

**MINISTRY OF
FINANCE
and
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE
RENEWAL**

*2003-2004
Joint Accessibility Plan*



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Introduction

In 2001, there were an estimated 1.5 million people in Ontario with self-disclosed disabilities. This number is expected to increase as the population ages.

In December 2001, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities, and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

In the Speech from the Throne, delivered on November 20, 2003, the Ontario Government confirmed its commitment to working with Ontarians with disabilities on meaningful legislation that will allow them to fully participate in building a stronger province.

This document is the first annual accessibility plan and describes improvements to accessibility that have been made to date and the commitments for the balance of the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Report on Achievements

The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal have an ongoing commitment to accessibility for people with disabilities, including implementing government obligations under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODA). This Accessibility Plan includes the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, as it is comprised of staff and facilities that were formerly part of the Ministry of Finance. Some examples of the ministries' achievements follow:

Undertaking a review of all existing facilities

- Grab bars in accessible washrooms
- Clearly lit, uncluttered hallways
- Lighting that ensures the optimal safety and convenience for people with visual impairments
- Universal signage that is written in plain language, clearly posted, readable and at an appropriate height.

Undertaking a review of internet sites

The Ministry of Finance is represented on an inter-ministerial Web Committee, which was established in 2002 to address accessibility of all Ontario Public Service internet sites based on standards that meet Section 6 of the ODA. The ministry undertook a review in 2002, to assess the accessibility of its internet sites against these standards. Based on the review, an improvement plan was developed and ministry internet sites were remediated to meet ODA Section 6 standards. Currently, Ministry of Finance internet sites are accessible to users with the most current technologies, and we are investigating options to broaden accessibility. Documents posted on the internet are also available in other formats upon request.

Reviewing and improving taxation legislation

The Ministry of Finance chairs an inter-ministerial Disability Tax Policy Working Group. The group meets to discuss tax policy specifically relating to people with disabilities, and its agenda often includes guest speakers from the disability and caregiving community. The Ministry of Finance's taxation legislation provides direct and indirect relief from taxation to people with disabilities and supporting family members under the Income Tax Act (Ontario), the Assessment Act, the Municipal Act, and the Retail Sales Tax Act. In addition, income tax incentives are available to businesses that hire people with disabilities and businesses that operate school buses used to transport people with developmental disabilities.

Conducting pre-Budget consultations

In the past, the Ministry of Finance has conducted pre-Budget consultations that have included open-forum discussions for various stakeholders across the province. The consultation provides individuals and groups the opportunity to bring forth their issues. Groups that have participated in past consultations are: the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the Autism Society of Canada, the MS Society of Canada, the Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services, the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation, the Ontario Association of Special Needs Homes, and the Ontario Association of Families of Children with Communication Disorders. Nine community living centres, four caregiving groups, two children's centres and members of the health and education sectors have also been consulted.

Providing government publications in alternate formats on request (ODA Section 7)

The Ministry of Finance's publications have historically been available and will continue to be available in alternate formats on request.

Establishing practices for meeting accessibility planning obligations (ODA Section 10)

The Ministry of Finance has established an Accessibility Planning Working Group to: identify and plan the removal of barriers to people with disabilities; prepare the ministry's annual accessibility plan in partnership with the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario; and integrate identified accessibility improvements into the ministry's 2004-2005 business plan. The working group comprises staff from the following areas: human resources, policy, program, financial planning, facilities, communications, procurement, and information technology. The group's membership also includes employees with disabilities, and is supported by security and building maintenance personnel. The group has completed the Accessibility Directorate's "Accessibility Quotient Questionnaire" to help determine the ministry's accessibility strengths and weaknesses, and has solicited comments from staff regarding known and suspected barriers.

Statement of Commitment to Annual Accessibility Planning

Through annual accessibility planning, the Ministry of Finance is demonstrating its commitment to improving the lives of the province's 1.5 million people with disabilities. We will work to create an Ontario where people with disabilities enjoy full access to all our province has to offer. We will ensure that existing barriers are removed and new ones are not created.

Accommodating people with disabilities on the job, as well as during the recruitment, interview and selection process (ODA Section 8)

Ministry of Finance managers and staff receive support in identifying, removing and preventing barriers to employees with disabilities through the Health and Safety Coordinator, Human Resource Consultants, Employment Accommodation Specialists, and Facilities Management staff. Where applicable, the ministry accesses the corporate Employment Accommodation Fund (EAF) for reimbursement of costs incurred. Since 1996, the Ministry of Finance has received over \$197,000 through the Fund for 29 separate employment accommodation requests.

Providing training to enquiry staff

All Ministry of Finance Public Enquiry Centre (PEC) staff have been trained on the use of TTY to provide better service to people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, or individuals who have suffered a hearing loss. In addition, all staff in both the PEC and the ministry's call centre have been provided training in the use of the Bell Relay System. This system allows staff without TTY to communicate with people through the use of an intermediary person at Bell Canada.

Implementing an emergency evacuation protocol that includes the safe evacuation of employees with disabilities

All Ministry of Finance locations have implemented emergency evacuation procedures that include the appointment of 'buddies' for staff with disabilities to aid in their evacuation.

Providing training to managers and supervisors on disability-related topics (ODA Section 8)

Between 1997 and 1999, 166 Ministry of Finance managers and supervisors participated in Injury, Illness and Employment Accommodation workshops which provided participants with the skills and knowledge needed to help employees who, due to injury, illness or disability, needed accommodation to remain fully productive at work or safely return to work. In addition, since October 2002, 90 percent of the ministry's managers and supervisors have taken ODA training.

Providing ministries with Capital Planning Guidelines that reflect ODA requirements (ODA Section 9)

As part of the annual capital planning process, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal prepares Capital Planning Guidelines to assist all ministries of the government with the submission of capital plans. For the first time, the guidelines for 2003-2004 included a specific section on the ODA. Ministries must indicate in their capital plan submissions whether a proposed project includes requirements under the ODA, and if so, must describe how the project will meet the requirements to be eligible to receive funding under a government funded capital program.

Commitments and Strategies for 2003-2004

Methods to be taken to prevent new barriers

During the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the Ministry of Finance will undertake the following activities to ensure that proposals for new acts, regulations, policies, programs and services are assessed with respect to their effect on people with disabilities:

Acts, Regulations and Policies

- Continue to lead the inter-ministerial Disability Tax Policy Working Group to facilitate information sharing on tax policy relating to people with disabilities.

- Implement accessibility evaluation protocols or processes in the ministry's business and fiscal planning or policy co-ordination units.
- Conduct an assessment of operating proposals put forward in the 2004-2005 business planning submissions to ensure accessibility has been given consideration.
- Revise internal operating proposal briefing notes to ensure that accessibility is considered in all operational planning for the year.
- Integrate accessibility improvements identified by the Accessibility Planning Working Group into the ministry's 2004-2005 business planning process.
- Provide ministries with Capital Planning Guidelines that include an ODA component, and continue this process through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal for 2004-2005.

Programs and Services

- Conduct Accessibility Planning Working Group meetings on a regular basis to: identify, discuss and resolve accessibility issues in partnership with the Accessibility Directorate; monitor the implementation and effectiveness of accessibility plans; and provide regular reports to the Chief Administrative Officer and updates to ministry staff.
- Undertake another review of existing facilities to meet the new guidelines for barrier-free access being developed by the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC), and ensure that all facilities continue to meet or exceed the government's accessibility standards
- When entering into new lease or purchase agreements, ensure that facilities under consideration meet or exceed the government's accessibility standards as established by the ORC.
- Ensure that materials posted to the ministry's internet sites are accessible to users with the most current technology and investigate further options to broaden accessibility.
- Establish learning plans for webmasters regarding adaptive technologies and accessible website design.
- Assess emergency evacuation protocols for members of the public with disabilities at Ministry of Finance locations.

- Ensure that ministry staff are informed of and comply with the new procurement guidelines.
- Communicate the Ministry of Finance's statement of commitment to accessibility to all staff.
- Continue to ensure that current and newly-hired Ministry of Finance managers and supervisors take ODA training.

Business areas to be reviewed

Acts & Regulations

The Ministry of Finance plans to work with the federal government to simplify and improve personal income tax support for people with disabilities and family caregivers. (Target Date: Ongoing)

Policies and Programs

Recruitment

The Ministry of Finance plans to review existing processes in place for employment competitions to identify areas for improvement in quality of service, access and accommodation for people with disabilities. (Target Date: Spring 2004)

Practices and Services

Public Enquiry

The Ministry of Finance plans to review public enquiry practices and services to identify areas for improvement in quality of service and accommodation for people with disabilities. (Target Date: Spring 2004)

Emergency Evacuation

The Ministry of Finance plans to assess emergency evacuation protocols for members of the public with disabilities at Ministry of Finance locations. (Target Date: Spring 2004)

Actions to be taken

Barrier Identification and Prevention

To strengthen and sustain its commitment to accessibility for people with disabilities, the Ministry of Finance will undertake the following activities:

- Once the new guidelines for barrier-free facilities have been released, the ministry will reassess its existing facilities to ensure that they meet or exceed these accessibility standards. The ministry will identify and make plans to remove or prevent barriers to people with disabilities. (Target Date: Spring 2004)
- The Ministry of Finance's Accessibility Planning Working Group will meet on an ongoing basis to: gather data on, identify and resolve accessibility issues; and monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the ministry's annual Accessibility Plan. (Target Date: Ongoing)
- The Ministry of Finance will assess emergency evacuation protocols for members of the public with disabilities at ministry locations. (Target Date: Spring 2004)
- Through ongoing communication and monitoring, the ministry will continue to ensure that managers and supervisors take ODA training. New managers and supervisors will take ODA training within three months of their appointment. (Target Date: Ongoing)
- The Ministry of Finance will continue to accommodate employees with disabilities by: encouraging ongoing employee-supervisor discussions; providing support through the Health and Safety Coordinator, the Facilities Management Unit, and Employment Accommodation Specialists in identifying, removing and preventing barriers; and accessing the corporate Employment Accommodation Fund for reimbursement of costs incurred. (Target Date: Ongoing)
- The Ministry of Finance will develop an accessibility page on the ministry's intranet to keep staff informed of: ODA requirements; new developments and achievements; and accomplishments of the Accessibility Planning Working Group. Staff will also be able to submit comments and suggestions to the Working Group. (Target Date: Spring 2004)
- The Ministry of Finance will communicate its commitment to accessibility to all staff. (Target Date: Winter 2004)

- Upon request, ergonomic assessments will continue to be conducted for employees with disabilities, and plans put in place for the removal of barriers. (Target Date: Ongoing)

Improved accessibility in communications

The Ministry of Finance will update the training for all Ministry Information Centre agents to include a component on ODA, so that staff understand the full scope of the definition of "disability" as defined under ODA. (Target Date: Spring 2004)

The Ministry of Finance will appoint an individual to coordinate the provision of documents in alternate formats. Ministry staff will be provided with procedures to respond to requests for publications in accessible formats. (Target Date: Spring 2004)

Improved accessibility of facilities

The reception areas of both Ministry of Finance Human Resources Branch locations (Toronto and Oshawa) will be redesigned to achieve greater accessibility to people with disabilities, using information collected by the Accessibility Planning Working Group. (Target Date: Spring 2004)

Improved accessibility in technology

The Ministry of Finance will ensure that materials posted to its internet sites continues to be accessible, by:

- Verifying content through manual checks and software
- Using software that supports the posting of accessible content
- Investigating further options to broaden accessibility
- Utilizing the Office of the Corporate Chief Strategist's proposed "ODA Lab" which will include workstations, tools and software for testing accessibility by various assistive tools
- Including website accessibility training in the learning plans for webmasters.

(Target Date: Ongoing)

For More Information

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome.
Please phone:

General inquiry number: (905) 433-6000

TTY number: 1-800-263-7776

1-800 number (English): 1-800-263-7965

1-800 number (French): 1-800-668-5821

Ministry of Finance website address: www.gov.on.ca/FIN

Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal website address: www.pir.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's Accessibility Ontario Web portal at: www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free society.

Alternate formats of this document are available free upon request from:

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