



MANITOBA  
OMBUDSMAN

# ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2025 & 2026



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Available in alternate formats upon request.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

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Manitoba Ombudsman is committed to service and is guided by provincial accessibility standards that we strive to meet or exceed in our daily operations. Our strategy to continuously improve accessibility focuses on two fronts: removing barriers that prevent citizens from accessing our office and services and considering accessibility in any new initiatives in our planning.

Our two-year Accessibility Plan for 2025 and 2026 provides information about progress we have made under our previous strategy, and our planned actions to improve accessible service delivery to Manitobans and accessible workplaces, spaces, and culture for our employees.

Four examples highlight recent achievements in offering accessible services:

- In 2021, Manitoba Ombudsman implemented new operational policies to align with all provincial accessibility standards for customer service and employment, changing how we operate for the better. This experience informed new policies to meet our obligations under the information and communication standard that applies to our office on May 1, 2025.
- In June 2024, Manitoba Ombudsman relocated our Winnipeg headquarters into a new space that meets accessibility requirements for employees and the public.
- In 2024, Manitoba Ombudsman launched our first public Service Charter. The charter commits to several service entitlements that all Manitobans can expect when approaching our office for assistance, including the entitlement to accommodation for people with a disability.
- Finally, the information and communication standard spurred our fully redesigned website that is compliant with WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines and WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines in 2025. An accessible and simplified website helps citizens to find our services, make complaints, source information, and contact us more easily. Our new website is a platform for future innovative communication that is fully accessible.

These achievements pave the way for new initiatives and a renewed plan for progress toward several goals. I would like to acknowledge the work of our team, who are united in our commitment to do our best and thank the citizens who take time to make suggestions that help us deliver our services accessibly.

**Jill Perron**

Ombudsman

# STATEMENT OF ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT

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Manitoba Ombudsman serves all citizens and is committed to access and participation for all who seek assistance from our office. We are committed to understanding the perspectives and experiences of people with disabilities and fully implementing the Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

We continually refine our practices, processes, and policies to maintain and strengthen our service by demonstrating respect for the individual and their time, safeguarding their rights, and treating them with respect in every interaction with our office.

The Ombudsman's commits to identify and remove barriers for employees in recruitment, advancement and retention and foster a workplace culture that is welcoming and inclusive. Accessibility policies are available to the public upon request.

## THE ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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This two-year Accessibility Plan aims to ensure people can access Manitoba Ombudsman information, services, spaces, and activities. Within the scope of this plan, we specifically address barriers that are problematic and limiting for citizens and employees with a disability (visible and non-visible), or those who are experiencing aging, injury or other life event that may temporarily or permanently impact:

- mental health
- mobility
- vision
- hearing
- communication
- understanding
- dexterity
- how people think, socialize, feel, and learn

Our plan focuses on eliminating barriers in two streams. The first stream removes barriers for people accessing Manitoba Ombudsman's services, improving citizen engagement and service experience. The second stream targets eliminating barriers for the people who work for Manitoba Ombudsman as regular or prospective employees. The desired outcomes for these measures will result in greater enablement, participation, and success of employees with disabilities in our workplaces and spaces. The plan is divided into two sections: the first section outlines the actions completed from the previous plan and notes any work that is still in progress. The second part of the plan shares new initiatives going forward.

## PART 1: LOOKING BACK - ACCESSIBILITY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023 & 2024

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In the calendar years 2023 and 2024, the Ombudsman took the following steps to enhance accessibility for customers and employees. Some of these achievements includes ongoing plans to continue building upon the work and are identified as 'Ongoing Actions' in the below table. New initiatives can be found in Part 2 of this plan.

### Eliminating Barriers at Manitoba Ombudsman

#### Service Enhancements for Citizens

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions
Post the Accessibility Plan and associated accessibility policies to the Manitoba Ombudsman website, including available accommodation options for citizens, recruitment candidates, and employees of the organization.	<b>The public has clear information about our accessibility plans for the future and what accommodations are available.</b>	The Manitoba Ombudsman's accessibility plan is posted to our website and associated policies on accommodation options for citizens, recruitment candidates, and employees of the organization are available upon request.
Implement a renewed service charter that explains the service entitlements all citizens can expect, including the entitlement to accommodation for people with a disability.	<b>Manitoba Ombudsman has set standards for barrier-free service that meet the expectations of its client.</b>	The Manitoba Ombudsman has implemented a <a href="#">Service Charter</a> that explains the service entitlements all citizens can expect, including the entitlement to accommodation for persons with a disability.

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions
<p>Upon first contact, citizens are offered accommodation service options. Any client needs/preferences will be documented within the client management system to ensure accommodations are managed consistently throughout the client relationship.</p>	<p><b>Citizens may declare accommodation needs only once (unless they change) and service will be delivered accordingly every time they interact with the office.</b></p>	<p>Client needs/preferences are documented within the client management system to ensure accommodation is managed consistently throughout the client relationship.</p>
<p>Complete a website audit and evaluation for accessibility and develop guidance for planned redesign and relaunch of website services. Best practices will be considered, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labels, instructions, and specific cues for interactive elements, such as form fields</li> <li>• Numerous ways to navigate around a webpage (mouse, keyboard, touch)</li> <li>• Input accommodation for keyboards, as well as options for speech input</li> <li>• Responsive sites and accommodation for web use on different devices</li> <li>• Hyperlink context indicating where links go to if users click on them</li> </ul>	<p><b>Plans for website redevelopment and launch will be informed by user feedback, best practices in accessible website design, and include as many accessibility features as can be reasonably incorporated.</b></p>	<p>We completed the audit and re-developed <a href="#">the website</a> based on best practices in accessible web design. It is fully accessible and compliant with WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines and WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines.</p>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative text for screen readers, as well as slow-loading images</li> <li>Closed captions on video or audio clips, as well as transcripts</li> <li>Zoom enabling and text resizing</li> </ul>		
<p>Introduce in-person accommodation for citizens unable to access services through traditional means (offsite and online virtual interviews for individuals who cannot attend in person).</p>	<p><b>All citizens who cannot visit the office in person are offered alternative options for face-to-face interaction.</b></p>	<p>The outcome for this action has been achieved. All citizens who cannot visit the office in person are offered alternative options for face-to-face interaction.</p>
<p>Adopt universal plain language principles in all communications to help people understand our messages and publications.</p>	<p><b>Information published by the office is easier to understand by more of the citizen population.</b></p>	<p>All staff received mandatory training in plain language through the Foundation of Administrative Justice, and the office has a policy that requires the use of easy-to-read fonts and plain language when serving citizens. The office has also been overhauling its broad public content with a goal of using more plain language and concise.</p> <p>New Actions can be found in part 2 of this plan.</p>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions
Develop alternative paper and on-line complaint forms format to eliminate barriers for people with limited vision.	<p><b>All complaint forms can be used by people with low vision without sight assistance.</b></p>	<p>Online forms on Manitoba Ombudsman's website are compliant with accessibility standards.</p> <p><b>Ongoing Actions:</b></p> <p>Hard copy forms are being audited to ensure they can be filled out by people with low vision without any sight assistance.</p>

## Employee Training to Enhance Client Service

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions
Provide training to all employees on accessibility policies of Manitoba Ombudsman, the accessibility standard for customer service (at point of employee onboarding and every two years).	<p><b>All employees understand what is expected of the office and themselves when providing service to people with a disability.</b></p> <p><b>Employees have broadened understanding of what barriers exist and how they</b></p>	<p>The policy for training on accessibility policies is included in the operational manual and staff are trained in accessible customer service during the onboarding process.</p> <p><b>Ongoing Actions:</b></p>

<b>Actions We Committed to Achieve</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>	<b>2025 Status &amp; Ongoing Actions</b>
	<b>impact people with visible and non-visible disabilities.</b>	Refresher training will be provided on the accessible customer service standard and policies of the office annually.
<p>Provide specialized training to all public-facing employees and engage with organizations to provide guidance on service intervention and barrier removal for people with a range of mental health needs. Seek the expertise and guidance of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities.</p>	<p><b>All staff receive training and possess basic tools to be consistently effective with any client.</b></p> <p><b>Specialized centres of knowledge are established within the organization so citizens can access resources to assist them that are the best possible fit for their unique needs.</b></p>	<p>1. Training provided on accommodation-centered and trauma-informed service for citizens with a range of mental health needs.</p> <p><b>Ongoing Actions:</b></p> <p>The office will continue to explore opportunities for guidance on service intervention and barrier removal for people with a range of mental health needs. The office continues to further strengthen their work on the outcome of this action.</p> <p><b>Ongoing Actions:</b></p> <p>Staff will explore ways of providing resources (information on mental health services, social services and disability services) at reception and online to ensure citizens can access resources to assist them that are the best possible fit for their unique needs.</p>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions
<p>Refine policies and practices to respect the right to complain by citizens who may present non-conventional behaviours and/or require more assistance to navigate our processes.</p>	<p><b>Investigations or resolutions involve a broader range of citizens.</b></p> <p><b>It is easier for citizens to be their authentic selves and obtain the services they require.</b></p>	<p>The office has refined policies and procedures to respect the right to complain by citizens who may present non-conventional behaviours and/or require more assistance to navigate our processes. The organization has also renewed its service charter to provide citizens with clear expectations of a respectful working relationship with the office.</p> <p><b>Ongoing Actions:</b></p> <p>Staff require refresher training based on the refined policies and procedures to ensure it is easier for citizen to be their authentic selves and obtain the services they require.</p>

## Built Environment: Barrier- Free Design for Citizens Accessing Manitoba Ombudsman

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions (as applicable)
<p>Manitoba Ombudsman will seek accessibility options for future headquarters and satellite office spaces upon lease renewals that enable citizens with disabilities to navigate our spaces with ease.</p> <p>Requirements/enhancements to be pursued include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street/parking lot wheelchair accessibility with drop off zones in close proximity to building entry and fully accessible entry points</li> <li>• Fully accessible and non-gendered washroom facilities</li> <li>• Fully accessible reception space that is able to comfortably accommodate service animals and escorts</li> <li>• Fully accessible public education areas and private meeting spaces</li> <li>• Accessible door hardware (automated or operable using a single fist with minimal</li> </ul>	<p><b>Citizens experience improvement in access and participation on our premises.</b></p> <p><b>Citizens navigate through the built environment with ease and clear direction.</b></p>	<p>The office continues to further strengthen their work on the outcome of this action. The Manitoba Ombudsman relocated their Winnipeg headquarters into a new space in 2024 that meets the requirements listed and is compliant with standards for an accessible built environment.</p> <p><b>Ongoing Actions:</b></p> <p>Manitoba Ombudsman continues suggest accessibility improvements to its landlord for the lobby of the Winnipeg headquarters (which houses other organizations). This includes a review of street/parking lot wheelchair accessibility with drop-off zones in close proximity to building entry and fully accessible entry points.</p>

<p>strength and without tight grasping or twisting of the wrist)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible wayfinding in hallways and elevators (braille, voice command)</li> <li>• Doorways and clearances that meet Manitoba Building code requirements for barrier-free design</li> </ul>		
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## Manitoba Ombudsman as an Accessible Employing Authority

### Operational Human Resource Policies and Practices

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions (as applicable)
<p>Implementation of 2021 operational policies that have an accessibility component:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employee Recruitment and Selection Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise of accommodation options within employment postings and ask interview candidates if they require accommodation when selected to advance to prescreening exercises or interviews.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p><b>1. Successful recruitment and onboarding experiences for a more diverse range of prospective employees.</b></p>	<p>Fully implemented.</p>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions (as applicable)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information in advance of interview, including what to expect, the names of panel members, skills and experience that will be assessed during the selection process (types of interview questions or screening assignments)</li> <li>Provide private, quiet waiting space in advance of interviews</li> <li>Provide short breaks within one-hour interviews</li> <li>Allow hand-written notes in interview room</li> <li>Advise on accommodation options available in the workplace in each letter of offer.</li> </ul>		
<p>2. Reasonable Accommodation for Persons with Disabilities Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees have workspace, equipment, and flexible work arrangements that enable them to be most productive while serving the position and organizational requirements of Manitoba Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Employees are offered a broader range of accommodation solutions to eliminate more operational barriers within the organization.</b></p>	<p>Staff have developed a reasonable accommodation policy for people with disabilities.</p>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions (as applicable)
<p>3. Emergency / Evacuation Response for Persons with a Disability Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees have a plan in place to meet their individual needs in an emergency situation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. Employees encounter zero barriers in the face of emergencies.</b></p>	<p>Fully implemented</p> <p>Ongoing Actions</p> <p>The office will ensure new employees with disabilities have a plan in place to meet their individual needs in an emergency for all three offices.</p>
<p>Maintain special training and skills that may contribute to the elimination of barriers within the Manitoba Ombudsman.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey the employee during orientation to track specialized knowledge or experience related to disabilities, accommodation, and specialized service skills within employee skills matrix (e.g., American Sign Language)</li> <li>Train employees in neurodiversity (experiencing differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits) to expand opportunities and acceptance.</li> </ol>	<p><b>1. More effectively matching client needs and employee skills.</b></p> <p><b>2. Greater organizational awareness about the capacity of individual employees to serve in different and better ways.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The office continues to further strengthen their work on the outcome of this action. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New actions can be found in Part 2 of this plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The office continues to further strengthen their work on the outcome of this action. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New actions can be found in Part 2 of this plan.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions (as applicable)
<p>Redevelopment of the performance management/career development program to include the provision of accessible format documentation and accommodations within feedback loops and development plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide feedback and coaching with methods that are accessible to the employee and enable meaningful participation (e.g., allowing someone with a learning disability to record the conversation; provide written documentation in advance of discussions)</li> <li>Self-assessments to determine whether a new or modified accommodation may enable employees to successfully perform an existing skill or function, learn new skills or take on more or different functions and responsibilities</li> <li>Explore technologies as they emerge to reduce barriers and ensure employees maximize their potential.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Performance system that accommodates people with existing or emerging disabilities while enabling excellence, success, and accountability.</b></p> <p><b>All employees experience the same opportunities for development, advancement, and challenging work.</b></p>	<p>The office continues to further strengthen their work on the outcome of this action.</p> <p><b>Ongoing actions</b></p> <p>Following the implementation stage, the office will evaluate the function of the new performance system to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system accommodates people with existing or emerging disabilities while enabling excellence, success, and accountability.</li> <li>All employees experience the same opportunities for development, advancement, and challenging work.</li> <li>Alignment with our strategic goal of fostering a collaborative and diverse work culture where skilled employees are engaged, valued, and make a difference.</li> </ul>

## Built Environment: Barrier-free Design for Employees of the Ombudsman

<b>Actions We Committed to Achieve</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>	<b>2025 Status &amp; Ongoing Actions (as applicable)</b>
<p>When exploring options for future headquarters and satellite offices, Manitoba Ombudsman will seek to incorporate accessibility requirements and enhancements that enable employees with disabilities to be their best selves and fully utilize their talents within a safe and accommodating workspace.</p> <p>Requirements/enhancements to be pursued include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Audio/visual emergency alarm systems</li><li>2. Flexible, configurable workspaces where employees are empowered to interact with and modify proxemics (personal spaces) to meet their needs.</li><li>3. Environmental accessibility for invisible disabilities (quiet spaces, modifiable light levels, audio filtration to enable privacy within</li></ol>	<p>Employees experience improvement in accessibility and safety on our premises.</p>	<p>Manitoba Ombudsman relocated their Winnipeg headquarters into a new space in 2024 that meets accessibility requirements for employees.</p>

Actions We Committed to Achieve	Expected Outcome	2025 Status & Ongoing Actions (as applicable)
<p>open space and use of voice-activated software)</p> <p>4. Fully accessible common spaces, including barrier free breakroom amenities with accessible food preparation facilities</p> <p>5. Developing new lease clauses that ensure compliance with the latest provincial accessibility standards</p>		

## PART 2: LOOKING FORWARD – OUR PLAN FOR 2025 & 2026

Actions We Plan and Commit to Achieve by 2027	Expected Outcome
<p>As part of its strategic goals to 1) address the barriers and challenges experienced by underserved populations in the public sector (inclusive of people with disabilities and persons who are neurodiverse) and 2) continuously improve the way we work to provide more effective and proactive services, the Manitoba Ombudsman will:</p> <p>1. Create a Committee for Accessible Service &amp; Work to support a culture of progress and inclusion and give ongoing policy and operational guidance</p>	<p><b>Sustained leadership and focus on accessibility understanding, enhancement, and innovation.</b></p>

<b>Actions We Plan and Commit to Achieve by 2027</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>
<p>and suggestions to improve the accessibility of services and our work at Manitoba Ombudsman.</p>	
<p>2. Establish an office-wide annual disability awareness month featuring various learning events and training on topics relevant to disability and neurodiversity (experiencing differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits) including webinars, guest speakers, and lunch and learns.</p>	<p><b>Employees have broadened understanding of what barriers exist and how they impact people with visible and non-visible disabilities, or people who are neurodiverse. As a result, citizens feel comfortable being their authentic selves and can obtain the services they require. Additionally, increased knowledge among management reduces biases in the hiring process, and there will be greater organizational awareness about the capacity of individual employees to serve in different and better ways.</b></p>
<p>3. Develop a survey tool to assess staff knowledge on disability topics before and after disability awareness month.</p>	<p><b>The office can identify where staff require refresher training on applicable accessibility standards and other topics related to providing accessible service to ensure we are continuously improving the way we work to provide more effective and proactive services.</b></p>

Actions We Plan and Commit to Achieve by 2027	Expected Outcome
<p>4. Provide staff with refresher training using a trauma informed approach when interacting with the public and provide regular opportunities for staff to learn about the various aspects of trauma, how trauma may show up in daily interactions with citizens, and recommended approaches for assisting citizens who may experience trauma.</p>	<p><b>All employees understand what is expected of the office and themselves to provide trauma-informed service. Employees have a broadened understanding of what trauma may look like and how it may impact people with visible and non-visible disabilities, and people who are neurodiverse.</b></p>
<p>The Manitoba Ombudsman will encourage business partners to explore and seek opportunities for improved accessibility options for future satellite office space in Thompson and Brandon. Requirements/enhancements to be pursued include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street/parking lot wheelchair accessibility with drop off zones in close proximity to building entry and fully accessible entry points</li> <li>• Fully accessible and non-gendered washroom facilities</li> <li>• Fully accessible reception space that can comfortably accommodate service animals and escorts</li> <li>• Fully accessible public education areas and private meeting spaces</li> <li>• Accessible door hardware (automated or operable using a single fist with minimal strength and without tight grasping or twisting of the wrist)</li> <li>• Accessible wayfinding in hallways and elevators (braille, voice command)</li> </ul>	<p><b>The public and Manitoba Ombudsman employees experience improvement in accessibility and safety on our premises.</b></p>

Actions We Plan and Commit to Achieve by 2027	Expected Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doorways and clearances that meet Manitoba Building code requirements for barrier-free design</li> </ul> <p>Audio/visual emergency alarm systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible, configurable workspaces where employees are empowered to interact with and modify proxemics (personal spaces) to meet their needs.</li> <li>Environmental accessibility for invisible disabilities (quiet spaces, modifiable light levels, audio filtration to enable privacy within open space and use of voice-activated software)</li> <li>Fully accessible common spaces, including barrier free breakroom amenities with accessible food preparation facilities</li> <li>Developing new lease clauses that ensure compliance with the latest provincial accessibility standards</li> </ul>	
<p>The Manitoba Ombudsman will ensure continued compliance with The Accessible Information and Communication Standard by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing a policy on applying the Information and Communication standard for the organization's operational policy manual.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Staff understand what is expected of them to provide information and communication that is accessible to all Manitobans.</b></li> <li><b>Communications staff are confident in their ability to support the organization's compliance with The Accessible Information and Communication Standard.</b></li> </ol>

Actions We Plan and Commit to Achieve by 2027	Expected Outcome
<p>2. Providing communications staff with timely and ongoing accessible communication training in alignment with the Accessible Information and Communication Standard, which requires training in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessible communication</li> <li>• How to provide information through a communication support or accessible format</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>The Human Rights Code, The Accessibility for Manitobans Act</u></a> and this <a href="#"><u>standard</u></a></li> </ul> <p>3. Providing staff with refresher training in using plain language.</p> <p>4. Auditing and revamping existing communications materials (print, online, educational) and developing new communications materials to meet the following standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set font and font size – minimum size 12.5</li> <li>• Ensure color contrast of background to text</li> <li>• Bulleted lists to break up content</li> <li>• Offer information in alternate formats upon request</li> <li>• Optimize headings (style function in Word) for screen readers</li> <li>• Limit italics and underlining</li> <li>• Provide Informative hyperlinks (not just 'click here')</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. Plain language is standard practice.</b></p> <p><b>4. Information published by the office is easier to understand by more of the citizen population.</b></p>

Actions We Plan and Commit to Achieve by 2027	Expected Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set Alt text for images, symbols, charts</li><li>• Provide Closed captioning</li><li>• Provide materials in dual format</li><li>• Use of plain language and adherence to style guides</li></ul> <p>These actions will also align with our strategic goal of continuously improving the way we work to provide more effective and proactive services.</p>	