

# ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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September 2023

**Elections BC  
Accessibility Plan**

September 2023



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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

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Building an accessible and inclusive electoral process is a core strategic priority for Elections BC. As Chief Electoral Officer, one of my key goals has been reducing barriers to voting and improving services for voters, candidates, political parties and everyone involved in elections. I'm excited by the opportunity to continue this work under the framework established by the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and this accessibility plan. Our accessibility plan, accessibility committee and feedback mechanism will help us identify, remove and prevent barriers, and help us maintain B.C.'s position as a leader in electoral accessibility. My sincere thanks to our accessibility committee members and everyone else who contributed to this plan.



**Anton Boegman**  
Chief Electoral Officer  
British Columbia

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The purpose of this plan is to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals that interact with Elections BC. During provincial general elections, we interact with voters, candidates and employees in all regions of the province. Ensuring an accessible electoral process for provincial elections in British Columbia is a major focus for us. We aim to make elections accessible by offering several ways to vote, including voting on Final Voting Day, voting at advance voting, voting by mail, voting at any district electoral office, and voting opportunities for voters with accessibility challenges, such as Assisted Telephone Voting and curbside voting. We also have resources and procedures in place to assist voters in the way that best meets their needs.

We plan to improve our resources and procedures with the assistance of our accessibility committee and the public. We encourage the public to send us feedback on any barriers they experience when they interact with us so we can remove the barriers and prevent them.

We have identified six priorities that we hope will make our resources, voting places and workplace more accessible in the next two years. These priorities are:

- implementing a modernized voting process for B.C.'s next provincial general election,
- reviewing our website and Online Voter Registration system for accessibility,
- providing information to political participants in a variety of formats,
- providing information to voters in a variety of formats,
- enhancing training materials for election officials and district electoral office staff, and
- soliciting input from Elections BC employees on how to improve accessibility in our workplaces.

# INTRODUCTION

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## About Elections BC

Elections BC is an independent, non-partisan Office of the Legislature. We administer provincial general elections, by-elections, recall petitions, initiative petitions, referenda and plebiscites. We also oversee campaign financing and advertising rules for local elections. Our mandate comes from legislation, including the *Election Act*, *Recall and Initiative Act*, *Referendum Act* and *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*. Together, these Acts define our responsibilities and set out the duties of the Chief Electoral Officer. The Chief Electoral Officer is a statutory Officer of the Legislature and reports directly to the Legislative Assembly. As an independent officer, the Chief Electoral Officer can make orders and regulations, and must remain neutral and impartial.

## Our Accessibility Story

Elections BC interacts with millions of people and numerous organizations in British Columbia, including:

- voters;
- political participants, such as candidates and political parties;
- our employees; and
- other members of the public, who may access the information we provide about democracy in British Columbia regardless of their eligibility to vote or be a candidate.

Our accessibility focus is to identify, remove and prevent barriers for everyone who interacts with us because we want all of our processes, services and resources to be accessible and easy to use.

## Acknowledgement of Key Contributors

Elections BC created this accessibility plan with the support of its accessibility committee. We would like to thank our committee members for their advice and guidance on the plan and for the critical role that they play in helping Elections BC provide accessible and inclusive electoral services. For more information about our [accessibility committee](#), visit the Elections BC website.



## Territorial Acknowledgement

Elections BC acknowledges, with respect, that our head office is located on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen People, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. We administer provincial elections in the traditional territories of all First Nations that are within what is now British Columbia.

## Definitions

The definitions in this section are from the [BC Accessibility Hub](#), [British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#) and [Accessibility Legislation Plain Language Summary](#):

- **Accessibility:** All people can take part in their communities through work, play and other daily activities. Accessibility is about removing barriers and increasing inclusion and independence for everyone.
- **Adaptability:** Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology and attitudes change.
- **Assistive/Adaptive Devices:** Any device that is designed, made, or adapted to assist a person to perform a particular task.
- **Barrier:** Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability.
- **Candidate Nomination Application System (CNAS):** A web-based application that individuals can use to prepare and submit their candidate nomination application.
- **Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play.
- **Disability:** An inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.
- **Diversity:** People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics, including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and lived experience, inform the experiences of individuals.
- **Impairment:** A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or cognitive disability, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.
- **Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including people with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
- **Prescribed Organization:** An organization designated by the regulations of a law.
- **Self-determination:** People with disabilities should be able to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
- **Universal Design:** The process of creating services and environments that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities, disabilities and other characteristics.

# FRAMEWORK GUIDING OUR WORK

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People with disabilities are unique and diverse. People's experiences with disabilities vary based on the type and severity of their disability. Many people have multiple disabilities, which can create unique barriers. Individual characteristics affect the experiences of individuals, including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, and where someone lives (rural or urban area).

## *Accessible British Columbia Act*

In 2021, the *Accessible British Columbia Act* became law. The Act provides a framework to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. To do this, the Act requires Elections BC and other prescribed organizations to:

- create an accessibility plan,
- establish an accessibility committee, and
- create a public feedback mechanism.

Elections BC must develop an accessibility plan to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals interacting with us. When we develop or update the plan, we must consult with our accessibility committee. The plan follows these principles:

- Adaptability
- Collaboration
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- Self-determination
- Universal design

For definitions of these terms, see the "Definitions" section above.

Elections BC must establish an accessibility committee to help us identify barriers to individuals that interact with us, and advise us on how to remove and prevent these barriers. For the feedback mechanism, Elections BC must develop a process for receiving comments from the public on our accessibility plan and barriers to individuals that interact with us.

## Other Legislation

There are additional laws and codes that influence Elections BC's mandate and support making the electoral process accessible. They protect the rights of individuals interacting with Elections BC, such as voters. These laws include:

- *Election Act*, which contains rules to reduce barriers to voting and to make voting accessible at the provincial level. There are multiple ways to vote, including on Final Voting Day, over six days of advance voting, by mail, at any district electoral office, and by Assisted Telephone Voting for voters with disabilities. All voters can vote at any voting place in the province. The *Election Act* also requires Elections BC employees to set up voting places that are, if reasonably possible, in a convenient location for a majority of the voters and easily accessible to individuals who have a physical disability or mobility challenges.
- *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which gives every Canadian citizen the right to vote and run as a candidate in provincial and federal elections. Elections BC is the custodian of that right for provincial elections in British Columbia. Every individual in Canada who is eligible to vote or run as a candidate has the right to vote or run, regardless of disability.
- *B.C. Human Rights Code*, which protects and promotes human rights and protects people from discrimination and harassment.
- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which protects the human rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination.

## ABOUT OUR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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This document is Elections BC's accessibility plan. The plan aims to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals that interact with us. We communicate with individuals in many ways, including in person, on the telephone and by fax, mail and email, and through social media. Voters, candidates, employees and other individuals use our website, guides and reports. They use them to find information about voting, provincial elections, how to become a candidate, election advertising rules and more. In our accessibility plan, we describe Elections BC's accessibility features, barriers, priorities and how we will monitor and evaluate our progress. We will update the plan at least every two years.

# ABOUT OUR ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

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## Role and Responsibilities of the Committee

In 2023, Elections BC appointed eight members to our first accessibility committee. The Elections BC Accessibility Committee will meet at least twice a year. The primary role of the committee is to assist Elections BC to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals interacting with Elections BC, including voters and candidates. The committee's responsibilities are to:

- provide subject matter expertise on disabilities, accessibility needs, and the delivery of barrier-free services to people with disabilities;
- advise Elections BC on how to provide accessible services to voters and others who interact with Elections BC;
- provide input to Elections BC on public facing, election-related services, tools and resources;
- provide input on Elections BC's accessibility plan and public feedback mechanism; and
- help identify the best ways to inform people with disabilities about voter registration, voting opportunities and the voting process.

## Selection of Committee Members

Elections BC conducted research to identify individuals in British Columbia who are subject matter experts on disabilities and accessibility. We invited eight individuals to join our committee. The majority of the members are people with disabilities or individuals who support or are from organizations that support, people with disabilities. The make-up of the committee meets the requirements of section 9 of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. More information about our [accessibility committee](#) is available on the Elections BC website.

# ABOUT OUR FEEDBACK MECHANISM

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We want to learn about barriers that people with disabilities face when interacting with Elections BC so we can remove and prevent those barriers. Individuals can provide feedback to Elections BC in many ways. Feedback informs our future accessibility plans and helps make sure everyone can use our services, processes and resources. During provincial elections, Elections BC uses an accessibility feedback form to collect feedback about accessibility from voters at voting places. Voters can fill out the form and leave it in the drop box. Election officials are available to assist voters when they fill out the form, if they want. Voters also give us feedback about voting in provincial elections by phone and email. Elections BC employees review the feedback after the election to see how we can improve our voting processes and resources for next time.

Elections BC also collects feedback from the public year-round. We share the ways that the public can provide us [feedback](#) on the Elections BC website. For example, people can contact us by mail, email, fax, in person or by phone. We welcome Video Relay Service (VRS) calls and we have a teletypewriter (TTY) phone number. We encourage the public to give us feedback on our accessibility plan and on any barriers that they experience when they are trying to:

- register to vote;
- vote;
- become a candidate;
- apply for employment with Elections BC; or
- use Elections BC's resources, information or offices.

Individuals can share as much or as little information as they want. Individuals will have the option to give us their name and contact information. The *Accessible British Columbia Act* allows us to collect any personal information someone sends us with their accessibility feedback. If people share their contact information, they may get a follow-up request from us asking for more details about their experience.

In addition, Elections BC is creating a separate internal process that will allow employees to provide feedback and input about accessibility at Elections BC's head office and warehouse. District electoral officers and deputy district electoral officers will be able to provide feedback and input about district electoral offices and voting places.

## Consultations

Elections BC consults with groups, organizations and the public to improve the accessibility of our services, processes and resources. This includes consulting our accessibility committee on a regular basis. For example, the committee helped us review and improve our accessibility plan.

Elections BC frequently works with electoral management bodies to help us make voting more accessible. For example, we are a member of the Secretariat for Electoral Coordination's Voters with a Disability Community of Practice. This cross-Canada group of election administrators shares their practices related to serving voters with disabilities and identifies new initiatives that we can work on together. The group also identifies tools and resources that Elections BC and other group members can use to improve services to voters with disabilities.

Elections BC also consults the Election Advisory Committee on the functioning of the *Election Act*, in particular before making recommendations for legislative change or regulations under the Act. Over the years, these consultations have frequently involved discussions of the accessibility of the electoral process. The Election Advisory Committee is established under section 14 of the *Election Act*. It includes the Chief Electoral Officer as committee chair, two members for each political party represented in the Legislative Assembly, and one member for each party that had candidates in at least half of the districts in the previous general election but is not represented in the Legislative Assembly.

In addition, Elections BC attends conferences and hosts workshops throughout the year, including conferences attended by people with disabilities. At the conferences and workshops, we collect feedback on people's experiences interacting with Elections BC, such as when they are voting or working at voting places.

# ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES AT ELECTIONS BC

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This section describes features that we hope make it easy for everyone to interact with Elections BC. Ultimately, people's experiences determine if these features are truly accessible and their experiences will identify ways that we can change and improve. In other sections, we discuss barriers at Elections BC and our priorities.

## Information and Communications

Elections BC shares information about elections and voter registration in several ways. For example, after an election is called, Elections BC mails a Where to Vote card to every registered voter in the province. This card has personalized information about when, where and how to vote. The information on the card is also available on the Elections BC website.

We advertise voting opportunities in various formats, including radio, online, print and newspaper. For example, in the past we have published an article in The Westcoast Reader, which is a plain language newspaper and online resource published by Decoda Literacy Solutions and Camosun College. Our advertisements include accessibility features, like captions in our video ads. In addition, in the past we have worked with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind to share information about Assisted Telephone Voting with its members (see the “Assisted Telephone Voting” section below for information about this voting opportunity). We also create resources about voter registration and voting materials in many languages. We plan to look at ways that we can create resources in even more formats and produce videos in sign language.

Our outreach program shares information about elections, voting, voter registration and job opportunities with individuals with disabilities. We share this information through presentations and exhibitor booths at conferences. For example, we have provided presentations and workshops for Inclusion BC for many years. Also, we send this information by email or letter to organizations across the province that serve people with disabilities so they can help us share our information with their networks. We also work with libraries, Service BC offices and municipalities to share our information in every region of the province, including urban and rural areas.

## Ways to Vote

Elections BC has a “vote anywhere” model, meaning voters can vote at any voting place in the province. During an election, Elections BC lists [voting places](#) on our website and on Where to Vote cards sent to every registered voter in the province. We also publish them in community newspapers. Voters can use our web app or call Elections BC during an election to find out where to vote. In addition, we share information about ways to vote:

- in our advertisements,
- during presentations,
- on our website, and
- in the voter’s guide that we mail to all households during a provincial election.

Here is a summary of the ways to vote in a provincial election:

**Vote in Advance**

There are six days of advance voting during provincial elections. Advance voting places are open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. local time. Voters don't need a special reason to vote at advance voting – it's an option for all eligible voters. If a person hasn't registered before, or has outdated information, they can register or update when they vote. Individuals can vote at any advance voting place, and all advance voting places are physically accessible to those using mobility devices.

**Vote on Final Voting Day**

Final Voting Day is the 28th day after the election is called. To vote on Final Voting Day, a voter can visit any voting place between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Pacific time. Their assigned/closest voting place will be listed on their Where to Vote card. If they haven't registered before, or their information needs to be updated, they can register or update when they vote.

**Vote at any District Electoral Office**

Voting is available at any district electoral office from the day an election is called until 4 p.m. on Final Voting Day. If a voter hasn't registered before, or their information is outdated, they can register or update when they vote.

**Vote by Mail**

Voters can ask for a vote-by-mail package from before an election is called until 4 p.m. on Final Voting Day. Elections BC will mail the package to the individual or they can pick it up at a district electoral office. Voters must wait until the election is called before they vote using their package. Voters can return the completed package to a district electoral office, any voting place, or other designated service locations before 8 p.m. on Final Voting Day. If a voter hasn't registered before or their information is outdated, we will give them instructions in the voting package on how to register or update their information.

**Special Voting Opportunities**

Elections BC establishes special voting opportunities to serve voters who might otherwise be unable to vote. Common special voting opportunities include visits by mobile teams to acute care hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and residential care homes that provide care to the elderly or younger adults living with physical or intellectual disabilities.



### **Assisted Telephone Voting**

Assisted Telephone Voting is available for voters who are unable to vote independently by other means. To vote by Assisted Telephone Voting, the person's voter registration information must be up-to-date and they must meet one of the following criteria:

- They have sight loss.
- They have a disability or underlying health condition that prevents them from voting independently.
- They are unable to vote by any other means during the last week of the campaign period and are unable to vote by mail.

Only voters who meet one of these criteria can vote by telephone and voters must confirm that they are eligible. If an ineligible voter attempts to vote by telephone, it could tie up phone lines needed by those who are eligible. Telephone operators assist voters who vote by phone. Elections BC follows a procedure to ensure the secrecy of the ballot for voters voting by telephone.

## Voting Accessibility

Election officials are available to assist voters at voting places, if a voter wants assistance. Elections BC trains election officials to follow these steps:

- Ask voters "How can I help you?"
- Listen carefully
- Act in accordance with what the voter has requested, not on what the election official thinks is going to be helpful

Elections BC has services, resources and tools available to assist voters with disabilities, whether they are voting in person or remotely.

### **Assistive/Adaptive Devices**

Voters are allowed to bring their own tools to the voting places to use. In addition, there is an Accessible Voting System at each district electoral office to allow voters to vote independently. This includes voters with sight loss and voters with others forms of disability. Voters will have the option to listen to an audio recording of the candidate list for their district and then to indicate their vote by using a hand-held selector device, sip-and-puff straws or paddles. The voter's ballot paper, bearing their candidate selection, will then be printed face-down and fed into the district electoral office tabulator. The Accessible Voting System includes these components:

- **Audio Tactile Interface:** A handheld, tactile controller used in Accessible Voting Sessions for voters with sight loss. The controller has audio directions; large, colour-contrasted tactile buttons, and Braille inscriptions.
- **Ballot Marking Device:** Used in conjunction with a ballot tabulator to print selections made by a voter during an Audio Accessible Voting session on an original ballot.

- **Audio:** Voters use headphones with the Accessible Voting Components to play the audio instructions to navigate and mark a ballot. Voters can bring their own headphones if they prefer.
- **Left and Right Paddles:** Voters can press the paddles using hands, feet, or elbows to vote. This is a good option for voters who have difficulty using small instruments, such as pens or markers.
- **Sip 'n' Puff Device:** The device allows voters to mark their ballot by “sipping” (inhaling) or “puffing” (exhaling) into a straw. Voters who have difficulty using their hands or feet primarily use this option.

### **Assistance Marking the Ballot**

Voters can get assistance marking their ballot for any reason. They can tell the election official at the voting place if they want assistance marking their ballot. They can also bring a friend or family member to assist them. The assistant must make a solemn declaration that they will assist the voter based on the voter's wishes.

### **Resources for Blind, Deafblind or Partially Sighted Voters**

In addition to the assistive devices available at district electoral offices, the List of Candidates in uncontracted Braille, large print ballot posters and Braille ballot templates are available at all voting places to assist voters with sight loss mark their ballot.

### **Resources for Voters who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

Elections BC trains election officials to assist voters who are deaf, Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. We have visual aids available at the voting place. Voters are welcome to have an interpreter present or assist them. Also, voters can contact Elections BC by phone using voice to text services or by Video Relay Service (VRS) at 1-888-456-5448.

### **Physical Accessibility at Voting Places**

All advance voting places and most general voting places are physically accessible to voters using mobility devices. Voters who can't enter a voting place can vote outside the building (at the curb or in the parking lot).

### **Translators and Interpreters**

Voters are welcome to bring a translator or interpreter to help them at the voting place. This includes a sign language, tactile signing or tracking interpreter. The translator or interpreter must make a solemn declaration that they are able to act as a translator or interpreter and will do so to the best of their abilities.

## Political Participant Accessibility

Elections BC interacts with many political participants, including candidates, political parties, elector organizations and third party sponsors of election advertising. Political participants are responsible for making their own resources and events accessible to the public. Any feedback on these matters should go directly to the applicable political participant.

One of Elections BC's provincial election responsibilities is to collect and process candidate nominations. Most eligible voters may run as candidates for the Legislative Assembly if they file a complete nomination application with Elections BC. After we review the application, we issue a certificate of candidacy.

In the past, the candidate nomination application was primarily a paper-based application. Candidate nominees had to print and mail, fax, or drop their forms off in person to an Elections BC office. When individuals were filling out the application, they sometimes made errors, such as not entering all of the required information. We recognize that filling out paper applications can be difficult for some individuals. In order to remove any barriers, Elections BC created an electronic filing option for nominations in 2023 called the Candidate Nomination Application System (CNAS). It is a web-based application that individuals can access through their computer, tablet or mobile device on the [Elections BC Services portal](#). Individuals can use CNAS to:

- complete their nomination documents and track their progress;
- pay their deposit online using a credit card;
- electronically sign their documents and request signatures from others;
- submit their nomination application for review at any time nominations are accepted;
- receive updates and feedback from Elections BC about their submission; and
- make corrections and resubmit their nomination application after an Elections BC review.

CNAS provides a convenient, self-serve, centralized method for filing nominations that assesses nomination information for completeness, and guides candidates through the process. The system has prompts to tell individuals if they are missing any information. This helps them complete the forms correctly meaning their applications are more likely to be accepted.

With CNAS in operation, candidates have the option to complete their nomination application online (using CNAS) or complete the paper application. Both filing methods require the same items and are subject to the same requirements.

In addition, Elections BC used to send written notices to political participants by mail; however, we now also send notices by email so the recipients can receive the notice faster and individuals can use technology to read the notice, if they want.

## Workplace Accessibility

Elections BC employs permanent and temporary employees in our head office and warehouse year-round. We also hire thousands of temporary employees during an election to work in voting places and district electoral offices across the province. Elections BC aims to create an inclusive, barrier-free workplace for all of its employees. Here are some examples of how we support our employees:

- We are mindful of the needs of employees with disabilities when we advertise employment opportunities and hire employees. For example:
  - We clearly identify which jobs have physical requirements, such as frequent lifting or long periods of standing.
  - We offer accessible formats and communication supports to job applicants upon request, such as providing large-print versions of material.
- We reduce physical barriers in our work environments by ensuring that our meeting spaces and offices are accessible to people using mobility devices and washrooms have an accessible stall and automatic door openers.
- We make policies and practices to help us prevent barriers in the workplace. For example, we provide a scent-free work environment because scents can cause sensory barriers.
- We follow the BC Public Service [Managers' Guide to Reasonable Accommodation](#) to help us provide accommodations and individualized supports to employees.
- We have a return to work process for employees that have been absent from work due to a disability and require accommodations to return to work.
- We provide information about workplace accommodations in employee orientation materials.

# BARRIERS

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This section outlines barriers that Elections BC has encountered and will be working to remove. Elections BC will likely identify new barriers for people that interact with us as we work with our accessibility committee and implement our accessibility plan and feedback mechanism. When we identify barriers, we will create strategies to remove and prevent them.

## Accessibility by Design

Historically, Elections BC developed its services and applications to ensure any identified barriers were addressed, but we did not constantly develop them with an “accessibility by design” approach. For example, barriers have not been identified with Elections BC’s Online Voter Registration System (either by Elections BC employees or the public). However, Elections BC has not yet conducted a full accessibility audit on that system to ensure it is easy to use and accessible for all users, so this is a future step (see the “Our Priorities for 2023/24 to 2025/26” section).

Elections BC provides many resources and documents in alternative formats, especially if they are required for someone to vote. For example, we provide the List of Candidates in uncontracted Braille. Elections BC could provide more plain language resources in alternative formats, such as Where to Vote cards and Voter’s Guides in large print and sign language video. We could also make training videos with captions for employees.

## Training

Elections BC creates materials, like guides, videos and online learning modules, to train employees and help them assist voters in voting places and district electoral offices. We train thousands of election officials during provincial elections. For the 2024 Provincial General Election, we will introduce new procedures and tools to serve voters with disabilities, such as the Accessible Voting System that will be in district electoral offices. We will need to enhance and update our training materials to make sure election officials know how to follow procedures and use tools to efficiently serve voters with disabilities. This will help us prevent barriers that could result from employee error.

## Physical Accessibility and Built Environment

Elections BC has not encountered any physical barriers to employees at our head office in Victoria or at our warehouse in Central Saanich. We assess voting places for physical accessibility when we select them. However, we recognize that physical space can present barriers for individuals with disabilities, and accessibility needs in this area change over time. Elections BC will continue to identify and address physical barriers as they arise.

While all advance voting places and most final voting places are physically accessible to those using mobility devices, some final voting places are not. Elections BC must rent a large number of venues throughout the province on Final Voting Day and it can be challenging to secure space that is fully accessible to those using mobility devices in all areas of the province. In some cases, we are able to improve the accessibility of these voting places through upgrades and temporary modifications. As well, we have other options for voters who can't access a voting place on Final Voting Day. For example, they can vote by mail, they can vote curbside at the voting place or they might qualify for Assisted Telephone Voting. They can also vote at a different voting place. Elections BC shows which voting places are physically accessible by people with mobility devices on Where to Vote cards and the Elections BC website. We do this by putting the International Symbol of Access beside the voting place names. Ensuring that voters are aware of the physical accessibility of their voting place and the alternative voting options available to them is key to reducing barriers.

## Voting Process Accessibility

British Columbia's electoral legislation makes our voting process very accessible (see the "Voting Accessibility" section). For example, voters with disabilities can vote via Assisted Telephone Voting or the Accessible Voting System at district electoral offices. Both options maintain the secrecy of the vote. The Accessible Voting System at district electoral offices allows voters to cast their ballot fully independently. Elections BC will implement this system on a province-wide scale for the first time in the 2024 Provincial General Election. Elections BC might identify additional process barriers at that time.

If a voter is registering in conjunction with voting by mail, they must prove their identity and residential address. Historically this has involved submitting photocopies of acceptable ID along with the voter's vote-by-mail package. Recent legislative changes allow Elections BC to use digital means to verify a voter's identity, such as uploading photos of acceptable ID to a secure website. At the time of writing the accessibility plan in 2023, Elections BC had not developed this functionality yet. This part of the vote-by-mail process may still present a barrier for some voters. Elections BC plans to make improvements in this area in advance of the 2024 Provincial General Election with an "accessibility first" approach.

# OUR PRIORITIES FOR 2023/24 TO 2025/26

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Below we outline our priorities for 2023/24 to 2025/26. We may identify additional priorities during this period in response to feedback from our accessibility committee and the public. Our current priorities are the following:

## Priority 1: Implement voting modernization for the next provincial general election

The next provincial general election is scheduled for October 19, 2024. This election will be the first general election conducted under the modernized *Election Act*. Voting modernization will allow us to improve the voting process. We will use new technology to administer elections, including using tabulators to count paper ballots and laptops to look up voters and cross them off the voters list. Tabulators will allow Elections BC to widely use assistive devices for voters with disabilities because tabulators are part of the Accessible Voting System that will be in all district electoral offices. Also, if a voter makes a mistake on a ballot, the tabulator will tell the election official right away so the voter can correct their ballot. Another benefit is that voters will vote based on the order that they arrive at the voting place instead of having to vote at a specific voting station at the voting place. This should reduce the amount of time voters have to wait in line at voting places.

We have had the opportunity to use the voting modernization processes on a small scale during by-elections. We will continue to test our processes before the 2024 Provincial General Election. This will include working with people with disabilities to test the processes to identify any barriers so we can remove and prevent them.

## Priority 2: Review Elections BC's website and Online Voter Registration System for accessibility

We want to ensure that people with disabilities can receive and understand information and communications delivered by Elections BC, including on our website. We also want to make sure that individuals can register to vote easily. For these reasons, Elections BC will work with people with disabilities to review the content and design of its website and Online Voter Registration System. This will include testing with assistive technologies. For example, we will ensure our web content, documents and guides are:

- compatible with assistive technology, such as screen readers, screen magnifiers, refreshable Braille displays and keyboard navigation;
- written in plain language; and
- clear with a simple layout.

## Priority 3: Provide information to political participants in a variety of formats

Our creation of CNAS is a big step towards improving accessibility for political participants. We are looking at ways that we can improve further. For example, Elections BC offered sign language interpretation at an online information session for political participants in 2022, based on a request from a meeting participant. We will make it a priority to offer sign language interpretation and other services, such as captioning, at future information sessions. We recognize that offering these services at all information sessions instead of only when someone requests it would be best. This would allow individuals who require these services to attend easily, even if they choose to attend last minute. If we offer these services at our information sessions, we could act as a model of accessibility for political participants. This could encourage political participants to offer these services at their own events.

## Priority 4: Provide information to voters in a variety of formats

We are examining ways that we can share our information with voters in a variety of formats, especially for the next provincial general election. This could include offering our information in large print, uncontracted or contracted Braille, audio and sign language video. We will make sure that all of our materials and formats are in plain language.

## Priority 5: Enhance training materials for election officials and district electoral office staff

We will work with individuals with disabilities to review and improve our training materials. This will include our guides, videos and online learning modules. We will review the format and content of our materials to make sure that employees with disabilities can easily access our training materials. Also, we will make sure our training materials clearly explain to employees:

- how to assist voters at the voting place and district electoral office, if they want assistance; and
- how to use tools and resources, like the Braille ballot template and Accessible Voting System.

For employees that will be in charge of hiring temporary staff, we will make sure our training materials clearly explain Elections BC's standards of conduct and the importance of respect and inclusion at Elections BC. We want all our employees to feel welcome and included. Hiring people with disabilities helps reduce attitudinal barriers in the workplace and it allows Elections BC to benefit from diverse skills and knowledge.



## Priority 6: Solicit input from Elections BC employees on how to improve accessibility in our workplaces

We plan to collect feedback from staff on ways we can reduce barriers in our workplaces caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies. Our goal is to increase our standing as an accessibility-confident employer, and to remain mindful of the needs of employees with disabilities when we create employment opportunities and conduct our work. This means continually embracing digital accessibility, and following policies and practices that ensure employees with disabilities are included.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

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We will monitor accessibility at Elections BC by gathering feedback on our accessibility plan and on barriers at Elections BC from our accessibility committee and the public. We look forward to receiving public feedback throughout the year; however, we expect that we will receive an increase in public feedback during elections and other electoral events because they increase our interactions with individuals across the province. We will provide an update about the work we have completed and our progress towards accomplishing our priorities in our Annual Report and Service Plan, which we publish on our website every year. We will also share our progress and accomplishments with our accessibility committee during every committee meeting.

We will work with individuals with disabilities to evaluate if we have completed our priorities. For example, after we audit and improve the Elections BC website for accessibility, we will ask individuals with disabilities to test the website using their own assistive technology to ensure it is compatible with our website. In addition, we will count how many resources and information sessions we provided in alternative formats for voters and political participants each year so we can look at ways to increase these numbers in future years.

# CONCLUSION

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Elections BC is committed to making the electoral process accessible and inclusive for everyone in British Columbia. In order to do this, we must identify, remove and prevent barriers for everyone that interacts with us. All eligible people in the province should be able to vote or become a candidate, if they choose to. We invite individuals to give us feedback on our accessibility plan and any interactions they have with Elections BC. We plan to improve accessibility in the next two years by completing our six priorities and any others we identify.

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