



# **2020**

# **Peel Region**

# **Accessibility Status Report**

*Ensuring Accessibility  
During a Pandemic*

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# 2020 Peel Region Accessibility Status Report – Ensuring Accessibility During a Pandemic

This annual report describes the progress and measures taken by the Regional Municipality of Peel (The Region of Peel) to remove barriers and improve accessibility with a focus on COVID-19 pandemic response while at the same time implementing the requirements set out in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA). It outlines the progress in 2020 to implement the Region of Peel's 2018–2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (Multi-Year Plan), with a shifted focus to responding to the immediate needs brought on by the global pandemic.

2020 was an unprecedented year. The COVID-19 pandemic presented additional challenges and barriers to the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. The challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have had an increased impact on the overall well-being of persons with disabilities, including an increased risk of infection, of isolation as most in-person services were cancelled as well as increased risk of financial insecurity as persons with disabilities have a lower employment rate than those without a disability (59% as opposed to 80% – Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017). While continuing to build on our strategic vision of **Community for Life**, accessibility at the Region of Peel looked different in 2020. It included adapting to the new reality of the pandemic while maintaining focus on the prevention or removal of barriers in Regional programs, services and facilities.



## Statement of Organizational Commitment to Accessibility

The Region of Peel is committed to implementing, maintaining and enhancing accessibility with respect to employment and the use of all Regional goods and services, programs and facilities for all persons with disabilities in a manner that:

- respects their dignity and independence and is sensitive to their individual needs;
- ensures reasonable efforts are made so that the service outcome is the same for persons with disabilities as well as those without disabilities; and
- allows persons with disabilities to benefit from the same services as those without disabilities, in the same location and in a timely and similar manner considering the nature of the service accommodations

## Office of Culture and Inclusion

The Office of Culture & Inclusion (the Office) supports the organization on its culture journey to create an environment that is open, dynamic, innovative, collaborative and inclusive. As an enabling partner, it plays a key role preparing, equipping and supporting individual and organizational capabilities. The Office's mandate is: *Working with you to create a cohesive organizational culture and community that embraces accessibility, diversity and inclusion* and plays an integral role advancing diversity, inclusion and accessibility across the Region of Peel's programs and services.

In 2020, the Office continued its efforts to developing a diverse and inclusive workplace and community. Efforts were directed toward anti-racism and systemic discrimination with the focus of identifying and removing barriers to achieve greater equity for our community and our workforce.

## Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Region of Peel's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) guides Regional Council on accessibility issues by helping to identify ways to improve accessibility and remove barriers with respect to Regional programs, services and facilities. The AAC monitors the progress of Regional accessibility initiatives which are reported annually to Regional Council. Its members, the majority of whom are persons with disabilities, advocate for accessibility and bring with them the desire to affect change and help improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

In 2020, meetings were cancelled the first half of the year due to the pandemic, however, were reinstated as the Region transitioned to a virtual format. The meeting platform included options for closed captioning and technical meeting support was provided to members where needed. Meetings were recorded and also streamed on the Region of Peel website for access by the public.





## Adapting to a changing environment



## Ensuring Accessibility During COVID-19

*In response to the crisis brought on by COVID-19, the Region of Peel had to quickly adapt to the changing environment. This included supporting staff to work from home where possible and continuing to carry out essential services that the community relied on such as health care, housing and social services. Some of the initiative undertaken in 2020 by the Region of Peel in response to COVID-19 included:*

### **Region of Peel website**

With the shutdown of physical office spaces and services counters, it was imperative that communication to the community continued to be timely and effective. The Region of Peel website became the hub for information sharing to ensure the community was provided with the most accurate and current information. Translation capabilities were added to the website which allowed residents to translate web content into 10 different languages. A COVID-19 Virtual Assistant was also introduced to help users get COVID-19 information quickly, improving the service delivery experience and providing more options for members of the public to obtain information in an accessible manner. As well, an online chat tool staffed by Customer Service Representatives from the Customer Contact Centre was expanded to include waste and water revenue pages. In addition, a new water billing portal was introduced to assist customers with water billing and related services.

### **Staff transition to work remotely**

With the Ontario government's declaration of a state of emergency on March 17 followed by the Region's declaration on March 18 which prompted the closure of many establishments, limitations to social gathering and the introduction of working

from home guidelines, the Region of Peel quickly adapted to supporting staff by ensuring access to tools and resources. This included equipment, technology and meeting software, to carry out their role while working from home or alternate sites. A staff wellness plan was put in place to support front-line staff and to demonstrate appreciation for their continuing efforts, hard work and dedication.

## Mental health and wellness supports for staff

The pandemic brought on added pressures and demands, especially for frontline and health care workers. It was critical that staff had the resources and supports to help them navigate and cope with these changes and added pressures. 24/7 access to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) was provided and virtual town hall sessions with Human Resources and service providers were set up to share resources and encourage facilitated dialogue on mental health and wellness. A COVID-19 online employee portal was also launched to support staff with timely information, resources and a means to keep engaged.

## The use of technology and meeting software

Microsoft Teams was launched across the organization providing a safe and secure option for remote meetings and includes note-taking capabilities and accessibility features such as closed captioning. The Teams application, along with other Office 365 products also offer accessibility features including immersive reading, accessibility checker and voice activated assistance. The introduction of Teams software, Office 365 products and access to cloud-based applications facilitated the transition to work remotely.

## Employee and Visitor Health Screening for COVID-19

As the Region pivoted to remote working for many staff in the early weeks of the pandemic, there remained the need for some essential frontline workforce to report to Peel facilities. To keep the workforce safe, and using a risk-based approach, active health screening for COVID-19 symptoms was established at many Regional facilities and supplemented by signage at all facilities to allow self-screening of COVID-19 symptoms during off hours. Accessibility considerations for self-screening signage were consistent with all other COVID-19 related signage. As the Region moved to the Province's stage 3 re-opening, the active screening of employees shifted to an online tool that was piloted for ease of use and accessibility before launching across





multiple digital platforms. As an additional safety measure to support re-opening, active screening of visitors to select Regional facilities was implemented through the Access Peel Service Counters.

### **Remote Council meetings**

Cisco WebEx Meeting technology was leveraged to enable live and interactive virtual Council and Committee meetings. WebEx accommodates small and large group meetings, as well as internal or external participants. WebEx was chosen for its proven stability at the peak of the Pandemic and added functionality. WebEx accessibility features include:

- Ability to enable closed captioning.
- 'Pin' feature allows you to pin anyone's video regardless of who is speaking. This is very useful when using sign language interpreters.
- Ability to access recordings and transcripts.
- Ease to change layout so end user decides what is placed front and centre
- In addition, meetings are live streamed on the Region of Peel website and include the option of viewing them on YouTube following the meeting.

### **Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA)**

In an effort to keep the community engaged, Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA) transitioned online. Some of PAMA's online offerings included the launching of virtual exhibits including Morphology, PAMA's first virtual exhibition. Other programs launched included:

- PAMA@Home which offers easy, fun filled online activities and educational resources for all ages and includes specialized programs for people of all abilities
- Summer Staycation @ Home Series





- Art Voice!, an exhibition featuring visual art, poetry, and more from over 70 local youth artists
- Increased access: Behind-the-Scenes, exhibition and artist features, focus on archival collections
- 360-degree digital exhibitions for *Simon Hughes: Works 2001–2020* and *When Night Stirred at Sea: Contemporary Caribbean*
- Online learning resource kits, including curriculum-based lessons for grades K–10.
- PAMA Talks – Virtual series

## **TransHelp**

TransHelp, the Region of Peel's specialized transportation service quickly modified its service in response to COVID-19. Safety protocols put in place to protect this vulnerable population included:

- Mandatory use of face masks or coverings
- 2 day booking window
- Screening for COVID-19 symptoms
- Suspension of subscription trips
- Operators wearing PPE
- Daily cleaning with hospital grade disinfectant



In collaboration with Human Services and Peel Paramedics, assistance was provided for the transportation of residents suspected or confirmed as having COVID-19. Some TransHelp 2020 priorities included on-board cameras, enhancements to the same day booking process, improved communication with passengers and a continued focus on the quality of service delivery.

## **Signage and way-finding at Regional spaces**

As the Region of Peel moved into the Province's stage three of re-opening, we needed to ensure that our programs and services continued to be accessible and inclusive given the new COVID-19 guidelines. The Region's AAC was consulted regarding pedestrian flow and signage at our headquarters to ensure safety and physical distancing. A simple, clear and inclusive approach was taken regarding the signage used while keeping in mind the importance of addressing the needs of those that may require assistance when navigating the off-grade ramp.

## Upgrades to service counters

As part of the re-opening plan, the Region of Peel adapted new protective measures to service counters and office spaces to ensure a safe customer service experience. Accessibility considerations were taken into account for the use of protective equipment while adhering to public health guidelines. All staff working on site were required to wear non-surgical face masks. Glass and plexiglass barriers were installed at all client facing counters including Council Chambers, Access Peel, Human Services receptions, Clerk's counter, Public Works counters and Health Clinics. In order to improve overall customer service and employee experience, online Access Peel Tracker was introduced for all counters to track visits as well as screen internal and external clients entering our Access Peel locations.



## Public Health

Peel Public Health's response to COVID-19, included the reallocation of staff and resources and as part of case, contact, exposure and outbreak management, a case by case approach was taken to those with accessibility needs. These included mitigating health and safety protocols during visits at Long-Term Care settings. For example, protecting the rights of a visitor that had a disability and required their support person with them when Provincial guidelines only allowed for one visitor at a time? Other examples of what the case and contact management team has done include: advocating for continued services in the home while isolating, providing direction on what personal protective equipment service providers should wear, accessing food deliveries, alternate methods of testing (in home) or working with TransHelp to ensure transportation options with appropriate precautions.

Efforts to address issues related to accessibility and vulnerable populations continue to be factored into the Regional and Public Health response.

## Adult Day Services

The Region of Peel five Adult Day Services (ADS), closed in-person services at the beginning of the pandemic. Service delivery pivoted to virtual and outreach service modalities. This response evolved over time to support clients and caregivers to isolate at home during the various waves of the pandemic. The program continued to remain connected to clients and caregivers providing Wellness Checks from the outset of the pandemic. ADS services evolved in response to the pandemic to include the following:



- Virtual social recreational programs that supported improved mood, socialization, and brain stimulation
- Virtual nursing and social work support, education and counselling
- Virtual caregiver nursing and social work support, education and counselling on an individual and group basis
- Porch side visits were arranged to support connections
- The development of personalized activity kits to support engagement at home and during social recreational virtual sessions

## Community Response Table

The Community Response Table (CRT), a collaboration between Human Services and Health Services was created for local community partners, social services and non-profit sector including municipalities and school boards to ensure the Region was collectively supporting residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its purpose:

- To help local agencies to support vulnerable and at-risk populations in identifying and responding to emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To support coordination, information sharing, problem solving, and collaboration among Peel Region's not-for-profit and community sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Regional Community Response Table meets weekly to identify, prioritize and respond to urgent organizational and community needs.

## Early Years and Child Care Services

The Region of Peel worked with child care providers to support everyone's health and safety during COVID-19 and that health and safety guidelines were followed. Providers also shared health and safety procedures with parents.



At the onset of the pandemic, child care fee subsidy shifted quickly to electronic service delivery to remain flexible for families and avoid disruption in child care services while ensuring the safety of everyone. Additional adjustments in response to the pandemic included:

- Mailing of documents for clients unable to access electronic documents and to maintain safety and accessible services
- Phone application completion was provided through the assessment unit
- Electronic fillable and accessible forms were introduced
- Virtual consultation with families
- A more flexible approach to policy application in assessing cases to ensure the best interest of the child, including extension of due dates for documents, pausing collection of overpayments, etc.
- Ongoing consultation for service improvement with families accessing Emergency Child Care to ensure accessible services for essential workers
- Advocated to the Ministry of Education for better and more consistent supports for children with special needs during the school closure

## **EarlyON**

EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free, high quality drop-in programs for caregivers and children age 6 and under. EarlyON centres are committed to an inclusive environment for all. For those who are deaf or hard of hearing, there is a phoneline in TTY in addition to in-program supports such as using sign-language with song and





providing access to books with sign. For those with low vision or blindness, some centres have wayfinding signs in braille and signs in large font that describe materials or play areas. Staff receive orientation on how to place furniture in centres in a way that is considerate to the need for clear paths for those with low vision/blindness and various physical abilities. Other signage, such as rainbow flags, medicine wheels and welcome signs in different languages help to build an inclusive environment for the LGBTQ2+ community, Indigenous peoples, and newcomers and those of various backgrounds.

During the pandemic, as EarlyON centres closed, programming transitioned to virtual formats with programming being offered at various times of day using various meeting platforms with closed caption and varying language capabilities as well as via telephone. Workshops were also provided to support families with parenting through the pandemic where they received advice or were referred to community supports. In addition, brief consultations with a resource consultant were provided for families that had concerns about their child's development and the impact of COVID on the growth and development of their child.

## **Ontario Works**

As a result of the pandemic, reloadable payment cards were introduced as an alternative electronic method of payment for social assistance recipients who do have a bank account for direct deposit. This program provides an accessible, convenient, secure and reliable method of payment to support Peel residents who have no fixed address. In addition, and when pandemic guidelines permitted, staff were available to provide in-person support for clients who didn't have access to technology or weren't able to receive services remotely.

## **Homelessness Services**

To mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on homeless individuals, a number of initiatives were implemented including extra cleaning and personal protective equipment for shelter and transitional housing clients and staff, additional temporary housing to ensure adequate physical distancing was in place in the shelters, as well as an isolation and recovery program. In Peel Living, a number of additional isolation sites and beds were made available to assist with overflow and safety for homeless clients. A drop-in Centre was opened in the City of Brampton where the homeless were provided meals and an area to rest.



## Peel Living

Regular call out and wellness checks were made at the Region's Peel Living social housing buildings to ensure the well-being of residents during the pandemic. Communication with residents was increased to keep residents informed. In collaboration with the local food banks, food hampers were provided to all senior units during the holiday season.

## Waste Management

Waste Management offers walk up services and medical exemptions to assist the vulnerable population in setting out their waste carts for disposal. This service was being maintained through the COVID pandemic, however, preventive measures were put in place to encourage physical distancing between the Region's waste collection contractor and residents to reduce risk.

The existing waste collection medical exemption program available to residents was enhanced by implementing a formal process with Brampton Civic Hospital. The hospital now completes the application paperwork on behalf of residents. This will remain in place post-COVID. The Region is looking to expand this process to other hospitals in Peel as well as moving it to an online platform.

To support residents and staff through the COVID pandemic, the following actions were undertaken in Waste Management service provision:

- Speakers and plexiglass partitions were installed and cashless transactions was incorporated at the Community Recycling Centre (CRC) scale houses to ensure staff and the public safety.



- COVID-related signage was installed at Community Recycling Centres to remind the public to practice COVID safety measures.
- In-person communications between on-road staff and the public was suspended.
- Garbage bag tag sales was moved online when point-of-purchase locations were closed.
- April 2020 to February 2021, waste limits were changed to allow residents to set out a maximum of two extra bags of garbage without requiring bag tags.
- April 2020 to June 2020, all CRC fees were waived for residents and from June 2020 to January 2021 CRC fees were waived for loads less than 100kg

## **Financial Transparency and Supports**

As the situation with the pandemic quickly evolved, so did the needs of the community. Ongoing economic updates were posted on the Region of Peel website to ensure the community was kept up to date on the impacts of the COVID-19. In addition, information on federal and provincial supports were shared to assist residents and businesses in need as a result of the pandemic.

## **Public Works Facilities**

Several improvements were made to various Public Works facilities with enhanced space and accessibility within the sites. This included improved staff access and more open circulation space at our Community Recycling Centers and other facilities to better support our Water Treatment and Waste Management teams that serve our community.



Enhancing  
space and  
accessibility



## Diversity, equity, and inclusion







## Other Accessibility Initiatives in 2020

### AODA Website Compliance

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), all designated public sector organizations and large organizations shall make their internet websites and web content conform with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA. WCAG is a set of guidelines that includes making web content more accessible to people with disabilities. The deadline to meet this obligation under the AODA was January 1, 2021.

In 2020, the Region of Peel continued its efforts in meeting this timeline, however, some of the work was paused to address the immediate response to the pandemic. Despite this setback, a compliance strategy was implemented. This includes continued site audits to help reduce the scope of pdfs, guidelines to rethink ineffective practices, the installation of automated tools to assist with document remediation, considerations for alternative formats of content, working with stakeholders on records management accountability as well as the introduction of a corporate policy to ensure that content placed on the Region of Peel website is accessible. Microsoft 101 training sessions on accessible document creation were implemented as part of education and awareness to assist with overall document accessibility. This training will continue into 2021.

### Corporate Accessibility Training

In 2020, the Region of Peel refreshed its corporate accessibility training. A new training module was launched which incorporated the previous training modules into one comprehensive module that addresses the training requirements under the AODA. It includes training on the *Integrated Accessibility Standards* and the *Human Rights Code* as it pertains to persons with disabilities. The module provides ease for auditing and reporting to ensure that the Region is compliant with the Provincial training requirements. A campaign will be launched for the re-training of all Region of Peel staff and volunteers.

## Accessible Technologies

Technologies are continuously evolving and it is important that they do not create further barriers to accessing information. In 2020, the Region of Peel partnered with its Public Works department to implement Geocortex AODA-compliant software, built upon the Region's Esri GIS platform. This new "PAL" (Peel Asset Locator) software replaced the older non-AODA-compliant software used by Public Works field workers to locate and display water and wastewater assets, and related assets for subdivision and regional construction projects.

The Region's Salesforce Resident Portal was updated to provide an enhanced user experience including streamlined screen layout and password reset capability, and improving the Resident Portal's adherence to the AODA accessibility standards.

## Community Rest Areas

In 2020, twelve rest areas were installed in the Town of Caledon in senior's dense areas in accordance with the Rest Area Guidelines endorsed by the Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee. The rest areas align with the Region's Term of Council Priorities to advance community safety and well-being and expand community mobility, and the Region's 2018–2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

## Dynamic Symbol of Access

In July of 2019, the Region of Peel adopted the use of the Dynamic Symbol of Access (DSA) on Regional properties. The Region of Peel started replacing all existing symbols of access with the new DSA symbol on Regional facilities located in Mississauga and Caledon with the exception of the City of Brampton which was governed by a City by-law that specifically directs ground symbol guidelines and the use of the International Symbol of Access. In 2020, following a delegation by Region of Peel staff and the Region's AAC Chair advocating for the use of the DSA at regional facilities located within the City of Brampton, the City of Brampton AAC voted in favour of the request and received Council endorsement and an exemption to the City by-law was granted.

The DSA symbol depicts people with disabilities as more dynamic and serves as an opportunity to educate regarding the importance of removing barriers, both attitudinal and physical.



## National Housing Strategy, Co-investment Funding Agreement

In December 2020, the Region of Peel, Peel Housing Corporation and Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation (CMHC) finalized the National Housing Strategy, Co-investment Funding Agreement. This Funding Agreement will support the development of affordable housing units and emergency shelters in the Region of Peel's Housing Master Plan. This funding agreement includes commitments to achieve outcomes related to affordability; accessibility and energy conservation/greenhouse gas emissions. With regards to accessibility, projects will be constructed to achieve on a portfolio level basis, 21% or more of the housing units will be barrier free and all housing units will have full universal design in accordance with CMHC's criteria.

## Workforce Census

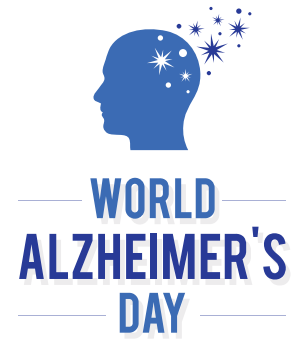
The Region is on a journey to becoming a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace. In 2020, the **We All Count! – Peel Workforce Census** was launched. The anonymous, online survey focused on the collection of demographic data and employee sentiments (feelings) that will help better understand our workforce and employee experiences with diversity, inclusion, racism and discrimination. Collecting this data was an essential first step to understanding the make-up of the organization and how representative our workforce is of the community we serve. Capturing this data will allow the Region of Peel to develop informed, evidence-based action planning to embed diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do.

## Events and Observances

Events and observances looked different in 2020 as we transitioned to a virtual approach. While an internal focused observance, National AccessAbility Week (NAAW) promoted accessibility through innovation and the Region's response to the pandemic. It focused on the different ways the Region of Peel has had to adapt to ensure that essential programs and services continued to be accessible and inclusive during times of crisis. This was an opportunity to continue to promote awareness within staff for the identification and removal of barriers brought on by the pandemic.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) built on the crisis of the pandemic. Using the UN's theme of "Building Better in a Post-Covid-19 World", this education campaign aimed to highlight the additional struggles and barriers the pandemic has caused, especially those living with disabilities, how the Region of Peel was supporting these needs and what could be done to assist Peel's vulnerable citizens.





World Alzheimer Day was also recognized on September 21. This observance aimed to increase knowledge and understanding about Alzheimer's disease and build awareness of this invisible disability by breaking down stereotypes and promoting inclusion. The Region of Peel is leading in breaking down stereotypes through its Butterfly Model of patient care, a new approach to patient care where the emotional needs of the individual is at the heart of the care.

### **Creating a Community for Life that is Inclusive and Accessible**

The accomplishments highlighted in this report demonstrate the Region of Peel's commitment to an inclusive and accessible community, even during turbulent and uncertain times as those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Region continues to seek opportunities to promote accessibility and remove barriers in its programs, services and public spaces while meeting the requirement of the AODA and its goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025 and bring to life the Region's vision of **Community for Life**.

As we continue to respond to the pandemic and plan for recovery, we must continue to ensure that the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities are being taken into consideration and that we are accessible and inclusive and continue to look for opportunities for improvement.





## We Welcome Your Feedback

Your feedback is important to us. Please let us know if you have any questions or feedback about the programs or services mentioned in this report, Peel Region's 2018-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan or about accessibility in general.

To request a copy of this report in an alternate format, please contact us at

**Call:** Toll-free **1-888-191-7800** or **905-791-7800**

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