BC Housing Accessibility Plan

September 2023

BC HOUSING

Territorial Acknowledgement

BC Housing gratefully acknowledges that we live and work on the unceded traditional and ancestral homelands of hundreds of Indigenous Peoples and Nations across British Columbia, each with their own unique traditions, history, and culture. We are committed to strong Indigenous partnerships and relationships based on principles of Reconciliation.

BC Housing also recognizes that intersecting impacts of colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism result in disproportionately higher rates of homelessness/houselessness and disability for Indigenous People. Urban Indigenous Peoples are 8 times more likely to experience homelessness/houselessness. Additionally, rates of disability among First Nations people living off reserve and Métis People are higher than for non-Indigenous people.

Accessibility Statement

This guide is accessible to PDF/UA standards. If you require an alternative format, you can contact BC Housing to request one by emailing accessibility@bchousing.org.

About the Accessibility Plan

BC Housing's Accessibility Plan represents our first attempt to gather the work to date and existing commitments into one document. This plan will support the development of a more comprehensive strategic framework for accessibility, which will be shared in September 2024.

A Note about Language

As with many aspects of our society, language used to describe disability and disability communities is evolving. Within this Accessibility Plan, we recognize that language preferences can vary from community to community and by individual. As a small gesture recognizing this diversity, we are alternating between using "person-first" and "identity-first" language. You will see both "people with disabilities" and "disabled people" in this plan. Alternating between these two options is considered a good practice, but of course when speaking to an individual, it's always best to ask them for their own preference.

Our Thanks

BC Housing would like to send our gratitude to the BC Housing residents, sector partner agencies and employees who have contributed to our accessibility work to date.

We would also like to say a thank you to the team at Untapped Accessibility for their support in developing this Accessibility Plan.

How to Give Us Feedback

To report errors or offer feedback on this plan, you can visit our feedback form or you can email us.

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Introduction

About BC Housing

Founded in 1967, BC Housing's role is to assist British Columbians in greatest need of affordable housing by providing options across the housing system. BC Housing works in partnership with the private, non-profit, and co-operative housing sectors, provincial health authorities and ministries, First Nations, other levels of government, Indigenous peoples, and community groups to deliver affordable housing programs. In 2023/24, BC Housing will directly assist approximately 123,000 households across the province through a range of programs, initiatives, and partnerships.

As a Crown corporation, BC Housing's strategic direction is guided by the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Housing. Its key responsibilities include implementing programs under the Homes for People Plan, delivering affordable housing through Housing Hub partnerships, providing portable rental assistance to households, supporting relevant ministries and partners to implement complex care housing, and delivering critical programs and services to address homelessness across the province. BC Housing also continues to improve the quality of residential construction and strengthen consumer protection for buyers of new homes through its responsibilities under the *Homeowner Protection Act*.

BC Housing is committed to addressing systemic discrimination and improving housing outcomes for everyone, particularly equity and rights-seeking communities. This is being advanced through the incorporation of reconciliation, equity, and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) principles into all the work we do, including our operations and programs. At the same time, BC Housing is transforming its structures, processes, and systems to be more accountable and responsive in meeting the increasingly complex needs of tenants, partners, and communities.

Message from Our CEO

The Accessibility Plan, and the subsequent strategic framework for accessibility, will help BC Housing reduce barriers, both by setting out our goals and by ensuring we are accountable for these commitments.

Vincent Tong
CEO, BC Housing

At BC Housing, we are driven by our vision: that everyone has a place to call home. For too many disabled people, the barriers to having an affordable place to make into a safe home are excessively steep.

People with disabilities experience countless environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers that hinder their full and equal participation in society. The impact of these barriers becomes particularly clear in housing. Disabled people are more likely to be houseless or live in substandard housing, and then, as a result, experience more severe health impacts that compound the negative impacts.

Because we at BC Housing know the impact of ableism and other forms of discrimination, our commitment to addressing oppression is foundational to everything we do. We know that accessibility will not only improve the lives of the more than 926,000 British Columbians with disabilities, but all of us.

The Accessibility Plan, and the subsequent strategic framework for accessibility, will help BC Housing reduce barriers, both by setting out our goals and by ensuring we are accountable for these commitments. This work will also help us implement recommendations from BC Housing's recent Equity Assessment, which evaluated BC Housing's performance in the areas of diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging, and reports on the organization's readiness to operationalize equity goals.

The strength of BC Housing's accessibility work lies in the intentional and sustained centring of the experiences and voices of disabled people. British Columbians with lived experience, BC Housing's People with Disabilities/Disabled People Employee Resource Group, and a cross-functional committee of BC Housing employees have been and will continue to be the guiding force of the strategic development of the plan.

I extend my sincerest thanks to BC Housing's employees, sector partners, and the External Advisory Committee members who participated in developing our first Accessibility Plan. This work is part of our journey towards building more accessible, equitable, and inclusive communities. I am proud of the work BC Housing has done, and I look forward to continuing to work together in building an accessible future in the years to come.

Who is Impacted by Accessibility Barriers?

At some point in life, everyone is impacted by accessibility barriers. The *Accessible BC Act* defines a barrier as:

"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, communication, or technologies and
- Affected by intersecting forms of discrimination."

As the Crown agency responsible for safe, affordable, and quality housing, we touch many lives across the province. It is our responsibility as a public agency to ensure all those who access our programs and services can do so without barriers that compromise their access or benefit of said programs or services. This is true of those:

- seeking housing or being housed in BC Housing buildings;
- seeking information, education, or supports, whether through digital or in-person;
- applying for building licenses;
- seeking funding for housing development or operations; and
- seeking to compete in BC Housing public tender processes.

BC Housing also employs approximately 1,100 employees in five regions across the province. As a public employer, it is imperative that we promote an environment of equity and inclusion for employees from equity and rights-seeking groups. Given that disabled persons make up about 25% of the BC population, and that many of our employees are represented in this number, we must create the internal conditions that ensure that barriers to their full participation and self-actualization are identified and removed.

Key definitions

For clarity, we are sharing a few definitions that will help readers of this Accessibility Plan.

Accessibility	Accessibility is the work we do to ensure that people with disabilities can participate in society on an equal basis with others. Accessibility seeks to improve access by changing the way we design buildings, policies, programs, as well as the assumptions and attitudes we hold, to improve opportunities for equal participation.
Adaptability	Adaptability creates options adapted to the resident occupying the home based on their specific physical needs.

Definitions from the *Accessible BC Act*

The *Accessible BC Act* enshrines into law definitions for the following terms:

Disability	An inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.
Impairment	A term that includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.
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, and can be affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

Frameworks Guiding Our Work

Canadian Context and Legislation

The *Accessible Canada Act* received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019. The purpose of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to make Canada barrier-free by January 1, 2040.

The *Accessible Canada Act* applies to the federal government, parliament, and federally regulated industries like telecommunications, banking, and the national transportation network. The *Act* requires that regulated organizations seek ways to proactively identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility.

On the international stage, Canada joined the *United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in 2010. The Convention protects and promotes the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

In December 2018, Canada also joined the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which allows individuals and organizations to make a complaint to the UN if they believe their rights under the Convention have been violated.

British Columbia Context

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* received royal assent on June 17, 2021. It provides a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility.

Under the law, Prescribed Organizations, including BC Housing, must develop an accessibility plan, accessibility committee, and a feedback mechanism where members of the public can provide feedback about accessibility barriers they experience or witness.

BC Housing's *Mandate Letter* provides specific government direction from the Minister of Housing to the BC Housing Board of Commissioners. The 2023-2024 Mandate Letter affirmed the organization's commitment to addressing systemic discrimination and addressing barriers for marginalized peoples. In particular, the Mandate Letter states:

> "Our province's history, identity and strength are rooted in its diverse population. Yet racialized and marginalized people face historic and present-day barriers that limit their full participation in their communities, workplaces, government, and their lives. The public sector has a moral and ethical responsibility to tackle systemic discrimination in all its forms – and every public sector organization has a role in this work."

BC Housing Internal Policies

There are several foundational policies that will be considered as we develop our strategic framework for accessibility:

Standards of Conduct

This policy is a fundamental framework that sets out the expectations for employees' behaviour and actions within BC Housing. These standards help avoid and prevent activities that could damage BC Housing's reputation, create an unfair or harmful workplace, or impair the ability of employees to do their jobs.

Respect in the Workplace

This policy establishes BC Housing's commitment to a positive, healthy, and respectful workplace that is free from harassment and bullying.

Diversity and Inclusion

This policy is designed to articulate BC Housing's commitment to diversity and inclusion, clarify roles and responsibilities of staff, managers, and Human Resources, and to ensure that BC Housing abides by the legislative requirements for government agencies, thereby ensuring that clients and staff are entitled to the rights and benefits specified by the law.

Principles in the *Accessible BC Act*

The *Act* includes a list of principles BC Housing must consider as we approach compliance. These same principles were used to develop the legislation itself:

Inclusion

Our work should aim to provide greater inclusion for people with disabilities with the goal that everyone should be able to participate equally and fully in their community.

Adaptability

Our work should consider that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

Diversity

All people, including disabled people, should be recognized as unique individuals with varied backgrounds. Their unique perspective is informed by factors such as disability status, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience of housing insecurity or poverty. Our work must be grounded in the principle of intersectionality, which recognizes that our identities and experiences of oppression or discrimination are complex.

Collaboration

Developing more accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Our accessibility work should create opportunities for our stakeholders to work together to promote access and inclusion.

Self-determination

Our work should seek ways 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." Our accessibility work should aim to meet the needs of all people we serve.

Our Mission, Vision, and Values

BC Housing's mission, vision and values are presented in the following section as further grounding to support the creation of a more equitable and inclusive organization for both employees, partners, and clients.

Mission

Making a positive difference in people's lives and communities through safe, affordable, and quality housing.

Vision

BC Housing serves as a trusted leader and partner in sustainable solutions for British Columbians.

Values

Forward-thinking
Client-focused
Empowerment
Responsibility

Our Approach to Accessibility at BC Housing

With a lot of work already underway across BC Housing, the *Accessible BC Act* presents us with the opportunity to elevate how we address accessibility with a lens that informs strategy and initiative development across the organization.

This initial Accessibility Plan represents our first attempt to gather the work to date and existing commitments into one document. This document will help external stakeholders and departments across the commission to understand our current state and provide a starting point for our work to develop a comprehensive strategic framework for accessibility. It will also centralize implementation and monitoring to ensure that there is accountability in following through on highlighted priorities and actions.

To get to a comprehensive strategic framework for accessibility, this plan will be workshopped with BC Housing stakeholders including tenants, employees, and non-profit housing partners. BC Housing will be developing more opportunities to hear from people with lived experience of accessibility barriers when accessing our programs and services.

In the coming years, each branch of BC Housing will receive support to incorporate the feedback we receive about accessibility priorities and to develop realistic timelines for addressing accessibility barriers.

In Spring 2024, we will publish our more comprehensive BC Housing strategic framework for accessibility which will include more specific, time bound actions for each of the identified Accessibility Realms.

Leadership of Accessibility Work at BC Housing

BC Housing's Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (OEDIB) was created in 2020 to guide and support BC Housing employees, partners, and clients in embedding equity and inclusion in the delivery of our mandate and in housing-related actions and experiences.

This office acts as a collaborative space to support change and advance work that takes a deep equity analysis to business operations, programs, policies, strategies, and measures. The intention of this office is to guide and act towards the goals of Reconciliation, equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

The OEDIB aims to embed equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) into systems, policies, procedures, culture, and service delivery, including using intersectional equity analyses and anti-racist / anti-oppressive practice frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of challenges faced by staff, clients, and partners.

The Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging is responsible for managing the development, implementation, and monitoring of this plan as well as the subsequent comprehensive BC Housing strategic framework for accessibility. The office works collaboratively with functions across the commission through an established cross-functional Accessibility Working Group. The team also aims to centre lived experience through liaising and coordinating with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and BC Housing's newly established Accessibility Advisory Committee.

The OEDIB is also a key member of the Business Transformation Working Group, which is a multi-year initiative to enhance the tools, processes, and systems at BC Housing. As part of this project, BC Housing is working to apply equity, reconciliation, accessibility, sustainability, and resilience lenses to all aspects of the Business Transformation Program. The OEDIB will have members of their team act as advisors on all relevant Business Transformation projects to ensure opportunities around equity, reconciliation and accessibility enhancements are realized.

About the Cross-Functional Accessibility Working Group

The cross-functional Accessibility Working Group is a team of BC Housing employees with a working knowledge that spans across all BC Housing business areas, policies, programs, and services.

The Working Group began meeting in January 2023 with the intention of becoming the enablers of change across the commission. The Working Group has more than 20 members from across BC Housing including Asset Management, Redevelopment, Operations, Employee Engagement, Research, Information Technology, and Communications. To date, their work has included providing updates on work underway. In the next phase of development of the strategic framework for accessibility, the Working Group will collaborate on developing an enterprise-wide approach to accessibility.

About the People with Disabilities/Disabled People Employee Resource Group

Established in May 2021, BC Housing's People with Disabilities/Disabled People Employee Resource Group provides a safe space for employees who self-identify as being a person with a disability to connect, raise awareness, discuss workplace matters related to disability and inclusion, and propose solutions to concerns or barriers faced or witnessed in the workplace or in BC Housing's service delivery.

Our Accessibility Lens

In alignment with the *Accessible BC Act*, BC Housing's accessibility work must embrace an intentional and sustained centring of the experiences and voices of people with disabilities. BC Housing recognizes that people with lived experience of disabilities are uniquely positioned to provide feedback and solutions to the question of improving accessibility.

We also recognize that disability is interwoven into the very construction of categories of race, class, gender, and so forth. In 2021, people with disabilities were twice as likely to live in poverty than non-disabled Canadians. BC Housing acknowledges that accessibility is a part of equity work and requires a strong understanding of how various forms of oppression compound and impact the lives of individuals.

Accessibility Realms

As we look for themes in the barriers to accessibility in our work, we have identified five key realms we will use as our organizing framework:

Built Environment

As a housing-focused organization, we know we need to address physical barriers to accessibility in BC Housing-funded buildings, our offices, and the spaces we use to gather with our partners and communities. We need to consider the housing we directly manage, the housing we fund, and the programs we deliver. In doing so, we will be able to improve the accessibility of social housing across the province.

Employment

BC Housing is recognized as a top employer in BC. We employ approximately 1,100 people throughout the province. By addressing the accessibility of our employment policies and the employee experience, we will ensure we are an employer of choice for talent, including people with disabilities.

Information and Communication Technologies

Information and Communication Technologies present many obstacles and solutions to accessibility for our stakeholders. BC Housing has a large digital footprint, including our websites and online application processes. Along with our social media presence and more traditional communication channels, we have many opportunities to create equal access to information for people with disabilities.

Procurement of Goods and Services

Given BC Housing's role in funding and developing affordable housing, we have significant buying power and the opportunity to raise awareness of accessibility requirements with a vast network of suppliers. BC Housing is committed to sustainable procurement that considers both environmental and social value, like accessibility.

Program and Service Delivery

Our organization supports the affordable housing ecosystem through a series of programs and services. From Licensing and Consumer Services to our housing registry and subsidized housing programs, accessibility needs to be considered in a range of areas.

About Our Accessibility Advisory Committee

Why – Purpose of the Accessibility Advisory Committee

The purpose of the Accessibility Advisory Committee is to support the development of the BC Housing Accessibility Plan in accordance with the *Accessible BC Act*.

The Committee plays a consultation role and provides feedback on accessibility considerations and goals for the benefit of tenants, applicants, staff, visitors, and partners.

The Committee helps BC Housing to identify and strategize how to remove and prevent accessibility barriers. Committee members also advise on how to prevent new barriers in areas that align with the *Accessible BC Act* and within BC Housing's accessibility realms listed above.

How – Recruitment of Committee Members

In early 2023, BC Housing invited members of the public to apply to become a member of the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The public call was open to all interested applicants, though we were especially encouraging applicants with lived experience or professional knowledge of disability, social housing, or poverty. Keeping in mind both the requirements of the *Accessible BC Act* and BC Housing's equity goals, we also strongly encouraged applications from people with intersecting identities, such as those from racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members.

Nearly 100 individuals applied through an online form. Applicants across the province shared their passion for safe, accessible housing for their family members, their neighbours, and themselves.

Selection Process

Before beginning the application review, applicant names and contact information like email addresses were removed. Our goals for committee composition included the requirements in the *Accessible BC Act* and beyond. Our resulting committee includes more than 50 per cent of committee members having lived experience of disability, and half of members having lived experience of poverty or social housing.

We sought to have representation from disability-serving organizations and non-profit housing providers. We also looked to include members with diverse experiences of gender and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Racialized communities and Indigenous peoples were included in our committee composition goals as well. To ensure that our committee reflects the diversity of the BC population, we evaluated applications to ensure representation from a variety of geographical areas.

Ultimately, 16 applicants were offered membership in the committee. We are grateful to the diverse group of individuals at the table who are willing to share their lived experience, professional knowledge, and passion for accessibility.

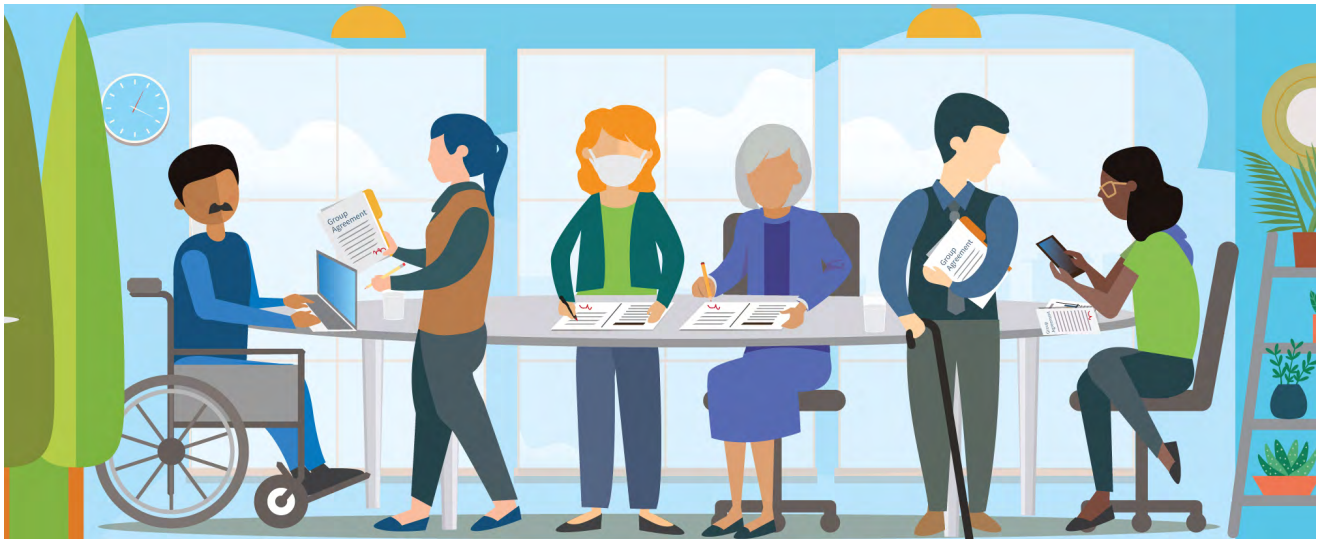
Committee members will gather online four times per year and will play an ongoing role in helping BC Housing identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility.

Who – Our Accessibility Advisory Committee

BC Housing is grateful to the following individuals who accepted a seat at our inaugural Accessibility Advisory Committee. Learn more about our committee and their work on our website.

Committee Members

- Alexandra Colombo
- Ben Postmus
- Debora Delyzer
- Donna Dykeman
- Francesca Tan
- Karla Verschoor
- Katt Cadieux
- Julianne (Jewels) Cressman
- Jonquil Hallgate
- Madison Hansen
- Melanie Cox
- Rebecca Bradley
- Shari-Lyn Rougeau
- Tabatha Berggren
- Thais Rocha
- Uli Egger



Our Engagement Process

In mid-2023, BC Housing initiated efforts to engage our stakeholders in the exercise of identifying accessibility barriers and possible solutions. In the further phases of our accessibility work, we will broaden our community engagement to include more voices from people with lived experience of disability.

Feedback received at these sessions has been inventoried in a barriers and solutions report, which we will continue to build on as we develop a strategic framework for accessibility in our work.

Committee Involvement

The BC Housing Accessibility Advisory Committee met for the first time in June 2023. One month later, the committee met again to discuss barriers to accessibility at BC Housing. Committee members shared their own experiences with accessibility barriers related to housing, as well as barriers they have noticed when supporting family members or clients seeking housing.

With such a large and engaged group, it is understandable that most people would have liked more time to expand the conversation and respond to each other's perspectives. We expect that as the committee continues to meet, we will revisit this initial conversation about the barriers experienced or witnessed by committee members and to review the feedback from other stakeholders.

Accessibility Committee members reviewed the draft BC Housing Accessibility Plan and gave feedback on the content.

Community Engagement

In June 2023, BC Housing hosted two engagement sessions. The first session was open to the approximately 80 community members who had applied to become part of our accessibility committee. A dozen community members joined our online meeting to share their experiences of accessibility barriers related to BC Housing, and housing in general.

The second session was open to partner organizations, namely non-profit housing providers. Over 700 organizations were invited to the session through our Sector Bulletin newsletter. Nearly 100 participants registered for the event. Over 30 sector partners joined us to share barriers and possible solutions from their professional and lived experience perspectives.

BC Housing Equity Assessment

In early 2021, BC Housing commenced work on conducting an Equity Assessment to evaluate how employees, clients and partners experience the programs, policies, processes, and measures at BC Housing.

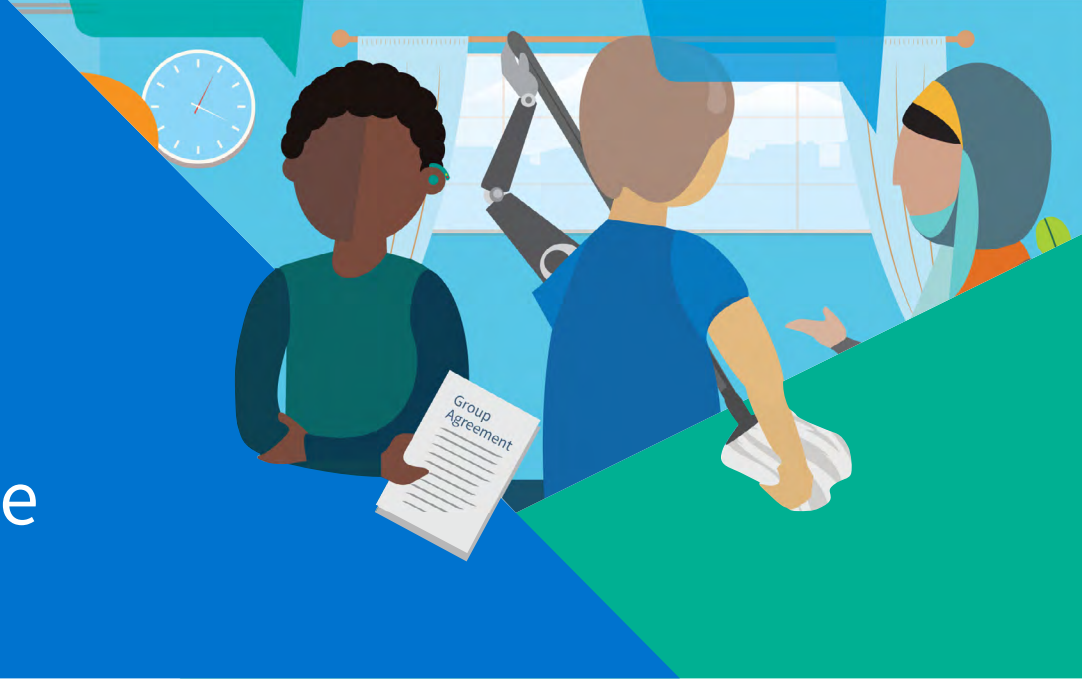
The BC Housing Equity Assessment was conducted in parallel to the work outlined in BC Housing's commitment to the *Accessible BC Act*. The Equity Assessment includes a broad evaluation of BC Housing's performance along various dimensions.

As part of the Equity Assessment, several feedback mechanisms were employed to understand the following areas of accessibility at BC Housing, including:

- a review of organizational policies and processes that impact employees and clients with accessibility needs;
- a staff survey that collected information about individual accessibility needs and employee experiences;
- a survey of partner non-profit housing organizations;
- focus group listening sessions; and
- one-on-one interviews.

A robust inquiry of both employee experience and external service delivery barriers related to accessibility was included in both the employee survey and the partner survey. Information gathered through the Equity Assessment that relates to accessibility will be used to inform the development of BC Housing's strategic framework for accessibility.

Work to Date



The following includes a summary of actions across BC Housing branches and departments as they relate to our Accessibility Realms framework.

Built Environment

BC Housing is responsible for developing, managing, and overseeing housing stock across the province. BC Housing also handles licensing of builders and provides professional development opportunities for builders. Built environment-related accessibility includes considerations for new construction, development, renovation, redevelopment, and management of housing stock.

All new housing projects that receive grants from BC Housing are required to meet or exceed the BC Housing Design Guidelines and Construction Standards (see Section 8 specifically) in addition to compliance with BC Building Code accessibility requirements and local bylaw (municipal/regional) requirements for accessibility and adaptability.

As part of design development, project teams look at various aspects of client needs to establish building and unit layouts and suite mix. Design professionals are tasked considering inclusivity, including accessibility considerations related to mobility, sensory, and neurodiversity needs.

Representation on External Working Groups and Committees

BC Housing participates in a variety of advisory bodies including:

- Pan-Canadian Forum Task Group: Guide for Accessible Built Environment in Northern, Rural and Remote;
- Accessibility Standards Canada's Task Group on Adaptable Housing and Associated Costs; and
- Right Fit Steering Committee.

Accessibility Assessment of Existing Buildings

BC Housing has worked with the Rick Hansen Foundation to complete assessments on five buildings as a pilot project. The five buildings assessed are:

- Steeves Manor (1985 Wallace Street, Vancouver);
- Lions Park (4200-4206 Garry Street, Richmond);
- Battin-Fielding (880 Vernon Avenue, Saanich);
- Hampton House (3333 Seaton Street, Saanich); and
- Hall Towers (7272 Kingsway, Burnaby).

The latest assessments were completed in August 2022 and recommendations were provided for each site. Work to implement the recommendations is already underway for Steeves Manor. Recommendations for the other sites are being prioritized as future standalone projects or incorporated into the scope of larger repair projects that are planned.

Portfolio Renovations – Accessibility and Adaptability Strategy

With financial support from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, BC Housing is implementing a strategy to provide additional adaptable and accessible units, where possible. Many existing buildings cannot be converted to fully accessible units because of current layouts or placement of fire separation and elevator and stairwell cores. In cases where units cannot be modified to be fully accessible, units will be modified to enhance livability and functionally for current residents based on their individual needs, whether that be mobility, visual, hearing, or other health related need, or aging in place. Changes can include new flooring, doors, accessible controls for sinks and faucets, or high contrast surfaces for visual cues.

For those buildings not limited by current layouts or fire separation or elevator and stairwell cores, BC Housing will modify for full wheelchair accessibility, which allows for barrier-free access, appropriate turning radius, and minimum circulation spaces.

The strategy also looks to improve accessibility of common areas in buildings. Modifications include looking to ensure accessible and barrier-free sidewalks and amenity spaces, added scooter storage, improved signage, and visual fire alarm signaling.

Redevelopment

BC Housing creates revitalization plans for existing directly managed sites that are aged and underutilized. Through engagement with tenants, BC Housing has determined that many of our tenants have accessibility requirements that are not addressed in the BC Building Code and local bylaw requirements. There is a need for more units and accessible units that support a wider variety of access needs.

As housing stock ages, BC Housing has a goal to replace the existing low-income housing at a one-for-one replacement ratio. For example, when replacing units, BC Housing will aim to replace two bedroom units with new two bedroom units. Densification will be attained through new builds. BC Housing's process for (re)building uses modernized building practices, including considerations for energy efficiency, climate adaptation, and accessibility.

BC Housing's Development and Asset Strategies involves an accessibility consultant as part of the design/master planning team. Accessibility consultants with both lived experience as well as design knowledge are prioritized. BC Housing also maintains an ongoing list of accessibility consultants that can be referred to across the branch.

BC Housing makes sure to consider the accessibility requirements of many users, including neurodivergent individuals and people with mobility and sensory disabilities. Temporary and permanent disabilities (i.e., car accident recovery versus chronic/lifelong condition) are also considered.

The Redevelopment Team conducts stakeholder engagements in a way that considers accessibility by holding public engagement events in accessible venues, offering online engagement opportunities, and providing materials in a variety of formats including:

- videos, including closed captioning, where possible;
- printed materials, including different language options, where possible; and
- digital/remote materials in addition to print materials.

Information is also communicated to tenants on-site through hand delivered print materials and posters.

Employment

BC Housing is taking steps to improve the accessibility of recruitment, onboarding, training, and retention processes.

Accessibility practices for employee events include providing captions in five different languages for all digital employee events and training sessions. There is also a recent practice of adding alternative text to images on the BC Housing intranet and in training materials.

Accessible design guidelines are in place to ensure adequate contrast on BC Housing internal email newsletters and that fonts and heading structures are in place.

BC Housing has taken steps to include closed captioning and plain language in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion trainings in our onboarding program for new employees. BC Housing has made accessibility a topic for periodic training and lunch and learn sessions.

For in-person employee events, accessibility considerations are built into the planning process. Activities and venues (hotels, picnic sites, event spaces, outdoor spaces at Home Office) are assessed and chosen to ensure accessibility for meetings, events, and social gatherings.

The organization has an accommodations policy, and the policy is part of the collective agreement. Work is currently underway to increase employee awareness about how to request workplace accommodations.

BC Housing job postings encourage applicants to request accommodations during the application process, by emailing hr_admin@bchousing.org.

BC Housing recently launched EQUIP, an equity-based mental health support program that offers equity-based, culturally sensitive, intersectional, and trauma-informed counselling services to BC Housing employees. The new program was developed by BC Housing to augment the Employee and Family Assistance Program.

Another custom BC Housing program that recognizes the relationship between retention and mental wellness is the BC Housing Peer Support and Resource Team. Launched in 2023, this new team is a group of BC Housing employees who bring their lived experience to offer support to other staff members. The team offers an additional pathway for employees to reach out for support, navigate their options, and access the right resources. They have had training and are skilled at listening and helping their peers.

Information and Communication Technologies

Work to improve the Information and Communication Technology is happening on many teams across BC Housing.

For external visitors to bchousing.org and other websites managed by the organization, the Web Accessibility Project is underway and will support inclusion by improving website accessibility for screen reader users and other visitors. The project will mean that bchousing.org adheres to WCAG 2.1 Level AA, which is an advanced version of this globally recognized benchmark for web accessibility. For context, the Government of Canada has adopted WCAG 2.0 AA.

BC Housing is also exploring how language choices can improve accessibility for users with intellectual and developmental disabilities and other audiences who may have lower English literacy skills. A Plain Language checklist was developed to support this initiative.

The Privacy and Information Services team launched a new digital records library to digitize and improve accessibility to records at BC Housing. A more accessible form for Freedom of Information requests is also being developed.

Procurement of Goods and Services

At BC Housing, procurement is guided by BC Housing's commitment to fair access, equitable treatment, and competition in the procurement process. BC Housing is currently implementing a Sustainability and Resilience Strategy, which includes work to better understand opportunities to leverage procurement spending to improve economic equity while contributing to the Commission's broader mission, vision, and values.

Program and Service Delivery

Research Centre

BC Housing has several projects related to the intersection of accessibility and housing design that considers aging in place.

A recent review of the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program and Rental Assistance Program (RAP) program involved targeted outreach to disability serving groups.

BC Housing is also conducting several surveys including an annual Builder Survey and bi-annual New Homeowner Survey. Both surveys include questions about accessibility.

Homeowner Education

BC Housing has been supporting the Condominium Home Owners Association (CHOA) to develop educational opportunities for its strata membership on accessibility, including workshops and guidance documents.

Operations

Along with the accessibility of the development and design of housing stock, BC Housing also must consider the accessibility of how buildings are managed and how tenants are served.

BC Housing includes staff involved in directly managed buildings, supportive housing units, shelters, and women's transition housing. The physical accessibility of buildings and office spaces used by BC Housing are part of the discussion.

When thinking about accessibility, BC Housing is already asking important questions about how to make forms and processes like the application process easier to understand through plain language materials. Plain Language and multilingual materials are two accessibility considerations the organization is working to incorporate into their workflows. BC Housing has embedded a Universal Design for Learning principles into the training they offer to staff and nonprofit partner organizations to create a more inclusive learning experience.

Programs

BC Rebate for Accessible Home Adaptations

Originally launched in 2011 as the Home Adaptations for Independence (HAFI) program, the BC Rebate for Accessible Home Adaptations program benefits low and moderate income households in British Columbia who are at risk of not being able to continue functioning independently in their home due to a permanent disability or loss of ability. Homeowners or landlords of affordable rental properties can apply for financial assistance in the form of a rebate to pay for home adaptations. The program allows eligible households to continue to live independently in their own home.

Sponsorship Program

Since 2020, BC Housing offers sponsorships to support events and programs that build a strong community housing sector and seek to advance accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Priority areas include Indigenous and racialized groups, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and those with self-identified barriers to access.

Partnerships with Service Providers

BC Housing has partnered with several service providers to advance accessible service delivery. Since 2015, BC Housing has been providing in-kind support to the Right Fit Project (RFP). The Right Fit Project is led by the Disability Alliance BC (DABC) in partnership with the Individualized Funding Resource Centre (IFRC). Right Fit is a multi-partner effort to address challenges in matching affordable, wheelchair accessible homes and independent living support services in Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Fraser Health Authority with people who need them. BC Housing supports efforts of the RFP to ensure that wheelchair accessible units are matched with wheelchair users.

Our Accessibility Plan – Next Steps to Improve Accessibility

Overview

In the coming stages of developing our strategic accessibility framework, BC Housing plans to engage more people with lived experience of disability and/or poverty to ensure that people with lived experience of accessibility barriers have their voices heard. This work begins with the launch of our accessibility feedback form and will continue with a series of tenant and employee engagement sessions in early 2024.

Across many areas of BC Housing, plans are underway to offer more education and awareness about accessibility for stakeholders, including staff, housing partners, and builders.

Across BC Housing, next steps are already planned in many of the accessibility domains. These include:

Built Environment

Accessible Facility Design Guidelines Development

BC Housing is responsible for developing and updating the Design Guidelines and Construction Standards (DGCS) for new development and renovation projects that are funded/financed by BC Housing. The current target for wheelchair accessible units is 5% of the residential units in any given project, but it will increase to 8% in the near future.

Building Inventory and Accessibility Upgrade Plan

When BC releases an accessible built environment standard, BC Housing will undergo a process to assess its existing directly managed and non-profit operated housing stock to determine the scope of any necessary building upgrades. This will take place over a period of five years with upgrades cascading after the first year of assessments. Based on this process, a multi-year plan and budget will be developed to support annually phased upgrades to inaccessible buildings and units.

Design Components for Redevelopment Projects

BC Housing is establishing new design goals that will improve the accessibility and adaptability of the housing stock. Within common areas, BC Housing is considering how tenants navigate the whole site, and increasing accessibility through more ramp systems, surface/texture considerations for those with sensory challenges to delineate spaces, and the accessibility of programming for spaces.

When looking at the placement of accessible units, BC Housing is considering equity. For example, providing accessible units throughout the building and ensuring access to common spaces like rooftop gardens.

Committee Participation

Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) established a Task Group to provide input on the development of a Guide for Accessible Built Environment in Northern, Rural, and Remote Communities. This task group will help ASC identify and analyze the different built environment accessibility issues in northern, rural, remote, Indigenous communities.

The Research team will represent BC Housing on this task group and will consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging team as needed.

Employment

BC Housing has identified several next steps that will improve accessibility of the tools and supports for employees. This will include ensuring accessibility best practices are applied throughout the organization's intranet, called HomeNet.

The organization is also working to adopt new practices regarding collection of disaggregated data, including areas such as disability status that will provide more accurate info about the workforce composition and enable data-informed and insight-driven HR programs, policy changes and decision-making.

As the organization starts a review of the employee extended health benefits package, the needs of disabled employees will be considered, including recommendations gathered through the Equity Assessment findings and through additional engagement with employees. The needs of caregivers will also be included in this work.

From a recruitment perspective, BC Housing will work with the OEDIB, ERGs and the Accessibility Working Group to develop a Persons with Disabilities Recruitment and Retention Action Plan. While this is in development, the Recruitment team will continue to expand its candidate sourcing, employer branding and recruitment advertising channels to ensure a diverse candidate pool, including people with disabilities. The team will also continue to assess recruitment processes to identify and remove barriers for people with disabilities, and to improve processes for accommodations throughout the hiring and onboarding processes.

The Human Resources Team will work with the OEDIB, ERGs, the Accessibility Working Group and leadership in all branches to assess, update, and improve employee policies and programs. This will align with recommendations from BC Housing's recent Equity Assessment and will also be informed by additional engagement with employees.

BC Housing employees will be offered additional accessibility awareness training opportunities through Fall 2023. Training will include an overview of the *Accessible BC Act*, inclusive leadership principles for managers, and plain language.

Information and Communication Technologies

Training and further assessment will be a theme across many aspects of communication and information technology at BC Housing.

In Fall 2023, the Information Management Team at BC Housing will host a townhall for all branch staff that will build the web accessibility knowledge of the team. In-depth plain language training to the branch is also planned in for Fall/Winter 2023.

BC Housing is developing a plan to improve accessibility of all the organization's websites and will develop guidelines that can be applied to future website projects.

Procurement of Goods and Services

In late 2022, BC Housing issued a Request For Proposals to retain consulting services to support the organization in developing a clear set of recommendations that will inform the development of our social procurement policy and practices in the future.

BC Housing aims to improve our social impact by increasing supplier diversity from groups/organizations who face systemic discrimination, including those with lived experience of disability, removing barriers to BC Housing's supply chain process, and increasing our purchasing from Social Impact organizations.

At a high level, recommendations from that project include:

- Maximize the impact of social procurement by ensuring the scope of procurement activities include all purchasing and contracts;
- Integrate EDIB criteria into BC Housing procurement policies and guidelines; and
- Evolve social procurement tactics to enhance and ensure all contracts include, weight, and report on the contract value through a lens of quality, price, and social value outcomes.

A final report and recommendations related to this project is forthcoming.

Program and Service Delivery

Training for Front Line Employees

BC Housing is currently rolling out Mental Health First Aid training to employees in front-line and directly managed housing operations.

Additionally, BC Housing is in the process of developing a robust training package to front line employees on trauma-informed service delivery with focus on equity and rights-seeking groups and their unique experiences with trauma.

Residential Builder Education

BC Housing is working on a multi-language environment for the Learning on Demand recorded webinar library. The first language to be added will be Punjabi and the first module is the Introductory module from the Step Code Learning-On-Demand modules.

Homeowner Education

BC Housing is also working on a pilot translation of the homeowner bulletin Maintenance Matters – Avoiding Condensation Problems into Cantonese and Mandarin. This will be publicly available later in 2023. Once this pilot is completed, work will begin to translate the entire bulletin series (over 20 bulletins).

Further Engagement

Further tenant engagement will be rolled out for tenants with lived experience to deepen BC Housing's understanding of barriers faced by clients with respect to service delivery. Moreover, further engagement will be undertaken in collaboration with employees with lived experience as well as the People with Disabilities/Disabled People Employee Resource Group to enhance our understanding of current accessibility barriers and opportunities to enhance accessibility at BC Housing. This will feed into the development of BC Housing's more comprehensive strategic framework for accessibility.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This document is the first step in the development of our corporate strategic framework for accessibility. As part of our commitment to accountability and transparency, BC Housing will provide updates on progress made on the plan actions listed in the previous section.

Updates will be communicated through a variety of established BC Housing channels, including but not limited to our accessibility webpage, HomeNet (intranet for employees), tenant and sector newsletters, and social media (when relevant).

These updates will also include further ways to engage in the development of BC Housing's more comprehensive strategic framework for accessibility as further exploration and engagement unfolds with clients, partners, and other stakeholders. The strategic framework for accessibility will be published in September 2024 and will be posted on our accessibility webpage.

How to Give Us Feedback

BC Housing welcomes feedback about this Accessibility Plan or accessibility barriers you've encountered when interacting with our organization. You can provide feedback by emailing us at accessibility@bchousing.org.

Resources

Free Accessibility Training

Accessible Employers

Accessible Employers offers a catalogue of free accessibility courses on topics such as how to Create an Accessible Workplace, how to Support Self-Disclosure, and how to Develop Your Accessibility Action Plan.

Learn More

Web Accessibility Initiative

The Web Accessibility Initiative offers a free Introduction to Web Accessibility.

Learn More

Accessibility Awareness Resources

Accessible Social Media

Accessible Social is a free resource and education hub that shares best practices for creating accessible and inclusive social media content.

Learn More

Accessible Employment

The Disability Inclusive Employer Self-Assessment tool is a free online questionnaire that helps employers compare their current practices to 35 of the most promising practices that create a disability inclusive workplace.

Learn More

Accessibility Glossaries

The BC Accessibility Hub offers a glossary of terms related to accessibility planning.

Learn More

Disability Support Services

The Disability Alliance BC is a cross-disability organization supporting people with all disabilities to live with dignity, independence and as equal and full participants in the community.

Learn More

Inclusion BC is a federation working to build community and to enhance the lives of children, youth, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families by building awareness, inspiring action, and advancing rights, responsibilities, and social justice.

Learn More

BC Disability is a community-developed website that provides a directory of disability related supports and resources.

Learn More

Accessible Housing Resources

The Right Fit is a multi-partner service designed to address the crisis in wheelchair accessible housing by matching affordable, accessible homes and independent living supports with people who need them in the Metro Vancouver region of British Columbia.

Learn More

Homelessness and Disability Research

Curated by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homeless Hub is a library of over 30,000 resources.

Learn More