

2020–2021 Annual Report



Accessibility Standards
Canada

Normes d'accessibilité
Canada

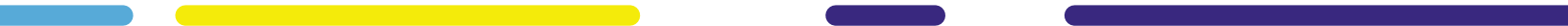
Canada

This publication is available for download at
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Message from the Chairperson

As I look back and reflect on the past year, I could not be more proud of this organization. We all faced unprecedented challenges. Still, our organization was able to continue to deliver results. As you will see in this report, 2020 to 2021 was a year in which we kept our focus on our goal of a barrier-free Canada from coast to coast to coast.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged us as a society. Many persons with disabilities experience greater barriers because of it. It showed us the importance of having accessibility standards in place. As an interim measure, the organization developed accessibility guidelines for COVID-19 and other emergencies.

Despite the pandemic, the Board was able to learn from and use our first public consultations when setting the priorities. Board members are firmly committed to the mission entrusted in them. The Board is comprised of persons with disabilities to reflect the principle of Nothing Without Us. It is critical that the work of our organization maintains this principle. We must work with persons with disabilities and their organizations.

We will only succeed if we are able to develop and implement rigorous and effective standards. That work has begun. Technical committees have already started to develop our first four standards. What's more, we have identified another five priorities for standard development – our work does not stop.

Clearly, our focus was to achieve concrete results. Still, we did not neglect our long-term vision; one of a Canada without barriers. This will not happen overnight, which is why the Board has started to develop a road map to 2040. We are working with our partners to determine the best path toward our goal of a barrier-free Canada.

We are committed to developing effective standards that remove and prevent barriers. We are committed to doing this by working with persons with disabilities throughout the country. These are our commitments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Bérubé', with a stylized, flowing script.

Paul-Claude Bérubé,
Chairperson



Message from the Chief Executive Officer

After our first year filled with major milestones, the past year saw us make tangible progress toward our mandate. Despite the challenges of a pandemic, we actually managed to gather momentum and achieve more than anticipated. We continued to build our organization and were able to dive into our core business of developing standards.

We kept our focus on establishing standard development committees. These groups of accessibility experts are already developing standards in the areas of:

- plain language;
- outdoor spaces;
- employment; and
- emergency egress.

We kept our focus on funding innovative research that will fuel accessibility standards. Through our program Advancing Accessibility Standards Research, we signed 18 funding agreements with organizations. We also launched our second competitive call for proposals.

We kept our focus on sharing information about accessibility. We created four sets of accessibility guidelines in the context of COVID-19, to help persons with disabilities and organizations. We hope they will serve as best practices for other types of emergencies as well.

We kept our focus on collaborating with Canadians with disabilities and stakeholders. No matter the circumstances, receiving input from Canadians to inform our work is vital. A big thank you to all those who provided input during our first online public consultation.

We kept our focus on hiring a strong and diverse workforce. I am proud of this group and everything that we have accomplished.

However, if 2020 showed us anything, it's that we still have a lot of work to do. We already look forward to creating new technical committees, and are partnering with other standard development organizations, provinces and territories to develop standards.

Year three is on the horizon, and we will keep our focus on working together to break down barriers. After all, collaborating with persons with disabilities is the only way to build a truly accessible Canada.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Philip Rizcallah". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Philip" and last name "Rizcallah" clearly distinguishable.

Philip Rizcallah,
Chief Executive Officer

1 About us

Vision

Everyone, including people with disabilities, can:

- expect a Canada without barriers; and
- be sure that opportunities and services are fully accessible.

Mission

People with disabilities lead Accessibility Standards Canada to create a Canada without barriers. We work with people with disabilities to:

- create modern accessibility standards in priority areas;
- revise current accessibility standards;
- lead research; and
- support society to reach the highest level of accessibility.



Values

These six value statements guide our work. We value:

1. The knowledge and experience of people with disabilities. We expect those we collaborate with to show this same value.
2. The diversity of society. Our work respects human rights and focuses on including everyone.
3. A Canada without barriers where people with disabilities can expect the same high level of access across the country.
4. Universal access where services, products and places are designed to be accessible to everyone.
5. Two-way communication in all areas of our work. It must be:
 - open;
 - accessible;
 - timely; and
 - clear.
6. Lived experience of disability and research as equally important when making decisions.

These values are based on the principles outlined in the *Accessible Canada Act*.

2 Board of Directors

As we described in [last year's annual report](#), our organization is unique. A [10 person Board of Directors](#) leads our organization. The Board represents the views and perspectives of the community of persons with disabilities.

Following a fruitful first year, which established our organization as a key player in the field of accessibility standards development, our Board was eager to do more. We had a clear vision and mandate, as well as a robust framework that includes by-laws and policies. It was now time to put things into action and start working toward real, concrete change.

“Now in our second year, Accessibility Standards Canada is showing how we will contribute to a barrier free Canada by 2040. The Roadmap will ensure we keep on track by ensuring we measure against milestones identified.”

– **Maureen Haan**, Board of Directors member

2.1 Overview of Board activities

The Board of Directors was excited to host our first annual public meeting and engage with the public in person. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, we cancelled the meeting. The pandemic also prevented the Board and its standing committees to hold meetings in different Canadian cities.

The Board adapted to the new reality and carried on with business as usual. It approved an interim strategic plan early in the year to change the way it executed its priorities and activities.

Key accomplishments

- Establishing priorities for new standards and our grants and contributions program.
- 12 virtual meetings and 3 training sessions on:
 - the standards development process and national codes system;
 - the accreditation process as a standards development organization; and
 - Indigenous awareness.
- Setting the CEO's objectives for 2020 to 2021.
- Directing the organization to support the work of the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group, which involved developing accessibility guidelines related to COVID and other emergencies.
- Updating its By-laws and governance policies to improve the governance framework moving forward.
- Adopting new protocols to enhance internal communications and Board effectiveness.
- Developing and implementing an internal accessibility policy to enhance accessibility practices.

2021 priority areas

Standards:

- emergency measures (particularly during a pandemic)
- wayfinding, including signage (finding location and destination)
- procurement (buying goods and services)
- acoustics (sound quality)

Research:

- design and delivery of programs and services
- built environment with a focus on Heritage buildings
- accessibility in Indigenous communities
- information and communication technology
- communication (other than plain language)
- procurement

2.2 Committee reports

Members of the Board of Directors contribute to the work of four standing committees. These committees give advice to the Board and make recommendations specific to the mandate of each committee. After a busy first year, standing committees kept their focus and continued to support the Board on all fronts. In total, we held 31 committee meetings.

Key Accomplishments

External relations committee

Role

Give advice and ideas to the Board of Directors about including persons with disabilities and other partners in the organization's activities.

2020 Highlights

- Provided insight into communications strategy.
- Directed the development of a stakeholder engagement strategy.
- Provided direction on virtual national consultations that informed research and standards development priorities.
- Identified strategies and tools to increase our reach and allow us to engage more partners (read [engagement section](#) for more).

Governance committee

Role

Provide advice to the Board of Directors on governance issues and training requirements.

2020 Highlights

- Reviewed and updated the organization's by-laws and governance policy.
- Made great progress on Board training and on the development of a roadmap for future training.

Strategic planning committee

Role

Propose a strategic plan to help the Board of Directors govern the organization. Propose a vision and values that guide the work of our organization.

2020 Highlights

- Working on a roadmap to guide work for the next 20 years. This roadmap will help remove barriers in the 7 priority areas in the *Accessible Canada Act*, by 2040. Implementation is expected for fiscal year 2021 to 2022.
- Kept the organization's focus on creating new standards and strengthening existing ones.
- Identified guidelines and tools to help implement standards and research on accessibility best practices.
- Through this roadmap, identified milestones that will keep us on track to achieve our goal of a Canada free of barriers.



Performance appraisal committee

Role

Develop, maintain and regularly review the tools used for the annual performance review of the Board of Directors and the CEO.

2020 highlights

- Completed the work on the review of the performance framework for the CEO
- Worked in conjunction with the Strategic Planning Committee to establish commitments for the review period (ending March 31, 2020).

“Accessibility Standards Canada is committed to developing accessibility standards and resources that really do remove barriers. This is critical for Canada’s social and economic well-being and for that of its citizens.”

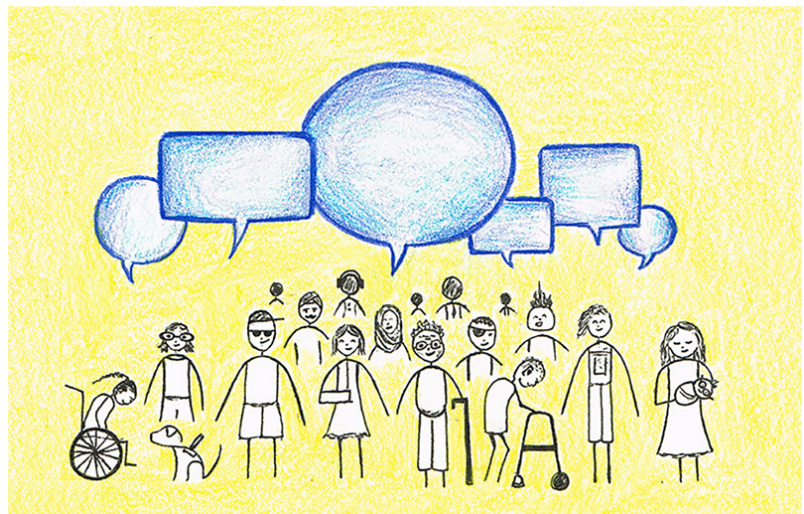
– **Mary Reid**, Vice-Chairperson, Board of Directors

3 Engagement

Engaging Canadians is at the heart of everything we do. Nothing is done without first engaging Canadians and seeking their expertise. Despite the challenges that the pandemic presented last year, we kept our focus on engaging with persons with disabilities and other stakeholders.

3.1 Online Consultation

We held our first national consultations in the fall of 2020. It was very successful: 588 Canadians participated. Most of the participants had disabilities or represented organizations of and for persons with disabilities.



Participants were invited to:

- fill the online survey;
- access American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) versions of the survey and provide feedback in ASL or LSQ;
- provide feedback through phone interviews; and
- provide feedback through other ways such as mail and email.

The consultations helped us determine:

- how to engage Canadians in our work;
- what kind of research to support; and
- which barriers to address in our standards.

Read our [consultation report](#) – available in accessible formats – and discover what Canadians had to say.

Throughout the year, we held roundtables with key stakeholders. They provided feedback on each set of accessibility guidelines we developed in the context of COVID-19. Learn more about these in the [guideline section](#).

3.2 Stakeholder engagement

Over the last year, we continued to expand our stakeholder database. As of today, we engage with over 3,500 stakeholders – and the list continues to grow everyday. We put the emphasis on under-represented categories this year.

More importantly, we continued to build strong relationships with:

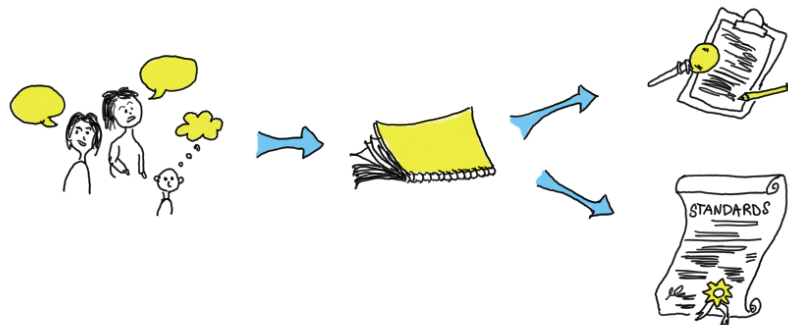
- the community of persons with disabilities;
- municipal and provincial governments;
- Indigenous governments and organizations;
- industry partners; and
- many others.

We collaborated closely with government departments that focus on accessibility and disability inclusion. We co-led the planning for:

- the Government of Canada's National AccessAbility Week celebrations; and
- the Government of Canada's International Day for Persons with Disabilities celebrations.

We also participated in the following inter-departmental working groups:

- the Accessibility Strategy Working Group;
- the Parliamentary Precinct Accessibility Advisory Committee;
- the Centre Block Rehabilitation Project's Universal Accessibility Committee; and
- the working group on the coordination of external consultations for accessibility plans.



“As experts on our limitations, we want Accessibility Standards Canada to be connected to the realities on the ground for people with disabilities across Canada. We all share the same goal: a barrier-free Canada by 2040. To achieve this goal, policies, regulations, standards, codes of practice and guidelines must be put in place that reflect our perspectives and respect the “nothing about us, without us” approach.”

– **Jérôme Plante**, Case manager, Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN)

3.3 Public events

Last year, we had to cancel our first annual public meeting due to COVID-19. It was going to be the first time the public met the Board of Directors in person. For this year’s public meeting, we are planning an accessible virtual event. It will be held in the spring of 2021 and will provide an opportunity for:

- the Board of Directors to present our goals and achievements to date; and
- stakeholders to provide input and connect with us.

Looking ahead, we are planning a virtual youth roundtable. This will be an opportunity for us to build relationships with young Canadians with disabilities. We want to hear and better understand their unique perspectives.

3.4 Outreach tools

In 2020 to 2021, we continued to develop tools to interact with Canadians and support stakeholder engagement.

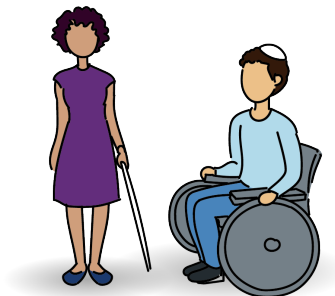
First, we launched our brand guide, which is a model of accessibility. It will serve as a reference for any organization that wants to ensure their designs are accessible.

We kept our focus on engaging Canadians through communication campaigns. We continued to promote our programs and launched four successful technical committee recruitment processes.

We continued to grow our networks on social media. Now, we engage with stakeholders daily on:

- [Facebook](#);
- [Twitter](#);
- [LinkedIn](#); and
- [YouTube](#).

We held a public photo contest for National AccessAbility Week. We also published our e-newsletter on a monthly basis.



In December 2020, we migrated [our website](#) to an accessible and easy to use platform. This was perhaps our most important communications achievement as it gave us complete control of our webpages. This meant more flexibility, which allowed us to tailor it to our audience's specific needs. We are constantly working with experts. We undergo user accessibility testing to improve the accessibility of our site. Read our website's [accessibility statement](#) to learn about our commitment.

We encourage Canadians to [provide feedback](#) all year long and to subscribe to our [newsletter](#).

4 Standards and technical committees

Developing standards to increase accessibility is our primary focus. In the last year, we made big strides in this area.

Once our standards are developed, they can be recommended to the Minister to be made into regulations. This means that federally-regulated entities will be required to implement them.



4.1 Standards under development

Four technical committees are already working to identify and eliminate accessibility barriers. We created these committees last year, through an open application process. Committees include persons with disabilities and other experts in the following categories:

- Industry and commerce
- Governmental authorities
- Consumers and Public Interest
- Workers and Trade Unions
- Academic and research organizations
- Non-governmental organizations
- Standards Development Organizations



A technical committee is a group of people from different organizations and backgrounds who combine their expertise to solve a problem facing an industry.

Our committees will identify where persons with disabilities may experience barriers. They will develop a national standard, or suite of standards, to eliminate these barriers.

Technical committees for [plain language](#) and [outdoor spaces](#)

- Our very first technical committees have been meeting since October 2020.
- So far, the committees have identified barriers and developed the clauses for their respective standards.
- Expected public review date: late 2021.
- Expected publication: 2022.

Technical committees for [employment](#) and [emergency egress \(exits\)](#)

- The above-mentioned committees were selected early 2021.
- Work has begun to identify accessibility barriers in their respective areas.

Across the four technical committees mentioned above, 49% of members are persons with disabilities.

4.2 Next set of standards

Last December, our Board of Directors identified four new priorities for standards development in 2021 to 2022. These include:

- emergency measures;
- wayfinding, including signage;
- procurement; and
- acoustics (sound quality).

We will establish technical committees for these in the coming months. Canadian experts can look forward to submitting their applications once we launch the process on our website.

Learning from experts in a variety of areas is vital to our organization's success. As such, we are collaborating with:

- the CSA Group to develop a new/revised electronic payment terminals standard;
- the CSA Group and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to co-brand an accessible housing standard; and
- the National Research Council of Canada to improve the accessibility of the built environment.

In March, we started recruiting members for the built environment technical committee.

“It’s really important for us all to work together in building an accessible Canada. There’s no ‘one size fits all’ answer to accessibility, and the more we collaborate, the farther we will go.”

– **Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai**, Ph.D., Director of Research and Chief Inclusion & Accessibility Officer, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)



5 Funding research

Our grants and contributions program – [Advancing Accessibility Standards Research](#) – supports research projects that will inform standards that find, remove and prevent obstacles to accessibility.

5.1 Objectives

The Program allows us to work with many people and organizations across Canada. Our goal is to make progress in accessibility standards research. The Program also has the following goals:

- to involve persons with disabilities, other experts and organizations to help carry out the research; and
- to find and share research, information, best practices and tools about accessibility obstacles and standards.

5.2 Projects funded in fiscal year 2020 to 2021

Following a competitive call for research project proposals, we assessed all applications. In the end, we approved and funded [18 research projects](#).

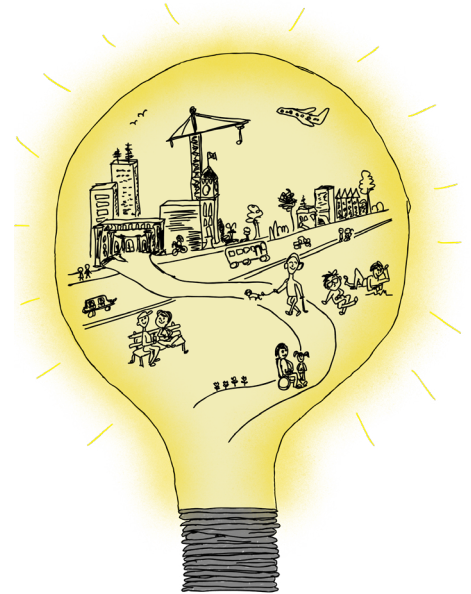


5.3 Research priorities for fiscal year 2021 to 2022

Looking forward to our 2021 call for proposals, we asked Canadians about their research funding priorities.

Following the review of the input received, the Board of Directors identified the following research priorities:

- Accessibility in Indigenous communities
- Built environment, with a focus on Heritage buildings;
- Communication, other than plain language;
- Design and delivery of programs and services;
- Information and communication technologies; and
- Procurement (buying) of goods, services and facilities.



5.4 Call for proposals 2021 to 2022

Our organization recently completed its second call for proposals. It focused on the research areas listed above. The process ended on March 25 and approved projects will be chosen soon.

6 Accessibility guidelines for COVID-19 and other emergencies

The pandemic brought challenges for all Canadians. It amplified existing barriers and created new barriers for persons with disabilities. To help with this serious situation, our organization created four accessibility guidelines for COVID-19 or other emergencies.



The guidelines provide information on accessibility best practices and tips about the following topics:

- [accessible practices for returning to the workplace](#) and [best practices for accessibility when working from home](#);
- accessible communication during COVID-19 and other emergencies [for persons with disabilities](#) and [organizations](#);
- accessible service delivery; and
- emergency and public health barriers.

We consulted with stakeholders to make sure that these guidelines met the needs of Canadians with disabilities.

The guidelines are available in the [resources section of our website](#). For each set, you can access a series of downloadable one-pagers. The guidelines are available in French, English, ASL and LSQ. Alternate formats are also available on request.



7 Finance

One of the most important milestones in our first year was receiving our own budget.

The table below represents the resources available and used during fiscal year 2020 to 2021. You can find more details about our financial activities in the 2020 to [2021 Departmental Results Report](#). Expect it on our website in fall 2021.

Details	Full-Time Equivalent	Salary	Operating & Maintenance	Total – Operating	Grants & Contributions	Total
Actual Spending						
Operating	38.8	4,427,781	4,938,757	9,366,538	N/A	9,366,538
Grants & Contributions	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5,237,602	5,237,602
Total 2020 to 2021 Funding						
Main Estimates	46	4,820,511	6,169,209	10,989,720	5,500,000	16,489,720

8 Looking ahead

“Engagement of our stakeholders is key to ensuring that the work of Accessibility Standards Canada reflects the needs and views of Canadians with disabilities. We are so grateful to the hundreds of individuals with disabilities and organizations who provided their opinions and suggestions that have helped inform our priorities. Your input was very valuable and appreciated.”

- **Penny Hartin**, Board of Directors member

For the past year, our team worked strictly from home. It has been an adjustment, but we adapted well.

This new reality made it easy to forget that some of our colleagues were hard at work on completing our new work offices. Currently, we are in the final steps of the construction. It will be a modern and inclusive workplace; a workplace that is a model of accessibility. Dare we say, the most accessible workplace in Canada? That is certainly the goal. We plan to complete the project in summer 2021 and move into our new offices as soon as permissible.

In the year ahead, we are also taking the steps to become a standards development organization accredited by the Standards Council of Canada. This means that our standards will be developed following an approved process, ensuring they reflect the input of Canadians. It will make them official standards of Canada and help ensure that they are more widely adopted.

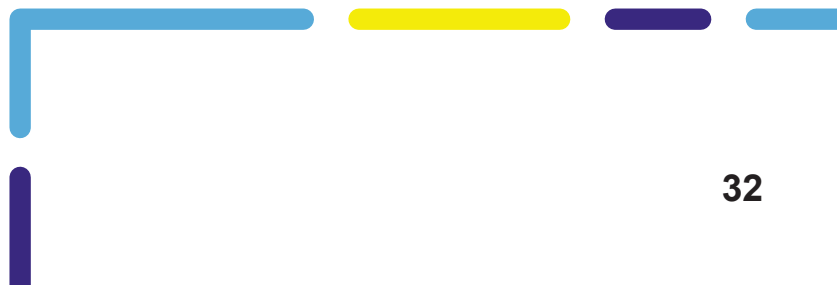
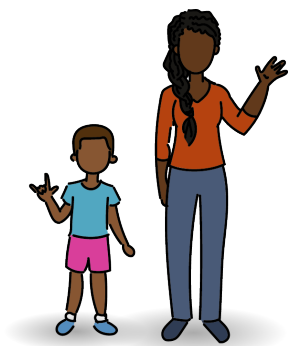
We plan to be fully staffed over the next year. We will continue to try to attract top and diverse talent.

Roadmap to 2040

We mentioned above that the Board of Directors was working on a roadmap. Once completed, we will share this roadmap with Canadians. It will show them our plans to get us to an accessible Canada by 2040.

Finally, we will continue to build relationships with our many stakeholders. Nothing is possible without the expertise and support from our partners, including:

- persons with disabilities;
- provinces and territories;
- Indigenous organizations; and
- standards development organizations.



Appendices

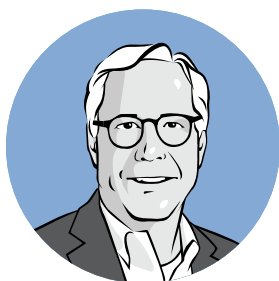
Appendix 1: Board members



Paul-Claude Bérubé,
Chairperson



Mary Reid,
Vice-Chairperson



William Adair,
Director



Kory L. Earle,
Director



Maureen Haan,
Director



Penny Hartin,
Director



Rabia S. Khedr,
Director



Brad McCannell,
Director



Dr. Joe McLaughlin,
Director



Laurie Ringaert,
Director



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