



The Conestoga College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2024 - 2029

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT	3
INTRODUCTION	4
GENERAL.....	7
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	8
EMPLOYMENT	9
THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACES	11
CUSTOMER SERVICE.....	12
CONCLUSION	14
FEEDBACK	14
DEFINITIONS	16

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For years, Conestoga has been dedicated to inclusivity, embracing accessibility and aiming to be a place for everyone. We have remained committed to deepening this goal by developing a comprehensive accessibility plan that builds on our longstanding efforts. Over the years we have learned and evolved, taking action on feedback and making meaningful improvements as we go. Our vision moving forward is a multi-year accessibility plan that will solidify and expand our commitment, ensuring accessibility remains at the core of our operations both now and in the future.

This document outlines our commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible environment for all students and employees. We have invested considerable thought and energy into the initiative understanding that accessibility is not a one-time goal but an ongoing journey. We recognize there is still work to be done and achieving our vision of fully accessible campuses and training centres will require the support and collaboration of our entire community.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* is a vital piece of legislation that strives to ensure our province is fully accessible for all Ontarians. As a college with multiple campuses across southwestern Ontario, we are deeply committed to adhering to this legislation and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) by going beyond compliance to foster a truly inclusive learning environment. With more than 32,000 students attending our campuses, it is vital that every individual has equal access to education and opportunities to succeed at Conestoga.

Over the past year, we have engaged with our students and employees through interviews, focus groups, drop-in sessions and surveys. We listened carefully to the feedback provided, acknowledging both our strengths and the areas where improvement is needed. This plan reflects that feedback, and we are committed to actioning it. We are proud of the efforts made by those who contributed to shaping this plan and stand dedicated to seeing it through.

Our commitment to student success is unwavering. Our Accessibility Plan outlines our current strengths, areas for growth, and the concrete actions we plan to take over the next five years. Your feedback is welcome and essential as we work together to make Conestoga a more inclusive, accessible and welcoming college for all.

John Tibbits

CEO and President, The Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

INTRODUCTION

About Conestoga College

Conestoga was established in Kitchener in 1967. Since then, the college has expanded significantly to deliver in-demand career and skills training to more than 32,000 students in eight communities and their surrounding areas in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, Brantford, Milton, Stratford and Ingersoll.

Conestoga's programs – from apprenticeships to diplomas, degrees to post-graduate certificates, continuing education and part-time studies – all reflect Ontario's changing job market and have been designed and developed to help students build the skills and knowledge that today's employers are seeking.

Conestoga now delivers over 200 career-focused full-time programs in various disciplines, including more than 19-degree programs, that combine theory, practical skills, paid co-op opportunities and other work-integrated learning experiences to prepare students for success in their future career.

Our comprehensive range of programming meets the needs of a variety of learners. We offer multiple entry points and established pathways to ensure individuals across our community can access the education they need for their chosen careers.

Territorial acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Conestoga College is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples. Our community of students and employees work towards reconciliation by learning about Indigenous culture, where respect is a traditional concept built into the seven natural laws and seven sacred grandfather teachings. Learn more about why we acknowledge the land and access elders, un-traditional counselling, and events with Be-Dah-Bin Gamik, a Place of New Beginnings.

Conestoga College's approach to accessibility

Conestoga College is dedicated to furthering an accessible environment of inclusion, dignity, independence and integration for people with disabilities. We strive to reflect that in the development and implementation of our policies and practices.

Conestoga will continue to meet the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner and will do so by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility. We are also committed to meeting accessibility requirements under the AODA and the IASR.

About the AODA

The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#) (AODA) was created in 2005 to make Ontario fully accessible for persons with disabilities by identifying, removing and preventing barriers. This law applies to all public sector organizations and most organizations in Ontario, with requirements depending on their size and type. Educational institutions, like Conestoga College, must comply with the AODA.

The AODA includes the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation](#) (IASR), which focuses on several key areas:

- **General requirements:** We must have accessibility policies and a multi-year plan, procure accessible goods and services, provide training on accessibility and ensure self-service kiosks are accessible.
- **Information and communication:** We must offer accessible formats and communication supports when requested.
- **Employment:** Our hiring practices and workplace accommodations must be accessible.
- **Transportation:** Public transportation must be made accessible.
- **Design of public spaces:** Any new or updated public spaces must be accessible.
- **Customer service:** Accessible customer service policies and staff training are required.

We are required to have an accessibility plan that outlines how we will meet these requirements. This plan must be updated every five years and made publicly available in accessible formats upon request. We also need to have an accessibility policy that includes our commitment to accessibility, along with a customer service policy.

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) ensures that we comply with AODA requirements. It offers a chance to go beyond minimum standards, helping to create a barrier-free Ontario.

Accessibility plan development process

Conestoga College partnered with a third-party vendor in the creation of our MYAP. The vendor has extensive knowledge of accessibility. Their team also has lived experience of disability. A fulsome accessibility assessment of Conestoga was conducted. This involved:

- Reviewing employee feedback related to accessibility within our various campuses. This included gathering and analyzing feedback from students and employees.
- Performing a thorough review of our documented processes and policies. Accessibility in the five priority areas outlined in the AODA were explored.
- Interviewing key members of the teams responsible for these priority areas.
- Consulting with employees who have disabilities and their allies at Conestoga.
- Conducted one-on-one interviews, held focus group sessions, and offered anonymous surveys for employees and students.

This accessibility assessment identified areas that we are doing well with regards to accessibility. It also informed of us existing barriers to accessibility that require more focused attention at Conestoga. It helped us shape the actions outlined in this MYAP to remove or reduce those barriers.

Consultations

It is important that persons with disabilities be consulted, included, and informed during the creation of accessibility plans. Their experiences and perceptions are vital in creating accessibility plans that lead to meaningful change.

As such, we consulted employees with disabilities, allies, and others at Conestoga to create this MYAP. All employees were invited to provide their feedback about accessibility at Conestoga by filling out an anonymous survey. We also reviewed feedback from members with lived experience of disability. We presented the draft actions in this Plan to the Conestoga AODA Steering Committee. They provided input and feedback. This feedback from persons with disabilities guided our Accessibility Plan.

In total, we engaged with the following:

- Twenty-four stakeholder/employee interview sessions.
- Two employee focus group sessions with approximately 20 employees in attendance between both sessions.
- Two student focus group sessions with approximately three students in attendance between both sessions.
- One focus group session with the AODA Committee.
- One hundred and ninety-nine completed employee surveys. Fifty-four identified as a person with a disability.
- Forty-eight completed student surveys. Forty identified as a person with a disability.

GENERAL

The General priority area of the AODA consists of the establishment of accessibility policies and plans. It also includes the procurement or acquiring goods, services, or facilities and offering and tracking general accessibility training.

Strengths and successes

- All new employees receive mandatory AODA training, ensuring they understand accessibility requirements from the outset.
- We have partnered with an external consultancy firm to assess and update our MYAP by the end of 2024. This process includes comprehensive consultations with employees, faculty, students, and the community of persons with disabilities to ensure inclusive and representative feedback.
- Our Vendor Guide and Purchasing Policy require that all vendors can recommend and deliver accessible and inclusive products and services in line with the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), and the AODA.
- We are actively working on developing sustainable procurement practices, ensuring that accessibility and sustainability are integrated into our procurement decisions.

Areas for growth

- The procurement team does not have a defined process for identifying or procuring accessible goods and services.
- The team currently lacks a comprehensive list of available software, hardware, or other readily available accessible goods.

Actions

Over the next five years we will focus on the following initiatives:

- To ensure the procurement process aligns with the college's needs, the procurement team will consult with employees to better understand the accessibility requirements that should be incorporated into procurement policies and practices.
- To provide better support for acquiring accessible solutions, the procurement team will develop an accessible resource repository. This repository will document accessible vendors and products, allowing for a more proactive approach to meeting the diverse needs of students and employees.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Information and Communication priority area relates to how we communicate with our employees, students and the public. This includes hardware, software, systems, assistive devices and all other aspects of communication and technology.

Strengths and successes

- Our commitment to quality Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is reflected in our 2021-2024 Strategic Plan and Student Success Strategic Plan. These plans prioritize delivering diverse learning options to meet students' needs.
- We have made significant strides in leveraging digital technology to enhance curriculum and increase access to programs, providing flexibility and customization for learners.
- Strategic goals from the Student Success Plan highlight our focus on improving service delivery through technology. It includes actions, such as establishing a consistent remote delivery approach and launching a virtual Talent Hub.
- Our website consistently meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standards. It is regularly monitored to ensure continued compliance.
- Our front-end platform team is dedicated to identifying and addressing inaccessible content. They offer guidance to ensure content remains accessible across platforms.
- Collaboration between the front-end platform team, marketing, and corporate communications teams ensures that web initiatives are inclusive and aligned with accessibility goals.
- We focus on accessible procurement for ICT. We ensure our technology choices are inclusive from the start.
- We support continuous learning by sponsoring a developer's attendance at an annual accessibility conference.
- Our Client & Creative Services team ensures that color palettes, documents, and digital content are fully accessible. This includes addressing screen reader compatibility and accessible links and fonts.
- Our "Making Learning Accessible to All" training document provides resources for creating accessible materials, such as PowerPoint and Word documents.
- We have a dedicated feedback link on our corporate website to allow users to report accessibility-related concerns. This ensures open channels for ongoing improvement.

Areas for growth

- Our brand and social media guidelines do not fully address accessibility considerations.
- Some of our IT systems lack accessibility features, particularly with employee-facing software that is not compatible with screen readers.

- Our IT team currently does not have subject matter experts or champions dedicated to accessibility. This limits our ability to proactively address accessibility needs in technology.
- There is a perception that creating accessible content could compromise the functionality and visual appeal of documents and communications. This may hinder broader adoption of accessible practices.

Actions

Over the next five years we will focus on the following initiatives:

- We will update our brand and social media guidelines to incorporate accessibility principles. This will ensure all visual and digital communications are inclusive.
- We will develop a social media policy that explicitly includes accessibility considerations to ensure our online presence remains accessible to all.
- We will establish protocols for reviewing external content for accessibility. This includes assigning responsibility to a designated individual or team to ensure third-party materials meet accessibility standards.
- We will ensure our IT team is well-versed in accessibility by providing specialized training or hiring experts in accessible technology.
- We will promote awareness and education on accessible design principles. We will reinforce that accessibility can enhance both functionality and aesthetics. Accessibility training will be offered to a broad range of staff to foster a culture of inclusivity in design and communication.

EMPLOYMENT

The Employment priority area covers an employee’s entire experience at Conestoga College. It starts from the recruitment and onboarding process and ends when the individual leaves the organization. It also includes accommodation and short and long-term disability absences from work.

Strengths and successes

- The implementation of our remote and hybrid work options allows employees to work flexibly.
- We acknowledge *Wellness Month* every March to raise awareness about fostering an inclusive and supportive community.

- We are currently developing an Indigenous Strategy and a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategy.
- We are compliant with all AODA employment procedures, including recruitment, accommodations and emergency management planning.
- We have an accessibility survey that compiles feedback including campus location, date of visit, comments and suggestions, and optional contact information.
- We offer accessibility and AODA workshops to employees.

Areas for growth

- There is a lack of awareness among faculty and staff about our accommodation processes.
- We do not have specific recruitment and hiring initiatives focused on increasing representation of persons with disabilities.
- Our recruitment and promotional materials for faculty and staff hiring do not reflect or communicate the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- There is limited accessibility-related training provided to managers and senior leaders. This may influence practices and attitudes across the organization.
- Our exit interview process for faculty and staff does not currently provide an option for employees to offer feedback related to accessibility. This makes it difficult to identify any disability-related factors that may impact retention.
- Feedback indicated that while AODA compliance training is offered, there is room to expand the frequency and scope of accessibility training for all employees.

Actions

Over the next five years we will focus on the following initiatives:

- We will conduct a thorough review of our accommodations processes to ensure clarity, accessibility and ongoing communication. This will include the creation of a formal feedback mechanism, allowing employees to share their experiences with the accommodation they received.
- To gain better insight into our workforce composition, we will explore effective methods for collecting and analyzing diversity data.
- We will explore the development of recruitment programs specifically aimed at increasing the representation of persons with disabilities in our workforce.
- We will prioritize accessibility training for senior leaders and managers.

- To further strengthen our commitment, we will increase the frequency of accessibility training for all employees and faculty.

THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACES

The Design of Public Spaces priority area considers the physical accessibility of campuses, offices, classrooms, training centres, and laboratories. It includes the accessibility of doors and washrooms. The built environment also considers proper lighting and clear signage. This priority area includes work-from-home spaces.

Strengths and successes

- Accessibility is a key priority when designing new locations or renovating existing offices. We ensure compliance with accessibility building code requirements.
- We have partnered with an ergonomic furniture vendor to ensure new office spaces are outfitted with accessible and comfortable furniture solutions. New office spaces are equipped with sit/stand desks, promoting flexible and ergonomic workstations for all employees.
- Our hybrid work model includes an ergonomic equipment allowance for employees working from home. This supports their comfort and accessibility needs.
- The role of Operations Coordinator has been introduced, with accessibility integrated as a core responsibility.
- One of our operations coordinators is in the final stages of Rick Hansen certification. This will enable them to conduct thorough built environment audits.
- New capital development projects will be guided by the findings from these built environment audits. This will ensure that accessibility is prioritized in future developments.
- An accessibility survey allows users to provide feedback on accessibility across our campuses.
- Our Emergency Management Program includes comprehensive evacuation procedures for persons with disabilities. It offers guidance on assisting individuals with vision, hearing and mobility impairments during emergencies.

Areas for growth

- While Campus Safety and Security has established Emergency Management procedures, they are not widely communicated to persons with disabilities. Concerns have been raised about the lack of clarity regarding evacuation protocols during emergencies.

- Accessible parking spaces are limited in number and are not optimally located for convenience. Additionally, the size of some parking spots does not always adequately accommodate individuals with wheelchairs or mobility needs.
- The absence of an accessibility-focused snow policy affects parking availability during inclement weather.
- Several physical spaces across our campus are not fully accessible. Issues such as narrow doorways, lack of braille signage, malfunctioning door openers, and outdated door hardware have been identified. Additionally, accessible washrooms are lacking in certain areas.

Actions

Over the next five years we will focus on the following initiatives:

- We will enhance communication of our Emergency Management procedures to all faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, we will ensure individuals requiring an individualized workplace emergency response plan have one in place, in compliance with AODA requirements.
- We will explore the implementation of regular parking audits to ensure accessible parking spaces meet the needs of users. This will involve consulting with permit holders who rely on accessible parking to gather feedback on their experiences.
- We will develop and implement an accessibility-focused snow policy that takes into account the needs of all individuals. This will include alternative accessible parking arrangements during weather-related lockdowns and clear communication about these alternative locations.
- We will continue conducting formal built environment accessibility audits and establish an ongoing strategy to systematically identify and remove barriers in the built environment.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

This priority area ensures Conestoga programs and services are accessible to all employees, students, volunteers, and the public. It includes proactively considering accessibility while programs and services are being designed. It also holds us accountable for reviewing and updating our programs and services. It helps us make changes based on feedback from persons with disabilities.

Strengths and successes

Conestoga has the following practices in place to remove barriers or gaps for persons with disabilities.

- Our Strategic Plan focuses on providing inclusive services that are accessible to a wide range of learners from all backgrounds to achieve their potential.
- Our Student Success Strategic Plan aims to maximize student potential through accessible, transformational and scalable services.
- Our Student Success' operating principals prioritize the student voice, removing barriers, and fostering a safe and inclusive environment for students and staff.
- We have set strategic goals to promote engagement, reduce barriers, integrate equity inclusion benchmarks and develop an Indigenous Strategy.
- Conestoga Student Inc. (CSI) ensures all eligible full-time students have access to additional wellness programming. This includes seminars, collaborative weeks, resources, information, and workshops.
- The Teaching and Learning team is well trained in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with nine members holding PhDs in this area.
- Our Accessible Learning Services Team collaborates with students and faculty to establish accommodation plans for accessible learning.
- We offer accessible admission applications, tests and gather feedback through the Ontario College Student Experience Survey.
- We have an Evaluation of Student Learning Policy to ensure evaluations of student learning are AODA compliant.

Areas for growth

- There are instances where professors have denied student accommodations or included last-minute assessments. This makes it difficult for students to obtain necessary accommodations.
- Students are not aware of how to provide feedback on accessibility-related concerns.
- Some course materials are not accessible, particularly for students using screen readers.
- The Accessible Learning Services Team is viewed as the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on all accessibility matters, which is beyond their job tasks.
- Ongoing stigma persists among both students, employees, and faculty concerning visible and invisible disabilities.

Actions

Over the next five years we will focus on the following initiatives:

- We are committed to providing additional accessibility training to our faculty and staff over the next five years.
- We will establish a formal feedback mechanism to gather student perspectives on the effectiveness of their accommodations.
- We will work with our faculty with expertise in UDL to create standard templates for faculty to use for course materials.
- We will promote and implement awareness campaigns throughout the academic year to educate our students, faculty and staff about various disabilities and the supports available.
- We will develop a peer support program to connect students with disabilities to mentors or peers who can offer guidance and assistance.
- We will prioritize hiring additional staff dedicated to accessibility.

CONCLUSION

At Conestoga College, we recognize that accessibility is an ongoing journey, not a one-time goal. We are fully committed to creating an inclusive environment where every student, faculty member and staff member has the support they need to succeed. We understand the importance of accessibility and are dedicated to taking meaningful actions to ensure our campuses and training centres are welcoming and accessible to all.

We know there is still work to be done. We take this responsibility seriously. Our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan reflects our commitment to continuous improvement. We are actively listening to feedback from our community and are committed to addressing the areas where improvement is needed.

Together, with the support and collaboration of the entire community, we will create a barrier-free environment that fosters dignity, independence, and integration for everyone.

FEEDBACK

Conestoga welcomes feedback on accessibility, especially from persons with disabilities. We will improve our approach to accessibility based on the information you provide.

We have established the following process for receiving and actioning feedback related to accessibility. Feedback related to barriers to accessibility at Conestoga or the implementation of our Accessibility Plan can be directed to:

Accessible Learning Front Desk

Doon Campus

299 Doon Valley Drive, Kitchener, ON N2G 4M4

Telephone: 519-748-5220, ext. 3232

Facsimile: 519-748-3507

E-mail: accessibility@conestogac.on.ca

DEFINITIONS

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to how services, technology, locations, devices, environments, and products are designed to accommodate persons with disabilities. Accessibility means giving people of all abilities equal opportunities to take part in life activities. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission the term implies conscious planning, design, and/or effort to make sure something is barrier-free to persons with disabilities. Accessibility also benefits the general population by making everything more usable and practical for all people.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats refer to print, audio, or video materials that have been modified from their original format. Alternative formats present information in other ways so that everyone has equal access to the information. This can be very beneficial to persons with disabilities. Some common types of alternative formats are audio recordings, captions, braille, descriptive video, and large print. Alternative formats are sometimes referred to as accessible formats.

AODA

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)

Assistive technologies/devices

Devices that have been developed with features specifically helpful for people with disabilities.

Barrier

According to the *Accessible Canada Act* (2019) a barrier is “anything - including anything physical, architectural, technological, or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice - that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.”

Disability

According to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)* disability is defined as:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability
- a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language
- a mental disorder, or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 (“handicap”).

IASR

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)

Service notice

A service notice is a notice containing the reason for a closure, the anticipated duration (including start date and time and estimated restore date and time), and a description of alternate facilities or services, if available.

Service disruption

A planned or unexpected interruption in facilities or services during normal hours which may affect access to facilities, programs, goods or services. This includes interrupted access to roadways, elevators, parking, programs, goods and services caused by construction, maintenance or repairs, electrical or IT shutdowns, service closure, washroom closure or hallway obstructions.

A planned service disruption is a disruption known at least three days in advance, with an expected duration of three hours or more.

An unplanned service disruption is an unexpected disruption without prior notification, with an expected duration of three hours or more.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines or WCAG are technical standards on web accessibility. WCAG covers a wide range of recommendations to make websites fully accessible.