



# Guide to Accessible Events

Summer 2024



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# Accessibility in Ontario

Ontario continues to work to create an accessible and inclusive province where people of all abilities can participate in their communities every day. The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) helps make Ontario more accessible by preventing, reducing and removing barriers for people with disabilities.

28% of Ontarians have a disability today. That is more than a quarter of the population. By 2036, as the population ages, it is projected that there will be more than 5.3 million people in Ontario with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

Plan your event so people with disabilities feel welcome. This applies whether it's an indoor or outdoor festival, fair, wedding or a block party.

## Did you know?

A person with a disability can be someone who:

- has low or no hearing
- has low or no vision
- lives with a mental health issue
- lives with a learning or developmental disability
- uses a cane, wheelchair or other mobility device to get around.

## How to use this guide

This guide is a resource for individuals and organizations to help you make your indoor or outdoor event more accessible, and provide you with information to help with planning, running and gathering feedback on your event.

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<sup>1</sup> [Population projections - Dataset - Ontario Data Catalogue](#) and Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability 2017 and 2022



If you are an organization with one or more employees, there are accessibility requirements you will have to meet. For more information on how to comply with Ontario's accessibility laws go to [ontario.ca/accessibility](https://ontario.ca/accessibility).

## Planning your event

One of the best ways to make sure that accessibility is being considered is to make accessibility the responsibility of some of your event staff or volunteers or to create an accessibility committee.

Your municipality may have an [Accessibility Advisory Committee](#). Consider consulting with them in the planning phase of your festival. Contact your municipality for more information.

## The venue

The key to making events inclusive and accessible is to think about the many barriers that can exist for people with disabilities and address them at the planning stage. It starts with your venue.

Whenever possible, visit the site of a potential venue. Think about people with different disabilities who may attend your event and the barriers they could encounter while there.

Your festival location may have to comply with accessibility requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard (DOPS) under the AODA. Please visit [ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo](https://ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo) for more information.

Even if your venue doesn't need to comply with DOPS, you can use [the requirements](#) as a guideline to decide on the number or size of accessible parking spaces you should have.

## Accessible parking spaces

Many people will use a car or van to get to your event. **Picking a venue** with accessible parking or creating a sufficient number of accessible parking spaces will make it easier for people with disabilities to attend.

When planning event parking, create accessible spaces as close as possible to:

- paths to the nearest accessible venue entries and exits

- any lifts and ramps for people using mobility devices
- pay stations (for example, a ticket booth or a parking-lot operator station)
- consider providing a designated passenger drop-off area that is clearly marked with signs and located close to the event entrance
- **consider using accessible vehicles** for event transportation. For example, provide a shuttle service from a remote parking lot to the event area.

## Public transit

Some of your participants may be using public transit to get to your event. Consider providing accessible public transit information for participants with disabilities wherever you post general transportation information or as part of registration information for your event. This information could include:

- schedules of accessible buses, trains and shuttles
- information on whether the buses on the route are accessible
- whether shelter is provided at the bus stop
- location of passenger drop-off areas
- whether the train or subway station has an accessible elevator.

## Accessibility information areas

Providing dedicated areas where people with disabilities can get information on the event's accessibility features helps make it easier for them. A dedicated information booth that offers accessibility information should be put near the entrance. In addition, relevant information about accessibility features should be placed on signs or available in pamphlets throughout the venue. You can improve accessibility by having:

- information booth areas with level pathways
- booths at a height that someone using a wheelchair could access
- brochures in large print and high-contrast formats for people with low vision.

## Signage

Signs should be in a large, easy to read font with good colour contrast, for example, a sans serif black font on a white background. Use common words and simple, short sentences to make signs easier for everyone to understand.

Clear signs that can be read in all light conditions at drop-off zones and parking areas will help direct people to specific areas across the event site. Signs should indicate the accessibility features located along the path of travel and event areas. Signs at different heights can also help assist people moving through crowds and help them see when they are at specific locations.

### Did you know?

Sans-serif fonts include:

**Arial**

**Century Gothic**

**Verdana**

**Univers**

## Paths of travel

As you **plan your event**, think about the routes people will take throughout the venue. Plan for accessible paths for people who use canes, crutches, wheelchairs or other mobility devices across the site that link all attractions and essential services. Make sure things like garbage cans and sandwich boards can be moved so there is at least a one-metre-wide path of travel for people using wheelchairs or walkers. If there are no automatic doors, prop doors open or at least make sure there will be volunteers who can help people trying to go through.

For an outdoor event at a venue that has uneven surfaces like sand or grass, you could buy or rent temporary outdoor flooring to help stabilize the paths.



## Tip:

Electrical wires are a tripping hazard for everyone. Keep electrical wires out of paths of travel or use cable protectors that are wheelchair accessible and are in bright/contrasting colours to alert people with low vision.

## Seating

You can plan your event so that people with disabilities can sit more comfortably and participate in your event.

- Consider creating or reserving areas with enough room for mobility devices. These areas will need to have a view of the stage from a seated position.
- Consider buying or renting a ramp to provide stage access for people who use mobility devices. Keep in mind that there are other requirements for stages, for example, in the [Ontario Building Code](#) or other municipal regulations.
- If you are providing tables and chairs for participants, make sure there are spaces without chairs at the tables for every person using a wheelchair. Where taller, bar height tables are used, provide some lower dining height tables for people using wheelchairs or walkers.
- Provide a variety of chairs with and without armrests, if available.
- Reserve seating for people with various disabilities and consider the nature of their disability when doing so. For example, people who rely on lip reading will need to sit closer to presenters.
- Provide seating for those who can't stand for long periods at events where people will be mostly standing.
- Some seats should be positioned to allow service animals to accompany their owner and rest in front of or under the seat.

- Consider providing outlets/charging stations for people with power wheelchairs, scooters and other electronic mobility devices and medical equipment.

## **Lighting and acoustics**

Indoors or outdoors, good lighting helps people who are Deaf or hard of hearing read lips or communicate using sign language.

In addition, check that you can adjust the amount of natural light for daytime events. Direct natural light can cause shadows and glare, making it difficult for people with low vision to see.

Rooms with high ceilings or other environments with significant echo create barriers for people who are hard of hearing. If you are using a sound system, consider testing it and adjusting the sound and positioning to minimize any echoes.

## **Food services and public eating areas**

Event participants should be able to easily reach food services using an accessible path and food service booths should allow access for a person in a wheelchair to reach them. Consider having large print copies of menus for people who have low-vision.

When buying or renting tables before your event, it's a good idea to ensure at least 20 per cent of tables are accessible for someone with a mobility aid (or to provide at least one accessible table in each eating area). Manufacturers of accessible tables provide tables with a range of dimensions to accommodate differently sized mobility devices. By providing a mixture of different types of accessible tables that accommodate a variety of mobility devices, you can ensure that guests of all abilities will be able to use your seating areas. Ensuring flat, firm and stable space around the table, under it and on the path to reach it will help guests who use mobility devices get around your event's eating areas.

There are accessibility options for buying or renting accessible event equipment, from picnic tables to admission gates. For information on how to buy or rent accessible equipment, visit

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-procurement>

## Tip:

If it is a buffet-style event, be sure to place food, drinks and utensils in easy reach of a person using a wheelchair.

Provide bendable straws as well as some cups with handles. People who have limited use of their hands have difficulty grasping or holding objects such as cups.

Ask volunteers to offer assistance to guests with disabilities.

Find more information about creating accessible eating areas by reading the "Outdoor public spaces" section at [ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo](https://ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo).

## Washrooms and temporary toilets

It's a good practice to plan for accessible washrooms. Accessible toilets can make or break the enjoyment of the event for a person with a disability. Accessible washrooms and temporary toilets at outdoor events should be at ground level and away from crowds and sound systems, but not so far that they're inconvenient to reach.

There are other requirements for washrooms, for example in the [Ontario Building Code](#) and your municipality's laws.

## Rest areas, quiet spaces and shelters

If your event attracts large crowds and is longer than a couple of hours, it's helpful to have a designated quiet space for people with disabilities. This can include people with mental health issues, sensory issues, fatigue issues and nursing mothers.

Prolonged exposure to rain, wind and sun can sometimes be an unpleasant experience but some people with disabilities are at particular risk from the elements. Open- or closed-sided tents can provide weather protection. If your participants at an outdoor event run the risk of being overheated, consider renting cool mist canopies or fans to cool people (and service animals) in extreme temperatures.

## Support persons

[Support persons](#) may be helping some people with disabilities at your event. A support person must be allowed to go wherever the person they support goes.

**Post the admission price for support persons** wherever you have information about entry or registration fees (such as on your website and at entrance gates). Consider reducing or waiving the entry fee for support persons.

### Did you know?

A support person can help with:

- mobility
- personal care
- medical needs and more

## Service animals

Service animals provide assistance to people with disabilities with a variety of needs. Guide dogs are one type of service animal but other kinds of animals are trained to help people with disabilities.

**At your event**, a person with a disability and their service animal can go to all areas that the public would normally be allowed to go.

**When planning outdoor events**, consider designating a suitable area as a relief area for service animals. Make sure to let volunteers know how to direct people to this area and post signs so people know where to go.

## Tip:

Provide water for service animals. Owners are responsible for caring for their service animals but by making it easier to care for them, you'll create a welcoming environment for people with service animals.

You can find more information about service animals at [ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo](https://ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo).

## Emergency and safety information

Give people with disabilities access to the emergency and safety information for the event, like maps, evacuation plans, brochures or signs. Before your event, check whether there is anything that would make these items hard to read, see, hear or understand for someone with a disability.

## Running your event

### Communication supports

If a person with a disability asks for accessible information or requires communication supports, work with them to figure out how to meet their needs. For example, someone who is Deaf or hard of hearing may need an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. Learn more about how to make your communications more accessible at [How to make information accessible | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca/How-to-make-information-accessible)

### Invitations and promotion for your event

Once you know about the accessibility features of your venue, make sure you inform your guests about them to help guests with disabilities make informed choices.

Use a variety of ways to communicate, such as telephone, email and print, to ensure that your guests with disabilities receive the information they need and are able to provide information back to you in a way that works best for them.

When promoting your event, you should think about including accessibility information:

- on your website
- in features in local news
- through your social media
- on posters, flyers and print ads

### Tip:

Make accessibility information on your website easy to find and ensure volunteers and organizers are prepared to answer accessibility-related questions.

## Information and maps

Brochures, websites, ads and maps can include a variety of topics, such as whether there are accessible toilets, viewing areas, accessible performances with American Sign Language/Langue des Signes Québécoise and the location of accessible parking spaces.

Consider how you can make your event information accessible to ensure everyone can find your information in a way that meets their needs. Learn more about how to make information accessible by visiting “Access to information” at [ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo](https://ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo).

## Presentations, speeches and performances

There are many ways to make sure the presentations, speeches, music, performances or exhibits at your event are accessible. When planning your event, consider:

- booking a person to provide captions for live events or providing volunteers to describe performances to persons with low or no vision



- having presenters describe themselves as part of introductions at the start of a presentation and describe any digital images they share
- booking an interpreter who is qualified in American Sign Language or in Langue des Signes Québécoise. You can find an interpreter through:
  - [Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters - Home \(oasli.on.ca\)](http://oasli.on.ca)
  - [Empowering Lives | Canadian Hearing Services \(chs.ca\)](http://chs.ca)
  - [Toronto Sign Language Interpreter Service \(tslis.ca\)](http://tslis.ca)

## When talking to people with disabilities

**Use appropriate language when talking about disabilities.** For example, use language that puts the person first, such as:

- referring to “people with disabilities” instead of “disabled people” or “the disabled”
- using the right words: “disability” versus “handicap”
- referencing specific disabilities, when appropriate, such as a person with epilepsy or a person who uses a wheelchair
- avoiding sympathetic statements: victim of, suffers with, or stricken with a particular illness or disability
- not making assumptions about what a person with a disability can or cannot do but simply asking, “How may I help you?”

**Before and during your event,** remind speakers, performers, hosts and other presenters to:

- speak clearly
- stay within the allotted time
- make sure there is a clear view of their face and mouth
- use the microphone at all times
- describe any images that may be projected during presentations
- use language that is considerate of people with disabilities.

# Considerations for festivals or other larger public events

Festivals or other larger public events may have specific requirements and considerations.

## Training staff and volunteers on accessibility

If your organization has at least one staff person, you must train your staff and volunteers on **Ontario's accessibility laws**. This can be incorporated into your regular training. Visit our website for information about the [training requirements](#).

If you are entirely organized by volunteers, you do not have legal training requirements. However, to make your event more accessible and inclusive, it is still a great idea to train your volunteers on:

- how to communicate with people with different types of disabilities
- your event's accessibility features
- your evacuation procedures for people with disabilities.

## Gathering feedback

It's always a good practice to get feedback on the accessibility of your event, especially if it is a larger event or festival.

- **Before the event:** ask what accessibility features people would like during any pre-event consulting you do.
- **At the event:** get feedback from event participants. Make sure you have more than one way to collect feedback and let people know what you plan to do with the feedback you receive. If you already have a feedback form, add a question about accessibility. It can be as simple as asking, "Were your accessibility needs met? If not, what can we do to improve your experience?"

- **After the event:** consider the feedback you heard. Are there suggestions or concerns that can be addressed in the planning for next year?
- Organizations with one or more employees in Ontario have a feedback requirement. Visit our website for information about [collecting feedback](#).

# Accessible event planning checklist

## Venue

- ❑ **Accessible parking spaces** – Place accessible parking spaces close to venue entries and exits, accessible toilets, pay stations and lifts/ramps.
- ❑ **Food services and public eating areas** – Design food areas so that someone who needs mobility support can easily navigate them. Provide options for people using wheeled mobility devices.
- ❑ **Paths of Travel** – Provide wide, even, slip-resistant paths, without steps or barriers, that lead to all the public areas of the event.
- ❑ **Public transportation** – Post local accessible routes and schedules.
- ❑ **Rest areas and rain/wind/sun shelters** – Offer quiet areas and weather shelters.
- ❑ **Signs** – Provide high-contrast signs in high and low positions, and make sure signs use fonts that are easy to read in all light conditions.
- ❑ **Stages and seating** – Provide a ramp for your stage, and ensure the stage is visible for someone watching from accessible seating or from a wheelchair.
- ❑ **Support persons** – A support person can go wherever the person they support goes. Post any admission fees for support persons in the same place you post general admission information.
- ❑ **Training staff and volunteers** – Train staff and volunteers to welcome people with disabilities and explain your event's accessibility features.
- ❑ **Washrooms and temporary toilets** – Provide accessible toilets or washrooms at ground level, away from crowds and sound systems.

## Communications and promotions

- ❑ **Communication supports** – Consider offering captioners, sign language interpreters, or individuals who can describe performances.
- ❑ **Maps and information**– Provide information about your event's accessibility features and consider people with disabilities in your emergency plans. Provide a map of the accessibility information area.
- ❑ **Other accessibility considerations** – Provide dedicated accessibility volunteers, rent/buy accessible equipment.
- ❑ **Promote your event** – Tell people about your accessibility features in the same places you promote your event.
- ❑ **Ask for feedback** – Collect feedback before, during, and after the event.

# Questions? We're here to help

## Learn more

Find more information about:

- how Ontario is becoming more accessible and accessibility requirements at [ontario.ca/accessibility](https://ontario.ca/accessibility)
- programs and services for people with disabilities at [ontario.ca/disabilities](https://ontario.ca/disabilities)
- resources for businesses and non-profit organizations at [ontario.ca/AccessibleBusiness](https://ontario.ca/AccessibleBusiness)
- accessibility requirements and training your employees at [AccessForward.ca](https://AccessForward.ca)
- how to comply with Ontario's accessibility laws at [ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo](https://ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo)
- emergency preparedness and planning for [people with disabilities](#)

## Contact us:

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# Appendix

For more information:

- About accessibility laws - [www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws](http://www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws)
- AccessForward – [www.accessforward.ca/](http://www.accessforward.ca/)
- Accessibility in Ontario - [www.ontario.ca/accessibility](http://www.ontario.ca/accessibility)
- Accessibility in Ontario: information for businesses – [ontario.ca/AccessibleBusiness](http://ontario.ca/AccessibleBusiness)
- Accessibility in Ontario: what you need to know - [www.ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo](http://www.ontario.ca/AccessibilityInfo)
- Accessibility in Ontario's Building Code – washrooms - [www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontarios-building-code#section-3](http://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontarios-building-code#section-3)
- Accessibility rules for procurement - [www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-procurement](http://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-procurement)
- Accessible parking section of the laws - [ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191%23s80p36s1#BK137](http://ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191%23s80p36s1#BK137)
- Canadian Hearing Services - [www.chs.ca/](http://www.chs.ca/)
- Emergency preparedness guide for people with disabilities - [www.ontario.ca/page/emergency-preparedness-guide-people-disabilities](http://www.ontario.ca/page/emergency-preparedness-guide-people-disabilities)
- Guide dogs and service animals - [www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-what-you-need-to-know#section-7](http://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-what-you-need-to-know#section-7)
- How to make customer service accessible - [www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-customer-service-accessible](http://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-customer-service-accessible)
- How to make information accessible - [www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-information-accessible](http://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-information-accessible)
- How to train your staff on accessibility - [www.ontario.ca/page/how-train-your-staff-accessibility](http://www.ontario.ca/page/how-train-your-staff-accessibility)

- Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees - [www.ontario.ca/page/municipal-accessibility-advisory-committees](http://www.ontario.ca/page/municipal-accessibility-advisory-committees)
- Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters - <https://oasli.on.ca/>
- Ontario regulation - O. Reg. 191/11: INTEGRATED ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS - [www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191%23s80p36s1](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191%23s80p36s1)
- Ontario's Building Code - [www.ontario.ca/BuildingCode](http://www.ontario.ca/BuildingCode)
- Outdoor public spaces - [www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-what-you-need-to-know#section-6](http://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontario-what-you-need-to-know#section-6)
- Programs and services for people with disabilities - [www.ontario.ca/disabilities](http://www.ontario.ca/disabilities)
- Toronto Sign Language Interpreter Service - [www.tslis.ca/](http://www.tslis.ca/)

