

Accessibility Advisory Board

Annual Report 2024–2025



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Message from the Chair

On behalf of the Accessibility Advisory Board, welcome to our annual report. I invite you to read about the work we contributed to and collaborated on from April 2024 to March 2025.

Our province reached a major accessibility milestone this year. In March 2025, the Built Environment Accessibility Standard Regulations became law. The board supported the work leading to Nova Scotia's first accessibility standard by making recommendations to the Minister of Justice in 2020 and 2021.

In 2024–2025, the board approved recommendations for standards in employment and in goods and services to submit to the minister. We also set up standard development committees for public transportation and for information and communication. These committees began their work in the fall of 2024.

A highlight for us this year was creating our website. This is a good way for Nova Scotians to learn more about the board and the Accessibility Act. We also began working on our board communication and engagement plan.

In the coming year, we will continue to support the committees developing recommendations for accessibility standards. We will continue to advise the minister about issues affecting Nova Scotians with disabilities.

Our ongoing commitment, supported by organizations and communities across the province, is helping to prevent and remove accessibility barriers. It is helping us move toward a more accessible Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,
Max Chauvin
Chair, Accessibility Advisory Board

About the Accessibility Advisory Board

The Accessibility Advisory Board was set up in 2018, as required under the [Accessibility Act](#). We offer advice and recommendations about accessibility and accessibility standards in Nova Scotia to the Minister of Justice.

Most board members are people with disabilities. We have expertise and experience in many areas of accessibility. We live in communities across Nova Scotia. Some of us have experience with groups, businesses, and organizations that will need to follow the accessibility standards.

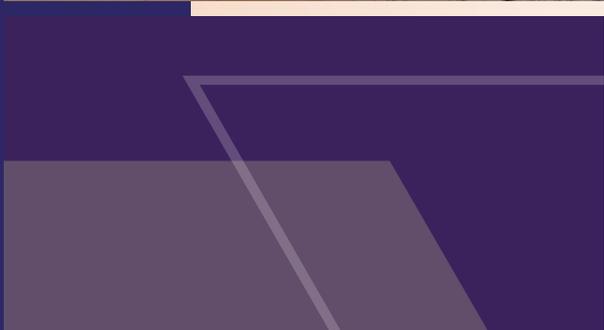
Our new [Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board website](#) provides information about the board and our work.

In 2024–2025, [board members](#) included

- Max Chauvin, Chair
- Ellen Johnson, Vice Chair
- Birgit Elssner
- Dr. Linda Campbell
- Denise Pictou Maloney
- Melissa MacKenzie
- P. Earl Muise
- Amy Lays
- Louise Gillis
- Dr. Sarah Moore
- Shellene Sparks
- Rob Patey

Our website lists [ways Nova Scotians can help us with our work](#), including

- how to provide First Voice advice on accessibility
- how to take part in public engagement and feedback opportunities
- how to apply to join the board



Our 2024–2025 Activities

Board Operations

The Accessibility Advisory Board met nine times between April 2024 and March 2025. All but one of our meetings were held online. In September 2024, we held a full-day in-person meeting.

Our work plan priorities for 2024–2025 included developing and launching our [Accessibility Advisory Board website](#) (separate from the Accessibility Directorate website) and developing recommendations for accessibility standards.

We also provided advice to the Minister of Justice on

- developing the built environment accessibility standard
- [Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act Independent Review Report](#)

Summaries of our meetings can be found in the [Our Work section](#) of our website.

Accessibility Standards Development

There are barriers in Nova Scotia that can make it hard for people with disabilities to fully take part in society. [Access by Design 2030](#) is our province's strategy to guide us to become accessible. This strategy sets priorities to prevent and remove barriers. It sets priorities to make our province more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities.

Among those priorities is government's commitment to have accessibility standards approved by 2030. These standards will become the sets of rules about accessibility in Nova Scotia. The Accessibility Advisory Board supports this priority by creating standard development committees. The role of the committees is to help the board provide recommendations about accessibility standards to government.



In 2024–2025, the board had three active standard development committees:

- [Goods and Services Standard Development Committee](#)
 - Travis Gunn, Chair
 - John Smith, Vice Chair
- [Public Transportation Standard Development Committee](#)
 - David McCusker, Chair
 - Ellen Johnson, Vice Chair
- [Information and Communication Standard Development Committee](#)
 - Jeff Overmars, Chair
 - Dr. Linda Campbell, Vice Chair

The committees are groups of experts in the standard areas. As with the board, most members of these committees are people with disabilities and bring lived experience to their work. Some members work in sectors that will be affected by these standards.

These committees

- identify barriers that people with disabilities experience
- identify and consider ways to remove and prevent barriers through regulation
- create draft recommendations for accessibility standard regulations
- consult with the public and government on draft recommendations, and review this feedback
- provide recommendations to the board to finalize, approve, and submit to the Minister of Justice

More information about each committee is on the [Accessibility Advisory Board website](#). This includes committee recommendations, plain language summaries and videos in American Sign Language about committee recommendations, lists of committee members, and details of each phase of work.

Built Environment Standard Update

The built environment standard is intended to make buildings and outdoor spaces like trails, parks, and beaches more accessible. It addresses areas not covered by the [Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations](#).

In November 2024, we provided advice to the Accessibility Directorate on the education and awareness plan for this standard. The plan includes government communications, plain language documents, educational videos, and presentations.

In March 2025, government approved the [Built Environment Accessibility Standard Regulations](#). This is Nova Scotia's first accessibility standard to become law. It is supported by updates to accessibility requirements in the [Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations](#) (effective April 1, 2025) and the [Fire Safety Regulations](#).

Education Standard Update

The education standard is intended to make the public education sectors accessible for students with disabilities.

In June 2024, Accessibility Directorate staff told us that government departments worked together to review the board's recommendations from 2023 and to support the development of an education standard.

Accessibility Directorate staff also shared that they met with leadership from the Regional Centres for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, as well as university presidents, to provide updates on work to develop the standard.

The Accessibility Directorate is working together with government departments to develop the proposed standard for public review. Board members offered to help promote the public review to make sure it reaches members of the Indigenous and Deaf communities.

Employment Standard Update

The employment standard is intended to make sure that workplaces are accessible. It will support people with disabilities to find, maintain, and advance in meaningful employment.

In April and May 2024, we reviewed recommendations made by the [Employment Standard Development Committee](#). We made some changes and then sent the final recommendations to the Minister of Justice. The minister released our

recommendations to the public in October 2024, which was Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Government is starting to review the recommendations to develop the proposed standard.

Goods and Services Standard Development Committee

The goods and services standard is intended to make sure that people with disabilities have equitable access to goods and services.

The [Goods and Services Standard Development Committee](#) met seven times in 2024–2025. It used customer service standards from Ontario and Manitoba as models for drafting its recommendations.

In fall 2024, the committee asked the public for input on the draft recommendations, potential exemptions or conditions based on business size, sign language interpretation needs, and the use of the terms “service animal” versus “service dog.”

The committee consulted with the public and with government departments. Consultations were held virtually and participants were also invited to submit written feedback.

Public consultation participants included

- people with disabilities and Deaf persons
- businesses, non-profit organizations, and community and public sector service providers
- prescribed public sector bodies
- organizations that work with people with disabilities
- families, friends, and support persons for people with disabilities
- other Nova Scotians with an interest in accessible service delivery

In November 2024, the committee chair presented feedback from these public consultations. The feedback revealed what needed to be improved in the draft recommendations. Some of the feedback included adding practical guidance on definitions, and the importance of resources, enforcement, inclusion, intersectionality, and public awareness. The feedback was used to help shape the committee’s recommendations for the standard.

Over the winter of 2025, the committee made changes to the recommendations based on the consultation feedback. In March 2025, the committee shared its final recommendations with us. We used our consensus decision-making model to review the recommendations and then accepted them. In summer 2025, after the recommendation documents are formatted and made accessible, we will send the recommendations to the Minister of Justice.

The committee's final recommendations addressed barriers in the following areas:

- temporary disruptions to service delivery
- service delivery feedback process
- service delivery communications
- service delivery events
- service delivery training
- use of assistive devices
- guide dogs and service dogs
- support persons
- sign language interpretation
- policies, practices, and procedures

Public Transportation Standard Development Committee

The public transportation standard is intended to make it easier for people with disabilities to get where they need to go using public transportation.

A board subcommittee recruited and selected members for the [Public Transportation Standard Development Committee](#). There were 48 people who applied to join the committee, including 19 people with disabilities. The selection subcommittee recommended 22 people, including 11 people with disabilities. The board approved the subcommittee's recommendations for committee membership in May 2024. The Minister of Justice approved the committee membership in June 2024.

The committee met four times as a full committee in 2024–2025. In fall 2024, committee members completed their orientation. They also held a full-day in-person meeting focusing on intersectionality and identifying transportation barriers. The committee formed working groups to develop recommendations. The working groups met 13 times in 2024–2025.

In January 2025, the committee received presentations from the Joint Regional Transportation Agency and the Ecology Action Centre.

Information and Communication Standard Development Committee

The information and communication standard is intended to make sure people with disabilities can receive, understand, and share the information they need.

The recommendations for this standard will aim to address communication barriers that exist digitally, in print, or through interactions with technology or people.

There were 48 people who applied to join the [Information and Communication Standard Development Committee](#), including 32 people with disabilities. The board's selection subcommittee recommended 22 people, including 17 people with disabilities. The board approved the subcommittee's recommendations for committee members in June 2024. The Minister of Justice approved the committee membership in July 2024.

The committee met five times in 2024–2025. In November 2024, committee members completed their orientation. They discussed the scope of their work and finalized their work plan in January 2025. In February and March 2025, committee members identified information and communication barriers. They set up working groups to develop their recommendations. The committee is considering existing standards and guidelines for digital accessibility, as well as Manitoba's standard, as models.

In January and March 2025, the board approved motions to recommend to the minister some committee membership changes and a change to the terms of reference to increase the size of the committee to 23 members.

Awareness and Capacity Building

Awareness and Capacity Building is one of the six priorities in [Access by Design 2030](#).

In 2024–2025, we created our own [Accessibility Advisory Board website](#). It includes

- details about our role, history, and values as a board
- board policies and governing documents, including the [Accessibility Act](#), our terms of reference, and our consensus decision-making model
- board meeting minutes and annual reports
- information about accessibility standards and the accessibility standard development committees
- common accessibility and disability terms and definitions
- details on how to share First Voice advice, join the board, or take part in public engagement sessions

Our website includes links to the [Access Includes Everyone](#) and [Accessibility Directorate](#) websites. It also describes what users will find on those sites.

In 2024–2025, we discussed the need for more communication from the board to the public. We reviewed ways the board could raise awareness and increase education about the work underway to improve accessibility in Nova Scotia. Suggestions included

- using social media and videos
- helping municipalities and small businesses understand our work
- making sure our work is informed by a diversity of people with disabilities
- developing and using a board communication plan

We also discussed what to consider as we develop our board communication plan:

- With whom do we want to communicate? This is called an audience.
- How will we communicate to that audience?
- What do we want to share with that audience?

We then created a Communications and Engagement Working Group to lead the work on our communication plan in 2025.

Collaboration and Support

Collaboration and Support is one of the six priorities in [Access by Design 2030](#).

In 2024–2025, the Accessibility Advisory Board met with many people and groups on key topics related to accessibility and disability.

In June 2024, staff from the Office of Addictions and Mental Health gave us an overview of services available in Nova Scotia, noting the office is trying to improve mental health services for Deaf people. We discussed the importance of this issue and the need for Deaf therapists.

In September 2024, staff from the Department of Opportunities and Social Development gave us an overview of the Human Rights Remedy. This is a set of actions that guides government’s work to transform our province’s disability support system. It is called “the Remedy” because it is what government must do to remedy the discrimination against Nova Scotians with disabilities. Department staff told us that government has launched a [Human Rights Remedy website](#). We asked how the plan will be monitored. We were told reports and external evaluations are required. We noted the importance of community engagement with municipalities.

During our September meeting, we took part in an engagement session about the Department of Justice's review of police services. We noted communication barriers that people with disabilities face when they interact with police and that police officers need more training about mental health issues. Our suggestions included

- building relationships
- developing an accessible and educational video on what to expect when a person calls the police, created for anyone who may be hesitant to do so

At that same September meeting, we received a presentation from Autism Nova Scotia about the action plan it is developing. The plan will focus on services and support for people who are autistic. There is an advisory group for this work, which includes autistic people, government, and other community representatives. Work on the plan began in May 2024.

Board member P. Earl Muise represented the board on a government review committee working to improve accessibility for Nova Scotians applying to agencies, boards, and commissions.

In November 2024, we passed a motion to recommend Ross Sampson be appointed for a second term as our board's representative on the Nova Scotia Building Advisory Committee.

Also in November, we received a panel discussion featuring several prescribed public sector bodies:

- Annapolis County told us what it has learned developing accessibility features for its trails and parks.
- The Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) presented its accessibility plan and some of the improvements made to its built environment and services. These included a Rick Hansen Accessibility Audit of its Young Street store in Halifax. The NSLC is planning to develop a pilot program to test accessibility changes to its price tags and launch new accessibility features such as low-sensory shopping hours.
- The Town of Shelburne, the District of Shelburne County, and the Town of Lockeport told us about their work on a joint accessibility plan. The three municipalities share staff to provide accessibility guidance and support to the community. They also share resources to improve their built environments.

Following the November provincial election, the new Minister of Justice and the Associate Deputy Minister met with us during our January 2025 meeting. We gave the minister an overview of our work this past year, including what committees have done to develop accessibility standard recommendations. We asked the minister to share the advice we put forward with government colleagues.

In January 2025, Accessibility Directorate staff told us that they had met with Elections Nova Scotia to share our feedback about barriers during voting in the November 2024 provincial election. This meeting resulted in Accessibility Directorate staff being invited to participate on Elections Nova Scotia's inclusion, diversity, equity, and access committee.

Also in January 2025, Engage Nova Scotia gave us an update on the upcoming Quality of Life Survey. We were asked to help promote the survey to increase participation from people with disabilities.

Compliance

Compliance and Enforcement is one of the six priorities in [Access by Design 2030](#).

Many organizations need to follow the [Accessibility Act](#) and follow the accessibility standards when they become law. This is called compliance.

In 2024–2025, Accessibility Directorate staff told us how prescribed public sector bodies were doing with compliance. They also gave us an overview of new tools and resources they had shared with prescribed public sector bodies to help them update their accessibility plans.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation is one of the six priorities in [Access by Design 2030](#). This means monitoring the impact and results of accessibility work happening in Nova Scotia.

In June 2024, Accessibility Directorate staff gave us an overview of the [Government of Nova Scotia Response to Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act Independent Review Report](#). (Government released its response in March 2024.) We learned how government will respond to recommendations in the review, including six key action areas government will implement over the next three years.

Access by Design 2030

In November 2024, Accessibility Directorate staff told us about work started within government to update the [Access by Design 2030](#) strategy to reflect current issues. This is one of the recommendations from [Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act Independent Review Report](#).

In January 2025, Accessibility Directorate staff gave us an overview of the draft updated strategy. We discussed it and were invited to share our feedback.





Looking Ahead to 2025–2026

In 2025–2026, the Accessibility Advisory Board will continue to make it a priority to communicate and engage more with Nova Scotians. We want them to know more about the work underway to improve accessibility in Nova Scotia.

We will use our new [Accessibility Advisory Board website](#), as well as presentations at meetings and events, to raise awareness about our work. We will also share details about who we are and what we do on our website.

Our new Communications and Engagement Working Group will support work to develop our board communication plan and engage with youth with disabilities.

We will support the work of standard development committees to develop recommendations for the information and communication standard and for the public transportation standard.

We will continue to receive updates on standards and compliance under the [Accessibility Act](#). We will share advice with the Accessibility Directorate about these topics, including First Voice advice.

We will continue to follow progress on commitments made in the 2025–2028 Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan. We will also track progress on actions outlined in the [Government of Nova Scotia Response to Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act Independent Review Report](#).

We will continue to advise the Minister of Justice about issues affecting Nova Scotians with disabilities. We will keep supporting the work of government and community to make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030.





Nova Scotia Accessibility
Advisory Board
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