

**Ministry of Community
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Dear Accessibility Advisory Committee Chairs and Members,

A new year is upon us and is promising to be very productive as we work toward our goal of making the province accessible by 2025. I would like to take this opportunity to update you on our progress.

January 1, 2010 ushered in a new era of accessibility in Ontario. The first standard under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) is now in force for Ontario's public sector. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service will help make customer services more accessible for people with disabilities. I know each of you helped prepare your communities for this standard and I want to thank you for your assistance.

My ministry has also been busy helping public sector organizations prepare to meet their requirements under the customer service standard. We've reached out to hundreds of obligated organizations with tools and resources to help them meet the needs of customers with disabilities. And we are already seeing the results of these outreach efforts.

We are taking a progressive approach to help ensure organizations meet their requirements. Ontario's public sector organizations are required to report their compliance with the customer service standard by March 31. I am proud to say the Ontario Public Service was the first organization to file their report and documented full compliance with the standard.

As the private sector prepares for their 2012 deadline, we will continue to assist businesses and organizations to break down barriers and make services accessible to every Ontarian.

The remaining standards are well on their way to being finalized. Standards development committees have now submitted final proposed standards in the areas of:

- Information and Communications
- Transportation
- Employment.

The government is currently analyzing the recommended direction in these standards.

The development of the Accessible Built Environment Standard is ongoing. As you may recall, public review for the initial proposed standard concluded on October 16, 2009. The standards development committee will soon reconvene to discuss feedback it has received and decide whether to make any revisions before finalizing their standard to submit to government.

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We need to work together to bring our accessibility standards to life, because partnerships are the key to making our vision of an accessible Ontario a reality. That's why, through our EnAbling Change Partnership Program, we are working with non-profit organizations to help organizations break down barriers. For six years, we have formed partnerships with organizations representing a variety of sectors, including hospitals, colleges, universities and municipalities.

This year, my ministry is shifting its focus to help businesses in the private sector improve accessibility. Organizations like the National Quality Institute and the Registered Graphic Designers of Ontario are developing tools and resources that will make a real difference in the lives of people with disabilities. For more information on this year's partnerships, visit the EnAbling Change section of www.ontario.ca/community.

We have made a lot of progress in the nearly five years since the AODA became law. Making Ontario accessible is a big undertaking and we want to make sure that we're on the right track.

As you know, Charles Beer was appointed in June 2009 to conduct a mandatory review of the AODA. For the last six months, he has been busy reviewing our outreach efforts, the standards development process, as well as AODA requirements, such as municipal advisory committees. Mr. Beer has consulted with stakeholders around the province and I understand that committees like yours have played an important role in these consultations. Mr. Beer will be submitting his report to me in February and I look forward to seeing his recommendations.

Every day, communities across Ontario are making more progress to break down barriers for people with disabilities. We have been using video to tell these accessibility stories. You can see these stories at www.ontario.ca/AccessON. If you have an accessibility success that you would like to profile, I encourage you to send your story to tellyourstories@ontario.ca.

Thank you again for your commitment to making your communities more accessible. Because of your efforts, we will all live in a very different province in 2025 — one where everyone has equal opportunities to work, live and travel in Ontario.

Sincerely,

(Original signed by)

Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Community and Social Services