



Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2024-2029

Niagara  Region

 Growing Better Together



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Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara stands with all Indigenous peoples, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live.

Indigenous culture is rich in diversity between nations and people. Niagara Region is using the teachings and wisdom of the first people as a way of developing programs and services that are welcoming and accessible to all.



Connect with Us

Feedback

Niagara Region is committed to ensuring that regional services and facilities are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to all. If you have feedback that will help us to prevent or remove barriers for people with disabilities, we want to hear from you.

Accessibility feedback will be responded to within three business days.

Contact Information

Email: accessibility@niagararegion.ca

Telephone: 905-980-6000 ext. 3252 or 1-800-263-7215

Bell Relay: 1-800-855-0511

Mail or In-person: 1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

The Region's [Contact Us](#) page at niagararegion.ca

This document can be provided in an alternate format or with communication supports upon request.



Special Thanks

The 2024-2029 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) is the result of collaborative efforts between Niagara Region and subject matter experts in our community. The Region is grateful to the many people across Niagara who shared their time, personal stories and lived expertise about disability, accessibility and barriers to Regional services.

Niagara Region would also like to thank members of the following area municipalities Accessibility Advisory Committees for their knowledge, insights and recommendations:

- Niagara Region Accessibility Advisory Committee
- St. Catharines Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Welland Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Niagara Falls Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Fort Erie Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC) representing Grimsby, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, Thorold, Lincoln, and West Lincoln.

Thank you to the countless organizations in Niagara who shared information about this project including the following community groups for their support of our in-person community engagement activities:

- Heartland Forest, Niagara Falls
- Meridian Community Centre, Fonthill
- Dunlop Drive Older Adult Centre, St. Catharines



Our Commitment

Niagara Region is committed to being responsive to the diverse needs of all its residents by striving to provide equal access to its programs, services and facilities, including for people with disabilities.

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) is a requirement under the Integrated Accessibility Standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). It is the Region's roadmap to greater accessibility. However, the work to make Regional services and facilities barrier-free is not limited to this plan alone. Regional Council and Senior Leadership's ongoing commitment to accessibility is expressed in a variety of current objectives and initiatives.

Advancing accessibility at the Region is supported by and carried out in connection with the corporation's:

- Strategic Priority of an Equitable Region.
- Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategic decision-making lens.
- Ongoing initiatives of the DEI Action Plan.
- The Region's participation in the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities.

The activities and actions in the MYAP will be considered in alignment with departmental and divisional planning and implemented as resources and capacity permit. Funding and grant opportunities will be explored to support this work.

The AODA requires the Region to update its MYAP every five years. This MYAP a living document. It is intended to be flexible enough to accommodate changes in community needs, accessibility legislation, organizational priorities, resources, and capacity. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Language and Definitions

Commonly used abbreviations or acronyms in this report include:

- AAC - Accessibility Advisory Committee
- ACA - Accessible Canada Act
- AFP - Accessible Facilities Project
- AODA - Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
- FADS - Facility Accessible Design Standards
- MYAP - Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
- NRPS - Niagara Regional Police Services

Accommodation: An adjustment or modification to working conditions or other environments that ensure that people with disabilities can participate fully and with dignity.

Alternate or Accessible Formats: May include, but are not limited to, braille, electronic formats, large print, plain language, recorded audio or other formats used by people with disabilities.

Barrier: Obstacles in a person's environment that prevent a person from participating fully in society.

Communication Supports: May include but are not limited to captioning, plain language, sign language, and audio descriptions that ensure people with disabilities have equal access to effective communication.

Conventional Transportation: Public passenger transportation that includes buses, motorcoaches and trains.

Emergency Response: An occurrence or event that requires prompt coordination of actions concerning persons or property to protect the health, safety or welfare of people or limit damage to the environment.

Service Animal: A dog or other animal that can be readily identified as one that is being used for reasons related to the person's disability including a vest or harness or documentation provided a regulated health professional.

Specialized Transportation: Passenger transportation services that operate in Ontario by designated public transportation agencies and are designed to transport people with disabilities.

Support Person: In relation to a person with a disability, another person who is with them to help with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or with access to goods, services or facilities.



A Message from the Regional Chair



I am pleased to introduce the Niagara Region’s Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) for 2024 to 2029.

This plan builds on our achievements in advancing accessibility across the Region and reaffirms Council’s commitment to ensuring that all Niagara Region services and facilities are accessible to everyone. Meeting and exceeding the standards set forth in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is foundational to our goal of creating an inclusive environment for all.

The MYAP outlines key initiatives that the Niagara Region will implement over the next five years, covering essential areas such as Niagara Regional Housing projects, customer service processes, our websites, and improvements to Regional roads and crosswalks. This plan is our comprehensive roadmap which will help us to maintain our focus on removing barriers to equal participation in all Regional services and public spaces.

On behalf of Regional Council, I want to acknowledge and thank the members of our Accessibility Advisory Committee. These volunteers bring invaluable insight and personal experiences that help inform our decisions and enhance our services. Input from this committee is vital to our progress and is helping to make Niagara a better place for everyone. Together, we are making strides towards a more inclusive Niagara where everyone can fully participate and thrive in our community.

Sincerely

Jim Bradley, Regional Chair
Niagara Region



Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)

Message from the AAC Chair and Vice-Chair

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is honoured to have participated in the development of Niagara Region's 2024-2029 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP). This MYAP represents a significant step in Niagara Region's accessibility journey to date. It builds on the achievements of the Region's previous MYAP (2018-2023) while laying a foundation for the organization to identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers for years to come.

The 2024-2029 MYAP considers accessibility and participation barriers in many essential areas of living and organizational service delivery. From public spaces and customer service to digital information, and employment, this plan aims to advance accessibility throughout the Region. The stories and experiences of people across Niagara, as well as the expert voices of the local Accessibility Advisory Committees,

helped to design this plan. A plan that will not only be effective in breaking down barriers but that is reflective of the needs of people with disabilities.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is grateful for Niagara Regional Council's commitment to accessibility and to an Equitable Region. We are pleased to endorse the Region's 2024-2029 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP).

We look forward to our continued work together to ensure that Regional services, programs and facilities are accessible, inclusive and welcoming to everyone.

Sincerely,



Councillor Haley Bateman
Chair
Accessibility Advisory Committee



Liz Hay
Vice-Chair
Accessibility Advisory Committee



Committee Membership 2022-2026

Mamdouh Abdelmaksoud, Public

Haley Bateman, Elected Official, Chair

Liz Hay, Public, Vice-Chair

Andrea Hernandez, Public

Valerie Leitch, Public

Naheed Qureshi, Public

Robert Walker, Public

Dan Whipple, Public

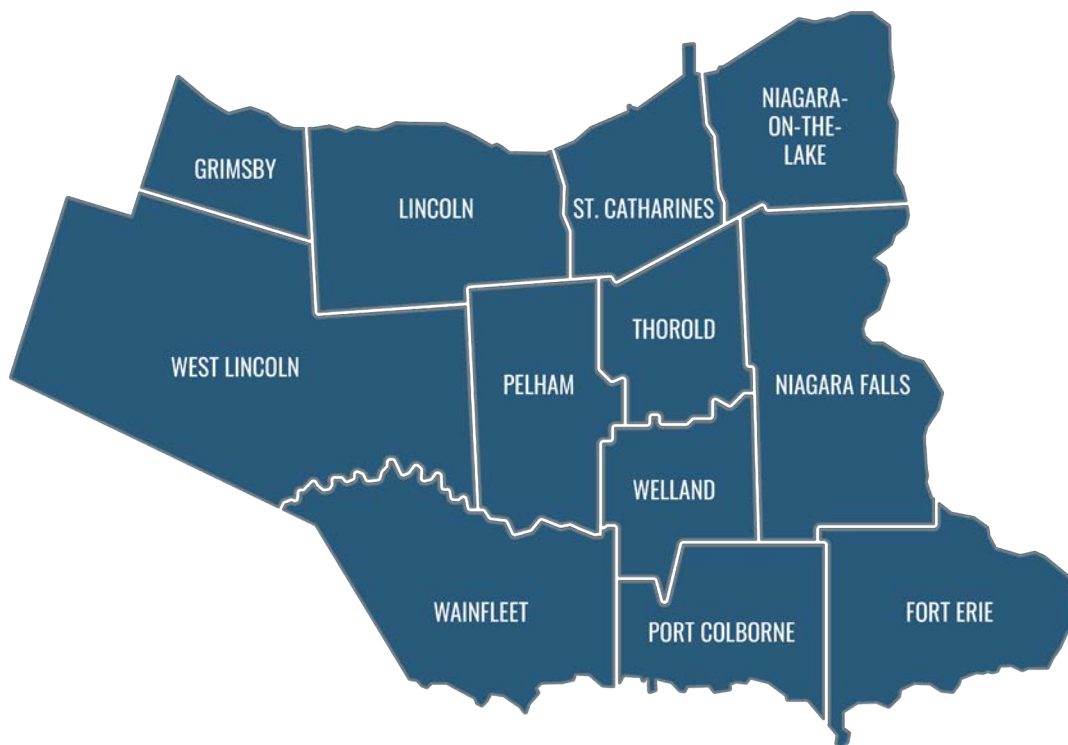
A photograph of a woman with short white hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and patterned pants, sitting in a wheelchair. She is holding a pencil and looking towards the camera. She is positioned in front of a wooden easel. The background is an art studio with a blue wall, a white lamp, and various art supplies on shelves.

Introduction

Regional Highlights

Niagara region is the traditional land of many First Nations including Hatiwendaronk, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people. It is rich in natural resources which helped sustain the original people for generations. The region is a mix of distinct and connected urban and rural communities situated between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara, also called the Niagara Region, serves more than 525,000¹ people who live, work and learn in Niagara. Regional government operations are overseen by Niagara Regional Council. Council is comprised of a Regional Chair and 32 council members who represent Niagara's 12 area municipalities. These include Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland and West Lincoln.



Niagara Region believes in social, environmental, and economic choices that support our diverse community and foster collaboration with our partners in making Niagara prosperous place for everyone.

¹ Statistics Canada, Population estimates by census division, 2021.



Growing Better Together

Strategic Priorities

Niagara is a growing Region. To grow better together, Regional Council has developed a strategic plan. This plan identifies Council's strategic priorities which create a link between the growing Region and the financial, social, economic, and environmental requirements for building a sustainable future. The priorities are:

- Effective Region
- Green and Resilient Region
- Equitable Region
- Prosperous Region

Strategic Lenses

Every action in Regional Council's strategic plan is guided by four strategic lenses. The following lens are used when making decisions on projects, programs and services:

- Diversity, equity, inclusion and Indigenous reconciliation
- Innovation
- Fiscal responsibility
- Sustainability and climate change



Corporate Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

Niagara Region is a unified community of communities with diverse opportunities and qualities. Together we strive for a better tomorrow.

Mission

Niagara Region will service its residents, businesses and visitors through leadership, partnership, and the provision of effective and community-focused services.

Values

Our corporate values guide our decision-making and actions every day.

Respect: We treat everyone equitably with compassion, sensitivity, and respect.

Serve: We serve Niagara with pride, care, and excellence.

Honesty: We value honesty, integrity, and trust.

Choice: We believe in social, environmental, and economic choices that support our diverse community.

Partnerships: We foster collaboration and value partnerships.



Regional Services

- Affordable housing
- Business licensing
- Children's services
- Emergency response management
- Economic development
- Garbage collection and landfill operations
- Homelessness prevention
- Land ambulance and dispatch (Emergency Medical Services)
- Planning and development
- Provincial Offences Courts administration
- Public health programs
- Regional roads and bridges
- Social assistance
- Seniors services
- Water and wastewater treatment

Accessibility Legislation

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is intended to make the province of Ontario more accessible for people with disabilities. Its aim is to make Ontario completely barrier-free by the year 2025.

The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) of the AODA sets out the specific accessibility requirements in key areas of living including Information and Communication, Employment, Customer Service, Transportation, and the Design of Public Spaces.

Organizations and businesses in Ontario are required to follow the AODA and the standards in the IASR. They are also required to develop an accessibility policy and a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP).

Ontario Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code, often called the Code, is a provincial law in Ontario. It protects people from discrimination in employment, housing, business dealings and other services. Disability is a protected ground under the Code.

Ontario Building Code

The Ontario Building Code defines the minimum accessibility requirements for most new construction and extensive renovations of buildings.

Accessible Canada Act, 2019

The Accessible Canada Act is a national legislation. Its purpose is to make Canada barrier-free by the year 2040. This legislation applies to organizations under federal responsibility.

Disability and Barriers to Participation

A disability can occur at any time in a person's life. Disability includes many different impairments or health conditions. These include, but are not limited to, physical or mobility disabilities, cognitive or learning disabilities, vision or hearing impairments, chronic illness, and mental health or sensory disorders.

Disabilities can be permanent or temporary. They can also be episodic meaning they come and go for some people. In 2023, 29 percent of people living in Niagara had a disability. This represents over 150,000 people in our community. Adults over the age of 65 reported the highest rates of disability. In general, older adults are more likely to have a disability than those in younger age groups.

When people with disabilities experience a barrier in their environment, it prevents them from participating fully, and equally, in society. There are many types of accessibility barriers. They include:

- Attitudes (judgements, bias, etc.)
- Physical or built environments (inaccessible buildings, walkways, parking, etc.)
- Information and Communication (inaccessible signs, documents, language)
- Technology (inaccessible websites, apps, etc.)
- Organizational or systemic (laws, policies that are not inclusive of people with disabilities)

Removing barriers to accessibility improves the lives of people with disabilities and benefits everyone.

This MYAP signifies the Region's ongoing commitment and responsibility to identify, remove and prevent barriers, to the greatest extent possible, for everyone who uses Regional programs, services or facilities.

Our Accessibility Roadmap

Community Engagement

An important part of this MYAP was providing meaningful opportunities for people in Niagara to give us their feedback. It was essential that the voices of people with disabilities were included in this plan.

To capture the experiences of people in the community, the Region initiated the Accessibility Plan Community Engagement Project. The purpose of this project was to gather information from people across Niagara about accessibility, and more specifically, barriers to Regional services. LURA Consulting assisted the Region in designing and implementing the project.

Public engagement activities took place between February 2024 and May 2024. To ensure that everyone who wanted to participate was able to, a variety of participation opportunities were offered. They included:

- In-person drop-in sessions held at three physical locations across Niagara.
- A survey that was available online, on paper, and over the telephone.
- One virtual meeting open to the public to report what we heard and gather additional feedback.

Information about the community engagement activities was shared via social media, the Region's website, emails to staff and community organizations, project flyers and memos to Regional Council. The project team also met with members of all local municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees to gather their unique insights, experiences and recommendations.

Overall, almost 600 community members from across Niagara, including residents, community organizations and Niagara Region staff and volunteers shared their experiences. People living with chronic illness, mental health and mobility challenges, hearing and vision loss, environmental sensitivities and language and learning disabilities provided valuable insights that have informed this plan.



During the consultations, feedback about accessibility and disability barriers was shared that did not apply specifically to Regional services. This feedback is captured in the [final project report](#) found at niagararegion.ca.

The final Accessibility Plan Community Engagement Summary has been shared with Niagara's area municipalities, the Niagara Transit Commission and the Niagara Conservation Authority to support their accessibility planning efforts. The summary is available on Niagara Region's website.



Plan Governance and Participation

Improving accessibility and removing barriers across the Region is a collective priority and shared responsibility. Regional Council, Senior Leadership, staff, volunteers and contractors all have an important role in advancing and promoting accessibility.

The 2024-2029 MYAP applies to Niagara Region as a corporation which includes the following departments:

- Office of the CAO
- Office of the Deputy CAO
- Community Services
- Corporate Services
- Public Health
- Public Works

Agencies, boards and commissions also participating in the 2024-2029 MYAP include:

- Niagara Regional Police Services
- Niagara Regional Housing

The Niagara Transit Commission and Niagara Conservation Authority participated in Niagara Region's previous MYAP (2018-2023). These organizations are not participating in the Region's 2024-2029 MYAP. These organizations, along with area municipalities in Niagara, develop their own multi-year accessibility plan.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2024-2029

Goal

To create and offer inclusive information, services, facilities for everyone, including people with disabilities, by removing and preventing barriers to accessibility.

Focus Areas

The focus areas of the MYAP are based on the Accessibility Standards in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) of the AODA. These include:

- General Requirements
- Customer Service
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Design of Public Spaces
- Transportation

Activities and Actions

The activities and actions in each focus area have been identified and developed based on:

- Accessibility legislation
- Internal accessibility audits
- Accessibility best practices
- Community feedback

Roles, Responsibilities and Timelines

Actions to advance accessibility outlined in the MYAP will be incorporated into the related corporate division's annual workplan as resources and capacity permit.

Progress of the 2024-2029 MYAP will be guided by the corporate Accessibility Advisor, Regional Council's Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the Niagara Region Staff Accessibility Working Group.

Actions to Advance Accessibility

1. Focus Area: General Requirements

- 1.1. Accessibility Plan and Policies
 - 1.1.1. Update the Region's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP).
 - 1.1.2. Update the corporate accessibility policy to reflect and renew the Region's commitment to accessibility.
 - 1.1.3. Develop and adopt a digital accessibility policy to enhance the accessibility and usability of web-based services and information for all users.
- 1.2. Training Processes
 - 1.2.1. Coordinate procedures for corporate training on AODA.
 - 1.2.2. Centralize AODA training completion data for employees, volunteers, and contractors.

2. Focus Area: Barriers in Customer Service

- 2.1. Procedures and Meetings
 - 2.1.1. Review corporate procedures related to procurement, service animals, support persons and service disruptions. Update as necessary for alignment with accessibility legislation and disability inclusion.
 - 2.1.2. Develop and implement best practices for accessible Regional meetings, including meetings of Regional Council, and for communicating meeting accessibility features to the public.
- 2.2. Staff Training
 - 2.2.1. Expand training for staff, volunteers and consultants on disability, assistive devices, accessibility barriers, accessibility supports and accessibility legislation.

3. Focus Area: Barriers in Information and Communication

3.1. Feedback Processes

- 3.1.1. Review public feedback processes across all departments to ensure they are accessible.
- 3.1.2. Strengthen corporate feedback processes as required for increased accessibility, increased staff response times and public awareness.

3.2. Accessible Information

- 3.2.1. Ensure all corporate and departmental websites, social media and applications meet or exceed Web Content Accessible Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA.
- 3.2.2. Establish consistent web auditing and internal reporting processes across departments.
- 3.2.3. Explore and implement, where possible, alternate document compliance testing and remediation tools for greater accessibility and efficiency.
- 3.2.4. Continue to develop and coordinate web and document accessibility training for staff.
- 3.2.5. Establish a digital accessibility sub-group of the staff accessibility working group.
- 3.2.6. Review emergency and public safety communication procedures for accessibility. Update where necessary.

4. Focus Area: Barriers in Employment

4.1. Recruitment, Hiring and Accommodations

- 4.1.1. Develop and implement corporate DEI resources and practices to ensure barrier free hiring and recruitment practices and an inclusive and welcoming workplace.
- 4.1.2. Strengthen communication processes with applicants and employees to ensure they are aware of available disability accommodations and related procedures.
- 4.1.3. Strengthen corporate processes for the development and maintenance of individualized employee accommodation plans.

- 4.2. Workplace Emergency Response
 - 4.2.1. Strengthen corporate processes for the development and maintenance of individualized workplace emergency response plans for employees with a disability.
- 4.3. Workplace Emergency Response
 - 4.3.1. Support opportunities for information sharing and collaboration for employees and Regional volunteers with a disability or accessibility needs.

5. Focus Area: Barriers in Public Spaces

- 5.1. Accessible Facilities Project (AFP)
 - 5.1.1. Complete the necessary accessible design upgrades identified in phases one and two of the Accessible Facilities Project (AFP).
 - 5.1.2. Continue phases three and four of the AFP. Conduct accessibility assessments on all remaining Regional facilities.
 - 5.1.3. Develop plans to remove identified access barriers.
- 5.2. Accessible Design Standards
 - 5.2.1. Construction Energy and Facilities Management: Update the Facilities Accessible Design Standards (FADS) for all Regional construction and re-development based on the Town of Oakville's Universal Design Standards v2.1.
 - 5.2.2. Niagara Regional Housing: Develop Universal Design Procedures for use in Niagara Regional Housing projects including Multi-Unit Residential Buildings.
- 5.3. Scent and Fragrance-Free Spaces
 - 5.3.1. Update and implement corporate policies and staff and public education tools toward making Region owned and operated facilities scent and fragrance free.

6. Focus Area: Barriers in Transportation

6.1. Accessible Paths of Travel

- 6.1.1. Provide education for the public, consultants, and staff on mobility barriers in the community (improper placement of garbage and recycle bins, improper use of accessible parking spaces, snow covered walkways, inaccessible paths of travel etc.).
- 6.1.2. Implement curb ramps, tactile walking surface indicators, and accessible pedestrian signals at Regional intersections as reconstruction projects occur.
- 6.1.3. Continue to adjust signal timings, where possible, to provide longer crossing times at intersections for pedestrians who may require more time to cross the road.
- 6.1.4. Work with local municipalities to ensure minimum pedestrian clearway requirements are incorporated into capital reconstruction projects.

6.2. Conventional and Specialized Transit

- 6.2.1. Projects and activities related to the accessibility of conventional and specialized transit, bus stops, and bus shelters are not addressed in the Region's MYAP. They will be addressed through the Niagara Transit Commission's master and accessibility plans.



Resources Consulted

A partial list of the resources consulted to inform this plan is as follows:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, S.O. 2005 C. 11

Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c.H.19

Niagara Region Corporate Strategy and Innovation (2022). Niagara Region Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Action Plan 2023–2027. June 2022. Thorold, Ontario.

Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services (2023). Niagara Priority Profile: Disabilities, Version 2.

Statistics Canada (2021). Table 17-10-0152-01 Population estimates, July 1, by census division.