WorkSafeBC
Accessibility Plan

WORK SAFE BC

Territorial acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the Indigenous communities on whose territories our employees work and live. WorkSafeBC recognizes the role of Indigenous Peoples as the original inhabitants and traditional stewards and caretakers of these lands, and aims to build meaningful relationships with community members.

Contents

Message from Anne Naser, President and CEO

I am pleased to present WorkSafeBC's inaugural Accessibility Plan, which outlines WorkSafeBC's journey toward becoming a more inclusive and accessible organization.

We are aware that persons with disabilities experience systemic, attitudinal, physical, and virtual barriers that prevent full and equal participation in society. The *Accessible British Columbia Act* is an opportunity for WorkSafeBC to renew our dedication to being an inclusive and accessible organization.

This plan builds on our strategic priority to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion in our organization, as well as our ongoing work to embed inclusive practices within WorkSafeBC. We know we still have more work to do, and this is a longer-term organizational and culture change journey. We are committed to addressing any accessibility barriers within our organization.

We look forward to receiving your feedback, as it will play a vital role in shaping our efforts to become a barrier-free organization.

Anne Naser
President and CEO

Message from Wendy Strugnell, Head of People & Culture

The WorkSafeBC accessibility journey begins by looking inward and ensuring that our own practices and culture encompass the principles of accessibility, equity, and inclusion for our employees.

The first year of our plan is focused on internal efforts to change our organizational culture and to improve our employment practices. Our plan strives to increase the sense of inclusion and support for our employees with disabilities. From there, we will turn our focus to other areas of our organization, based on the feedback we receive from our public feedback mechanisms and our Accessibility Committee.

I want to acknowledge and thank the Abilities Inclusion Evolution employee resource group and the members of the Accessibility Committee. Their support in developing this plan and their input into our practices will continue to positively impact our organization.

Wendy Strugnell
Head of People and Culture

About WorkSafeBC

We are a provincial agency with a mandate established under the ***Workers Compensation Act***. We are dedicated to promoting safe and healthy workplaces and supporting injured workers with compensation and rehabilitation services.

We partner with employers and workers in B.C. to:

- Promote the prevention of workplace injury, illness, and disease

- Rehabilitate those who are injured, and provide timely return to work

- Provide fair compensation to replace workers' loss of wages while recovering from injuries

- Ensure sound financial management for a healthy workers' compensation system

Our workforce is made up of more than 3,500 employees. Our employees work hard to serve 2.6 million workers and approximately 270,000 employers in B.C.

For more information, visit our website: **About us**.

Our guiding framework

The following outlines the principles that inform our accessibility work and serve as the guiding framework for our accessibility plan.

WorkSafeBC's vision

Safe and healthy workplaces. Compassionate and responsive services.

WorkSafeBC's behaviours

Our behaviours guide how we act and how we create a consistent and positive experience for those we serve. These behaviours are the actions we take to bring WorkSafeBC's mission, vision, and values to life every day. We are:

- **Responsive:** We anticipate the needs of those we serve, and get them what they need, when they need it.

- **Respectful:** We seek to understand the unique needs of those we serve. We provide caring, client-centric service, considering each person's experience, feelings, needs, knowledge, and abilities.

- **Forward-thinking:** We are knowledgeable and passionate. We understand our vision and goals, and identify and embrace new ways to innovate, continuously improve, and achieve service excellence.

- **Collaborative:** We actively listen, demonstrate a willingness to learn, co-operate, and partner to work toward solutions.

- **Accountable:** We show up for our stakeholders. We take responsibility for our actions, confront problems openly and quickly, and follow through on commitments.

- **Fair**: We exhibit uncompromising integrity, and act honestly, ethically and without bias to ensure those we serve receive consistent and transparent service.

"Nothing about us without us"

In the context of our accessibility plan, we are also guided by the phrase "nothing about us without us." This phrase was popularized by disability rights activists in the 1990s. It means that policies or decisions should be made with the meaningful participation of those affected by that policy or decision. The phrase is now associated with the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**.[i]

Language of disability

In the spirit of "nothing about us without us," we want to clarify the terminology we use in this plan.

The language used to describe those who experience marginalization is continually evolving. This evolution is important as it represents a longer-term journey of learning and progress.

There is much discussion underway about the use of person-first versus identity-first language within the disability community.

Person-first language highlights the person before the disability ("person with a disability"). Some people with disabilities prefer person-first language because they do not want to be defined by their disability, condition, or difference. Person-first language is often used by government organizations.

Some disabled people prefer identity-first language ("disabled person"). They wish to centre their disability as an integral part of their social identities. They consider person-first language as minimizing their identity by suggesting that the person can be separated from their disability, condition, or difference.[ii]

Finally, many euphemisms have emerged to describe persons with disabilities, such as "diversely abled," "special needs," "handi-capable." Some people with disabilities prefer these as ways to counter the negative social stereotypes associated with the term "disabled." At the same time, many disabled people prefer to embrace their disability identity and don't agree with the use of euphemisms.[iii] Some also feel that euphemisms should be avoided because they are not legally protected terms. Human rights and accessibility legislation all use the term "disability" and there is power in using the legally protected terms.

In the spirit of "nothing about us without us" we are using the language that has been recommended by our Accessibility Committee. In this plan, and in our work over the coming year, we will use both person-first and identity-first language as a small gesture of recognition to the diversity of preferences within disability communities.

The social and medical models of disability

It's important to understand the differences between the social model and medical model of disability. These are both important to our mandate as an insurer and as an employer.

The social model of disability sees disability arising from the barriers created by society. For example, the absence of a ramp is disabling, not the fact that someone uses a wheelchair. The lack of closed captioning is disabling, not the fact that someone is D/deaf.[iv]

The social model focuses on identifying and addressing systemic barriers to the full inclusion of disabled people. The *Accessible British Columbia Act* is based in the social model of disability.

In the medical model, a person's health condition or difference is seen as disabling. In this model, people with disabilities are seen as in need of a cure, support, or care. The medical model is also used to identify and develop individualized supports for disabled people in the workplace.

The social model is systemic in focus, while the medical model is individualized. These two approaches — when operating in harmony — can support meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities.

WorkSafeBC's mandate is to oversee a fair workers' compensation system for B.C. workplaces. We rely on the medical model in much of our work, including adjudicating claims, rehabilitating injured workers, and supporting injured workers in their return-to-work journey. We are also an employer, so we have a duty to accommodate our own employees.

The return-to-work journey for injured workers and our duty to accommodate employees are highly individualized processes. These processes include:

- Confirming the injured worker's or employee's abilities and considerations (physical, psychological, etc.)

- Identifying any recovery and return-to-work factors specific to their role or work environment

- Creating an individualized plan to support the worker's or employee's success in their jobs

These individualized approaches are fluid processes that rely on medical information, ongoing assessments, and regular reviews. These approaches also complement and support our systemic change efforts toward more meaningful and tailored inclusion.

Our accessibility plan and our equity and inclusion work are based on the social model of disability and are focused on the work of systemic change. This aligns with the intention of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*.

The *Accessible British Columbia Act*

The ***Accessible British Columbia Act*** aims to remove barriers to people with disabilities in accessing services and employment. It requires prescribed organizations to do the following:

- Create an Accessibility Committee. The Committee should include people with lived experience of diverse disabilities and have Indigenous representation. It should also reflect the diversity of the population of British Columbia.

- Provide a feedback mechanism to receive reports of accessibility barriers experienced by people within and interacting with the organization.

- Publish an accessibility plan describing how the organization will identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers going forward.

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* provides disabled people with an unprecedented level of agency and voice in our province. As an organization, we will benefit from new direct methods of hearing from people with disabilities about how we can be a more accessible and inclusive organization.

Key definitions

- **Disability:** The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society due to the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

- **Impairment**: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

- **Accessibility**: The state of having programs, services, and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers. Accessibility is a fundamental aspect of the equity and inclusion of disabled people.

- **Barrier**: 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. Barriers can also be made worse by intersecting forms of discrimination.

For a full list of definitions, visit the **Appendix**.

Our accessibility story

Equity, diversity, and inclusion audit

In the fall of 2021, we launched an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) audit of our workplace. The audit included:

- Review of our policies and procedures

- Focus groups with leaders and employees

- Organization-wide survey that helped us better understand how our work environment affects employees differently based on factors such as age, disabilities, caregiving, race, gender, and diverse sexualities

Our audit confirmed that WorkSafeBC employees with disabilities experienced a lower sense of inclusion than the average across all employees.

EDI roadmap

The results of the EDI audit informed our three-year EDI roadmap, which began in 2022. Our EDI roadmap prioritizes disabled employees as an area of focus. The roadmap charts an organizational journey through work in three key areas:

1. Leadership and governance

- Goal: EDI is embedded throughout the organization and supported by equity infrastructure.

2. Education and communication

- Goal: Employees and leaders have the capacity and desire to contribute to and maintain respectful, accessible, and inclusive work environments.

3. Systemic change

- Goal: Organizational systems, policies, and processes are inclusive and equitable.

Employee Psychological Health and Safety Strategy

Launched in 2022, our Employee Psychological Health and Safety Strategy supports WorkSafeBC's commitment to foster a workplace that promotes employees' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to employees' psychological health. This strategy focuses on:

- Working to reduce stigma around mental health

- Integrating psychological health and safety into how we work

- Ensuring the proper resources and supports are in place for everyone

- Promoting employee well-being and our collective responsibilities

- Building incremental awareness of psychological health and safety in the workplace

Underserved and marginalized communities research

In 2022, our Experience, Marketing, and Insights department completed extensive research to identify underserved and marginalized communities interacting with WorkSafeBC.

The research aimed to ensure that any potentially marginalized and underserved communities are heard and engaged with. Through consultations, we learned that the trust ratings of workers with disabilities were lower than the average among all workers.

Our research in this area informed and will continue to inform our accessibility plan as we engage in a variety of intentional and targeted ways to better understand and respond to the needs of these communities.

Our work to date

Hire dedicated resources

We have created dedicated roles to support the implementation of our EDI roadmap and Employee Psychological Health and Safety Strategy:

- A full-time psychological health and safety specialist

- A three-person EDI team made up of a manager, a specialist, and an advisor

Establish an employee resource group

Our priority following the EDI audit was to establish employee resource groups. Abilities Inclusion Evolution (AIE) is the employee resource group for staff with disabilities. Since early 2022, AIE has been actively engaged in our equity, diversity, and inclusion work. AIE has also raised awareness through activities such as:

- Providing education to staff about invisible disabilities and their effects in the workplace

- Hosting a live event on Microsoft's accessibility features

- Inviting an external expert with lived experience to share strategies on engaging neurodiverse employees

- Providing education on how assistive technologies help to remove barriers and create employment opportunities for disabled people

Equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) education

EDI Foundations

We have rolled out foundational EDI training to all employees. This training ensures all employees share a foundational and common level of awareness on topics related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. As of September 1, 2023, 94 percent of our workforce has completed this training.

Psychological health and safety

The Working Mind

The Working Mind program, developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, is designed to promote mental health and reduce stigma around mental illness in the workplace. The program aims to do the following:

- Provide an understanding of mental health and mental illness

- Reduce stigma around mental health in the workplace

- Provide actions participants can take to support colleagues with mental health concerns

- Provide tools to maintain and support one's own mental health and resilience

Employee workplace culture survey

This annual survey is based on the **13 factors addressing mental health in the workplace**, developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This all-staff, anonymous survey offers an opportunity for employees to share about their experience at WorkSafeBC. The results determine our organizational areas

of focus. In 2023, our focus areas included mental health resources and supports.

WCB/CEU Collective Agreement

About 80 percent of our workforce is covered by the **collective agreement** between WorkSafeBC and the **Compensation Employees' Union**. In 2019, we added a letter of understanding to the collective agreement about psychological health and safety in the workplace. This language was updated in 2022 with our commitment to undertake psychological health and safety strategies and initiatives that align with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard on psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Training on psychologically safe leadership

We provide training and support to leaders to strengthen their understanding of the following:

- Their role in providing a psychologically safe workplace

- The characteristics of a safe and supportive team environment

- How to support a team member who is going through a difficult time or experiencing mental health issues

Mental Health Conversations

Throughout 2022 and 2023, employees were invited to attend a series of Mental Health Conversations. Facilitated by external experts, the series focuses on the themes of resiliency, cohesive communication, and conversations that promote positive mental health.

Hybrid work model

We've implemented a hybrid work model in response to employee feedback we received following the COVID-19 pandemic. The hybrid model offers most of our employees the flexibility to choose how frequently they work in the office. Our hybrid model improves work-life balance and responds to the diverse needs of staff with disabilities. To support employees working remotely, our in-house ergonomist conducts virtual ergonomic assessments for home workspaces to help ensure a comfortable and safe home office environment.

Our plan

The first year of our accessibility plan focuses internally on our workplace culture and employment practices. We are actively engaged on achieving the following pillars:

Pillar 1 — Organizational culture of accessibility and inclusion

- Accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion are valued and are woven into our decisions and practices.

- Our employees are confident and empowered to support and serve disabled people.

Pillar 2 — Employment

- Our employment practices support an accessible, inclusive, and diverse workforce.

The first year of our plan recognizes that we must first build our employees' capacity to understand, identify, and remedy barriers to inclusion. We must also ensure that our employment practices are inclusive and responsive to staff with disabilities.

The following are actions we'll undertake to make progress in each of these pillars.

Pillar 1 — Organizational culture of inclusion and accessibility

EDI Foundations

- **Action**: The remainder of our workforce will complete this training in 2023. Going forward, new employees will be automatically enrolled in this training as part of their onboarding.

EDI for Leaders

EDI for Leaders is an intermediate course that builds upon the knowledge gained in EDI Foundations. The workshop covers inclusive leadership, allyship, and managing difficult conversations related to accessibility and EDI.

- **Action**: EDI for Leaders will be rolled out to our directors and our executive leadership team. It will also be provided to our employee resource groups, our Joint Equity Diversity Inclusion Committee and our People & Culture business partners. EDI for Leaders will also be available to all new and existing people leaders at WorkSafeBC as part of their ongoing professional development plans.

EDI role-specific training

In 2024, we will prioritize three teams to receive tailored, role-specific training: Talent Acquisition, Communications, and Learning and Development Services.

- **Action**: These teams will complete a tailored learning path that will strengthen competency in accessibility and EDI as it relates to their roles — for example, inclusive and accessible hiring practices, inclusive communications, and inclusive learning environments.

Psychological health and safety

- **Action**: In 2024, we will continue to grow our initiatives and programs to promote employee well-being and our collective responsibilities, and to better integrate psychological health and safety into how we work.

Intermediate learning opportunities on workplace accessibility

- **Action**: We will provide and promote self-directed learning opportunities on various accommodation and accessibility topics, including creating an accessible workplace and supporting self-disclosure.

Inclusive writing and editorial style guides

Our written communications, both internal and external, are guided by our corporate writing guide and editorial style guide. These guides are continually reviewed and updated to incorporate changes in bias-free language and approaches over time.

- **Action**: These guides will continue to be reviewed and updated to ensure they meet current best practices and expectations for accessible and inclusive communications.

Inclusive curriculum design and facilitation

WorkSafeBC has an internal team of learning and design experts who support all our corporate functions with job-specific training and ongoing professional development.

- **Action**: We will develop a framework for accessible and inclusive facilitation and training practices. The framework will apply to all modes of training: in person, virtual, and self-directed online training.

Pillar 2 — Employment

Recruitment

We are reviewing and improving our recruitment practices to ensure they are inclusive, responsive, and accessible.

- **Action**: We are securing and customizing a new online applicant tracking system (ATS). The new ATS will provide job applicants with an improved applicant experience. The requirements for the new ATS include improved accessibility for assistive technologies and disabled applicants. The ATS will be customized in 2024 and implemented in 2025.

- **Action**: Many of our roles require pre-employment testing. We offer accommodations in our pre-employment assessments by asking candidates to identify their needs to participate fully. We are currently improving our job testing requirements to ensure that pre-employment testing is inclusive, and reduces bias and potential adverse effects.

- **Action**: We are developing a tool kit for hiring managers to orient them on inclusive and accessible recruitment processes. We are also creating resources for our talent acquisition advisors and partners to help them identify biases in the selection process and to support hiring managers accordingly.

Retention and engagement

We have several actions to support employee retention and engagement, and to measure our progress.

- **Action**: We are improving our internal demographic data-gathering practices. Our goal is to track representation of diverse groups, including

employees with disabilities, throughout the employee life cycle — from recruitment and hiring to career development and leaving the organization. By the end of 2024, we will have improved demographic data-gathering practices to support this goal.

- **Action**: We conduct our employee workplace culture survey each September. The survey results:

  - Highlight areas for improvement as they relate to the 13 factors for psychological health and safety in the workplace

  - Inform specific initiatives aimed at addressing the areas of improvement

  - Allow us to measure progress on past initiatives

Supports for disabled employees

Our Disability Management Program values early intervention and staying at work whenever possible and appropriate. It provides employees with individualized accommodations so they can be successful in their roles and to support any leaves that may be required. The program also supports the employee during leaves and assists them in their return-to-work journey.

- **Action**: In the spirit of ongoing learning and improvement, reviews and enhancements of the Disability Management Program will continue to take place. Our goal is to ensure we're supporting our employees as well as we can and that the program is as effective and supportive as possible.

Our timeline

Our timeline and approach for the accessibility plan reflect our behaviours:

- Responsive and collaborative: We will review and adapt our plan based on input and feedback from those with lived experience, and in collaboration with our Accessibility Committee.

- Accountable: We will publish annual updates on our progress, the feedback we've received, and how this feedback is incorporated into our future planning.

- Respectful and fair: We will demonstrate equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in our accessibility work.

- Forward-thinking: We will adapt to new information and continuously learn and evolve through our accessibility journey.

Our three-year plan will progress on the following timeline.

September 2023 to August 2024

- We will work toward completion of the actions described in the previous section (**Our plan**).

- We will review feedback and recommendations received from our Accessibility Committee and through our feedback mechanisms.

- We will identify other pillars and determine related priorities and plans based on the feedback and recommendations.

September 2024 and September 2025

We will publish interim reports each September. These reports will include the following:

- Progress update on our commitments and actions

- Summary of the feedback we've received

- Information on how this feedback is informing our plans

Each interim report will include updated priorities and plans for the coming year.

September 2026

We will publish a final report on our first three-year plan. This report will provide a final update and outline our future plans and priorities.

Our Accessibility Committee

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* requires prescribed organizations to establish an accessibility committee. The purpose of the committee is to:

- Help identify accessibility barriers for individuals interacting with our organization

- Advise the organization on how to remove and prevent barriers

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* also states that a committee should, to the extent possible, follow the guidelines below:

- At least half of the members are persons with disabilities or individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, disabled people

- The members described in the first bullet reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities in British Columbia

- At least one of the members identifies as an Indigenous person

- The committee broadly reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia

About our Accessibility Committee

For the first year of our plan, our committee is composed of members of our Abilities Inclusion Evolution employee resource group and our senior manager of Indigenous Relations. Our committee is made up of ten individuals who are passionate about advancing EDI and accessibility at WorkSafeBC.

In the second year of our plan, we will extend membership to a broader group of stakeholders that more closely aligns with the recommendations of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*.

In consideration of our employees' privacy, and in light of the internal focus of our Accessibility Committee, the names of the Accessibility Committee members are not shared in this plan.

As the scope and membership of the committee expands, we may make the names and profiles of committee members available in subsequent plans and on our website at **Accessibility at WorkSafeBC**.

How to provide feedback

We welcome your thoughts on our accessibility plan and any barriers you have seen or experienced when interacting with us.

Visit **this online form** for options to provide feedback on this plan and on accessibility at WorkSafeBC.

You can include photos and videos with your feedback.

All feedback will be summarized and shared with our Accessibility Committee and our leadership to inform our future accessibility planning.

Other requests

- If you are a WorkSafeBC employee seeking accommodation in your work, please contact your manager or People & Culture partner.

- If you are a worker, employer, or member of the public, and wish to file a complaint about alleged unfairness in your dealings with WorkSafeBC, please contact the **Issue Resolution Office**.

Appendix: Definitions

- **Assistive technology:** Assistive technology is any piece of equipment, software program, or product system that can be used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities. (Definition adapted from the **Assistive Technology Industry Association**.)

- **Adaptive technology**: Adaptive technology is a subcategory of assistive technology. It refers to something that is specifically designed for disabled people.

- **Barriers**: The following are the types of barriers identified by the **Province of British Columbia's accessibility plan**:

  - **Attitudinal**: When people think and act based upon false assumptions, such as making decisions about people with disabilities without including them, or not believing that a person with a disability can contribute to the workforce.

  - **Physical**: When obstacles in an environment make access difficult, such as hosting inaccessible events or meeting spaces, or a washroom with an accessible stall but no automatic door opener.

  - **Information or communication:** When disabled people are excluded because they use other ways to communicate, such as using small print or not providing large-print versions of material, or videos, events, or meetings that do not have closed captions.

  - **Systemic**: When an organization's policies, practices, or procedures result in exclusion, such as not providing an American Sign Language

interpreter or requiring a driver's license for a job that could be reorganized to use another form of transportation.

- **Technology**: When technology can't be accessed by people with disabilities, such as websites, documents, or databases that are not accessible for screen readers, or graphs and charts that are posted without text to explain them.

- **Sensory**: When sensory information such as lights, sounds, and smells prevent participation in the environment, such as co-workers wearing perfume in the workplace or the use of fluorescent lighting in the workplace.

- **Diversity:** Describes the demographic mix of the workforce. Diversity can be both visible and invisible (e.g., race, disabilities, religion, age, culture, socioeconomic background, family or marital status, neurodiversity, sexuality, gender).

- **Employee resource group**: Voluntary employee-led groups that aim to foster an inclusive and diverse workforce. Employee resource groups are organized around the lived experiences of specific identity groups.

- **Equity**: Describes the process of identifying barriers faced by specific groups and the steps to address these barriers, whether they are attitudinal, systemic, or individual barriers. Equity is a process that begins by acknowledging that different groups have unequal starting places and by making a commitment to address the imbalance.

- **Inclusion**: Describes an environment where we all feel welcomed, respected, and where we can fully and meaningfully participate.

- **Intersectionality**: The concept that multiple social identities and related systems of oppression can intersect, which may lead to unique experiences for people who belong to more than one marginalized group. For example, a person of colour with a disability may face barriers because of their disability as well as experience challenges because of their race or ethnicity.

- **Lived experience:** A term used to describe first-hand accounts of living as a member of a group that is marginalized. In this plan, lived experience refers to the personal realities and challenges of an individual living with a disability.

Endnotes

i "**Nothing about us without us**," *Wikipedia*, accessed August 17, 2023.
ii Lydia Brown, "**Identify-First Language**," *Autistic Self Advocacy Network*, accessed August 17, 2023.
iii Erin E. Andrews, Anjali J. Forber-Pratt, Linda R. Mona, Emily M. Lund, Carrie R. Pilarski, Rochelle Balter, "**#SaytheWord: A disability culture commentary on the erasure of 'disability,'**" *Rehabilitation Psychology, 64(2)* (2019): 111-118, accessed August 17, 2023,.
iv "**Terminology**," *Canadian Association of the Deaf*, accessed August 17, 2023.