

# Council of Ontario Universities' Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

This 2014-21 accessibility plan outlines the policies and actions the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) will put in place to prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities, and to meet its requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This plan will be reviewed and updated at least every five years as per section 4(1) (b) of the Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation (IASR).

## Background

The AODA, given Royal Assent on June 13, 2005, sets out to make Ontario fully accessible to persons with disabilities by 2025. The AODA creates a legal duty to remove and prevent barriers in both the public and private sectors. Through this legislation, the Government of Ontario committed to increasing accessibility with a focus in five specific development areas: Customer Service; Information and Communications; Employment; Transportation; and Built Environment.

## Statement of Commitment

COU is committed to treating all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in integration and equal opportunity. We are committed to meeting the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities in a timely manner, and will do so by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility and meeting accessibility requirements under the AODA. In order to meet and sustain compliance, COU will build accessibility into existing and new policies and will review its accessibility policies on an ongoing basis.

COU has established an Accessible COU Working Group to ensure that COU meets its obligations under the AODA and, where possible, demonstrates leadership in terms of exceeding requirements. On an ongoing basis, the Working Group will:

- Assess timelines for AODA compliance that have been established by the Ontario government;
- Develop an implementation plan or work plan, which outlines specific requirements and timelines for compliance.
- Conduct a gaps analysis to determine which requirements are outstanding after considering COU's existing practices and policies.
- Identify training requirements.

Members of the Working Group include representatives across COU. The Working Group is chaired by the Executive Director, Corporate Services, and reports to COU's Executive Team.

## **Accessible Emergency Information**

COU is committed to providing our clients and stakeholders with publicly available emergency information in an accessible way, upon request. We will also continue to provide employees with disabilities with individualized emergency response information, when necessary.

## **Training**

COU will ensure employees are provided with the training needed to meet Ontario's accessibility laws in the following ways:

- COU will provide training to employees, volunteers and others who deal with members, guests, vendors or other third parties on COU's behalf, on Ontario's accessibility laws and on the Ontario Human Rights Code (HRC) as it relates to persons with disabilities. Training will be provided in a way that best suits the responsibilities of employees, volunteers and others who deal with members, guests, vendors or other third parties on COU's behalf.
- Should there be any changes to COU's policies, COU will provide training to employees, volunteers and those who deal with members, guests, vendors or others on COU's behalf.
- As soon as is practicable, newly hired employees will be provided with the training required in order to comply with the AODA Customer Service Standard, and will also be trained on COU's obligations under the IASR and HRC.
- COU's Human Resources department will maintain records of all training, including the dates the training was provided and the individuals who received the training.

Through ongoing education and awareness, COU will give employees the knowledge and skills they need to meet or exceed compliance requirements. This will include developing alternate formats, hosting accessible meetings and creating documents, processes and policies with accessibility in mind.

## **Information and Communications**

COU is committed to meeting the communication needs of persons with disabilities. We will consult with persons with disabilities to determine their information and communication needs.

- COU will complete an audit of its website to ensure compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A.
- COU will embark on a multi-year project to make the COU website and content conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA, by January 1, 2021.

- COU will continue to ensure that feedback processes are accessible to persons with disabilities, including providing accessible formats and communication supports, upon request.
- COU will continue to provide information in accessible formats and/or communication supports, upon request. COU has undertaken staff training on the creation of accessible Microsoft Office and Adobe Acrobat documents, will plan for future training sessions as new information becomes available, and will adhere to current best practices as much as is practicable.

## Employment

COU is committed to fair and accessible employment practices.

- Provide training to hiring managers, and those involved in hiring processes, on AODA requirements and disability-related requirements in the recruitment process.
- Notify employees and members of the public that, when requested, COU will accommodate persons with disabilities during the recruitment and assessment process.
  - Notice will be issued on COU's career website page, in all job postings and correspondence with applicants.
- Notify successful applicants of COU's policies for accommodating persons with disabilities as soon as is practicable after they begin their employment, as part of the COU workplace orientation, and on an ongoing basis should there be changes to COU's policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to a disability.
- Determine suitable accommodation, by consulting with the employee, that takes into account the employee's accessibility needs due to a disability.
- Arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for employees, upon request and in consultation with the employee, for information that is needed in order to perform job duties and for information generally available to employees in the workplace.
- Develop and put in place a process for developing individual accommodation plans and return-to-work policies for employees that have been absent due to a disability.
  - Develop a template for individual accommodation and return-to-work plans.
- Ensure the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities are taken into account when using performance management, career development and advancement, and redeployment processes.
- Prevent and remove other accessibility barriers as or if identified.

## **Disruption of Service**

In the event of a service disruption, we will notify the public of the service disruption and of alternatives available. As appropriate to the disruption, notice will be placed on one or more of the following:

1. Our front door
2. Our website and social media channels
3. Our main telephone line

## **Questions/Feedback**

For more information on this accessibility plan or to request an alternate format of this document, please contact:

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Where possible, COU will provide a response within 14 business days or as soon as reasonably possible.