

**Summary of the
Final Proposed
Accessible Information and Communications
(IC) Standard**

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0 Introduction

Background

The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\)](#) has a goal — make Ontario accessible to people with disabilities by 2025. The AODA is the first law of this kind in Canada. Through it, Ontario is developing accessibility standards for important areas of everyday life.

An important part of making Ontario accessible is breaking down information and communications barriers. A standard will help make this happen. A standard explains an accepted way of doing something. It states what the requirements are, who has to meet them and by when.

The Ontario Minister of Community and Social Services appointed the **Accessible Information and Communications Standards Development Committee** (the Committee) to develop a proposed **Accessible Information and Communications (IC) Standard**. Its members include representatives from Ontario's disability and business communities.

The Committee prepared an **initial proposed standard** in the fall of 2008 for public review. Members of the public could send their comments about it to the Committee from November 17, 2008 to February 6, 2009. The Committee took all of the comments into account. It has prepared and given the **final proposed IC standard** to the Minister of Community and Social Services for review.

The proposed IC standard is not the law. If the Minister approves the whole standard, or parts of it, this will begin a process for it to become law in Ontario. The proposed IC standard is one of four standards that are currently at different stages of development to become the law in Ontario. The [Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07](#) was the first standard to become law, on January 1, 2008.

What is in the Proposed Standard?

There are eight sections in the proposed standard, two appendices and three schedules. The eight sections cover the introduction, scope, classes of obligated organizations (who must comply), policies and procedures, emergency and public safety information, training, priority areas and definitions. Appendices A and B have information to help organizations to comply with the proposed IC standard. All designated Ontario government agencies will have to comply with the proposed standard, once it is the law. Schedules 1, 2 and 3 have lists of other organizations that must also comply.

The detailed proposed standard includes the Committee's comments. The comments give background on the Committee's thinking in developing the proposed standard. There are also recommendations for actions the Ontario government could take to help organizations to comply. Although the Committee's comments are in the detailed proposed standard document, they are not part of the proposed standard.

In this summary, the words "proposed standard" mean the proposed **Accessible Information and Communications (IC) Standard**. This summary is an overview of the detailed proposed standard. It does not include the full details. If there is any conflict between this summary and the proposed standard, the proposed standard is always the final authority.

Changes to Make a Lasting Difference

The IC Committee has a vision. The vision is that, by 2025, it will be easier for people with disabilities to communicate with organizations, as well as give and get the information they need. “Accessibility” laws are expected to be consistent with other Ontario laws. These include the Ontario Human Rights Code, 1990, the French Language Services Act, 1990 (where it applies) and inclusive design principles. **“Inclusive design”** is a design process. Its aim is to make it possible for everyone, no matter what their ability, to use systems, services or products.

The proposed IC standard’s requirements build on the principle of providing accommodation so that people with disabilities can live independently and with dignity.

The IC Committee wants to create systemic change. Simply put, “systemic change” means making changes that last. The proposed IC standard is expected to make it possible for everyone to get the information and communications they want and need. That way, they can get the full benefit from all of Ontario’s services, facilities and job opportunities.

The proposed IC standard should make information and communications in the province accessible for most people. At the same time, there will always be individual situations. They will need the kind of accommodation that organizations must provide under the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Committee members understand this. They also know that it is not an easy challenge to balance the goal of accessibility with technical and cost issues.

“Information” in the proposed IC standard means data, facts, knowledge and subject matter that may exist in any format such as text, numbers, image or sound and that convey meaning.

“Communications” in the proposed IC standard means the interactive process between two entities (people, systems) where information is provided, sent or received.

Accessible information and communications (IC) means:

- taking a person’s disability into account
- giving a person with a disability the same amount of time as other people have to look at, consider and reply to information they receive
- providing everyone with the same IC quality and availability.

As you read about the proposed IC standard, you may notice that it may make it easier for everyone, not just people with disabilities, to communicate with organizations, and to get and give information.

1 Scope

Under the proposed IC standard, organizations must prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities. The proposed standard covers:

- alternate formats and communication supports and services
- policies and procedures
- identification of priority IC areas for people with disabilities
- procurement (purchasing)
- training
- web sites and web content.

2 Who Is Expected to Have to Comply with the IC Standard When It Is the Law?

The organizations that are expected to have to comply are:

- all Ontario government ministries
- public and broader public sector organizations and licensing and regulatory bodies (listed in Schedules 1, 2 and 3 of the detailed proposed standard)
- public, private and not-for-profit sector organizations with:
 - fewer than 50 employees
 - 50 to 99 employees
 - 100 or more employees.

The proposed standard calls these “classes of obligated organizations.” The target dates for complying are at the end of this summary. (See, “When Will Organizations Have to Comply?”)

3 Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures are an organization’s “rules” for how it wants to do certain things. Under the proposed standard, organizations must have:

- written policies on accessible IC
- a statement of commitment to accessible IC
- procedures and feedback processes.

There must be **written policies** on:

- how to answer requests for alternate formats of IC and for communication supports and services
- including accessibility in procurement policies
- having criteria for deciding what information and communications to put in plain language.

A regularly updated **statement of commitment** must include:

- training for employees on how to provide accessible IC
- meeting the needs of people with disabilities, taking “urgency” into account
- identifying, removing and preventing barriers
- providing IC supports, services, resources, products, practices and systems for the organization to comply with the proposed standard.

Accessible Processes

The proposed standard states that there must be accessible processes for:

- handling feedback and complaints
- receiving requests for, and providing, accessible IC
- charging for material in alternate formats — if there is a charge, it cannot be more than the regular cost that the organization charges for the material.

Organizations will have a **duty to notify** people with disabilities that they have accessible IC. An organization should have several ways of doing this.

4 Training

Formal training helps people to know and understand what accessible information and communications means and how to make it happen. There are many different ways to train. Under the proposed standard:

Organizations must provide **employees, volunteers and others** who have IC roles and responsibilities with training on:

- IC policies, procedures and practices
- removing IC barriers
- IC tools and where to get more information
- how to communicate with people with disabilities in emergency and crisis situations.

Licensing and regulatory bodies must make sure that mandatory professional development includes training for their members on:

- the IC needs of people with disabilities
- the prevention, identification and removal of IC barriers
- resources, tools, and communication supports
- accessible alternate IC formats
- communication supports and services.

5 Emergency and Public Safety Information

There are laws and requirements on **emergency and public safety information**. This information must be accessible to all members of the public and to all employees. There must be accessible IC on:

- evacuation procedures and facility alarms for all publicly accessible buildings
- events that threaten life, property, operations or the environment
- workplace emergency and public safety information for employees (e.g., workplace evacuation procedures).

6 Technical Requirements

For some people with disabilities, web sites are their primary source of information and communication. An organization's web site and its contents must be made accessible to people with disabilities.

It may not be possible to put all information and communications on an accessible web site. However, if a person with a disability asks, the organization must be able to provide the material in an alternate format that meet's the person's needs. Organizations should consider the information in Appendix A and Appendix B in deciding how to make their information accessible.

Organizations selling goods and services and producing **sales receipts from a computerized point of sale system** must be able to give their customers a sales receipt in an accessible format.

7 Priority Areas

Some service providers and organizations provide information and communications that are critical for people with disabilities:

- health care providers
- educational institutions
- producers of educational and training materials
- libraries at educational institutions
- developers of information and communications resources
- public libraries
- organizations in the legal / justice and financial sectors
- political parties and Elections Ontario.

Providers of health care services must provide accessible IC about essential matters (e.g., symptoms, tests, prescription instructions, etc).

Educational institutions in the business of delivering training or education must:

- Have materials that are either accessible or readily convertible to accessible formats.
- Make materials available to everyone at the same time.
- On request, provide student records and other information (e.g., degree requirements), in alternate formats.
- Provide accessible materials to people with disabilities, before or at the same time as for other people.
- Have accessible classes and course instructions.

Producers of educational and training materials for educational institutions must provide materials that are either accessible or readily convertible to accessible formats. The materials have to be ready before or at the same time as the print and multi-media formats.

Libraries at educational institutions must buy new text-based and multi-media material in versions that are either accessible or readily convertible to an accessible format. There are some exemptions (e.g., rare books).

Developers of information and communication resources in the business of delivering training or education must provide training to students / course participants that covers:

- the IC needs of people with disabilities
- the prevention, identification and removal of barriers to accessible IC
- inclusive design principles, resources and tools
- the testing of IC products to see if they meet the accessibility needs of people with disabilities.

Public libraries must be able to provide accessible materials.

If asked, organizations producing **legal / justice information and communications** (e.g., court proceedings) and **financial information and communications** (e.g., mortgages) must provide accessible IC.

Political parties in provincial elections must provide accessible election and candidate materials. They must also hold at least one all-candidates meeting where people with disabilities can participate fully (e.g., ask questions and get answers).

Elections Ontario must provide accessible voting procedures so that a person with a disability can vote independently and cast a secret ballot.

Timelines — When Will Organizations Have to Comply?

The proposed standard has recommended target dates for organizations to comply. The Committee understands that organizations with more resources may be able to comply sooner.

Within one year of the proposed IC standard becoming the law, it is anticipated that all organizations will have to:

- Comply with the requirements for: policies, a statement of commitment, feedback mechanism, emergency and public safety information for the public and for employees, new web sites and new web content.
- Provide existing web content in accessible formats, on request.

Within two years of the proposed IC standard becoming the law:

- All organizations will have to comply with the requirements on training for employees, volunteers and third parties.
- All licensing and regulatory bodies (in Schedule 3 of the detailed proposed standard) will have to comply with the requirements for members of regulated professions.
- Political parties in provincial elections will have to comply with the requirements for political parties concerning elections.

Within three years of the proposed IC standard becoming the law:

- Public sector organizations with 50 or more employees will have to comply with the duty to notify and provide alternate formats, communications supports and services.
- All organizations will have to comply with the requirements for existing web sites.
- All health care services providers will have to be able to provide accessible information about priority matters (e.g., medication).
- Educational institutions with 50 or more employees will have to provide accessible information about priority matters (e.g., registration).
- All producers of educational and training materials will have to provide accessible information about priority matters (e.g., catalogues).
- All organizations that provide training or education on the design, production or delivery of information and communication products will have to provide accessible information about priority matters (e.g., study guides).
- All public libraries, all legal/justice organizations (on request), and all financial organizations (on request) will have to provide accessible information.
- Elections Ontario will have to provide accessible voting information.

Within four years of the proposed IC standard becoming the law:

- Public sector organizations with fewer than 50 employees will have to comply with the requirements on the duty to notify and alternate formats, communications supports and services.
- Private sector organizations with 50 or more employees will have to comply with the requirements on the duty to notify and alternate formats, communications supports and services.

Within five years of the proposed IC standard becoming the law:

- Private sector organizations with fewer than 50 employees will have to comply with the requirements on the duty to notify and alternate formats, communications supports and services.
- Educational institutions with fewer than 50 employees will have to provide accessible information about priority matters (e.g., registration).

Within 10 years of the proposed IC standard becoming the law:

- All organizations that produce sales receipts from a computerized system must provide them in accessible formats.
- Libraries at educational institutions must get new text-based materials in accessible electronic formats.

Within 15 years of the proposed IC standard becoming the law:

- Libraries at educational institutions must get new multi-media materials in accessible electronic formats.

Want to Learn More?

For more information, to get a copy of the **Proposed IC Standard** and/or to learn more about other initiatives to improve accessibility in Ontario, please visit the [Ministry of Community and Social Services' website](#).

Appendices and Schedules in the Proposed Standard

Appendix A, Choices for Accessible Formats and Communication Supports and Services has a list of IC choices (e.g., sign language interpretation). Organizations can use these individually or in combination to communicate with a person who has a disability.

Appendix B, Guide for Technical Specifications for Accessible Formats and Communication Supports and Services has technical specifications for providing accessible IC (e.g., accessing web sites).

Schedule 1 lists the Ontario government agencies, board and commissions that must comply with the proposed IC standard.

Schedule 2 lists the broader public sector organizations that must comply with the proposed IC standard.

Schedule 3 lists the licensing and regulatory bodies that must comply with the proposed IC standard.