



# Accessibility Plan Update 2026-29

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Working together for barrier-free care

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## Accessibility Commitment

IWK Health is committed to delivering health care that is accessible, equitable, and inclusive for everyone. We recognize accessibility as a fundamental human right and an essential part of high-quality, family-centred care.

We actively work to identify, prevent, and remove barriers—physical, digital, communication-related, attitudinal, and systemic—that limit people’s ability to fully participate in, navigate, or receive care. Guided by the lived experiences and expertise of people with disabilities, we strive to design services, environments, and policies that work for everyone.

We will continue working toward a health system where all patients, families, staff, and community members can access and participate in care with dignity, independence, choice, and respect.

Stacy Burgess  
Vice President, Clinical Support  
& System Integration

Jen Feron  
General Counsel

# Acknowledging Land, History and Community through Shared Responsibility

We begin by acknowledging that we are gathered in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This land is protected by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, which remind us of the ongoing relationship and responsibilities shared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. We also recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose history, culture, and contributions have deeply shaped this part of Mi'kma'ki—now known as Nova Scotia—for hundreds of years.

Land acknowledgements and recognition statements are essential tools for learning and reflection. They help us understand the long-standing histories and impacts of colonization and slavery—systems that have directly and disproportionately affected the communities we serve. These legacies have contributed to persistent inequities, including poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion.

As we reflect on these histories, we also recognize that people with disabilities have long faced barriers created by colonial systems, institutional practices, and ableism. These barriers continue to affect access to land, community, culture, health care, and full participation in society.



## Accessibility as a Core Component of Equity

Accessibility is an important part of our IWK Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation and Accessibility (EDIRA) Strategic Plan. We recognize that attitudinal, physical, cultural, linguistic, digital, and systemic barriers continue to affect people with disabilities and others in our communities. IWK Health is committed to identifying and removing these barriers, improving the accessibility of our spaces, services, and systems, and fostering an environment where everyone is welcomed, respected, and able to participate fully. The established principle of “*Nothing about us without us*”, central to the Accessibility Act, informs and guides this work.

## Our Commitment to Accessibility Goals

We remain committed to advancing the goals outlined in Nova Scotia’s accessibility legislation. We believe that diverse workplaces and communities strengthen our organization, and this plan reinforces the contributions and perspectives of people with disabilities. It identifies key actions that will enhance accessibility within our care environments and workplaces.

# Working Together Toward Shared Provincial Goals

As central partners in the provincial health system, IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health continue to collaborate toward shared accessibility goals that prioritize safety, dignity, and respect for patients, families, staff, physicians, learners, and volunteers.

## Engagement

This plan is informed by broad engagement. Disabled Nova Scotians, care partners, families, and employees, physicians, learners, and volunteers from both IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health contributed valuable insights and experiences. While it is not possible to reflect every individual perspective, we remain committed to ensuring diverse voices continue to guide this work. Additional details on the engagement process are provided in [Appendix B](#).

## Our Gratitude and Ongoing Commitment

We extend our appreciation to everyone who contributed their lived experience and expertise to shape the IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health 2026–2029 Accessibility Plan. This plan reflects the progress made over the past three years and reaffirms our long-term commitment to accessibility and equity. It will guide our continued efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system and will be reviewed and updated at least every three years. As we move forward, we will focus on implementing the actions required to achieve our accessibility and equity priorities.



## About the 2026–2029 Accessibility Action Plan

The 2026–2029 Accessibility Action Plan outlines our ongoing commitment under the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and *Access by Design 2030*. Organized around six priority accessibility standards, the plan establishes expectations, clarifies roles, and provides direction for sustained progress toward a more inclusive health system. The [Appendix A](#) includes additional information about our ongoing accessibility initiatives.

## Embedding Accessibility into Our Organizational Identity

Accessibility is becoming integral to who we are an organization. IWK Health continues to advance this work through the priorities outlined in the IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health (NSH) Accessibility Plan, aligned with provincial accessibility goals. We value the opportunity to highlight progress underway and to expand awareness and understanding of accessibility and disability across our organization and the communities we serve.

# Built Environment

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At IWK Health, we are committed to ensuring that patients, families, staff, and visitors can access our facilities and services with dignity and ease. This report shares the progress we have made across five key areas of our Accessibility Action Plan related to Build Environment: Infrastructure Design & Standards, Wheelchair Accessibility, Universal Design, Accessible Wayfinding & Navigation, and Parking.

## Infrastructure Design & Standards

We are making accessibility an integral part of every capital and construction project. Accessibility experts, both internal team members and third-party consultants, are now included as standard participants in the design process for any capital project. Most recently, we engaged an external accessibility consultant to support wayfinding and signage planning across several sites, including Richmond Yards, Family Newborn Care Unit, and Spring Garden upgrades.

IWK participates in the provincial Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), a group composed of people with lived experience of disability as well as representatives from multiple organizations across Nova Scotia. This partnership ensures our facility planning reflects real-world needs and perspectives, see [Appendix B](#).

All RFP (Request for Proposal) documents now explicitly require that designs meet or exceed Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations and the Accessible Design for the Built Environment Standard (CAN/CSA B651-18).

We are also addressing immediate safety and accessibility needs through our recently launched "**Spotless Spaces**" initiative, which ensures that entrances, exits, and hallways are kept clear of clutter and barriers. This effort is part of broader compliance action in response to orders from the Office of the Fire Marshal.

A recent example of this approach is the redesign of two fully accessible washrooms on the main floor of the main IWK Health campus. These washrooms were reimagined to remove barriers and uphold dignity for all users. They now feature height-adjustable, full-sized change tables and advanced gantry lift systems that support safe and seamless transfers for individuals with mobility challenges.

The creation of these newly accessible washrooms highlights the strength of our collaborative process. Guidance from the Accessibility Action Group, insights from Occupational Therapy, and partnership with APSEA (Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority) fostered a culture of curiosity, innovation, and continuous learning. We recognize that truly effective design relies on a diversity of perspectives, no single viewpoint can encompass all the considerations required to shape fully inclusive environments. Consultation with diverse user groups is built into our project processes. Patient and family advisors, clinical teams, program leadership, and accessibility consultants are engaged during planning and design to ensure that the spaces we create reflect the needs of all who use them.

## Rick Hansen Certification

IWK currently has two individuals who have successfully completed this course, and we are committed to increasing this number over the next three years.

# Joint Occupational Health & Safety Committee (JOSHC)

Accessibility criteria are currently being integrated into the JOSHC inspection form for all program areas across both on-campus and off-campus IWK sites.

## Wheelchair Accessibility

We are actively developing a comprehensive plan to review and improve wheelchair availability and access across our facilities. This work is currently underway, and further updates will be shared as the plan progresses.

## Universal Design

Universal design is the practice of creating spaces and services that work for everyone, regardless of age or ability. This practice is now a standard expectation in all IWK redevelopment projects, both on our main campus and at off-site locations.

Our Space & Leasing team collaborates with Facilities, IT, and program teams to integrate universal design into new fit-ups, renovations, and leased spaces. This includes inclusive workstations, accessible circulation routes, and appropriate technology supports. The principle of inclusion has become the norm in our planning process, a meaningful shift that reflects our ongoing commitment to building a truly accessible healthcare environment.

# Accessible Wayfinding & Navigation

Helping people find their way through our facilities is a priority. We have received approvals to engage an external vendor to develop a comprehensive wayfinding strategy for IWK Health. This strategy will be broad and holistic, encompassing signage, icons, electronic navigation tools, verbal directions, and communications — ensuring that our facilities are navigable for people of all abilities.

We are also exploring how volunteer and support roles within our organization can be enhanced to better assist patients and families in navigating our spaces and accessing equipment. A business case for expanding these roles is in development.

## Parking

IWK Health offers approximately 20 accessible parking spaces across Levels 1 through 4 of the University Avenue parkade, with the majority located on Levels 3 and 4. In addition, there are seven specialized spaces designed for side entry vans to support individuals who use motorized wheelchairs. Two designated accessible spots are also available in the staff underground parking lot. For added convenience, there are accessible spaces at the Children's Emergency entrance as well as at the South Street entrance. Work to repaint parking lines and install additional signage will begin soon.

# Employment

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IWK Health is committed to building a workplace that is equitable, inclusive, and representative of the diverse communities we serve. This update highlights the progress we have made across four employment focus areas: Overall Culture, Recruitment, Occupational Health, Safety & Wellness, and Job Postings & Hiring Practices.

## Overall Culture

Building a culture of equity, diversity, inclusion, reconciliation, and accessibility (EDIRA) is foundational to everything we do at IWK Health. This year, we launched our EDIRA strategy, marking a significant organizational commitment to embedding these values across all areas of our work, from how we hire to how we deliver care.

As part of this work, we have begun reviewing our organizational policies through the EDIRA lens toolkit, a structured approach to identifying and addressing gaps or barriers that may exist in our current policies. This process helps ensure that our internal rules and practices reflect our values of equity and belonging.

## Recruitment

We are working to make our recruitment processes more equitable and accessible at every stage. Key steps taken include:

- We have introduced demographic information collection within our MAP recruitment system, which will help us better understand who is applying to

work at IWK Health and identify where we need to do more to attract diverse talent.

- Candidates who are invited to participate in an interview or assessment process are now actively informed of their right to request accommodation. Our team is committed to ensuring the assessment experience is accessible and inclusive for all applicants.
- All new Hiring Leaders participate in monthly recruitment training that covers equity in hiring, the self-identification process, diversification of interview panels, and the importance of avoiding ableist language. These topics are integrated as core components of the training to ensure that inclusive hiring practices are understood and applied consistently across the organization.

## Occupational Health, Safety & Wellness (OHS&W)

IWK Health is committed to helping employees do their best work in a safe, supportive environment. All new employees complete a pre-placement health screening with Occupational Health, Safety & Wellness (OHSW), including identifying any accommodation or support needed to work safely and effectively.

We acknowledge that we have more work to do in this area. Some of our existing systems are not yet fully accessible, and we recognize that retrofitting or creating workarounds is not sufficient. We are committed to addressing these gaps more meaningfully, ensuring staff feel valued and fully supported rather than having to navigate unnecessary barriers. Dedicated resources and budget for accommodation support will be part of our continued advocacy.

# Job Postings & Hiring Language

The language we use in job postings reflects who we are and who we want to become. Our postings now include a clear and explicit statement affirming IWK Health's commitment to anti-racism, anti-ableism, equity, and inclusion.

# Education

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Education is one of the most powerful tools we have for building a more accessible and inclusive organization. At IWK Health, we are investing in learning opportunities that deepen awareness, shift culture, and equip our teams with the knowledge they need to better support patients, families, and colleagues. This update shares the progress we have made in our education and training efforts as part of our Accessibility Action Plan.

## Staff Training & Learning

Creating a workplace where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported starts with education. Through our HR Labour & Learning team, we have introduced and advanced two key training initiatives this year.

Psychologically Safe Workplace training is being rolled out to help staff understand what psychological safety means in practice and how they can contribute to a culture where people feel comfortable speaking up, sharing concerns, and being themselves at work.

People-Centred and Trauma-Informed Care training is equipping our teams with a deeper understanding of how trauma, adversity, and systemic barriers affect the people we serve. This approach helps staff respond with greater empathy, reduces unintentional harm, and provides care that recognizes the whole person.

In partnership with SeaChange CoLab and their Accessibility Confident Employer (ACE), we have developed 2 new learning modules developed in partnership between the Equity & Belonging team and Learning & Development. These

modules strengthen understanding of accessibility, inclusive language, and equitable practices.

- **Accessibility Foundations** covers types of disabilities, key accessibility principles, the impact of ableism, and practical ways to remove barriers.
- **Accessible Communication** explores essential communication strategies, demonstrating how accessible approaches support equity and improve everyday interactions.

## Partnerships & Collaborative Work

We believe that meaningful progress on accessibility requires collaboration beyond our own walls. This year, we have developed a formal partnership with the Accessibility Directorate, strengthening our connection to provincial expertise and resources that support our accessibility work.

As part of this partnership, IWK Health is an active member of the anti-ableism working group convened by the Accessibility Directorate. This group brings together organizations committed to challenging ableist attitudes and practices, and our participation reflects our commitment to learning from and contributing to that broader provincial conversation. This working group was created to develop the Understanding Ableism resource, which is now available.

We are also in the process of developing a Service Dog policy for IWK Health. As part of this work, we are organizing an education presentation delivered by the Department of Justice's Service Dog Program last January 23, 2025, to ensure our staff are well-informed about the rights of individuals who rely on service dogs and how to welcome them appropriately in our facilities.

## Awareness & Outreach

Raising awareness across our organization and the communities we serve is an important part of our education mandate. This year, we marked International

Day of Persons with Disabilities with a featured article in our internal Pulse publication, sharing insights and perspectives to foster greater understanding and engagement among IWK staff. We also celebrated our first Access Awareness week.

We also presented to the Accessibility Advisory Committee on Models of Disability – an important opportunity to engage with external partners and people with lived experience, and to demonstrate IWK’s ongoing commitment to understanding disability through an equity lens.

# Goods and Services

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Accessible goods and services are at the heart of equitable healthcare. At IWK Health, we are committed to ensuring that every patient and family who comes through our doors can access the care and services they need with dignity and ease. This update shares progress across three areas: our Perinatal Centre, our Gynecology and Ambulatory clinic spaces, and our food services.

## Perinatal Centre

Our onsite Perinatal Centre currently has two rooms equipped with accessible exam tables, ensuring that patients with mobility needs can receive care in a safe and comfortable environment.

Looking ahead, the Perinatal Centre is scheduled to move to an offsite location in mid-2026. This transition represents a significant accessibility milestone: the new facility will feature 17 rooms, and **every single one** will be equipped with an accessible exam table. This expansion reflects our commitment to making accessibility the standard, not the exception, in the care spaces we build.

## Gynecology, Urogynecology & Ambulatory Clinics

Our onsite and offsite Dartmouth Ambulatory clinic locations are equipped with specialized exam chairs designed with accessibility and patient comfort in mind. These chairs offer a wide range of movements, including reclining and sitting

up, and feature footrests that function as stirrups, reducing the need for patients to reposition themselves.

The clinical locations also have mechanical lifts available for patients who require additional transfer support, ensuring that no one is excluded from accessing care due to mobility needs.

Our physiotherapy spaces include two accessible treatment tables, and all of this equipment (exam chairs, lifts, and physiotherapy tables) meets the bariatric standard for up to 1,000 lbs, ensuring that our care spaces are inclusive for patients of all body types.

## Food Services

We understand that access to food is an important part of a patient's and family's experience at IWK Health, particularly for those staying with us over extended periods. Around-the-clock food access is available through two convenient options: our Dial for Dining service, which allows patients and families to order meals by phone at any time, and our Harvest vending machine, which provides accessible, on-demand food options 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Safety Pods

IWK Health began inquiring about the Safety Pods in early summer 2025. They were received in late summer 2025 and distributed to interested departments in early winter 2025. Training for users occurred in February 2026. The pods have been available in common areas for several weeks, where patients have been using them as supportive seating.

The pods provide a broad range of clinical, therapeutic, sensory, and comfort-based benefits, including:

## Patient & Family Support

- Providing comfort during difficult treatments
- Allowing patients and caregivers to sit together comfortably
- Offering deep pressure input to reduce anxiety and increase overall comfort
- Supporting breastfeeding or kangaroo care
- Offering an alternative to traditional hospital furniture
- Supporting procedures such as bloodwork, IV initiation, NG tube insertion, and dressing changes

## Sensory & Mental Health Support

- Creating a quiet, acoustically dampened environment that serves as a “safe haven” for neurodiverse individuals or those with sensory sensitivities, anxiety, or high stress
- Offering a self-regulation space that clients/patients can access independently—not only during heightened emotional states

## Enhanced Safety & Accessibility

- Allowing the pods to be positioned wherever needed to create an immediate, supportive environment
- Reducing the need for clients/patients with mobility challenges to navigate complex or overstimulating public areas
- Increasing therapeutic accessibility for individuals who may struggle in traditional clinical settings



# Information and Communication

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How we share information matters. At IWK Health, we are committed to ensuring that the information and communications we produce, whether for patients, families, staff, or the public, are accessible to everyone, regardless of ability, language, or the way they process information.

## Universal Design Toolkit

IWK Health is partnering with SeaChange CoLab and their Accessibility Confident Employer (ACE) program to develop a Universal Design Toolkit, a practical resource designed to guide staff in creating communications and information materials that are accessible by design. The toolkit provides clear, actionable guidance on how to apply Universal Design principles across a range of formats, including written documents, digital content, signage, presentations, and patient education materials.

The toolkit is intended to serve as a shared reference for anyone at IWK who creates or shares information, helping to build consistent, organization-wide practices that reduce barriers and improve the experience for all users, including people with visual, auditory, cognitive, or physical disabilities.

# Accessibility Reporting and Feedback

During 2024-2025, the provincial adverse event management system (SIMS) was updated to allow for the documentation and tracking of concerns, compliments, and suggestions under a new Racism & Discrimination category. Accessibility related concerns, compliments or suggestions are included within this category, enabling more consistent identification and monitoring of accessibility specific issues raised by patients, families, or staff.

This enhancement has strengthened organizational insight into accessibility barriers by capturing these events alongside other patient-initiated feedback sources, including experience surveys and direct reports. Together, these data streams support a more comprehensive understanding of accessibility trends and areas requiring improvement.

Accessibility related SIMS data is compiled quarterly and reported through established quality and safety reporting structures, including IWK Health Leadership and the Board of Directors. This ensures accessibility considerations are consistently reflected in leadership decision making and inform broader EDIRA strategy development.

# Transportation

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Safe and accessible transportation is a critical part of ensuring that children and youth with disabilities and special healthcare needs can travel safely to and from care. At IWK Health, our transportation accessibility work is led by Child Safety Link — an Atlantic-wide child and youth injury prevention program with a dedicated focus on unintentional injury prevention, including child passenger safety.

## Child Safety Link: Supporting Children with Special Healthcare Needs

Child Safety Link plays a central role in supporting the transportation needs of children with special healthcare needs across our region. The program provides training, consultation, hands-on support, and the provision of appropriate car seats to several IWK departments, including the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), the Family Newborn Care Unit (FNCU), the Medical Surgical Nursing Unit (MSNU), Occupational Therapy (both Rehabilitation and Specialty Seating), and Orthopedics.

This work is led by a Health Promotion Specialist with exceptional expertise in accessible child passenger safety. This specialist holds two rare distinctions: they are the only STAC Instructor Mentor in Canada and the only CPST Instructor Trainer in Atlantic Canada. STAC — Safe Travel for All Children — is an internationally recognized program focused on the safe transportation of children with disabilities and complex medical needs.

## Virtual Community of Practice

Child Safety Link leads a virtual STAC community of practice that extends its reach beyond IWK's walls. This community connects and supports healthcare professionals and community practitioners across the region who work with infants, children, and youth with disabilities affecting safe travel — covering both conventional and adaptive car seat solutions.

By bringing together diverse professionals in a shared learning environment, this community of practice helps raise the standard of accessible transportation support available to families throughout Atlantic Canada.

## Infant Car Seat Education & Policy

IWK Health has an established Infant Car Seat Education Policy that sets out required training and discharge education for nurses caring for infants under one year of age. Child Safety Link actively supports this policy by developing targeted education resources for nursing staff and by training nurses to deliver car seat education directly to families before discharge.

This ensures that every family leaving IWK with a newborn or young infant has the knowledge and confidence to transport their child safely — a foundational step in child passenger safety.

## Our Partners

The transportation accessibility work at IWK Health is strengthened by a broad network of internal and external partners. Within IWK, we work closely with Occupational Therapists (including Specialty Seating and Rehabilitation), the NICU, MSNU, FNCU, Orthopedics, and Social Work teams.

Externally, we collaborate with the Nova Scotia Society of Occupational Therapists, Nova Scotia Health, Autism Nova Scotia, and the Child Passenger

Safety Association of Canada. Together, these partnerships help ensure that our work reflects the most current knowledge and reaches the families and communities who need it most.

# Advancing the Accessibility Plan in Ongoing Practice

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## Evaluating and Reviewing Our Progress

As prescribed public sector organizations, IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health must continually improve and carry out this accessibility plan.

Beyond meeting legal requirements, we are dedicated to ensuring this plan reflects how we value the voices, experiences, and needs of disabled Nova Scotians. We will bring our 2026-2029 Accessibility Plan to life by transforming evidence and ideas into policies and practices that make a real difference for people in their everyday lives.

## Responsibilities

### **The Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for:**

- Advising IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health on updating, implementing, and reviewing progress of the Accessibility Plan
- Reviewing and updating the Accessibility Plan at least every three years
- Providing advice and recommendations on strategies to help achieve the plan's goals
- Helping ensure compliance with federal and provincial accessibility directives and regulations

## IWK Health Accessibility Action Group is responsible for:

- Serves as an internal advisory group that supports IWK Health’s commitment to equitable access by advising IWK Health on updating, implementing, and reviewing progress of the Accessibility Plan
- Identifies barriers and provides practical guidance for removing them
- Recommends improvements to policies, programs, services, and environments
- Promote awareness and supports accessible organizational practices
- Centres lived-experience perspectives in decision-making
- Helps foster an inclusive and equitable culture across all abilities and experiences

## Implementation Approach and Prioritization

The IWK and NSH Accessibility Action Plan includes 115 individual actions spanning six key domains: built environment, education, employment, goods and services, information and communications, and transportation.

IWK Health determined that managing each action individually was neither practical nor sustainable. To create a clearer, more coordinated approach for continuous improvement in the 2026–2029 Accessibility Plan, a comprehensive review of all actions was completed. Related tasks were grouped into 30 defined projects (see Table 1) to strengthen oversight, improve efficiency, and enhance accountability.

Responsibilities have already been aligned with the appropriate teams across the health centre. The next phase of implementation will include the assignment of project leads, the establishment of working groups, and the development of clear problem statements for each initiative.

This structured, project-based approach strengthens coordination and accountability across the organization. It supports effective monitoring of

implementation, clearer progress tracking, timely updates to the Accessibility Plan, and continuous refinement of initiatives over time.

To support sustained progress, projects have been distributed across the organization to allow concurrent advancement. In total, 15 teams across the health centre are actively engaged in implementing accessibility initiatives. This broad engagement reinforces shared ownership and embeds accessibility considerations across clinical, operational, and administrative functions. For more information see [Appendix D](#).

As a children's hospital, accessibility is priority. Accessibility directly affects patient safety, quality of care, and equitable access for children and families. For this reason, all projects within the Accessibility Action Plan are considered high priority at a strategic level.

Given the scope and complexity of this work, a formal prioritization framework guides implementation sequencing and resource allocation. While all projects are high priority, structured sequencing ensures that the most urgent safety risks and compliance requirements are addressed first.

When teams are responsible for multiple projects, sequencing decisions are informed by:

- Patient safety considerations
- Legal and regulatory requirements
- Number of individuals impacted
- Risks associated with delays
- Resource availability
- Project interdependencies
- Alignment with the hospital's strategic objectives

This coordinated and prioritized approach ensures that critical safety and compliance issues are addressed promptly while maintaining steady, measurable progress across the full portfolio of [accessibility initiatives](#).

Feedback about our 2026-2029 Accessibility Plan can be sent to us by email:

[IWKAccessibility@iwk.nshealth.ca](mailto:IWKAccessibility@iwk.nshealth.ca)

# How We Address Questions and Complaints

Anyone can share a concern, complaint, or compliment about accessibility at IWK Health. There are several ways to contact us about accessibility.

## IWK Health

1-855-495-2273 (IWK CARE) (toll free)

902-470-7435 (local call in Halifax)

[feedback@iwk.nshealth.ca](mailto:feedback@iwk.nshealth.ca)

Accessibility concerns, complaints, or compliments can also be shared directly with care providers or unit and department managers.

## Appendix A:

# Projects with Associated Standards

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Project	Associated Standard(s)
Coordinated Accessibility Improvement Framework Project	 Built Environment
Infrastructure, Design, and Standards Guidelines	 Built Environment
Service Dog / Guide Dog Access and Support Enhancement Project	 Built Environment
Wheelchair Availability and Access Project	 Built Environment
Accessible Parking Review and Improvement	 Built Environment
Accessibility Training & Certification	 Built Environment
Accessibility Standards and Guidelines for Learning Program	 Education
Accommodations and Support Processes Program	 Education
Accessible Learning Materials Program	 Education
Accessibility and Transition Supports	 Education

Project	Associated Standard(s)
Accessible Employment Practices Audit Project	 Employment
Accessible Hiring and Inclusive Recruitment Initiative	 Employment
Accessible Barrier-Free Hiring Practices Initiative	 Employment
Accessible Communication and Technology Inclusion Project	 Employment
Workplace Access & Accommodation Initiative	 Employment
Universal Design in Workplace Environments	 Employment
Accessible Booking and Appointment Improvements	 Goods & Services
Accessible 24/7 Food Access Initiative	 Goods & Services
Accessible Examination Equipment Review Project	 Goods & Services
Accessible Information & Communication Technology Enhancement Project	 Information & Communication
Inclusive Public Communication and Presentation Standards Project	 Information & Communication
Accessible Transportation Audit and Coordination Initiative	 Transportation
Accessible Procurement Review and Improvement Initiative	 Goods & Services  Transportation

Project	Associated Standard(s)
Accessibility Learning and Awareness Development Project	 Built Environment  Employment  Education  Goods & Services  Information & Communication
Inclusive Engagement and Lived Experience Partnership Initiative	 Built Environment  Employment  Information & Communication  Transportation
Accessible Wayfinding and Navigation Enhancement Project	 Built Environment  Goods & Services
Web Accessibility Standards Implementation Project	 Education  Information & Communication
Accessible Feedback and Patient Input Enhancement Project	 Goods & Services  Information & Communication
Accessible Information and Document Standards	 Goods & Services  Information & Communication

Project	Associated Standard(s)
Accessibility Policy Review Initiative	 Built Environment
	 Employment
	 Education
	 Goods & Services
	 Information & Communication
	 Transportation

# Appendix B:

# Engagement

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## Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee Engagement Session

To provide a concise overview of accessibility-related challenges, barriers, successes, and gaps identified during the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee Engagement Session held on January 23, 2025, with a focus on strengthening accessibility outcomes across partner organizations.

### Background

In partnership with Asanti Leadership this session brought together committee members—including newly introduced leadership—to assess the current state of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Accessibility (EDIRA). Participants emphasized accessibility as a core driver of equitable service delivery and organizational accountability. Discussions highlighted both systemic issues and opportunities for improvement.

### Key Issues

#### 1. Operational Accessibility Challenges

- Frequent leadership and staffing changes disrupt planning, continuity, and relationship-building.
- Engagement with people with disabilities is hindered by inconsistent communication pathways.

- Existing institutional systems are not designed with accessibility in mind, creating ongoing barriers.

## **2. Structural and Systemic Barriers**

- Decision-making remains predominantly Halifax-centric, limiting rural and provincial representation.
- Rural communities experience infrastructure limitations beyond organizational control.
- Aging facilities require significant investment to meet accessibility standards.

## **3. Digital and IT Accessibility Gaps**

- Current IT systems pose barriers for users with visual, hearing, cognitive, or mobility impairments.
- Lack of accessible digital design limits full participation in programs and services.

## **4. Accountability and Governance Challenges**

- Accessibility policies exist without clear mechanisms for implementation, monitoring, or enforcement.
- There is no unified, organization-wide accessibility pathway guiding long-term priorities.

## **What Is Working Well**

- Strong dedication and lived-experience contributions from committee members.
- Increased recognition of the need for sustained systemic investment in accessibility roles and infrastructure.
- More meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in conversations and decision-making processes.

# Analysis

The session highlighted a gap between accessibility commitments and actual operational capacity. Progress requires consistent leadership support, stronger accountability structures, and accessible digital and physical environments. Ongoing engagement with disability communities remains a critical enabler of effective accessibility practice.

## Next Steps / Recommendations

1. **Develop a clear organizational accessibility pathway** with priorities, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.
2. **Strengthening digital accessibility**, including IT system upgrades and adherence to accessibility standards.
3. **Improve community engagement structures** to ensure continuity despite staffing changes.
4. **Expand representation beyond Halifax** to reflect diverse provincial and rural accessibility needs.
5. **Advance infrastructure planning** to prioritize upgrades in older buildings.
6. **Continue gathering feedback** through online questionnaires and targeted consultations.

# Themes from the Accessibility Action Group Engagement Session

Date: January 9, 2025

## Purpose

To summarize accessibility-related insights and issues raised during the Accessibility Action Group Engagement Session in support of the development of the IWK's inaugural EDIRA Strategy and Implementation Plan.

## Background

The session focused on identifying current accessibility gaps, operational challenges, and opportunities for improvement across the organization. Accessibility emerged as a central area requiring structured assessment, coordinated planning, and increased resourcing.

## Key Accessibility Challenges Identified

### 1. Physical and Built Environment Barriers

- Inadequate signage and limited accessible washrooms.
- Low-visibility stair indicators and insufficient bariatric-appropriate equipment.
- Frequent construction and renovations causing navigational and safety challenges.

### 2. Systemic and Operational Barriers

- Appointment scheduling processes do not capture or accommodate patient accessibility needs.
- Planning for additional support persons during appointments is lacking.
- Equipment use challenges and gaps in evacuation planning for individuals with disabilities.

### 3. Attitudinal and Knowledge Barriers

- Silent ableism and inconsistent understanding of accessibility across staff groups.
- Limited training and awareness of accessibility principles and inclusive practice.

#### 4. Gaps Beyond the Built Environment

- Transportation issues that affect access to services.
- HR processes and hiring practices that do not consistently incorporate accessibility considerations.

#### What Needs to Happen

- Expand accessibility education, including Rick Hansen Foundation training and ongoing staff learning.
- Increase engagement of individuals with lived experience in planning, design, and decision-making.
- Strengthen and sustain resourcing for accessibility, including funding and dedicated roles.
- Improve emergency and evacuation planning to account for diverse accessibility needs.
- Enhance organizational understanding of ableism and its impact on patient and family experience.

#### Current Strengths and Positive Developments

- Hiring an Accessibility Health Consultant with lived experience and establishment of a dedicated accessibility budget.
- Increased co-development practices and greater involvement of the accessibility team in design reviews.
- Growing organizational openness to staff ideas and input on accessibility improvements.
- Early movement toward shifting from infrastructure fixes to broader behavioral and cultural change.

#### Major Gaps in Current Implementation

- Insufficient attention to transportation accessibility and inclusive HR practices.
- Need for more structured and widespread accessibility education.
- Limited diversity within the accessibility-focused workforce.

## Appendix C:

# Committee and Group Membership

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## Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Accessibility Advisory Committee provides guidance to IWK Health and Nova Scotia Health on identifying, preventing, and removing barriers for people with disabilities across programs, services, initiatives, and facilities, in alignment with Nova Scotia's Act. Its role includes advising on barrier removal, supporting both organizations in meeting their obligations under the Act, and contributing to the development, implementation, and evaluation of the joint accessibility plan. The Committee upholds accessibility as human rights and works in alignment with the Accessibility Directorate's mandate, which requires that at least 50% of members have lived experience with disability.

## Committee Composition

The Committee includes 12–16 members from IWK, NSH, disability-serving organizations, and individuals with disabilities. We are seeking members who have lived experience with disability or accessibility barriers, are connected to organizations serving persons with disabilities, and are committed to advancing accessibility, inclusion, and system-level change.

# Meeting Dates

- February 19, 2026
- January 15, 2026
  
- November 20, 2025
- September 18, 2025
- June 26, 2025
- May 22, 2025
- April 24, 2025
- March 27, 2025
- February 27, 2025
  
- November 28, 2024
- October 23, 2024
- August 22, 2024
- June 27, 2024
- May 23, 2024
- January 25, 2024
  
- June 22, 2023
- May 25, 2023
- March 23, 2023
- February 23, 2023
- January 23, 2023
  
- October 27, 2022
- September 22, 2022
- August 25, 2022

# Current Membership

## IWK Health

- **Angela Johnson**, Director, Health Equity, Safety, & Wellness
- **Jeff Harding**, Director, Redevelopment, Space and Leasing Services
- **Jaime Blenus**, Accessibility Health Consultant

## NS Health

- **Mahogany O’Keiffie**, Senior Director, EDIRA NE
- **Cher Smith**, Interprofessional Practice Learning Leader, Western Zone
- **Margaret Angus**, Senior Communications Advisor, Public Affairs, Content and Media Relations
- **Chris Smith**, Director, Program Management, Facilities Management and Support

## Partners

- **Heidi Wallace**, Manager Assisted Mobility Programs, Easter Seals Nova Scotia
- **Caden Flinn**, Special Events Coordinator, Easter Seals Nova Scotia
- **Marion Brown**, Associate Professor, School of Social Work; Associate Dean Academic, Faculty of Health, Dalhousie University
- **Holly MacLellan**, Supervisor of Accessibility Services, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)
- **Alycia Pottie**, Patient/Family Representative

## Committee Support

- **Terri Fraser**, Director, Communications, Engagement & Change, IWK
- **Vinson Li**, Librarian Educator, Library Services, NSH

# Current Membership

## IWK Health Accessibility Action Group

The Accessibility Action Group is an internal advisory body that advances IWK Health's commitment to equitable access by identifying barriers, offering practical guidance, and recommending improvements across policies, programs, services, and environments. Grounded in principles of full inclusion across the continuum of human ability and experience, the group promotes awareness, supports accessible organizational practices, and brings valuable lived-experience perspectives into decision-making to help foster an equitable and inclusive culture. This group meets every two weeks.

- **Jaime Blenus**, Consultant, Accessibility Health
- **John Garcia**, Sr. Consultant, EDIRA, HES-W
- **Joaquin Rodriguez Juandeaburre**, Consultant Transformation
- **Katherine Hutka**, Health Promotion Specialist
- **Julie Purinton**, Consultant, Redevelopment Space Leasing
- **Jen Feron**, General Counsel
- **Mitchell Touesnard**, Consultant, Redevelopment Space Leasing
- **Michelle Zinck**, Privacy Officer
- **Sara Mirzaei**, Consultant, Process & System Improvement
- **Nancy Cashen**, Director Nursing & Professional Practice
- **Courtney Fortune**, Manager Space & Leasing

### Additional Support

- **Jeff Harding**, Director, Redevelopment Space & Leasing
- **Angela Johnson**, Director Health Equity Safety & Wellness (HES-W)

# Appendix D: Governance of project teams

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## Purpose

The purpose of the governance of the project teams is to provide a structured framework for decision-making, accountability, and oversight, ensuring projects deliver the expected accessibility improvements.

## Structure

The governance structure has three layers:

### 1. Steering Committee

Purpose	Composition	Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide executive direction</li><li>• Ensure alignment with hospital strategy</li><li>• Remove barriers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Executive Sponsor</li><li>• HR Director</li><li>• Facilities Director</li><li>• Redevelopment Director</li><li>• Learning Director</li><li>• Communications Director</li><li>• Strategy Director</li><li>• Patient Safety representative</li><li>• Patient Experience Manager</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approve scope, priorities, and resource allocation</li><li>• Monitor progress</li><li>• Remove organizational/operational barriers</li></ul>

Purpose	Composition	Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occupational Health representative</li> <li>Health Equity, Safety and Wellness Director</li> <li>Accessibility Consultant</li> <li>Project Manager</li> </ul>	

## 2. Accessibility Program Team

Purpose	Composition	Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate accessibility initiatives across all hospital priority areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Manager</li> <li>Accessibility Consultant</li> <li>Accessibility Leads</li> <li>Health and Safety representative</li> <li>Communications representative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share progress updates</li> <li>Manage risks</li> <li>Coordinate communication</li> <li>Escalate issues</li> </ul>

## 3. Priority Working Groups

Purpose	Composition	Responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Execute and monitor actions within each accessibility domain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Manager</li> <li>Accessibility Consultant</li> <li>Accessibility Lead for the priority area</li> <li>Members from relevant operational teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and execute action plans</li> <li>Track indicators and outcomes</li> <li>Identify and escalate risks</li> </ul>

## Timeline

The goal is to have all teams fully established by the end of April 2026. This structure will remain in place for the next three years.



IWK Health

*Nothing about us without us*

[iwkhealth.ca/accessibility](http://iwkhealth.ca/accessibility)