


# Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2025 Progress Report



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# Acknowledgement

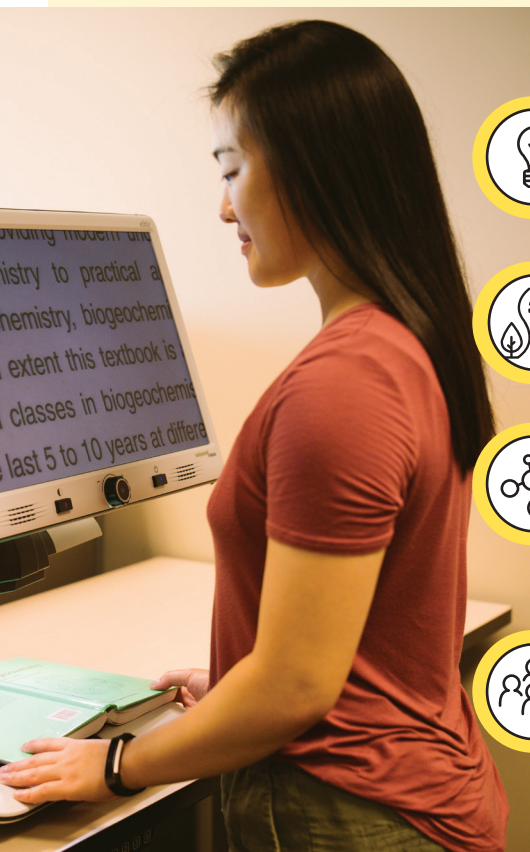
The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is co-ordinated within the Office of Indigenous Relations. The University's approach to institutional initiatives, including those shared within this report, take on an intersectional approach to advance our reconciliation efforts.



# Introduction

In June 2024, the University launched its renewed values, affirming our commitment to Think Differently, Act with Purpose, and Work Together. These values provide an important lens for the University’s accessibility efforts and inform the direction of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2023-2025. This plan was developed to align Waterloo’s accessibility priorities with the University’s strategic plan and the proposed Post Secondary Education Standard recommendations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

This report highlights progress made from fall 2024 to fall 2025, reflecting both the goals established in 2023 and the deliberate, values-driven approach guiding our accessibility work across the institution. Progress is organized under the **four interrelated themes** identified in the MYAP Bridge Plan 2023-2025, which together supports a shift from compliance-focused activity towards more integrated, sustainable accessibility practices:



**LEADERSHIP** highlights initiatives that require senior-level commitment and reinforce the importance of putting accessibility at the forefront of institutional decision-making.



**ACCESSIBILITY INFUSION** focuses on integrating accessibility into core processes and leveraging existing initiatives so that accessibility becomes part of how the University routinely operates.



**INTERSECTIONALITY** recognizes that identity is multi-faceted and dynamic; therefore, disability inclusion is strengthened through collaboration with campus partners who advance equity and inclusion.



**COMMUNITY** emphasizes meaningful consultation with people with lived experience, upholding the principle of “nothing about us without us” as central to advancing disability inclusion at Waterloo.



# Summary of Progress



## LEADERSHIP

Over the past year, the University has continued to strengthen leadership-level accountability and infrastructure for advancing disability inclusion. A key milestone was the completion of the Disability Inclusion Steering Committee's (DISCo) mandate. DISCo was convened to champion disability inclusion at the executive level and to support shared institutional responsibility for identifying, prioritizing, and advancing accessibility initiatives.

Co-chaired by University senior leaders and advisors to the Vice-President Academic and Provost, DISCo led

a three-year, in-depth review of AODA's Post Secondary Education Standards recommendations. This work focused on identifying systemic barriers that limit access to the world-class education offered at Waterloo, and on developing strategies to address those barriers in a sustainable and coordinated way. As highlighted in the 2024 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) Progress report, DISCo advanced a leadership framework that emphasized executive-level sponsorship, interdisciplinary collaboration, alignment across accessibility initiatives, and the strategic use of existing institutional structures to support long-term cultural change related to disability inclusion.

# Summary of progress



DISCo's final report, submitted to the Provost, included five recommendations aimed at maintaining an ongoing infrastructure for disability inclusion and embedding accessibility more fully into institutional governance and decision-making. In response, the Provost adopted all five recommendations and committed to the following actions:

1. Establish an ongoing Accessibility Steering Committee with standing membership that includes the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility; the Associate Vice President, Academic; and a rotating member of Dean's Council, with additional members as needed to support collaboration
2. Ensure accessibility is a required consideration in planning and budgeting processes, through incorporation into templates and guidance materials developed by the Integrated Planning and Budgeting Office
3. Include AODA compliance as an annual agenda item at Executive Council
4. Provide regular accessibility updates to the Board of Governor's Community and Culture Committee
5. Commitment to ongoing support of a minimum of two additional years for the Accessible Education Project to support the integration of accessible education practices into the everyday work of instructors and academic support units.

Work is already underway to implement these commitments. The newly established Accessibility Steering Committee has met regularly, with an initial focus on determining effective approaches for integrating accessibility considerations into the University's budget and planning cycle.

In parallel, the Office of the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility continues to build its administrative capacity and offer its subject-matter expertise to support Executive Council members in meeting their responsibilities under AODA, and in sustaining a coordinated approach to legislative compliance and accessibility across institutional initiatives. One example of this work includes auditing the completion rates of mandatory employee AODA Accessibility training. By sharing completion data with Executive Council members and reinforcing employment-related training expectations, the University increased its completion by 12% in 2025.





## ACCESSIBILITY INFUSION

### Accessible Education Project

Over the past two years, teams of faculty and staff across the University have worked collaboratively to advance a comprehensive, cross-faculty, institution-wide approach to accessible education. Through the Accessible Education project, housed within Waterloo's Teaching Innovation Incubator (TII - now a part of the Integrated Teaching Support Unit), the University has developed the supports, resources, and governance structures needed to ensure accessibility is embedded in teaching and learning from the outset rather than treated as an “add-on” to existing practices. This work directly responds to the proposed Post-Secondary Education Standards recommendations under Ontario legislation (the AODA).

Locating the project within the TII was a deliberate choice. As a launch pad for innovative approaches to teaching and learning, the TII provided pedagogical expertise, project leadership, and evaluation capacity while fostering collaboration among faculty and staff.

Major accomplishments of the Accessible Education project include:

- › Drafting of a new Student Academic Disability Accommodation Policy (in collaboration with the Policy Development Committee)
- › creation of an Accessible Teaching website
- › research and knowledge mobilization supporting the Waterloo Postsecondary Course Accessibility Guide

- › designing processes to support academic programs in identifying essential requirements.
- › delivering institution-wide events, training, and programming to deepen instructor understanding of accessible education
- › establish an accessibility governance structure that integrates academic and non-academic perspectives through advisory and steering committees.

Together, these efforts provide a transferable and scalable model grounded in collaboration among faculty, staff, and senior leadership.

As the Accessible Education project concluded in early 2026, and in alignment with the Provost's commitment to a minimum of two additional years of ongoing support, project efforts are now focused on integrating project outcomes and recommendations into the University's standard operating processes. This work safeguards the advances made, and reinforces the principle that *good education is accessible education*.

### CAPACITY Initiative

Building a culture of accessibility requires supporting learners to integrate accessibility considerations into their academic work. In spring of 2025, the Faculty of Engineering launched the Capstone Initiative: Accessibility at UWaterloo (CAPACITY) to promote capstone projects that address campus accessibility challenges.

CAPACITY supports student teams working to address and reduce barriers to participation for students, staff and visitors



with disabilities by providing project funding, faculty advisors, access to on-campus stakeholders (including individuals with lived experience), and opportunities for awards and seed funding to support further development and implementation.

Across the spring and fall term 2025, four capstone projects were adopted through CAPACITY including novel wheeled mobility designs and speech enhancement devices across Electrical & Computing, Mechanical & Mechanics, and Biomedical Engineering programs. In addition to supporting students in meeting capstone course requirements, the initiative emphasizes meaningful consultation with the disability community, as well as user-focused design, helping students develop practical, inclusive solutions informed by lived experience.

## **Disability Inclusive Student Success Strategy**

The Student Success Office (SSO) and the International Experience Centre (IEC) launched the Disability Inclusive Student Success Strategy (DISSS) to strengthen disability confidence and competence among staff who support students. Recognizing disability inclusion as a shared responsibility, DISSS aims to move beyond compliance-based approaches by embedding disability inclusion into everyday program and service delivery across multiple units.

The strategy employs a reflective and iterative approach that includes:

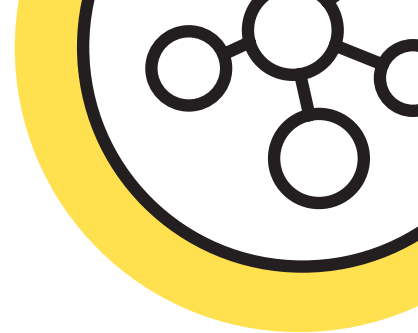
- > Training workshops
- > integration of disability inclusion resources into physical and virtual Lending Libraries
- > intentional reviews of processes and practices
- > the promotion of campus events.

## **Digital Governance and Accessibility**

As part of the institution's three-year plan to advance financial sustainability, a functional review of campus-wide administrative functional areas was completed. The review found duplication of content across departments and a lack of unified approach in publicly posted digital information.

Accessibility is central to this strategy. The University recognizes that while maintaining accurate and up-to-date digital content improves the user experience, the archiving of outdated materials also plays a critical role in reducing accessibility barriers and user frustration. By integrating accessibility considerations into digital planning from the beginning, the University is avoiding a compliance-only approach and ensuring accessibility is treated as a foundational design principle.

The parallel need for consistent digital presence across the institution and a robust digital accessibility framework has fostered strong inter-departmental collaboration, amplifying benefits across both areas. This work exemplifies the One Waterloo approach, demonstrating how accessibility infusion can enhance institutional effectiveness while advancing disability inclusion.



## INTERSECTIONALITY

### Community Engagement Guide

The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism office (EDI-R), Office of Indigenous Relations and Campus Support and Accessibility share a commitment to ensure that the University engages with representative communities in ways that are meaningful, dignified, and constructive. While each office has a distinct mandate, we recognize that individuals' identities are intersectional, multi-faceted, and diverse. Campus colleagues also identified a need for greater clarity and expressed desire for a centralized, consolidated approach to inclusive community engagement.

In response, throughout 2025, these offices worked collaboratively to deliver a single Community Engagement Guide, a centralized resource to support campus colleagues in planning and conducting meaningful engagement. Adoption of this guide supports dignified, respectful, and accessible opportunities for members of the campus community to share their experiences and perspectives. This guide has already informed several institutional initiatives, including community consultation activities associated with Shift:Mobility, the University's inaugural sustainable transportation plan.

Community engagement is an ongoing process and relationship between the institution and the communities it serves. This Guide will be updated as

feedback, insights, new developments, and resources come to light. For example, the Establishing Payment Practices with Indigenous Community Members project, co-sponsored by Finance, Human Resources, the Office of Research and the Office of Indigenous Relations addresses systemic and administrative barriers related to compensating Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Workers. Outcomes of this project will further support more equitable and respectful community engagement.

### University of Waterloo Writing Style Guide

The University of Waterloo's Writing Style Guide serves as the primary reference for writing standards across the institution and complements the University's brand guidelines. Through its recent revisions, the University integrated previously separate Writing and Style resources into a single, consolidated website.

Several sections of the guide, including *Spelling and language conventions*, *Formatting*, and *Inclusive language and written style* explicitly reinforce the importance of disability-inclusive language and accessible information design. Collectively, these updates reflect a commitment to recognize the University's diverse audiences and ensure that institutional communications accurately and respectfully reflect their identities, experiences, and access needs.



## COMMUNITY

### Disability Affinity Program

Campus colleagues have long expressed a strong interest in learning from the disability community about accessibility barriers at Waterloo; however, identifying individuals with lived experience posed risks for unnecessary disclosure or potential stigmatization. At the same time, disabled students, staff and faculty lacked a formal, collective space through which to share perspectives on broader campus accessibility, including and extending beyond individual accommodation processes and needs.

The Disability Affinity Program, launched in January 2025, was designed to address these gaps by creating a dedicated, community-centred space for Waterloo students, staff, and faculty to connect, seek peer support, and collaborate. The program comprises three interconnected networks: the Student Disability Community Network, the Employee Disability Community Network, and the Accessibility Ally Network.

Through monthly meetings, the Student Disability Community Network (55 student members in 2025) and the Employee Disability Community Network

(97 employee members in 2025) supports peer connection, knowledge exchange, and community building among students and employees with lived experience of disability.

The Accessibility Ally Network (185 employee members in 2025) supports employees across the institution in meeting their AODA requirements and advancing shared responsibility for accessibility throughout educational and informational sessions aligned with the Waterloo at 100 vision.

As part of the University's broader community engagement strategy, the Disability Affinity Program promoted 14 consultation opportunities and facilitated three instances of community-initiated feedback. These included consultation on the sustainable transportation plan and the Library Physical Space Strategy. This model of engagement proved beneficial for both campus colleagues seeking informed input from the individuals with lived experience, and the disability community, who were able to share insight and feedback in a dignified, meaningful manner without fear of stigma or the consequences of forced disclosure.





# Looking Ahead

Alongside accessibility grassroots initiatives that have advanced accessibility in various departments, the past two years saw the emergence of a senior leadership steering approach with the creation of DISCo and its five strategic recommendations that will support the development of key supports within all units. Coupled together, this dual approach has been effective in fostering a culture of accessibility and in the broad adoption of shared accountability and cross-institutional collaboration. With the establishment of the Campus Support and Accessibility unit, the central support unit focused on campus support and accessibility, the University affirmed its commitment to advancing accessibility beyond compliance by embedding inclusive practices into standard operating processes. In partnership with a strong Disability Affinity Program, the University looks ahead to developing its next MYAP; one that is grounded in leadership accountability, centred on user experience, and built through institution-wide collaboration.



# Conclusion

The University of Waterloo's 2023-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan reflects a continued shift from compliance-driven accessibility toward a more integrated, values-based approach grounded in dignity, equity, and shared responsibility. Across the initiatives outlined in this report, the University has strengthened governance structures, invested in centralized and sustainable supports, and expanded opportunities for meaningful engagement with disability communities. Key developments, such as the adoption of executive oversight that ensures ongoing sponsorship and visibility of projects, the consolidation of inclusive engagement and resources, and the launch of the Disability Affinity Program demonstrate a growing institutional commitment to embedding accessibility into everyday decision-making, policies, and practices. Together, these efforts

underscore the importance of intersectionality, recognizing that accessibility is inextricably linked with equity, inclusion, Indigenization, and anti-racism.

Equally important, the University has advanced models of engagement that respect autonomy, reduce stigma, and amplify community voices. By creating structured, dignified spaces for collaboration and feedback, Waterloo has improved its ability to learn from lived experience while fostering shared accountability across the institution.

Looking ahead, Waterloo will continue to work with campus leaders, community networks, and accessibility champions to ensure our operations continue to be leadership driven, user-centred, and collaboratively developed. This approach will set the foundation for the development of our next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.