

# EDC's 2023 Accessibility Progress Report

## General

### Accessibility statement

Export Development Canada (EDC) remains committed to creating accessible, inclusive, and equitable experiences for our customers, employees, and all Canadians, especially people with disabilities. Our first three-year [Accessibility Plan](#) (2023-2025) published in 2023 is now being implemented. Proactive incremental steps are being taken to embed accessibility into everything we do at EDC, as described in this progress report.

### Contact information

#### Accessibility lead

Export Development Canada

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### Accessibility feedback

We welcome feedback on barriers you may have encountered when visiting our workplaces or website, or during the implementation of our accessibility plan. Consult

our **description of feedback** processes for ways to provide feedback, and to learn how your information is used and safeguarded.

## **Alternate formats**

Request alternate formats of our accessibility plan, progress report or description of feedback processes by email at [Accessible@edc.ca](mailto:Accessible@edc.ca) , or by using the [accessibility feedback form](#).

- Print
- Large print
- Braille
- Audio format
- Electronic format

## **Areas in Section 5 of the Accessibility Canada Act (ACA)**

We continue to apply an accessibility lens to our services, programs, and products to remove barriers for people with disabilities and improve the customer and employee experience.

## **Employment**

For this pillar, we're committed to applying an accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity lens to all stages of the employment lifecycle to attract and retain employees with disabilities and build an inclusive work culture.

We continue to monitor the ACA Standard on Employment (CAN-ASC-1.1), which has a revised target publication date of fall 2024. This standard, which covers all aspects of the employment lifecycle, will have significant impact and require a comprehensive road map to align accessibility priorities, sequencing of funding, and roles and responsibilities. Based on a preliminary review of the draft standard, we're confident we'll be well-positioned when it comes into force.

To attract employees with disabilities, our Talent Acquisition team is starting to identify and reach out to external disability employment partners to discuss advertising on a regular basis to attract talent in these communities. During the hiring process, we always ask candidates if accommodation is required and/or support needed. While there have only been a few accommodation requests, they're generally for additional time to help candidates understand, process and respond to questions.

Our accommodation program and processes were reviewed and updated in 2023 under the guidance of EDC's accessibility lead to better reflect the needs of employees and align with EDC's principles and values as an organization. This included:

- updating template forms and emails;
- setting expectations and processes with the insurer; and
- posting revised documents on our internal intranet for increased employee awareness and access.

An information session was provided to our DiversAbility Employee Resource Group to explain the updated process and provide insights into how accommodations are supported at EDC. The process for accommodations requiring renewal is also being streamlined to ensure employees continue to receive necessary supports for work. Further adjustments will be made as needed, as the program matures and additional needs are identified.

We're always looking for opportunities to engage with employees and leaders to highlight mental health supports within our programming. To increase employee awareness of wellness and mental health services and resources, several actions were taken throughout the year, including the development of:

- a dedicated online LiveWell site;
- an online monthly *Wellness* newsletter promoting wellness themes and resources; and
- a comprehensive *Wellness Guide* to help employees navigate through the vast array of resources available to them.

Each year, the month of May is dedicated to mental health with different programming each week to engage employees in mental health conversations, as well as the challenges and supports available.

During October's Healthy Workplace Month, resources and themes are further reinforced to ensure employees have access to the various supports available, including our:

- Core Benefits Program;
- Employee Assistance Program; and
- Paramedical Benefit Extension Program for those needing more support.

## **Built environment**

All of our offices are leased spaces, designed with accessibility in mind to ensure equal access for employees and visitors with disabilities. Our health and safety information provides guidance for people with disabilities, including procedures to follow in case of emergency.

We're continuing to monitor ACA standards for the built environment, namely:

- Standard on Outdoor Spaces (CAN-ASC-2.1) with a revised publication target date of summer 2024;
- Standard on Emergency Egress (Exit) (CAN-ASC-2.2) with a revised publication date of summer 2025; and
- Model Standard for the Built Environment (CAN-ASC-2.3) with a revised publication date of spring 2026.

The CSA/ASC B651, Accessible Design for the Built Environment Standard, which came into effect in 2023, revised an existing standard and contains requirements for making buildings and other facilities accessible to individuals with a range of physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities.

In advance of these standards, our Real Estate team is developing a built environment road map for 2024–2026 and beyond. It will identify resourcing and funding needs in order to respond to new standards and support EDC's commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible workspace for everyone.

A proactive approach is being taken for our Ottawa head office, known as the Ottawa Community Hub, and accessibility thinking is being applied to all redesigns planned for EDC spaces.

In late November 2022, the Rick Hansen Foundation conducted an on-site accessibility assessment of EDC's Ottawa Community Hub to rate the site and determine its level of meaningful access. The rating and scores are currently under review by the CSA Group, an independent adjudicator. The Ottawa Community Hub is on its way to officially becoming Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certified (RHFAC) and will be listed on the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Public Registry, a public listing of sites that have completed the RHFAC rating process.

The Rick Hansen Foundation report for the Ottawa Hub has been shared with the building landlord as many of the recommendations are specific to the landlord. Dialogue with the landlord has started to prioritize considerations in the report based on cost, impact and level of difficulty. User feedback, including from people with disabilities, will be collected in the coming months to help with prioritization specific to the report. Several recommendations in the report are already being actioned by the landlord, including:

- adding electric vehicle (EV) charging stations to accessible parking spaces;
- installing convex mirrors in the lobby;
- extending a railing at the front entrance; and
- installing push plates to open doors in the front lobby.

Signage in our Ottawa Community Hub was also updated in August 2023 to be more visible and accessible. It now includes raised characters, braille and images, and uses more inclusive language changing from “Mobility Impaired Persons Staging Area” to “Area of Rescue Assistance.”

Guidelines and best practices for physical spaces included in the Rick Hansen Foundation report are being incorporated into the redesign of all EDC spaces in Ottawa to help build a model for EDC offices in Canada and abroad.

Our Floor Warden Program was updated and improved to support our hybrid work model since we couldn't assume employees were in the office on any given day. By adopting an approach of “everyone is a floor warden,” all employees are now responsible for floor warden responsibilities, in the event of an emergency evacuation of the EDC buildings. A short mandatory learning module, *Everyone's a Floor Warden*, was launched in September 2023 to reinforce this message for employees.

## Information and communication technologies (ICT)

We're advancing our technology and digital capabilities to improve our customer and employee experience, and help Canadian businesses grow and succeed.

We're proactively planning for the adoption of the ACA Standard for ICT products and services (CAN-ASC-6.1) being recommended for adoption in spring 2024 (originally spring 2023).

Our accessibility priorities for this pillar are being determined by EDC's digital road map. Our current efforts are focused on transforming our flagship digital asset, [www.edc.ca](http://www.edc.ca), to ensure the site will be 100% compliant with *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* version 2.1, level AA (WCAG2.1AA) standards.

New brand visual guidelines were developed to evolve our brand colour palette and fonts. We're leveraging these new guidelines and starting to apply them to the transformation of our external website and branded collateral on an incremental basis. The accessible brand experience will be rolled out to our social channels, digital advertising and other platforms as our full brand and materials are revised. In terms of the Microsoft Office 365 suite of products, we rely on the accessibility of Microsoft and provide the latest updates to employees when available.

Our Marketing team developed a three-year road map to deliver assets that are accessible and easy to use for our customers and employees. Here's the breakdown:

- **Year 1** focuses on training to build accessible skills and on the acquisition of accessibility testing technologies.
- **Year 2** leverages the skills training to ensure all new materials are accessible.
- **Year 3** begins the compliance of legacy assets.

Actions already underway include no longer outsourcing publishing and bringing accessible content publishing capability in-house, resulting in a cost savings of approximate \$50,000 compared to 2022.

## **Communication, other than ICT**

We're using creative communications and channels to support our vision and mandate to help Canadian businesses grow and succeed on an international scale, and to inform, inspire, and engage our customers and employees.

We continue to monitor ACA Standard on Plain Language (CAN-ASC-3.1) targeted for publication in spring 2025 (originally 2023).

For the 2023 virtual EDC Employee Conference, our Employee Communications team worked closely with EDC's accessibility lead and our third-party service provider to ensure the platform design was as accessible as possible. To address accessibility barriers and create a more inclusive work environment for people with disabilities, enhancements were made to ensure the online and in-person experiences were the same for everyone.

For in-person viewing parties held in our major offices across Canada (Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax), closed captioning was available on the main page for the first time and the formatting of the closed captions was easier to access and follow.

The Employee Communications team is also promoting SharePoint Online, a more accessible platform, that provides employees with advice and guidance on accessible best practices for those migrating their sites to the platform. An informal SharePoint Online community was formed to share best practices and provide peer support with site migration and content updates. Closed captioning and transcripts are now available for all videos being produced internally.



Efforts are being made to integrate best practices into writing accessibly. The Employee Communications team is starting to change the way links are displayed (writing out the name of the linked page instead of saying, “click here”); writing shorter stories using plain language and easy-to-read bullet-form formats; and no longer embedding text over images which aren’t accessible by screen readers.

## **Procurement of goods, services and facilities**

Our procurement initiatives focus on improving the availability of accessible goods, services and facilities, and the accessibility of procurement policies, programs, guidelines, and processes.

We continue to embed accessibility into our procurement processes even though there’s no current targeted publication date for an ACA Standard for Procurement. The Procurement team has committed to providing diverse supplier data for inclusion in the 2023 annual report and ESG (environmental, social and governance) scorecard.

EDC’s *Supplier Code of Conduct* was updated and approved in June 2023, after consultation with relevant stakeholder groups, to establish external accessibility expectations of suppliers. Accessibility requirements are being incorporated into various internal procurement documents. For example, an internal competitive procurement procedure checklist now includes a step during the initiation phase to assess and incorporate, where appropriate, accessibility considerations into Statements of Work. A justification checklist is being developed with input from Adaptability Canada to document the timely assessment of accessibility considerations within public competitive procurement processes.

To enhance our Supplier Diversity Program, we became a corporate member of the Inclusive Workplace Supplier Council of Canada (IWSCC) in 2022. We now advise them of upcoming competitive procurement notices which they, in turn, share with their diverse suppliers. To date, eight notices of competitive processes have been shared with

IWSCC, and more than 20 purchase orders issued to diverse suppliers, with approximately 22% of the diverse spending to suppliers certified by IWSCC.

Our *Meet the Buyer* event series continues to raise internal awareness of diverse suppliers. A targeted three-day session in April 2023 introduced members of the Human Resources team (Talent Acquisition and HR Programs) to 24 diverse suppliers. This was followed by a May match-making event with four diverse suppliers certified through IWSCC.

During National Accessibility Awareness Week in May, the Procurement team and IWSCC shared with employees how they're partnering to advance supplier diversity goals for businesses owned by people with disabilities or veterans, and the accessible procurement actions that can be taken as an organization, or an individual for their next sourcing request.

We're participating as a corporate partner in Adaptability Canada's research project, *Accessible Procurement: Models for Driving Inclusion & Innovation* (described further under Consultations). As part of this partnership, Adaptability Canada is assessing EDC's procurement program which includes a visual mapping of procurement processes, barrier identification and workshops to discuss findings and address issues. Their findings are contributing to the development of a multi-year procurement road map starting in 2024.

## **Design and delivery of services and programs**

EDC's accessibility lead continues to partner with the ACA working group, our partners, and representatives across EDC, including people with disabilities, to embed accessibility into our daily practices. This design and delivery pillar can't be actioned without input from impacted users (people with disabilities). This means raising awareness that accessibility impacts everyone everywhere to ensure persons with disabilities aren't excluded from all phases of design and delivery of services and programs. As a result, universal design thinking is starting to be incorporated into the

development process, leading to a better understanding of the interconnectedness and overlap of many of the ACA pillars such as ICT, Employment, Communications and Procurement.

Many teams at EDC are starting to work collaboratively to apply an accessibility lens and embed accessibility into their processes. Many internal SharePoint Online sites are being developed with the user in mind, specifically on accessibility and official languages requirements, and are including people with disabilities' user input, feedback and testing. We're also beginning to embed consultations early and often with people with disabilities to inform the design and delivery of products and services. Examples include updates to the *Brand Guidelines* and a request for a digital solution.

## **Transportation**

We're committed to creating a barrier-free experience for employees and visitors with disabilities when accessing our spaces or participating in EDC-hosted events or meetings.

We're monitoring the development of the ACA Standard on Accessible Travel for Persons with Disabilities targeted for publication in fall 2026.

Accessibility is being built into meetings, conferences and events and on our website to advise employees, visitors and guests of the accessibility features available when visiting EDC sites and to give them an opportunity to share their accessibility requirements.

## **Consultations**

We're building a culture to ensure we're consulting with both internal and external partners and stakeholders to inform all phases of the design and delivery of our products and services.

In late 2022, EDC became a corporate partner in the accessible procurement research project, *Accessible Procurement: Models for Driving Inclusion & Innovation*, led by Adaptability Canada with the support of Carleton University (READ Initiative), Canadian Access Network and the Inclusive Workplace & Supply Council of Canada (IWSCC).

The first of its kind in Canada and globally, this 18-month project was designed to assess how procurement creates barriers that limit the participation of disabled-owned businesses and disabled employees. With more than 60+ individual interviews and 25+ businesses, its goal is to provide insight on how to improve and encourage meaningful participation by people with disabilities in Canadian supply chains. The results of this research project and extensive consultations are guiding the development of EDC's multi-year procurement road map.

Adaptability Canada is also providing consultation services to help prioritize 2024 accessible procurement initiatives and budget requirements, and identify initiatives to engage disabled suppliers without major changes to our existing procurement processes.

Our partnership with CNIB, Canada's largest non-profit supporting people who are blind or visually impaired, is growing. As part of our National Accessibility Awareness Week, CNIB provided an overview of their Come to Work Program and the practical strategies that can be used to create inclusive workplaces for people with vision impairments or loss.

Our employees continue to play an important role in our accessibility journey providing insights and feedback. Our Procurement and Digital Experience teams invited our DiversAbility Employee Resource Group and Digital Experience Champions (employees with a disability) to pilot and demo new digital solutions and Microsoft tools throughout 2023. Their feedback helped identify digital/web accessibility considerations that were successfully incorporated into a request for a digital whiteboard supplier. These

employees will be user testers to trial the short-listed vendor platforms and provide feedback.

User feedback from a mobility impaired employee at EDC's Ottawa Community Hub also identified a few areas without automatic door openers, preventing access by the employee and some blind spots in the lobby. Based on this feedback, EDC's installing automatic door openers to patios and the 5<sup>th</sup>-floor café in Q4 2023. We'll also explore options to add another automatic door opener to the 18<sup>th</sup>-floor patio doors in 2024.

## **Feedback**

Our feedback form was launched with the publication of our first accessibility plan in November 2023. Since then, only one submission was received through our official online feedback channel. The person requested an alternate format of a web page or form on our external website, [www.edc.ca](http://www.edc.ca), but didn't share the web page link or form name. Three attempts offering support and requesting more information were made. No response was received, and our file was closed.

We continue to receive internal feedback through our ACA Working Group and other partners across EDC, which is helping to inform our programs and identify priorities and actions. Through these informal channels, we've identified the need to increase awareness. We're also exploring enhancements to our internal feedback process.

## **What we have learned**

We'll continue to execute our three-year Accessibility Plan with a focus on the customer and employee experience, specifically for people with disabilities. Proactive incremental steps are being taken to embed accessibility into everything we do at EDC.

During the first year of our three-year plan, we've learned:

- An accessibility lens needs to be applied to all major transformation and operational initiatives early and throughout all phases to inform EDC product, service design and delivery. Cross-functional collaboration is imperative as many ACA pillars overlap with each other such as ICT, Employment, Communications and Procurement.
- We lack resources and skillsets to implement our Accessibility Plan, as well as technologies to test against standards in compliance, and best practices in usability for persons with disabilities.
- Meaningful engagement of users with disabilities needs to be embedded into processes for all EDC products and services.

### **Other highlights**

- We're moving beyond legislative compliance to embedding our ACA strategy and standard impact assessments into business strategic and annual planning.
- We're moving from tactical, project-level, siloed activities that produce limited gains that aren't scalable and sustainable, to ACA action plans that are aligned with EDC strategic priorities, with cross-functional collaboration to design and deliver scalable and sustainable activities.
- We're moving from no dedicated funding for ACA awareness, training, tools, consultation and partnerships to dedicated ACA funding to increase internal knowledge, skills and capacity to execute cross-functional road maps.
- We're moving to a strong governance model with shared accountabilities for the ACA action plans, which includes risk and issue awareness and resolution, prioritization, funding, resourcing and sequencing across groups.

## **Training**

We continue to collaborate with representatives from our Learning, Communications and Wellness and Accommodations teams, the DiversAbility Employee Resource Group, and employees with disabilities, to design and deliver awareness and training activities to advance accessibility and disability inclusion at EDC.

All new training content developed by our Learning team is accessible and meets *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* version 2.1, level AA (WCAG2.1AA) standards.

Enhancements to the user interface design of our learning management conform with WCAG2.1AA standards for employees using laptops or desktop devices to ensure superior learning experiences for employees with visual and hearing impairments.

A mandatory training course, *Digital Accessibility*, was developed by the Learning team to increase employee awareness about the need to create accessible content and ensure technology being used to perform a job is accessible. The module introduced employees to the concept of digital accessibility—what it is, how to do it and more importantly, why we do it.

An online digital accessibility guide for employees on how to apply digital accessibility is being developed. It will include a full listing of resources to help employees design and develop accessible content.

Finally, comprehensive mental health training programs continue to be offered to educate and provide resources and tools to all employees and leaders:

- 80 leaders completed our e-learning module, *Mental Health in the Workplace for Leaders*.
- 17 completed the Workplace Mental Health Leadership Certificate Program.
- 53 employees attended a *Mental Health Awareness* webinar.
- 24 attended a Mental Health in the Workplace workshop for employees.