



2023-2025

Accessibility Plan

Legal Aid BC



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Message from the LABC Executive Team

Legal Aid BC's Strategic Framework for 2023-2028 reflects our new vision: BC's legal system transformed into one that is more equitable and inclusive.

We will do that by strengthening the client-centred legal help we provide to British Columbians experiencing barriers accessing the legal system.

We acknowledge that we are early in our journey and embedded in high-barrier systems for British Columbians with accessibility needs. We embrace the opportunity to do better as we commit to planning and investing in the necessary changes to make LABC an accessible organization.

Our commitment extends to ensuring accessibility for all interested parties, including our team members, clients who are service recipients, prospective employees, and the wider public who rely on our services. We understand that genuine accessibility encompasses a wide spectrum, from shaping our employment policies to enhancing our interactions and communications with our valued community members and clients.

We invite you to join us on this journey towards a future that is more accessible and equitable for all British Columbians. Your support, feedback, and collaboration are essential as we work together to ensure that Legal Aid BC reduces its own barriers and those of our clients in delivering fair and equitable outcomes for those living with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Ali Allameh

Guiding Framework

The guiding framework for our Accessibility Plan covers the following key areas:

- Our Areas of Focus for Accessibility
- Our Principles
- Legislation and Regulation Cornerstones
- Our Existing Policies and Plans
- Our Vision Statement and Service Commitment

Our Areas of Focus for Accessibility

Our Accessibility Plan is rooted in considering and enhancing the following areas of accessibility at LABC:

- employment
- delivery of services
- the work culture
- the built environment
- information and communications
- technology
- health and wellbeing
- education

Our Principles

In creating, monitoring and evaluating our Accessibility Plan, we will rely on the following key principles:

- **Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
- **Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
- **Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experiences greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.
- **Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for Organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.
- **Self-Determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
- **Universal Design:** The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.” An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to interact with the Organization.

Legislation and Regulation Cornerstones

In tandem with the efforts undertaken to fulfill the Accessible BC Act, we are committed to maintaining alignment with critical legislation and regulations in accordance with the BC Human Rights Code, BC Employment Standards Act, BC Labour Relations Code, and WorkSafeBC. Legal Aid BC holds a steadfast commitment to ensuring that these legal frameworks serve as the cornerstone upon which our actions are founded.

Our Existing Policies and Plans

Legal Aid BC has undertaken significant efforts to enhance Truth, Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. This includes the adoption of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) aimed at guiding decision-making and service delivery throughout the organization. The RAP underscores Legal Aid BC's commitment to improving access to justice for Indigenous peoples in BC, aligning with principles from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Indigenous child welfare recommendations, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the goal of reducing Indigenous involvement in child protection and criminal justice systems.

In addition, our Employment Equity Policy is dedicated to fostering a diverse workforce that accurately reflects the geographic and cultural communities we serve. Our Discrimination, Bullying, and Harassment Policy ensures a work environment where every employee is treated with respect and dignity, free from any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Furthermore, Legal Aid BC has established an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Council, tasked with developing an EDI strategy aimed at identifying and dismantling barriers faced by equity-seeking groups, including those with disabilities. These initiatives collectively embody our unwavering commitment to fostering an environment of equality, accessibility, and respect for every individual.

Our Vision Statement and Service Commitment

At Legal Aid BC, we aspire to transform British Columbia's legal landscape, using our unwavering commitment to representing clients as a catalyst for a more equitable and inclusive system. Our dedication is rooted in the belief in the strength of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We work hard to break down systemic barriers, ensuring justice is tangible for everyone we serve. Our mission is to fortify client-centred legal assistance for all British Columbians by actively addressing systemic obstacles. Inclusivity is our cornerstone, fostering a culture of openness and kindness. We create safe spaces for conversations about discrimination's impact and are committed to integrating Truth and Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion principles throughout LABC, ensuring our values guide every facet of our work to make justice accessible to all.

Definitions



Disability

Means an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.



Impairment

Includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.



Barrier

Is anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment; barriers can be caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications or technologies. They can also be affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.



Intersectionality

The acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people



Accessibility Plan

A plan to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. Based on the Accessible BC Act, an organization must consider the following principles when designing their plan: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design. The plan must be reviewed and updated at least once every three years. In updating its accessibility plan, an organization must consider any comments received from public feedback and from the Accessibility Committee.



Accessibility Committee

A committee formed within an organization to assist in identifying barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization and advising the organization on how to remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. An accessibility committee must, to the extent possible, have members who are selected in accordance with the following goals: at least half of the members are persons with disabilities, at least one of the members is an Indigenous person, and the committee reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia.

Accessibility Committee at LABC

The process for creating the Accessibility Committee was driven by inclusivity and a genuine commitment to representation.

This process began with an internal, confidential Self-Identification Survey designed to collect information to further understand the demographics of LABC's employee population. The survey was conducted by an independent third-party firm that was engaged to support LABC in its Accessibility journey. Following this, a communication was sent to all LABC employees to explain the Accessibility Act and the purpose of the Accessibility Committee that was going to be formed. People were invited to express their interest and to voluntarily disclose if they had a diverse ability or identified as Indigenous. Every individual who expressed interest in joining the Committee was warmly welcomed, ensuring a team comprised of a broad spectrum of voices and experiences.

Accessibility Committee Members



Name: Ali-Reza Allameh , Committee Chair
Position: General Counsel & Corporate Secretary

Ali-Reza Allameh has served as General Counsel & Corporate Secretary at LABC since 2022. Prior to joining LABC, Ali served as in-house counsel in the private sector and has practiced law in private practice in different jurisdictions in Canada and the United States. He is passionate about supporting a future that is more accessible and equitable for all British Columbians.



Name: Camille Narayan
Position: TREDI Manager

Camille Narayan is a dedicated and accomplished Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion leader with extensive experience in developing and implementing Reconciliation and EDI strategies. Camille has a diverse background in leading values-based and public service organizations in the lower mainland, and globally. Experienced on engaging staff and improving employee experience, Camille has successfully implemented evidence-based strategies and programs, achieving high levels of senior leadership support and employee engagement. During her free time she enjoys spending time with her family, wildlife watching, and enjoying the outdoors. She is honoured to be supporting LABC's Accessibility Committee and addressing ableism in partnership with those living with diverse abilities.



Name: Kevin Tilley

Position: Senior Counsel & Assistant Corporate Secretary

Kevin Tilley joined the LABC General Counsel office in May 2023 as the Senior Counsel and Assistant Corporate Secretary. Prior to joining LABC he worked as in-house counsel, focused on Labour and Human Rights Law, and had previously practiced criminal defence and public interest law. He is proud to assist LABC in taking steps toward building a more accessible and inclusive environment for its employees, clients and lawyers alike.



Name: Brigitte Petersen

Position: Legal Information Content Developer/Analyst

Brigitte joined LABC in 2019 as a Communications Generalist. In April 2023, she became a Legal Information Content Developer/Analyst in LABC's new Public Legal Education and Information Department. Brigitte's job involves creating online resources to support legal aid services for criminal, family, child protection, and immigration law. This work follows plain language best practices and focuses on keeping accessibility a top priority. Brigitte also updates LABC's three websites: the corporate site, Family Law in BC, and Aboriginal Legal Aid in BC.

Through this work, and her experience as a journalist, Brigitte gained experience writing and editing for internal and external audiences. Brigitte lives in Vancouver's West End and works from home and the Vancouver Regional Centre.



Name: Denbigh Watertosh

Position: Lawyer Engagement Coordinator

Denbigh Watertosh is the Lawyer Engagement Coordinator at LABC. Her 4 years with the organization include working in Intake as well as Lawyer Services. Currently in a project-based role with a goal to improve services, her long-term passions involve improving access to justice and health care as well as upholding human rights.

Denbigh holds a Bachelor's in Criminology and Psychology from SFU. Her previous work and volunteer experience includes working with vulnerable populations such as Indigenous youth, women fleeing abuse, and those struggling with mental illness.



Name: Olivia Santacroce

Position: Administrative Legal Assistant

Olivia is a Legal Administrative Assistant with the Family Law Services team at Legal Aid BC, bringing five years' experience in the legal field. With an educational background in First Nations and Indigenous Studies, she remains committed to promoting equal access to justice. Having struggled herself with a diagnosed learning disability, she also is passionate about advocating for inclusivity within legal frameworks.



Name: Fran

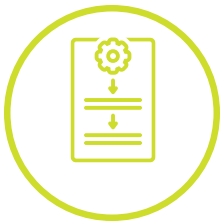
Position: Legal Intake Assistant

Key Priorities 2023-2025

This section lists Legal Aid BC's key priorities for increasing accessibility from 2023-2025.



Priority 01: Information, Communication and Technology



Priority 02: Organizational Policies and Work Practices



Priority 03: Invisible and Environmental Barriers

Priority 01: Information, Communication and Technology

Enhance the accessibility of information, communications and technology at LABC to remove potential barriers for individuals accessing services, employees, and prospective employees.

Action	Details
Enhance Website Accessibility for Individuals with Disabilities	Review exemplary websites known for their strong accessibility measures and research best practices to enhance website accessibility. Based on our findings, the LABC website will be modified to ensure there is improved online accessibility for our clients and the public.
Acquire Assistive Tools	LABC is committed to acquiring specialized assistive tools that would benefit our clients and employees and will research options that may best provide this support. New tools will be implemented accordingly based on our research findings.
Develop an Accessible Job Application Process	Review the current process for how applicants submit their online applications at LABC. Develop alternative low-tech processes and research more accessible application submission solutions for job seekers.

Work on major priorities is set to commence in 2023, and ongoing efforts will extend through the year 2024.

Priority 02: Organizational Policies and Work Practices

Revise and develop organizational policies and work practices that focus on enhancing the employee experience at LABC and promote accessibility in client service delivery.

Action	Details
Evaluate Expenditure on Employee Wellness Programs and Benefits	To ensure that these programs effectively meet the needs and preferences of our employees facing barriers, a comprehensive review to determine their impact and relevance will be conducted. Based on feedback, modifications may be made to current wellness programs and benefits.
Collaborate with HR to Enhance Recruitment Processes	LABC will convene with our HR team to evaluate and improve the accessibility of our recruitment processes, including implementing diverse posting practices and seeking partnerships with equity-seeking groups, as well as reviewing candidate assessment methods.
Establish Psychological Safety and Opportunities for Voluntary Self-Disclosure of Disabilities	Where permissible and on a voluntary basis, LABC will implement Robust Self-Identification Data Collection Processes and psychological safety measures to collect comprehensive self-identification data from our employees, tariff lawyers and clients. We aim to create an environment of psychological safety where employees feel comfortable disclosing not only the presence of disabilities but also the specific types of disabilities they may have and the types of support they require. This will enable us to monitor and track barriers for employees and clients in delivering fair and equitable outcomes.
Review of Existing Policies	LABC will conduct a policy audit to ensure there is a focus on accessibility and mental health support. New policies may be introduced, or existing policies may be revised, based on the audit findings. Further looking at ways to communicate the policies to ensure overall organizational awareness will be an important focus.

Work on major priorities is set to commence in 2023, and ongoing efforts will extend into 2024 and beyond.

Priority 03: Invisible and Environmental Barriers

Remove potential invisible and built environment barriers for our clients, prospective employees and the team at LABC.

Action	Details
Ergonomics Committee to Evaluate Office and Home Equipment	There will be a re-engagement of the Ergonomics Committee to review office equipment, for employees working in-office and from home, to ensure that employees have access to the equipment they need to address accessibility barriers, and to perform their work safely and with comfort.
Conduct an Organizational Accessibility Audit	LABC will engage with an external organization that has significant experience with conducting accessibility audits to allow for a fulsome review of the physical and virtual office environment. Based on the findings, steps will be taken to make the office more accessible to all.
Solicit Employee Feedback on Barriers that Exist	To capture a wide range of perspectives regarding physical and invisible barriers that may exist for employees, there will be several mechanisms put in place to solicit feedback, including surveys, focus groups, and meetings with the TREDI Council or Accessibility Committee.

Work on major priorities is set to commence in 2023, and ongoing efforts will extend into the year 2024.

Monitoring Progress

The Accessibility Committee will have the primary responsibility of reviewing the actions that have been taken to monitor the progression of our Accessibility Plan.

Frequency

The Accessibility Committee will meet at a minimum of six (6) times per year. At each meeting, there will be a review of action steps that have been taken and work that has been completed. Once per year, the Accessibility Committee will prepare a progress report for the Senior Executive and Board of Directors at LABC.

Work Completed

The Accessibility Committee will provide updates internally to all employees, as well as to the public via LABC's website, to report on work that has been completed for the Plan.

Recommendations

Based on input that is received from employees, clients and the public about LABC's Accessibility Plan, updates will be made and incorporated in our Plan once they have been reviewed and approved by the Accessibility Committee. Our Plan is a living document that will shift and adapt over time based on input received.

Evaluating Progress

In September 2024 and 2025, the Accessibility Committee will evaluate what progress has been made towards the Plan in relation to stated priorities and corresponding activities. As may be necessary, action steps may be revised or updated to ensure they are relevant to the overarching priorities of the Plan.

How to Give Us Feedback

Your feedback is not only welcome but essential to our mission. The Accessibility Committee and LABC are committed to carefully considering every suggestion and concern you share. Your insights are pivotal in shaping our policies and practices, helping us create more accessible and inclusive environments. Thank you for your active engagement as we work toward a more accessible world together.

Contact Us:



Reach out to the Accessibility Committee at:
accessibility@legalaid.bc.ca



By Phone: 604-601-6000

Where to Find the Accessibility Plan:



Conclusion

The pursuit of greater accessibility and inclusivity lies at the core of Legal Aid BC's mission. Our unwavering commitment to align with The Accessible British Columbia Act is rooted in the moral imperative to ensure that justice is within reach for everyone. We understand that this journey is a dynamic and ever-evolving one and we invite you to join us as we work toward creating a more accessible BC.

Together, we aspire to rewrite the story, replacing barriers with narratives of hope and progress.

We want to ensure that Legal Aid BC remains a model of accessibility and inclusivity, where justice is not a privilege but a fundamental right for all British Columbians.

