Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada

# Evaluation of the Office of Public Service Accessibility: Final Report

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## 1. Introduction

This is the first evaluation of the Office of Public Service Accessibility (OPSA). Conducted between April 2022 and April 2023, this evaluation:

- is part of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's (TBS's) Departmental Evaluation Plan
- was conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board *Policy on Results* and its associated directive
- was undertaken by TBS's Internal Audit and Evaluation Bureau with the assistance of Goss Gilroy Inc.

# 2. Results at a glance

This report will show that OPSA, through its strategic leadership, governance and focused team, has made notable progress in increasing awareness among federal departments and agencies, [1] including at the deputy head level, of their role in implementing the _Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada_. The legislative deadline to meet the requirements of the _Accessible Canada Act_ [2] has facilitated this progress.

This evaluation has determined the following:

- overall, federal departments largely know where to find information on accessibility and workplace accommodations
- departments have increased their use of the Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund (CEWF)
- OPSA is well regarded among national and international jurisdictions for its progress on public service accessibility

OPSA has made progress with its initiatives, but it is still a challenge for many departments to effectively integrate accessibility and accommodations for their employees. Transforming the culture of the federal public service from focusing on disability management to embracing accessibility and disability inclusion is still a work in progress.

This evaluation report highlights how the implementation of OPSA and the Accessibility Strategy have been enabled through the leadership of a deputy head. Even though a new Deputy Minister Champion for Employees with Disabilities in the Federal Public Service has been appointed, this evaluation revealed concerns about continued progress in accessibility and disability inclusion in the public service after OPSA's funding is due to sunset in 2024.

As the government focuses more on its diversity and inclusion commitments, maintaining progress will be a challenge. To address this challenge, the following areas should be considered:

- measuring the performance of departments' processes for accessibility and accommodation
- departmental incentives
- digital solutions

# 3. OPSA's role and mandate

OPSA was established in August 2018 to help the Government of Canada meet the requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act*. OPSA's main responsibilities are to:

- develop a comprehensive strategy and plan for implementing the *Accessible Canada Act* within the federal public service to meet the act's requirements
- develop the CEWF to support accessibility by:
  - investing in innovation, exploration and experimentation to reduce or eliminate systemic barriers to individual accommodations
  - improving existing workplace accommodation practices where there are barriers

OPSA provides strategic advice on various accessibility issues, including the following:

- accessibility issues related to employment
- the built environment of the workplace
- information and communications technologies
- the procurement of goods and services
- program and service delivery
- workplace accommodation
- promoting a disability-inclusive culture for the Government of Canada

OPSA's mandate includes the following:

- co-developing, launching and advancing "Nothing Without Us: An Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada"
- advising and guiding federal departments on meeting the requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act*
- launching and managing the CEWF to invest in research, tools and innovation to:
  - improve workplace accommodation practices
  - remove barriers that create a need for accommodation, including implementing the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport, which is the CEWF's primary initiative to simplify workplace accommodation processes

Appendix A provides details about OPSA's partners, role, budget and expected outcomes of its initiatives.

# 4. Evaluation methodology and scope

This evaluation aimed to assess OPSA's implementation of its initiatives. The evaluation approach focused on assessing the relevance, design and implementation of OPSA's initiatives, as well as the organization's

performance. The main areas of interest were:

- immediate outcomes
- progress made toward intermediate outcomes
- the sustainability of OPSA's efforts

The evaluation covered the period from the start of the program in 2018 to the end of August 2022.

In addition, an Evaluation Working Group was created to:

- contribute to developing the evaluation framework, review the evaluation tools and list of key informants for the evaluation
- review the draft version of this final report

The Evaluation Working Group's involvement ensured that the evaluation was accessible, inclusive and thoughtfully implemented, and its contributions are greatly appreciated.

Appendix C provides further details about the methodology used for this evaluation.

# 5. Limitation

A limitation in the evaluation methodology was that the survey did not use random sampling, which means that the survey was not distributed to all employees in all departments. Instead, the survey was sent to direct users of OPSA's advice, guidance and funding, that is, federal public servants who were clients or partners of OPSA. In addition, a snowball method [3] was used to allow a broader population to be captured.

Low response rates limited the ability to make comparisons across certain characteristics, such as between departments or functional communities. This limitation was mitigated by using multiple lines of evidence.

# 6. Findings

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## 6.1 Relevance

## Conclusion

There is a need for an organization that helps departments continue to build their capacity to make Canada's public service accessible by identifying, removing and preventing barriers.

All the evidence highlighted the importance of having a centralized body such as OPSA to act as a focal point and centre of expertise for accessibility issues within the Government of Canada. Key informants from the Deputy Minister Accessibility Group and the Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee stressed that without an organization such as OPSA, efforts to address accessibility are disjointed and the issue "belongs to everyone and no one." Findings show that the reasons that led to the creation and design of OPSA are still valid and essential.

The evaluation found strong support for OPSA to continue its role:

- 85% of survey respondents believe that their department will require OPSA's support beyond the 2023–24 fiscal year
- key informants also emphasized that:
  - addressing accessibility issues in the public service is a long-term cultural change
  - OPSA has an important role in promoting and ensuring that accessibility in the federal public service continues to improve

# 6.2 Immediate outcomes

## Implementation of the Public Service Accessibility Strategy

### Expected outcome

Departments are aware of their role in implementing the Public Service Accessibility Strategy.

### Conclusion

Departments know their responsibilities in implementing the Accessibility Strategy, and OPSA has contributed to this awareness. The legal requirement that all departments develop and publish an accessibility plan by December 2022 likely helped in achieving this awareness.

All the evidence confirms that departments are aware of the following:

- the importance of accessibility as a priority of the federal public service
- departments' role in fostering accessibility as outlined in the Accessibility Strategy
- the distinct role of OPSA compared to the role of federal departments

Many key informants mentioned the *Accessible Canada Act* and its requirement for departments to publish accessibility plans by December 2022. This finding suggests that the *Accessible Canada Act*'s requirements contributed to ensuring that departments understood their responsibility to implement the Accessibility Strategy. A review of similar practices in other jurisdictions suggests that when departments are mandated to create their own accessibility plans, report on them publicly and provide regular updates, such actions positively affect overall progress.

The Deputy Minister Accessibility Group and the Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee, with key partner stakeholders, had generally positive views about the improved awareness of departments regarding their role in implementing the Accessibility Strategy. In fact, many respondents from the Deputy Minister Accessibility Group and the Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee mentioned that one of OPSA's strongest accomplishments has been to effectively raise awareness throughout the public service through its communications efforts.

The increased awareness among deputy heads was strongly attributed to the presence and leadership of the Deputy Minister of OPSA, who was described as being "charismatic and articulate," having lived experience, actively engaging at all levels, and capable of captivating an audience. This presence created a "ripple effect" across the public service and contributed to the overall increase in awareness.

Documents show that OPSA has been working to ensure that departments are well informed about the Accessibility Strategy and their responsibilities in implementing it. Some examples are as follows:

- the Accessibility Strategy outlines actions that departments need to take [4]
- from 2018 to 2021, OPSA held:
  - nine in-person regional townhalls
  - five in-person "Accessibility Spotlight" learning sessions reaching 5,000 public servants
  - five virtual townhalls reaching 6,500 participants
- in 2020–21, OPSA launched various micro-learning products to help learners better support the implementation of the *Accessible Canada Act* and the Accessibility Strategy [5]

As the examples below show, departments were aware of the Accessibility Strategy and what it required:

- more than 20 departments throughout the Government of Canada participated as early adopters of the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport [6]
- 17 departments used the voluntary departmental Accessibility Self-Assessment Tool [7]
- the Interdepartmental Accessibility Community of Practice, first started in 2019, expanded to include more than 66 departments by 2022 [8]

# Capacity to support accessibility and disability inclusion

## Expected outcome

Departments have the capacity to support accessibility and disability inclusion within their organization.

# Conclusion

The capacity of departments to support accessibility and disability inclusion varies, with some departments facing significant challenges. OPSA has had a positive impact on enhancing departmental capacity, but further efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity of all departments.

Key informants reported differences in departmental capacity, with these differences influenced by factors such as:

- differences in levels of commitment
- the extent of culture change needed
- internal capacity, including a lack of internal expertise and resources

Some key informants indicated that departments that prioritized hiring accessibility experts are much better equipped to meet their responsibilities than departments that do not have such expertise.

According to data on public service accessibility, fewer departments than expected have appointed executive accessibility leads in their organizations (23 out of a target of 30). Despite training opportunities provided in departments and through OPSA, there are still gaps in accessibility skills and competencies in areas such as human resources, information technology, facilities, learning and service. [9] Documents reviewed as part of the evaluation also noted that given multiple diversity and inclusion priorities set for departments by the Clerk of the Privy Council, there is a risk that departments may not have sufficient capacity to fulfill all their employment equity commitments. Survey results showed that 67% of respondents indicated that "barriers and challenges to improving accessibility and disability inclusion in their departments and agencies" were significant or very significant.

Key informants and 55% of survey respondents agreed that the resources developed, supported and shared by OPSA had a positive impact on strengthening their capacity to support accessibility and disability inclusion within their department:

- key informants noted how OPSA supports them by answering questions, making referrals to appropriate departments when needed, and having a supportive role in motivating change management and culture-building efforts
- 65% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that OPSA has supported their department in responding to the requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act*
- 43% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that OPSA's advice and guidance on accessibility were instrumental in addressing accessibility barriers in their department

The following are some examples of capacity-building tools available across the public service on the Accessibility Hub aimed at addressing the barriers and challenges that departments face.

## Developed by OPSA

- The Accessibility Self-Assessment Tool
- Hiring Persons with Disabilities: Managers' Toolkit

## Developed by Shared Services Canada with support from OPSA

- _Guidelines on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible_
- The Digital Accessibility Toolkit
- A guide to acquisition of IT-related adaptive technologies

# Ability to find information on accessibility and workplace accommodations

## Expected outcome

Departments know where to find information on accessibility and workplace accommodations.

## Conclusion

The evidence shows that departments generally know where to find information about accessibility and workplace accommodations and that OPSA has contributed to this knowledge.

According to survey data on OPSA's communications and tools:

- 55% of survey respondents agreed that:
  - they can easily find information on improving accessibility and workplace accommodations in their department; the Accessibility Hub on GCpedia, which is an early CEWF project and an evergreen

online repository of tools, guidance and advice, has helped improve public service accessibility knowledge

- 50% of survey respondents found the Accessibility Hub to be extremely or very useful, although some indicated that it is difficult to search
- 49% found OPSA's accessibility-related outreach and engagement activities to be extremely useful or very useful
- 40% found OPSA's accessibility-related advice and guidance to be extremely useful or very useful

In addition to using the Accessibility Hub to distribute information, OPSA shares information through:

- distribution lists
- the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport newsletter
- events such as National AccessAbility Week, government-wide virtual townhalls and meetings of the National Managers' Community

Some key informants noted that the amount of information distributed within departments often depends on managers and how engaged they are with their employees.

# Departments lead or partner on CEWF projects and initiatives

## Expected outcome

Federal organizations outside OPSA are leading or partnering on CEWF projects and initiatives.

## Conclusion

Initially, OPSA led most CEWF initiatives, but over time, other federal organizations began to lead more and more projects. The number of CEWF projects that had multiple partners also increased.

OPSA led many early CEWF projects, such as the _Benchmarking Study of Workplace Accommodations_ and the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport, which were led mostly without formal participation by other organizations. Less than half (46%) of the CEWF's early projects had collaborating partners.

However, as of September 2022, all "approved and active" projects had partnership support from at least one department, if not several. This increased partnership shows a growing trend of federal organizations other than OPSA leading and partnering on CEWF projects. Some departments have been particularly active, such as Shared Services Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada, and TBS.

Some key informants highlighted the importance of considering differences in resources and capacity between small and large departments when considering their ability to propose, lead, partner and participate in initiatives.

# 6.3 Intermediate outcomes

## Departments take concrete actions

### Expected outcome

Departments have taken concrete actions to remove barriers to accessibility in their workplace and/or services.

### Conclusion

Departments indicate that since August 2018, they have taken concrete actions to remove barriers to accessibility in their workplace and services.

The evaluation primarily looked at OPSA's progress toward its immediate outcomes, but there is also evidence that departments are making progress toward intermediate and long-term outcomes.

According to the survey's findings, 82% of respondents agree or strongly agree that since August 2018, their department has taken concrete actions required by the *Accessible Canada Act* to remove barriers to accessibility in the workplace. [10]

The evaluation's document review showed examples of how OPSA has helped improve workplace accommodation practices and processes. This contribution was validated by key informants. For example, OPSA:

- provided advice to the Public Service Commission of Canada to launch the Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities to accelerate targeted recruitment of students with disabilities
- provided deputy heads with specific data and tools to increase the representation of persons with disabilities
- provided guidance to Public Services and Procurement Canada on how to:
  - incorporate accessibility into government procurement
  - gather user feedback to measure client satisfaction with the accessibility of government programs and services
- partnered with the Canada School of Public Service and Shared Services Canada to create new courses, learning events, and guidance on accessibility and disability inclusion for:
  - managers
  - executives
  - functional communities for human resources, information technology and communications

## Accessibility is considered in new policies and processes

## Expected outcome

An accessibility lens informs the development of policies and processes**.**

## Conclusion

Although there has been progress in considering accessibility when creating policies and processes, such consideration within departments is limited.

OPSA has worked to ensure that accessibility and disability considerations were fully integrated into Government of Canada post-pandemic transformation efforts. Some key informants described how accessibility has been "internalized by departments and human resources." For instance, departments are now prioritizing hiring individuals with disabilities and focusing on accommodation issues. Certain initiatives, such as the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport have now "become part of the vernacular in government." In raising awareness, OPSA has helped "[generate] commitment to departmental strategies."

The evaluation's document review shows that an accessibility lens is influencing the development of policy and processes to some extent. For example:

- in 2021–22, new guidance on the following was released to help departments remove barriers:
  - *Accessible Canada Regulations*
  - *Guidelines on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible*
  - Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology
- OPSA worked closely with the Office of the Chief Information Officer to:
  - ensure that government tools purchased and used, such as Microsoft 365, have strong accessibility features
  - provide guidance on using the European Union Standard

The evidence shows that although more policies and processes are taking accessibility into account, more work needs to be done. For example, departments did not always involve people with disabilities when creating policies and programs.

# CEWF projects and initiatives improve workplace accommodation

## Expected outcome

CEWF projects and initiatives contribute to improvements in workplace accommodation practices and processes.

## Conclusion

Although CEWF projects have contributed to several improvements in workplace accommodation practices and processes, there were different opinions on how effective these projects have been.

As of March 2023, 15 projects were completed, 11 projects were ongoing, and one project was being developed. These 26 projects have spent approximately 65% of the fund. By March 2024, it is expected that the CEWF will have supported 27 projects and used all its funding.

Based on interviews and documents, it was found that the CEWF enabled the testing of models and accommodations to remove barriers for persons with disabilities. The projects led to improvements in workplace accommodation practices and processes. Following are some examples:

- The Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport has been integrated into several departmental workplace accommodation processes, despite facing resistance in some departments. Resistance could be because of:
  - capacity issues

- varying levels of commitment
- a need for more cultural change and guidance
- The Lending Library Service Pilot Project provided adaptive devices to 256 employees in 49 departments, lending a total of 809 tools since its launch in late 2022. [11] [12]
- The LED Lighting Project, led by Public Services and Procurement Canada in collaboration with Health Canada, National Research Council of Canada, Statistics Canada, and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, tested lighting types to remove barriers for people with light sensitivity.
- A public opinion research study was conducted to identify the root causes of harassment and discrimination toward public servants with disabilities in the workplace:
  - the findings will help make recommendations to address these issues and create a healthy and respectful work environment for everyone
  - in collaboration with the Canada School of Public Service, a series of e-learning modules were piloted to build awareness and knowledge about neurodiversity for employees, managers and human resources professionals
- The Engaging DisAbility Innovation project used an innovative research methodology to describe how employees with disabilities experience recruitment, retention, promotion and workplace accommodation practices in two departments. This project was designed and developed by a Community Advisory Board, which is a disability committee led by employees at Canadian Heritage and Statistics Canada.
- The CEWF helped create and set up a shared workplace accommodations centre at TBS that will provide a centralized and neutral case management model for accommodations requests.

In 2021, the CEWF funded a neurodiversity recruitment pilot. Its purpose was to try new ways to overcome obstacles and retain neurodivergent individuals in the federal public service. Experts in neurodiversity recruitment worked with participating department to:

- develop recruitment criteria
- make the onboarding process accessible
- provide support and guidance to managers and recruits during their employment

The pilot successfully recruited 16 candidates in three departments.

Some project leads noted that their department would not have been able to fund their project without the CEWF and that their project had a significant impact on accessibility in the Government of Canada. Others noted that the CEWF application process was difficult and time-consuming.

Less than one quarter (22%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the CEWF has contributed to improvements in workplace accommodation practices and processes in their department. Over one third (38%) reported "not applicable," which might be because they didn't know about the CEWF or couldn't access it.

# 6.4 Long-term outcome

## A barrier-free workplace

### Expected outcome

The federal public service workplace is free from barriers for all employees.

### Conclusion

Although there has been some progress, the federal public service workplace is not yet barrier-free for all employees.

OPSA has supported changes at the system level within the Government of Canada, but there is still much work to be done. Many departments still need OPSA's assistance as their understanding of the barriers faced by people with disabilities evolves. All key informants felt that OPSA supported some system-level change within the Government of Canada accessibility ecosystem. OPSA has achieved greater understanding by departments through:

- raising awareness, including among senior leaders
- supporting the creation and importance of networks for people with disabilities throughout the government
- providing guidance and resources to all federal departments
- helping with process changes, such as working to improve enterprise workplace accommodations and helping departments develop their accessibility plans
- ensuring that federal public service accountability tools are available and that they measure aspects related to accessibility

Findings indicate that the Accessibility Strategy is contributing to improvements in workplace accommodation practices and processes. Evidence includes the following:

- the advancement of many of the Accessibility Strategy's core system-wide projects, such as:
  - the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport
  - the Draft Standard on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Accessibility and ICT Accessibility Scorecard
  - accessibility assessments of buildings
- support for departments to attract, hire and retain persons with disabilities

- updates to the Management Accountability Framework and the Public Service Employee Survey to collect new data on accessibility in areas such as accommodations for persons with disabilities and their workplace experiences

Despite these positive developments, many key informants pointed out barriers or questioned how much progress has been made in specific areas, such as the federal goal to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities.

Key informants identified factors that hinder progress, including the following:

- problems with assessing progress, particularly regarding people with disabilities; key informants also noted the absence of definitions of success
- resistance from functional communities such as information technology and labour relations units that strictly interpret rules can make it difficult to build capacity for making improvements

> **"It's not just about hiring; are we set up to get them whatever they need to be able to do their job?"**
>
> — Interview comment from Deputy Minister / Assistant Deputy Minister key informant

Although much evidence shows positive change at the departmental level and across government, more effort is needed to achieve the goal of an "ambitious culture shift." Key informants mentioned the challenge of changing and emerging needs, and that some target groups may benefit more than expected. Examples described were an "unintended preference" for high-functioning individuals on the autism spectrum and individuals with invisible disabilities. Key informants stressed the importance of striving for equity across disabilities, including those who are severely disabled.

All key informants raised concerns about the sustainability of these changes. Specifically, many indicated that the federal public service is not yet fully equipped to take on this work alone and that smaller departments still require targeted support. They expressed concern that the work would not continue without OPSA's involvement. Survey findings also strongly indicated that departments will continue to need OPSA beyond 2023–24.

# 7. Recommendations

Sustained attention is needed to improve accessibility within the public service and to support *Nothing Without Us: An Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada*.

Following are this evaluation report's recommendations:

1. It is recommended that OPSA expand its awareness activities by:
   a. advising and guiding those responsible for implementing accommodation practices
   b. advising and guiding departments that are struggling with capacity
   c. sharing the results of Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund projects
2. It is recommended that OPSA monitor and foster departmental performance measurement on accessibility and accommodation processes. Doing so would enable OPSA and key partners to share methodologies and tools that support departments to identify gaps, set targets and track accessibility change over time.
3. To achieve making the public service barrier-free by 2040, it is recommended that OPSA develop options with input from stakeholders, such as departmental accessibility leads and networks of

employees with disabilities, to ensure that investments in the following occur, whether OPSA's operations sunset or not:

    a. the Accessibility Strategy

    b. the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport

    c. the commitment to hire 5,000 people with disabilities by 2025

# Appendix A: OPSA's Role, Budget and Logic Model

OPSA supports the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion to:

- remove barriers to accessibility
- promote disability inclusion in the federal public service
- hire 5,000 new public servants with disabilities by 2025

OPSA reports to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Service Accessibility, who is responsible for managing the CEWF and making sure it meets its goals.

OPSA set up a governance structure (Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister, and officials) to support the Accessibility Strategy's development and implementation. The Deputy Minister Accessibility Group and Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee were created in December 2018 to:

- give advice on the Accessibility Strategy's development and implementation
- serve as a consultation mechanism for the CEWF

In addition, an advisory group of employees with lived experience of disability was established in spring 2019. It provides informal advice and feedback on key CEWF projects, following the principle of "nothing without us."

The CEWF is a $10-million fund over five years (2019 to 2024) to help departments:

- develop new tools
- improve existing processes
- experiment with innovative solutions for workplace accommodation and accessibility

The CEWF focuses on physical or process barriers that limit access to workplaces and meaningful employment. It aims to support projects that bring immediate and practical benefits to current and future public servants.

OPSA has a budget of $2.5 million. In addition, the CEWF has the following resources:

- CEWF program resources: the CEWF has nine full-time equivalent employees
- CEWF budget: the CEWF was granted $10 million in funding approved by the Treasury Board over five years (2019–24)

Funding for projects is decided on a case-by-case basis, and there is no minimum cost requirement.

# OPSA logic model

## Overarching goal

The federal government leads by example by ensuring that barriers to participation for employees and clients with disabilities are proactively identified, prevented and removed, and that all business processes, activities and services are designed with accessibility in mind.

## Long-term outcomes

Federal programs and services for Canadians are barrier-free.

The federal public service workplace is barrier-free for all employees.

## Medium-term outcomes

**Departments and agencies have taken concrete actions to remove barriers to accessibility in their workplace and services.**

**An accessibility perspective informs the development of policies and processes.**

**The Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund's (CEWF's) projects and initiatives contribute to improvements in workplace accommodation practices and processes.**

# Short-term outcomes

Departments and agencies are aware of their role in implementing the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada.

Departments and agencies have the capacity to support accessibility and disability inclusion within their organization.

**Departments and agencies know where to find information on accessibility and workplace accommodations.**

**Federal organizations outside of OPSA are leading and/or partnering on projects and initiatives of the CEWF.**

# Outputs

Implementation plan for the Accessibility Strategy
Accessibility Hub: information, guidance and tools
Progress reports for implementation of the Accessibility Strategy
Progress reports on CEWF projects

Benchmarking Study of Workplace Accommodations in the Federal Public Service

Multi-year strategic plan for the CEWF

# Reach

Heads of organizations, champions and executive accessibility leads

External stakeholders and partners

Managers and employees seeking accessibility solutions

Managers and employees seeking workplace accommodations

# Activities

Coordinate efforts to implement new requirements under the *Accessible Canada Act*.

Conduct outreach and engagement activities with diverse audiences across the public service.

Provide strategic advice and guidance on accessibility to federal organizations.

Establish and manage the CEWF.

# Appendix B: Jurisdictional Review

The jurisdictional scan indicated that the issues and rationale that underpin OPSA's creation are relevant and coherent, as is the design of the *Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada*:

- all national jurisdictions reviewed referred to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and have legislation that focuses on similar standards for employment, the built environment, customer service, communications and technology, and transportation (some also include education and housing)
- the accessibility strategies reviewed have these elements in common:
  - training and capacity-building
  - updating policies and improving practices
  - communications and technology
  - enhancing the accessibility of the built environment
  - promoting culture change
  - employing people with disabilities
- all accessibility strategies reviewed were governed by an entity or a leader supported by a coordinating body that steers the implementation of a government plan

Canada and Australia are the only countries that have a separate strategy for making their public service more accessible. With regard to transforming the public service, Canada's Accessibility Strategy compared favourably because it has a broad focus and sets targets.

All jurisdictions reviewed use similar approaches to achieve their accessibility goals. Findings suggest that requiring each department to develop its own accessibility plan, publicly report on its plan, and publish regular progress updates appears to positively affect departmental

compliance. In addition, increased collaboration in developing government accessibility plans may encourage increased cooperation and sharing of accessibility action item responsibilities.

# Appendix C: Methodology

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This evaluation used a mixed methods approach to gather information. This approach consisted of quantitative and qualitative methods, specifically:

- a jurisdictional scan
- a document review
- key informant interviews
- an online survey

## Jurisdictional scan

The jurisdictional scan compared enterprise-wide accessibility initiatives in other public sector jurisdictions in Canada and internationally. The focus of this scan was to determine:

- how the initiatives were designed
- how they were delivered
- how their success was measured

The five jurisdictions selected had several years of experience in implementing accessibility plans and were similar in terms of their socio-political and economic contexts. The jurisdictions chosen were:

- Ontario, which is developing its third five-year accessibility plan
- Nova Scotia, which is in its second three-year accessibility plan
- Manitoba, which is in its third two-year accessibility plan

- Australia, which began the first five-year portion of its second 10-year strategy in 2021
- Germany, which is in the second iteration of its 2016 National Action Plan, which is based on its original National Action Plan of 2011

The scan included a desk review (an online search of publicly available information) for each jurisdiction. Information searched and gathered for each jurisdiction was as follows:

- general strategy details:
  - legislation and its areas of focus regarding accessibility
  - name of the government accessibility plan or strategy
  - year of the launch of the accessibility plan or strategy and number of iterations to date
  - areas of focus on accessibility in government plans
- governance:
  - who the strategy lead is
  - the role of the lead
  - who else is involved
- approach to implementation:
  - how people who have a disability are involved
  - how responsibility is distributed
  - the components and design of the implementation plan
- examples of efficiency or economy found in elements of the plans' designs or approach
- new, different or innovative elements of the design or approach
- measurements of the plan's success
- accountability and reporting

The information was collected in a spreadsheet and results were analyzed by theme.

# Document review

The documents were reviewed to gather information for the evaluation covering various programs elements, such as:

- relevance of the program
- how well the program performed
- lessons learned
- potential design alternatives

Seventy-one documents were reviewed, including key federal and other national-level documents and internal program documents and data. As documents and data were reviewed, information was recorded in an evidence matrix by evaluation indicator so that it could be readily compiled and analyzed for reporting.

# Key informant interviews

Interviews were held to ask questions about OPSA's relevance and performance, its effectiveness and design alternatives. TBS's Office of Internal Audit and Evaluation identified key informants. In total, 33 interviews were completed with representatives from the following:

- the Deputy Ministers Accessibility Group and the Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee (n=15)
- OPSA (n=6)
- key partners (n=5)
- project leads of the CEWF (n=7)

Interviews were conducted in English and French. The interviews varied in length from 20 minutes to over 60 minutes and took place between January and April 2023.

# Survey

Goss Gilroy Inc. and TBS's Internal Audit and Evaluation Bureau worked together to create the survey. The survey was designed to provide results that would contribute to answering key evaluation questions related to the relevance and performance of OPSA, including effectiveness, efficiency and design alternatives. The survey was launched in an online format using available contact information provided by TBS. The survey was available in both English and French.

The list of respondents was drawn from the following sources:

- Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport Engagement Tracker
- Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport Adopter community contacts
- the Interdepartmental Accessibility Community of Practice
- accessibility leads in departments
- CEWF contacts
- the distribution list for the Centre on Diversity and Inclusion
- designated senior officials for employment, equity, diversity and inclusion
- internal OPSA employees

Individual closed survey links were sent to all individuals on the master list created from these respondent lists. In addition:

- survey links were sent to individuals who were referred by others and who wanted to participate in the survey
- survey links were sent to individuals who otherwise requested access to the survey

The survey was launched on February 13, 2023, and remained open until March 13, 2023. During the period in which the survey was open, four email reminders were sent on February 21 and 27 and on March 7 and 10.

Since there were only 439 potential respondents who were government departmental representatives, the survey was conducted as a census to get as many responses as possible. There were 113 surveys completed, which was a response rate of 26%.

## Evaluation Working Group

- Members of the Evaluation Working Group were representatives from the following:
- OPSA
- Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer
- Statistics Canada
- Health Canada
- Library of Parliament
- Knowledge Circle for Indigenous Inclusion

# Appendix D: Management Response and Action Plan for the Evaluation of the Office of Public Service Accessibility

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The Office of Public Service Accessibility (OPSA) of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) has reviewed the evaluation report and agrees with the recommendations. Proposed actions to address the recommendations of the report are outlined in the tables below.

# Recommendation 1

It is recommended that OPSA expand its awareness activities by:

a. advising and guiding those responsible for implementing accommodation practices
b. advising and guiding departments that are struggling with capacity
c. sharing the results of the Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund projects

# Management response

OPSA agrees that its awareness activities should be expanded by:

- advising and guiding those responsible for implementing accommodation practices
- advising and guiding departments and agencies who struggle with capacity

Centralized Enabling Workplace Fund (CEWF) project results should be disseminated. Expanding awareness activities align with the *Accessible Canada Act* requirement of creating a barrier-free Canada and federal public service by 2040.

## Proposed actions for Recommendation 1

### Actions for 1(a)

| Actions | Start date | Targeted completion date | Office of primary interest |
|---|---|---|---|
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|---|---|---|---|
| OPSA will deliver workshops and regularly engage with adopter organizations of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport Community of Practice, including organizations that struggle with capacity.<br><br>OPSA will engage with federal organizations, human resources and managers' communities, and functional communities to communicate the launch of a new digital passport application in March 2024, which will encourage broader adoption of the passport among federal organizations.<br><br>OPSA will deliver workshops to the human resources and National Managers' Community to build awareness on the use of the passport and on improving workplace accommodation processes. | In progress | March 31, 2024 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |
| OPSA is working collaboratively with the internal audit community to provide consistent and standardized guidance to internal audit functions that will help assess the effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of the workplace accommodation processes. | In progress | March 2024 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |

## Actions for 1(b)

| Actions | Start date | Targeted completion date | Office of primary interest |
|---|---|---|---|
| A review of the first federally regulated accessibility plans released in December 2022 gave OPSA insights into the accessibility maturity of the core public administration. December 2023 will bring the release of progress reports on implementation and feedback received. OPSA will build on that previous work to scan progress reports published on December 31, 2023, to identify those departments and agencies that are in need of further support.<br><br>Taking conclusions from the scan into consideration, OPSA will lead engagement sessions on how to build capacity in accessibility and disability inclusion. | January 2024 | March 31, 2024 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |

## Actions for 1(c)

| Actions | Start date | Targeted completion date | Office of primary interest |
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|---|---|---|---|
| OPSA is developing a final report that captures project results and communicates lessons learned and key recommendations that emerged from CEWF projects. The final report will be disseminated to organizations to build awareness. | In progress | March 31, 2024 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |
| An event is to be organized for the launch of the report before March 31, 2024, to build awareness among organizations and functional communities on lessons learned and recommendations. | | | |

# Recommendation 2

It is recommended that OPSA monitor and foster departmental performance measurement on accessibility and accommodation processes. Doing so would enable OPSA and key partners to share methodologies and tools that support departments to identify gaps, set targets and track accessibility change over time.

## Management response

OPSA agrees that monitoring and fostering departmental performance on accessibility and accommodation processes is a key priority to ensure that accessibility is meaningfully improved across the Government of Canada. The Deputy Ministers' Accessibility Group has also identified the improvement of Government of Canada measurement capabilities as a critical aspect of making the federal public service barrier-free. OPSA therefore agrees that departments should be provided with resources to support accessibility measurement progress.

## Proposed actions for Recommendation 2

| Actions | Start date | Targeted completion date | Office of primary interest |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| OPSA will co-develop and publish on the Accessibility Hub a final measurement framework for accessibility, complete with a series of indicators that departments will be encouraged to use to develop their capabilities and measure their progress. This framework was developed in collaboration with Statistics Canada and accessibility leads in departments across the federal public service. | June 2023 | September 2023 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |
| The Accessibility Measurement Framework will be presented at the Public Service Management Committee to promote to use of indicators to monitor progress. | In progress | November 29, 2023 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |

# Recommendation 3

To achieve making the public service barrier-free by 2040, it is recommended that OPSA develop options with input from stakeholders, such as departmental accessibility leads and networks of employees with disabilities, to ensure that investments in the following occur, whether OPSA's operations sunset or not:

a. the Accessibility Strategy

b. the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport

c. the commitment to hire 5,000 people with disabilities by 2025

## Management response

OPSA agrees that options should be developed to ensure that investments in the Accessibility Strategy, the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport and the commitment to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025 be maintained, whether OPSA sunsets or not in March 2024. The inclusion of persons with disabilities should remain a priority to embed accessibility in all Government of Canada activities. OPSA will issue an accessibility progress report in December 2023, which will highlight recommendations to continue to advance accessibility across the public service, whether OPSA sunsets or not. Furthermore, OPSA will provide the results of the evaluation with the Assistant Secretary of Government Operations Sector, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

As noted in the evaluation, the legislative obligations introduced by the *Accessible Canada Act* have been instrumental in helping departments focus their efforts on accessibility and disability inclusion. OPSA has supported the operationalization of the *Accessible Canada Act* through building awareness, providing guidance and tools, and convening partners. There is a confluence of work, including through implementation and measuring progress of the Clerk's Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion, in that:

- all federally regulated entities must:
  - publish their first accessibility plans
  - report annually on their progress in identifying, preventing and removing barriers faced by persons with disabilities

- the forthcoming modernized self-identification tool will influence change in the largest employer and service provider in Canada

OPSA has strategically identified a number of proposed actions to further embed an accessibility lens within departments, and it will continue to undertake these activities with the support of key partners. Collaboration has been a priority since OPSA's inception in 2018.

## Proposed actions for Recommendation 3

| Action | Start date | Targeted completion date | Office of primary interest |
|---|---|---|---|
| OPSA will update and modify the Accessibility Self-Assessment Tool to ensure that departments reassess their policies and practices. | June 2023 | September 2023 | OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |
| As a result of OPSA's input and guidance, the modernized self-identification tool will be deployed government-wide, along with a more inclusive definition of disabilities aligned with the *Accessible Canada Act* and the social model of disability. | In progress | October 2023 | Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Work with interested partners to strengthen and rebrand GBA Plus to ensure that the latest and best available questions related to accessibility and disability inclusion are considered as part of program and policy work. | In progress | March 31, 2024 | Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat<br><br>Women and Gender Equality Canada<br><br>Office for Disability Issues, Employment and Social Development Canada<br><br>OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ensure that letters that inform departments regarding their progress toward achieving hiring targets and closing representation gaps for persons with disabilities are sent to deputy ministers to:<br><br>• sustain momentum on the government's commitment to hire 5,000 employees with disabilities by 2025<br>• meet legal obligations under the *Employment Equity Act* and the *Accessible Canada Act* | December 2023 | February 28, 2024 | Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat<br><br>OPSA, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat<br><br>Public Service Commission of Canada |
| OPSA will lead engagement activities with key audiences across the public service (for example, National Managers' Community, human resources councils and accessibility networks) to raise awareness about the importance of accessibility. Departments will be encouraged to cascade messaging to all employees and ensure that managers and employees receive messages and become aware of events and training opportunities. | June 2023 | March 2024 | Office of Public Service Accessibility, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat<br><br>Canada School of Public Service |

# Footnotes

1        Referred to as "departments" in this report.

2        Bill C-81: An Act to Ensure a Barrier-Free Canada received royal assent in 2019.

3        Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method. In the present context, a group of subjects – for example, a group of program administrators – already participating in the survey referred other program administrators (who otherwise would have been unlikely to be identified) to be part of the survey sample.

4        *Nothing Without Us: An Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada*

5        *Making it real: update on the implementation of "Nothing Without Us" – Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada (2021)*

6        Update on the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport, January 2022

7        *Moving Forward Together: Update on Progress in Public Service Accessibility (2022)*

8        List of participating departments in the Interdepartmental Accessibility Community of Practice, June 2022

9        Deputy Minister Accessibility Group Summary, June 2022

10       Respondents who answered "not applicable" were removed from the count.

11      *Moving Forward Together: Update on Progress in Public Service Accessibility (2022)*

12      At the time of writing, the numbers grew to 368 employees in 52 departments, with 1,094 tools loaned.

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**Date modified:**

2024-06-13