



2022

York Region Accessibility Status Report

Creating an Accessible York Region

An update on actions by York Region and York Regional Police to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities and to implement the York Region 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan



York Region

2022

Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that York Region is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat and Métis peoples and the treaty territories of the Haudenosaunee, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Williams Treaties First Nations. Today this area is home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples, and we recognize their history, spirituality, culture and stewardship of this land. We also acknowledge the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation as our closest First Nation community.

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Please email aoda@york.ca or call 1-877-464-9675 ext. 74562 or TTY: 1-866-512-6228 (for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing)

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The York Region Accessibility Status Report 2022

York Region is committed to a welcoming and inclusive community where diversity is celebrated and everyone can develop to their full potential, participate freely in society and live with respect, dignity and freedom from discrimination, as affirmed by the [Inclusion Charter for York Region](#). York Region and York Regional Police are committed to creating programs, services and facilities that people of all abilities can enjoy. An accessible York Region is an inclusive York Region.

This report highlights what we have accomplished since the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) became law and the actions taken to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities in York Regional and York Regional Police programs, services and facilities. It provides an update on actions taken to implement the Region's [2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#). An Accessibility Status Report is prepared and posted annually. To review the Plan and previous Status Reports, visit york.ca/accessibility.



2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

In April 2020, York Region and York Regional Police updated their joint Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This Plan highlights actions approved by York Regional Council to strengthen the accessibility of York Region and York Regional Police's programs, services and facilities. The Plan was developed with advice from people with disabilities, staff, the community, and the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC). The Plan specifies new work ahead of us, including actions to meet legislated standards and continuous quality improvement initiatives. These actions affirm our commitment to creating welcoming and inclusive communities.





Setting the Context

In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed our communities and our world. Although these have been challenging times for all of us, our vulnerable populations were, and remain, at an increased risk of experiencing detrimental impacts from the virus.

York Region and York Regional Police have taken action to respond to the pandemic and protect and promote wellness in our communities. Throughout 2020, the Region converted many essential programs and services to a virtual format to support physical distancing measures and in 2021, York Region collaborated with community partners to deliver mass vaccinations across the Region in an accessible and inclusive way.

Similarly, York Regional Police had to move many community engagement opportunities to virtual settings during 2020 and 2021 to reduce opportunities for the spread of COVID-19 at in-person events. For example, seminars on the sustainable global goals of the Human Right Education Classroom at the York Regional Police Community Safety Village were offered virtually. In 2021, York Regional Police also launched the Older Adult Seminar Information Series (O.A.S.I.S) online.

In 2022, the Region began taking steps to return to a “new normal.” In recognition of the mental health benefits of in-person interaction for our clients, the Region supported the return to in-person programming for many of its services. York Regional Police also transitioned back to providing in-person community engagement events in 2022, including hosting an in-person recognition of Asian Heritage Month and Pride Month. Lessons learned from the pandemic have also been used to enhance the accessibility of York Region and York Regional Police programs. For example, much of the Region’s programming continues to be offered virtually for those who would prefer, or find it easier, to participate from home. York Regional Police have continued to offer public employment information sessions and training on their new [Community Safety Data Portal](#) in a virtual format throughout 2022.

As COVID-19 evolves in its risk to communities, York Region and York Regional Police remain committed to protecting the wellness and safety of its residents. The importance of accessibility is embedded in our work and will continue to guide COVID-19 response planning.

Theme for the 2022 Accessibility Status Report

The theme for this Report is “Creating Accessible Communities For Each Other.” This theme acknowledges that many of this year’s collective and concerted actions focused on creating more accessible environments for our friends, neighbours and colleagues.

This year York Region and York Regional Police created accessible spaces in their communities and their workplaces by creating a Community of Belonging for Staff with Disabilities at York Region, launching an [Inclusive Language Guide](#), incorporating accessibility planning in the 2023-2025 York Regional Police Business Plan for staff and the public and highlighting the work of Accessibility Superstars across York Region.

York Region Statement of Organizational Commitment

“The Regional Municipality of York is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in a timely and proactive manner and will use reasonable efforts to provide equitable access to Regional programs, goods, services and facilities in a way that respects a person’s dignity and independence.”

Source: [York Region Accessibility Policy 2017](#)

York Regional Police AODA Procedure Statement

“York Regional Police is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in a timely and proactive manner so that all people may have equitable access to programs, goods, services and facilities in a way that respects their dignity and independence.

Persons with disabilities shall be given an opportunity equal to those given to others in obtaining, using and benefiting from our services. This Procedure [*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*] and the principles contained herein apply to all York Regional Police practices and Procedures.

Source: York Regional Police Procedure AI-345



Accessibility Planning Includes Both Legislated and Non-Legislated Actions

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) requires organizations to meet standards of accessibility in the areas of information and communications, employment, transportation, design of public spaces and customer service.

The AODA legislation is ongoing. This at-a-glance summary shows AODA requirements that are completed and continue to be part of York Region's and York Regional Police's day-to-day operations:

- ✓ Accessible customer service
- ✓ Accessibility policies
- ✓ Accessible purchases
- ✓ Emergency response plans for employees
- ✓ Transportation standards
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Accessible feedback
- ✓ New websites that conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) Level A
- ✓ Employment standards
- ✓ Accessible formats and communication supports
- ✓ Design of public spaces standards
- ✓ Compliance monitoring and reporting

New Actions

✓ Websites and web content conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA

Under the AODA, all obligated organization websites must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. WCAG 2.0 defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities.

This year, York Region and York Regional Police worked to bring all its websites in alignment with the legislation. York Region redesigned and launched a fully accessible york.ca website in 2022. The new website improves user experience and removes barriers to ensure that people with disabilities can access the information they need.



The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC)

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) advises York Regional Council and York Regional Police on accessibility for the region's programs, services and facilities. Members are mostly people with disabilities bringing a lens of lived experience to this committee. Visit york.ca to see upcoming meeting dates and times.

Virtual YRAAC meetings are streamed live on york.ca and can be viewed by members of the public. To ensure these meetings are accessible, live captioning is provided and York Region staff are available to offer technical support to participating members if needed. The virtual format demonstrates YRAAC's continued commitment to removing barriers for people with disabilities.



Learning and Development for YRAAC Members

YRAAC members hosted a forum in recognition of National AccessAbility Week (May 29 to June 4, 2022). This event brought together members of municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees (AACs) across the Region to network, learn from each other and discuss the forum theme of Making York Region AccessAble. This theme focused on the intersection between the social determinants of health, accessibility and inclusion.

Attendees heard from several presenters, including Meenu Sikand, an award-winning disability rights advocate, and the current Assistant Deputy Minister for the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. The forum also featured Dr. Alexis Buettgen, a community-focused researcher with academic appointments in community psychology and a PhD in critical disability studies.

Participants also contributed to a round-table discussion about their experience with sitting on a municipal accessibility advisory committee and lessons learned.



Accessibility Superstars

York Region ran an internal employee recognition and awareness campaign between 2021 and 2022 titled Accessibility is Everyone's Responsibility. This campaign recognized York Region staff who were nominated by their colleagues for going above and beyond in applying an accessibility lens to their work.

York Region's Accessibility Superstars contribute to and foster a workplace culture at York Region that emphasizes that accessibility is everyone's responsibility. In total, nine staff across the organization were highlighted on York Region's internal website for their ongoing contributions to an accessible organization and community.

Read on to learn why considering accessibility is important to York Region's Accessibility Superstars.

Tracy Kirkwood

Departmental AODA lead for the AODA Design of Public Spaces Standard

"Everyone in York Region should have the ability to access the same type of amenities as others," said Tracy. "If staff thought about accessibility in and around everything they do, it will impact them as much as it does others. Think about it personally – what if it was your mother, brother, or child? How would it make you feel?"



Tracy Kidd

Integrated Wraparound Case Worker

As a person with hearing loss, Tracy understands firsthand the struggles that can be experienced, and wants to ensure others don't face those same challenges. "Many disabilities are invisible, and not everyone is comfortable disclosing them. Being a social service worker, I work from an anti-oppressive framework and apply the same lens when working with my coworkers and clients. We need to remove accessibility barriers for those around us and provide accessible opportunities to be their best selves and do their best work."



Carol Clark

Committee Coordinator for the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

"As a very large part of our population ages, so come challenges in accessibility," said Carol. "Change comes from practice. The more we practice, the greater chance we have to become the accessible and inclusive community that we strive to be."





Erin Straughan

Departmental AODA lead for the AODA Transportation Standard

There is always room for innovation and improvements when it comes to accessibility. "Engagement provides people with disabilities the opportunity to advance accessibility in our services and programs, which can allow them to feel heard and can make our communities better."



Adrian Hall

Web Communications/Graphic Design, Long Range Planning

"Accessibility is about being inclusive. The more I learned, the question became 'how can I ensure our communications are accessible to as many people as possible? The business case for inclusivity and removing barriers speaks for itself. "If the goal is to reach as many individuals as possible through our communications, then we need to remove all barriers for individuals."



Michelle Herder

Departmental AODA lead for the AODA Customer Service Standard

"Asking, 'how may I best help you?' welcomes all customers. Many disabilities are not visible. People are experts in their abilities and will communicate if they require accommodation."

Candice Einstoss and Lucy Valleau

Public Health Nutritionists

"Throughout the pandemic, we saw how individuals with disabilities were impacted disproportionately. As we began to plan clinics, we became more aware of the needs of various equity-deserving groups within the community. We knew that our clinics had to be designed with the needs of people with disabilities, including seniors, as they were one of the highest priority groups when vaccinations began to roll out."



Megan Rippin

Transit Ability Coordinator

"Accessibility shouldn't even be a question in today's day and age - it's essential for all York Region employees to keep accessibility in mind when completing all daily duties. Accessibility is constantly evolving, and not all disabilities are visible. By treating everyone with respect, inclusivity, and equity, we create and maintain an accessible working environment."





Members of the 2019 to 2022 York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee and York Region Staff

Front row (left to right): Scott Wollin, Joseph Silva (Director, Strategies and Partnerships, Community and Health Services, York Region) Astley Dennis

Back row (left to right): Regional Councillor Don Hamilton (Deputy Mayor, City of Markham), Katherine Chislett (Commissioner, Community and Health Services, York Region), Sandy Palombo, Regional Councillor Tom Vegh (YRAAC Chair and Deputy Mayor, Town of Newmarket), Kirsten Hill, Vito Spatafora, Lindsey Gold, Joann Simmons (YRAAC Vice-Chair), Cheryl Davies, Wayne Emmerson (Chairman and CEO, Ex-officio Member of the YRAAC), Angelo Tocco, Bruce Macgregor (CAO, York Region).

Not pictured: Laurie Fortnum

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of previous members of the 2019 to 2022 York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee including David Hingsburger (1952 – 2021) and Barry Martin.

Visit york.ca/accessibility to learn more about the members of the YRAAC.

Recruitment for the new term (2023-2026) of York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee members began in September 2022, with Council appointment of members expected in early 2023.

Doing More to Create Accessible Communities in 2022

York Region and York Regional Police continue to create and implement actions to ensure programs, services and facilities are accessible for everyone. This section highlights some of these actions.

Emergency Housing in Aurora

In February of 2022, the YRAAC provided their feedback on the accessibility features and design of a new emergency housing and transitional housing development in the Town of Aurora. Some of the building elements YRAAC informed included:

- Site layout, including parking and outdoor paths of travel;
- Unit layouts and configurations, including unit furnishings; and
- Common amenities, programming, and service areas, including outdoor amenity spaces

Currently this project is in the design and planning stage, with construction activity anticipated to begin in late 2023. York Region housing staff will consult again with the YRAAC in early 2023 to capture their feedback on the refined designs.

Update to the Regional Official Plan

The [Regional Official Plan](#) is a long-term plan that describes where and how the Region will grow, and how that growth will be accommodated while protecting natural and agricultural areas.

In February 2022, the YRAAC advised on the 2022 York Region Official Plan update, including accessibility considerations in the Plan and inclusive engagement planning. The Committee's feedback helped ensure that their vision of accessible communities was captured in the Plan and that the engagement process included people with diverse lived experiences.

The Regional Official Plan update was adopted in June 2022 by Regional Council and was approved with modifications by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in November 2022.



Photo Credit: Kearns Mancini Architects Inc.



Access York Consultations

In September 2022, members of the YRAAC were asked for input on how to make services more accessible to people with disabilities through Access York, York Region's Corporate contact centre.

Members of the YRAAC provided feedback on the accessibility of current service channels, including phone, in-person services, email and digital self-serve options. Members also identified accessibility considerations for future channels and tools that persons with disabilities could use when accessing Access York services.

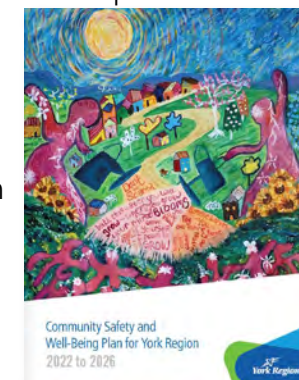
The feedback provided by the YRAAC will be used to build on Access York's "no wrong door" approach, which is designed to enable all customers to access information and services through the communication channel of their choice.



Implementing the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

The [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan for York Region](#) takes a strengths-based, partnerships approach to enhancing the safety and well-being of residents and communities. Focused on social development and prevention, its goal is to enhance safety and well-being through proactive, targeted, community-driven actions. Throughout the planning process, York Region consulted residents and community partners to understand their perceptions of safety and well-being, and how they feel about the communities in which they live.

YRAAC has been consulted during development and implementation of the Plan. Members shared unique perspectives about how persons with disabilities experience safety and well-being in our communities. Once the Plan was approved by Council, members provided their advice on how York Region can begin implementing actions in the Plan in an inclusive and accessible manner.



York Regional Police 2023-2025 Business Plan

York Regional Police continues to have meaningful conversations with YRAAC to inform the accessibility of its services for residents with disabilities. One prominent York Regional Police project that the YRAAC advised on in 2022 was the 2023-2025 York Regional Police Business Plan.

The 2023-2025 York Regional Police Business Plan lays out York Regional Police's service objectives over the next three years. During its development, York Regional Police sought feedback from both York Regional Police staff and the community to inform the plan. The unique perspective of the YRAAC will be used to inform how York Regional Police prioritizes and meets the needs of residents with disabilities over the next three years.



Community of Belonging for Staff with Disabilities

Beginning in 2021, Communities of Belonging began to form within the organization, serving as a source of community and connection for staff that belong to equity-deserving groups.¹

Communities of Belonging are also known as affinity groups, employee network or resource groups, business resource groups or internal support networks. Communities of Belonging provide groups of employees with a formal structure to support their unique needs as they relate to specific, personally-identifying characteristics, including visible and invisible identities or qualities.

In 2022, the Community of Belonging for staff with disabilities was formed. This completely staff-initiated and staff-led group provides a space for staff who identify as having a disability an opportunity to network and connect with other staff who may share similar lived experience.

¹ Equity-deserving groups include: Those listed in the Employment Equity Act (women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, members of visible minorities), members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and other groups filtered through the Ontario Human Rights Code (protected grounds)



Inclusive Language Guide

Language plays a key role in shaping cultural and societal attitudes and using inclusive language is a powerful way to promote equality and eradicate biases.

The Municipal Diversity, and Inclusion Group (MDIG), comprising of 20 member organizations that serve people who live, work, and visit York Region, share a common commitment to welcoming and inclusive communities. Acknowledging the significant impact that language has on a person’s sense of belonging, MDIG committed to the priority action of creating and launching an Inclusive Language Guide. York Region, as MDIG co-chair, launched the [Inclusive Language Guide](#) in April 2022. This Guide was developed as one of many actions resulting from the [Inclusion Charter for York Region](#) in consultation with MDIG.

The Inclusive Language Guide includes guiding principles to help people utilize inclusive language when communicating and covers various topics, including guidance on best practices when discussing disabilities.

The Guide is a publicly available document and can be used by community members and organizations to ensure their communications are inclusive. Internal training sessions have also been held at York Region to help promote inclusive language principles across the organization.



Web and Web Content Accessibility Improvements

York Region oversees and implements compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements for accessibility under the Accessibility for Ontarians Act, 2005 (AODA) on behalf of the Region, York Regional Police and York Regional Police Services Board. Under these requirements, the public facing websites and web content of designated public sector organizations’ must conform with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. In addition to ensuring york.ca meets legislated web requirements, York Region is also responsible for ensuring affiliated websites, including [yorklink.ca](#), [vivanext.com](#), [yrt.ca](#), [yrp.ca](#) and [yrpsb.ca](#) also comply.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, York Region staff and the web administrators of York Region’s affiliated websites worked closely to meet compliance. In March 2022, a new and fully accessible [york.ca](#) was launched. In addition to revamping websites to ensure they meet compliance, all York Region owned websites are regularly scanned to ensure the sites and their content continue to meet or exceed legislated requirements for web accessibility.





Pedestrian Warning System on YRT Electric Buses

York Region Transit (YRT) proactively assesses new technology to provide safe, accessible and efficient transit service for all. YRT is currently piloting a Collision Avoidance and Pedestrian Warning system on 12 electric buses. The system uses camera sensors to detect all nearby pedestrians, including those using assistive devices, and provides visual alerts to the driver and audible messages to pedestrians. Due to the quiet nature of electric buses, the Warning system will help to enhance pedestrian safety, regardless of ability.



Pedestrian Crossovers

In 2022, York Region installed a pedestrian crossover (PXO) in the Town of Georgina and in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. A PXO is ideal for a location where some pedestrian demand exists, but volumes are not enough to warrant traditional traffic or pedestrian signal installations. The PXOs enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility by providing clear signage, overhead flashing beacons, pedestrian push buttons, tactile plates, crosswalk markings, street lighting and pavement markings that distinguish where drivers must come to a stop.

Accessible Services and Features at Sexual Health Clinics

Clients with physical disabilities often encounter barriers when accessing medical assessments because standard examination tables may be too high for a client with a disability to access. The Sexual Health Clinics program has procured and installed an accessible examination table at each of their five clinic locations. This ensures staff can complete sexual health examinations, pap testing, sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatments and intrauterine device (IUD) insertions for all clients who wish to attend the sexual health clinic.

In addition, four of five sexual health clinics have undergone improvements to their washrooms to ensure they are accessible, including the addition of larger doorways and installing accessible entry buttons and locks.



Let Us Know What You Think

We welcome your feedback. Let us know if you have any questions or feedback about the programs highlighted in this 2022 Status Report, the York Region 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and any accessibility matters in general.

To view previous Status Reports, visit [york.ca/accessibility](https://www.york.ca/accessibility)

To request a copy in another format or to send us your comments or questions, please contact us at:

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