation  
Institute\)](#)

[Variety Village](#)

# Outreach and Education Initiatives

Increasing awareness of Ontario's accessibility standards helps organizations reduce barriers for people with disabilities. In 2020, the ministry continued to provide invaluable, targeted information to organizations across all sectors on how to promote accessibility within and outside their organization, as well as help them meet their accessibility requirements. Outreach activities included a variety of initiatives, such as delivering webinars, publishing stakeholder e-newsletters, creating and distributing helpful resources and conducting outreach at professional conferences and events.

## AODA Toolbox Newsletter

The ministry's [AODA Toolbox](#) e-newsletter provides relevant resources and practical tips that organizations can use to help them become more accessible, and better understand the benefits of accessibility.

In 2020, the ministry continued to share regular updates on accessibility (e.g., issues, resources, success stories) with the e-newsletter's more than 9,000 subscribers.

Highlights included:

- showcasing several accessibility initiatives and resources that support organizations when they are considering their accessibility requirements
- providing legislative updates on topics such as the progress of the health care

and education SDCs' work, and the posting of the Information and Communications SDC's Final Recommendations Report

- promoting both National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October 2020) and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2020)
- sharing reminders about accessibility compliance reporting requirements.

## Disability and the Arts Webinar

Organizations across Ontario and Canada work to cultivate disability arts and support access to the arts for artists and audiences with disabilities.

The ministry hosted the Accessible Art and Design: Cultivating Disability Arts webinar in February 2020 to help bring these organizations together to share their information and expertise with their peers.

Two organizations joined the ministry in the webinar to discuss their work helping to showcase and promote artists with disabilities in the visual, performing, media, film and integrated art forms. [Tangled Art + Disability](#) is a registered charitable organization dedicated to enhancing opportunities for artists with disabilities, and [Surface Impressions](#) is an organization that helps the cultural sector get the best from digital media – particularly in relation to accessibility.

## Conference Outreach

Participating in regular events is an important way for the ministry to fulfill its legislative mandate and reach its main stakeholder groups – people with disabilities, accessibility stakeholders and organizations obligated to comply with the legislation.

Ministry staff attended several outreach events and professional conferences in early 2020 before COVID-19 related public safety measures were enacted. These included:

### Human Resources Professional Association (HRPA) Conference (January 20-22, 2020)

The HRPA conference delivered an immersive and interactive learning and networking experience for Human Resources leaders.

The ministry set up a booth where staff provided accessibility and seniors' resources. Staff spoke with attendees about the AODA and its standards, and provided reminders regarding 2020 accessibility compliance reporting requirements for business and non-profit organizations. In addition, staff answered questions from attendees about specific accessibility and seniors' resources available for family members and friends.

### Ontario Library Association (OLA) Super Conference (January 30-31, 2020)

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) is Canada's largest library organization and the OLA's Super Conference is Canada's largest continuing education event and trade show for librarians.

To promote continued education about accessibility to the hundreds of attendees representing libraries across Ontario, ministry staff set up a booth to answer questions and provide accessibility resources.

### Ontario Public Service Multi-ministry Inclusion Café Speaker Series (February 10, 2020)

Deputy Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, Denise Cole, participated in an Ontario Public Service (OPS) Inclusion Café Speaker Series to help OPS leaders and managers better understand why accessibility, diversity and inclusion are organizational priorities, and how these priorities are relevant to their leadership efforts.



## Restaurants Canada (RC) Trade Show and Conference (March 1-3, 2020)

The Restaurants Canada (RC) Trade Show and Conference is Canada's largest food service and hospitality event, bringing industry representatives together to shop, taste, learn, connect and expand their businesses. The event offered leadership presentations and networking events to the approximate 20,000 industry professionals in attendance.

Once again, the ministry staffed a booth, provided accessibility and seniors' resource materials, and answered attendee questions. The event was another great opportunity to remind many businesses about the 2020 accessibility compliance reporting requirements for Business and Non-Profit organizations with 20 or more employees.

## Minister's Event and Announcement Outreach

Public safety measures enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic limited in-person attendance at events and conferences throughout most of 2020. However, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, Raymond Cho, continued to join key stakeholders through virtual events to discuss the importance of accessibility, as well as the government's inclusion initiatives and priorities.

## Rural Ontario Municipality Association (ROMA) Annual Conference (January 20, 2020)

Minister Cho and Parliamentary Assistant for Seniors and Accessibility Daisy Wai, along with ministry staff met with delegates from across Ontario to discuss current seniors and accessibility issues.

The Minister also participated in the Minister's Forum and mentioned that the ministry is developing a seniors strategy to help seniors (including those with disabilities, or who may develop age-related disabilities) remain independent, active and safe. As part of that discussion, the Minister highlighted that findings from the consultation showed that 80 per cent of seniors want to age in place. And, he said the strategy will take that into account. In addition, Minister Cho underscored the importance of combating social isolation in rural areas through the SCG Program and SALC programs.

## Advancing Accessibility in Ontario Framework: Breaking Down Barriers in the Built Environment – Minister's Announcement (January 28, 2020)

Minister Cho and Parliamentary Assistant Daisy Wai [announced the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario Framework](#) at the Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre.

The framework helps focus the province's accessibility and inclusion work in four key areas: breaking down barriers in the built environment; government leading by example; improving understanding and awareness about accessibility and increasing participation in the economy for people with disabilities.

Minister Cho gave numerous examples of government initiatives to help address the first area of the framework – breaking down barriers in the built environment. He outlined how government is working with partner ministries and businesses to reduce barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities in the built environment and housing.

Minister Cho also outlined how the cross-government framework was informed by recommendations from the third legislative review of the AODA, as well as key partners, organizations and people with disabilities.

## Advancing Accessibility in Ontario: Government as a Leader – Minister's Announcement (February 28, 2020)

Minister Cho and Parliamentary Assistant Wai [announced details of the second pillar of the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework](#) at the Abilities Centre in Whitby.

Minister Cho outlined how the Ontario government is leading by example to create a more accessible and inclusive province. He pointed to numerous initiatives and actions that demonstrate Ontario's leadership in improving accessibility in each of the government's roles – as a policy maker, service provider and employer.

## National AccessAbility Week (May 31 to June 6, 2020)

During this important week, Minister Cho carried out numerous virtual activities to spread the word on the importance of accessibility, as well as outline government initiatives to promote inclusion. Actions included an opinion editorial that was sent to print media, a Minister's video that was shared via social media, emailed letters sent directly to stakeholders, a [Minister's statement](#) that was posted online and a statement that was read by the Minister in the Legislature.

The Minister noted that this year National Accessibility Week comes during a particularly challenging time, as COVID-19 has forced many people to stay home and practice social distancing. He reminded Ontarians that this can be stressful and lonely, and urged those in need to take advantage of the many supports being offered by visiting the government's [COVID-19: Support for people](#) webpage.

He also outlined recent initiatives to help during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included a partnership with SPARK Ontario – an online hub that connects volunteers to community organizations that support seniors and people with disabilities. And, [\\$11 million in funding](#) to help the OCSP in delivering hot meals, medicine and other essentials to low-income seniors and people with disabilities.

## Association of Municipalities in Ontario Annual Conference (August 17, 2020)

Minister Cho virtually attended the 2020 Association of Municipalities in Ontario (AMO) Annual Conference. Minister Cho and ministry staff met with several delegates from across Ontario to discuss current seniors and accessibility issues.

The Minister also attended the Ministers' Forum. The forum focused on supporting community well-being through health, social services and education. The Minister shared that the government launched the [OCSP](#) to expand existing Meals on Wheels Services and support the delivering of essentials (such as food baskets and medications) to help low-income seniors and people with disabilities self-isolating at home. The Minister also highlighted that SALC programs are available virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic to help combat social isolation.

## International Day of Charity (September 4, 2020)

Minister Cho read a statement to the Legislature where he acknowledged the important contributions charities make to the lives of people across the province each and every day. He stressed that many charities owe their success to the countless number of volunteers who help those in need. He also released a [Minister's statement](#) online.

The Minister mentioned the government's partnership with SPARK Ontario. He said the

5,200 volunteers that had signed up through the website over the past few months are supporting others in a variety of ways, such as making deliveries and getting supplies to those in need.

He also said his ministry is working closely with the [OCSA](#) and its network of volunteers to deliver the [OCSP](#), so that seniors and those with disabilities can stay safe at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October 2020)

Minister Cho carried out numerous activities in October to highlight the importance of hiring people with disabilities, as well as outline government initiatives that promote accessibility. Actions included a Minister's video that was shared via social media, letters sent to stakeholders, a [Minister's statement](#) that was posted online and a statement that was read in the Legislature.

The Minister highlighted that by working together with municipal, business and community partners, the government can ensure people with disabilities can participate in their communities as fully as possible.

He also shared details on how the government is addressing the fourth pillar of the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework. One example was how the [EnAbling Change Program](#) is helping support the expansion of the [Ontario Chamber of Commerce's Discover Ability Network](#) to connect employers with job seekers and increase inclusive hiring. Minister Cho highlighted his plans to engage with partners both within and beyond government to shed more light on how accessibility and inclusivity benefits us all.

## Virtual Roundtable to Discuss the Positive Impact of Employing People with Disabilities at Small Businesses in Ontario (October 19, 2020)

Minister Cho was joined by Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, Prabmeet Sarkaria to meet with several small business owners at a virtual roundtable to discuss the positive impact of employing people with disabilities. The roundtable addressed topics including: hiring practices, financial support, securing talent, incentives and business champions. The roundtable also highlighted the importance of removing barriers to help people with disabilities fully participate.

The Minister told the audience that, "When our workplaces are accessible and inclusive, businesses gain access to deeper talent pools, new customers and higher profits .... By sharing your insights and experience, you are helping to build a stronger province. You have seen firsthand how hiring people with disabilities can help increase productivity and innovation, while lowering turnover and workplace injuries. We want to help spread these valuable lessons to other businesses across Ontario."

He also acknowledged that COVID-19 had brought unique challenges for businesses, but said it has also opened up some opportunities for people with disabilities to become involved in the labour market through digital technologies. Minister Cho told the audience that they, "are in tune with your workplace cultures, and we want your help to change Ontario for the better."

## Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) Virtual Business Panel Discussion: The Power of Inclusion (October 26, 2020)

Minister Cho participated in the [Ontario Disability Employment Network's \(ODEN\) Virtual Business Panel Discussion](#).

He stressed the importance of promoting inclusive hiring so skilled and qualified employees are better able to reach their full potential. He told the business audience that inclusion also helps organizations increase productivity and innovation while lowering turnover and workplace injuries. And, he pointed out the opportunities for people with disabilities to become involved in the labour market through digital technologies.

The Minister also thanked ODEN for being one of Ontario's valuable partners in enhancing employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities.

## Advancing Accessibility in Ontario: Improving Understanding and Awareness – Minister's Announcement (October 29, 2020)

Minister Cho and Parliamentary Assistant Wai virtually [announced details of the third pillar of the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework](#) – Improving understanding and awareness.



Minister Cho outlined how the government is working with its stakeholders – including partner ministries, broader public sector organizations, businesses and non-profit organizations – to help raise awareness and change attitudes.

He also launched a new public education campaign to increase awareness about accessibility needs and responsibilities, and help organizations identify and remove barriers for people with disabilities.

"We want everyone, especially people with disabilities and seniors, to be able to fully participate in everyday life in our communities and our economy," said Minister Cho. "Our new campaign will help foster understanding and encourage cultural change towards accessibility needs."

## Virtual Roundtable on Skills Development and Training for People with Disabilities (November 9, 2020)

Minister Cho was joined by Jane McKenna, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, to co-host a virtual roundtable on skills development and training for people with disabilities.

The roundtable addressed the benefits that both people with disabilities and business get by increasing participation in the economy for people with disabilities. Discussions were also had on various training and skills development opportunities for people with disabilities.

## Advancing Accessibility in Ontario: Increasing Participation in the Economy for People with Disabilities – Minister's Announcement (November 18, 2020)

Minister Cho [announced specific details of the fourth pillar of its Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework](#) through an online news bulletin. He promoted the positive effects of inclusive hiring with employers and partners by sharing examples and online resources.

He also highlighted valuable work to help increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, such as:

- modernizing and improving employment services
- providing funding and supports to help employees with disabilities and employers thrive
- enhancing employment opportunities for youth with disabilities
- investing in businesses and services to help them be more accessible to attract more customers and employees.

"Our government knows that COVID-19 has been a challenging time for everyone, especially people with disabilities. Many businesses have also been impacted and we are working with partner ministries, businesses and community organizations to increase accessibility and inclusion in



workplaces. We want all Ontarians to be able to fully participate in everyday life in our communities and our economy," said Minister Cho.

## International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2020)

Minister Cho marked this special day by issuing a [Minister's statement](#) and delivering a statement to the Legislature.

The Minister said it was a time to celebrate the accomplishments and promote the rights and well-being of people with disabilities. He also said it is an opportunity to increase awareness of the barriers that people with disabilities face in their daily lives, and to recognize that it is everyone's shared responsibility to help bring these barriers down.

Minister Cho emphasized that people with disabilities need greater help, especially during COVID-19, and confirmed the government's commitment to making sure this diverse group of vulnerable people are not left behind. He outlined the many initiatives the government has undertaken to this end – including moving swiftly to provide targeted supports for seniors and people with disabilities during the pandemic.

The Minister emphasized that collaboration is key in moving Ontario towards our goal of being more open and accessible for everyone. He thanked the ministry's partners in the disability community, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and the broader public sector for all their continued hard work to increase accessibility through the ministry's many programs and partnerships. And, he encouraged his MPP colleagues to help bring positive change to the daily lives of people with disabilities.

## Destination Ontario and Accessibility Travel Information

Making accessibility enhancements helps ensure that everyone can fully participate in everyday life.

In early 2020, [Destination Ontario](#) (the tourism agency of the Government of Ontario), the [Tourism Industry Association of Ontario](#) and the ministry completed a project that enhanced the accessibility information available on Ontario's [official travel website](#). The goal is to help travellers with disabilities make more informed decisions about which tourist sites best meet their needs. The improvements make it easier for seniors and people with disabilities to plan their tourism activities and find a destination where they can play, rest and participate in new adventures.

The project increased the number of accessibility features tourism operators can select from for their business listings on Ontario's official travel website. Twenty [additional accessibility features](#) and an accessible search filter were added (e.g. information about accessible seating, elevator access, service animals and the availability of mobility devices, etc.).

In addition, the ministry developed a reference guide to help tourism operators better understand the enhanced accessibility features, so they could decide whether these apply to their business. And, the ministry provided training on the new features to Destination Ontario staff, including those who liaise with tourism operators.

The enhancements will help make Ontario a destination of choice for travelers with disabilities, and they align with the Ontario government's vision to build a new tourism strategy to maximize the economic impact of Ontario's \$34 billion tourism industry.

# Accessibility in 2021

Much was accomplished by many dedicated people under trying conditions in 2020. Going forward, much more will be accomplished as we continue to work together to shape an Ontario that is open and accessible to everyone.



