

Accessibility Matters

Why Accessibility Assessments Matter

Accessibility is a human right, which means that an individual, irrespective of their abilities should at a facility, be able to manoeuvre the path of travel and access the amenities at the facility, barrier-free and with dignity. Recognizing the dignity of an individual with respect to their abilities and making the accommodations to address barriers that may challenge their abilities at the built environment becomes a moral objective for a building owner. Creating this inclusive environment, will provide the individual the opportunity to become an active and contributing member to the community.

Assessments vs Audits

Accessibility assessments are recommended as opposed to audits because assessments go further than audits. With an assessment, when there is a reporting of a non-compliance a recommendation or action is also provided to address or improve the noted accessibility barrier. In an audit, the accessibility barrier is only verified for accuracy, no improvement is recommended.

In Canada, providing a barrier-free accessible built environment is subject to, and is at different stages of enactment based on the authority having jurisdiction (Federal, Province, Municipality, etc.).

At the federal level, the [Accessible Canada Act \(ACA\)](#) received Royal Assent in 2019 to create barrier-free Canada by 2040. The ACA applies to agencies and Crown Corporations federally regulated private sector (e.g., banks, transportation, etc.), the Canadian Forces, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

At the provincial level, the Province of Ontario set the precedent in 2005 when it passed into law the landmark legislation to create an accessible province within 20 years. The Provinces of Manitoba (2013) and Nova Scotia (2017) followed suit. In provinces where accessibility is not legislated, and the building code not amended, the National Building Code (NBC) is the reference to address barrier-free design.

The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) prepared by the province, enacts the law that sets out the process to develop and enforce a barrierfree accessibility standard in Ontario, The infograph here highlights the milestones to create Barrier-Free Accessibility by 2025 in Ontario.

Several municipalities have also enforced barrier-free environments in their bylaws by legislating a Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) for their buildings.

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Given that, at the Federal and Provincial levels, the prescribed barrier-free design standards reference the building code (amended), it is argued that a barrier-free built environment applies only to:

- Buildings that have been designed and constructed after release of amended building code (in the case of Ontario 2015) or
- Existing buildings, where an extensive renovation of the building is proposed.

In other words, existing buildings do not have to make the accommodations to meet the barrier-free design standard (grandfathered) unless a major renovation is undertaken.

However, under the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#), which takes precedent, accommodations to provide a barrier-free access environment becomes a requisite. Hence owners need to consider providing a barrier-free accessible environment for individuals with disabilities to allow them the ability to participate as members of society.

Where and How to Undertake an Accessibility Assessment

Depending on the authority having jurisdiction, a barrier-free accessible design generally applies to all classes of major occupancy. The exceptions are generally:

- Houses (single, semi-detached, duplex, townhouses, etc.) or rooming houses with fewer than eight boarders or roomers.
- Buildings with high hazard industrial occupancies (factories, power plants, etc.).
- Buildings that are not intended to be occupied on a daily or full-time basis, including automatic telephone exchanges, pumphouse and substations and
- Camps for housing of workers.

To successfully capture the accessibility barriers at the subject facility, the use of an Accessibility Assessment (AA) checklist list is recommended. The AA checklist can be streamlined based on the building owner's objective:

- The baseline AA Screening Checklist provides owners, at a high-level the potential accessible barriers at their facility. The assessment, which is visual, uses no measuring tools to confirm compliance to a prescribed Facility Accessibility Design Standard (FADS) by the authority having jurisdiction. The AA screen checklist can be completed by in-house staff; and
- The consolidated AA checklist, which is structured to address barriers to a FADS prescribed guideline(s). In Ontario, the Ontario Building Code (OBC) (primarily Section 3.8) and O. Reg 191/11 (Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation), provides the barrier-free design standards. The consolidated AA checklist is completed by trained and experienced accessibility practitioners with measuring

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tools (conventional or digital tape-meter, slope-meter, force gauges etc.), to analyze and confirm the barrier.

The AA checklist generally addresses accessible barriers at:

- Designated accessible parking space (surface and underground parking garage).
- Exterior path of travel including curb ramps.
- Exterior stairs and ramps.
- Exterior entrances.
- Wayfinding signage.
- Interior doors.
- Vertical transportation devices (elevators, wheelchair accessible lift, etc.).
- Interior stairs.
- Common areas (corridors, Universal washrooms, etc.).
- Communal washrooms and changerooms and ○ Building controls.

Who Is Qualified to Do an Accessibility Assessment for You?

Aim to work with vendors with the knowledge and practical skills needed to rate a building for its overall accessibility and who have trained under the **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ program**. This certification was developed by the Rick Hansen Foundation to train accessibility practitioners in assessment of facility from the perspective of Universal Design with the intent to provide owners a level of meaningful access at their facility.

When undertaking Accessibility Assessments, vendors who offer this work as a core service and with certificated experts in the field are most qualified to assist you.

By

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