



GHC THREE-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2026 - 2028

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Accessibility is vital for delivering quality healthcare. At Group Health Centre (GHC), we believe everyone should receive care in a welcoming, inclusive, and barrier-free environment. Accessibility is more than just a legal requirement; it reflects our values and our dedication to equity for all.

Creating accessible spaces involves more than just physical design. It requires us to examine our systems, policies, and practices carefully to ensure they uphold dignity, independence, and easy access for everyone. This effort is ongoing, and we understand that achieving true accessibility is a shared responsibility.

I am eager to take the next steps and share a renewed approach to accessibility through our three-year Accessibility Plan. This plan will guide us in conducting a thorough compliance review and implementing innovative strategies to enhance accessibility across all areas of our organization. It is designed to help us go beyond minimum standards and move toward a model of care that is truly inclusive by design.

This plan directly aligns with GHC's mission to deliver high-quality, patient-centred care to everyone in our community. By integrating accessibility into every part of our operations, we ensure our services embody compassion, respect, and equity; fundamental principles that define who we are.

There is still work to do, and we cannot do it alone. I invite you to join us in this effort to foster a healthcare environment where no one is left behind. Together, we can build a system that reflects the strength of our diversity and guarantees equitable access for everyone.



Sincerely,
LIL SILVANO
PRESIDENT AND CEO
GROUP HEALTH CENTRE

INTRODUCTION

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) addresses a history of discrimination against individuals with disabilities by ensuring they have equal access to goods, services, facilities, accommodations, buildings, and premises. The Act requires that Ontario be accessible to individuals with disabilities by 2021. Five key areas of the related standards were developed with the involvement of Ontarians with disabilities and are phased in over a 20-year period:

- Customer Service
- Built Environment
- Information & Communications
- Transportation
- Employment

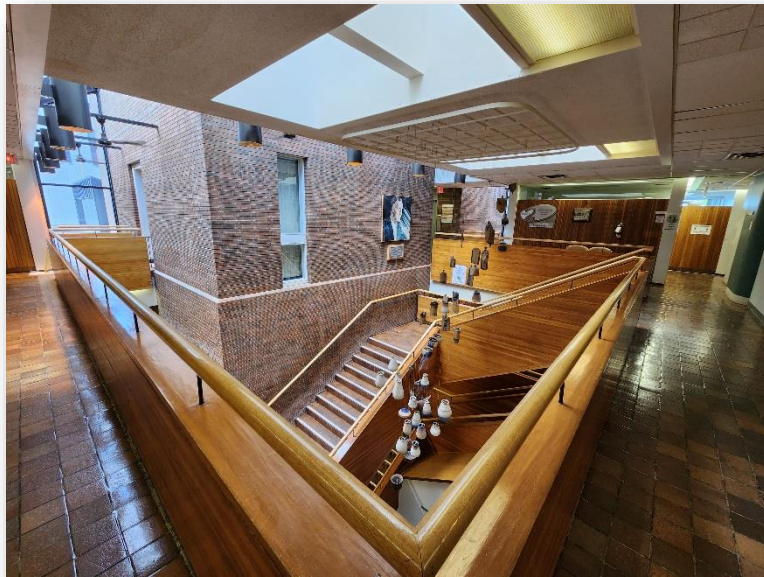
GHC is committed to providing quality services that are accessible to everyone, as we believe in the intrinsic worth of all — including our employees, patients, providers, volunteers, and visitors. We are committed to creating a supportive environment for individuals with disabilities.

Under the AODA, private and not-for-profit organizations with 50 or more employees, such as GHC, must develop a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, accessibility policies, and meet various other requirements. To address the unique needs of every individual each day and comply with the legal requirements of the AODA, the GHC Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, **Barrier-Free GHC**, outlines the work GHC has completed to provide accessible services and workplaces, and details the ongoing efforts to create an accessible organization in accordance with, and beyond, legislative requirements.

ABOUT GHC

The Sault Ste. Marie and District Group Health Association, operating as GHC, a not-for-profit and charitable healthcare organization, provides outpatient primary care, specialty care, and other community-based health services to the residents of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma District.

GHC was established in 1963 as one of Canada's first union-sponsored community health centres. Initially funded by thousands of steelworkers in Sault Ste. Marie, GHC pledged to offer its members primary and preventive care at no out-of-pocket expense, even before provincial health insurance was in place.



Today, over 80 providers, including primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, and specialist physicians, work at GHC in a group setting alongside registered and practical nurses and other allied health professionals. GHC adopts a multidisciplinary approach to healthcare, emphasizing health promotion and illness prevention as core parts of its mission. GHC is committed to removing and preventing barriers to accessibility for its patients, clients, employees, and volunteers.

GHC ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

The GHC Accessibility Committee supports the organization’s commitment to accessibility and inclusion, in alignment with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Reporting to the Senior Leadership Team, the committee advises on, monitors, and promotes initiatives that identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities across the organization’s services, facilities, and employment practices.

The committee oversees the development, implementation, and review of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, Annual Accessibility Report, and Compliance Report.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

GHC is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for people with disabilities. We aim to treat individuals with disabilities in a manner that preserves their dignity and independence. We believe in inclusion and addressing needs promptly. We will achieve this by removing and preventing barriers to accessibility and complying with our accessibility obligations under the AODA and Ontario’s accessibility laws.



GHC is committed to meeting its current and ongoing obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and understands that obligations under the AODA and its accessibility standards do not substitute or limit its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code or obligations to people with disabilities under any other law.

GHC is committed to excellence in serving and providing goods, services or facilities to all persons, including people with disabilities.

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS

- **Attitudinal barriers:** may result in people with disabilities being treated differently from people without disabilities.
- **Informational and communication barriers:** arise when a person with a disability cannot easily receive and/ or understand information that is available to others.
- **Technological barriers:** occur when technology or the way it is used does not meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- **Systemic barriers:** can occur in policies, practices and procedures and result in people with disabilities being treated differently than others or sometimes excluded altogether.
- **Physical/ architectural barriers:** actual physical barriers that prevent access for people with disabilities. For example, power-operated doors are broken and not fixed promptly.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

- ✓ Widened entrances and pathways in the paediatric area to accommodate modified strollers and wheelchairs.
- ✓ Acquired a digital wheelchair ramp scale for paediatric patients
- ✓ Purchased two bariatric wheelchairs
- ✓ Published revised accessibility policy
- ✓ Started GHC Accessibility Committee
- ✓ Built partnerships and resources for accessibility education and training
- ✓ Railing installed to ramp between upper and lower parking lots for added safety

2026 – 2028 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The 2026-2028 Multi-Year Accessibility plan focuses primarily on reviewing compliance items and improving governance structures to ensure ongoing compliance.

Priority projects have also been identified for evaluation and implementation based on patient, employee and physician feedback.

ONGOING

Requirement/Area of Improvement	Goal	Department	Standard
Policy and Procedure	Review policies and procedures to identify gaps and ensure accessibility requirements are included where applicable.	All	General
Policy and Procedure	Ensure the updated accessibility policy and policies, including accessibility items, are uploaded to the website/intranet.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Feedback	Review and address all accessibility feedback. Provide recommendations to Senior Leadership Team based on review. Communicate with the responsible department for implementation.	Accessibility Committee	General

YEAR ONE | 2026

Requirement/Area of Improvement	Goal	Department	Standard
Accessibility Plan	Post Multi-Year Accessibility Plan to the website.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Procurement	Review procurement best practices and incorporate them into policy/procedure.	Finance	General
Training	Review training practices for volunteers and ensure AODA training is incorporated.	Trust Fund	General
Compliance Reporting	Submit Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility Compliance Report	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Accessibility Survey	Add accessibility questions to employee experience survey.	Communication, Planning and Risk	General
Accessibility Budget	Assign budget for Accessibility Committee	Senior Leadership Team	General
Notice of Temporary Disruptions	Document procedure for temporary disruptions.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Customer Service
Training	Ensure training covers elements of customer service listed in 80.49.2.	Human Resources	Customer Service
Training	Ensure training is tracked for volunteers.	Trust Fund	Customer Service
Feedback	Implement a “Report a Barrier” button on the website and intranet to simplify the process and notify staff.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Customer Service
Workplace Emergency Response	Review emergency response practices, policy and procedure.	Human Resources	Employment

Requirement/Area of Improvement	Goal	Department	Standard
Accommodations	Review accommodation policy and procedure to ensure all best practices are included and the process is clear to the reader. .	Human Resources	Employment
Informing Employees of Supports	Ensure employees are informed of policies that support employees with disabilities.	Human Resources	Employment
Informing Employees of Supports	Add applicable policies to Learning Management System (LMS).	Human Resources	Employment
Accessible Websites	Ensure website conforms with WCAG 2.0 Level AA	Communications, Planning and Risk	Information and Communications
Accessible Formats and Communications Supports	Document procedure for providing accessible formats and communication supports for the public and employees.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Information and Communications
Accessible Formats and Communications Supports	Ensure the public is notified about the availability of accessible formats and communication supports by posting on website and notifying employees.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Information and Communications
Parking Signage	Install updated parking signage, including designated signage for access vehicles.	Facilities	Public Spaces
Parking Spaces	Incorporate updated parking space guidelines with an access lane when lines are repainted.	Facilities	Public Spaces
Wayfinding	Review and ensure appropriate and accurate signage for accessible public restrooms.	Accessibility Committee	Public Spaces

YEAR TWO | 2027

Requirement/Area of Improvement	Goal	Department	Standard
Accessibility Plan	Prepare and post Annual Status Report to the website.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Training	Explore options for refresher training, easy reference guides, etc.	Human Resources	General
Training	Establish plan to update respective training leads for employees, providers, students, clinical learners, and volunteers when updates occur to policy or legislation.	Human Resources	General
Appointment Booking	Review option for online booking for Diagnostic Imaging.	Clinical Operations	General
Virtual Advisory Committee	Explore options for a virtual accessibility advisory committee to incorporate patient participation in the planning process.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Exceptions	Document procedure for responding when information requested is unconvertible.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Information and Communications
Emergency Procedure, Plans, or Public Safety Information	Make emergency procedures available to the public.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Information and Communications
Obtaining Services	Review service counters and waiting areas to ensure accessibility. Offer recommendations that would improve the user experience	Accessibility Committee	Public Spaces

Requirement/Area of Improvement	Goal	Department	Standard
Accessible Exam Rooms	Within current constraints, review current patient areas that are accessible and ensure broad awareness. Explore what is possible at all sites regarding improving accessibility of physical layout.	Accessibility Committee	Public Spaces
Maintenance	Document procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements	Facilities	Public Spaces

YEAR THREE | 2028

Requirement/Area of Improvement	Goal	Department	Standard
Accessibility Plan	Prepare and post Annual Status Report to the website.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Virtual Advisory Committee	If feasible, establish a virtual advisory committee.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Accessible Documents	Review options for accessible document training for staff where applicable.	Communications, Planning and Risk	General
Accessible Website	Understand and implement strategies to improve website accessibility.	Communications, Planning and Risk	Information and Communications

CLOSING

This multi-year accessibility plan demonstrates our steadfast commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where every patient, visitor, and team member can access care with dignity and ease.

Our approach fully aligns with GHC's Strategic Plan, which is built on three pillars: People, Patients, and Financial Health. Accessibility improvements directly support these priorities by:

People: Ensuring our facilities are welcoming and safe for staff and providers, reinforcing GHC's goal of being the best place to work and practice medicine.

Patients: Delivering a trusted healthcare home for all patients by removing physical and systemic barriers to care.

Financial Health: Investing in sustainable, cost-effective accessibility solutions that meet regulatory standards and anticipate future needs.

As we move forward, accessibility will remain an ongoing responsibility, not a one-time effort. We will continue to review, adapt, and enhance our practices to meet evolving standards and community expectations. These actions strengthen our shared vision of "Best health, best lives for our community" and demonstrate our commitment to compassion, accountability, and respect in every aspect of care.

Together, we are building a more integrated, patient-centred, and inclusive future—one where accessibility is embedded in the foundation of health care delivery.