



2023–2025 Accessibility Plan

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1 General

1.1 Statement of Commitment

The Senate is committed to representing Canada’s diversity and to giving voice to many underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities. To ensure that all Canadians can participate fully in their democratic institutions, we are dedicated to making all aspects of the Senate’s activities accessible. Accessibility is an ongoing process, and we strive to continuously improve accessibility by listening to the voices of people with disabilities.

1.2 Contact Information and Feedback Process

The Senate welcomes feedback—including feedback submitted anonymously—from senators, our staff, and members of the public about accessibility at the Senate and about this plan. We are committed to reviewing the feedback we receive in good faith and to taking steps to address barriers to accessibility that are identified through this feedback.

You can submit feedback about accessibility at the Senate or about this plan by contacting the Senate of Canada Accessibility Officer at accessible@sen.parl.gc.ca or by phone: 1-888-810- 9470.

You can also write to the following address:

Accessibility Officer Senate of Canada
56 Sparks St., 4th floor Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A4

Information on [submitting feedback to the Senate](#) is also available on our public website.

You can request this plan, as well as a description of our feedback process, in alternative formats by contacting the Senate Accessibility Officer at accessible@sen.parl.gc.ca or by phone: 1- 888-810-9470.

An [electronic version of this plan](#)—one compatible with assistive technology—can be accessed on our website.

You can also access an [audio version](#) (a recording of someone reading the text aloud).

In accordance with the *Accessible Canada Regulations*, the Senate will provide the following alternative formats within 15 days of the initial request:

- Print
- Large print (increased font size)

The Senate will provide a braille format within 45 days of the initial request. This deadline is set out in the *Accessible Canada Regulations* and allows for the time necessary to produce and distribute the braille version. Should there be an urgent need for this version, the Senate will make every effort to send it sooner.

1.3 Definitions

The following definitions apply throughout this plan:

- **Accessibility:** The design of products, devices, services, environments, technologies, policies, and rules in a way that allows all people—including people with a variety of disabilities—to access them.
- **Barrier:** Anything that might hinder the full and equal participation in society by people with disabilities. Barriers can be physical, architectural, technological, attitudinal, based on information or communications, or the result of a policy or procedure.
- **Disability:** Any impairment or difference in physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, sensory, or communication abilities that, when interacting with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary, or change over time, and they may or may not be evident.
- **Remediate:** To fix something or make it right. In this case, remediation refers to changing things to make them more accessible.

1.4 Description of the Senate of Canada

The Senate is the upper house of the Parliament of Canada. It was created to counterbalance representation by population in the House of Commons. The Senate has evolved from defending regional interests to giving voice to underrepresented groups like Indigenous peoples, minority groups, women, and people with disabilities.

2 Consultations

2.1 Consultation Overview

The Senate is fully committed to representing the voices of people with disabilities both in our legislative activities and in day-to-day operations. To ensure that this commitment is upheld, the Senate intends to consult people with disabilities in all aspects of this accessibility plan’s evolution, as well as in other major projects undertaken by the organization.

The sections of this plan that follow outline how people with disabilities were consulted in its preparation; however, the Senate recognizes that such consultations need to be ongoing. The Senate is therefore dedicated to building relationships of trust with people with disabilities to engage in effective consultations going forward.

All the consultations were conducted between January and March 2022. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all consultations were conducted virtually, either through online surveys or through video call platforms (Microsoft Teams and Zoom). To ensure that the consultations were accessible, we checked in with each person in advance of the scheduled meeting to make sure the platform itself was accessible for the individual and to ask if they required any accommodations to participate.

2.2 Consultations with Senators and Senate Staff Members with Disabilities

Consultations began with a survey for senators and Senate staff members with a disability. This survey asked about the person's experiences, barriers to accessibility, and suggestions for improvements. People who responded to the survey were also asked if they would like to have a follow-up conversation to share their more detailed thoughts about accessibility at the Senate. Responses helped to identify some barriers, particularly in the built environment, in information and communication technology, and with the employee accommodations process.

2.3 One-on-One Consultations

We conducted in-depth, one-on-one consultations with senators and staff members with disabilities who volunteered to participate. These individuals have vision, hearing, physical, and cognitive disabilities. During casual conversations, these individuals were asked to provide thoughts and comments for each of the areas identified under section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act*.

The individuals we consulted identified specific barriers in the built environment and were also able to point to barriers in information and communication. They also provided suggestions on ways of removing barriers and increasing accessibility across the organization. Many of these suggestions are reflected in the Senate's plan to improve accessibility over the next three years.

2.4 Consultations with Stakeholders with Disabilities

To decide on whom to consult in the preparation of this accessibility plan, we had to consider who is impacted by Senate operations and who would likely experience a barrier when interacting with the Senate. Although the work done at the Senate is on behalf of all Canadians, many people do not interact directly or regularly with the Senate and would therefore be unable to identify most accessibility barriers at the Senate.

For these reasons, we chose to consult with organizations that represent people with disabilities. These groups have a deep understanding of accessibility barriers and are likely to have experience interacting with the Senate by participating in committee hearings. We engaged in virtual meetings with representatives—some of whom are persons with disabilities—from the following groups:

- **Inclusion Canada**—Formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living, Inclusion Canada leads the way in building an inclusive Canada for people with an intellectual disability and for their families.
- **CNIB Foundation**—Formerly the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, CNIB Foundation is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today.
- **ARCH Disability Law Centre**—ARCH is a specialty legal clinic that practises exclusively in disability rights law.
- **Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility**—Wavefront Centre is a registered charity that exists to reduce communication barriers by providing access and inclusion for the deaf and hard of hearing.

During each of these four consultation meetings, we asked a standard set of questions. However, we allowed the conversation to flow in whichever direction was the most natural for the people we were consulting.

The information gained during these consultations helped us to identify barriers in parliamentary processes and barriers experienced by visitors to the Senate. Many of the people with whom we spoke pointed to some accessibility barriers when participating in legislative procedures, such as time limits for speakers or extremely tight turnaround times for submitting feedback. Their input is reflected in the Senate's plan to improve accessibility over the next three years.

3 Areas Described Under Section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act*

3.1 The Built Environment

Overview

The accessibility of the built environment has a significant impact on the ability of people with disabilities to access and function within a space in a manner equitable with those who do not have disabilities. The primary location in which the Senate conducts most of its business is the Senate of Canada Building, which was opened in 2019 following a six-year rehabilitation project. We also use other buildings and office spaces throughout the National Capital Region.

We work closely with Public Service and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to ensure that our built environment is accessible to everyone.

Current State of Accessibility

As part of its mandate, PSPC recently conducted accessibility audits of the Senate of Canada Building and the East Block, where many other Senate offices are located.

Barriers were identified, and the Senate is working with PSPC to prioritize them and to help implement the necessary corrective measures for persons with disabilities.

The Senate has created emergency procedures that take into account a wide range of people with disabilities. The procedures include the steps that Senate staff members and first responders would take to assist people with disabilities in the event of an emergency. Further staff training and knowledge building is needed to ensure that Senate staff members are aware of the emergency plans and who is responsible for assisting staff members or visitors both inside our buildings and in the immediate surrounding area in the case of an emergency.

Accessibility Goals

1. Over the coming years, PSPC and the Senate will continue auditing the built environment. As barriers are identified, we will work with PSPC to prioritize those barriers and take the necessary steps to correct or eliminate them.

2. Over the coming years, the Senate will continue to work with PSPC on continuous improvements to best practices and accessibility guidelines to ensure that feedback and lessons learned are systematically integrated into future plans and particularly into the renovation of the Centre Block, East Block and Block 2 buildings.
3. By the end of 2023, the Senate will work with PSPC and its parliamentary partners to update the existing signage standards to include applicable accessibility requirements and best practices. The Senate will also work with PSPC on planning updates to existing signage that uses the approved signage standards.
4. By the end of 2023, the Senate will ensure that signage is added in its committee rooms to reserve some seats with access to audio earpieces for people with a hearing disability.
5. By the end of 2023, the Senate will establish criteria to help guide the planning of its interior spaces to ensure that planning reflects the latest inclusive design practices and that it complies with accessibility standards and best practices.
6. By the end of 2023, the Senate will create a process to regularly review and revise accessibility at buildings occupied by the Senate to ensure that new barriers have not been introduced and that existing accessibility features have been maintained.
7. The current procedure requires hosts or sponsors of visitors to fill out and submit a “Senate Precinct Access Form” prior to their guests’ arrival at any Senate- occupied building. By the end of 2023, the Senate will update this form to include a section at the bottom of the form identifying appropriate Senate contact numbers should their visitors require any accessibility needs (e.g., wheelchairs).
8. By the end of 2024, the Senate will incorporate information about emergency egress for people with disabilities into the accessibility awareness training that will be launched later (see section 3.8 – Organization-Wide Initiatives). In the meantime, all staff with roles and responsibilities in emergency procedures have received the necessary information.

3.2 Employment

Overview

The Senate is composed of approximately 700 staff members working in a variety of positions, as well as up to 105 appointed senators who are supervisors to their staff members. The primary location of work is the Senate of Canada Building and other spaces around Parliament Hill, all of which are located in the National Capital Region.

Current State of Accessibility

The Senate has not yet established a process for conducting systematic reviews of its employment practices, policies, and procedures to identify barriers for people with disabilities.

The Senate offers accommodations to staff members and employment candidates with disabilities and has a policy guiding how accommodation requests are addressed.

Employee network groups for Parliament Hill continue to be formed, including the Network for Persons with Disabilities group. This group will include staff members from all parliamentary

entities listed under section 134 of the *Accessibility Canada Act*. The group will provide peer support to staff members with disabilities and will be consulted in the planning and implementation of accessibility projects and plans.

Accessibility Goals

1. By the end of 2024, the Senate will replace its online application system. Accessibility will be an essential requirement in the next online application system, and the chosen system will be compliant with World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) WCAG 2.1 AA (a set of international standards for online accessibility). While waiting for this system upgrade, the Senate will be proactive in offering to assist applicants who require accommodation.
2. By the end of 2024, the Senate will conduct a review of its accommodation policy and processes for employees with disabilities. Information about available accommodations and how to request them will be included as part of new employee onboarding activities, and all accommodations will be available through a single point of contact.
3. By the end of 2025, the Senate will conduct a review of talent acquisition and talent management policies, procedures, and practices to identify and remove any barriers in the process for people with disabilities.
4. By the end of 2025, the Senate will review its systems to improve the collection and monitoring of human resources data, including recruitment, advancement, and retention.
5. The Senate will continue to support the employee network groups, including a group for Senate Administration staff members with disabilities.

3.3 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Overview

The Senate produces and distributes information about the Senate, senators, and their work. Information produced by the Senate is mainly shared through its public website and social media platforms. The website contains links to many documents (many of them historical) that are available in web (HTML) and PDF format.

Internally, the Senate uses an intranet site known as IntraSEN. This intranet is used for internal communications and provides information and tools to support senators and staff members in their work. Senators and Senate staff also use a variety of software applications in their day-to-day business, including the Microsoft Office suite, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom.

Current State of Accessibility

With a few exceptions, the Senate's public and internal websites comply with WCAG 2.1

AA. Ongoing, automated accessibility testing of the sites is in place. Remaining issues will be addressed below as part of this plan.

Newer documents published on our intranet are more likely to be accessible than older ones, as the Senate has recently developed templates and guides for creating accessible documents. Internal documents with accessibility issues will be identified for remediation.

Administration employees who post on social media on behalf of the Senate have received some limited training on accessibility, and some accessibility features have been incorporated into social media posts when supported by the platforms.

Accessibility Goals

1. By the end of 2023, the Senate will develop an action plan to continue with the review and remediation of all internal and external documents and forms. This plan will outline the order in which documents will be reviewed and remediated, starting with the most important and frequently used documents and forms.
2. By the end of 2024, all Senate Administration employees and new hires responsible for developing, updating, and maintaining the internal or public-facing website or for creating social media content will receive training on web accessibility.
3. By the end of 2024, all existing Senate employees and new hires who prepare documents will receive training on how to make documents accessible. This training will include when PDF format should be used, when it should be avoided, and how to make PDFs accessible.
4. By the end of 2024, the Senate will create a process for conducting regular reviews of documents to check for accessibility.
5. By the end of 2025, the Senate will conduct an in-depth review of all software applications developed in-house or acquired from third parties to identify any potential accessibility barriers. An action plan will be developed to eliminate any identified barriers.
6. By the end of 2025, the Senate will conduct user testing of the internal and public-facing websites to identify barriers. A procedure respecting periodic reviews of the websites' accessibility will also be established. In this context, user testing is accessibility testing completed by people with disabilities who regularly use assistive technology.

3.4 Communication Other Than ICT

Overview

The Senate produces a large volume of information, and it is important that all Canadians can access it. Many Senate activities (e.g., committee meetings) are broadcast live. These live broadcasts then become on-demand videos that members of the public can access at any time. In addition, the Senate produces videos that are posted on its website, on its YouTube channel, and on other social media platforms.

Senators and Senate staff members often give presentations. Presentations can be in person or virtual. In some instances, the Senate is the event organizer (or co-organizer); in other instances, presenters from the Senate are invited to an event hosted by a third party.

Current State of Accessibility

Chamber and committee publications and processes can be complex. This may be particularly challenging for people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

The live broadcasts of Senate activities have live closed captioning. The words spoken during the broadcast appear in written form at the bottom of the screen. These unrevised closed captions remain when live-broadcast videos are turned into on-demand videos. Sign-language interpretation may be provided on request for certain events, subject to resource availability.

The Senate has an accessible PowerPoint template for internal use (not for parliamentary proceedings). However, there may be some knowledge gaps about using it and providing accessible presentations.

Accessibility Goals

1. By the end of 2023, the Senate will complete an assessment of potential new Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) solutions that could allow closed captions of live proceedings to be viewed from anywhere, on any device.
2. By the end of 2023, in collaboration with its parliamentary partners, the Senate will complete an assessment of the resources required for providing sign-language interpretation for some Senate proceedings and official ceremonies.
3. By the end of 2024, the Senate will create and publish plain-language explanations and guidance on how to read and better understand certain Chamber and committee documents. These guidance documents will inform readers on how to navigate these documents and will highlight where they can find important pieces of information.
4. By the end of 2024, the Senate will develop a tool kit on how to request live closed captioning and/or sign-language interpretation.
5. By the end of 2024, the Senate will incorporate training on how to give accessible presentations into its wider accessibility awareness training to be rolled out across the organization (see section 3.8 – Organization-Wide Initiatives).

3.5 Procurement of Goods, Services, and Facilities

Overview

Procurement refers to the buying of goods and services in accordance with the Senate's Procurement Policy.

Current State of Accessibility

The current Procurement Policy mentions social objectives, one of which is the requirement to include diverse suppliers as part of the Senate's procurement activities and processes to the greatest extent possible. When the Senate is procuring goods and services related to websites and online tools, it includes language about WCAG 2.1 AA requirements in its requests. For other goods and services that the Senate procures competitively, bidders are asked to describe their accessibility practices in their bids.

Accessibility Goals

1. By the end of 2023, the Senate will have a checklist available for clients to ensure that accessibility is considered when developing their requirements. Finance and Procurement Directorate employees will keep themselves informed of any future accessibility standards to ensure compliance with applicable accessibility requirements and best practices.

3.6 Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

Overview

The Senate conducts debates, committee meetings, and various other events. There are six different types of public-facing events, each with their own accessibility requirements:

1. Senate sittings
2. Committee meetings
3. Ceremonial or protocol events hosted by the Senate in its facilities
4. Public events hosted by the Senate in its facilities
5. Public events hosted by the Senate at an external venue (e.g., in a hotel or conference centre)
6. Public events hosted by a third party at their venue, with Senate participation (e.g., the SENgage program in which a senator visits a school, or a job fair where the Senate has a booth).

Current State of Accessibility

Consultations with people with disabilities have identified potential barriers to participation in the Senate's parliamentary procedures, including the following:

- If the turnaround time given to participate in consultations or to share comments is short, it may preclude the full participation of some people with disabilities who may take longer to process or generate information.
- Rules that govern the process and schedule of hearings and meetings may lead to some barriers. The length of time given to speak is a barrier for individuals who take longer to communicate.
- Overall, Senate processes are complex. People may not understand how they can provide feedback to the Senate on certain initiatives. They may not understand what is happening during hearings and meetings because of the complexity and traditions of Senate processes. This confusion is likely common among many Canadians, and it can present additional barriers for people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

The Senate makes every effort to make the events that it hosts accessible. In addition, efforts are made to ensure that events held outside of Senate premises are held in accessible spaces, and that a walk-through before an event identifies any potential barriers to accessibility.

Witnesses appearing before committees have been accommodated in various ways, including allowing for pre-recorded testimony or allotting extra speaking time.

While every effort is made to accommodate participants who have special requirements, these services are not consistently advertised nor are participants specifically invited to share their accessibility needs. To ensure a consistent approach, there should be guidelines on how accessibility services are offered and provided at any event.

Accessibility Goals

1. By the end of 2023, the Senate will develop guidelines on how accessibility services can be offered and provided for members of the public with disabilities who participate in Senate activities. These guidelines will be used when planning and organizing events.
2. By the end of 2024, the Senate will ensure that all existing event staff have been trained on how to offer and provide assistance to attendees with disabilities. We will also ensure that this training becomes part of the standard onboarding process for any new Senate Administration employee who will plan or run events.
3. By the end of 2025, training on chairing or running accessible meetings will be developed and rolled out across the organization. This training will be offered to senators, staff members, and anyone else who regularly runs or chairs meetings at the Senate. It will focus on ensuring that meetings are accessible for everyone and determining appropriate accessibility services for participants with disabilities.
4. By the end of 2025, the Senate will complete an assessment of parliamentary processes to seek out other potential barriers for people with disabilities.

3.7 Transportation

Overview

The Senate operates a shuttle bus service that transports people between various buildings on and around Parliament Hill. Four buses are used in the operation of this service, and they travel along predefined routes with designated stops.

The number of parking spaces available to senators and staff in proximity to Senate buildings is limited. Parking passes are assigned and managed by the Senate.

Current State of Accessibility

Three of the four shuttle buses operated by the Senate are equipped with a lift so that a person using a mobility device can enter and exit the bus. At the end of its life cycle, the fourth bus will be replaced by a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. Stop announcements are made live by the drivers.

The Senate makes all reasonable efforts to meet the parking needs of Senate staff who need an approved accommodation. All requests for accommodation are assessed on a case-by-case basis. Construction project plans are also reviewed to determine their potential impacts on Senate designated parking spaces.

Accessibility Goals

1. By the end of 2023, the Senate will complete a review of its shuttle service for the purposes of identifying and removing any barriers to accessibility.

2. By the end of 2023, the Senate will complete an update of the Senate Parking Policy to include the Senate's established accommodation practices and ensure that parking spaces are assigned in accordance with the *Accessible Canada Act* and with *Canadian Human Rights Act* obligations.
3. By the end of 2025, the Senate will implement automatic audio and visual (displayed-through-text) stop announcements on all shuttle vehicles.

3.8 Organization-Wide Initiatives

In addition to the goals listed above, other Senate-wide initiatives are planned.

Training

While some individual training has been provided in the past, there is no organization-wide disability or accessibility training for Senate staff.

1. By the end of 2024, the Senate will implement organization-wide disability and accessibility awareness training. This training will be mandatory for all Senate staff members and will become part of the standard onboarding process for new staff members. This training will also be available for senators and will cover topics such as:
 - a) an introduction to different types of disabilities and the types of barriers that people with those disabilities often face;
 - b) how to interact with people with different types of disabilities, including best practices for communication and offering assistance;
 - c) introductory ideas on ensuring that information, communication, and physical spaces are accessible to all people; and
 - d) information on assisting people with disabilities in the event of an emergency.

Accessibility Tool Kit for Senators

We have identified a need to provide specific information and guidance for senators and their staff.

1. By the end of 2025, the Senate will develop an Accessibility Tool Kit for senators and their staff. This tool kit will offer training and guidance on how they can incorporate accessibility best practices into the activities they undertake outside the Chamber and committees. This tool kit may include:
 - a) basic accessibility awareness training and advice on interacting with people with various disabilities;
 - b) advice on hosting and chairing meetings and events in an accessible way and how to give accessible presentations;
 - c) guidance on creating accessible documents and PowerPoint presentations; and
 - d) information on ensuring that social media posts, website updates, and other forms of electronic communication are accessible.

Compliance With Future Standards

Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) is responsible for developing accessibility standards aimed at removing the barriers to access that people with disabilities face. These standards fall within the priority areas listed in the *Accessibility Canada Act*.

ASC developed [Roadmap to 2040](#) to guide its work. Development of the first round of standards is expected to be completed within the time frame of the Senate's first accessibility plan. As standards are published, the Senate will review them and will adjust its plan to ensure that compliance is reached.

4 Conclusion

Inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of our organization is a top priority for the Senate. The Senate is committed to improving accessibility by implementing this accessibility plan over the next three years. We are also dedicated to continuing the work of examining our practices and operations to find and address barriers to accessibility. We understand that accessibility is an ongoing process, and we are committed to engaging in that process through consultation with people with disabilities.