

Recommendations to the Minister of Justice on an Accessibility Standard in Goods and Services

Summary

***Submitted to the Minister of Justice
by the Accessibility Advisory Board***

May 2025

This is a summary of recommendations developed by the Goods and Services Standard Development Committee and submitted to the Accessibility Advisory Board in March 2025.

The Accessibility Advisory Board reviewed, made amendments, and approved the recommendations for submission to the Minister of Justice.

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Introduction

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act enables Government to develop and enact accessibility standard regulations in various areas, including goods and services. The Accessibility Advisory Board is responsible for developing recommendations for the Minister of Justice on accessibility standards. The Goods and Services Standard Development Committee (SDC) was created to help the Accessibility Advisory Board develop recommendations on the accessibility standard in goods and services.

The recommendations are designed to address barriers in service delivery, including physical, digital and systemic barriers. They include specific actions and requirements for goods and services providers to ensure accessibility in areas such as service disruptions, feedback processes, training, communications, and inclusive policies. The recommendations also include areas such as assistive devices, guide dogs and service dogs, support persons, and sign language interpreters.

The recommendations apply to all businesses, organizations and public entities that provide goods and services in Nova Scotia. There are specific exemptions for micro-businesses with fewer than 10 employees or annual revenue less than \$500,000. These recommendations apply to services delivered both on physical premises and within digital spaces.

The Goods and Services SDC held consultations to gather feedback on their recommendations. The following groups provided feedback: persons with disabilities, organizations supporting persons with disabilities, goods and services providers, prescribed public sector bodies (PPSBs), and government departments. PPSBs include municipalities, libraries, health authorities, education organizations, and crown corporations.

The following is a summary of the content of the recommendations.

Recommendations for a Goods and Services Accessibility Standard

Recommendation 1 – Temporary Disruptions of Service Delivery

Temporary disruptions to services can significantly impact accessibility for people with disabilities in accessing, using and benefiting from goods and services. This recommendation requires goods and services providers to notify the public of disruptions and provide information about alternatives to maintaining access to critical services.

Recommendation 2 – Service Delivery Feedback Processes

Feedback processes are important in understanding the needs of people with disabilities and improving the accessibility of service delivery. The recommendation requires goods and services providers to create a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the accessibility of its service delivery, and the feedback process itself.

Recommendation 3 – Service Delivery Communications

This recommendation addresses barriers people with disabilities experience when communicating with goods and services providers. The recommendation requires that goods and services providers deliver information in multiple formats, and make sure signage and displays are clear and accessible. Goods and services providers must train staff to understand different communication needs and the basics of accessible communication to help staff recognize different communication needs and respond accordingly.

Recommendation 4 – Service Delivery Events

This recommendation requires that goods and services providers ensure that event announcements, registration processes, venues, and participation options for public events are accessible to people with disabilities. Small, private or informal gatherings are exempt. The recommendation also requires goods and services providers to ensure different communication options are promoted, and available upon request, to meet the communication needs of people with disabilities at the public event.

Recommendation 5 – Service Delivery Training

Staff, volunteers, and leaders need to be prepared to deliver inclusive and accessible services. Therefore, this recommendation states that goods and services providers will be required to provide training to those delivering services.

It is also recommended that the Government of Nova Scotia be required to support goods and services providers in creating the training by providing them with resources through a central hub, in accessible formats. The recommendations require that people with disabilities must be involved with developing and/or providing the training as well.

Recommendation 6 – Use of Assistive Devices

Assistive devices include equipment, hardware, software, apps, etc. They are used by people with disabilities to address barriers with accessing, using and benefiting from service delivery. This recommendation requires goods and services providers to implement measures and practices to reasonably accommodate the use of these devices when delivering goods and services.

Recommendation 7 – Guide Dogs and Service Dogs

Guide dogs and service dogs support people with disabilities when using services. To complement the Nova Scotia Blind Persons' Rights Act and the Service Dog Act, this recommendation requires goods and services providers to recognize in their policies that a person with a disability may use a guide dog or service dog to remove barriers when accessing, using or benefiting from service delivery. Goods and services providers must also implement measures and practices to ensure people who use guide dogs and/or service dogs are reasonably accommodated when accessing, using or benefiting from service delivery.

Recommendation 8 – Support Persons

Support persons are people who help people with disabilities access and benefit from service delivery. This recommendation requires goods and services providers to ensure policies accommodate the presence of support persons and eliminate financial and procedural barriers, up until undue hardship.

Recommendation 9 – Sign Language Interpretation

Sign language interpreters facilitate effective communication between Deaf and non-Deaf people to ensure inclusive and accessible interactions. This recommendation requires goods and services providers to ensure that sign language interpreters are made available upon request at no cost to the Deaf person.

There are additional requirements in the recommendation for PPSBs to facilitate effective sign language interpretation services when delivering goods and services, including developing a policy to provide sign language interpretation. There is also a requirement that the Government of Nova Scotia must provide adequate funding to PPSBs to support sign language interpretation services.

Recommendation 10 – Policies, Practices, and Procedures

Policies, practices, and procedures are needed to implement standards and ensure accountability. This recommendation requires goods and services providers to make policies, practices, and procedures for recommendations 1 through 9. The recommendation outlines the requirements for policies, practices, and procedures, including what must be included, when to review, and how to promote them, with exemptions for micro-businesses.