



2021

Peel Region Accessibility Status Report

Moving forward to ensure
a safe and accessible Peel



Table of contents

Region of Peel’s Accessibility Status Report 2021 – moving forward to ensure a safe and accessible Peel.....	1
Statement of the Region of Peel’s commitment to accessibility	2
Office of Culture and Inclusion.....	2
Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee	3
COVID-19 Pandemic	4
Ongoing response to community needs.....	5
Mass vaccination clinics	5
Adult Day Services.....	6
Peel Adult Day Services (ADS) – Virtual caregiver retreats	6
Special needs resourcing.....	7
Licensed child care programs.....	8
Peel inclusion resources services intake	8
Child care subsidy.....	8
Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA)	8
Other accessibility initiatives.....	10
2021 milestone year for TransHelp.....	11
Seniors Health and Wellness Village at Peel Manor	12
Paramedics	12
Affordable housing	12
Age-friendly planning.....	13
Discover ability network	13
Employment project for youth with disabilities.....	14
Digital accessibility and website compliance	14
2021 AODA Accessibility Compliance Report	15
Peel facilities.....	15
Waste collection	15
Treat Accessibly Movement.....	15
Events and observances	16
Continuing our journey to create a Community for Life that is inclusive and accessible.....	17

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Peel Region Accessibility Status Report 2021 – moving forward to ensure a safe and accessible Peel

Learning to navigate the COVID-19 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 while implementing the requirements set out in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). It outlines the progress in 2021 to implement the Region of Peel's 2018 - 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (Multi-Year Plan).

2021 continued to be a challenging year with a sustained focus on the COVID-19 pandemic response. Lockdowns and restrictions continued as we tried to mitigate the spread of the virus during the various 'waves' of the pandemic. As the pandemic evolved so did our approach in the delivery of our programs and services. The Region worked with internal and external partners to roll out our Mass Vaccination Plan (MVP). However, vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, continued to be at greater risk of experiencing the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and access to services. The Region of Peel continues to take into consideration diversity, equity, and inclusion to support and promote vaccination efforts in high priority communities. Our vision of **Community for Life** aspires to create a place where everyone enjoys a sense of belonging and has access to services, programs and facilities that meet their needs. Inclusion cannot be achieved without accessibility.

To review the Region of Peel's 2018 - 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and previous accessibility status reports, visit peelregion.ca/accessibility/.



Statement of the Region of Peel's 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 service outcomes are the same for persons with disabilities 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'. The Office plays an integral role advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility across the Region of Peel's programs and services.

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In 2021, several steps were undertaken to assist in our efforts to develop a diverse and inclusive workplace and community:

- leadership declared diversity, equity, and inclusion an organizational priority as we continue to support our community and workforce.
- results from the We All Count! – Peel Workforce Census and Courageous Conversation Series were compiled leading to the creation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion recommendations.





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. The AAC helps bring to life the Region's vision of **Community for Life**, a place where everyone enjoys a sense of belonging and has access to the services and opportunities they need to thrive throughout each stage of their lives.

In 2021, virtual AAC meetings continued to be the norm and were made available for public viewing on our Regional website peelregion.ca. Closed captioning was made available and AAC members received ongoing training and support to ensure full participation. Despite the continued response to the pandemic, the work of the AAC was ongoing. Members were consulted on website accessibility, provided input for enhancements to the Region's agenda management tool, and conducted site plan reviews for two affordable/supportive housing projects and a Regional paramedic station.



COVID-19 Pandemic

Ongoing response to community needs

As we learned to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and respond to the challenges brought on by a global pandemic, we ensured the needs of the community were being met and responded to in a timely, inclusive, safe, and accessible manner. In 2021, the following actions to improve accessibility and remove barriers were undertaken as part of our pandemic response.

Mass vaccination clinics

The Region of Peel is committed to supporting COVID-19 mass vaccinations for everyone in our community. Several mass vaccination clinics were set up at various facilities conveniently located to reduce travel distances. Sites were reviewed and selected to ensure there was sufficient parking with accessible stalls, clear access to the site and space that was well designed to serve all residents of Peel. This included the provision of bold, high contrast signage, large circulation spaces, quiet areas, and sit/stand desk options to provide enhanced services when required. In partnership with the Canadian Hearing Society, virtual sign language and sound amplifying devices were made available. Customer contact provisions included the availability of translation, relay service, web chat and virtual web assistance.

In addition, several resident-facing solutions were implemented, in support of the Region's Mass Vaccination Program. These included: homebound vaccination, which assists residents who cannot physically leave their home to receive the vaccine due to medical, social, or other cognitive reasons; vaccination appointment request forms; and out-of-province vaccination registration.

Free shuttle services were provided by TransHelp, Peel's accessible transportation service, to assist residents that were not able to access the clinic through other methods of transit.



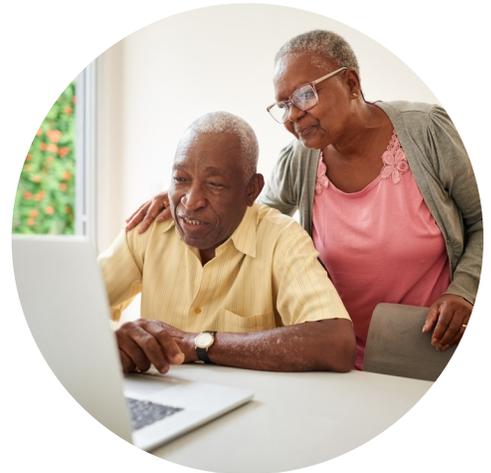
Adult Day Services

Reassessment of client needs has been ongoing throughout the pandemic which included access to technology, barriers to communication and overall ability to participate in virtual social recreation programs and healthcare. Individualized plans were developed to address barriers to accessing supports. In response to the results of reassessments, funders have been engaged to seek resources to address the barriers to accessing technology and are currently implementing a technology lending program. Goals for this program included:

- increased digital literacy
- reduced social isolation, and
- improving access to technology for older adults and their caregivers

A prioritization tool was developed to help determine needs and to provide appropriate referrals to internal and external resources.

To address increasing waitlists to programs, Volunteer Resources was engaged to implement a new Telephone Companion program matching volunteers with clients and caregivers to receive a friendly call from a specially trained volunteer.



Peel Adult Day Services (ADS) Virtual caregiver retreats

In addition to ensuring ongoing adult day services for older adults in the community, the Region of Peel recognizes the important roles that caregivers play in the provision of care, especially as we continued to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the Region of Peel hosted virtual caregiver retreats. These retreats included keynote speakers, door prizes, fun activities, and breakout rooms and celebrated the important work that caregivers do with a focus on mental health. Technology training sessions are also offered ahead of the retreats to ensure participants have a smooth and successful experience:

EarlyON

Brief consultations were offered online with an EarlyON Resource Consultant for families who had concerns about their child's development and the impact of COVID-19 on their child's growth and development for children birth to 6 years of age. In addition, workshops were provided to support parents on a variety of topics: understanding challenging behaviour, building resilience in young children and much more.

2021 work to enhance accessibility at EarlyON locations included the opening of three locations with full accessibility and an additional two locations were retrofitted to improve accessibility. Accessibility features at these locations include a ramp or flat entry and an accessible washroom. Some locations also include colour contrast for those with low vision. All locations comply with accessibility provisions and the Ontario Building Code.

As we move back to in-person programs, EarlyON staff have placed hand sanitizers and other disinfectant stations at a height that everyone can access, including people using mobility devices.

Staff also have an understanding that wearing masks and personal protective equipment may not be possible for some people with a disability or illness, ensuring that those that cannot wear a mask or face covering have access to the same programming.

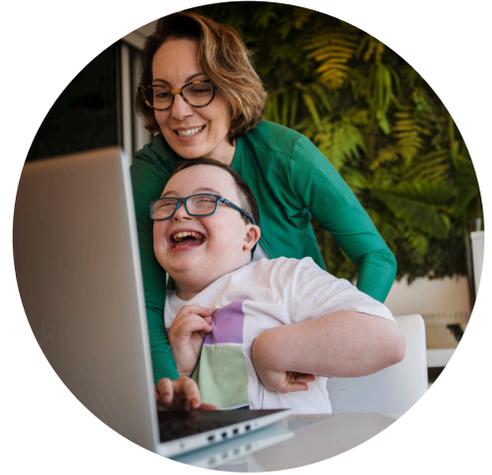
Special needs resourcing

During Emergency Child Care, virtual resource consultation support was provided to Educators which included strategy and resource sharing, as well as goal development support, to support the inclusion, participation, and safety of children with special needs in ECC sites. ECC sites also had access to short term, goal focused consultation, focusing on safety, inclusion, and inclusive practices.



Licensed child care programs

Virtual resource consultation support was provided to support children, child care programs/educators and families. Limited in person resource consultation support was provided to support children, child care programs/educators. Parameters included the number of cohorts that could be visited a week, direction on the use of personal protective equipment and health and safety guidelines.



Peel inclusion resources services intake

In 2021 Peel Inclusion Resources Services intake and referral was moved online. This has provided families with increased access to completing a PIRS referral for Resource Consultation support at a time that works for them.

Child care subsidy

All communications to clients were reviewed to ensure reading level is acceptable and accessible for all audiences. Situations were addressed and assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the best interest of the child, and family, through flexible solutions and application of policy. Clients were supported with flexible delivery of Emergency Child Care so that families who wished to remain in an existing licensed home child care centre could do so. In addition, time frames were extended for the submission of key documentation due to the difficulty in getting documents from third parties during pandemic-related closures and restrictions.

Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA)

In 2021, PAMA continued its virtual offerings in light of the pandemic. Partnering with Dancing with Parkinson and Autism Ontario, PAMA was able to offer virtual interactive Art workshops. Families throughout Canada with participants between the ages of 6 -100 were welcomed to review works from the PAMA's Art Gallery collections and interpret the works by either designing new pieces or transforming the visual pieces into movement. The digitization of Museum Memories allowed items from within the Museum collections to be shared with the seniors residing in Peel's Long Term Care facilities. Museum Memories, a program encouraging cognitive recollection, provides an interactive opportunity for groups or individuals to reflect on items from their past.

PAMA provided 224 Creative Expressions instructional kits which allowed teachers to facilitate self-led Art programs. In addition, 65 design Art kits were sold to the general public to support virtual led interactive activities during Halloween and the Christmas holidays. PAMA talks, tutorials and workshops began being offered on the PAMA YouTube channel for greater access and convenience.

691 digital resources were placed on Region of Peel Archives page which expanded the ability to share historical resources while ensuring the Archives continued to service reference requests during the closure of our reading room due to the pandemic. In addition, Meditation Moments was created as an opportunity to combine art and mindfulness for Region of Peel residents. These segments are possible through a partnership using art from PAMA's collection with the Region of Peel meditation team.

PAMA's facilities also underwent upgrades to improve accessibility and promote inclusion. In November 2021, infant changing tables were installed in washrooms along with the addition of an all-gender washroom in one of the classrooms of the Museum. Wayfinding signage in the Art Gallery and Courthouse was finalized. Outdoor portable signs were also purchased, and a map for easier wayfinding was implemented while the facility underwent construction. Public lockers in the Art Gallery were upgraded to larger ones and relocated to the same level as the information desk making them easier to access. In addition, anti-glare film was installed on the plexiglass barriers at the Access Peel desk. The film dulls the glare on the barrier and allows visitors clearer sight of the information desk.





Other accessibility initiatives

2021 milestone year for TransHelp!

2021 was a significant year for the Peel's accessible transportation service. TransHelp booking went digital, providing passengers the option to book trips online, improving the passenger experience while reducing calls to the call centre and phone wait times. Prior to this, TransHelp passengers had to call in to book each trip. This meant booking within certain hours and waiting on the phone to speak with a representative. Passengers asked for a digital booking option and the Region of Peel delivered on this promise, despite the unprecedented events brought on by the pandemic.

Online booking allows passengers to:

- book, cancel or confirm a trip from any device;
- track the bus in real-time; and
- receive instant confirmation email.

This is one important step forward in TransHelp's modernization. It was a major effort with input from many stakeholders, including TransHelp passengers.

2021 also marked a big milestone for specialized public transit in Peel as TransHelp celebrated 40 years of service. What a difference 40 years makes!

In **1981**, TransHelp

- Had 190 passengers.
- Employed 13 people.
- Had 6 modified vans.
- Used pencils and paper for scheduling.
- Offered limited service on Saturdays and evenings, with no service on Sundays.

In **2021**, TransHelp

- Had 10,000 passengers.
- Employed 150 people.
- Had 71 buses plus contracted taxi vendors.
- Used digital scheduling software.
- Offered service 7 days a week until 1 a.m., 365 days a year.



Seniors Health and Wellness Village at Peel Manor

By 2041, one in five residents in Peel will be over the age of 65.

Accelerated growth is expected among the oldest seniors in Peel, with the proportion of residents 85 years and older anticipated to grow from one (1) per cent to 3.8 per cent between 2011 and 2041. The Region of Peel is continuously working to ensure seniors have access to the services they need, and to enhance community and home care services. The development of a Seniors Health and Wellness Village at the existing Peel Manor Long Term Care site is a key component of Regional efforts to enhance supports and services for seniors.

The site will include a long-term care centre and a service hub with health, social, and community services. In 2021, Region of Peel Council approved the use of additional funding to support the expansion of the Adult Day Services program and respite centre. Move-in and operational start-up is scheduled for mid-2022.



Paramedics

Paramedic Services continue to comply with all the guidance contained in the AODA as new facilities are built. Facility building plans are brought to Peel's Accessibility Advisory Committee for their endorsement and possible recommendations.

Affordable housing

In 2019, Regional Council approved the Housing Master Plan (HMP), which includes 31 development opportunities on lands owned by the Region and Peel Housing Corporation. The Housing Master Plan is a key action of the Peel Housing and Homelessness Plan; it supports the strategy to build more affordable housing. The HMP, if fully funded, can create 5,650 new affordable rental, supportive units, and emergency shelter beds to the housing stock in Peel by 2034.

All the Region of Peel housing and shelter projects have dedicated barrier free units. Also, the portfolio of projects receiving funding from the National Housing Co-Investment Fund will meet Universal Design criteria and at least 21% of the units will be accessible.

Progress is being made in implementing the Housing Master Plan. In early 2021, the Region completed the 360 City Centre Drive project, which provides 174 affordable and market rental units, including 37 barrier-free units, for families, singles, and seniors.

In addition, the Region also leads several non-HMP projects and third-party led projects that are funded through the federal, provincial, and regional funding. Brampton Bramalea

Christian Fellowship Residences Ltd. (BBCFR) is a third-party led project that was completed and opened for occupancy in 2021. The project provides 90 affordable and market units, including 29 accessible units.

Age-friendly planning

Peel Region is preparing for its aging population by supporting the vision to make Peel more age-friendly where seniors have access to services that enable them to age safely and with dignity, while maximizing their quality of life. An age-friendly community enables people of all ages to be engaged and participate in community activities and treats everyone with respect, regardless of age. An Age-Friendly Community is a place that makes it easy for older adults (aged 55+) and seniors (65+) to:

- stay active;
- maintain physical and mental well-being;
- stay connected to people that are important to them; and
- access services, facilities, and programs that are responsive to their needs.



To plan for a healthy and active aging population, in 2021 Peel undertook an Age-Friendly Communities Built Environment

Assessment. The built environment includes many areas in which people live, work, and play, like streets, road crossings, parks, and commercial areas. The project intends to gather information on the diverse seniors population in Peel and elements of the design of Peel communities. Focus groups were conducted to discuss the experiences of seniors, service providers, and caregivers in Peel. The results will identify gaps and recommend opportunities in Peel to address healthy, active aging, and universal (accessible) design in all aspects of the built environment and public spaces.

Discover ability network

In 2021, the Region of Peel undertook to explore a potential partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and their Discover Ability Network. The Discover Ability Network is a free program that connects qualified job seekers with a disability to organizations who are seeking talent. The program provides a free job-matching platform, free training and resources, and free networking events to all interested parties including, people with disabilities, businesses, service providers, and post-secondary institutions. The Region of Peel agreed to pilot the platform and tap into this pool of candidates.

Employment project for youth with disabilities

In 2021 Peel collaborated with the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services (MCCSS) to pilot a project called Employment Project for Youth with Disabilities, referred to as the Youth Project. The purpose of the initiative is to provide an enhanced and intensive case management approach to youth with disabilities (ages 14-29) to plan for employment and community inclusion opportunities. Specially trained caseworkers use a flexible, personalized approach when working with youth and their support system to help them:

- set goals, identify barriers, and develop an action plan
- connect to services in the community such as mental health, employment services, and housing supports
- gain skills and education
- prepare for and find employment

A total of 58 youth with disabilities were accepted into the program and provided with support to achieve their goals. The pilot ends in March 2022 and the outcomes will be evaluated by MCCSS.



Digital accessibility and website compliance

In 2021, the Region of Peel continued its efforts in meeting website compliance. Unfortunately, the ongoing focus on the pandemic response delayed this work, however, great strides were made in pushing the digital accessibility agenda forward. It became clear that digital accessibility was an organization wide responsibility and an interdisciplinary AODA internal working group was established. In an effort to elevate accessibility at the Region of Peel, the working group involves different areas of the organization working together in a strategic manner to advance Peel's accessibility mandate as it relates to digital accessibility. One of the first tasks that came out of the working group is the development of an Accessibility Peel SharePoint hub, which launched early 2022.

The approval of the Advancing Digital Service Delivery project in October 2021 provided a roadmap for the future of digital services at the Region of Peel. It is a three-year plan to deliver end-to-end services that are accessible, easy to find and use. This includes a redesigned website that is built around services using a modern, accessible framework.

In addition, our customer contact provisions included the availability of translation, relay service, web chat and virtual web assistance.

2021 AODA Accessibility Compliance Report

The Region of Peel filed its Accessibility Compliance Report with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility by the stipulated timeline. Once again, Peel was proud to report compliance to all the questions posed in the report, except the one pertaining to accessible websites and web content. While great strides are being made to ensure website compliance, the Region of Peel is of the mindset that Accessibility goes beyond adherence to specific criteria and involves a comprehensive approach to ensure an accessible and positive end user experience.

Peel facilities

The Region of Peel continues to look for opportunities to improve and upgrade our built environments to ensure accessibility for those using our facilities. Updates were made to elevators in Peel's administrative offices to bring them to new accessibility standards, including the addition of an elevator floor announcer. Part of the renovations of this facility will include washrooms that will be enhanced to meet new accessibility standards.



Waste collection

A new resident-facing AODA-compliant garbage tag solution was implemented in 2021. This new garbage tag solution replaced the previous older non-AODA-compliant software and offers the flexibility of ordering by mail. Additional garbage tags are required when exceeding the 2-bag limit.

Treat Accessibly Movement

The Region of Peel took part in the Treat Accessibly Movement. The movement helps to make Halloween accessible for children with disabilities and their families. October 7, 2021 was acknowledged as Treat Accessibly Day at Peel and an accessible and inclusive Halloween experience was promoted through various communication channels.

Events and observances

Events and observances continued to take a virtual approach in 2021. Closed captioning and chat features are a standard for all virtual events, while ensuring that attendees are aware of the availability of accommodations. Events were also recorded and provided on secure portal for those not able to attend the event. Some of the accessibility related events and observances for 2021 included:

National AccessAbility Week:

In partnership with the AAC, the Region of Peel hosted a virtual event acknowledging National AccessAbility Week. The event included keynote speakers and AAC members Carol-Ann Chafe and Naz Husain who shared their lived experience about the barriers faced by people with disabilities and how the pandemic has exacerbated this situation. Attendees gained a better understanding of what we can do to break down barriers and promote inclusivity.



World Autism Awareness Day – April 2nd:

In collaboration with Peel Regional Paramedic Services (PRPS), the Region of Peel commemorated World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, 2021. The day aimed to build awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorder, increase knowledge and understanding and invoke sensitivity for those living with autism. The campaign included a video of a PRPS employee sharing her lived experience as a person living with autism. The day was also observed corporately and through various social media outlets.



National Disability Employment Awareness Month – October:

Through an internal awareness campaign, Peel commemorated National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This observance aims to increase public awareness of the positive outcomes of hiring persons with disabilities in Canada and the positive impact persons with disabilities have when they are employed. Region of Peel staff learned about the realities that persons with disabilities face in obtaining employment as well as the positive contributions employees with disabilities make to Canadian workplaces.



International Day of Persons with Disabilities – December 3rd:

On December 3, 2021 the Region of Peel commemorated International Day of Persons with Disabilities with the theme of “I am More than My Disability”. The day was acknowledged through a virtual lunch and learn and consisted of sharing videos and having an intimate dialogue around mental health and how stigma continues to be a barrier that many people with visible and invisible disabilities continue to face.



International
Day of
Persons with
Disabilities
3 DECEMBER

Continuing our journey to create a *Community for Life* that is inclusive and accessible

The accomplishments highlighted in this report demonstrate the Region of Peel's ongoing commitment to an inclusive and accessible community while ensuring health and safety in response to 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 requirements 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 changing challenges brought on by the pandemic we 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:

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