



2021

York Region Accessibility Status Report

Creating an Accessible York Region

An update on actions by York Region and York Regional Police to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities and implement the [York Region 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#)



York Region

2021



Table of Contents

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The York Region Accessibility Status Report 2021	3
Accessibility Planning Includes Both Legislated and Non-Legislated Actions	5
The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee	6
Doing More to Create Accessible Communities in 2021	7
Let Us Know What You Think	12

The York Region Accessibility Status Report 2021

York Region is committed to a welcoming and inclusive community where diversity is celebrated and where everyone can develop to their full potential, participate freely in society and live with respect, dignity and freedom from discrimination, as affirmed by the [Inclusion Charter for York Region](#). York Region and York Regional Police are committed to creating programs, services and facilities that people of all abilities can enjoy. An accessible York Region is an inclusive York Region.

This report highlights what we have accomplished since the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) became law and the actions taken to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities in Regional programs, services and facilities. It provides an update on actions taken to implement the Region's 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. An Accessibility Status Report is prepared and posted annually. To review the Plan and previous Status Reports, visit york.ca/accessibility.

2020 To 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

In April 2020, York Region and York Regional Police updated their joint Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This Plan highlights actions approved by York Regional Council to strengthen the accessibility of York Region's and York Regional Police's programs, services and facilities. The Plan was developed with advice from people with disabilities, staff, the community and the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC). The Plan specifies new work ahead of us, including actions to meet legislated standards and continuous quality improvement initiatives. These actions affirm our commitment to creating welcoming and inclusive communities.





Setting the Context

In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed our communities and our world. Although these have been challenging times for all of us, our vulnerable populations were, and remain, at an increased risk of experiencing detrimental impacts from the virus. Yet, in 2021 York Region pivoted – like much of the world – by responding to the pandemic through targeted health, community and social service programs. This includes working with partners to plan and roll out mass vaccination across the Region. Through a concerted and collaborative effort among its various departments and business units, the Region delivered inclusive and accessible environments at COVID-19 immunization sites. Additionally, to ensure success of the Region’s immunization efforts, the Region continues to incorporate diversity and inclusion considerations that support and promote vaccines in high priority communities and address vaccine hesitancy.

York Region and York Regional Police continue to respond to COVID-19 and recognize that persons with disabilities may have increased vulnerabilities. To ensure the safety of its community members, many York Region and York Regional Police programs and services adopted virtual or physically distanced formats. As noted in the report, the importance of accessibility is embedded in our work and continues to drive our commitment to welcoming, inclusive and accessible communities.

Statement of Organizational Commitment

“The Regional Municipality of York is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in a timely and proactive manner and will use reasonable efforts to provide equitable access to Regional programs, goods, services and facilities in a way that respects a person’s dignity and independence.”

Source: [York Region Accessibility Policy 2017](#)

Accessibility Planning Includes Both Legislated and Non-Legislated Actions

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) requires organizations to meet standards of accessibility in the areas of information and communications, employment, transportation, design of public spaces and customer service.

The AODA legislation is ongoing. This at-a-glance summary shows AODA requirements that are completed and continue to be part of York Region's and York Regional Police's day-to-day operations:

- ✓ Accessible customer service
- ✓ Accessibility policies
- ✓ Accessible purchases
- ✓ Emergency response plans for employees
- ✓ Transportation standards
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Accessible feedback
- ✓ New websites that conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) Level A
- ✓ Employment standards
- ✓ Accessible formats and communication supports
- ✓ Design of public spaces standards
- ✓ Compliance monitoring and reporting

Ongoing Actions

Websites and Web Content

Under the AODA, all obligated organization websites must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. WCAG 2.0 defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Accessibility involves a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning and neurological disabilities.

York Region and York Regional Police have been actively working to bring all websites owned and maintained by York Region in alignment with the legislation. A redesigned and fully accessible york.ca will launch in 2022. This will provide an improved user experience for all users and remove any barriers for people with disabilities from accessing information through York Region's external website.



The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) advises York Regional Council and York Regional Police on accessibility for the Region's programs, services and facilities. Members come from different backgrounds and most are people with disabilities. Visit york.ca to see upcoming meeting dates and times.

Virtual YRAAC meetings are streamed live on york.ca and can be viewed by members of the public. To ensure these meetings are accessible, live captioning is provided and York Region staff are available to offer technical support to participating members if needed. The transition to virtual format demonstrates YRAAC's continued commitment to removing barriers for people with disabilities.

Learning and Development for YRAAC Members

For National AccessAbility Week (May 30 to June 5, 2021), YRAAC hosted a forum that brought together members of municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees (AACs) across the Region to network and explore resources, tools and learn about inclusive design. Attendees heard from Human Space, a global collaborative of experts working with city builders to create spaces for all and participated in a workshop. Members also contributed to a round-table discussion on COVID-19's impact on AAC engagements and how local AACs can meet new challenges and opportunities to support accessibility in a post-COVID world.

On October 19, 2021, York Region hosted a professional development forum for municipal AAC members to enhance capacity and increase awareness for inclusion and accessibility. Participants had the opportunity to network and discuss best practices with other AAC members from across York Region and hear from headliner [Michael Jacques](#), who is a public speaker and activist within the disability community.



Members of the 2019 to 2022 York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

Front row (left to right): Scott Wollin, David Hingsburger (past member), Astley Dennis

Middle row (left to right): Vito Spatafora, Laurie Fortnum, Town of Newmarket Regional Councillor Tom Vegh, Lindsey Gold, Barry Martin (past member), Joann Simmons (Vice-Chair), City of Markham Deputy Mayor and Regional Councillor Don Hamilton (Chair)

Back row (left to right): Angelo Tocco, Cheryl Davies, Kirsten Hill

Not pictured: York Region Chairman and CEO Wayne Emmerson (Ex-Officio), Sandy Palombo

Visit york.ca/accessibility to learn more about the members of the YRAAC.

Doing More to Create Accessible Communities in 2021

York Region and York Regional Police continue to create and implement actions to ensure programs, services and facilities are accessible for everyone. This section highlights some of these actions.



Contributions from YRAAC

Renewing York Region's Vision: Strong, Caring, Safe Communities

In April 2021, staff sought feedback from YRAAC, via a survey, to inform the refresh work for Regional Council's Vision. Vision is Regional Council's commitment towards realizing the quality-of-life residents envision now for the future and serves as the guiding star for the Region's corporate planning activities. The feedback received from YRAAC will assist in ensuring the updated Vision reflects the many diverse perspectives in the Region's communities, including those from residents with disabilities.

On November 25, 2021, Regional Council approved York Region's renewed Vision document. Visit york.ca/vision to learn more about Vision.

17150 Yonge Street Achieves Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification

Through York Regional Council's leadership and guidance of the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee, York Region's new facility at 17150 Yonge Street in Newmarket has been awarded the Gold Certification by the [Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification](#) (RHFAC). The RHFAC is a national rating system that measures and certifies the level of accessibility of buildings and sites.

Based on the public RHFAC Registry, there are 684 certified buildings, of which 68 achieved the Gold Level. With the inclusion of 17150 Yonge Street, there are only 24 Gold Level buildings in Ontario. To receive Gold certification, sites must achieve a rating score of 80% and higher and meet mandatory [Gold certification requirements](#).

Some of the accessible and inclusive designs that earned the 17150 Yonge Street building its Gold certification include,

- Accessible paths of travel leading to the building's entrances, which are provided throughout the building
- The site and building incorporate safety warning features, such as tactile attention indicators at the top of stairs and where drive aisles are level with pedestrian paths; cane-detectable features; and features detecting if there are overhead or protruding hazards along the path of travel
- The fire alarm system is equipped with visual and audible signal devices mounted in both public and private areas (e.g., washrooms and changerooms)

This certification is a testament to York Region's commitment to building welcoming and inclusive communities that are accessible to all.



Transitional Housing Projects

In April and May 2021, York Region Housing Services consulted with YRAAC regarding the construction of new transitional housing in the Towns of Georgina and East Gwillimbury. The new units will provide supportive transitional housing accommodation meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing offering structure, individualized supports, life skills, and, in some cases, education and training, helping people to live independently.

Using feedback received from YRAAC, Georgina and East Gwillimbury AACs, the building in East Gwillimbury was revised to enclose the stairwells and common corridors, providing weather protection for residents. Revisions were made to barrier-free suite bathrooms to enhance accessibility in the Georgina building. Additionally, the project's 3d renderings were revised to include a more diverse range of lived experiences, including people with visible disabilities.

Community Investment Fund Program

In October 2021, York Region Council approved a new framework for the Region's [Community Investment Fund](#). The new framework includes a broadened program target population with a focus on priority groups, one population being people living with disabilities. Previously, the program was focused on funding services for residents living with low to moderate income. While residents who identify with the priority groups have always been eligible to receive Community Investment Funded services (provided they also met the program's income threshold), the new focus will help service providers design and deliver projects that specifically respond to the needs of priority groups. Through consultation with YRAAC in June 2021, it was recognized that focusing the program to respond to the unique needs of specific populations would better serve those most in need.

COVID-19 Mass Vaccination Clinics

Accessibility at COVID-19 Mass Vaccination Clinics

Designed to be accessible by default, York Region launched and operated several COVID-19 Mass Vaccination Clinics during 2021 – which was one of the largest direct service delivery initiatives in its history. Throughout the planning/design phases of the clinics, site selection and audits for accessibility were conducted and the Region consulted with YRAAC to ensure accessibility standards were being met. Clinic staff who were already AODA trained also received supplemental accessibility content in their clinic training program to provide quality customer service.

The accessibility features of the clinics ensured all persons with disabilities could access these vital services without being prevented from visible/invisible barriers. These features included:

- An option in the vaccination online booking system that allowed customers to indicate if they were being accompanied by a support person and if they require any accommodations
- Designated quiet areas for vaccination of people with sensory-related disabilities



- Chairs placed along waiting lines so that people could rest
- Wheelchair accessible access, including accessible post-vaccination areas
- [Pocket talkers](#), clear masks and American sign language (ASL) interpretation (via video)

Other vaccination clinic options were offered to York Region residents as well, including drive-through vaccination clinics, in-car vaccination options at non-drive-through sites and specialized clinics that meet the unique needs of people, such as children with developmental disabilities.

Recommendations for accessibility at Mass Immunization Clinics were documented in the Risk Assessment Planning Tool, which will help inform the development of future clinics.

Doing More to Create Accessible Communities in 2021



Public Transportation to Vaccination Clinics

Mobility On-Request (MOR) completed more than 1,500 trips to safely connect paratransit customers and seniors to their nearest vaccination clinic within York Region. Drivers provided added support by remaining at clinics to avoid having customers wait outside for their return trips. The MOR team supported stakeholder communications and worked with Public Health on drive-through clinic entrance/exit logistics.

Implementing Online Subsidized Housing Applications and Offers in York Region

In a move to offer more online tools for subsidized housing applicants, York Region's Housing Services Branch launched a new online portal in January 2021. The portal improves waitlist management and communication with applicants and will enable applicants to express interest in available subsidies online. It will become the main channel to access subsidized housing.

To support applicant accessibility of the portal, including for those with disabilities, Housing Services established a dedicated support team and partnered with Access York to provide technical assistance and problem-solving to applicants over the phone. Drawing upon the lessons learned from implementing and the COVID-19 vaccination online booking system and York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee feedback, the teams were better equipped to refine the supports for applicants, further enhancing applicants' experience with the portal, and will continue to actively monitor feedback from applicants and partners to drive continuous improvement.

Doing More to
Create Accessible
Communities in
2021



Improving Accessibility in York Regional Forests

To broaden the ability of York Region residents and visitors with disabilities to access Regional forest trails for recreational use, and to help meet legislated requirements of AODA, Environmental Services department completed the design of an additional 1,700 metres of accessible trail in the Hollidge Tract. Construction of the first 700 meters of this additional accessible trail will be undertaken in 2022.



Court Services Accessibility Coordinators

York Region Legal and Court Services now employs Accessibility Coordinators, enhancing the customer experience while increasing accessibility for residents. These Coordinators are highly trained staff who act as a point-of-contact for the public, assist them with court processes and provide personalized and specialized assistance for those with accessibility needs. The Coordinators are available by phone and email and are equipped with the appropriate tools to best support all clients.

York.ca/courts Webpage Upgrade

The Court Services external webpage was upgraded in June 2021 to increase access and enhance the customer experience for residents. These upgrades include:

- Redesigning the layout with content grouping for ease of navigation
- Using plain language for clearer communication and ease of understanding
- Enabling Google Translate and screen reader functions to further increase accessibility
- Embedding new keywords into the website to improve searchability through search engines
- All PDF forms were updated to be AODA compliant



Vulnerable Person Identity Card

Informed by YRAAC's advice, York Region Police introduced a new identification (ID) card for York Region residents that are registered in the Vulnerable Person Registry and/or Project Lifesaver program. The Vulnerable Person ID card is a wallet-sized, foldable card that provides officers with quick access to critical information (e.g., name, language spoken, medical condition/allergies, etc.) to vulnerable individuals in York Region. The card is meant to be carried by the vulnerable person to provide quick details to emergency services if they are unable to give details about themselves.

Let Us Know What You Think

We welcome your feedback. Let us know if you have any questions or feedback about the programs highlighted in this 2021 Status Report, the York Region 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and any accessibility matters in general.

To view previous Status Reports, visit york.ca/accessibility

To request a copy in another format or to send us your comments or questions, please contact us at:

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