



Water Security Agency Accessibility Plan

2025-28

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Introduction

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to identifying, removing and preventing accessibility barriers for individuals who work at or access government facilities, programs and services. As part of this commitment, the government introduced *The Accessible Saskatchewan Act*, which came into force on December 3, 2023. The Act requires the provincial government to publicly post an accessibility plan to remove and prevent accessibility barriers for people with disabilities.

In the spirit of 'Nothing about us, without us', the Government of Saskatchewan consulted with persons with disabilities to inform people of the actions outlined in the government's first accessibility plan. A public survey was conducted between April 15 and May 10, 2024, to seek feedback from individuals, including people with disabilities, about the accessibility barriers they experience while using provincial government facilities, programs and services. More than 1,000 individuals participated in this survey.

During this engagement, we heard about physical accessibility barriers that people experience related to entrances, parking and navigation when accessing provincial government buildings. We also heard about information and communication barriers related to finding and understanding information about provincial government programs and services. For example, people told us that websites can be confusing, making it hard to find and access information. People also shared their experiences with attitudinal barriers and being treated differently due to their disability.

Ministries across the Government of Saskatchewan worked together to consider the feedback received and identified actions that the government will take over the next three years to improve the accessibility of government facilities, programs and services.

Accessibility barriers

The Accessible Saskatchewan Act defines a barrier as anything that hinders or challenges the full and equal participation in society of people with disabilities.

There are many types of barriers that people with disabilities may experience, including physical barriers, information and communications barriers, and attitudinal barriers. Definitions and examples of each barrier type are outlined below to help people understand the experiences of people with disabilities.

Physical barriers

Physical barriers exist when spaces are designed in ways that prevent or limit mobility or access.

For example:

- Hosting events at a venue that is only accessible by stairs.
- Parking lots with no curb cuts that make it difficult to access sidewalks.
- Entrance and Washrooms that lack accessible stalls or automatic door openers.

Information and communications barriers

Information and communications barriers exist when information or material is shared in a way that is not accessible to all people.

For example:

- Using small print that is hard to read.
- Websites and documents that are not accessible for screen readers.
- Videos that do not have closed captioning.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers exist when people act or think based on false assumptions.

For example:

- Not including persons with disabilities in decisions that impact them.
- Making assumptions about a person's ability to communicate or do things for themselves.
- Avoiding a person with a disability for fear of offending them.

Accessibility goals and actions

This plan outlines the actions that the Water Security Agency (WSA) will prioritize over the next three years to remove accessibility barriers that people with disabilities experience. Agency divisions will work together to complete the actions outlined in this plan and raise awareness about accessibility across the organization. Using a one-team approach, the Water Security Agency will work to identify and remove barriers that people with disabilities experience when working or interacting with WSA.

Goal 1 – Improve employee knowledge and awareness of accessibility

Increasing employee awareness about accessibility and understanding the importance of inclusion are key to improving the quality of services provided to all individuals, including people with disabilities.

Achievements to date:

In 2025, WSA implemented a required course for all employees that is focused on fostering diversity, equity and inclusion in our workplace culture. "Navigating Diverse Waters: Inclusive Mindset" informs participants how to create a work environment where everyone feels valued, respected and included, and develops an awareness to foster a culture of belonging and equity.

WSA's Communications and Client Services branch is responsible for managing the organization's website and social media. Employees on this team receive ongoing training related to accessibility and improving the user experience. This training ensures that team members know how to make our website (www.wsask.ca) and social media posts accessible. Accessibility standards have been

applied to existing external communications; for example, colour palettes have been designed with accessibility in mind and alternative text is included on website photos for screen readers.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Develop new accessibility-focused training for Water Security Agency employees to increase accessibility awareness and promote a more inclusive and accepting work environment. This training will expand on information contained in existing disability awareness training and will help employees identify and remove accessibility barriers, more confidently interact with people with disabilities and create more inclusive spaces for all.
- Explore opportunities for additional specialized training for Water Security Agency employees related to the services that their divisions provide, e.g., accessibility design for websites and client service considerations for remote or in-person interactions.

Goal 2 – Building Accessibility

The Water Security Agency recognizes that accessible buildings are an important part of improving the accessibility of WSA client services.

Achievements to date:

The Water Security Agency has begun evaluating the accessibility of its buildings.

WSA has also made accessibility improvements to its buildings during routine facility updates. These updates have included moving reception areas to the main floors of some buildings, increasing the availability of automatic door openers, and adding lower service counters.

Parking improvements have been made (e.g., widening stalls, paving gravel lots) to accommodate accessibility needs.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Evaluate current buildings to better understand accessibility barriers and include accessibility requirements in new lease improvements (e.g., automatic door openers). Develop a checklist for future renovation projects using The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification audits as the best practice reference. This will ensure that accessibility is always a factor in the design of government buildings and promotes more consistent user experience.
- In addition to ongoing accessibility improvements, accommodating individual needs as required.
- Develop strategies to increase braille signage and make accessibility improvements to washrooms and reception areas.
- Review accessible parking strategies for buildings and work with local authorities regarding on-street accessible parking at WSA buildings.

Goal 3 – Improve the accessibility of programs and services

The Water Security Agency is taking steps to remove accessibility barriers that limit access to programs and services.

Achievements to date:

The Water Security Agency recently launched its new website, designed with accessibility and user experience as top priorities. Aligning with the Government of Saskatchewan's Digital Public Services Policy, WSA developed the site following best practices to ensure it is inclusive and easy to navigate for all users.

In addition to our website, our updated brand identity guidelines also meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA standard. The WCAG outlines steps that can be taken to make sure that everyone can use websites, no matter what their abilities. This includes factors like meeting minimum contrast ratios between background and foreground colours to ensure readability for all users. This approach is consistent with broader efforts across the Government of Saskatchewan to improve digital services.

WSA's Client Services unit provides client accommodation on an as-needed basis for in-person interactions and website/phone inquiries. This includes aiding in filling out forms as needed.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Continually review and improve the accessibility of websites and web-based services to meet current standards and best practices.
- Create plain language guides for how to apply to WSA programs and services. This will make it easier for all members of the public to understand the application processes of available programs.
- Review and update WSA documents to ensure information is easy to find, consume and understand.
- Evaluate how people currently access information and communicate with WSA employees to identify ways to improve the accessibility of services.
- Explore the feasibility of providing free Wi-Fi at public-facing Water Security Agency offices. Providing access to Wi-Fi may improve access to internet-based communications services used by people with disabilities.
- Ensure digital content is understandable and accessible on a range of digital devices.

Goal 4 – Support a diverse and inclusive workforce

The Water Security Agency recognizes the importance of fostering an inclusive environment for all employees. Human Resources follows best practices when recruiting and onboarding employees. Along with hiring practices, ongoing training and development is promoted through the Culture, Diversity and Inclusion Committee with purpose of creating and fostering a safe and accepting culture

Achievements to date:

In January 2024, the Public Service Commission launched the Employee Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan. This is an ongoing commitment to promote mental health at all levels of government by encouraging and supporting employees to be informed and proactive leaders and colleagues. In 2024, the Employee Mental Health Action Plan launched the Employee Mental Health Campaign. This

campaign is designed to engage employees in building awareness, reducing stigma, promoting healthy mental health practices, building resilience, and encouraging inclusion. WSA created a dedicated Culture, Diversity and Inclusion committee in 2021 to focus efforts on strategic initiatives that help build and strengthen WSA culture.

In summer 2024, the Public Service Commission's Employee Well-being and Inclusion Branch began directly supporting managers and supervisors who require expert advice and guidance on providing medical accommodation. The centralization of this support ensures timely and direct consultation with managers to build capacity and ensure consistent medical accommodation practices, processes and information.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Review, with an accessibility lens, HR policies and processes, including resources to support medical accommodation in the workplace. The goal is to ensure that these policies are equitable and support a diverse and inclusive workplace that is representative of the citizens of the province.
- Review the current process for employees to self-declare a disability to identify opportunities for improvement. Improving understanding of employee diversity in the context of recruitment, retention and career advancement will help the agency to better support employees with disabilities and create a more engaged and productive workforce.

Goal 5 – Provide leadership to promote accessibility and inclusion

The Water Security Agency will adopt a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy – in alignment with the Government of Saskatchewan to promote accessibility and inclusion. Human Resources is responsible for developing and implementing the strategy with support from the Culture, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. This is also part of the WSA Strategic Plan.

Actions for 2025-28:

- Explore Rick Hansen Foundation to offer accessibility training. These efforts will help to ensure that organizations can effectively develop an accessibility plan and work towards preventing and removing accessibility barriers.
- Develop an Internal Guide for Hosting Accessible Events. This resource will be made available, helping ensure events are more accessible.
- Government will include accessibility requirements during the procurement and tendering processes. Including accessibility considerations will ensure government proactively considers accessibility when purchasing goods and services.

Conclusion

The Water Security Agency is committed to improving accessibility for those who work and interact with the organization and will review and update this plan every three years. The actions outlined in this plan are intended to improve the accessibility of WSA services and remove barriers that people with disabilities experience. As we move forward in our accessibility journey, we want to continue to hear from members of our community about accessibility barriers that impact the lives of people with disabilities.

Contact us

Please contact the Water Security Agency to share any feedback, questions, or comments you have on our accessibility plan, or to request an alternate format of this document.

Water Security Agency

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