

# Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

## 2021 Progress Report

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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# MESSAGE

## from the Associate Provost, Human Resources

Like 2020, 2021 was heavily defined by the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, particularly due to the emergence of multiple COVID-19 variants that affected much of the world. With remote work and learning still leading the better part of 2021, the institution kept utilizing new tools and strategies to prepare for a fall term of employees and students returning to our campuses. So too did our work on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) throughout the year at the University. A key highlight of this year includes improved customer service communications for planned service disruptions due to a self-subscribe list that provides emailed updates on a variety of service interruption notifications, including location and service type. Additionally, in March 2021, the University successfully launched its Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) to represent the disability community within the institution and as a resource on issues related to accessibility. Our websites have begun their upgrades and migration to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines under the AODA to support more accessible communication. Our Visitors Centre

began to provide tours with adaptive technology to provide accessible tours of the campus for prospective students and their families. We have also begun to generate a tangible design framework for the University to adopt within our physical space design projects.

2021 was another disruptive year due to the pandemic and areas of previous progress have been delayed, such as the changes to Policy 57 on Employment accommodations. Remote work and concerns over health have slowed down the consultation process. It is our hope, with the prevalence of Coronavirus vaccinations, the return of many of our students and employees for in-person experiences and returning to our offices, that we can refocus and rethink how we connect for consultations, and how different parts of the Waterloo workforce and student populations can participate now that we finally see progress on these areas on the horizon.

Sincerely,

**MARILYN THOMPSON**

ASSOCIATE PROVOST, HUMAN RESOURCES  
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO



# ABOUT THIS REPORT



This summary report highlights examples of progress towards each of the seven themes that were identified in Waterloo’s Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2018-2022. The report describes relevant projects and initiatives that have occurred at Waterloo up to and including December 2021. The report also includes an assessment of the status of each objective, to give the community a snapshot of Waterloo’s progress. This is a non-exhaustive list of work that Waterloo has undertaken. Many departments and individuals have engaged in accessibility initiatives and activities to create an inclusive environment at Waterloo. Only objectives that were highlighted within the MYAP have been specifically noted and assessed using the “progress assessment” model.

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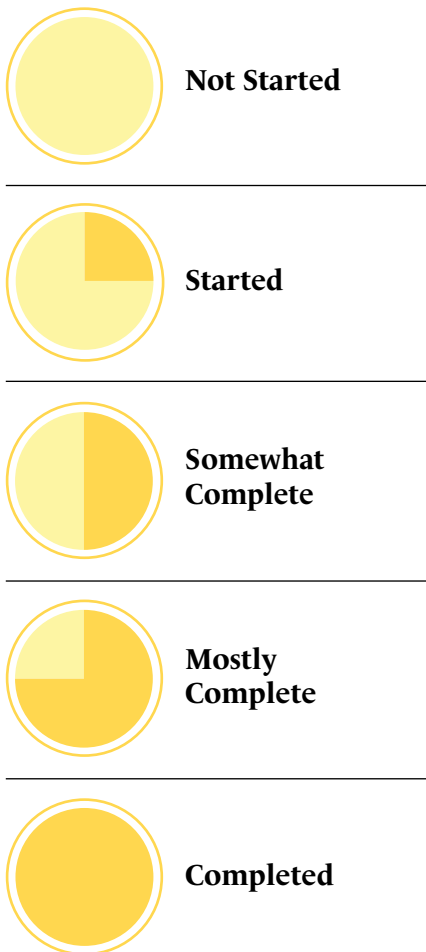
## Acknowledgement

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is centralized within our *Indigenous Initiatives Office*.

# SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Waterloo utilizes the requirements outlined within the AODA (Accessibility with Ontarians with Disabilities Act) and its standards to measure progress. Each theme from the MYAP and their respective initiatives is included in this report. A status indicator summarizes the qualitative or quantitative completion. The progress indicator further identifies whether the current stage of the initiative is meeting the pre-determined timelines for implementation.

## Status indicator:



## Status Overview



**Progress indicator:** Complete | on track | behind schedule | at risk



## Section A

# Policies and Procedures

MYAP 2018-2022:

1. Waterloo is committed to the development of a specific policy concerning accessibility for Waterloo employees.

### A1. Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations



**Status:** mostly complete

**Progress:** at risk

The Policy Drafting Committee on Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations have shared their first draft with key stakeholders over the Spring and Fall Term 2021. This anticipated Policy will define the University’s approach to accommodating employees within the protected grounds of the Ontario Human Rights Code, including persons with disabilities. The Faculty Association of University of Waterloo (FAUW), the University of Waterloo Staff Association (UWSA), and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 793, who represent the University’s employee groups, and the Provost and colleagues have provided feedback and comments. The Committee is planning to broaden its consultation efforts to ensure impacted individuals and departments have an opportunity to provide feedback. Consultation progress has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, as colleagues shift their attention to managing the ever-changing public health landscape, and we continue to explore the best way to gather feedback in a collegial and effective manner. All consultation and policy development activities continue to follow the standard processes outlined in University’s Policy 1 – Initiation and Review of University Policies.



# Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



## Section B

# Customer Service

MYAP: Waterloo will develop a strategy for the following customer service areas:

1. Improving communications for planned service disruptions (such as IT, roads, elevators, etc.)
2. Developing a community engagement strategy that involves active and ongoing consultation with persons experiencing disabilities.

\*Developing a consistent verification process for service animals was completed in 2019.

### B1. Communications for service disruptions



**Status:** complete

**Progress:** complete

In March 2021, Plant Operations successfully launched their self-subscription notifications for planned service interruptions. This system allows users to self-subscribe to a variety of emailed service interruption notifications, including location, and service type, such as planned power outages, elevator maintenance, water shutoffs, etc. Information released includes when the disruption will occur, the duration, and the reason for the disruption. There are currently 693 subscribers to this service. The Plant Operations group continues to explore avenues to include accessibility-specific information as it relates to the temporary disruption. Additional opportunities may arise as we progress through the work of cataloguing accessible elements (initiative D2).







## **B2. Community engagement strategy**



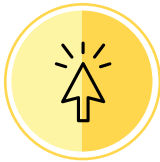
**Status:** complete  
**Progress:** complete

In March 2021, the University successfully launched its Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/accessibility/about/accessibility-advisory-panel>). Utilizing a virtual platform, individuals can sign up to become a panel member at any time and remain on the panel for as long as they are engaged. Information is sent to panel members through the platform regarding accessibility initiatives occurring at the University. Panel members are invited to participate as they see fit, either by responding directly through the platform, or emailing the secretary of the Accessibility Committee.

As of November 2021, there are 48 panel members, with the majority (56%) from our student community. 50% of members disclosed having a disability and the most interested topic areas were “Policies and Procedures” and “Education”. In the new year, a participant survey will be distributed to all panel members with the aim of better understanding their experience thus far, request feedback for areas of improvement to the University’s approach to communicating with the panel, and to increase engagement.

# Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



## Section C

### Information and Communication

The MYAP included the following objectives under the Information and Communication theme:

1. Identifying the most commonly required communication formats and develop a strategy to meet those needs.
2. Developing a sustainable strategy to ensure consistency across all publicly facing websites including open and online learning platforms.

#### C1. Alternate communication formats



Status: complete

Progress: complete


This year has continued the trend of requiring timely, accessible information to our campus community in the ever-changing pandemic landscape. Over the past year, the University established an internal process to source third party provider services to deliver alternate communication formats, as needed. As we began to increase our physical presence on campus, we started to review our in-person communication practices and identify areas of improvement.

The pandemic has highlighted our need to be flexible and agile in the way we interact with our community. It has also highlighted the many ways we need to communicate, and we recognize that there is no single, central way to disseminate information to engage with our community. As such, our focus has been on raising awareness and educating departments on the tools available for them to use to communicate accessibly. Sessions such as “Adaptive Technology for the Workplace”, and “Everyday Accessibility Tools for Everyone” bring attention to the built-in accessibility features in our software and the range of virtual platforms that can be leveraged.

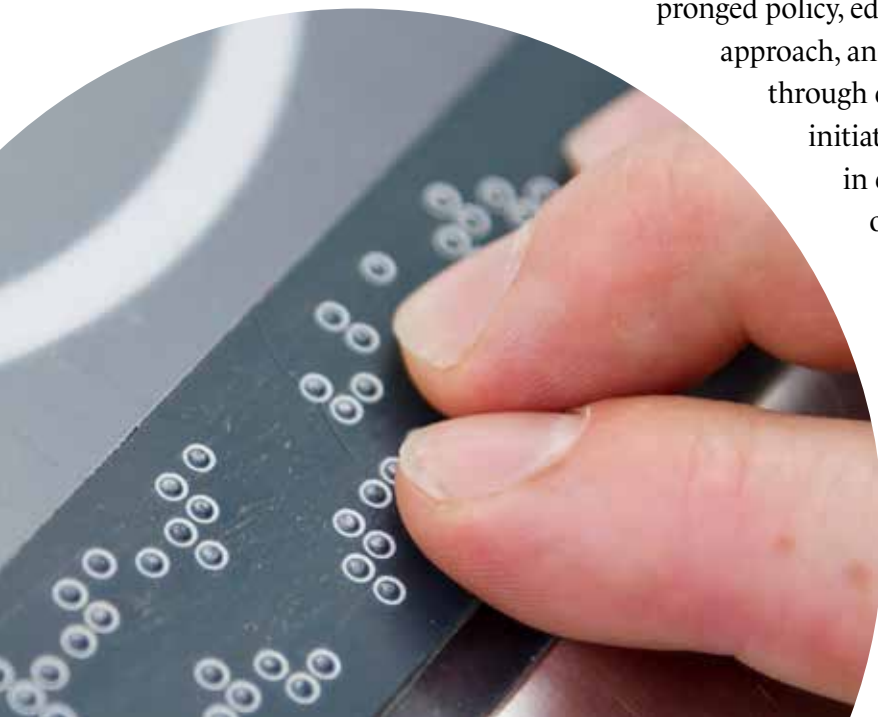




## **C2. Website accessibility**

 **Status:** somewhat complete  
**Progress:** behind schedule

As of January 1, 2021, all Waterloo-owned and -controlled public web content must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA standard, under the AODA. As Waterloo continues with its migration to a new web content management system, the vast number of websites housed under Waterloo's systems became increasingly evident. Additionally, we are learning that there are immeasurable pieces of web and social media content in our digital landscape. Since the pandemic, the internet has been leveraged heavily to deliver information to our community in a timely manner. Website accessibility is not just about technology, it is about communication. However, the volume and ephemeral duration of web and social media content make it difficult to continually track conformance with WCAG standard. It is important that Waterloo develops a sustainable Accessible Communication Strategy, focusing on the development of policy, strategies, training, and remediation support. To that end, Waterloo has undergone a shift in perspective, treating accessible web and social media content as communication management, beyond technological requirements. The goal is to approach the inventory, remediation, and ongoing accountability and reporting mechanisms strategically, by working with campus partners to build accessible design and maintenance into their unit-level workflows, moving the campus forward from a multi-pronged policy, education, and resource support-oriented approach, and emphasizing inclusive excellence through decentralized coordination. Specific initiatives and project planning will occur in early 2022 and will be captured within our next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.



# Summary of Progress

CONTINUED

# OUR STORY



The University of Waterloo's Visitors Centre facilitates a range of tours for prospective undergraduate students, including campus and faculty tours. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Visitors Centre provided tours to over 12,000 visitors each year, often giving prospective students and their families their first impression of the University and its campus. Campus visits make an enormous impact on a prospective student's decision on where to apply and to accept an offer of admission. With such a diverse student body with a range of backgrounds and experiences, the Visitors Centre endeavors to make each and every visitor feel welcome and included. Continuing to build accessibility for all guests into everyday activities is one of these goals.

Campus tours involve travelling through many indoor and outdoor spaces, with information about the campus delivered verbally. Tours typically have 10-15 visitors per tour, although may see as many as 45 visitors during peak times or events. Planning for re-opening of the Visitors Centre for tours in Fall 2021 was an opportunity to further the strategic goal of increasing inclusivity and accessibility in the campus visits program. When considering how to provide better service for all visitors, including tours that occurred in less-than-ideal situations, such as windy days or in crowded settings, the Visitors Centre also considered guests who had additional hearing challenges. The Visitors Centre partnered with the Canadian Hearing Services to source a portable amplification system for our tour guides to ensure delivery of the best possible experience for visitors of all hearing abilities, under various environmental circumstances. This initiative builds on the Visitors Centre's previous project of mapping the most accessible tour route for mobility, denoting accessibility features in campus buildings throughout the tour, and orienting all tour guides on nearest accessible washroom and elevator locations to support visitors' questions as they arise.

# Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



## Section D

# Design of Public Spaces

MYAP:

1. Develop a consistent design strategy to address those limitations or building elements where it may be feasible for Waterloo to exceed legislative requirements.
2. Catalogue existing physical space elements on Waterloo campus, identifying spaces with accessibility considerations.
3. Support the space and asset management strategy to embed accessible elements and integrate it with Waterloo's standard facilities management protocol.

### D1. Design Strategy



**Status:** started

**Progress:** on track



In March 2020, the Government of Ontario's initiative to partner with the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) program to offer complimentary accessibility ratings expanded to include the city of Waterloo. The University was successful in expanding our application for eight additional campus buildings: B.C. Matthews Hall (Faculty of Health), Claudette Millar Hall (Housing), Columbia Icefield (Athletics), Dana Porter Library, Mathematics and Computer building, Physical Activities Complex (Athletics), South Campus Hall, and Student Life Centre. Assessments were completed by September 2021, and six out of the eight buildings received RHF Accessibility Certified, scoring at least 60 per cent in the assessment findings. This complements the 71 per cent score previously received by the School of Pharmacy in 2020. Many departments are already taking the assessment findings and making changes, including accessibility modifications within their capital projects and budgets.



In December 2021, the University was also successful in receiving an EnAbling Change grant through the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility to develop an Inclusive Physical Space Design Strategy. With the support of a sizeable government grant, the University will look to develop a comprehensive, performance-based design strategy that stitches together accessibility, sustainability, and well-being frameworks. This will include a review of various performance-based accessibility standards and identify intersections with established sustainability and well-being standards. The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Program will be one of the standards within the environmental scan. This project will look to generate a tangible design framework for the University to adopt within our physical space design projects, either completed internally or through consultants. Under commitments of the EnAbling Change grant, this resource will be open-source content, made available for any other institution or organization to adopt. This final strategy resource will be available by December 31, 2022.

### **D2/D3. Cataloguing accessible elements, Facilities Management protocol**



**Status:** started  
**Progress:** behind schedule

As the University begins to resume on-campus activities, we are able to resume reviewing our preventative maintenance strategy for accessible elements, taking into consideration ongoing public health measures and requirements that have been brought on by the pandemic. As part of our Campus Wayfinding project, we have begun cataloguing all our power door operators for external entrances. Our Plant Operations department has had discussions on how to develop a sustainable preventative maintenance strategy, including the communication between the design group and maintenance group on building changes.

By identifying the key players within this project, we have created a solid multi-pronged approach to developing a sustainable preventative maintenance strategy. First, we will review our existing preventative maintenance workflows to ensure accessible elements within the area are captured. Areas that require additional verbiage to ensure maintenance on those elements will be reviewed, and training will be provided to the team to ensure they are

aware of what to look for. We will create a preventative maintenance workflow for accessible elements that do not currently have one and are identified as a priority in phase one. Finally, taking all elements and cataloguing them appropriately within our facilities management system to allow for assigning work, audit, cost allocation, etc. will be completed.

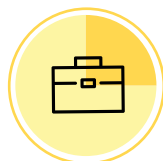
At the same time, we will leverage our existing annual classroom space planning review to include accessible elements within the classroom setting to catalogue assets and flag areas of concern.

Integration between the two systems will be discussed as we build out our strategy.



# Summary of Progress

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## Section E

# Employment



MYAP: Waterloo will:

1. Develop a centralized and standardized process for managing accommodation requests for persons with disabilities (active or prospective employees, students, and cross-over populations).
2. The priorities for this centralized body are to uphold the privacy and confidentiality of individuals in need of accommodation (to prevent real or perceived bias against an individual based on their disability) as well as to ensure that funding is provided for accommodation solutions regardless of an individual's faculty/department affiliation.

### E1. Centralize accommodation process



**Status:** somewhat complete

**Progress:** at risk

As noted in our last progress report, establishing our Accommodation Policy is a prerequisite for planning the management process for employment accommodations. This activity remains on hold while Policy 57 – Employee accommodations continues with its finalization activities. Currently, employment accommodations as they relate to disability continue to be managed by our Occupational Health department.

### E2. Employment accommodation funding



**Status:** not started

**Progress:** at risk

Employment accommodation funding is a key component of the central accommodation process and will be a part of the process development within initiative E1. At present, departments continue to manage the financial requirements for implementing disability accommodation solutions.







## Section F

# Education

MYAP:

1. Waterloo will strive to incorporate universal design principles within teaching spaces and related protocols.

### F1. Universal Design in Teaching spaces



**Status:** started

**Progress:** behind schedule

The Teaching and Learning Spaces Committee (TLSC) piloted a preliminary physical classroom standard in 2021. Various gaps and areas of improvements were identified, and since then, the TLSC has been conducting an environmental scan of physical teaching space standards at other universities. Along with consultation with key stakeholders within the University, the goal is to develop a more robust classroom standard that clearly articulates the University's values and requirements for design teams (both internal and consulting) to apply these principles in all classroom spaces. The goal is to finalize the standard in Spring term, with immediate application to Registrar-managed spaces. Ongoing consultation with faculties and support units will be completed to consider their unique circumstances, with the goal of implementing the standard across all other classrooms spaces, beyond the Registrar-managed spaces.



# Summary of Progress

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## Section G



## Training and Tools for Employees (including instructors)

MYAP:

1. Tools and resources will be developed for instructors to increase awareness of accessibility and universal design for learning (UDL) principles in the classroom.

\*Training for employees was completed in 2019. A resource guide for Procurement was developed in 2020, and tools to support the creation of accessible information and educational materials within an online learning environment was completed in 2020.

### G1. Instructor training on accessible course design and delivery



**Status:** completed

**Progress:** on track

In January 2021, the Government of Ontario invested \$50 million in a Virtual Learning Strategy to “drive growth and advancement in virtual learning across the province’s post-secondary institutions” (<https://vls.ecampusontario.ca>). Waterloo, in partnership with 10 other Ontario universities and colleges, was a successful recipient of funding to create a “Universal Design for Learning (UDL): An Online Post-Secondary Educator Micro-credential for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA)” (UDL for IDEA) course. This six-module, online course aims to provide educators with the key principles of Universal Design for Learning, and its application to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and indigenous pedagogy. This course has been designed to meet the legislative requirements under the AODA in providing training to educators on “accessible program or course delivery and instruction” (O. Reg. 191/11, s. 16(1)). It is anticipated this course will be published and available for use in March 2022. Once published, Waterloo will work with relative faculty and support units to adapt the course for Waterloo-specific needs and determine the best forum for implementation within our campus.

# NEXT STEPS

As our current MYAP nears its final year in 2022, we are excited to build on what we have learned over the past four years and to work to bring true disability inclusion to the University. 2022 is already proving to be an exciting year to come, where we will begin establishing our next MYAP 2023-2027, taking into consideration the anticipated requirements of the upcoming AODA Education Standard. We are excited to review and revise our governance structure, establish new connections with our disability community, and work to develop a post-pandemic institution with an inclusive design lens.



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