Accessibility Plan

2023-2028

Lakeridge Health

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About Lakeridge Health

Based in Durham Region, Lakeridge Health provides one of the most comprehensive ranges of acute, ambulatory, and long-term care services in Ontario.

Our 'one system' includes five hospitals, four emergency departments, three critical care units, a long-term care home, more than 20 community health-care locations, and a full range of medical and surgical specialties.

We proudly operate several leading regional specialty centres, including the Central East Regional Cancer Program, R.S. McLaughlin Durham Regional Cancer Centre, and The Shoulder Centre, along with specialized eye care and chronic kidney disease services. Furthermore, we have the second largest mental health and addictions program in the province, offered across inpatient, ambulatory, and community-based settings. We also provide safe, compassionate care for residents in our modern long-term care facility, Lakeridge Gardens, as well as state-of-the-art surgical care within the Jerry Coughlan Health and Wellness Centre.

Driven by our unwavering commitment to our Durham Region communities, and with the steadfast support of more than 8,000 dedicated staff, physicians, and volunteers, Lakeridge Health proudly collaborates with the Durham Ontario Health Team, primary care providers, and government partners to forge an integrated regional system of care. Together, we are on a mission to Empower People to Live their Best Health through an accessible, inclusive, and equitable health care ecosystem.

Lakeridge Health's Commitment to Accessibility

At Lakeridge Health, we know that, in order to truly deliver patient-centred care and promote psychological safety in the workplace, everyone's accessibility needs must be considered from the start. As the largest health-care provider and employer in Durham Region, we are dedicated to ensuring equal access for all individuals with disabilities. This commitment extends not only to our patients, residents, and clients, but also to their families, our staff, physicians, and volunteers.

Our journey towards accessibility begins with recognizing and addressing the barriers that exist within our organization. By working closely with all internal and external stakeholders, we strive not just to meet Ontario's accessibility standards, but to go beyond them. We do this by prioritizing the lived experiences of people with disabilities in our efforts.

This multi-year accessibility plan reflects our shared responsibility to ensure our policies and practices evolve to meet the needs of the people of Durham Region. It reaffirms our commitment to innovation and outlines actions to create barrier-free care that respects and preserves each individual's dignity.

Background

In the summer of 2023, we proudly unveiled *I Belong*, Lakeridge Health's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Anti-Racism (IDEAA) Multi-Year Action Plan. As an integral goal of the IDEAA Multi-Year Action Plan, this plan represents the culmination of years of deep engagement with both our internal teams and the broader community, solidifying our unwavering commitment to embedding IDEAA principles across our organization.

Through numerous community conversations, a comprehensive disability justice* audit of our health system, as well as feedback from team member engagement surveys and the internal and community reports used develop our IDEAA Multi-Year Action Plan, we have identified existing accessibility gaps across our organization and are putting strategies in place to address them.

Community Engagement and Involvement

This work has been grounded in the Indigenous principle of "Nothing about us, without us," ensuring that all recommendations center those with lived experience, both personal and familial. This community led approach has been critical to the development of this plan, as this expertise and knowledge has paved the way for the innovative initiatives outlined in this work.

Internal IDEAA Report

In the summer of 2020, Lakeridge Health conducted extensive consultation with team members as part of its initial accelerated IDEAA efforts. Avenues for feedback included an organization-wide survey, focus groups, an anonymous discussion board, and 1:1 conversations. A total of 1,828 people completed the survey, resulting in over 111,000 individual data points showcasing feedback from a range of team members with various lived experiences across race, disability, gender, and more. The experiences shared were multi-faceted and highlighted a large representation amongst staff and physicians with chronic illness and mental health disabilities.

Accessibility Audit: Centering the "Leadership of the Most Impacted"

In February 2023, we partnered with the Abilities Centre to conduct accessibility audits of our five hospitals. At each hospital, two or three Abilities Centre staff members and three or four persons with lived experience of disabilities, accompanied by staff from our Engineering, Capital Planning and Development, and IDEAA teams to assess the accessibility of public-facing areas of the hospital. Feedback on opportunities for improvement were shared and consolidated into final recommendations.

*See definition in glossary.

Accessibility Committee

Lakeridge Health's Accessibility Committee aimed to provide leadership and resources within Lakeridge Health in order to eliminate barriers in the service, work, and learning environments for patients, residents, clients, employees, privileged staff, volunteers, students, and all other stakeholders. This committee was comprised of patient and family advisors and included Occupational Health, Capital Planning, Wellness, Facilities, Environmental Services, People Services (Human Resources), and Medical Affairs.

Moving Forward and Looking Ahead

This plan will support to all Lakeridge Health team members, including employees, privileged staff, volunteers, students, and contractors, as well as patients and patients, family members, and visitors with disabilities. Along with actions linked to the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the initiatives from this work link novel recommendations shared by community members, Ontario's Health Care Standards Development Committee, and will continue to be updated monthly through Lakeridge Health's Accessibility Committee.

Acknowledgments

This important work is a reflection of the collective dedication, insights, and hard work of the entire Lakeridge Health Accessibility Committee, the Abilities Centre, and community advocates. These collaborative efforts included the development of the Accessibility Plan Working Group; a subcommittee responsible for developing this Accessibility plan. Working group members include:

- **Andrew Brown** | Patient Family Advisor
- **Nkem Ogbonna** | IDEAA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Anti-Racism) Consultant
- **Belinda Gruber** | Manager, IDEAA and Wellness
- **Nick Ricciotti** | Project Manager, Capital Planning and Development
- **Carrie Ann Szorady** | Senior Manager, Capital Delivery
- **Matthew Kurtcu** | Planning Analyst, Capital Planning and Development
- **Sharon Navarro** | Manager, Public Relations

Executive Sponsor(s) of this plan include:

- **Petrina McGrath** | Health System Executive, People, Quality, and Practice, and Chief Nursing Executive
- **Umwali Sauter** | Director, IDEAA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Anti-Racism), Wellness, Organizational Development, Volunteer Resources, and Spiritual Care
- **Matthew Cannon** | Senior Director, Infrastructure and Capital Development

a) Organizational Initiatives

Clear policies, detailed plans, and open communication are integral in creating a consistent guide for our actions. A strong Accessibility Plan gives us clear goals, helps us focus on the right priorities, and lets us track our progress. Being transparent is just as important – it allows us to share our commitments, celebrate successes, and learn where we can do better. Together, these pieces create a strong foundation for building a more inclusive and accessible environment for everyone.

What We've Done: Completed Work

Category	Completed Initiatives	Completion Date
TRANSPARENCY *AODA Compliance*	Reviewed our organizational compliance to AODA, highlighting areas success and growth opportunities.	**December 2023** *AODA Compliance Report*
PLANNING *Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*	Published our updated Multi-Year Accessibility Plan with dedicated project timelines.	**March 2025** *Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*

Where We're Going: Barriers We Will Address

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
ORGANIZATIONAL *Policies*	Review and update the following existing policies to ensure they reflect the requirements of the Integrated Accessibility Standard. • Accessibility for Persons with Disability Policy and Procedures. • Illness, Injuries, and Abilities Policy and Procedures.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**
ORGANIZATIONAL *Procedures*	Review and update Lakeridge Health procedures to facilitate increased access to services. This includes guidance on: • Using personally owned accessibility devices/items • Updating inventory and location of specialized equipment intended to accommodate patients with disabilities. • Using specialized equipment to meet accessibility-related patient needs. • Reporting damaged or faulty equipment in need of repair.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**

Category	Completed Initiatives	Completion Date
ORGANIZATIONAL *Multi-year Accessibility Plan*	Develop and publicly communicate 2028-2033 Accessibility Plan.	**Year 5 (March 2028)**
ORGANIZATIONAL *Audits*	Conduct accessibility policy audits ensuring AODA compliance and using a Disability Justice* lens.	**Annually**
	Conduct a physical space audit of public hospital spaces.	**Year 5 (March 2028)**
	Conduct a physical space audit of non-public hospital spaces.	**Year 5 (March 2028)**
PLANNING *Accessibility Planning*	Conduct monthly meetings of the Accessibility Committee with a goal to ensure meaningful representation of people with disabilities on the committee.	**Ongoing**
TRANSPARENCY *Annual Reporting*	Prepare and publicly share an annual Accessibility status report.	**Annually (December)**

*See definition in glossary.

b) Technology, Information, and Communication Initiatives

When technology, information, and communication is accessible, empowers everyone to fully participate in their care, work, or visit. By ensuring our work is available in alternative formats and meets accessibility standards, we aim to remove barriers and create a more inclusive experience for everyone. Communication isn't just about sharing information; it's about building trust, fostering connection, and ensuring that everyone feels informed, respected, and valued.

What We've Done: Completed Work

Category	Completed Initiatives	Completion Date
Patient and Family Guides	Integrated physical site accessibility information into Patient and Family Handbooks.	**Year 2 (March 2025)**

Where We're Going: Barriers We Will Address

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Feedback Processes	- Develop accessibility focused patient and family feedback pathways. - Develop internal accessibility feedback process that allows team members to provide feedback on accessibility gaps.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Public Safety	• Review all fire alarms have visual components. • Ensure access to accessible formats of public safety plans.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**
Patient and Family Accommodations	Review of Patient and Family accommodation documentation processes to ensure patients, residents, and caregivers know what to expect regarding accommodation plans at the earliest possible time in their care journey.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**
Websites and Web Content	Develop accessibility guide for Lakeridge Health's intranet to assist staff in developing content that meets WCAG 2.2 guidelines.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**
	Review public facing Lakeridge Health website to ensure it is up to date to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 criteria.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Room Booking	Update Lakeridge Health internal room booking system to show rooms that are accessible for wheelchairs/scooters and other accessible, additional accessibility features.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**

c) Employment and Attitudinal Initiatives

Fostering an inclusive and accessible workplace is essential and removing barriers in hiring, accommodations, and career development creates opportunities for talented individuals with disabilities to thrive on our team. This commitment isn't just about meeting regulations – it's about living our values and striving to Be A Workplace of Choice for all. When employees feel supported and valued, they can bring their best to work every day, and that directly enhances the care and services we provide to our community.

What We've Done: Completed Work

Category	Completed Initiatives	Completion Date
Career Development and Advancement	Expanded expertise from Accessibility Committee members through the engagement of those with lived and professional accessibility expertise.	**March 2025**

Where We're Going: Barriers We Will Address

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Career Development and Advancement	Ensure performance planning is responsive to individualized accessibility needs.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**
Accommodations and Workplace Supports	• Develop accessibility-focused orientation and new hire materials • Review employee accommodations process.	**Year 3 (March 2026)**
Training and Education	Develop internal educational materials on Unpacking Ableism and Removing Accessibility Barriers within Health Care.	**Year 3 (March 2025)**
	Develop leadership training on supporting employees with disabilities and implementing documented individual accommodation plans.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Recruitment and Hiring	Review current hiring processes to identify and remove barriers related to accessibility.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**

d) Design of Physical Spaces

Integrating inclusive design in public spaces ensures a shared sense of belonging. By improving both physical features (such as ramps, doorways, signage, and restrooms) and environmental features (such as audio and visual components), we aim to ensure a barrier-free experience the moment anyone steps through our doors.

What We've Done: Completed Work

Category	Completed Initiatives	Completion Date
Waiting Areas	Increased number of bariatric chairs and space for wheelchairs in patient waiting areas.	**March 2024**
Outdoor Route of Travel	Installed colour-contrast, tactile strips to separate pedestrian walkway and driveway for cars.	**March 2024**

Category	Completed Initiatives	Completion Date
Entrances and Doorways	- Ensured power door buttons are large and at appropriate heights. - Provided alternate power doors besides revolving doors. - Installed on opaque strips across glass doors. - Removed lip or trip hazards at entrances. - Ensured flooring is smooth and carpets are secured.	**March 2024**

Where We're Going: Barriers We Will Address

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Breastfeeding and Quiet Rooms	- Remove chairs for easier access to grab bar/handrails. - Adjust location of the basins, faucets, change tables countertops, and placement of towel dispensers. - Install emergency call buttons or pull cords.	**Ongoing** ***Completed Items*** Remove chairs for easier access

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Breastfeeding and Quiet Rooms	Equip quiet rooms with sensory kits.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**
Elevators	Enhance audible announcements in elevators, for indicating direction and floors.	**Ongoing**
Indoor Route of Travel	Ensure all hallways are barrier and obstruction free.	**Ongoing**
Accessible Washrooms	Install power door openers and change the type of locks used to increase accessibility, including graspable latch locks, and grab bars above toilets. Widen doorways and increase washroom spaces to accommodate mobility device turning radius and additional support persons. Adjust hook, flush handle, and dispenser placements. Install the following: • Clear signage • Emergency system with pull cords. • Grab bars • Accessible urinals and toilets.	**Ongoing**

Category	Our Commitment	Deadline
Reception and Service Counters	Reconfigure spatial configuration for better acoustics.	**Year 4 (March 2027)**
Parking	• Increase number of accessible parking spots. • Ensure visibility through signage and painted parking lines.	**Year 5 (March 2028)**
Municipality Improvements	• Provide designated area for accessible transit. • Add audible crossing services. • Collaborate with municipal stakeholders to develop bus routes that drive directly to hospitals.	**Year 5 (March 2028)**

Glossary

Ableism: Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be 'fixed' in one form or the other. Ableism is intertwined in our culture, due to many limiting beliefs about what disability does or does not mean, how able-bodied people learn to treat people with disabilities and how we are often not included at the table for key decisions.

Accessible formats: These are formats that present printed or electronic documents in different formats in order to ensure everyone has equal access to the information which is required under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). Persons with disabilities often use adaptive/assistive technology that require an alternate/accessible format so the technology can access the information in a specific manner for the user.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA): The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 is a statute enacted in 2005 by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in Canada. Its purpose is to improve accessibility standards for Ontarians with physical and mental disabilities to all public establishments by 2025.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

Disability Justice: A Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. The disability justice framework calls attention to the ways that ableism is linked to multiple other systems of oppression. This centers on the needs and voices of "disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others."

Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC): The Ontario Human Rights Commission was established in the Canadian province of Ontario on March 29, 1961 to administer the Ontario Human Rights Code. The OHRC is an arm's length agency of government accountable to the legislature through the Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario. The OHRC's power under section 30 of the Code to develop policies is part of its broader responsibility under section 29 to promote, protect and advance respect for human rights in Ontario, to protect the public interest and to eliminate discriminatory practices.

WCAG Guidelines: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) international standard, including WCAG 2.0, WCAG 2.1, and WCAG 2.2. WCAG documents explain how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities.

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