

For Immediate Release
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MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS AN ACCESSIBLE ONTARIO

Second Anniversary Of The Passage Of The Accessibility For Ontarians With Disabilities Act

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is making important progress in making businesses, government services and communities fully accessible to all Ontarians, Minister Responsible for Ontarians with Disabilities Madeleine Meilleur said today in celebration of the second anniversary of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The landmark legislation was passed unanimously in the Legislature on June 13, 2005.

“Our government believes that a fully accessible Ontario will be a stronger Ontario,” said Meilleur. “That’s why we took a strong stand for accessibility by making the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act the law. And that’s why we will continue to work together to break down barriers for people with disabilities.”

According to Statistics Canada, approximately 1.5 million people, or 13 per cent of Ontarians, have a disability and that is expected to increase to 20 per cent in 20 years, as the population ages.

The government is developing provincewide standards in five key areas: customer service, transportation, information and communications, the physical environment, and employment. The proposed standards are created by Standards Development Committees, which consist of people with disabilities and experts in their field from the private sector and the public sector.

The proposed Accessible Customer Service Standard has been posted for public review and feedback, and the proposed Accessible Transportation Standard will be posted for public review later this year.

The Standards Development Committee that will draft the proposed Accessible Information and Communications Standard has recently begun its work. And the committees for the Accessible Built Environment Standard and the Employment Accessibility Standard are being assembled now.

The McGuinty government has also entered into several different partnership projects with various private sector and not-for-profit organizations to improve accessibility in some new and innovative ways.

Over the past two years, these partnerships have resulted in:

- A new guide for front-line managers and human resources professionals that provides information and advice on recruiting, interviewing and employing people with disabilities.
- The *Ontario Mainstreet Awards* which recognize businesses and communities that have been leaders in providing quality service to all customers.
- A series of videos and printed materials developed through the Ontario Chinese Restaurant and Food Services Association. These tools will help an important part of the Chinese business community better understand how to make their businesses and services more accessible.
- Tools and resources developed by media professionals aimed at raising the profile of people with disabilities in the Canadian movie, television and radio industry.

The government has also invested nearly \$11 million in new funding for interpreter and intervenor services for people who are deaf or deafblind, announced \$28.2 million for universities and colleges to provide services for students with disabilities, and developed a new *Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities* to help make Ontario's communities safer for everyone in the event of an emergency.

Last month, the government launched a new public awareness website on accessibility called AccessON which challenges attitudes and encourages all Ontarians to learn about barriers to accessibility. The AccessON.ca website will also help businesses get the information and tools they need to comply with the new accessibility standards.

“In the coming years, we look forward to continuing our progress with the development of accessibility standards and public education to raise awareness of the benefits of accessibility. We are also looking for new ways in which we can partner with the private sector as well as the broader public sector and municipalities, to open more doors for Ontarians with disabilities,” said Meilleur. “An accessible Ontario is going to be a stronger Ontario for everyone.”

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Contacts:

Marc Despatie
Minister's Office
416-325-5219

John Letherby
Communications and Marketing Branch
416-325-5187

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