

# The Business of Accessibility

How to Make Your Main Street Business Accessibility Smart



**OBIAA**<sup>TM</sup>

Produced by  
The Ontario BIA  
Association

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Business Accessibility Smart

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The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) requires businesses with one or more employees to meet a number of accessibility requirements in the areas of customer service, information and communications, employment, and the built environment. The AODA Design of Public Spaces (DOPS) does not only apply to a building's physical structure and businesses are not required to do retrofits. However, there are many ways businesses can be more accessible and inclusive of all customers.

**This handbook offers no cost and low cost suggestions, gathered from those with first-hand experience, to inspire businesses to become more inclusive of people with access needs.**

The Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) acknowledges the guidance provided by the Accessible Main Street Project Advisory Committee, the project leadership of Constance Exley (Accessibility Services Canada), and the financial support of the Ontario Government.



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*Often the greatest limitation of a person’s ability is the attitudes of other people.*

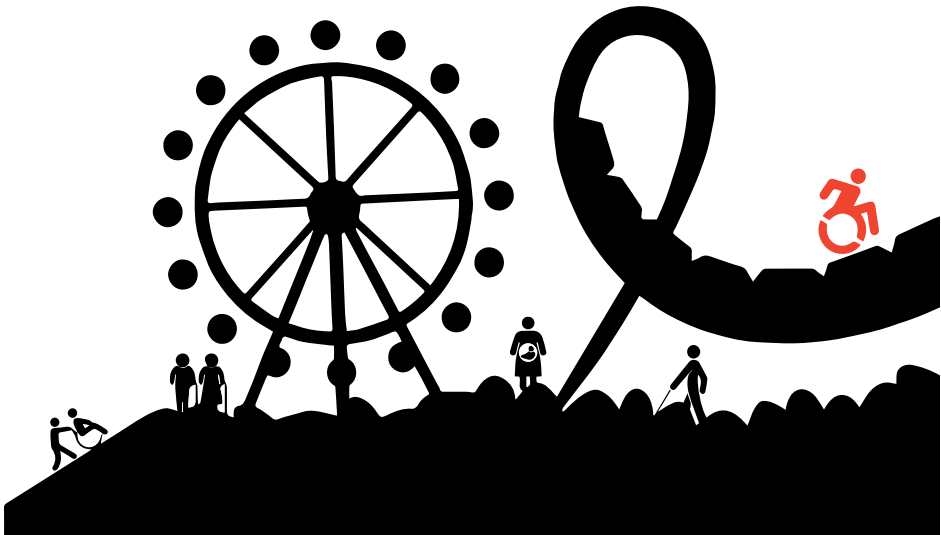
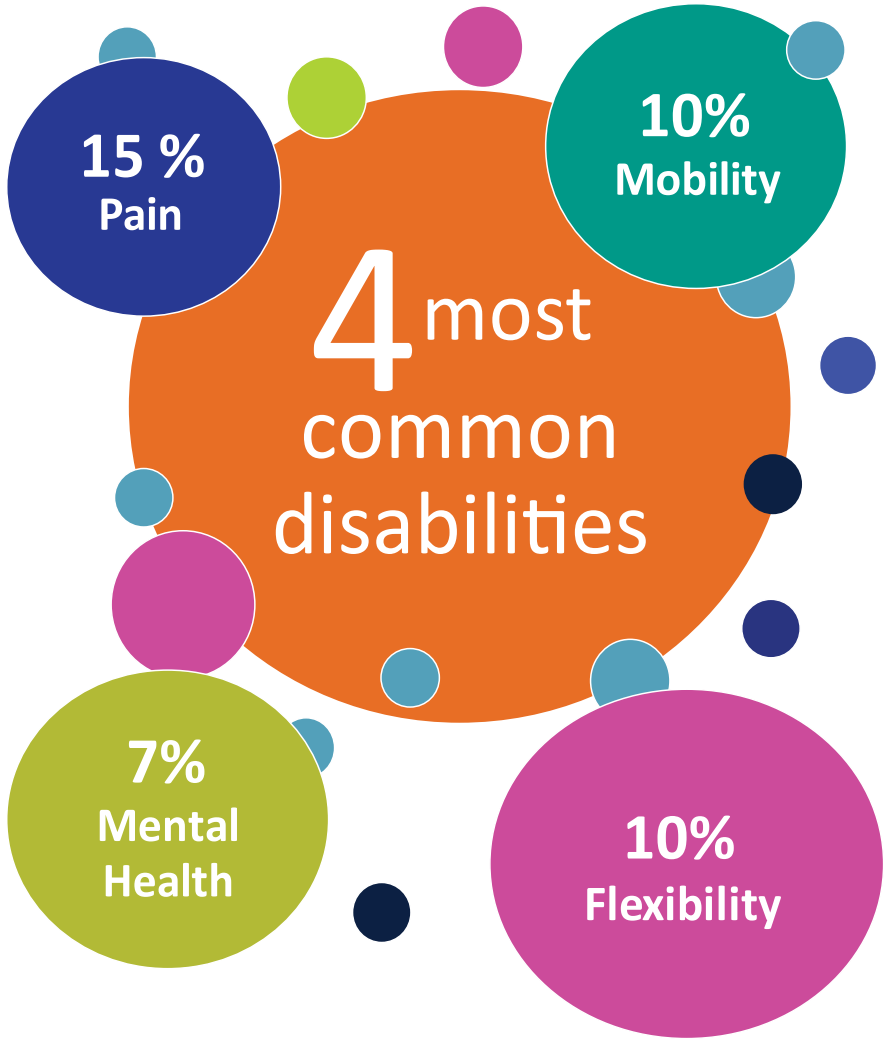


Illustration: [Accessibility Services Canada](#)



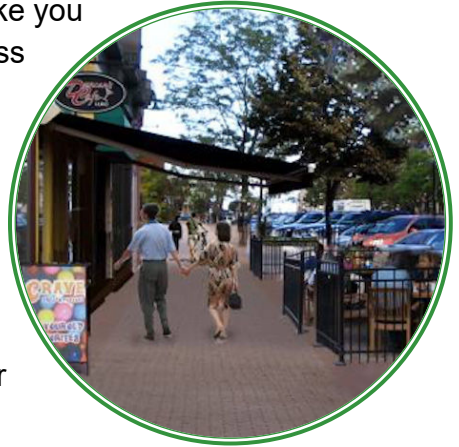
**53%** of the population in Ontario has a disability or is related to someone who has a disability.<sup>1</sup>

1 <https://tgam.ca/2Ep8WsW>

# Accessibility Matters

As a business, your success depends on making sure that your customers have a positive experience. Taking measures to improve the accessibility of your business will make you more attractive to people who have access needs, as well as their friends, families, and colleagues.

It is true that many people benefit from a step-free building, or one that has a ramp, including wheelchair users, parents with strollers, or delivery providers. It is also true that many of your customers have access needs that have nothing to do with ramps, for example someone with hearing loss, dementia, or diminishing vision, or a concussion.



Everyone knows that Canada's population is aging. 33% of boomers will retire with at least one disability<sup>1</sup> and the demand for greater accessibility will continue to increase.

People with disabilities and aging consumers are a large and growing group. They want to spend money in their communities and they are very loyal to businesses that meet their needs. Businesses would do well to attract these potential customers by removing as many access barriers as possible, especially since many barriers can be so easy to remove once you know about them.

Accessibility encompasses more than renovations. Simple no-cost, low-cost modifications can quickly improve access and we invite you to consider the tips and best practices offered in this booklet, as well as the resources provided at the end.

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1 <https://bit.ly/2tJY9oh>

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Who is this handbook for?

For any business, professional, or organization and its staff. Everyone has a role to play in making a business welcoming of all customers.

## Why is accessibility important to my business?

**Accessibility = business!** People with access needs will choose a business where they feel welcome and where they can easily get the products and services they want. Remember: **A happy customer tells a friend but an unhappy customer tells everyone!**

## Do I have to make my business accessible?

Yes, actually you do. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requires all organizations with one or more employees to meet a number of accessibility requirements in the areas of customer service, employment, training, information, communications, and more. As well, the Ontario Human Rights Code requires you to accommodate individuals with disabilities ‘to the point of undue hardship’. However, you do not need to retrofit your space. For more information on your legal obligations, see the Resources section at the end of this handbook.

## My business is in a building with a lot of steps so I can't be accessible to people with disabilities. Or can I?

Many people, with or without a disability, would benefit from a ramp but many of your customers have access needs that have nothing to do with steps. This includes customers who have hearing loss, are partially sighted, have a learning disability, or live with chronic pain.













About 1% of Ontarians use a wheelchair or scooter as their primary mode of transportation so access issues are not always about door widths, ramps and elevators.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2SzWWtJ>

# Three Features of an Accessible Business

1. **Welcoming and friendly staff** who have had accessibility training. (Customer Service)
2. **Easy to access information** on the accessibility of the business's space, products and services. (Information and Communications)
3. **Accessibility considerations** given to the design and layout. (Built Environment)

	Permanent	Temporary	Situational
Touch	 One arm	 Arm injury	 New parent
See	 Blind	 Cataract	 Distracted driver
Hear	 Deaf	 Ear infection	 Bartender
Speak	 Non-verbal	 Laryngitis	 Heavy accent

Microsoft Inclusive Design Toolkit

## Who benefits from accessibility?

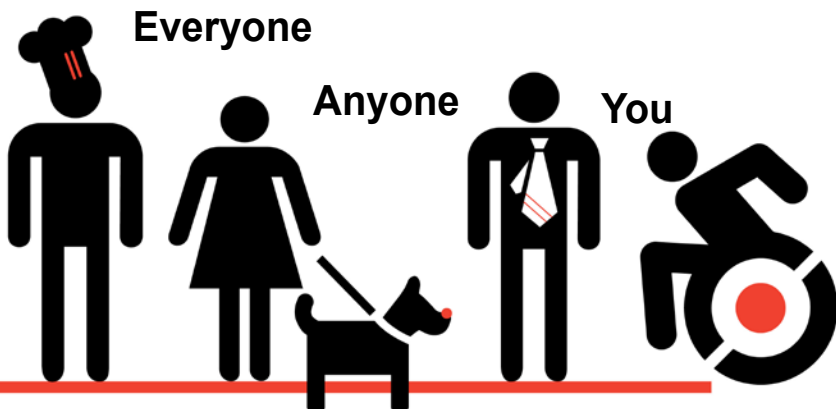


Illustration: Accessibility Services Canada





## Heritage & Second Floor Businesses

There are many businesses in Ontario that operate in a heritage building or on a second floor. While most of those buildings do not have an elevator or an accessible entrance, such barriers do not affect 90% of people with disabilities. Examples of common access needs include requiring large print, needing additional lighting or a reduction in background noise.

If you are thinking of making some renovations to a heritage building, work with accessibility and conservation specialists, as well as individuals with disabilities, to find the most appropriate, barrier free renovations. Your municipal Planning and Building Departments and local Accessibility Advisory Committee can also be tremendously helpful in coming up with creative solutions.



Shortly after Savon Dubois opened its business in Uxbridge, owner Anne Dubois got a ramp made to address the step at her entrance. As luck would have it, Savon Dubois is connected to its neighbour, Blue Heron Books, by an inside, accessible door. This has allowed the bookstore to welcome customers who had previously not been able to get in because of the three steps at their door.

# Building Exterior

## Doorway Tips

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- Use lever door handles.
- Choose doors that can be opened with one hand only.
- Make doorways as wide as possible. 38 inches is the required minimum width for a wheelchair.
- Make door frames colour contrasting to the walls or surfaces around them.
- Put signs, logos, or coloured strips on glass and glazed doors.
- Install a doorbell with appropriate signage if you don't have automatic doors.
- Use a secondary entrance if you have one that is wider and step-free. Post directional signage.

## Entrance Tips

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- Create a permanent, sloped entry way.
- Make your own temporary ramp or get a lightweight and roll-up ramp from suppliers, such as [MobilityBasics.ca](http://MobilityBasics.ca), [StopGap](http://StopGap.com), or [Staples](http://Staples.com).
- Have good lighting and no shadows.

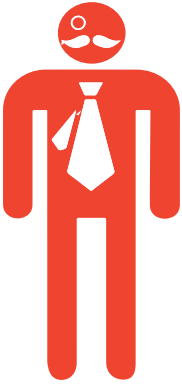
## Path of Travel Tips

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- Make sure the path from the parking area is smooth, level, and non-slip.
- Sandwich boards, freestanding movable signs, merchandise racks, etc. should be avoided if possible or placed outside the path of travel.
- Planters can be used to draw attention and direct attention to your entrance but ensure that they are out of the main path of travel and do not narrow the entrance way.



# Customer Service



**Between 2016 and 2041, the number of seniors aged 65 and over is projected to more than double.**

**Aging baby boomers account for 33% of the population but 55% of the discretionary income.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2N7wyZu>



**1/3 of Ontarians over the age of 65 have a disability.**

**70% of disabilities are non-apparent.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/2HN7vo8>

Be creative about the ways you can serve customers who cannot get into your location.

- Offer online shopping on your accessible website.
- Serve a customer outside if it is a small item.
- Shop for the customer and bring the goods to them.
- Offer in home service.
- Let customers call you with a list of what they want and have their shopping ready for a quick pick up.
- Offer a weekly delivery service or alternate drop off location.
- Allow a customer to book an appointment instead of waiting in line.

Invite customers to contact you if they are having difficulty accessing your goods or services.

Illustrations: [Accessibility Services Canada](#)

## Service Animals

Service animals assist people with a wide range of disabilities and illnesses, including autism, diabetes, epilepsy, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The most common type of service animal is a guide dog, but other animals can also serve in this role, such as rabbits, horses, cats, and parrots. Service animals don't always wear a vest or harness and, if necessary, you can ask for proof in the form of documentation. Note that if you have a no-pet policy, it cannot apply to a service animal.



## Don't Assume...

- That a person with a disability needs assistance. Always ask first.
- That only people with white canes or accompanied by service animals have low or no vision.
- That a person who is unable to speak clearly is unable to understand.
- That a person having difficulty speaking or is slurring words is inebriated. There could be many reasons, including a stroke or a recent trip to the dentist.
- That your staff know how to provide accessible customer service to people with various access needs. Train them - it's the law!

## Customer Service Tips

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- Never pet a service animal. They are working!
- Use electronic payment devices with accessible features, such as tactile and colour contrasting buttons, large print numbering, flexible cord (or cordless) for seated user, and voice activated.
- Have a pen and paper on hand to use as an alternative form of communication.
- Use 'people first' language, e.g. a person with vision loss.

# Space Layout and Design

Consider redesigning the layout of your restaurant or shop, where possible, to allow your customers to comfortably circulate. In cases where your space has limitations, be ready to offer alternatives. For example, a staff member could offer to describe the layout of the space or read aloud the menu (or price tags). Keep aisles free from obstacles, such as boxes waiting to be unpacked.



## Colour Contrast

Colour contrast and brightness are easy ways to increase the accessibility of your space - inside and out. The more visually different the colours, the greater the contrast.

### Consider colour contrast in these areas:

- Door openings
- Walls
- Paths of travel
- Counters
- Signage
- Floor
- Display tables
- Steps

Aim for a colour and brightness contrast of at least 50%, but higher is better. The colour and brightness (overall lightness or darkness) contrast on signs should be at least 70%. See the Resources section for a colour contrast checker.

# Service Counters and Waiting Areas

By law, all businesses must make both service counters and waiting areas accessible if they are building a new one or making major changes to an existing one. Service counters, either indoors or outdoors, can be desks or counter spaces where people have face to-face conversations with staff to receive service, such as reception desks, ticketing windows, food service counters and check-out counters. Check the Resources section of this handbook to get more information on your AODA requirements in this area.

Learn about the accessibility requirements for buildings such as entrances, ramps, elevators and washrooms in Ontario's Building Code.

## Customer Service Tips

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- Have seating available for customers waiting for service.
- Organize your space so there is room for wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers to circulate easily.
- Have clear sight lines between the entrance and the counter so that staff can easily see when a customer needs assistance.
- Place goods, particularly the most popular ones, within reach of someone using a wheelchair or create a catalogue of your stock.
- Post a sign to tell customers when an accessibility feature is temporarily unavailable and who to contact for more information.
- Use a ramp inside your space if there are stairs.
- Create a queuing path that has a different surface or texture, and colour contrasts with the surrounding floor.
- Provide accessible signage and other wayfinding strategies.
- Print price tags and product labels in a minimum of 14pt font.



**Mary Be Kitchen** is a new business in Toronto's Yonge and St. Clair neighbourhood. Great attention and thought was given to accessibility in a number of areas, including a gradual, permanent, ramp to the front door, an automatic front door opener, a spacious interior layout and accessible washroom.

**Mary Be Kitchen is one of many Toronto businesses profiled on [AccessTO.ca](https://www.accessTO.ca)**



## Seasonal Tips

- Occasional mats (e.g. runners used in bad weather) should be level with the floor surface and/or have a gently beveled edge, so as not to create a tripping hazard.
- Keep walkways, stairs, ramps and entrances clear of snow and ice.
- Use sand, not salt which is harmful to service animal paws.
- Ensure surfaces are firm and slip resistant.

## Accommodations

Accommodations are required by law under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Invite your customers to tell you if they want your information in alternative formats. For example, say “please ask us for this information in alternative formats” instead of “this information is available in alternative formats upon request”. And, don’t assume ‘alternative formats’ always means Braille - it could mean large print or in audio format.



The wheelchair accessible symbol was updated by the Accessibility Icon Project to display an active, engaged image, with focus on the person with disability.



## A Day Downtown in a Wheelchair

Terry Guiel, ED of the Downtown Peterborough BIA, spent a day in a wheelchair to better understand the accessibility barriers people were

facing. “I found out quickly how hard it is to find a change room large enough for a wheelchair. I learned about fears of knocking over something expensive because the aisles are too close together. Curbs, railroad tracks and bumpy sidewalks actually hurt your insides. Some stores I couldn’t even enter, no matter how much I wanted to.”

Read more Terry’s experience and insights: <https://bit.ly/219AI78>



# Information and Communications

Designing marketing materials, signage and websites that are both accessible and attractive is relatively easy if you follow a few key principles. Don't underestimate the impact that small changes, like increased font size, proper placement, and plain language can have.

## Print and Digital Tips

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- A minimum of 12 points (Arial equivalent), preferably 14-16 points for printed materials.
- Use easy-to-read fonts, such as sans-serif fonts (e.g., Helvetica, Verdana, Arial).
- Avoid using highly stylized typefaces.
- Avoid using lots of capital letters for more than a couple of words.
- Avoid underlining, all caps and italicizing large volumes of text.
- Left justify all text. Do not centre or fully justify.
- Aim for good visual contrast between text and background.
- Avoid putting text over images.
- Keep a good balance between space given to images versus text.
- Use images to support your text.
- When creating a Braille document, Grade 1 is recommended.



## Website Tips

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- Post images of your building (rooms, entrance, reception, customer area, key facilities and spaces) and your service (e.g.menu).
- Include a text alternative to describe each picture. Check that all the images on your website have ALT text.
- Give a clear text description or add a sentence to explain what the link is about. For example 'click here for details about our upcoming events.'

## Signage Tips

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- Use a plain (sans serif) font such as Arial, Helvetica and Verdana.
- Use good colour contrast between the sign background and the text.
- For people with vision loss, white lettering on a dark background is generally easier to read than dark lettering on a white background.
- Keep information short and simple.
- Use consistent placement of signs, generally at eye-level but above head level to be seen from a distance.
- Ensure signage is non-reflective.
- Ensure signs around your space are clearly visible and not obstructed or covered.
- Provide signage at each decision point where a choice of paths is available.
- Use symbols and pictograms, especially for common features, like exits and washrooms.
- Use Sentence case - an initial uppercase letter and then lowercase text.
- Avoid small font sizes – a minimum of 16 point for large print information and notices, and still bigger for signs, depending upon viewing distance.



# Lighting

Lighting preferences and needs can vary from person to person. The same level of light may be fine for a fully sighted person, excessive for someone with glaucoma and too low for someone with macular degeneration. However, generally people require more light as they age and for some people sufficient lighting helps to prevent injuries and falls when navigating a space. People with hearing loss also need adequate lighting to lip-read and people with vision loss rely on good lighting to maximize their ability to see finer detail.



## Lighting Tips

- Use uplighting and indirect lighting, reflecting light onto a ceiling or wall so as to not create strong shadows or glare.
- In general, provide illumination that is 25 to 50 percent higher than the standard illumination levels.
- Check light fixtures from all angles to ensure no glare or reflection.
- Place lights so that they are evenly distributed. Have task lighting in key places, such as counters and entry key pads.
- Put lighting on dimmers so that they can be adjusted as needed.
- Install blinds to prevent the glare of sunlight.
- Offer customers clip-on lights or a lighted magnifying glass for greater illumination.

# Accessibility is a journey



Almost everyone will experience a disability at some point in their lives -

whether due to aging, a chronic disease, illness, or an injury. With seniors and people with disabilities representing 40% of Ontario's income over the coming years, a focus on access and inclusion is a smart and sustainable business investment.<sup>1</sup>

1. Start with small, easy to implement changes. Make a plan for how you will accomplish other tasks in due course.
2. Get feedback from your customers on the changes you've made and ask if they have any other suggestions.
3. Let your customers know that they can ask for assistance with their access needs. Together you can find a suitable solution.
4. Ensure you are compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (see the Resources section to get more information).
5. Talk to your local BIA, fellow business owners, and disability organizations to identify other access barriers and the best ways to remove them.
6. Set aside a budget every year to make more costly accessibility improvements. Explore municipal, provincial and federal grants to match your budget.
7. And, tell your customers the ways in which you are accessible, including your service and delivery options, on-site wayfinding, amenities, website, signage, staff training, entrance, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2N7wyZu>

# All Access Downtown Guelph



## Celebrating Accessibility in Downtown Guelph

The Downtown Guelph BIA has been working hard to increase the accessibility of its main streets and businesses. The BIA, in partnership with GAP (Guelph Accessibility Project) and the City of Guelph’s “Age Friendly” initiative, held a one-day event to profile and celebrate the significant improvements made in their downtown’s accessibility. The BIA created and distributed a map to the public which highlighted accessible parking, washrooms, curb cut-outs and benches. They also created an Accessibility Toolkit for their business members with excellent customer service tips.

# OBIAA Accessibility Awards

People with disabilities and seniors hold the key to the economic and social prosperity of businesses and communities across Ontario. 53% of Ontario's population has a disability or is related to someone who has a disability. As business owners, residents, neighbours and friends, we are all being called on to be more responsive, creative, inclusive and forward-thinking.

For many years now, OBIAA has had a focus, along with its BIA members, to support main street businesses to become accessible - meeting their AODA obligations, diversifying their staff team, and removing built environment barriers. In 2015, OBIAA created an annual "Main Street Accessibility" Award to recognize demonstrated leadership by BIAs and businesses.

## New in 2019!

OBIAA is a champion for accessibility. We strive to encourage and help our BIAs and their Business Members to become more accessible. What started as a category specific award is now a criteria for all Awards submissions.



Collingwood BIA was the first recipient of the "Main Street Accessibility" Award for their Streetscape Revitalization Project. This photo shows the redesigned sidewalks that allow for a clear, uninterrupted path of travel.

# Accessibility Checklist

## Entrances

	No Cost	Low Cost	Medium Cost
Accessible door hardware		■	
Automatic door opener			■
Non-slip, temporary ramps		■	
Good lighting		■	
Permanent sloped ramp			■
Hand railings			■
Colour contrast on door frame		■	
Signs, logos, or coloured strips on glass and glazed doors		■	
Doorbell		■	
Use secondary entrance if more accessible	■		
Directional signage	■		
Permanent, sloped entrance			■
Unobstructed paths of travel	■		
Smooth, non-slip paths		■	

## Signage

	No Cost	Low Cost	Medium Cost
Large, clear font	■		
Plain language	■		
Good contrast	■		
Clearly visible	■		
Not obstructed or covered	■		
Not blocking paths	■		
Short, simple information	■		
Consistent placement	■		
Non-reflective	■		
Use pictograms	■		

## Websites

	No Cost	Low Cost	Medium Cost
Post images of your building	■		
Include ALT text to describe pictures	■		
Clear explanation for links	■		

## Customer Service

	No Cost	Low Cost	Medium Cost
Staff trained on accessible customer service		■	
Multiple ways for customers to give feedback	■		
Appropriate and respectful language	■		
Let customers know that they can ask for assistance	■		
Never pet a service animal	■		
Have a pen and paper on hand	■		
Electronic payment devices with accessible features	■	■	
Online shopping			
In-home service	■		
Weekly delivery service		■	
Quick pick-up	■		
Appointment option	■		

## Building Interior

	No Cost	Low Cost	Medium Cost
Sufficient and well placed lighting	■		
Good visual contrast		■	
Paths of travel free from obstacles	■		
Easy navigation for wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers	■		
Goods within easy reach	■		
Price tags in large font	■		
Accessible signage and wayfinding information	■		
Seasonal/transition mats level with the floor surface	■		

## Documents

	No Cost	Low Cost	Medium Cost
Minimum 12 point, sans serif fonts	■		
No highly stylized typefaces	■		
Left justify all text	■		
Good visual contrast between text and background	■		
Avoid putting text over images	■		
Use images to support your text	■		



# Resources

## Accessibility Legislation

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005:

<https://bit.ly/2eKrmcN>

Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility: <https://bit.ly/1WIUIE9>

Ontario Building Code (Section 3.8): <https://bit.ly/2GJdcas>

Ontario Human Rights Code: <https://bit.ly/1O4Rmfs>

## Accessibility Resources

Ontario BIA Association: <https://bit.ly/2NoOhJN>

Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility: <https://bit.ly/2caeHyl>

Illustrated Technical Guide to the Design of Public Spaces:

<https://bit.ly/2SZBNOM>

Clearing Our Path: Creating accessible environments for people impacted by blindness: <https://bit.ly/2Vi7xeC>

Facility Accessibility Design Standards (Mississauga, 2015):

<https://bit.ly/31yfqR4>

Technical Guide: Design of Accessible Public Spaces:

<https://bit.ly/2F6VuM4>

The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments:

<https://bit.ly/2HoajHH>

WebAIM: Colour Contrast Checker: <https://bit.ly/2ALPtTp>

Guide for Small Business: Making Your Business Accessible for People with Disabilities: <https://bit.ly/2tEt2KE>

A Day Downtown in a wheelchair (Peterborough BIA):

<https://bit.ly/2I9AI7B>

Accessibility Services Canada: <https://accessibilitycanada.ca/>



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Contact your local BIA for additional support and resources.