



In Partnership With



BOMA Canada

## 2022 Accessibility Guide

**How to create  
inclusive  
buildings for  
everyone,  
everywhere.**





## BOMA Accessibility Guide

We are proud to present this accessibility guide—a resource to help building owners and managers be inclusive of people with varying temporary and permanent disabilities, and ensure their buildings are sustainable for our aging population.

Dear Friends,

As we come to the end of two years of ongoing business closures driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, and economic recovery begins across the country, it is more important than ever to work together to ensure our spaces work for everyone.

1 in 5 Canadian adults identify as having a disability. These are our colleagues, customers, employees and friends. We must consider all Canadians when we examine accessibility or millions of Canadians will be left behind.

Reopening strategies need to work for everyone. Building owners and managers are in a unique position to transform the built environment so it can best serve the needs of everyone. The federal government has committed up to \$100B in new infrastructure and we need to ensure these new buildings aren't being built with new barriers.

Since we first launched this guide, Canada has introduced the Accessible Canada Act, and many provinces have implemented or updated their own accessibility legislation. But we know that isn't enough to meet the needs of the 6.2 million Canadians living with a disability.

That is why BOMA Canada and the Rick Hansen Foundation have updated this Accessibility Guide:

to help building owners and managers understand what accessibility is, where it should be factored into a site's plans and how to start. This guide has been tailored to address the questions and specific needs of those in the commercial real estate industry.

### **Who should read this?**

This guide is primarily intended for building owners and managers of commercial real estate, and for anyone interested in how commercial buildings can be made more accessible to meet the needs of Canadians of all abilities. We believe that anyone who works in the industry should be concerned with accessibility and will find this guide valuable.

### **How should this guide be used?**

This guide is intended as an introduction to understanding the importance of accessibility, its relevance to the work you do, and how it can be incorporated into any site. It is not all-encompassing, and should be supplemented with further reading and adherence to specific standards with the help of professionals.

Removing barriers in our built environment that have previously prevented people from participating in our workplaces, homes and communities, is critical to allowing every Canadian to fully participate in our society. We hope that you find this Accessibility Guide useful, and that it can act as a roadmap on your journey to creating more accessible and inclusive spaces that benefit everyone.

Sincerely,



**Benjamin Shinewald**  
President & CEO  
*BOMA Canada*



**Rick Hansen**  
Founder  
*Rick Hansen Foundation*



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## Why is Accessibility Important?

There is a growing need to ensure increased access as the number of people with disabilities continues to rise. Existing building codes vary widely by province, and while buildings may have certain accessible features, overall, they generally fall short of the actual needs of people with challenges related to vision, hearing, and mobility. Looking at the building from a user experience perspective ensures that it can accommodate everyone—parents with strollers, older adults and seniors, and people with temporary and permanent disabilities—and is inclusive of people's needs across their lifespan.

### **Accessibility is Good for Business**

Recent research from the Conference Board of Canada<sup>1</sup> shows that by 2030:

- Real spending by Canadians with disabilities related to mobility, vision, and hearing will rise from 14 to 21% of the total consumer market.
- Improvements to workplace access would allow 550,000 Canadians with disabilities to work more, increasing GDP by \$16.8 billion.
- The increase in labour availability would lift the income of people with disabilities by more than \$13.5 billion.

Simply put, accessibility means more people can access your business, whether they're customers, clients, tenants, employees, or members of the community. No building or site is truly accessible—or sustainable—if it doesn't take into consideration the wide range of needs of its users.

How do you, as a building owner or manager, ensure your buildings are truly accessible? One of the first steps is to look at Meaningful Access.

<sup>1</sup> Source: The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments, *Conference Board of Canada*, 2018

# Canada's Report Card on Disability & Inclusion

Fall 2021

The Angus Reid Institute polled 2,085 Canadians in a public opinion survey on disability, accessibility and inclusion.

The new data shows that people with disabilities continue to face barriers to employment and that Canadians agree accessibility should be front of mind for all future construction.

## Corporate Canada Can Do Better<sup>1</sup>



**91%**

say it's unacceptable that people with physical disabilities are underemployed because of workplace barriers.



**40%**

of people with disabilities say corporations fall short when it comes to hiring those with disabilities. This increases to 55% for 18- to 34-year olds with a disability.



**39%**

of people with disabilities say companies fall short in supporting employees with disabilities.



## Canadians Consider Disability in Equity, Diversity & Inclusion<sup>1</sup>



**78%**

believe disability should be included in equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.



**62%**

say they would be more likely to support a company with specific policies supporting people with disabilities.

## Canadians Care About Access<sup>2</sup>

**92%**

believe that taxpayer funded projects should be held to the highest accessibility standards.

**56%**

prefer a priority on BOTH environmental and accessibility concerns when it comes to how taxpayer money is spent.

**78%**

believe there should be a national standard of accessibility.

<sup>1</sup> Corporate Canada gets mixed report card from Canadians living with disabilities, Nov. 4, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Platform Inaccessibility, Sept. 7, 2021 - View full report on [www.rickhansen.com/reports](http://www.rickhansen.com/reports).

## What is Meaningful Access?

Meaningful Access is building design that meets the real accessibility needs of all users, regardless of their physical ability. It recognizes that the accessibility of any given site needs to be judged on the basis of the entire user experience, rather than by simply evaluating its physical access features. For instance, a public washroom with grab bars is of little use if it's located at the top of a set of stairs that many people would not be able to climb.

Meaningful access differs from the traditional approach to setting the level of accessibility

“A building with meaningful access has a few distinctive traits. These traits are not the nuts and bolts of how steep your ramp should be. Instead, they are the outcome, they are what you achieve when all of your accessible features come together. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

– **Brad McCannell, Vice President Access & Inclusion, Rick Hansen Foundation**

for a given site, which often relies on minimum requirements, such as building code. This code-compliant approach may meet the letter of the law, but not the spirit of meaningful access. Code focuses narrowly on access features for specific areas and for a small, defined group of people with disabilities. For example, a building may have a few features for wheelchair users, but no features to assist individuals with vision or hearing disabilities. As a result, a building's design can frequently make life difficult for many

of its intended users. A planned meaningful access strategy creates a built environment that anticipates the needs of all of its users and meets those user's needs as equals.

When accessibility is considered from the perspective of the people using the space, and not just out of obligation, the site transforms into a place where everyone is equal and can use it with dignity. This is the true meaning behind meaningful access.

After understanding the value of creating meaningful access, the next step is to look at how to achieve this in your buildings and sites. Universal Design is an approach to design that offers a holistic perspective, creating real and meaningful access for all users, no matter their level of physical ability.



# Building to RHF Accessibility Certification A Cost Comparison Feasibility Study

January 2020



## Build for everyone, everywhere — without increasing costs

HCMA Architecture + Design (HCMA) conducted a feasibility study on behalf of the Rick Hansen Foundation. The study evaluates a detailed

cost comparison of Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC), Canada's 2015 National Building Code (NBC), and the 2018 Ontario Building Code (OBC). The findings will help advocate for greater accessibility – to the benefit of all.

## Improved access for new builds at minimal cost



# 1%

The average increase in construction cost to achieve RHFAC Gold\* compared to National or Ontario building code.



# 0.4%

The average increase in construction cost to achieve RHFAC Gold\* for an office building compared to National or Ontario building code.

# \$0

The cost for new builds to achieve RHF Accessibility Certified\* when thoughtful planning and design are applied.

## Building to code won't achieve RHF Accessibility Certification



# 35%

The RHFAC Rating Score a building would achieve if built to National Building Code.



# 42%

The RHFAC Rating Score a building would achieve if built to Ontario Building Code.

\*Buildings can achieve 'RHF Accessibility Certified' or 'RHF Accessibility Certified Gold' levels by scoring at least 60 per cent or 80 per cent respectively on the RHFAC Rating Survey.



Source: Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Cost Comparison Feasibility Study, HCMA, January 2020. Read the full report at: [www.rickhansen.com/reports](http://www.rickhansen.com/reports).



# Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) is a rating system that measures the accessibility of the built environment for existing and pre-construction sites and promotes increased access through the adoption of Universal Design principles. It also helps guide a property towards meeting *meaningful* accessibility. Whether you are a property owner, building or facilities manager, architect or engineer, RHFAC will give you a real snapshot of your building's current level of access and a roadmap on where and how to improve.

**RHFAC is the first program of its kind to:**

- Measure the level of meaningful access, based on the experience of people with varying disabilities affecting their mobility, vision, and hearing;
- Train individuals who are authorized to conduct ratings through an RHFAC Professional designation; and



- Recognize and celebrate a building's level of accessibility through formal certification as 'RHF Accessibility Certified' or 'RHF Accessibility Certified Gold.'

Getting your site rated will prepare your organization for Canada's changing demographics and recently announced federal accessibility legislation. Any building owner choosing to have their site rated will receive a scorecard and rating summary outlining areas of potential improvement to help guide them improve the accessibility of their site. The scorecard is not made public unless the building owner chooses to have the venue listed on the online RHFAC Registry hosted by CSA Group. For organizations that want to showcase their commitment to access and inspire others, e-labels, window decals and plaques are also available.

Getting rated will position your organization as a leader in building a sustainable Canada that is accessible for all.

To learn more visit [www.RickHansen.com/RHFAC](http://www.RickHansen.com/RHFAC)



## RHFAC Benefits for BOMA members

### BOMA BEST™ Rewards RHFAC with Innovation Points

BOMA Canada is proud to support RHFAC by including a question on the achievement of RHF Accessibility Certification in the BOMA BEST Sustainable Buildings assessment, Canada's leading environmental certification program for existing buildings.

The question, located in the "Comfort" section of the assessment, rewards buildings with bonus points if they are currently RHF Accessibility Certified (12 points) or RHF Accessibility Certified Gold (16 points).

The question is applicable for the following property types:

- Office
- Light Industrial
- Universal
- Open Air Retail
- Enclosed Shopping Centre

These points go toward the buildings overall score, helping them earn their building BOMA BEST™ certification.

Learn about all the benefits of BOMA BEST™ certification.

## BOMA Canada and Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Award

Each year, BOMA Canada and RHF present the Rick Hansen Accessibility Challenge Award at the National Awards Gala during BOMEX. The award goes to the BOMA member building that achieves the highest RHFAC rating score.



### **BOMA members receive 10% discount on RHFAC Registry Application Fee**

RHF is pleased to offer BOMA Members a special 10% discount on RHFAC Registry Application Fee. To take advantage of this rate, register your site on the RHFAC Registry and use discount code: BOMA2022.



## Accessibility Tips

RHFAC breaks down the built environment into eight key areas: vehicular access; exterior approach and entrance; interior circulation; interior services and environment; sanitary facilities; wayfinding and signage; emergency systems; and additional uses of space.

It also recognizes how the journey of the user crosses from the public realm, to landlord and tenant controlled spaces. Therefore, RHFAC certification can be tailored for different perspectives and uses. It can be delivered across a general element of the building, such as the entrance, through to full access into a tenant space, and into the user work environment.

Here are just a couple questions building owners and managers should be asking themselves in each area:

### Vehicular Access



### Approaching the Site (Includes parking, passenger zone and public transit)

- Is there a suitable number of clearly marked designated parking spaces on a level surface that is close to the main entrance reserved for people with disabilities?
- Is there a drop-off/pick-up zone with appropriate markings, a level, no-slip surface, and seating?

### Exterior Approach & Entrance

#### Approaching the Building and Entrance (Includes pathways, ramps, stairs and entrance)

- Do the pathways leading to the building have level, firm, and slip-resistant ground surfaces and is there an easily identified accessible route (e.g., level, low slope route or ramp) where there are stairs at level changes?
- Is the entrance step-free and the door wide enough for people using mobility aids/devices and service animals?

### Interior Circulation

#### Navigating inside the Building (Includes doors, corridors, hallways, stairs and elevators)

- If the building has more than one floor, is there an elevator that provides access to all floors above or below grade?
- Does the elevator include Braille and tactile features on cab operating buttons, audio floor announcements and handrails?

### Interior Services and Environment

#### Using Facilities inside the Building (Includes lobby, reception, waiting areas, service counters, area acoustics and lighting)

- Are reception and service counters equipped

with assistive listening technologies to ensure clear communication for people with hearing disabilities?

- Do reception or service counters provide universal height counters for people to use in a seated position?

## Sanitary Facilities

### Using Sanitary Facilities (Includes washrooms and showers)

- Is at least one stall in each washroom designed for people who use a wheelchair or is a universal washroom provided?
- Are there easy to operate washroom accessories mounted at an accessible height for people using mobility devices?

## Wayfinding and Signage

### Locating Facilities and Amenities (Includes general and room signage, directories and communications)

- Is the information provided on signs in large text, high colour contrast with its background, and in Braille and raised characters?
- Are there different techniques used to help people navigate the building, such as the use of different colours, flooring textures, and landmarks?

## Emergency Systems

### Exiting the Building Safely (Includes emergencies, fire alarms and evacuation procedures)

- Are there fire/smoke protected areas of refuge or an emergency evacuation chair on floor levels that do not have an accessible emergency exit at grade for people unable to use exit stairs?



- Are there visual fire alarms installed throughout the building to notify people who are deaf or hard of hearing of emergency situations?

## Additional Use of Space

### Using Specific Spaces in the Building (Includes workstations in offices, cafeterias and retail outlets)

- Are there adjustable height desks and chairs provided at office workstations?
- Are there wide access aisles and turnaround points provided in retail stores for people using mobility devices to navigate around the store?



## Impact Story:

### Cadillac Fairview Commits to Accessibility and Inclusion

Cadillac Fairview (CF) has made accessibility and inclusion a part of their company culture and first embarked on its Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHAC) journey in Ontario and British Columbia in 2018. With federal and provincial legislation requirements across the country, CF wanted to ensure they were creating spaces that worked for everyone.

“As a company committed to wellness and inclusivity and owners and managers of best-in-class buildings, it is essential that we provide a welcoming and accessible environment for everyone,” Mathur Variem, Senior Director, Occupational & Life Safety at Cadillac Fairview said. “This involves removing barriers of all forms, both physical and non-physical, to create a happier, healthier and more productive setting. This rests not just within our own work environment but stretches beyond to include our tenants, partners and visitors.”

“In recent years we have focused on improving frequently used and common in-person and online access points,” Variem said. “This includes implementing family and accessible washrooms, new waste collecting stations and guest services centres, expanding our seating areas at select retail centres and redesigning our websites to make them more accessible.”

#### **Buildings Without Barriers**

CF participated in the Rick Hansen Foundation’s (RHF) Buildings Without Barriers (BWB) Challenge in 2021 — a challenge in which commercial property owners and managers were able to gain

valuable information about their building and show their visitors, employees, and customers their commitment to creating accessible spaces for everyone, everywhere.

In October 2021, CF announced that 10 of their office buildings in Toronto achieved RHFAC. They also received the BWB Challenge's Commitment award, which is awarded to the participant with the greatest number of sites rated with RHFAC.

According to Variem, participating in this challenge was an opportunity to first identify barriers and make necessary enhancements. It also allows Cadillac Fairview to showcase their commitment to improving accessibility.

"The process of certification helps to provide transparency, accountability and confidence that we're creating the right changes to benefit anyone accessing our properties," Variem explained.

Having buildings rated and certified provides CF with the confidence that their buildings meet a certain level of meaningful accessibility.

"Through our work with consultants (RHFAC Professionals), we rely on third-party expertise to assist our efforts to improve our buildings and our partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation is another measure to ensure that our efforts have been independently reviewed for accessibility."

### A part of the culture

CF wants to create a strong user experience for every individual. Ensuring their buildings are accessible is kept top-of-mind. Going forward, CF hopes to continue their journey with RHFAC to rate and make improvements to all their buildings.

"CF is in the business of creating connected communities and this cannot be accomplished without accessibility. CF serves millions of guests, partners, clients and employees with varying

needs so we have a responsibility to continue to improve our offering and it's something we don't take lightly," Variem noted. "Ultimately, accessibility is about user experience at CF and we believe that everyone should have access to our spaces and include everyone, regardless of disability."



## Impact Study: Accessibility in the Workplace

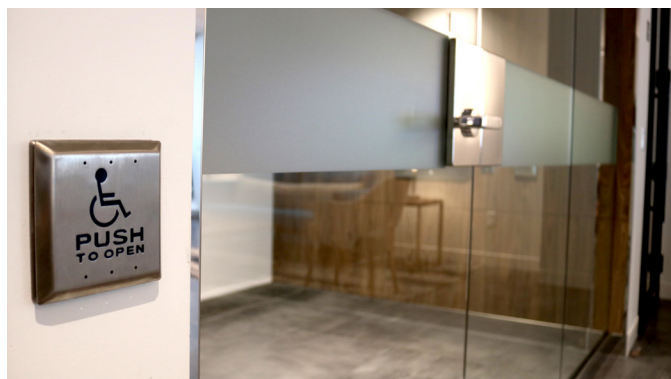
In June 2018, the headquarters for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Ottawa moved to a new building managed by BOMA member Colonnade Bridgeport. One of their priorities with the new space was ensuring its accessibility. The new office was built with accessibility in mind, but the team, including Vice President of Operations and Program Implementation Stacey Roy, knew it was important to really understand its level of accessibility. Working with RHFAC Professional Jenny Blome, the Chamber of Commerce office undertook an RHFAC rating to measure its level of meaningful access.

Accessibility is a crucial component of a successful workplace, says Roy: "It's the opportunities—not just in servicing your clients and making your organization more accessible, but also allowing all people to have employment opportunities."

Accessible workplaces are vital to business owners and managers as they can attract a wider pool of qualified employees. There are currently about 550,000 people with disabilities in Canada who know they could find meaningful employment if barriers were removed.

Your business can have a major advantage over competitors if it removes barriers. A recent report<sup>1</sup> shows there is a significant financial benefit to inclusivity. Companies that excelled in disability employment and inclusion had, on average, 28 percent higher revenue and twice as likely to outperform their peers in terms of total shareholder returns.

After receiving their scorecard outlining the areas where they performed well and what areas can be strengthened, the Chamber created an action plan to implement the suggested improvements.



One of the immediate changes they made was implementing automatic door openers. Features like this benefit everyone, particularly one of their employees who uses a walker and cane for mobility assistance.

Another feature in the Chamber offices is white noise. "As an individual with a hearing impairment ...this not only lessens the static within my hearing aids, but also blocks out my tinnitus symptoms. These accessibility measures have improved my focus and allowed me to work better with my team, which has ultimately improved my workplace confidence as well," says Communications and Marketing Officer, Alita Fabiano.

As part of a network of over 450 chambers of commerce and boards of trade, it is important that their offices can accommodate everyone, now and for years to come. Being accessible ensures they can do just that.

"I am fortunate to work for the Canadian Chamber, an organization that acknowledges the value of an inclusive environment and is leading the way with a barrier-free workplace that has earned Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification. Everyone wins when people with disabilities are given the resources they need to succeed," says Fabiano.



## Advancing Accessibility in your Building: Your Next Steps

To discover your building's current level of accessibility, find a designated RHFAC Professional on the RHFAC Professional Directory to start the rating process. Following a rating, you will receive a detailed Scorecard and a rating summary identifying your key areas of success and improvement.

For more information, email: [access@rickhansen.com](mailto:access@rickhansen.com) or download the RHFAC Guide to Certification.

Accessibility is key to ensuring your building is able to sustain and continually serve the people who it was made for. When everyone has access, we all win.



# How to create inclusive buildings for everyone, everywhere.

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