



SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 73
(Kamloops - Thompson)

SD73 Accessibility Plan – Draft V.1 – 2023-2026

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Land Acknowledgement

School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) sits on the traditional and unceded territories of the Secwepemc Peoples, Secwepemcúlcw. The Simpcw, Whispering Pines/Clinton Indian Band, Tkemlúps te Secwépemc, Skeetchestn Indian Band, Neskonlith Indian Band, Adams Lake Indian Band, and the Skwláx te Secwepemcúlcw are the seven specific Secwepemc communities and territories the District is in and serves. The District also values partnerships with Urban Aboriginal and Métis organizations within the District boundaries.



Introduction

The [Accessible British Columbia Act](#) came into effect September 1, 2022, and applies to school districts as of September 1, 2023. The act aims to increase all persons' ability to meaningfully participate in their communities by attempting to remove barriers through the development of accessibility standards. As part of this mandate, School District No.73 was required to establish:

- an accessibility committee;
- an accessibility plan; and
- a tool to receive feedback on accessibility.

To make our district more accessible, we will adopt the following three key objectives in the development of our accessibility plan:

- Increase meaningful participation in school communities
- Develop standards for improved service delivery in areas such as education including critical infrastructure like entranceways, playgrounds, sidewalks, accessible transportation, and employment opportunities
- Harmonize with other jurisdictions, including federal requirements.

The SD73 Accessibility Plan will outline how we will identify, remove, and prevent barriers within the District. Six specific principles were considered in the development of the accessibility plan: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.

The SD73 Accessibility Plan was developed in consultation with the District Accessibility Committee.



Message from the District

Accessibility, equity, and inclusion are incredibly important! School District No. 73 is committed to removing barriers and creating environments that provide accessible and empowering opportunities for all students and staff to thrive. As part of this commitment, SD73's Accessibility Committee has created the current Accessibility Plan here.

We would appreciate hearing any recommendations you have to make our schools and facilities more accessible in the areas of built environments, attitudes, policies and practices, information and communication and technology based on your experiences within the school district. Your feedback will help identify the barriers that exist and help the Accessibility Committee with possible solutions to issues. If you want to provide feedback verbally, you can also call the school board office at (250) 374-0679, where you will be connected to someone who will record your feedback.

Please share your experiences, concerns, and suggestions with the Accessibility Committee. You can also share your thoughts by:

- Email [HERE](#),
- Calling (250) 374-0679, and the receptionist will connect you to a committee member,
- Mailing written feedback to the School Board Office at 1383 9th Avenue, Kamloops, BC, V2C 3X7, or
- Completing a paper copy of the accessibility survey and deliver/mail it to the School Board Office.

Thank you in advance for helping to make the Kamloops-Thompson School District more accessible and inclusive for everyone!

District Strategic Plan

The 2022-2027 District Strategic Plan, is centered around the four value commitments of equity, connection/relationships, well-being, and sustainability. Equity refers to removing barriers and creating environments that provide accessible and empowering opportunities for all students and staff to thrive. The value commitments are achieved by enacting the Seven Grandfather Teachings: Courage, Love, Wisdom, Respect, Truth, Honesty, and Humility.



Definitions

The following definitions are provided in the [Accessible British Columbia Act](#) and the [Developing Your First Accessibility Plan](#) guide which was created as part of the Accessible Organization Project led by Disability Alliance BC.

Accessibility	The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.
Accessibility Committee	An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.
Accessibility Plan	A plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization through the considerations of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.
Adaptability	Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
Barriers Types of Barriers	<p>Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Barrier: A barrier resulting from architectural design or outdoor spaces which can include certain smells or sounds, internal lighting, configuration of classrooms and meeting rooms and the size and width of halls and doorways. • Attitudinal Barrier: A barrier that arises from the attitudes of people, including discriminatory behaviours, false assumptions, and a lack of disability awareness. • Communication and Information Barrier: A barrier that arises when communicating, locating or accessing information, including in-person, by telephone or online. This could include the use of signage, fonts, brochures, forms, manuals, and equipment labels. • Policy or Practice Barrier: A barrier resulting from rules, regulations or protocols which could include processes, policies, and standard operating practices. • Technology Barrier: Barriers that result from the use of inaccessible devices, platforms, closed captioning, software, programs, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones, and switches, including the lack of assistive technology
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 due to the interaction of an impairment or a barrier.
Diversity	Every person is unique. 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 impairment, which is permanent, temporary, or episodic.
Inclusion	All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
Public Feedback Tool	A mechanism for the school district to receive information from the public about the School Districts Accessibility Plan and/or barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.

Self- Determination	Empowering 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.”

Accessible BC Act

The Accessible British Columbia Act, enacted in June 2021, and initially the accessibility planning requirements only applied to provincial government organizations. The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as accessible organizations, and school districts and independent schools will be required to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility by September 1, 2023. The Act's goal is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the province's life.

Principles of the Accessible BC Act

The Accessible BC Act includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The Definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation.

Adaptability: Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

Collaboration: Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

Diversity: Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

Inclusion: All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

Self-Determination: Accessibility plans should seek 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.” An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who interact with the organization.

About Our Committee

The District Accessibility Committee was formed in May 2023 and is comprised of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Kamloops-Thompson Teachers Association (KTTA), excluded employees and senior staff, the Board Chairperson, a District Parents Advisory Council (DPAC) representative, a provincial teacher, and community service providers. Our members either identify as having, or support those with, varying physical, sensory, and neurodivergent abilities, and include Indigenous representation. A student and an Elder will also be participating in the Accessibility Committee.

On May 10, 2023, the Accessibility Committee met for the first time to review the legislative requirements of the Accessibility Act, determine the composition of the committee, develop Terms of Reference, and to begin identifying barriers that our school community members face.

The Committee engaged in an activity that started with an individual reflection on barriers that people who have disabilities encounter. Then, committee members were put into small groups to share their reflections with each other and identify themes these barriers belong to. Committee members discussed barriers with colleagues and people they support.

Each committee member communicated with their respective colleagues to consider the best way to receive feedback from folks in identifying barriers people with disabilities face. The Accessibility Committee then met on July 10, 2023, to consolidate the identified barriers into five focus areas:

1. Built Environments
2. Attitudes
3. Policies and Practices
4. Information and Communication
5. Technology

The Committee continues to brainstorm action items that will reduce or eliminate barriers to accessibility and discuss feedback from students, staff members and families who have experienced accessibility issues when interacting within the school district. Feedback from people who have disabilities is needed to identify and remove accessibility barriers. Students, staff, and families will be able to provide feedback by:

- Emailing accessibilityplan@sd73.bc.ca,
- Calling (250) 374-0679, and the receptionist will connect you to a committee member,
- Mailing written feedback to the School Board Office at 1383 9th Avenue, Kamloops, BC, V2C 3X7

This communication is placed on the District website home page under the Community/Parents and Students tab and communicated through school newsletters, social media, and the assistance of the DPAC and Indigenous Family Voices for Education (IFVE) group.

The Accessibility Committee will continue to meet to review strategies for each of the five areas and updates are available to families and community service providers on the School District website. The Committee finalized the Accessibility survey available to students, staff, and families in January 2024. 200 survey responses were collected. The Accessibility Committee continues to meet to determine strategies in each of the Accessibility focus areas, along with timelines to complete strategies and measurements of success.

Overview of the Plan

The plan includes identifying, preventing, and removing barriers to accessibility that students, staff, and family members who have disabilities face within the school district. The Accessibility Committee and District are working hard to create accessible, inclusive environments and your feedback is important. The plan is targeting improvements in:

1. Built (Physical) Environments
2. Attitudes
3. Policies and Practices
4. Information and Communication
5. Technology

Focus Areas

Please note that the plan is fluid. The Accessibility Plan will be updated regularly. The most current version of the Accessibility Plan will always be posted on the SD73 home page under the Community/Parents and Students tab.

The Accessibility Committee met on Feb 6, 2024, to review feedback collected through student learning circles and the SD73 Accessibility IDEAS form (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility Survey). The Accessibility Committee will add timelines and measurements of success to its plan.

Focus Area #1 – Built Environment

Priority: Assess the accessibility of all schools and District facilities to obtain baseline information and inform future school builds, upgrades, and renovations.

Action	Measurement of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Review survey responses to list physical barriers identified in each school or district site. Create a list of necessary adaptations and priorities	Completed list for each school and District site	June 30, 2025		
Create a way to highlight work orders that are focused on accessibility issues	System in place	June 30, 2024		
Create an Accessibility checklist for school teams to use as a tool to assess accessibility of each facility	Checklist completed Accessibility Tool from BCCAISE	Feb 2025		
Perform an Accessibility assessment at every school and district facility using BCCAISE Accessibility Tool	Results from each assessment will be shared with the Accessibility Committee	June 2025		
Recommendation: Include a member of the Accessibility Committee on the Snine Committee	Make recommendation to the Board of Education, through Superintendent Nixon. Bonnie McBride is representative for DPAC and can also rep for AC.	March 2024		

Complete an inventory of playgrounds to gauge how many require accessibility Upgrades. Accessibility Tool from BCCAISE	Survey school leaders to indicate accessibility of individual playgrounds.	June 30, 2025		
Examine ways to improve busing to accommodate students who have disabilities	Develop a system to prioritize field trip requests that involve students who have disabilities	September 2024 – December 2024		
Examine ways to improve snow removal at schools and District sites, including crosswalks	Develop a system to prioritize snow removal at schools that have students and/or staff with known disabilities	September 2024 – December 2024		
Increase the number of accessible parking spaces, where possible, at schools. Accessibility Tool from BCCAISE	More accessible parking spaces at each location	September 2024 – December 2024		
Perform an Accessibility Audit of a school (possibly through a Rick Hansen Accessibility Consultant)	Audit completed and results shared with school and district staff, as well as Accessibility Committee	June 30, 2024	Rhonda Nixon	✓

Focus Area #2 – Attitudes

Priority 1: Implement a communication plan to foster a collective understanding of “disability”, “accessibility”, “barriers” and “inclusion.”

Action	Measurement of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Create and share resources that inform folks of important definitions. Create a newsletter to share resources and news.	Videos provided to all staff, parents/caregivers Posters outlining definitions created and shared with staff and school communities	January 2025, ongoing		
Create a resource outlining person-first language	Posters created and shared with staff and school communities	September 2024		

Priority 2: Increase awareness of our individual and collective responsibilities to create and maintain inclusive environments.

Actions	Measurement of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Continue implementing the annual SD73 Diversity Film Festival	Monitor the number of staff participating in the Diversity Film Festival.	February, annually	Deanna Brady	

Answer phones with "weytk"	Consider committee feedback on how to do this	Next committee meeting		
Sensory sound, smell, touch through quiet nature sounds in buildings	Consider how this can be done with the committee. Newsletter?	Next committee meeting		
Present accessibility awareness information to all district leaders	Track presentations during school leaders' meetings Include information in school leaders' bulletin	Ongoing, at monthly school leaders' meetings Ongoing		✓
District leaders share information with school staff/teams and PACs (Parent Advisory Council)	Copies of information shared in school newsletters and with PACs/DPAC	Ongoing		✓
Share survey responses with school and district leaders	Complete, as demonstrated in school leaders' meeting minutes	March 7, 2024		✓
Review Accessibility plan with school and district leaders	Shared Accessibility Plan with school leaders	April 10, 2024		✓
Communicate feedback tool on school website	Share feedback tool in educators' bulletin	April 30, 2024		✓

Priority 3: Create and communicate school and district professional development opportunities to staff and school communities (Pro D opportunities are great 2x/year, but what can we do in between?)

Actions	Measurements of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Promote Deaf History School Leaders/Parent Bulletin	Consider how this can be done with the committee	Next committee meeting		
Promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion for neurodiverse students and staff through the education of neurodivergent conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, etc.	Advertising sessions available by September of each year and measure attendees. - in progress (POPARD to present to DRRs in January) -Grant proposal submitted through POPFASD for support with literacy and FASD Host specific training for Certified Education Assistants and monitor attendance - April 28 CEA Workshop is currently being planned. Presenters will include:	September 30, 2024 October and April professional development days, annually and through Parent Engagement Sessions, Employee Reps (e.g. POPARD) - nothing was planned within SD73 this year in October, however the free online POPCON	Deanna Brady / Lise Hyam	

	POPFASD, POPARD, CTFRC, Executive Functioning, Mental Health	workshop was shared with staffs. (Provincial Outreach Programs)		
Share learning resources and highlight curriculum examples to highlight accessibility lessons	Track examples on the school district website, MySD73, and Superintendent's weekly bulletin.	Ongoing		

Priority 4: Promote significant days/events throughout the year

Actions	Measurements of Success	Timeline
Sept 9 Red Shoes Rock (FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder))	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	September 9, 2024
Sept 21 International Day of Sign Languages	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	September 21, 2024
Oct 10 World Mental Health Day	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	October 10, 2024
Dec 3 International Day of People with Disabilities	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	December 3, 2024
Jan 4 World Braille Day	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	January 4, 2025
Apr 2 World Autism Awareness Day	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	April 2, 2025
May 28-June 3 AccessAbility Week	Participation rates in lessons, highlight day in District communications	May 28 – June 3, 2024
June 1-30 Deaf-Blind Awareness Month	Participation rates, highlight day in District communications	June 1 – 30, 2024

Priority 5: Host parent/caregiver engagement sessions that are focused on supporting children/students who have disabilities

Actions	Measurements of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Ensure parent/caregiver engagement sessions that focus on supporting students with disabilities are offered annually	Advertise parent/caregiver sessions each September and ensure diverse topics are selected	September 5, 2024	Lise Hyam /Deanna Brady	✓

Focus Area #3 – Policies & Practices

An organization’s policies, practices and procedures can result in exclusion.

Priority 1: Seek opportunities to increase the employment for persons with disabilities.

Action	Measurement of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Youth witnesses for meetings	Consider how this can be done with the committee	Next committee meeting		
Continue to offer training to help professional and support staff to understand trauma-informed practices, and mental health curriculum.	Evaluation of curriculum materials for cultural relevance and trauma informed content.	Ongoing, review data mid-year (February), and end of year, (June), annually		
Improving psychological safety in the workplace by training employees at each location in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).	Staff participation in Mental Health First Aid sessions offered by Human Resources	Ongoing, collect data annually, in June. 9 hr course Approx. \$150-200 per person		
Mandatory professional development on accessibility.	Onboarding modules for new hires. Examine mandatory training options for staff	June 30, 2024 Mandatory training is Bullying and Harassment-Respectful Workplace Training and Duty of Care		

Priority 2: Continue to emphasize curriculum, processes, and resources to support students who have disabilities.

Action	Measurement of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Continue the emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion to foster a sense of belonging for students	Provide students with access to support staff trained to assist with specific accessibility needs. Ensure that staff is trained in trauma-informed practices, cultural competence, and mental health support. Audit the number of resources for equity, diversity and inclusion in school and District library learning commons	Ongoing		✓
Continue expectations of Competency-Based IEPs (Individual Education Plans) and staff training	Ensure each IEP is accessible and regularly reviewed to reflect the evolving needs of students with disabilities. Ensure IEPs reflect and respect each student's cultural background, incorporating cultural healing practices where appropriate.	Ongoing		✓
Continue providing culturally relevant mental health supports	Track number of students receiving support from Aboriginal Family Counsellors District teams (Inclusive Education, Aboriginal Education and Curriculum and Career teams engage in San'Yas cultural humility and safety training	June 30, Ongoing	Deanna Brady / Kelly Kirby	✓
Mental health literacy and Mental Health in Schools Strategy: building capacity, compassionate systems leadership, and mental health in classrooms	Review number of staff attending professional development in these areas	Collect data throughout the year, and summarize by June 30, annually Ongoing	Deanna Brady/ Health Promoting Schools Coordinator (Alex Inglis)	✓

Emphasize trauma informed network	Review number of staff attending professional development in this area. SFC's took virtual session. MH Clinician presented monthly at IES meetings.	Collect data throughout the year, and summarize by June 30, annually		✓
Continue to support ways to increase the number of psychological education assessments completed each year	Use Inclusive Education Services funds to pay school psychologists to complete additional assessments in the summer	July, August – 2024 completed. Unavailable in 2025 due to budget constraints		✓

Focus Area #4 – Information & Communication

People with disabilities are excluded because they use other ways to communicate.

Priority: To enhance the accessibility of information and communication for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Actions	Measurements of Success	Timeline	Who	Completed
Develop and share considerations and expectations for accessibility in meetings (eg. programming consultation, CBIEP meetings & SBT meetings)	District guideline document created and distributed to school leaders and staff, outlining inclusive practices/expectations to increase accessibility at meetings. Share at school leaders meeting and staff bulletins.	September 2024 Ongoing	Assistive Technology Resource Teacher	
Develop and share guidelines for accessible written and visual communication, such as fonts, use of pictures and clear language. ARC-BC workshops have been made available.	Guidelines are completed and distributed to school leaders and staff.	February 2025 Ongoing		

<p>Increase awareness of alternate formats for students and adults (e.g., symbol use to accompany text, braille, large print, tactile documents, signage, maps, magnifying devices)</p>	<p>Audit existing formats and track number of alternate formats available.</p> <p>Evidence of alternative formats in schools.</p>	<p>September 30, 2024, to June 30, 2025.</p>	<p>Assistive Technology Resource Teacher</p>	
<p>Provide information and training for accessible format resources to be more inclusive of people with disabilities eg. ARC-BC, SET-BC, consultations and workshops</p>	<p>Offer professional development to support staff, teachers, and school leaders.</p>	<p>September 30, 2024, to June 30, 2025.</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Assistive Technology Resource Teacher</p>	

Focus Area #5 – Technology

Priority: Maintain and enhance implementation of assistive technology.

Actions	Measurements of Success	Timelines	Who	Completed
Perform a SD73 Inventory of existing accessibility software and hardware.	Audit existing software and hardware in District.	April 2024 – June 30, 2025 Ongoing (catalogued through HGEC library; Elizabeth Webber maintains a separate spreadsheet that also includes student names; outdated technology is either donated to schools or recycled through the maintenance department, and the library catalogue is updated)	Assistive Technology Resource Teacher	
Designing for inclusion training opportunity on creating accessible digital formats. eg. ARC-BC, consultations and workshops	Inclusive Education Services staff tracks the number of participants (students and staff) at training sessions.	September 30, 2024, to June 30, 2025. Ongoing	Assistive Technology Resource Teacher	
Examine ways to make SD73 website more visually accessible (e.g., large print option, colour contrast, alternative text, etc.)	Adaptations made to the website. Large Print Option is available	January 2025 – June 30, 2025	Website Coordinator	

Feedback Mechanism

Students, staff, and families will have many ways to provide feedback on the Accessibility Plan and accessibility within the district.

Your feedback will help identify the barriers that exist and help the Accessibility Committee with practical solutions. Students, staff, and families are encouraged to also provide their experiences,

concerns, and suggestions as follows:

- Email: accessibilityplan@sd73.bc.ca
- Call the School District at 250-374-0679 to verbally complete the survey or provide other feedback directly to a committee member
- Mail or hand deliver written feedback or a paper copy of the survey to the School Board Office at 1383 9th Avenue, Kamloops, BC, V2C 3X7

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Committee's work will be ongoing to report on actions and timelines which will form a part of this evolving plan. Public feedback will be monitored and will form part of the priorities identified.

The SD73 Accessibility Plan will be continually monitored and formally evaluated by the SD73 Accessibility Committee annually.

The SD73 Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every 3 years in consultation with the Accessibility Committee.

Appendix A - Terms of Reference

ESTABLISHMENT

- May 10, 2023
- Established as a non-statutory body
- To assist and support the Board of Education

PARTICIPANTS

- School district staff and representatives from community and stakeholder agencies
- At least half the members identifying as persons with disabilities or representing organizations that provide services or programs to them
- Required to have Indigenous representation within the Committee
- An Elder representative will be invited to participate on the Committee
- The Committee will include student representation

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Accessibility Committee will:
 - Provide input and feedback for the Board of Education
 - Identify opportunities to remove barriers to accessibility at School District No.73
 - Provide input into the School District's new Accessibility Plan
- The Committee will assist and report to the Board of Education on any matter falling within its mandate, as and when requested
- The Committee does not have any delegated authority of the Board of Education, authority to speak on behalf of the Board, or power to authorize any actions on behalf of the Board
- Being a non-statutory body without delegated authority, no action of the Committee will be binding on the Board of Education, unless the Board specifically approves the action
- The Committee, in carrying out its roles and responsibilities, must do so in accordance with all applicable federal and provincial laws and legislation as well as School District administrative procedures and Board policies
- The Committee will work collaboratively with other organizations and agencies, including rural partners, within the District's region

MEETINGS

- Minimum, four (4) times per calendar year or as needed
- Accessibility Committee members as liaisons and may attend meetings
- Staff people will record a summary of discussion points raised. Meeting summaries will be forwarded to Superintendent Rhonda Nixon
- The Assistant Superintendent – Inclusive Education will be the Chairperson in charge of the scheduled meetings
- The Committee Chair will provide the Board with an update through Board Reports

Appendix B – About Disability

The Disability Continuum

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word “disability.” However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms, and treatments. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.” Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm. Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength, and mental powers.

Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled “Ageing and health”, 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm. The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual’s medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel.

A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person’s disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities reduce one’s ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Impaired vision can restrict a person’s ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and must pay attention. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you are giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you are approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Do not just assume the individual cannot see you.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use emails, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Do not shout.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- Attract the person’s attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where the person can see your face. □ Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper. **Use ‘speech to text’ apps/features on your iPhone**
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
- Be clean and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary.
- Make sure you have been understood.
- Service animals are working and must pay attention. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing, or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.

- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one’s ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

- As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else.
- They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.
- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you have said.
- If you cannot understand what is being said, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in many different communication difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person’s ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning or cognitive disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person.
- Take some time – people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you are dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”

- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like everyone else. You will not know that the person has a mental health disability unless you are informed of it, but if someone is having difficulty controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring and listen to people with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

- Just because a person has one disability does not mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you do not understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered ‘yes’ or ‘no.’
- Take some time. Be patient and polite and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.
- Patience, respect, and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Deafblind Disabilities

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet, or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deafblind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deafblind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- A deafblind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deafblind.

- Do not touch service animals – they are working and must always pay attention.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf blind person without permission.

Appendix C – Additional Resources

What are other sources of information about the Accessible BC Act?

- [Legislation – Accessible BC Act](#)
- [Regulation – Accessible BC Act](#)
- [BC Accessibility Hub](#)

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canada Ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
- [British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)
- [Accessible British Columbia Act](#)
- [BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary](#)

Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools and School Boards

- [BC Accessibility Hub](#)
- [Universal Design](#)
- [Special Education Technology BC \(SET BC\)](#)
- [Accessible Resource Centre - BC](#)
- [Standards Council of Canada](#)
- [B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design](#)
- [A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces](#) (Rick Hansen Foundation)
- [Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)
- [Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)
- [Canadian Hearing Services](#)
- [Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program](#) (Complex Needs)
- [Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#)
- [Brain Injury Canada](#)
- [Spinal Cord Injury Canada](#)
- [Tourette Canada](#)
- [Kelty Mental Health](#) (BC Children's Hospital)