



# 2024 Durham Region Accessibility Report



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# Land Acknowledgment

The Region of Durham exists on lands that the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg inhabited for thousands of years prior to European colonization. These lands are the traditional and treaty territories of the Nations covered under the Williams Treaties, including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, and the Chippewa Nations of Georgina Island, Beausoleil and Rama.

We honour, recognize, and respect Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and stewards of the lands and waters on which we have the privilege to live. In our efforts towards reconciliation, we continue to build and strengthen relationships with First Nations, as well as the large Métis communities and growing Inuit communities here in Durham. We commit to learning from Indigenous values and knowledge, building opportunities for collaboration, and recognizing that we are all connected.



# Durham Region Accessibility Report

In our ongoing commitment to accessibility, the Regional Municipality of Durham has consistently strived to exceed the requirements set forth by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Ontario Building Code. This annual AODA Status report is a self-assessment tool that organizations use to demonstrate their compliance with the AODA. While meeting legislative standards is a fundamental aspect of our operations, we recognize that true accessibility extends beyond mere compliance. It requires a proactive, empathetic approach that includes the voices of those with lived experiences.

Our achievements in accessibility are a testament to our dedication to creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels genuinely welcomed and valued. We have implemented numerous initiatives that go beyond legislative mandates, driven by our belief that accessibility should be pursued not just to avoid repercussions but to foster a community built on mutual respect, full participation and equity.

As we move forward, we will continue to listen, learn, and adapt, ensuring that our commitment to accessibility remains unwavering. Our goal is to create a society where everyone can thrive, and where true inclusion is not just an idea, but a lived reality.

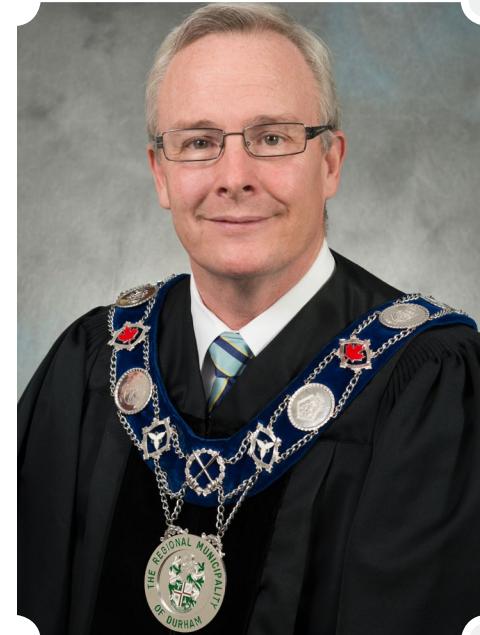
# Message from the Regional Chair and Chief Administrative Officer

True inclusion happens when accessibility is at the heart of everything we do—when it's woven into every step of our work, from planning to delivery.

It happens when we recognize the challenges people with disabilities continue to face within the employment sector, when navigating public spaces and in accessing services and supports. And, it cannot be achieved without collective efforts to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility.

In 2024, we continued our important work in creating an accessible Durham Region to ensure that people of all identities and abilities have equal opportunities to live, work, grow, and thrive.

We empowered employees to independently create accessible documents with confidence by launching the Online Accessible Document Resource Guide. Built in response to employee feedback, the guide—along with training from the Region's Accessibility team—has helped make accessibility part of their everyday work.



To ensure that everyone has the same opportunities to travel with ease, the foundation was laid for the launch of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program on Durham Region Transit. This program will help us build a more supportive and inclusive transit networking where all customers feel safe, understood and confident to travel independently.

A new Community Resource Guide for Seniors and Older Adults was released, connecting Durham's aging population with vital services and opportunities to stay safe, active and engaged.

We also strengthened community partnerships by expanding the Durham Accessibility Conference, in partnership with Abilities Centre, to offer a hybrid model that ensured even more people could participate.

In undertaking this important work, we are grateful for the support and guidance of Durham Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). Through their advocacy, the AAC is helping to build a more inclusive region where diversity is embraced, and everyone is valued for who they are.

Accessibility matters, which is why the Region remains committed to advancing initiatives and programs that foster inclusion. Together, we can create opportunities that will make a real difference in the lives of those who are part of this amazing community that we call, home.



# Message from Chair of Accessibility Advisory Committee

It is my honour to represent Durham Region and its residents as Chair of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). Volunteering in retirement is a wonderful way to give back to one's community and contributes to good personal health.

Members of the AAC are motivated to join the committee for several reasons. They have a passion for advocating for accessibility and inclusivity, and they want to make a tangible difference in their community. Being part of the AAC provides an opportunity to collaborate with like-minded individuals, influence policy, and drive initiatives that enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.

For individuals living with disabilities, advocacy is particularly important work. It provides a platform to voice their unique perspectives and challenges, ensuring that their needs are understood and addressed. Advocacy helps to break down barriers, promote equal opportunities, and foster a more inclusive society.

By actively participating in these efforts, individuals with disabilities can directly influence the creation

of environments that are more accommodating and supportive, ultimately improving their own quality of life and that of others in similar situations.

The vision for Durham Region in 2025 and beyond is that every resident has access to services and programs that best fits their abilities. We are committed to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or sensory abilities, can participate in and benefit from the resources and opportunities provided by the Region of Durham.

This shared commitment drives us to continually strive for improvements and innovations that make our community more inclusive and equitable for everyone. I am proud of our work and honoured to sit among my fellow members as we look forward to a new year full of possibilities to improve the lives of every resident in Durham Region.

Sincerely,

Jim McEwan, Chair of the Durham Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

# Accessibility Advisory Committee (ACC)



The Durham Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), operating under the mandate of the AODA, is a Council-appointed committee that provides guidance to enhance the accessibility of regional programs, services, and facilities for people with disabilities. The AAC offers input on accessibility considerations related to physical spaces and infrastructure and plays a key role in reviewing and advising on both the Region's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and its annual Accessibility Reports.

The Region of Durham AAC comprises members with lived experiences, having family members with disabilities, and industry and community representatives.

## Accomplishments in 2024

### 1. Durham Region Accessibility Advisory Committee Awards

Each year, the AAC presents Accessibility Awards to recognize individuals, businesses, or organizations that have made significant efforts to incorporate accessibility into their operations or daily life. Nominations are sought from each of the eight area municipalities. In 2024, nine winners from across Durham were honoured for their outstanding contributions.

### 2. International Day of Persons with Disabilities

A flag raising ceremony and panel discussion were hosted at the Region of Durham by AAC members in collaboration with regional staff advocates.

### 3. Education and Awareness

The AAC hosted several educational presentations, allowing members to participate in key discussions on accessibility topics and concerns. These included:

- **CNIB – Get on Board Report:** results from the Accessible Transit Campaign Fall 2023.

- **Developing Durham Region's 2025 Strategic Plan: insights into the region's future plans.**

Durham Region's 2025 to 2035 Strategic Plan, titled "Connected Communities. Connected to You" outlines a long-term vision for building inclusive, sustainable, and resilient communities. The plan is shaped by community input and staff expertise and is guided by five strategic directions:

- Connected and Vibrant Communities
- Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action
- Healthy People, Caring Communities
- Resilient Local Economies
- Strong Relationships

- **Lakeshore East GO Train Extension to Bowmanville**

The Bowmanville GO train extension project, led by Metrolinx, is designed to enhance regional connectivity and aligns well with accessibility goals. The extension will add four new stations:

- Thornton's Corners East
- Ritson Road
- Courtice
- Bowmanville

The integration of accessibility into both physical design and service frequency reflects a strong alignment with the AODA and Regional equity goals.



- **Durham Region Equity Audit**

The 2023 Equity Audit identified institutional, cultural, and attitudinal barriers that affect individuals with disabilities. The audit also highlighted the need for both physically and digitally accessible environments, aligning with the Region's commitments under the AODA. In the area of employment, the audit underscored the importance of accessible hiring and promotion practices to ensure equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

- **Region of Durham Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Strategy**

Durham Region's DEI strategy is grounded in research, community input, and best practices, and is designed to guide equity-advancing initiatives across the Region. The AAC recognizes accessibility as a core pillar of equity, and the DEI strategy reflects this by building on foundational work such as the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and the 2023 Equity Audit.

## Collaborative Work and Initiatives

- **Neurodiversity Presentation**

Collaborated with regional staff to host a panel discussion for Neurodiversity Celebration Week. AAC Member Meghann Lloyd was a panelist.

- **Updated Terms of Reference**

The AAC updated its Terms of Reference to include the importance of having a youth voice on the committee whenever possible.

- **Motion to Council**

The AAC proposed a motion to the council regarding construction of stations for the Lakeshore East GO train Extension to Bowmanville.





# Accessibility Success Highlights 2024

This section will highlight our accessibility and inclusion successes, by department and, in some cases, by division.

# Section 1: Customer Service

Customer Service is a key pillar of the Region's commitment to service excellence. Across departments, teams have championed innovative improvements to ensure services are more inclusive, accessible, and convenient for all residents. The following highlights showcase how various divisions have advanced customer service practices to better meet the diverse needs of the community.

## Regional Chair's Office

The Office of the Regional Chair continues to play a leading role in advancing accessibility across the Region of Durham. The Chair and staff maintain a visible and active presence at events that promote disability awareness, education, and celebration. They are committed to ensuring that all internal and external communications support all employees and residents with inclusive language and accessible formats. This includes supporting requests for flag raisings, proclamations, and the recognition of significant observances. The Regional Chair provides multiple channels for public engagement offering in-person meetings at various locations such as Regional Headquarters, outdoor/onsite locations, coffee shop, and restaurants, as well as hybrid meetings and events. These efforts reinforce a strong commitment to responsive service and inclusive community outreach.

## Accessibility and Responsiveness

The Office of the Regional Chair is committed to accessibility and responsiveness:

- Efficient monitoring of phone calls, emails, and other correspondence to promptly address urgent matters.
- Letters and proclamations are available in multiple languages and accessible formats.
- Pre-recorded greetings/congratulations with accompanying text.
- An open-door policy to ensure accessibility for everyone.

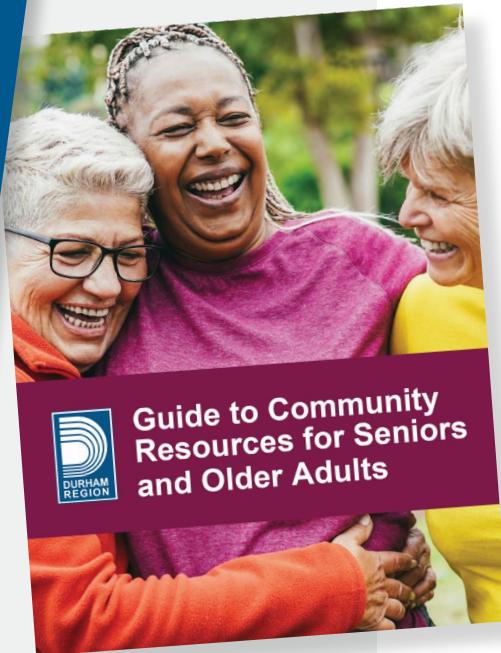


# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) division includes Accessibility, Community Safety and Well-Being, Durham Local Immigration Partnership and core equity and inclusion program areas. The Durham Local Immigration Partnership, in collaboration with the Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership and the Newcomer Accessibility Council (NAC), co-hosted a panel discussion to explore how newcomers with disabilities are accessing settlement and disability support services. The panel featured individuals with lived experiences as newcomers with disabilities, alongside service providers who support this population. Held at the University of Toronto Scarborough, the forum was attended by over 20 service providers from both Durham and Scarborough.

## Age Friendly

The Seniors' Guide is a product of the Age-Friendly Division with the Region of Durham, with support from the Government of Ontario (Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility - Seniors Community Grant 2023-2024). The guide was developed in partnership with the Region's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Division, Social Services Department, and Durham Region Transit.



- The Guide aims to enhance social connections and community engagement among older adults by raising awareness of resources and supports available in the community, including culturally responsive programs and services for older adults. It features essential safety and well-being programs and services from 109 non-profit organizations, organized into ten categories: Food and Clothing, Health, Mental Health, Housing, Income, Legal, Safety, Settlement, Social and Recreation, and Transportation.
- Printed copies of the Guide were distributed at approximately 130 locations throughout Durham Region, including public libraries, community facilities, health centers, seniors' residences, and community partners. To date, over 6,700 older adults have received hard copies of the guide, and an accessible online version is available on the Region of Durham's Age-Friendly web page ([durham.ca/AgeFriendly](http://durham.ca/AgeFriendly)).



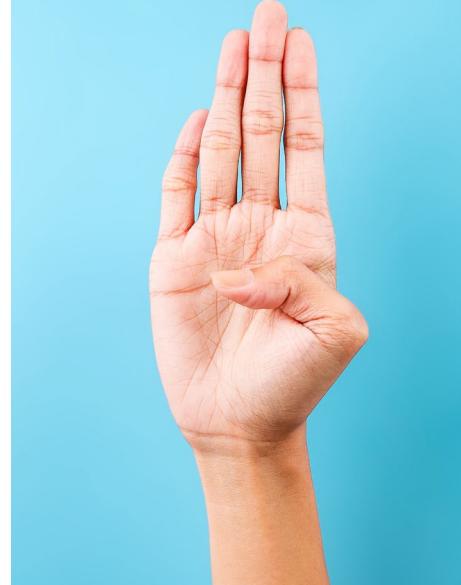
## Accessibility

- The Region partnered with Abilities Centre to host the annual Durham Accessibility Conference under the theme, “Committing to Inclusion: Building Your Workplace Accessibility Toolkit.” This annual conference expanded from a virtual format to a hybrid one, allowing for both in-person and online participation.
- Launched in 2024 in response to employee feedback, the Online Accessible Document Resource Guide provides resources for independently creating accessible documents. This guide supports employees by offering a comprehensive means to find answers to their questions unassisted. Alongside training, this resource empowers employees to build accessible documents efficiently and confidently.
- The Accessibility Spotlight is an article series that highlights accessibility related information for Regional Employees. These features are a monthly addition to our Insider, offering regular updates and insights on accessibility initiatives and developments.
- The Accessibility Team has strengthened working relationships with several key organizations and departments, including the Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS), Durham Region Transit (DRT), Regional Abilities Team, Abilities Centre, and the Ontario Tech University (OTU). These collaborations enhance our ability to support accessibility initiatives and foster a more inclusive environment across the region.
- The Region of Durham continues to build awareness and educate the community about important dates related to disabilities and significant observances, such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

# Corporate Services

## Service Durham Division

Service Durham remains dedicated to providing exceptional customer service for all and continuously seeks multiple ways to serve our community. Service Durham is also responsible for myDurham311, which is a customer service platform dedicated to creating a consistent, convenient, and a personalized customer experience. This includes offering documents in various formats and greeting Residents at our front counter with staff trained in American Sign Language (ASL). In 2024, our residents were surveyed and feedback from the survey was used to determine how we could better meet their accessibility needs.



## Information Management

The Information Management (IM) division prioritized accessibility by:

- Applying an accessibility lens compliant with AODA guidelines to all training and job-aid materials such as corporate training slide decks and staff training materials, tailoring content to be provided in multiple formats.
- Accessible Document specialist worked with the Information Management team to develop and deliver seven Micro Accessible document sessions. To ensure the whole team understands accessible documents and can develop most material to be accessible from the start.

## Access and Privacy

- Continued to assist customers staff and residents by providing options for documents to be provided in a variety of accessible formats quickly and efficiently.
- Access and Privacy staff supported community members in understanding their rights related to records access and privacy, empowering individuals to make informed decisions and navigate services with greater confidence and independence. We continued to gather feedback from customers about their experiences with our services, allowing us to develop areas identified as requiring improvement and meet the accessibility needs of those we serve effectively.

## Information Technology Division

- TECHConnect Initiative created a new space and concept that provides dedicated walk-in assistance for hardware issues, new laptop and cell phone deployment, device setups and Information Technology (IT) guidance, with no appointment required. This was launched in 2024 to enhance IT support by providing a more accessible, personalized, and customer-centric service.
- The Website Audit project was launched, requiring each department to methodically review every item currently on our website. The review should check for various factors, including ensuring that every item meets accessibility needs. The project was initiated to improve the usability, accessibility, and overall quality on durham.ca.



## Health

- Oral health screening programs were initiated for children in Regional Daycare Centers, ensuring early detection and intervention for oral health issues.
- Portable oral health clinics resumed services for children in high-risk neighborhoods within Durham Region, providing accessible dental care to underserved communities.
- An evaluation of the Sexual Health Clinic (SHC) conducted between January 2023 and October 2024 assessed client learning, anticipated behaviour changes, outcomes, and intervention effectiveness. Results showed a positive impact, with 96 per cent of clients feeling more confident in making sexual health decisions. These outcomes highlight the importance in offering inclusive, non-judgmental, safe, and confidential services to Durham residents.
- The Population Health team assist residents in accessing services that meet their individual needs. They tailor interactions to the client's preferred locations (e.g., home, community sites, programs) and collaboratively support clients in identifying needs and achieving goals related to parenting skills and child development.
- Developed the Heat Hacks resource to offer tips on managing high temperatures and recognizing heat-related illnesses. This resource, printed on card stock paper for seniors, features larger print and relevant graphics for accessibility. The use of numerous graphics enhances message clarity. Other health units have expressed interest in adopting this resource.





## Social Services

### Income, Employment and Homelessness Support Division

The Income, Employment and Homelessness Support Division (IEHSD) continued its commitment to inclusive, accessible, and equitable service delivery through the following key achievements:

- Developed clear processes, job aids, and accessible resources to support both staff and clients in effectively using these tools, ensuring technology is accessible and usable for all.
- Enhanced Client-Facing technology - equipped front counters at all offices with iPads to provide clients with more accessible, self-service options during in-person visits.
- Increased Connectivity for Vulnerable Populations - Cellphone distribution continued to support clients at risk due to domestic violence, homelessness, or mental health concerns, enabling them to stay connected with supports and services in a safe and accessible way.

### Social Services Affordable Housing and Redevelopment Division

In winter 2024, online community engagement sessions for the Durham Region Local Housing Corporation developments at Christine Crescent and Malaga Road in Oshawa were hosted to obtain community feedback on redevelopment plans. An online method was selected to broaden reach and to enable participation by more residents. An online portal has been maintained to respond in a timely manner to community inquiries.

In summer 2024, a virtual public open house was held to share redevelopment plans for the Ritson School site and get feedback from the community. An online portal is maintained to receive and respond to public inquiries.

## Family Services Division

### Employee Assistance Program and Region of Durham Community Counselling Intake

- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has made significant advancements to enhance service delivery and accessibility. The program now offers scheduled intake appointments, providing quicker initial access to services. Capacity has been expanded to offer Mental Health First-Aid and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, along with more virtual and in-person workshops and trainings for staff and community partners. Information about Family Services Durham (FSD) services is provided to new hires within the Integrated Employment and Human Services Division (IEHSD). The EAP has partnered with Long Term Care (LTC) to offer workshops for caregivers of LTC residents. Additional information is gathered at intake, allowing clients to share information about their unique identities, needs and preferences. The Here and Now Counselling service has been implemented to provide immediate access for clients who are most in need.
- The program continues to offer an iPad loaner program, allowing clients without access to electronic devices or the internet to complete important applications, participate in workshops, and use apps. Virtual and in-person workshops for clients and other service providers have been expanded.

## Social Services Affordable Housing and Redevelopment Division

The Primary Care Outreach Program (PCOP) team has made significant strides in expanding and enhancing its services to better support clients across the Durham region. The Mental health Outreach Program (MHOP) now serves the entire Durham region, from Pickering to Beaverton.

The team has increased accessibility by meeting clients in various community settings such as parks, shelters, community hubs, and plazas. They connect with clients through multiple channels, including in-person meetings, phone calls, texts, and emails. The use of Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) has been expanded for medical appointments with physicians and nurse practitioners, both at medical clinics and virtually.

Medical treatment, consultations, and referrals are offered while social workers facilitate referrals to a wide range of service providers. The PCOP team, as an integral partner, provides counselling, grief support and addiction support to individuals experiencing or at risk of human trafficking.

### Older Adult Safety Advisor

The Older Adult Safety Advisor (OASA), formerly known as the Senior Safety Advisor, has undergone significant changes to better serve older adult clients. The OASA has adapted its services ensuring that all interactions and resources are accessible to individuals with varying physical, mental, and social needs. The program connects with clients through multiple channels, including telephone, email, and in-person meetings, allowing clients to reach out in the manner most convenient for them. The OASA advocates for services that address the mental, physical, and social needs of clients, considering their strengths and limitations to provide supports that improve their quality of life. Collaborations with both internal and external agencies enhance the level of care provided, while an increased presence in the community promotes the program's services to the public.

## Strategic Partnerships and Priorities

Social Services Department received budget approval for a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Program Manager. This role prioritizes accessibility and inclusivity for both departmental employees with disabilities and clients in the community who are living with disabilities.

### Durham Region Transit (DRT)

Durham Region Transit (DRT) is preparing to introduce the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program to support individuals with hidden disabilities. This initiative aims to provide a discreet way for individuals to indicate that they may need additional assistance. As of December 2024, at least 80 per cent of all DRT employees received training about the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program and the various aspects of hidden disabilities. This training ensures that staff are well-equipped to recognize and appropriately assist those who may require extra support, fostering a more inclusive and supportive transit environment.

Durham Region Transit staff have undergone comprehensive training to ensure they can provide accessible and inclusive customer service. Training includes:

1. Accessibility features of vehicles
2. Safe boarding and exiting
3. Securement and safety
4. Communication and respect
5. Emergency procedures



The Travel Training Program helps individuals of all abilities learn how to use public transit independently and confidently by including the following:

- Introduction to the transit system, including all tools available and their various formats.
- Education on how to plan travel to chosen locations with assistance from tools available.
- Training on how to safely board and exit transit vehicles, including buses, trains, and other modes of public transportation.
- Educating individuals on transit safety protocols, including emergency procedures.
- Safe use of mobility aids on public transit
- Assisted practice trips on public transit with feedback



Durham Region Transit Ambassadors continue to engage with seniors, newcomers, and other community members to provide support and gather feedback on accessibility needs. They also provide transit education, support, and training through the Pathways to Employment initiative, aimed at helping individuals of varying abilities find and maintain employment.

Durham Region Transit works closely with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to ensure that all accessibility initiatives are aligned with community needs and expectations.

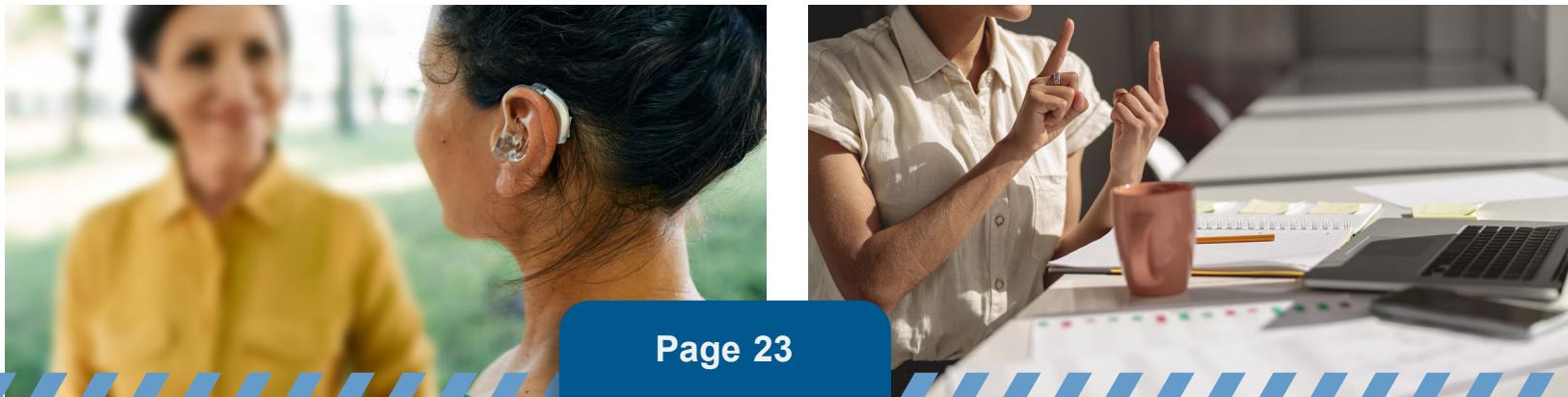


## Durham Region Police Services

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, Durham Regional Police Services (DRPS) strives to provide services that are accessible to all persons. Key highlights include:

- **Partnership with Durham Deaf Services:** DRPS engages in ongoing collaboration through fraud prevention seminars, community events, and integration with the Youth in Policing Initiative to educate on Deaf culture and aging.
- **Educational Materials:** On October 9, 2024, DRPS posted educational materials on “Interacting with a Deaf Person” for its members, along with a short video titled “I am Deaf” in American Sign Language.
- **Collaboration with the Canadian Hearing Society:** Led by the Older Adult Support and Investigative Services Unit, DRPS has strengthened relationships with the Canadian Hearing Society over four years. This includes participating in Abuse of Older Adults training and transcribing DRPS training videos into American Sign Language at no cost.
- **Inclusive Events:** On November 10, 2024, DRPS hosted the 40th Anniversary Children’s Games, providing an accessible, fun and inclusive sporting opportunity for children ages 5 to 18 with various physical disabilities. Over 150 volunteers from DRPS and the community facilitated all elements of the Games.

By leveraging these tools and partnerships, DRPS is committed to more inclusive practices and ensuring that its services are accessible to everyone.





## Addressing Hate/Bias-Motivated Crimes

People with disabilities can be targeted for hate crimes due to societal prejudices and misconceptions about disability. These crimes can include physical violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and other forms of discrimination. DRPS is actively working to address these issues through:

- **Training on Hate Crimes and Incidents:** In 2024, the Intelligence Operations team delivered presentations to 25 front-line platoons (Teams of 25 to 55 officers), educating officers on the differentiation between hate crimes and hate incidents.
- **Public-Facing Hate Crime Campaign:** DRPS, in collaboration with the Equity and Inclusion unit, Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC), and DRPS Corporate Communications, is working with the Durham Region Anti-Racism Task Force to develop a public-facing Hate Crime Campaign for 2025.

These initiatives demonstrate DRPS's commitment to addressing hate crimes and ensuring the safety and inclusion of all community members.

# Section 2: Information and Communications

The Region of Durham has advanced accessibility in the way information is shared and communicated. Efforts focus on delivering content that is transparent, inclusive and available in multiple formats to meet diverse needs. By offering various communication channels and formats—such as plain language, multilingual resources, and digital accessibility features—we are fostering more inclusive engagement and empowering residents to interact with Regional services confidently and independently.

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## Corporate Services

### Service Durham Division

The Service Durham Division took several initiatives to enhance accessibility for all users. An annual review of the customer portal is completed in partnership with the Accessibility lead to ensure it meets accessibility standards. Service disruptions are promptly posted on both the customer portal and Durham Region's official website, [durham.ca](http://durham.ca). All external communications include a statement providing options for accessible formats and contact information, with similar wording also present on the customer service portal. The portal itself is designed to be device agnostic and compliant with WCAG 2.1 standards, ensuring it is accessible to all users. Additionally, a training and learning plan focused on document accessibility is on the roadmap for future rollout for Service Durham roles involved in communication development and distribution. These measures reflect our commitment to maintaining and improving accessibility across all services and communications.



## Human Resources Division

The Human Resources department is committed to enhancing accessibility by continuously collecting feedback through various channels, including surveys, email, phone, and in-person interactions. This feedback helps identify process improvements and preferred resource delivery options for staff and residents. To meet just-in-time and on-demand needs, resources are offered in multiple modalities such as e-learning, websites, recordings, presentations, written materials, and virtual sessions. Additionally, training programs are provided in accessible formats, and forms are regularly updated or created to ensure they are accessible to all users.

## Health

Our health department collaborated in research with the University of Toronto to broaden the knowledge base in oral health for Durham Region residents. This resulted in the following:

- In response to clients expressing an interest in having results provided by email, the sexual health clinic (SHC) implemented a confidential and encrypted method of emailing test results to ensure accessibility and timely access to personal health information.
- To ensure accessible communication of important health information, a multilingual resource was developed to accompany immunization information being provided to parents. This resource includes a message informing parents that to call the Health Department if translation services are needed. The message is translated into 32 different languages on the resource.
- Clients are asked their preferred method of communication (e.g., texting, phone calls, email, in-person) to ensure accessibility needs are met. Also, clients are asked how they prefer to receive resources or information to support their learning.





## Income Employment and Homelessness Support Division

The Income, Employment and Homelessness Support Division (IESHD) strengthen its commitment to accessible information and communication by implementing the following key actions:

- Multi-channel communication for public notices: The division ensured that important public communications, such as, service disruptions and other key updates, were delivered through multiple channels. This included digital platforms, printed notices, and in-office signage.
- Continuous accessibility training for staff: IEHSD staff participated in ongoing training to ensure all documents and digital content comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA.
- Accessible emergency communications: Emergency-related information was made available in accessible formats, enabling equitable access to essential updates for residents, visitors, and staff during times of crisis.
- Commitment to continuous improvement: The division reviewed and updated practices to align with accessibility legislation and standards. An online portal has been maintained to respond to community inquiries. Additionally, in summer 2024, a virtual public open house was held to present redevelopment plans for the Ritson School site.

This open house provided a platform to present the concept and address public questions regarding the development's scope. The online portal continues to be available to answer public inquiries, ensuring ongoing accessibility and engagement with the community.

## Children's Services

The Children's Services Division of the Region of Durham has achieved significant accessibility improvements. All resource tip sheets have been revised to meet accessibility standards and are now available on our webpage, featuring a read-aloud option. Accessible templates have been created and an accessible PowerPoint template developed for all training sessions. Reports templates have been updated to an accessible format, and clients are asked how they prefer to receive information—whether in writing or via email, which allows for the use of translation and read-aloud applications.

In the Fee Subsidy program area, all client consents and forms are readily accessible and equipped with electronic signature capabilities for client convenience. Additionally, all information shared with families and childcare operators is in an accessible format. Services can be provided through various channels, including telephone, video call, and in-person meetings. Referral documents are now available online, allowing for easy completion with features to change the language of the information and a read-aloud option.



PLAY Project videos have been updated with online vignettes to describe service details, featuring closed captions and transcripts. The PLAY Project videos are part of a comprehensive autism intervention program designed to support children with autism and their families. The website content and attachments are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure accessibility. Documents, flyers, and guides have all been made accessible.

# Section 3: Employment

The Region of Durham is committed to fair and equitable employment practices, ensuring that applicants and employees with disabilities receive the supports they need throughout all stages of employment. This commitment includes the following actions:

- **Review employment policies and practices:** Continuously review employment policies and practices to ensure applicants and employees with disabilities receive the necessary supports throughout all stages of employment, including recruitment, selection, and ongoing support.
- **Accessibility accommodations in recruitment:** Notify applicants about the availability of accessibility accommodations during the recruitment process.
- **Accommodations for employees:** Advise successful applicants about the availability of accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- **Promotion of accessibility policies:** Ensure policies on accommodating and supporting employees with disabilities are available and promoted through internal courses, webinars, team meetings, and e-newsletters.
- **Accessible formats and communication supports:** Provide accessible formats and/or communication supports to employees with disabilities who require them.
- **Individual emergency evacuation plans:** Develop and document individual emergency evacuation plans for employees with temporary or permanent disabilities.
- **Individual accommodation plans:** Document individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities.
- **Feedback on recruitment process:** Engage with applicants and staff to obtain feedback on how to make the recruitment process more accessible and inclusive.
- **Equity Audit Recommendations related to Accessibility**



## Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH program in the Region of Durham is now in its second year, offering numerous. This 10-month transition-to-work internship program is designed for high school students with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities who are in their final year of school. The program is a collaborative effort between Abilities Centre, Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB), and the Regional Municipality of Durham.

Interns participate in a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on work experience within various Durham Region municipal departments. This immersive approach helps students develop transferable and marketable skills required for employment.



## Accessibility Ambassadors and Disabilities Committee

All divisions within the Region of Durham are actively encouraging staff involvement in the Accessibility Ambassadors Program or the Disabilities Committees.

The Accessibility Ambassador program is an opportunity for staff who have a passion or interest in being accessibility allies to promote accessibility and inclusion in their divisions and be supported to do this work.

The Disabilities committee prioritizes the needs of employees and clients with disabilities to ensure their voices are heard at the beginning of plans and processes.

Both groups are offered capacity building opportunities through training, education sessions and events to help them keep abreast of evolving trends and best practices, in creating and maintaining accessible workplaces.

# Office of The Chief Administrative Office

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Durham Region was honoured with the Accessibility Award for Accessible Employer of the Year Award. This recognition highlights the region's outstanding commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible workplace. A key initiative contributing to this accolade is the implementation of the Project SEARCH program. This award underscores Durham Region's dedication to supporting both residents and employees with disabilities, ensuring equal opportunities for all.



## Social Services

### Children's Services

Employees participate in regular training sessions focused on understanding different types of disabilities, inclusive communication, and best practices for accessibility. These sessions are designed to build empathy, reduce stigma, which empowers staff to create a more inclusive workplace and provide accessible services. Employees are offered continuous learning resources, including workshops, webinars, and e-learning modules, to ensure that accessibility remains a core component of Children Services culture.



# Durham Regional Police Service

Commencing September 2024, DRPS launched a pilot project with Languages in Motion, introducing a tech-driven app to improve communication.

- Officers and Dispatch Communicators have 24/7 access to interpreters within 30 seconds, anytime, anywhere.
- Integrated into officers' work-issued cell phones, members have access to interpretation in 200+ languages with audio and video interpretation options.
- Includes American Sign Language through video option.
- Each Division is equipped with a "Hearing Loop" system, designed to transmit audio directly to Bluetooth-enabled hearing aids.
- Each Divisional front desk counter is equipped with a microphone, and the system's directional antenna creates a focused communication zone, minimizing interference and ensuring clear communication. Bluetooth activated.

The DRPS website is built with accessibility in mind, allowing users to modify their operating system and browser to make it more accessible to them.

- Powered by Google Translate, the website can be translated into 249 languages.
- Check out [www.drps.ca/pages/accessibility](http://www.drps.ca/pages/accessibility) for more information.



# Section 4: Transportation

The Region is committed to improving transportation through accessible design, inclusive infrastructure, and mobility solutions that meet the diverse needs of the community. Efforts focus on enhancing physical spaces to ensure they are safe, navigable, and welcoming for all residents.



## Corporate Services

### Service Durham Division

Service Durham continues to explore opportunities for fare integration and payment options to improve the customer experience. Currently these two important measures are in place effective 2024:

- Presto card payments can be made at Public Front Counter at Regional Headquarters.
- Consolidation of Human Services into Human Services counter (which opened in October 2024) and removing barrier for Ontario Works customers to be able to receive Presto concession card (reduced bus fare) without additional proof of Ontario Works status.



# Social Services

## Income, Employment and Homelessness Division

In 2024, the Income, Employment and Homelessness Division (IEHSD) remained committed to reducing transportation-related barriers for clients by providing flexible and accessible transportation supports. Key achievements included the provision of bus tickets through the Ontario Works program, ensuring that individuals facing financial hardship could attend essential appointments, job interviews, and employment-related activities. Additionally, IEHSD strengthened its collaboration with the Regional Street Outreach Team to coordinate transportation services for clients experiencing significant barriers such as homelessness, mental health issues, or safety risks. This targeted support helped vulnerable individuals access shelters, healthcare, and other critical community services.

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## Durham Region Transit

Durham Region Transit (DRT) and Business Services Divisions provide accessible transportation services through various initiatives. The division successfully implemented a robust travel training program helping customers learn to use Durham Region Transit.

An Eligibility Review was completed for all customers registered, allowing DRT to assess and provide mobility solutions based on current abilities in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

A Demand Responsive service was introduced, amalgamating Specialized and On Demand services to create a more spontaneous, equitable, reliable, and customer-focused service.

Key transit expansion programs, such as the Durham-Scarborough Bus Rapid Transit (DSBRT) and Lakeshore East GO Extension to Bowmanville, were planned and coordinated. Community outreach efforts were maintained to better understand customer experiences, including participation in the Ontario Public Transit Association's (OPTA) public education campaign, EnAbling Change.

Additionally, the division improved accessibility and customer experience at bus stops through DRT's hard surfacing and bus shelter program. Stations, Terminals, and Hub's study were completed, enabling the rollout and improvement of accessible transfer locations throughout Durham Region.

# Section 5: Design of Public Spaces



# Corporate Services

## Service Durham and Facilities Divisions

The Service Durham and Facilities Divisions implemented several significant accessibility initiatives to enhance the experience for clients at our public front counters and regional headquarters.

- **Redesign of headquarters counters:** Our newly constructed Headquarters counters feature ample waiting areas for customers, ensuring comfort and convenience.
- **Queueing lines:** Oshawa and Ajax Human Services locations have installed stanchions to provide physical queueing lines, with plans to expand this feature to additional locations.
- **Counter accessibility:** Counters are equipped with multi-height offerings, are wheelchair accessible, and counter depths reviewed and designed for ease of arm reach and bending length.
- **Signage at Public Front Counters:** Larger print signage is available and posted for better visibility.
- **Wheelchair availability:** Wheelchairs are available for distribution to clients as needed at the Regional Headquarters.
- **Universal washroom:** A new universal washroom with an adult change table has been added.
- **All-gender washroom:** A new public all-gender washroom with two accessible stalls and wave-to-open door openers installed on the first level at Regional Headquarters.
- **Courtyard renovation:** The north-west courtyard has been renovated to eliminate uneven exterior grading.
- **Accessible ramp and stair replacement:** A new accessible ramp and stair replacement have been completed at the north-east entrance to the parking garage.



## Social Services

### Income, Employment and Homelessness Division

The Income, Employment, and Homelessness Division (IEHSD) ensures that all satellite offices are accessible, providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all clients. An example is the building at 1635 Dundas Street East in Whitby. It was designed in collaboration with the Region's Works Department with an accessibility lens to ensure that everyone can access the services and support they need.

## Conclusion

The power of action is a testament to the Region's reliability and commitment to accessibility. This report speaks to the tangible steps we have taken to create an inclusive environment. By transforming our intentions into actions, we demonstrate our dedication to not only meeting but exceeding accessibility standards. Our proactive approach ensures that we listen to and learn from those with lived experiences, fostering a community built on mutual respect and equity. As we continue to innovate and improve, we remain steadfast in our mission to make accessibility a fundamental value, embraced by all.

Planning has started for our new Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2026 to 2030. This plan will further the work in the Region of Durham's dedication to accessibility and inclusion.



# Contact Information

We welcome your feedback on the Regional Municipality of Durham 2024 Accessibility Report. Your input is invaluable in helping us improve our services and accessibility initiatives.

## **Mail:**

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If you require this information in an accessible format, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator by emailing [accessibility@durham.ca](mailto:accessibility@durham.ca) or calling 311 extension 2009.