

Accessible BC Act:

The Public Guardian and Trustee
2024–2027 Plan



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Territorial acknowledgment

We acknowledge the territories of First Nations around British Columbia and we are grateful to carry out our work on these lands. We acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – respecting and acknowledging their cultures, histories, rights, laws and governments.

We also recognize the painful legacy of colonialism and the residential school system in our province, including the discoveries of unmarked graves. We honour the survivors and the memories of the children who never came home. We commit to meaningful reconciliation, including working with Indigenous peoples on improved outcomes for clients that identify as Indigenous.







Background

The Government of B.C. has taken action to create a more accessible and inclusive province and is committed to removing physical, attitudinal and virtual barriers and to fostering inclusion among people of all abilities.

The Accessible BC Act (the “Act”) came into force June 17, 2021 and provides the legal framework by which government, people with disabilities and the broader community will work together to enhance the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in B.C.¹

The Accessible British Columbia Act [SBC 2021] Chapter 19 and associated regulations apply to prescribed organizations. B.C. Reg. 105/2022 s.3 lists the Public Guardian and Trustee as a prescribed organization with the effective date of September 1, 2023.

Section 11 of the Act states:

- (1) An organization must develop a plan to identify, remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.
- (2) An organization must review and update its accessibility plan at least once every 3 years.
- (3) In developing and updating its accessibility plan, an organization must consider the following principles:
 -  (a) inclusion;
 -  (b) adaptability;
 -  (c) diversity;
 -  (d) collaboration;
 -  (e) self-determination;
 -  (f) universal design.
- (4) In developing its accessibility plan, an organization must consult with its accessibility committee.
- (5) In updating its accessibility plan, an organization must:
 - (a) consider any comments received under section 12 [public feedback], and
 - (b) consult with its accessibility committee.



The Act requires prescribed organizations to establish an accessibility committee. While the B.C. plan speaks mostly about persons with disabilities and associated barriers, the Act requires that committee participants include at least one Indigenous person and also reflect the diversity of persons in B.C. Barriers are to include those affecting individuals in or interacting with the organization. Overall, the scope is wide and intersectional.

¹ AccessibleBC: B.C.’s Accessibility Plan, 2022/23-2024/25

Message from the Public Guardian and Trustee

The work we do everyday involves access to services on behalf of a variety of clients. The Public Guardian and Trustee (PGT) is independent of government for client decisions and we deliver those services in alignment with our goals and values.



Our values of collaboration and respect along with our focus on client-centred service and a people-focused workplace merge with the values of accessibility and inclusiveness articulated in the government's Accessible British Columbia Act. We are excited to work together with staff and external partners in outlining our current accessibility successes and identifying and removing even more barriers for those who engage with the PGT and those who work here.

Provincial data indicates that 25% of British Columbians identify as having a disability and 70% of those have more than one disability – the most common of which are pain-related, mental health related or a learning disability.

While just over 11% of people living with a disability are in the workforce, PGT staffing data shows that 18% of our staff identify as having a disability – 43 staff (2022). As one of those people, I am grateful to work at, and lead, an organization that values diversity and provides support for success.

This new legislation provides more opportunity to focus on accessibility within our organization, to acknowledge our successes and to continue improving. We strive to reduce barriers for staff and those interacting with the PGT and continue to create a highly accessible and inclusive workspace.

The PGT proudly presents the following plan in furtherance of our on-going work to reduce barriers to those with disabilities and in compliance with the Accessible BC Act.

Dana Kingsbury

Public Guardian and Trustee



Key contributors

In September 2023, the PGT struck its first Accessibility Act Committee. The members are:

Anu Pala, public member

David Mitchell, public member

Sasha Karpov, PGT staff

Emilia Amaya, PGT staff

Brittney Vivian, PGT staff

Dana Kingsbury, PGT staff

All committee members have contributed to this plan and brought their unique perspectives to the discussion. Their input has been invaluable and the PGT extends appreciation to both the external members and to the PGT staff, all of whom have volunteered their time.

Definitions

Accessibility

The quality of being able to be reached, entered, easy to obtain, easy to use, understood or appreciated

Accessibility lens

A process to identify and clarify issues affecting those with disabilities so those issues and their impacts can be addressed

Accommodation

A means of preventing and removing barriers that impede those with disabilities from participating fully in society- involves dignity, individualization and inclusion

Diversity

The practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Ergonomic assessment

An assessment of a worker at their work station to ensure correct posture and set-up to minimize injury

Inclusion

Practice or policy of providing equal access to those otherwise excluded or marginalized

PGT

Public Guardian and Trustee (the organization or the individual)

Systemic barrier

Attitudes, policies, practices or systems that result in certain population groups receiving unequal access or being excluded from participation in services or programs

The PGT Accessible BC Act Plan 2024–2027

The PGT has often considered how to improve accessibility in our physical spaces and how to support staff who require workplace accommodations. We have pro-actively implemented change when we believed it was the right thing to do.

We have reduced barriers for those wishing and able to interact with the PGT through the formal complaints process and for those experiencing cultural or language impediments to accessing service. We have adjusted our use of space to improve safety and comfort for staff and visitors.

The implementation of the Accessible BC Act has provided more opportunity to consider accessibility in a wider context.

In drafting this plan, PGT has learned that while we have accomplished a lot there is more to do starting with improving our understanding of accessibility and barriers. We can communicate better, see our physical spaces differently, and ensure that our hiring practices accommodate applicants with diverse needs. As we navigate this work, we are sure to see systemic barriers we can begin to dismantle.

Overall, the PGT looks forward to acknowledging the work we have done to date and building on it in the future. The following five themes form the framework of the PGT plan going forward.

01

Understanding

The PGT has long worked to be an employer of choice with an overt culture of inclusion and accessibility. We have done a lot but we do not have a clear understanding of what has worked and what more we can do. Much of our work has focused on identifying barriers for the general public but has not included a specific review on barriers for those with disabilities.

Related actions		
Where are we starting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct staff and public surveys on perception of the PGT’s accessibility to establish a baseline 	
How can we learn more?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review complaints processes to determine where barriers may be impacting service to persons with disabilities 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver accessibility and disability training for staff by professionals with lived experience of disability 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from accessibility and disability training about the needs of people living with disability 	

02

Communication

We know that PGT delivers many services and clients have a variety of complex financial and legal situations that are difficult to understand especially in times of crisis or need. Ideally, PGT information would be plain language and available in a variety of formats. Where it works best, people would be connected either in-person or through technology to a staff person.

Related actions		
What can be more plain language?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure PGT’s new website and related publications meet accessibility standards 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with clients and service partners about website and publication enhancements to better inform about the PGT’s mandate, role and services 	
How can we accommodate a variety of communication styles more easily?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all communications will be made available in accessible formats 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver training for staff on communicating with those who are deaf or hard of hearing and those using assistive devices 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure any new or updated policy and procedure has an accessibility lens/perspective applied and the new documents are readable in a variety of formats 	




















03

Employment

PGT staff represent many of the same demographics as the British Columbia public. Twenty-five percent of the people in BC self identify as having a disability and of those 11% are in the available workforce. With these numbers, the PGT would be expected to have 35 staff members who identify as having a disability. Our actual number is 43 staff or just over 18% of our total staffing complement. We are proud of this accomplishment.

PGT is also focused on improving hiring practices to attract more persons from designated groups to ensure we have a very diverse staff including those with disabilities, Indigenous persons, visible minorities and gender-diverse folks.

With this in mind, the PGT can do more to hire diverse talent and to take advantage of the skills available.

Related actions		
How can we make the PGT hiring process more equitable for persons with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt job postings to simplify language and incorporate PGT’s commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion 	 
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement inclusive hiring practices such as accessible and/or virtual interviews and interpreters for deaf/hard of hearing candidates 	  
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide more information during the hiring process about the availability of accommodation in both written and oral interviews 	 
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pro-actively ask candidates about their accommodation needs 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that interview questions are delivered in plain language and in sufficient time to allow for appropriate processing and response 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust Human Resources plan to include equity, diversity and inclusion lenses/perspectives 	  
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver training for hiring managers about disability awareness, talent fit and accommodation during the recruitment, hiring and on-boarding phases 	 
How can PGT hire more staff that identify as Indigenous?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine which positions are best filled by Indigenous staff 	 
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrict appropriate positions so that only Indigenous individuals will be hired 	 
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain a Human Rights Commission designation to support hiring of some positions to only Indigenous candidates 	

04

Physical spaces

Staff, clients and visitors expect PGT physical spaces to be accessible, welcoming and safe. After all, the work we do involves people, many of whom need support and information, sometimes at points in their lives when they are facing difficult challenges or life changes. Knowing where to go and how they will be received helps reduce stress and anxiety.

Related actions

How can our spaces be more welcoming and functional?

- Determine how to conduct an accessibility audit for each PGT physical office for signage, accessibility, telephone and virtual connectivity, parking, washrooms etc.
- Develop accessibility requirements for new spaces in light of pending lease renewals
- Deliver more learning for staff about available ergonomic assessment options



How can getting to our spaces be easier?

- Develop information on how to come to each PGT location – location, accessibility, parking, reception, waiting areas, services available (plug-ins, video conference, available communication methods, child areas etc.)



05

Systemic barriers

All PGT clients are vulnerable individuals and some have likely experienced systemic barriers that have prevented or hindered access to our services. The PGT is committed to identifying and doing our part to identify and remove systemic barriers within our control.

Related actions

How can PGT identify and remove systemic barriers?

- Examine processes for barriers that impact those who identify as Indigenous, persons with disabilities, gender diverse, 2SLGBTQIA+ and visible minorities
- Develop a plan to review policies for barriers that impact clients with disabilities





Reporting

The PGT will report on the status of this plan in the Annual Report published each fall.

Implementation plan

	2024–2025	2025–2026	2026–2027
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Survey • Accessibility training (on-going) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints Process Review
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PGT website • Training re: Deaf and hard of hearing, assistive devices • Policy (on-going) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review website and external publications for compliance with accessibility standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with clients and service partners about website and publication enhancements to better inform about PGT’s mandate, role and services
Physical spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review PGT spaces • Ergonomic training (on-going) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for new leased spaces • Develop “How to get to a PGT space” 	
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edit job postings • Train hiring managers • Update interview questions • Attract more employees from designated groups, including Indigenous persons (on-going) • ID restricted positions • Obtain HRC designation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edit HR plan to include diversity, equity and inclusion lenses 	
Systemic barriers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine processes for barriers that impact those who identify as Indigenous, persons with disabilities, gender diverse, LGBTQ2S+ and visible minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review policies for barriers



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