

Minister's Annual Report with Respect to The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) March 31, 2017

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) became law on December 5, 2013. Under this landmark legislation, the Manitoba Government is developing accessibility standards to address barriers for Manitobans in key areas of daily living. Standards will apply to Manitoba's private and public sector organizations. Under section 19(1) of the AMA, the Minister is to prepare an annual report on the activities that have been undertaken to implement the provisions of the legislation.

The following report summarizes the actions taken to meet the commitments made in the 2016/17 Minister's Annual Plan with respect to The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. The annual plans and reports of the Minister ensure public accountability for the act and are posted on www.AccessibilityMB.ca website. The following section is organized according to the six strategic priorities set out in the Minister's 2016/17 annual plan.

Strategic Priority 1: Development and Implementation of Standards

Commitments in the 2016/17 Annual Plan:

- Create and share an Employment Accessibility Standard discussion paper to serve as the basis for public consultations on this proposed standard.
- Develop terms of reference and a seed document and establish a Standard Development Committee for the Information and Communication Standard.

Achievements to Date:

The Accessibility Advisory Council (AAC) released a discussion paper on a proposal for an accessibility standard in employment in October 2016. It was then posted to www.AccessibilityMB.ca for the required 60-day period prior to public consultations. On January 18, 2017, more than 250 individuals either attended or participated by webcast in a consultation day held at the Viscount Gort Hotel in Winnipeg. The deadline for written submissions was February 15, 2017. Based on public feedback, the AAC prepared a report and recommendations that will be submitted to the Manitoba Government in early April 2017.

The Accessibility Advisory Council's Terms of Reference for the Information and Communication Standard Development Committee have been prepared. They will be forwarded to the Minister for review and approval. The process of assembling an Information and Communication Standard Development Committee is underway. Once the committee has been established, work will begin on a seed document that will serve as a starting point for the development of the standard.

Strategic Priority 2: Government Leadership

Commitments in the 2016/17 Annual Plan:

- Government of Manitoba Accessibility Plan developed, posted on the website and available to the public.
- Government of Manitoba to implement an accessible customer service policy.
- Work with Government of Manitoba Access Coordinators to improve departmental service delivery.
- Work with government as a whole to fulfill obligations under the Customer Service Standard.

Achievements to Date:

The Government of Manitoba was the first public sector organization to launch its Accessibility Plan. The Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan, or MGAP, was posted in early December 2016. A Manitoba Government Accessible Customer Service Policy was released on February 23, 2017. It provides a framework for accessible services and directs all civil servants to receive training on accessible customer service.

Government departments engaged their Access Coordinators to ensure departmental plans were complementary to the Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan and focused on policies and actions related to implementation of the Customer Service Standard. Each department prepared its own accessibility plan. Taking a "whole of government approach," the MGAP Steering Committee decided to consolidate the departmental plans into a single document, which would be applicable across government. The Department of Families assumed the lead role in developing the consolidated 2017/18 Government of Manitoba Accessibility Implementation Plan. This document will be completed in early 2017/18 and be made available to the public as a complement to the MGAP Steering Committee.

Strategic Priority 3: Resource Development

Commitments in the 2016/17 Annual Plan:

- Update The Accessibility for Manitobans Act brochure, the Customer Service Standard brochure and the guide on “How to Create Your Accessibility Plan.” Complement the brochure and guide with templates, new resources and tools.
- Expand the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) web presence to facilitate access to information about the AMA, policies and implementation progress.

Achievements to Date:

The DIO updated the AMA and Customer Service Standard brochures and the guide on “How to Create Your Accessibility Plan.” The DIO created tip sheets on the Customer Service Standard for employers and employees, checklists, Frequently Asked Questions in plain language, and a short guide for conducting community consultations. Customer service policies were also developed for public and private sector organizations. The DIO will continue to create new bilingual tools and training opportunities in English and French to implement the Customer Service Standard. A priority for 2017/18 is to develop similar tools and supports to assist with implementation of the employment standard.

The website www.AccessibilityMB.ca (www.accessibilitéMB.ca in French) was created in 2015 to act as a central repository of a broad range of information and resources to support implementation of the AMA. The site was restructured in March 2017 and is continuously updated. The updated website includes links to Accessibility Plans and leading practices.

Strategic Priority 4: Training

Commitments in the 2016/17 Annual Plan:

- Provide training to public sector organizations that are required to develop an Accessibility Plan within 2016 and 2017 deadlines.
- Work with public sector bodies to ensure all publicly funded institutions have introduced Accessibility Plans as set out in the AMA.

Achievements to Date:

Staff from the DIO initially contacted and advised all public sector organizations about the requirement to create Accessibility Plans and implement the Customer Service Standard. The DIO worked closely with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the Manitoba School Board Association to ensure all their member municipalities and school divisions were provided with similar information. The DIO offered support and training to all public sector organizations, including municipalities and school divisions.

The following training activities were completed in 2016/17:

- Throughout 2016/17, the DIO offered half-day workshops once a month for organizations that must create an Accessibility Plan in 2016 and 2017. Special training for Government of Manitoba departments took place in November 2016.
- The DIO responded to numerous invitations in and outside Winnipeg for on-site presentations to senior management of affected organizations, and training for groups of twenty or more.
- The DIO organized a day-long training event on June 1, 2016, during Manitoba Access Awareness Week. Approximately 200 representatives from public sector organizations learned about web accessibility, how to use surveys as a consultation tool, and lessons learned in introducing an accessibility plan into a large organizational structure.
- Training on the Customer Service Standard was integrated into training on “How to Create an Accessibility Plan” targeting public sector organizations.
- The DIO worked with the Civil Service Commission and the Organization for Staff Development (OSD) to create an on-line training module on customer service for all government staff.
- The OCAD University helped the DIO offer training on website accessibility to public sector organizations, libraries, archives, and other specialists in web technology.
- The DIO trained representatives from the 2017 Canada Summer Games to ensure they would, in turn, train their volunteers to provide accessible customer service.
- Manitoba post-secondary institutions created a cross-institution working group in 2015 to develop shared accessibility tools and on-line training, using resources developed by their Ontario counterparts. In 2016/17, the DIO continued to meet with this group to exchange resources, as well as successes and challenges in creating accessibility.

Through these efforts, all 75 public sector organizations that were required to create an Accessibility Plan in 2016 received training in 2016/17. The DIO also established a

process whereby it reviewed and provided feedback to public sector bodies on draft Accessibility Plans to assist them to strengthen these plans.

As of March 31, 2017, the Manitoba Government, four of five health authorities, eight of ten municipalities, 34 of 37 school divisions, five of six universities and colleges and all four crown corporations posted Accessibility Plans on their websites.

Strategic Priority 5: Public Awareness

Commitments in the 2016/17 Annual Plan:

- Approach potential partners in the public and private sectors to explore joint efforts for broader awareness of the AMA and its standards.
- Collaborate with community partners to raise public awareness during Manitoba Access Awareness Week (MAAW), the first week of June.
- Create awareness posters and distribute them at presentations and workshops.

Achievements to Date:

As public sector organizations began consulting on accessibility barriers affecting their organizations, they also helped the DIO create public awareness about the AMA. For example, Manitoba Hydro included an accessibility survey in the Hydro bills sent to home owners. During MAAW 2016, every Liquor Mart receipt requested participation in an accessibility survey. Likewise, during MAAW, print materials and signage at Manitoba Casinos asked patrons how accessibility may be approved. A number of Manitoba's other largest employers, including municipalities, regional health authorities, colleges, universities and school divisions also engaged their employees and clients in a discussion about accessibility.

Staff from the DIO frequently work with partners to guide the development of the AMA resources these organizations produce. For example, staff provided content advice to the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities to assist that organization develop an introductory training video about the AMA and accessible customer service. The DIO worked with a variety of other partners to create public awareness around the AMA, including the United Way of Winnipeg, The Winnipeg Foundation, the World Trade Centre (Winnipeg) and some Manitoba Government departments.

In spring 2016, the DIO created a poster campaign promoting Accessibility for All Manitobans. The five posters were distributed widely throughout the year. The DIO also offered numerous presentations and wrote articles to create AMA awareness.

Strategic Priority 6: Development of Compliance Measures

Commitments in the 2016/17 Annual Plan:

- Undertake an environmental scan of existing provincial inspection and enforcement regimes to determine how these can assist in ensuring compliance with the AMA.
- Appoint a Compliance Director.

Achievements to Date:

The DIO completed the environmental scan of existing provincial inspection and enforcement regimes to determine how these can assist in ensuring compliance with the AMA. In August 2016 the DIO prepared a report entitled: “The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, From Supporting to Enforcing Compliance” for the Minister’s review and consideration.

Section 22(1) of the AMA requires that a Director be appointed in accordance with The Civil Service Act. On December 14, 2016, the Minister appointed the Deputy Minister of Families as Director for the purposes of the AMA. In January 2017, staff resources within the department were identified to establish a new secretariat function in support of the new Director’s role and mandate under the AMA.

In February 2017, a policy paper was forwarded to the Director that considered and contemplated compliance. Key topics in the policy paper include: core responsibilities in compliance and enforcement; options for responding to non-compliance; rules for procedural fairness; monitoring and reporting – including identifying relationships to other Manitoba frameworks, and ways to establish a process for enquiries and complaints. This policy paper will be followed by the development of a compliance framework which will be in place in early 2017/18.

Conclusion

The main goal of accessibility legislation is to identify, prevent and remove barriers by working with public and private sectors on long range plans to ensure accessibility. Considerable progress was made in 2016/17 as described in this report. This critically important work will continue. As new standards are developed and established under the AMA, the Manitoba Government is committed to leading the way.

In accordance with Section 19(2) of the AMA, this report will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly. Future plans are underway. See Minister’s Annual Plan for 2017/18 for more details.