

# Access and Inclusion for Visitors with Disabilities

Engaging with guests, that may have a range of disabilities, can be an unfamiliar experience for some team members. This information sheet provides engagement strategies, product enhancement suggestions, and resources to help make your Nova Scotia tourism business more accessible and welcoming for guests and visitors of all abilities.



“In Canada, almost 50% of adults have or have experienced a permanent or temporary physical disability or live with someone who has.” – Rick Hanson Foundation.

This general information sheet is supported by tourism industry sector specific sheets. Links to these sheets and other resources are provided at the end of the document.

## Arrival at your Business

- Make it easier for guests to find designated accessible parking spaces by marking them with a sign instead of a painted symbol on the concrete. The painted symbol can be difficult for people to see and can be a hazard as paint becomes slippery when wet.
- Colour contrast on stairs, doors, doorknobs, etc. will help people with visual impairments clearly see how tall/wide stairs are, and help them identify doors and door handles. If doorknobs are the same colour as door, people may not see them. Consider contrast for knobs, doors, walls, elevators, steps, ramps, and signs.
- Use a lever instead of a doorknob, so people with physical limitations can open doorknobs with greater ease.
- Automatic doors should be set to stay open longer than 5 seconds, and there needs to be an indication of the direction that the door will open.

“Disability inclusion is an essential condition to upholding human rights, sustainable development, and peace and security.”

UN – International Day of Disability  
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## Environment and Ease of Access

- Ensure all signs are accessible and readable from a distance by using large and basic font, clear colour contrast, including images and/or symbols as well as words, tactile and braille features, and minimal glare.
- The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) cites that braille is a system of raised dots that people who are blind can read with their fingers. It's a key to literacy, education, employment and success in life. Having information available in braille allows guests with visual impairment to understand the messages you want to deliver.
- To avoid creating a tripping hazard, carpets and floor mats should be taped down and secured.
- Accessible washrooms should be spacious, include support bars, have a lowered sink and an angled mirror so people in wheelchairs can see themselves. Ensure the toilet paper roll and waste basket are beside the toilet.
- Have tables that are wheelchair accessible and ensure a clear path to those tables.
- Have different types of chairs (stool, bench, chair, etc.) for people with different requirements.

### Inspiration Objectification

People living with disabilities often have strangers or acquaintances tell them how brave or strong they are - simply for carrying out ordinary tasks or going about their daily business. What might have been intended as a compliment could be landing as a patronizing remark.



## Space and Contrast

- Ensure chairs in your establishment can be easily moved to allow space for someone with a wheelchair.
- Provide a nearby designated space for service animals to relieve themselves.
- Stairs and ramps should have colour contrast to indicate their length, width, and depth.
- Consider the space around seating areas. Is there room for mobility devices that can be placed out of the way, yet close at hand?
- Provide a designated seating area for people with disabilities that are waiting for assistance or transportation.
- Train all staff to avoid creating temporary obstacles, such as leaving a bucket and a mop in an entrance or boxes of supplies in a hallway.





## Understanding and Being Understood

- Always treat guests with dignity and be respectful and adaptable to different needs and situations.
- Always ask guests if they require assistance before taking action. If they confirm that they require assistance, determine how best to help them, with their guidance.
- Give people time to communicate and express themselves. Summarize and repeat the information back to the guest to ensure there are no misunderstandings.
- Be prepared to rephrase or provide an explanation more than once.
- Rather than pointing or describing directions, offer to accompany the guest to the location that they are looking for, such as the exit or washroom door.
- Have a magnifying glass available for guests with visual impairments.
- Have a pen and paper on hand to assist when communicating with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.

## Additional Amenities and Services you Could Provide

- Offer sensory kits that can help calm a person in an overstimulated environment. This may include earplugs, headphones, eye mask, fidget toys, stress ball, colouring books, notebook, etc.
- Offer a 'calm room' or a quiet space for guests with sensory or communication disorders, who are neurodivergent, or patrons with anxiety.
- Some disabilities, conditions or chronic illnesses are not immediately obvious to others. Sunflower Lanyards may be used by people with invisible disabilities to help identify that they need extra help or additional time while travelling. The program was initially launched in 2016 at Gatwick Airport in the UK and has since expanded to 215 airports in 30 countries.

## Guest Interactions

"Often in a retail store or restaurant the customer service person will avoid contact with my son and engage with me directly. My son has a physical disability and is wheelchair bound however, he does not have any cognitive, speech or hearing issues. This exclusion is upsetting for both of us." -CJ



## Support Providers & Interpreters

- Ensure you speak to the person with the disability first, regardless of their disability, before seeking assistance from other members of the traveling party.
- Avoid directing comments to the interpreter (i.e. “Tell him...” or “Ask her...”). The interpreter will speak for the person and translate your message, when required.
- If someone is using the assistance of an interpreter, maintain eye contact with the guest not the interpreter. The guest will be looking at the interpreter in order to receive your message.
- If someone is hard of hearing, it is not generally about volume, rather the pronunciation and clarity of speech. To make it easier for the guest to understand you, face the guest directly and ensure your face is not covered, which allows for lip reading.
- Service dogs are doing their jobs when at your business. Staff should resist petting or otherwise distracting the dog unless their handler specifically says otherwise.



## Emergency Assistance

- Fire alarms should be unobstructed and accessible to people using mobility devices. Alarms should be visual, blink, with colour contrast and have a symbol to be visible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- There should be a designated evacuation area for people with disabilities, with seating provided. The area should not be near a sprinkler as people with mobility issues could face challenges from excessive water.
- In case of evacuation, ensure adequate lighting is available or provide flashlights for people with visual impairments.
- Emergency situations for people with disabilities are stressful, as they may need assistance to get to safety. Keep the guest informed by advising them of the situation and take the necessary action steps to assist them.

## Patience and Understanding

“As a Nova Scotia based, group home, support worker I often take our residents, all of whom have intellectual disabilities, to different restaurants and attractions in the city. They can get sometimes loud and rambunctious – the intention is certainly not to offend or disrupt. Please be patient with us and please don’t stare”. -SL



## Share Your Accessible Information

- Remember to share that you are accessible and welcoming to all through your digital and printed information. Include your policies, values, and mission on your website and any applicable on-site signage (for example, service animals welcome; we provide accessible accommodation options; all are welcome).
- Help guests better understand how they would access your business by providing a detailed description on your website (for example, the main entrance has an automatic door, 15 steps forward to reach the front desk).
- Publicize how you are accessible on your website and other media channels. Share that you have ramps and automatic doors, braille menus, accessible washrooms, and other ways you can accommodate. Update and publicize changes in your accessible facilities.
- In media and advertisements, include images of people representing customers with diverse accessibility needs.



## Next Steps

- Review this document and consider some of the changes you can make immediately. They can be small measures, at little (or no cost) that can improve your visitor experience.
- Consider longer-term plans that could involve building modifications, installing equipment, purchasing items for you business or developing action plans for the future.
- Engage your team and discuss how to create a more accessible and inclusive workplace.
- Look at training options for your team. A variety of programs are available, many at low to no cost. Consult the websites in the following 'Resources' section. Many organizations that assist people with disabilities have resources, videos, and educational materials on their websites.
- Making accessibility changes at your business helps you better welcome people of all abilities and advances overall accessibility awareness throughout the tourism industry.

### Impact of Accessibility

“Accessibility is a crucial element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is a human rights issue and it is also an extraordinary business opportunity. Above all, we must realize that accessible tourism is not only good for people with disabilities or special needs, it is good for everyone”.

- Taleb Rifai (fmr. UNWTO Secretary-General)



## Resources

### Associations

We acknowledge and thank the following associations who provided their time, resources, and assistance in developing this resource and the tourism industry-specific guides:

- Autism Nova Scotia
- Canadian Council of the Blind
- CNIB Clearing Our Path , creating accessible environments for people impacted by blindness
- Easter Seals Nova Scotia provides training and resources
- March of Dimes
- Rick Hansen Foundation provides training, audits, and resources

### Government – Legislation, Resources and Guidelines

- Accessible Nova Scotia - provides information, resources, and accessibility stories
- Accessibility Directorate - provides resources, guidelines, and tool kits
- Business ACCESS-Ability program – apply for a grant to make accessibility-related improvements
- Built Environment Recommendations Phase 1 (Accessibility Advisory Board)
- Nova Scotia Accessibility Act
- Standards Council of Canada – Accessible Design for the Built Environment -provides detailed measurements and guidelines

### Sector Specific Tourism Industry Information Sheets

- Accommodation Sector Tip Sheet
- Activities, Festivals and Events Tip Sheet
- Food and Beverage Sector Tip Sheet
- Transportation Sector Tip Sheet

