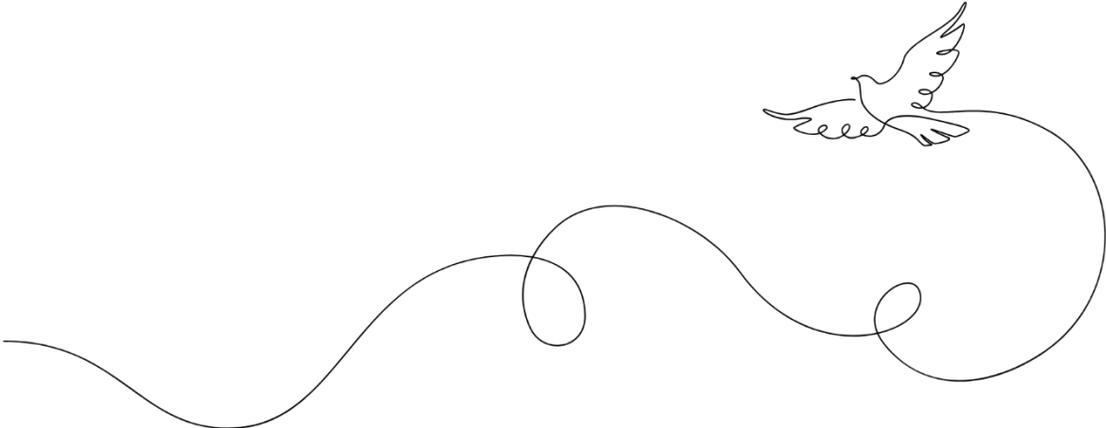# North Okanagan
ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Territorial Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that the Regional District of North Okanagan is on the traditional territory of the Syilx and Secwépemc First Nations.

Acknowledgement of Key Contributors

The Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO) and member communities acknowledge the significant contributions made towards the creation of this plan by:

Inter-municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee Members

- Davida Maitland
- Debbie Moore
- Givonna De Bruin
- Scott James

As well as the 207 community members who took the time to participate in our survey.

Funding Contributions

The development of this Accessibility Plan was made possible through funding provided by the Province of British Columbia, administered by the Disability Alliance BC.

This plan was prepared by Urban Matters CCC for the Regional District of North Okanagan and its member municipalities of City of Armstrong, District of Coldstream, City of Enderby, Village of Lumby, Township of Spallumcheen and City of Vernon.

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Introduction to the Plan

Accessibility improvements have been happening across the North Okanagan for many years. The RDNO and member communities in the North Okanagan have shown their commitment to providing accessible services through projects such as recreational equipment upgrades, accessibility features in facility washrooms, careful planning of traffic disruptions to protect accessible pathways, and other projects and programs. Much of the work done to date has been related to accessible recreation, inclusive programs and services, and enabling greater participation in active transportation.

The Accessible BC Act and its requirements that local governments create an accessibility committee has provided an opportunity to work together across the region in a new way. Taking a regional approach to accessibility has many benefits but can also be complex. This Accessibility Plan outlines a set of goals and actions that can be considered over the next three years to address barriers and foster a regional approach to accessibility. While each community will independently make decisions to act on this Plan, collective reporting and evaluation will benefit everyone by sharing learnings, resources, and reducing duplication of efforts, helping strengthen community approaches to this work.

The actions outlined in this Plan come from public engagement with people who live with disabilities and those who care for them. Over 200 community members provided their input on how they experience barriers to accessibility and inclusion. The priority areas, goals, and actions presented in this Plan come from their input as well as with insight from the Inter-municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Accessibility in the RDNO

Who is Involved

This is a joint Accessibility Plan for the Regional District of North Okanagan which includes the following communities:

Electoral Areas

- Area B Swan Lake / Commonage
- Area C BX / Silver Star
- Area D Rural Lumby
- Area E Cherryville
- Area F Rural Enderby

Municipalities

- City of Armstrong
- District of Coldstream
- City of Enderby
- Village of Lumby
- Township of Spallumcheen
- City of Vernon
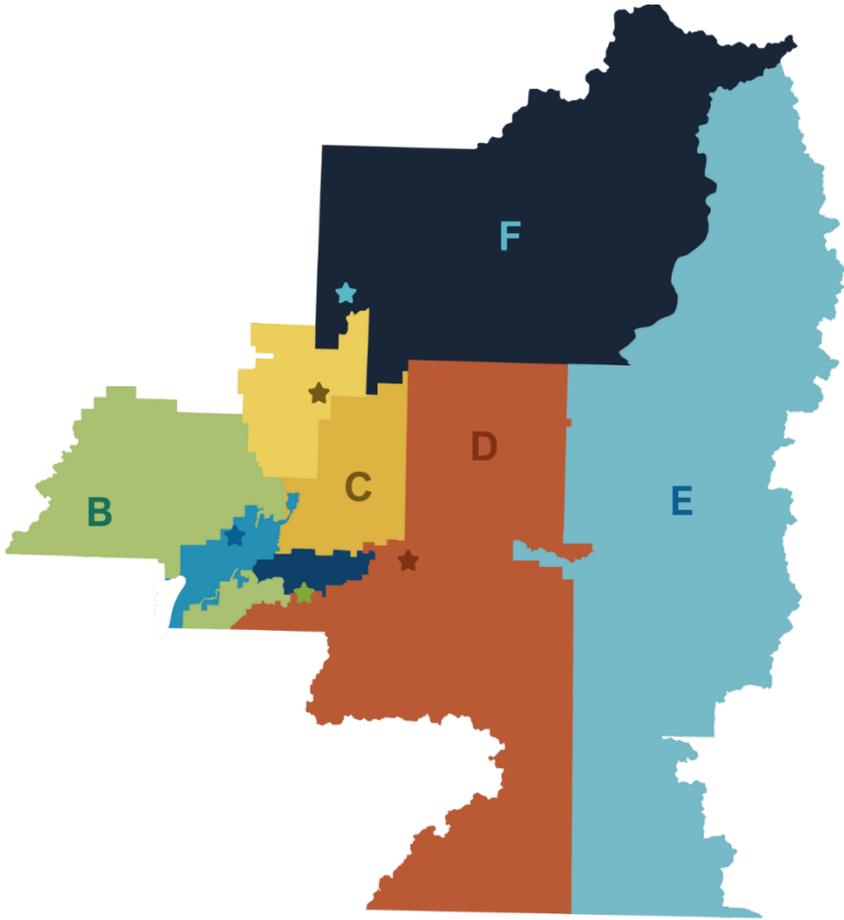
For the purpose of this Plan, the term "member communities" is used to refer to these two groups of local governments: the electoral areas and municipalities.

Why a Regional Approach

Representatives from the RDNO and six member municipalities met multiple times to review the requirements of the Accessible BC Act. Through these discussions, they concluded that forming a regional accessibility committee would be the most effective approach. Given the Act's specific criteria for committee composition, it was recognized that establishing individual committees in each community would be challenging.

A regional committee and action plan has many benefits:

- A regional approach improves consistency of experiences across communities. Knowing what to expect can help people access and use the accessible features, technologies, or services available to them.
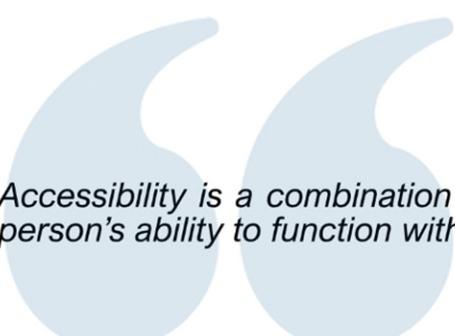- Communities can share resources like information, tools, best practices, and suppliers for equipment.
- Working with others can help keep everyone inspired, motivated, and involved.

Defining Accessibility

Accessibility is a combination of aspects, physical or virtual, that influence a person's ability to function within an environment and to access it with ease.

(Canadian Institute of Health Research)

Accessibility means that all people can take part in their communities through work, play and other daily activities.

Accessibility is important for everyone, especially people with disabilities.

Accessibility is about removing barriers and increasing inclusion and independence for everyone.

(Province of British Columbia)

The following themes about what accessibility looks like and what improving accessibility means come from public survey responses received in the creation of this Plan.

Accessibility looks like…

- ✓ **Positive public attitudes** – Community members, business owners, and local government staff understand differences and are aware of what might be needed to make sure everyone can access their buildings and services. They can plan to prevent barriers because of this knowledge.
- ✓ **Representation in decision-making** – People with disabilities are included in civic engagement opportunities and involved at decision-making tables.
- ✓ **Community participation and belonging** – People have access to the supports and environment to participate in public programming, community events, and live meaningful lives in their communities.
- ✓ **Feeling safe in community** – People are empowered to navigate their local environment without fear of vehicle conflict and are able to better navigate throughout the community.
- ✓ **Everyone is able to get around** – People are able to move through their community at all times of year, especially winter, without encountering obstacles.

> *"[Accessibility] would mean I could feel proud to be part of a community that is inclusive of, and considers everyone, regardless of their ability"*
> *– Survey Participant*

Improving Accessibility means…

- ✓ **Removing barriers** in physical, social, and virtual environments to increase access and opportunities for participation.
- ✓ Looking for opportunities to **use Universal Design** and other high standards of accessible and inclusive design principles in development and renovations of buildings, parks, transportation networks, and other physical environments.
- ✓ **Collaborating** with and ensuring the **inclusion** of people who experience barriers when planning improvements and determining priorities.
- ✓ Taking an **adaptive approach** to improvements that considers how different users may experience and interact with their environments. Think about how services, technology, and environments can be adapted when existing structures do not work for someone.
- ✓ Supporting **self-determination** by giving people options and choice.
- ✓ **Including people in government and leadership** processes and working to ensure that community leadership and government staff reflect community diversity.

Inter-municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Inter-municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) was established by the RDNO Board of Directors June 21, 2023. Committee members were recruited during the summer of 2023 and were appointed by the RDNO Board of Directors at the August 16, 2023, meeting. The Committee has met many times over the past two years to discuss accessibility and how it can be improved in the region.

Vision Statement

The vision is that the Regional District of North Okanagan and its member communities will become a safe, tolerant, and inclusive place for people of all ages and abilities to live, work, and play.

Purpose

To promote initiatives that foster active living, and the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in their communities by assisting the RDNO and member communities in identifying, removing and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with them.

Responsibilities

The AAC helps make things better for people with disabilities. Here's what they do:

- Give advice to the RDNO Board and member community Councils on how to create fair and accessible policies, services, and places. They may make recommendations on topics like transportation, housing, jobs, education, and recreation.
- Work with the RDNO and member communities to create and update an Accessibility Plan.
- Give the public the opportunity to share their thoughts on accessibility issues.
- Identify things that make it hard for people with disabilities to access services or places—including communication challenges—and suggest ways to fix them.
- Help source funding to support accessibility improvements.
- Recommend which accessibility projects should be prioritized and how to carry them out.

Recommendations from the committee are provided to Board and Councils for consideration.

Role in this strategy implementation

This committee is an integral resource for member communities when implementing this Action Plan. The committee can provide important insight on proposed activities and projects based on their lived experience, expertise, and knowledge. There are a few ways they can do this:

1) Annual updates and evaluation of the action plan at the end of three years can be provided for discussion with the committee. RDNO and member community representatives have an opportunity to share successes and challenges at an annual conversation with the AAC. Having regular conversation provides a chance to learn from others and receive feedback from committee members.
2) As the action plan is carried out, this committee may help with prioritization of the actions. They can also provide recommendations for how to achieve the goals.
3) Actions undertaken from this Plan will be more effective if reviewed with the AAC and other accessibility resources. People with personal experiences of disability can provide advice and input on how to achieve the best outcomes of the actions. The RDNO and member communities can also learn from one another when bringing forward plans or actions for review. These discussions will help identify best practices and strategies for action that are applicable in all communities.

Developing this Plan

This Plan was developed in partnership with the Inter-municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee and the member communities that operate within the RDNO. The AAC provided advice and input on the survey and engagement process. Following the survey, the results were presented and discussed with RDNO and member community representatives and the AAC at a workshop. Based on the survey findings and this workshop, a draft action plan was created.

RDNO and member community staff were responsible for reviewing suggested items in the action plan, identifying current initiatives, and sharing upcoming projects that support the goals identified by the AAC and public. This draft action plan was shared for comment and revision among the AAC and member communities before being finalized. This process allowed the AAC to have ongoing input into the development of the Accessibility Plan and action items.

Consultation

Two surveys were circulated to understand how people are experiencing barriers within the region. One survey was circulated to members of the public with an emphasis on hearing from people with personal experiences of disability, and the second survey was distributed to local government staff within the RDNO and member communities.

Survey questions asked about current accessibility projects, personal experiences, and suggestions for improvement within five focus areas. These focus areas were selected to align with legislated focus areas in the Accessible BC Act:

- Built Environment
- Transportation
- Communications and Engagement
- Programs and Services
- Employment

Community Member Priorities

The top concerns included all-weather access in communities, accessible recreation, and inclusive government processes. Participants in both surveys said they would like to increase collaboration and connection between people with disabilities and local governments.

A key learning from the survey is that many of the common challenges identified by participants who said they have a disability are also experienced by participants without. **This finding emphasizes the benefit to improving accessibility for all community members.**

For example, winter street clearing was frequently identified as a priority by active transportation users regardless of ability (e.g., pedestrians, cyclists, families with strollers, and others). Numerous comments were shared describing challenges experienced crossing streets with built up snowbanks, accessing transit at uncleared bus stops, or walking along icy sidewalks. This reinforces the importance of using Universal Design principles, such as designing all environments to be useable by all people, when working to improve accessibility. Accessibility changes are an opportunity to improve access for everyone.

Priorities that emerged from the survey and conversations with the AAC are summarized below.

Most important challenges to address:

Top challenges	**Transportation / Network Mobility** • Sidewalk connectivity and condition • Network safety and user conflict • Intersection design	**Built Environment** • (Seasonal) maintenance / landscaping • Building access and entrances • Washrooms and changerooms
Mid-range challenges	**Programming & Services** • Scheduling and availability of options • Program costs (too high) • Need for specialized support	**Communication & Information** • Participating in community events / engagement • Lack of accessible communication formats • Receiving emergency alerts
Other challenges	**Employment** Things like • Job requirements (education, experience) • Attitudes & representation in workplace culture • Workplace accessibility	

Priority Areas for Action

The survey identifies what is important for improving accessibility in the RDNO and member communities. The priority areas for action stem from these key engagement themes (a summary of engagement is included in Appendix A). The priority areas reflect the top challenges, as well as those where there seems to be an opportunity for increased collaboration and focus. The actions for the next three years are based on the suggestions that we heard the most in the survey. The six priority areas are:

Accessible Built Environment and Outdoor Recreation – Focuses on integrating Universal Design into facilities and public spaces. Key considerations include ensuring accessible washrooms, entrances, wayfinding, and parking, as well as improving access to outdoor spaces such as parks, picnic areas, and beaches.

Safe and User-friendly Transportation Networks – Enhancing year-round access to the transportation network by improving sidewalk connectivity, bike lanes, maintenance, and supporting other transportation options (e.g., e-scooters). Identifying opportunities to improve road user safety and ensuring route connectivity to key destinations such as schools and business areas.

Inclusive Programs and Services – Improving how people access community services and recreation by enhancing the user experience through adaptive technology and programming, scheduling adjustments, staff and customer service education, and affordability.

Accessible Communication and Access to Information – Ensuring multiple forms of communication, addressing web accessibility barriers, and providing customer service training to connect people efficiently and compassionately to the information they need.

Collaboration and Leadership to Remove Barriers – Establishing a formal approach to including people with lived experience of disability in decision-making. Ensuring diverse voices and experiences are reflected while building external capacity to support a cohesive approach to accessibility (e.g., engaging businesses, healthcare, and the development sector). Improving relationships with service providers and people with lived experience who can help inform accessibility improvements.

Educated and Aware Civil Servants and Community Members – Providing education and training opportunities to leaders, staff, and employees of local governments to enhance awareness of how barriers are created and can be removed, and to address attitudinal barriers. Learning opportunities for members of the public and community partners such as businesses, builders, and service providers.
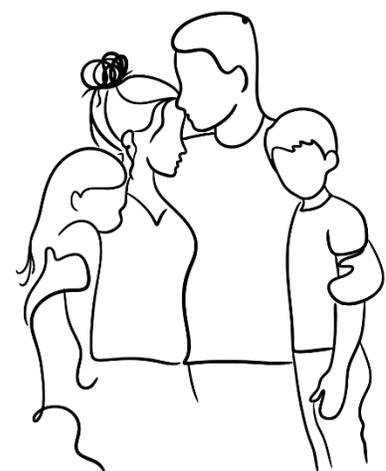
Action Plan

Approach to Action

Because this Plan is regional, some items are already taking place in the RDNO and member communities. We see this as a valuable asset as it allows us to learn from successful examples and follow the leadership driving those results. It is also important to recognize that not all communities will have to take the same actions. For instance, if a community does not have a swimming pool, the actions related to swimming equipment would not be applicable.

The following approaches are used in this document:
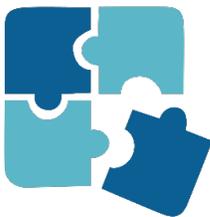
REGIONALIZE - Regionalizing is when one community has already successfully taken an action, or has an action started, and can provide support to other communities. This specifically relates to actions where it would be helpful to have the same devices, tools, programs, or trainings in all communities.

INITIATE/START - Initiating is when there is no action being taken yet and there is a need for leadership to begin carrying out an action. In this case, a leader would take responsibility for starting something that everyone could later use to inform their own work. New initiatives could also be collaborative between multiple communities.
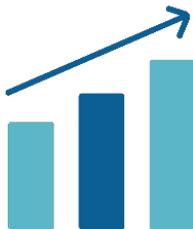
ENHANCE & IMPROVE - Enhance and Improve is when there is already action but we know that it can be improved. This could be increasing a program, service, or support, or taking action to expand a pilot project.

Overview of Priorities and Goals

Build our capacity by increasing our knowledge, skills and access to resources to action this plan.

Accessible Built Environment and Outdoor Education

- Using Universal Design when designing and updating facilities and outdoor spaces like parks, beaches, and picnic areas
- Increase the availability of accessible and Universally Designed washrooms.

Safe & User-Friendly Transportation Networks

- Improving year-round access to transportation.
- Improving road user safety.
- Improve transportation network connectivity so people can move through their communities safely and easily.

Inclusive Programs and Services

- Improving how people access community services and recreation.
- Improve the experience of using community services by making changes to schedules, staff training, and one-on-one services.
- Use technology and adaptive tools to help more people access recreation.

Educated and Aware Civil Servants and Community Members

- Increase chances for staff to learn about accessibility.
- Increase opportunities for employment in local governments for people with disabilities.

Collaboration and Leadership to Remove Barrers

- Consult people with lived experience and expertise of disability when making decisions that may impact them.
- Create a centralized resource hub that can help each community follow best practices.

Accessible Communication and Access to Information

- Make sure that information and opportunities for engagement are accessible and inclusive.
- Improve customer service by making it easy to provide feedback and clear how action is taken.
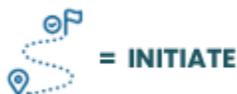
= REGIONALIZE

= INITIATE

= ENHANCE

Priority Area: Accessible Built Environment and Outdoor Recreation

Focuses on integrating Universal Design into facilities and public spaces. Considerations include providing accessible washrooms, entrances, wayfinding, and parking, as well as improving access to outdoor spaces like parks, picnic areas, and beaches.

Goal 1
Ensure public buildings and outdoor spaces meet Universal Design guidelines.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Develop a process for reviewing new construction and major renovations from a Universal Design perspective. Include people with disabilities in the review process whenever possible.	• Use accessibility standards that go beyond the minimum accessibility requirements in the BC Building Code such as the most recent version of CSA B651 and other standards that embed Universal Design principles. • Create a referral process in each community for which projects are to be directed to the AAC.	• Process for review created. • Number of facilities reviewed in the design phase for Universal Design considerations.	Regionalize

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Enderby, Vernon
- The RDNO completed accessibility audits through the Rick Hansen Foundation on cultural facilities in Greater Vernon that informed facility improvements that improved building accessibility.
- The RDNO has accessed local expertise from Vernon Independent Living to review building design and ensure accessibility for new projects.
- Enderby's new outdoor pool is being designed with accessibility features such as a "zero entry" pool that gently slopes into the water, so that it is possible to access the water without stairs.
- Vernon worked with the Rick Hansen Foundation to ensure the new Active Living Centre is designed with accessibility in mind.

Goal 2
Improve access to outdoor recreation areas such as paths and trails, beaches, play facilities, and others.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Review key outdoor recreation areas and develop a list of strategies to reduce barriers to access (e.g., installing beach mats, widening and paving access paths, installing ramps, adding seating, creating rest areas, providing changing facilities, incorporating shade structures, and other interventions). Review list with the AAC for support with prioritization and ideas for implementation.	• Collaborate with the AAC to identify any high-priority areas for upgrade. • Embed in high-level plans such as Parks and Recreation Master Plans. • Advocacy for funding programs to improve accessibility of parks and facilities.	• Complete review and list of potential interventions. • Review list with AAC • Identify 3-5 top interventions to pursue through grants or annual budgeting.	Regionalize

Action 2	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Develop an accessibility-focused procurement guide for public spaces to support the consistent application of accessible elements such as seating, picnic tables, signage, and adaptive equipment.	• Procurement can extend beyond purchasing of goods to include services and be a consideration of RFPs or even grant evaluation criteria	• Completion of document	Initiate

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Coldstream, Enderby, Vernon
- The RDNO Parks, Recreation, and Culture Master Plans identify universal accessibility as a component of their facilities condition analysis and recommended improvements.
- Coldstream has plans to assess its 13 lake accesses for safety and accessibility, and to-date, has installed a mobi-mat at Kal Beach to improve accessibility to the water and pier.
- Enderby is adding seating and shade structures in popular outdoor locations.
- Vernon ensured accessible design was a central consideration for upgrades to Marshall Fields Park, helping build an accessible, inclusive, playground for children with a range of sensory, cognitive, and physical abilities. Pathways, washrooms, and picnic tables were also upgraded to be accessible.
- Vernon considers accessibility as part of its procurement of new recreation equipment.

Goal 3

Increase the availability of accessible, universally designed washrooms.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Create a list of each local government operated recreation facility and space, indicating whether they have a universally accessible washroom. For facilities that do not have at least one universally accessible washroom, explore funding opportunities to install. Prioritize accessible washrooms in facility renovation planning.	• Collaborate with the AAC to identify any high-priority areas for upgrade.	• List of locations where washrooms are needed. • Funding sources identified.	Initiate

Action 2	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Review opportunities for facility changerooms to incorporate adult change tables, especially at recreation facilities.	• Collaborate with the AAC to identify any gaps in existing offerings.	• List of locations where adult change tables are needed.	Enhance & Improve

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Coldstream, Enderby, Vernon
- The RDNO has considered accessibility when designing new washrooms, including the Greater Vernon Cultural Centre.
- Coldstream incorporated accessible washrooms and entrance doors as part of its new Public Works office building, the Coldstream Community Hall and at Coldstream Station. Washroom upgrades at Kalamalka Beach will consider accessibility in the design.
- Enderby's new outdoor pool will have accessible changerooms and include universal washrooms with an adult change table.
- Vernon has worked to include accessible public washrooms in new buildings, including the Active Living Centre, and has retrofitted several buildings. Adult change tables are included at the Lakeview Wading Pool and they will be provided at the upcoming Active Living Centre.

Priority Area: Safe and User-friendly Transportation Networks

Enhancing year-round access to transportation networks by improving sidewalk connectivity, bike lanes, maintenance, and supporting other transportation options (e.g., e-scooters). Identifying opportunities to improve road user safety and ensuring route connectivity to key destinations such as schools and business areas.

Goal 1			
Improve year-round access to sidewalks, bus stops, and public travel routes.			
Action 1	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Review winter maintenance and service strategies for opportunities to improve clearing of intersections, sidewalks, and bus stops.	• Work with the AAC to engage leadership in an experiential workshop to deepen awareness of difficulties navigating in winter conditions. • Work with BC Transit and MOTT for roads/routes they are responsible for.	• Complete a review and document key findings. • Identify strategies for improvement.	Initiate
Action 2	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Explore pilot projects and work crew training opportunities to improve level of service for pedestrians and transit users during winter. Where possible, engage people with lived experience of disability to inform understanding of impact.	• Explore partnership with Snow Angel program.	• Identify possible pilot projects and partnerships.	Enhance & Improve
Action 3	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Work to provide advance notice of travel network disruptions. During construction and road maintenance project planning, create a plan for accessible pedestrian detours during construction and appropriate signage for users.	• Important not just to provide a detour but to ensure it is truly accessible (curbs, signage, crossings, etc.) • Consider updates to bylaw and policy wording that helps standardize approaches to providing accessible detours.	• Guide for planning alternative routes, notification process, and signage for alternative routes. • Standard for accessible active transportation detours.	Enhance & Improve

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Armstrong, Coldstream, Enderby, Vernon,

- Vernon's Traffic Bylaw requires property owners to remove snow and ice from sidewalks within 24 hours. The Bylaw also requires active transportation routes be maintained during construction or provided with an alternative safe detour route.
- The communities of Armstrong, Coldstream, Enderby, and Vernon provide advance notice of traffic interruptions using a variety of media to share information about any detours or disruptions. Coldstream ensures ramps are provided at active transportation detours where needed.

Goal 2
Improve community transportation network connectivity.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Facilitate conversations with transportation providers such as BC Transit and HandyDART to address service gaps and improve accessible transportation options.	• Explore regionalizing taxi voucher program or similar subsidy to support access to transportation when existing options are unavailable or at capacity.	• Number of conversations that have occurred. • Tracking of other advocacy activities.	Regionalize

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Vernon

- Vernon, in collaboration with BC Transit, has a taxi voucher program that provides users access to transportation when handyDART services are unavailable. The voucher covers half of the taxi ride cost.

Priority Area: Inclusive Programs and Services

Improving how people access community services and recreation by enhancing the user experience through adaptive technology and programming, scheduling adjustments, staff and customer service education, and affordability.

Goal 1
Improve the availability and accessibility of recreation programs and services.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Identify adaptive equipment required to support accessible programming and develop a procurement and replacement strategy.	• Engage the AAC to determine any gaps in existing adaptive equipment	• Completion of procurement and replacement strategy document.	Enhance & Improve

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Enderby, Vernon
- The RDNO has acquired adaptive equipment for facilities it owns and manages, such as the accessible pool lift at the Lumby Outdoor Pool.
- Enderby's new pool will have accessible wheelchair lifts so users can get in and out of the pool and hot tub.
- Vernon considers accessibility as part of its recreation equipment procurement and considers life cycle planning for replacement.

Goal 2

Improve staff capacity to provide tailored supports and knowledgeable responses to customer service requests and during recreation programs and services.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Deliver accessibility training for frontline staff and program instructors on topics such as disability accommodations, and available accessible options.	• Select training programs developed by people with disabilities. • Bring in trainers with diverse abilities.	• Number of training programs delivered.	Regionalize
Action 2	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Explore opportunities to offer or increase one-on-one supports for youth with high support needs during programs and camps.	• Examine requirements to provide paperwork, or evidence of different conditions • Ensure staff are able to create a safe environment for sensitive conversations.	• Document opportunities identified and subsequent actions.	Regionalize

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
Vernon
- Vernon provides training to all parks and recreation staff as part of their onboarding process.
- Vernon offers several financial discounts to people with disabilities as well as the option to bring a support person to programming at no extra cost.

Priority Area: Accessible Communication and Access to Information

Ensuring multiple forms of communication, addressing web accessibility barriers, and providing customer service training to connect people efficiently and compassionately to the information they need.

Goal 1

Ensure communication materials, community engagement, and civic meetings incorporate best practices for accessibility and that a range of methods are used to reach all community members.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Increase the variety of methods used to communicate and engage with the community. Prioritize accessible communication practices such as website and document accessibility.	• Use multiple civic platforms and establish dissemination channels by collaborating with community service providers to share information, updates, and engagement opportunities for local government initiatives • Potential dissemination channels can include library, post office, newspaper, e-newsletter, social media, community bulletin boards, and other resources.	• Documentation of where information is being posted. • Creation of communications guides and accessibility guidelines for public facing documents.	Enhance & Improve
Action 2	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Improve the accessibility of online civic websites by ensuring navigation to key information is intuitive and uploaded documents and files are in accessible formats.	• Provide closed captions as part of council meeting recordings.	• Completion of civic website improvements.	Enhance & Improve

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Coldstream, Enderby, Vernon,
- The RDNO shares public information through its website, digital newsletter, local newspaper, social media, and local radio ads.
- Coldstream uses a hearing loop system in council chambers to support people with hearing aids. Engagement opportunities are also provided via Zoom to provide people with alternative options to in-person participation. Coldstream has also been working to improve the communication of its documents by implementing standard accessible fonts. Coldstream uses online feedback forms and applications.
- Enderby ensures image descriptions are generated for all photos on the website and that the website is screen-reader compatible.
- Vernon has several methods for sharing public information: public notice board, website, social media channels, newspaper, radio ads, subscriber lists, mail-outs, and hand delivered notices.

Goal 2
Improve frontline customer service and response practices.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Ensure public feedback mechanisms are easily accessible to community members to raise concerns, ask questions, or request accessibility accommodations.	• Consider providing an accessible fillable web-form through the community's website.	• No. of public feedback requests and reporting on responses.	Enhance & Improve
Action 2	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Ensure frontline staff are aware of feedback processes, are able to communicate available feedback options to the public and are able to direct information to the right department for follow up.	• Ensure processes reduce the number of times individuals are asked to share sensitive personal information. • Develop response protocols to guide departmental support of accessibility requests.	• Documentation of conversations / training approaches that inform staff.	Enhance & Improve

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
All
- Every community has created an online feedback mechanism for the public to share their input on accessibility. In most communities, this is currently an email address.
- A shared email dedicated to accessibility has been created: **accessibility@rdno.ca**. This dedicated email can be used to share feedback about accessibility related to any of the communities represented by the North Okanagan Accessibility Plan. Information about this email will be shared with public facing staff to help them know how to direct queries and how to support people who do not use email to provide their feedback.

Priority Area: Collaboration and Leadership to Remove Barriers

Establishing a formal approach to including people with lived experience of disability in decision-making. Ensuring diverse voices and experiences are reflected while building external capacity to support a cohesive approach to accessibility (e.g., engaging businesses, healthcare, and the development sector). Improve relationships with service providers and people with lived experience who can help inform accessibility improvements.

Goal 1
Ensure lived experience of accessibility informs decision-making across communities, departments, programs, and projects.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Collaborate with the AAC to clarify its role in supporting local government efforts. Identify specific topic areas and project types where committee review or inclusion should be considered. Create a plan with the AAC for how reviews and input should be provided, including expectations of committee members and local government communities.	• Review significant project timelines to identify upcoming work (new builds and retrofits) where AAC input can be incorporated from the beginning. • Provide guidelines to project teams for when to refer a project to AAC	• Guidelines developed for when to engage AAC.	Regionalize

Action 2	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Establish a centralized accessibility resource hub for staff that includes tools, checklists, and best practices based on lived experience of a range of disabilities.	• The AAC can work with the RDNO and member communities to identify helpful resources and reduce duplication of efforts by local governments.	• Resource hub established. • Feedback collected from staff on usability of hub, desired resources to support their work.	Initiate

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Armstrong, Coldstream, Spallumcheen, Vernon
- RDNO has consulted with local expertise, such as the Vernon Independent Living Society and the White Valley Community Resource Centre, for feedback from people with lived experience of accessibility.
- Armstrong Spallumcheen Parks and Recreation Commission asked for feedback from the AAC to support a community request about accessible parking at the outdoor pool.
- Coldstream's Kal Beach Pier reconstruction project was referred to the AAC for review. Feedback was used to support funding of accessible beach mats that support access to the pier across the beach.
- Vernon has plans to engage the AAC in the future designs of the front counter areas of City Hall and Community Services Buildings.

Priority Area: Educated & Aware Civil Servants & Community Members

Providing education and training opportunities to leaders, staff, and employees of local governments to enhance awareness of how barriers are created and can be removed, and to address attitudinal barriers. Learning opportunities for members of the public and community partners such as businesses, builders, and service providers.

Goal 1

Strengthen accessibility knowledge and practices within participating local governments.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Identify ways to integrate accessibility education into existing staff training programs. Seek out specialized training for roles with specific responsibilities related to service delivery, planning, and infrastructure.	• Extend education beyond recreation staff to other departments.	• Number of trainings offered. • Topics added to staff training programs.	Regionalize

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
Vernon
• Vernon provided training to customer service clerks as an action item through the Age and Dementia Friendly Community Plan.

Goal 2

Increase employment within local governments of people with lived experience of disability to diversify internal team perspectives.

Action 1	Opportunities to Strengthen Action	Monitoring	Approach
Review and update internal employee policies with an accessibility lens including eligibility requirements, job postings, hiring processes, onboarding, training, and accommodation protocols to ensure compliance with new provincial standards when they are completed.	• Consider a diverse range of abilities and conditions beyond physical disability including neurodiversity and mental health. • Offer flexible work schedules that enable people to adjust their workload to their best working hours.	• Number of policies reviewed and updated.	Enhance & Improve

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
RDNO, Vernon
• RDNO has begun examining job postings to remove eligibility requirements that are not necessary for the job duties.
• Vernon is designing a wheelchair-accessible workplace as part of renovations to the Operations building (planned for 2025).

Additional Actions: Building our Capacity

Acting on this Plan will require some investments in knowledge and skill development on the part of local government staff and AAC members. The actions in this section are intended to help build the knowledge and skills of those involved in activating the plan.

Goal 1			
Local government staff and Inter-municipal Accessibility Committee members have the knowledge, skills, and access to resources to implement this plan.			
Action 1	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Seek out training opportunities for the AAC and a variety of staff roles and departments. ***Note -** *There are considerable training and education resources on the BC Accessibility Hub that have been created specifically for supporting implementing the Accessible BC Act.*	• Work with the AAC and public input from survey to identify priorities for training and potential courses. • Take trainings together to create shared understanding and learning that can be applied to the actions. • Encourage staff of all departments and roles to pursue trainings.	• Number of trainings and types of training completed.	Initiate
Action 2	**Opportunities to Strengthen Action**	**Monitoring**	**Approach**
Create a repository of shared resources that can support action. This repository could include best practices or guiding documents related to improving accessibility, reports or feedback and evaluation of this Plan.	• A method of sharing resources could be an online shared filing system. • Resources that are agreed upon as best practices could be shared on a public committee website to provide education and tools to the public.	• Creation of the information repository.	Initiate

Getting Started

There are simple steps the RDNO and member communities can take to get started with items listed in the action plan to maintain momentum on accessibility efforts. Building a strong climate of collaboration will be critical to the regional approach underpinning this Accessibility Plan.

To start, it will be important to develop a shared understanding of this Plan and action items. Sharing with the Board and Council members will help generate awareness and buy-in by connecting proposed actions to community priorities heard through engagement.

Moving forward, the RDNO and member communities will work together with the AAC to explore which communities might be best positioned to take a lead role in supporting the action areas. In cases where efforts are already underway, there may be opportunities to build on that momentum by enhancing or expanding the work regionally.

Some actions may benefit from the involvement of larger communities such as Vernon, or the RDNO, especially those that require discussions with external entities such as BC Transit. Other actions may be suitable for AAC members to lead, benefiting from the insight of personal experiences of disability.

Additionally, it is important that the AAC provides a resource network where the RDNO and member communities participate, receive feedback, and share learnings that can be useful for multiple communities. Engaging in these conversations will help establish shared standards, best practices, and common language leading to more consistent approaches to embedding accessibility within communities.

Collaboration should go beyond simply working together; it should be about aligning purpose, sharing ownership and driving meaningful change. Collaboration involves identifying opportunities celebrating wins and small successes, and proudly sharing examples of successful initiatives. These celebrations and efforts can also take place externally. For example, participating in events such as Red Shirt Day or engaging in National AccessAbility Week are key opportunities to celebrate people with disabilities and increase awareness and understanding of the importance of accessibility and inclusion.

Ongoing Feedback

Ongoing public feedback will be gathered through RDNO and member community feedback mechanisms. Feedback will be responded to in the following ways:

1. **Point approach** – An isolated issue or challenge is identified, and the responsible local government addresses and resolves the concern efficiently, reporting the course of action taken to the person who provided the feedback.
2. **Network approach** - Barriers that are identified as needing a more collaborative response are shared among relevant departments and partners. The person who provided feedback is notified of what action is being taken and when they can expect follow-up communications.
3. **Consult approach** - Barriers that need further information or consultation may be referred to the AAC for input. The person who provided feedback is notified of what action is being taken and when they can expect follow-up communications.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring

Annual

An annual meeting will be held with the AAC and local government representatives to discuss the actions that have been completed, are underway, or planned for each member community. A summary memo of this conversation should be completed that includes the following components:

1. A list of:
    - Actions taken to advance the action items in this Plan by each community
    - Any other actions taken towards improving accessibility.
    - Any other information that may be relevant to understanding how progress on these actions is being achieved.
2. A summary of public feedback and the steps taken to resolve identified issues.

The annual meeting is an opportunity to discuss progress being made, barriers being encountered, and any potential solutions or resources that could provide support. The summary memo will provide each community with a tool to reflect on the past year and learn from others to advance their actions.

At Three Year Intervals

Every three years a report will be created that gives a fulsome update on community progress toward these goals. This report will include a summary from each community that states:

- Actions taken
- Outcomes of actions taken
- Information and any changes made to the indicators outlined in the 'monitoring' sections of the action plan
- Additional projects related to accessibility that were started or completed
- Feedback received from the public and how it was responded to.

The three-year reports will track progress towards goals and support communities in refining their approaches based on public feedback.

Ongoing

A document that identifies progress made on action plan items will be posted on the RDNO website.

Evaluating

The RDNO and member communities will conduct a review and evaluation of the Accessibility Plan every three years following its endorsement in 2025. This review will include conversations with the RDNO, member communities, and the AAC to determine what amendments need to be made to the Plan to support the creation of a new three-year action plan.

Developing the updated three-year action plan should also include a consideration of suggested actions. These items, provided in Appendix B, were identified based on survey feedback and consultation with the AAC and member communities. Items on this list are places where action is needed, but were deemed to be lower priorities, or require additional organizational capacity to be established prior to undertaking them. As work progresses on the action items identified in this Plan, the list of suggested actions should be reviewed as opportunities become available to start addressing them.

Updated action plans should be posted to the RDNO and member community websites so members of the public can remain aware of progress.

Appendix A – Engagement Summary

What We Heard Report with Survey Results.

WHAT WE HEARD: FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT IN THE REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NORTH OKANAGAN REGARDING ACCESSIBILITY

PREPARED BY URBAN MATTERS CCC

Contents

1.0   INTRO

The following What We Heard Report presents engagement findings based on both a survey circulated to staff of the RDNO and member municipalities, and an accessibility survey that was disseminated throughout the RDNO and member municipalities in January 2025.

Survey questions were designed to seek insight into existing community action, respondent experiences, and suggestions for improvement within five focus areas. These focus areas were selected to align with legislated focus areas in the Accessible BC Act:

- Built Environment
- Transportation
- Communications and Engagement
- Programs and Services
- Employment

What we learned is that many of the common challenges identified by participants with lived experience are also experienced by participants without, which only goes to show the benefit of improving accessibility for all community members. The top concerns included all-weather access in communities, accessible recreation, and inclusive governance processes. Overall, participants in both surveys would like to increase collaboration and connection between people with disabilities and local government actions.

1.1   COMMON CHALLENGES

The survey asked participants to identify a range of challenges that they, or someone they care for, regularly experience within the Regional District or their member municipality. The five survey challenge categories are:

1. Built environment – including buildings, facilities, parks
2. Transportation and network mobility
3. Communication and access to information
4. Community programming and services
5. Employment with the Regional District or member municipality

Participant responses clearly identified challenges that are experienced more commonly than others. The following table summarizes the findings. Note the results should not be interpreted as reflecting the importance of each barrier, they are intended to show which barriers are encountered at a high frequency.

urban
matters

	Transportation / Network Mobility	Built Environment
Top challenges	Things like • Sidewalk connectivity and condition • Network safety and user conflict • Intersection design	Things like • (Seasonal) maintenance / landscaping • Building access and entrances • Washrooms and changerooms
	Programming & Services	**Communication & Information**
Mid-range challenges	Things like • Scheduling and availability of options • Program costs (too high) • Need for specialized support	• Participating in community events / engagement • Lack of accessible communication formats • Receiving emergency alerts
	Employment	
Other challenges	Things like • Job requirements (education, experience) • Attitudes & representation in workplace culture • Workplace accessibility	

1.2   EMERGING FOCUS AREAS

The analysis of open-response data is helping to identify key topic areas that matter to community members. These areas will form the foundation for further engagement (e.g., Accessibility Committee and partners workshop) and guide the focus areas as we develop the accessibility plan.

- **Accessible Built Environment and Outdoor Recreation** – Focuses on integrating universal design into facilities and public spaces. Key considerations include ensuring accessible washrooms, entrances, wayfinding, and parking, as well as improving access to outdoor spaces such as parks, picnic areas, and beaches.

- **Safe and User-friendly Transportation Networks** – Enhancing year-round access to transportation network by improving sidewalk connectivity, bike lanes, maintenance, and supporting other transportation options (e.g., e-scooters). Identifying opportunities to improve road user safety and ensuring route connectivity to key destinations such as schools and business areas.

- **Inclusive Programs and Services** – Improving how people access community services and recreation by enhancing the user experience through adaptive technology and programming, scheduling adjustments, staff and customer service education, and affordability.

- **Accessible Communication and Access to Information** – Ensuring multiple forms of communication, addressing web accessibility barriers, and providing customer service training to connect people efficiently and compassionately to the information they need.

- **Collaboration and Leadership to Remove Barriers** – Establishing a formal approach to including people with lived experience of disability in decision-making. Ensuring diverse voices and experiences are reflected while building external capacity to support a cohesive approach to accessibility (e.g., engaging businesses, healthcare, and the development sector). Improve relationships with service providers and people with lived experience who can help inform accessibility improvements.

- **Educated and Aware Civil Servants and Community Members** – Providing education and training opportunities to leaders, staff, and employees of local governments to enhance awareness of how barriers are created and can be removed, and to address attitudinal barriers. Learning opportunities for members of the public and community partners such as businesses, builders, and service providers.

2.0 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

In total, 207 surveys were collected from individual participants across online and hardcopy submissions. Overall response rates were high, with non-open ended questions receiving answers from between 96% and 98% of survey participants. Open-ended questions had a lower response rate that depended on the question, for example, fewer participants shared ideas for improving member community employment compared to the number of responses provided to improve community accessibility.

The following summary of survey responses presents an analysis of findings and is organized according to key theme and focus area. Any findings unique to people with experiences of disabilities have been identified throughout the analysis.

- **Demographics** – Who participated in the survey and were a diversity of perspectives included?
- **Successes** – What actions currently or previously underway in member communities are recognized as improving accessibility?
- **Current Context** – How are survey respondents experiencing public attitudes, understanding of disability, and actions by member communities to improve accessibility?
- **Identified Barriers and Challenges** – What barriers to accessibility are people commonly experiencing in their daily lives?

Further detail and figures relating to participant responses are presented in Appendix 1.

2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC RESPONSES

Demographics at a glance:

- All RDNO member communities were represented in survey findings.
- People of all ages completed the survey with most people being between 35 and 79.
- Over one third of respondents have personal experiences of disability (36%).
- Mobility and movement related disabilities emerged as the top experience, although many respondents identified having one or more overlapping disabilities.

Member Communities - Survey participants included at least one individual from each of the member communities within the RDNO (See Figure 2.1 below, following page). Communities with the highest rate of participation included Vernon (52%) and Coldstream (13%), with the lowest participation (1%) coming from Cherryville in Electoral Area E, Sicamous or Other.

Figure 2.1: Which Regional District of North Okanagan community do you live in?

Area of residence of all survey participants.

Area	Percentage
Vernon	52%
Coldstream	13%
Electoral Area C (BX / Silverstar)	8%
Armstrong	6%
Enderby	5%
Electoral Area F (Rural Enderby)	5%
Spallumcheen	4%
Lumby	3%
Electoral Area D (Rural Lumby)	2%
Electoral Area B (Swan Lake / Commonage)	2%
Electoral Area E (Cherryville)	1%
Sicamous	1%
Other	1%
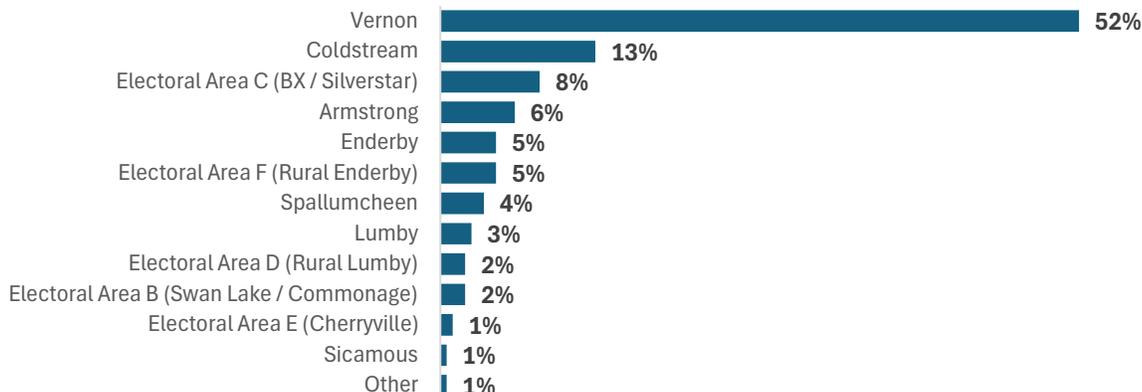
Respondent ages – Survey respondents skewed older which is in keeping with regional demographics. A majority of participants are between the ages of 35 to 79 (see Figure 2.2 below). Among participants who self identified as having a disability, ages were slightly older, with the largest age cohort aged 65 to 79 (36%).

Figure 2.2: How old are you?

Age distribution of all survey participants.

Age group	Percentage
19 to 34	5%
35 to 49	26%
50 to 64	31%
65 to 79	33%
80 and up	3%
Prefer not to answer	3%
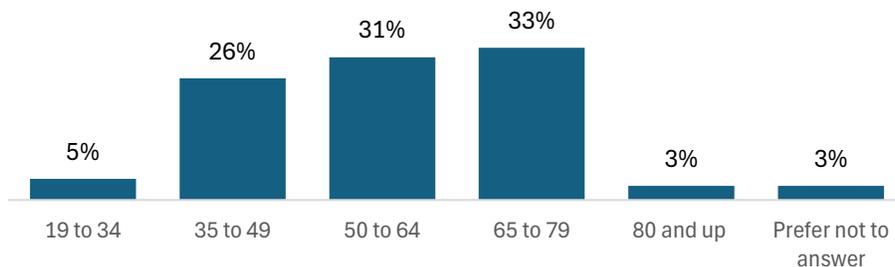
Disability Experience – There was overlap among participant responses with many identifying multiple perspectives. For example, several respondents identified as having both a personal experience of disability as well as working for a service provider that supports people with disabilities. Most participants identified as being *interested residents* (49%) with other common responses being *a family member of someone with a disability* (47%) and having *a personal experience of disability* (36%) – see Figure 2.3 below.

Figure 2.3: What is your relationship with disability?

Relationship to disability of all respondents.

Relationship	Percent
Interested resident	49%
Family member	47%
Lived experience of disability	36%
Caregiver	25%
Service provider	19%
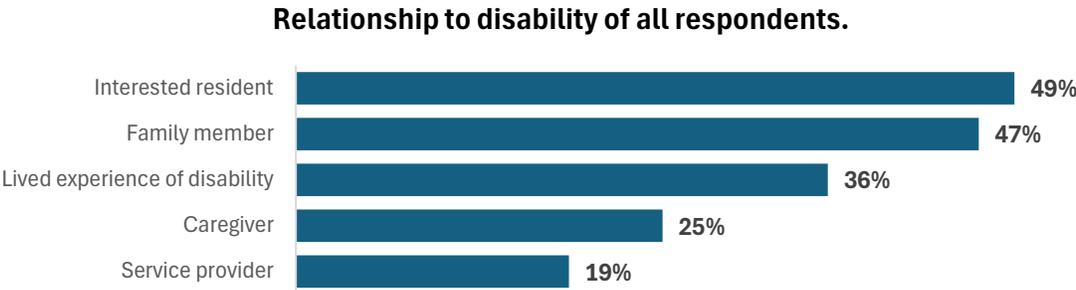
Disabilities Represented – Responses were received by participants representing all forms of disability included in the survey (see Figure 2.4 below). Most respondents with personal experiences of disability, or people being supported by survey respondents, have *mobility* or other *movement* related challenges (69%) with other top responses being *mental health* (36%) and *chronic pain* (35%). The least common experiences relate to *language* (14%) and *vision* (21%) and are important perspectives to include as accessibility interventions frequently focus on mobility-related challenges.

Figure 2.4: What disability-related difficulties do you (or the person you support) experience?

Disability-related barriers experienced by participants who indicated they have or support someone with a disability.

Barrier	Percent
Mobility / movement	69%
Mental health	36%
Chronic pain	35%
Neurodivergence	30%
Hearing	28%
Intellectual	24%
Visual	21%
Disability related to language	14%
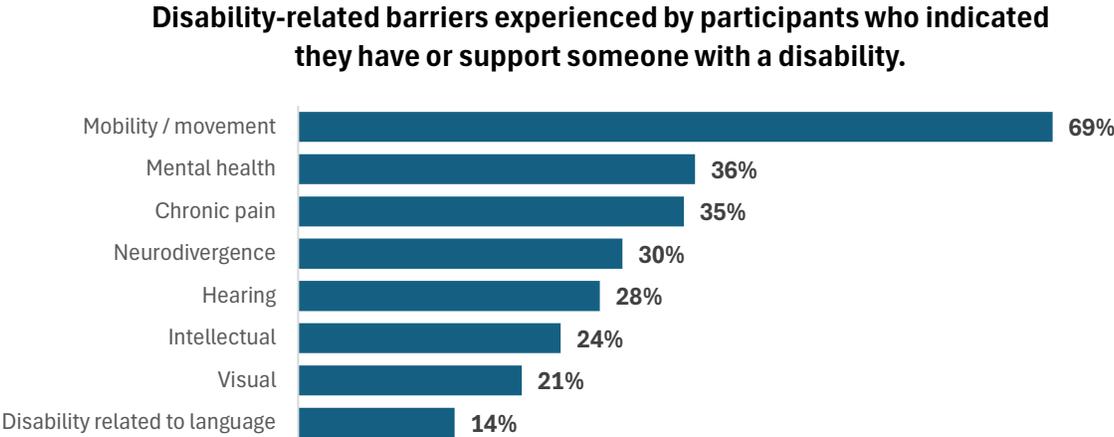
2.2   WHAT IS AN ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY

The survey sought an understanding of why accessibility is important to community members by asking the following question **What does making the Regional District and its member communities more accessible mean to you?** Responses to the question identify why accessibility improvements are important to people with disabilities.

Survey responses highlight that making accessibility improvements not only benefits people with disabilities, but other community members as well, such as families, older adults and people with different identities and backgrounds. Responses generally describe how an accessible community would not have barriers in key focus areas (i.e., built environment, transportation, communication, and others) and would resolve additional non-physical barriers. A vision for a community without barriers began to emerge:

- **Positive Public attitudes** – Community members, business owners, and municipal staff are knowledgeable in challenges faced by people with disabilities. Differences are normalized and planned for instead of being stigmatized or addressed retroactively.

- **Representation in decision-making** – People with disabilities are included in civic engagement opportunities and involved at decision-making tables.

- **Community participation and belonging** – People have access to the supports and environment to participate in public programming, community events, and live meaningful lives in their communities.

- **Safe in community** – People are empowered to navigate their local environment without fear of vehicle conflict and are able to better navigate throughout the community.

- **Able to get around** – People are able to move through their community at all times of year, especially winter, without encountering obstacles.

Quotes

- "It would mean I could feel proud to be part of a community that is inclusive of, and considers everyone, regardless of their abilities."
- "It would mean that anyone regardless of abilities, financial status, physical limitations etc. could access the community resources"
- "The possibility of taking my child for a walk without fear that I will run out of sidewalk for his stroller."
- "That as a senior I am able to travel within my area safely"
- "Affordable family activities with welcoming people and environments suitable for all including those with divergence and disabilities"

2.3   SUCCESSES

An understanding of areas where the RDNO and member communities are recognized for their work improving accessibility was developed through the following question: **Provide an example of something the Regional District, or your member community, has done well to improve accessibility?**

Answers reveal that progress on improving accessibility differs by member community within the RDNO and that there is a connection between urbanized areas and more examples of improvements. Responses generally highlight

improvements to the built environment including elements of transportation relating to network navigation, and to a lesser degree, communications and programming. Employment-related improvements were not identified.

- **Built Environment**
  - o Things like embedding universal design principles in new facilities, playgrounds, wading pools, washrooms, and trail improvements.
- **Transportation**
  - o Things like addressing sidewalk connectivity, widening paths, providing accessible parking, designing intersection let downs, and having crossings with audible beacons.
- **Communications and Engagement**
  - o Things like mail-outs to keep residents informed, hardcopy materials like the recreation guide, and engagement on the scooter program.
- **Programs and Services**
  - o Things like having access to affordable programing, free community music events, cultural activities, and accessible parking passes.

Quotes

- "Making community events accessible and providing information on them in advance. The library holding small events for younger children."
- "I believe the regional district in our community has improved widening bike paths and walking trails, adequate curb cuts, and accessible buses."
- "The new scooter program. RDNO saw a need and tried to initiate change and fun while doing it. kept the public informed on how it was going, and the results of what company has been permanently chosen and when the scooters will be available." *This quote refers to a program within the City of Vernon*
- "The bike paths are wonderful - smooth, safe, quick, accessible."

2.4 CURRENT CONTEXT

We asked a series of questions to better understand how people with disabilities are currently experiencing accessibility in their community. We wanted to learn what actions are perceived as being successful in improving accessibility and about the social interactions people with disabilities are having in their communities.

2.4.1 AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

We asked questions about how RDNO and member communities are improving accessibility. We asked **How is your member community doing at improving Physical Spaces / Transportation / Programs and Services / Communications and Engagement / Hiring Practices?**

- **Focus areas recognized as improving** – The top focus areas where over half of respondents answered improvement has been *Alright*, *Well*, or *Very Well* are:
  - o Physical Spaces (59%)
  - o Communications and Engagement (52%)
  - o Programs and Services (51%)
- **Focus areas with lowest improvement scores** – The focus areas with the greatest number of responses indicating improvement has been *Poor* or *Very Poor* are:

      o   Transportation (38%)

      o   Communications and Engagement (34%)

- **Most people are unaware of improvements in employment practices –** Over half (60%) of respondents selected that they *Don't Know* how their member community is doing with improving employment practices.

- **Greater awareness of improvements among people with disabilities –** Respondents who identify as having a personal experience of disability were slightly less likely to respond *Don't Know* to improvement-related questions than respondents without disabilities.

2.4.2 PUBLIC ATTITUDES

We asked questions about community attitudes to people with disabilities and understanding of disability issues. In general, responses indicate there is a need for improvement:

- **Community attitudes and behaviours need work** - Although participant responses indicate the RDNO and member communities are primarily doing *Alright* (37%) improving attitudes and behaviours toward people with disability, among participants with personal experiences of disability, *Poor* or *Very Poor* progress emerged as the second-highest rating (18% total). Survey respondents also shared that community members only *Sometimes* (42%) show positive attitudes and behaviours toward people with disabilities.

- **Low awareness of issues related to disability –** Respondents generally do not believe their community is informed on disability issues, most commonly selecting they think people have only *Moderate* (40%) or *Low* (35%) awareness.

- **Low feelings of civic inclusion** - Respondents most commonly identified that they only *Sometimes* (45%) or *Rarely* (23%) feel included in local government spaces, programs, activities, and community engagement - regardless of if participants self-identify as having an experience of disability or not.

2.5 IDENTIFIED BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Survey respondents identified barriers and challenges across most survey questions. The following sections summarize key themes that emerged across questions and are organized by focus area:

- **Built Environment** – Public spaces both indoors and outdoors including member community buildings, facilities, parks, and playgrounds.

- **Transportation** – The infrastructure that helps people get around in their community including sidewalks, bike paths, crosswalks, parking spaces, bus stops, pedestrian lighting and more.

- **Communications and Information** – The methods that member communities and the RDNO use to communicate including materials, public notices, meetings, and engagement sessions.

- **Programs and Services** – The recreation programming, cultural initiatives, service forms, and registration procedures offered by member communities and the RDNO.

- **Employment** – Elements of employment with member communities and the RDNO including job postings, interview practices, accommodation options, and training opportunities.

- **Other** – We left a place holder for other themes that emerged from engagement, including collaboration and inclusion and understanding.

2.5.1 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

We asked questions about the challenges respondents face with community buildings, facilities, and parks in their member community. We asked **"Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support with a disability, experience in the Regional District and member community buildings, facilities, or parks"** and followed up with questions asking for additional suggestions to improve member community transportation.

Findings

The **top challenges** survey respondents experience in community buildings, facilities, and parks differ based on ability. Generally, participants with a personal experience of disability were more likely than other respondents to identify more barriers, and rate them more highly. Table 1 below illustrates how there are similarities across responses, but that Seating Area Options and Building Navigation were not as highly rated as barriers by participants without lived experience of disability.

Table 1: Top responses to common challenging areas in community buildings, facilities, and parks:

Participants **with** lived experience of disability	Participants **without** lived experience of disability
1. Seasonal Maintenance and Building Access – 73% (tie)	1. Seasonal maintenance – 66%
2. Accessible Washrooms / changerooms and Seating Area Options – 56% (tie)	2. Building Access – 55%
3. Building navigation – 52%	3. Accessible washrooms / changerooms – 41%

The following additional information and suggestions emerged from respondents' answers to open-ended questions. There is some overlap between the challenges identified in this focus area relating to the public realm and those challenges identified for transportation in the following section.

- **Winter maintenance** – Snow and ice clearing emerged as an issue of great concern with many respondents identifying challenges or obstacles with navigation due to snowbanks at intersections as well as ice or pooling near building entrances.
- **Access to outdoor recreation** – A high number of respondents described feeling unable to participate in outdoor recreation offerings such as hiking trails, lookout points, beaches, and lakes. There is a desire to ensure access is provided to key destinations through designing trails appropriately, providing accessible seating, and offering adaptive beach mats. Whiskey Cove Park in Lake Country was provided as an example of an accessible park.
- **Design and retrofit of spaces and buildings** – There is a desire for buildings, facilities, playgrounds, splash parks, walking trails and other community infrastructure to be universally designed. Where retrofits are required, there is a desire to use insight based on the experiences of people with disabilities. Specific areas identified by survey respondents include:
  - Building entrances and doorways (such as ramps, automatic door openers)
  - Parking spaces (such as size, number, location)
  - Internal areas of circulation (such as ramps, elevators, wayfinding)
  - Service areas (such as height of service counters, available seating)
  - Facility changerooms (such as having change tables for both adults and children)
- **Use of RHFAC** – Several participants identified the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification as a standard that could be applied to audits of public spaces to support accessibility improvements.

- **More public, universal washrooms** – Not having access to a washroom was identified as a barrier to being able to participate in community. There is a desire to have more universal washrooms as these spaces are accessible for a range of users (such as people looking for additional privacy, people needing a low sensory environment, and people needing access to a change table). A desire for public washrooms that are available year-round in outdoor areas such as parks and popular trailheads was also identified.
- **Events and shows** – There is a desire to embed accessible best-practices into community events, both outdoors and indoors. Suggestions were provided to ensure accessible viewing areas consider companions and service animals as well as have clear sight lines.
- **Seating in public areas** – Provide accessibly-designed public seating in public areas and along key walking trails. Also ensure interior seating areas use accessible seating forms.
- **Wayfinding and signage** – There is a desire to improve wayfinding within facilities and in key outdoor recreation areas through use of pictographs and plain language to support people with language processing needs or other first languages.
- **Working with other jurisdictions -** Respondents shared suggestions for desired changes that require working with a range of people beyond the RDNO's jurisdiction:
  - **Private developers** – There is a desire to increase the supply of accessible and affordable housing.
  - **Businesses** – There is a desire to embed accessible design, especially specific to entrances and navigation in local businesses.
  - **Resorts** – There is a desire to work with local resorts to prove accessible accommodations and provide accessible transportation to and from (such as Silver Star).

Quotes

- "Automatic door openers are rare. These would be a help in improving accessibility and reducing injury."
- "Wheelchair access to rivers and lakes, how can a wheelchair bound person get into the water for summer enjoyment or exercise."
- "More frequent seating offerings in public spaces would encourage more participation from the elderly and mobility challenged."
- "Wider doors, shorter counters, equipment to support wheeled mobility and dependent lifts"
- "More and larger single washroom stalls would encourage more participation in recreational facility use by those who are gender different, socially anxious, or religiously restricted."

2.5.2   TRANSPORTATION

We asked questions about the challenges respondents face getting around their community. We asked **"Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support with a disability, experience when travelling around your community"** and followed up with questions asking for additional suggestions to improve member community transportation.

Findings

The **top methods** survey respondents use to get around their member community differ based on ability. Participants with a personal experience of disability are more likely to be a passenger in a vehicle, are less likely to bike or scooter, and are more likely to use a mobility aid to get around compared to respondents without disabilities (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Top responses to how participants usually get around their community:

Participants **with** lived experience of disability	Participants **without** lived experience of disability
1. Drive Yourself – 72%	1. Drive Yourself – 84%
2. Passenger in a vehicle – 59%	2. Walk – 61%
3. Walk – 46%	3. Passenger in a vehicle – 52%
4. Use a mobility aid (scooter, cane, walker) – 43%	4. Bike, scooter, or electric option – 34%
5. Bus (BC Transit) – 19%	5. Use a mobility aid (scooter, cane, walker) – 16%

Regardless of ability, **the top challenges** survey respondents encounter moving around their member community are:

1. **Sidewalks and paths** (70%) – issues with the availability and condition such as width and smoothness.
2. **Personal safety** (61%) – concerns for personal safety when traveling through the community due to conflicts or challenges with other users such as vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, or others using the roads, trails and sidewalks.
3. **Seasonal maintenance** (54%) - challenges with landscaping and snow clearing along route or at key pick up / drop off points.

The following additional information, challenges and suggestions emerged from respondents' answers to open-ended questions:

- **Path design** – Respondents described a desire for wide, even sidewalks and trails with pedestrian lighting in key areas. There is a desire to have dedicated space (sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-modal lanes) that are separated from vehicle users. Gravel was identified as being challenging to users with mobility impairments.
- **Clear path of travel** – Respondents shared examples of obstacles in the path of travel that prevent them from being able to get around their community including:
  - **Snow and ice build up** –Winter snow clearing along pedestrian routes of travel emerged as the top obstacle with key locations identified:
    - Bus stop let downs
    - Intersections
    - Accessible parking aisles and routes to building entrances
  - **Construction zones** – Sidewalks not always blocked off correctly and / or detours do not provide an accessible alternative route.
  - **Scooter parking** – Rental scooters parked incorrectly obstruct the sidewalk.
- **Network connectivity** - Respondents shared examples of sidewalks and active transportation lanes ending abruptly or not connecting to key destinations. There is a desire to ensure the layout and network is thoughtfully considered relating to sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails with connection to specific locations:
  - **Recreation locations** – Water, beaches, parks
  - **Service areas** – Grocery stores, shopping centres, schools, medical centres
  - **High-density seniors communities** – Independent or assisted living centres, group homes
  - **Other disconnected areas** - Comments identified portions of the greater community that are not serviced by buses, taxis, or handyDART systems and where respondents struggle to safely get around.
  - **External communities** – Such as a regularly programmed bus service to Kelowna

- **Lack of street lighting at key locations** – Navigating in the dark is a key source of concern especially among pedestrians and active transportation users. There is a desire to introduce pedestrian lighting in key areas such as bus stops, trails, pedestrian crossings, and intersections.
- **Intersection design** – Respondents shared elements of intersection design they would like improved to increase user safety among pedestrians and active transportation users:
  - **Crossing elements** – Pedestrian-activated lights with audible and flashing signals are provided at high-traffic crossings, and push buttons are placed in alignment with crossings at an adequate height / angle.
  - **Crossing times** – Lights and pedestrian crossing signals are scheduled to provide sufficient time to cross intersections.
  - **Let downs / ramps**– Pedestrian crossings have let downs that are flush with the road so mobility devices, strollers, and other wheeled devices can safely transition from the sidewalk to the crossing.
- **Accessible parking spots** – Several respondents shared that accessible parking stalls are under-sized and incorrectly connected to surrounding infrastructure. There is a desire to ensure that accessible parking spots are universally designed, with access aisles, access to curb ramps, and appropriately marked with signage. Also providing enough spaces near building / park entrances.
  - **Enforcement** – Several respondents also shared issues with people using accessible parking spaces without having a visible decal.
- **Road signage** – Signage is not always legible or installed in the right location (for active transportation and vehicle users). It would be beneficial to have advance notice of needing to merge and reduce speed. As well, there is a desire to ensure road signage is highly legible and uses symbols, where appropriate.
- **Awareness of road rules** – Participants described numerous user groups that share community infrastructure and do not always adhere to the rules of the road (e.g., mobility scooters, electric micro mobility devices, cyclists, etc.,). There is a desire for increased education to reduce the likelihood of user conflict and risk to personal safety.
- **Traffic calming** – There is a desire to introduce traffic calming measures in residential areas and along key pedestrian routes (especially those not separated from vehicle traffic).
- **Public transportation** – Navigating to, and waiting at, bus stops can be challenging due to a lack of sidewalk infrastructure, benches to sit on, and overhead shelter from the elements. Several respondents shared challenges embarking and disembarking from bus stops that do not have sidewalks and require users to travel along the road, sometimes in the dark.
- **Feedback for other jurisdictions** – Respondents shared suggestions for desired changes that require provincial involvement, particularly by BC Transit and handyDART
  - **Bus stop signage contents and legibility** – Incorporate accessible signage at bus stops alongside schedule information.
  - **Extending bus service (schedules and routes)** – Increasing the frequency of bus service in high demand areas and identifying additional routes (in unserviced communities).
  - **Buses equipped with ramps** – There is a desire to ensure all buses in the region are capable of catering to people with wheeled devices.

Quotes

- "When the sides of roads by parking and sidewalks and crosswalks don't get cleared, it's inaccessible for us in the winter."
- "New pathways are being built with zero lighting which is insane."
- "Some areas do not have sidewalks and a wheelchair is forced to navigate in the street."

- "We are not on an accessible bus route. handyDART is fully booked, and accessible taxi service often doesn't go beyond 10 pm. We are fortunate we still drive to provide transportation."
- "Make it mandatory for crosswalks to have flashing indicators when someone is crossing the road. Example: fantastic flashing pedestrian lights installed like the ones by BX school and other locations."
- "Traffic lights don't have verbal warning when it is safe to cross different now for blind folks to know when it's safe to walk"

2.5.3 COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

We asked questions about the challenges community members with accessibility needs face accessing community information. We asked **"Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support with a disability, experience accessing information from the Regional District of member municipalities"** and followed up with questions asking for additional suggestions to improve communications and information.

Findings

Regardless of ability, the **top methods** survey respondents use to access information and communications from their member community and the RDNO are:

1. Website (59%)
2. Social Media (58%)
3. Newspaper – online or paper (49%)

As well, nearly half of respondents (42%) receive emergency alerts through the Alertable App.

Regardless of ability, **the top challenges** survey respondents encounter accessing information from the RDNO or their member community are:

1. **In-person participation in community events** (57%) – such as municipal or District meetings and public engagement
2. **Communication formats** (39%) - lack of accessible formats like ASL, digital, large print, or audio options.
3. **Online participation in community events** (32%) - challenges participating online with municipal or District meetings and public engagement.

The following additional challenges and suggestions emerged from respondents' answers to open-ended questions:

- **Understanding of municipal role** – Respondents identified a general lack of community awareness of municipal functions suggesting there is a need for better communication from municipal leadership.
- **Online information retrieval** – Respondents identified challenges navigating online civic websites to find information. Challenges include difficulty using embedded search functions and finding local government documents.
- **Accessible documents and language** - There is a desire for communication materials (documents, notifications, etc.) to be compatible with assistive devices, use plain language, and be designed for accessibility. Several participants identified a desire for clear instructions specific to obtaining a disability parking permit.
- **Range of communication methods** – Respondents emphasized that communications cannot rely solely on online platforms as many community members face challenges accessing online information (for example, poor internet connectivity or lack of access to a computer). Information should be shared online and in other, physical, formats including:

- o   Community notice boards – centralized location (e.g., library, post office)
- o   Local news publications – such as Castanet
- o   Direct mail
- o   Through communication with key service providers and community hubs
- **Advance communications** – There is a need to know about details of community events and engagement opportunities well in advance so people can arrange the supports they need to be able to attend.
- **Municipal meetings and events** – Several respondents identified specific challenges participating in public meetings. Suggestions include posting videos and livestreams to more commonly-accessed platforms such as YouTube, as well as considering different meeting times that are compatible with work schedules.
  - o   **Closed captioning & ASL** – There is a desire to include closed captioning and have sign language interpreters incorporated in community events.
- **Frontline staff training** – There is a need for staff training that focuses on customer service related to supporting people with disabilities, such as sharing information on available supports and programming.
- **Feedback procedures** - Several comments shared interactions with staff where they had not received responses in a timely manner to their inquiries. There is a desire to set better standards for response timelines.
- **Emergency planning** – There is a desire for emergency communications to be shared directly with key groups of vulnerable individuals such as group homes and care homes.

Quotes

- "We do not hear from our area representative in any format whatsoever about current events, future plans, nothing. We have a resident who takes the time to pass along information on social media, otherwise we have no clue what RDNO is doing."
- "I think we could make the language more easily translated. I do not consider myself stupid (this might be an error on my part) but I read some of the notices in the paper and think, seriously? That could have been said so much more clearly with less words if someone bothered to write for clarity."
- "Not everyone uses Facebook. Not everyone has a computer or even a smart phone. No local newspaper means we hear about events, meetings, change in garbage pick up after the fact."
- "People with lack of vision need more assistance to find specific services they look for. Staff need to know how to direct people who are searching. (vision impaired people also need to know how to ask for assistance)."

2.5.4   PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

We asked respondents to share their experiences accessing community programming and services. We asked **"Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support, experience accessing community programming and services"** and followed up with questions asking for additional suggestions to improve programs and services.

Findings

Regardless of ability, the **most used** programs and services by survey respondents are:
1. Aquatic, ice, and fitness programming (69%)
2. Paying a bill (42%)
3. Volunteer opportunities (40%)

Regardless of ability, the **top challenges** survey respondents encounter accessing community programming and services are:

1. **Scheduling and capacity** (58%) - program or service times do not work with their schedule or there are not enough spaces.
2. **Program cost** (57%) - fees are too high to participate.
3. **Variety of programs** (48%) - the types of programs offered do not meet their needs.

The following additional challenges emerged from respondents' answers to open-ended questions:

- **Cost barriers** – Programming costs were repeatedly identified as a significant barrier to participation, especially for older (senior) respondents, families, and others on fixed incomes.
  - Taxi voucher system – A specific request was identified to reinstate this program in the case that users don't have access to handyDART.
- **Geographic access -** Some member communities have limited access to facilities and / or programming opportunities while several respondents identified challenges getting to and from community facilities.
- **Suitable adaptive equipment –** Some recreation facilities lack adequate adaptive supports to enable people to participate (e.g., swimming and aquatic wheelchair).
- **Range of program offerings** – There is a desire to provide more programming options that people with diverse abilities can participate in such as cooking, gardening, knitting, volunteering and others.
  - **Sensory programming** – Several respondents shared a desire for quiet hour programming that provides a destimulating environment for people with sensory needs.
- **Range of program times –** There is a desire for some popular programs to be offered outside of work / school hours such as swimming.
- **One on One support –** There is an absence of programming and summer camp options that cater to the needs of youth and children with high support needs.
- **Community attitudes** – There is a desire to have staff trained to be aware of the accessibility needs of people in their courses, such as speaking in plain language or using correct pronouns. This training should extend to program instructors and coordinators to grow understanding of how to navigate the needs of different participants / registrants.
- **Event planning** – Several barriers were identified participating in community events such as getting to and from the event, safely navigating the event, and being able to access the stage or view the stage from designated seating. There is a need for events to plan for accessibility of a range of different needs.

Quotes

- "Program fees are a barrier to disabled people living and participating in one's own community."
- "The indoor walking track is difficult for handyDART and my residence bus ...I don't need to go and then wait for 3 hours to be picked up"
- "The pool and recreational area at Rutland is far more accessible than ours in Vernon. Their spaces for changing are so much better. We need more space and lifts."
- "Limited options for youth on the spectrum."
- "I really liked the free exercise programs for people with disabilities at the rec center. Because of my disability I'm always short on money and that was helpful."

2.5.5   EMPLOYMENT

We asked questions about the challenges community members with accessibility needs face accessing local government employment. We asked **"Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support with a disability, have experienced with employment offered by the Regional District or your member community"** and followed up with questions asking about reasons **"Why, or Why not?"** and **"Suggestions for improving municipal / District employment?"**

Findings

Most respondents have never applied to work with the RDNO or member municipality (85%). 15% of respondents have applied and 6% have been successful. Of the people with disabilities who have applied and not been successful (9%), the following key challenges were identified:

- **Need for accommodations during hiring process** – consideration of different methods of posting/advertising positions and conducting interviews.
- **Concerns with workplace culture** – challenges being included or feeling represented in the workplace.
- **Ineligible due to job requirements** – relating to education, experience, and or certification.
- **Physical workspace** – not accessible.

The following additional challenges with employment, both generally, and related to the RDNO and member municipalities emerged from respondents' answers to open-ended questions:

- **Workplace flexibility** – Desirable positions are those that provide flexible working hours, scheduling, and the ability to work from home to facilitate changing health status.
- **Accommodation policies** – There is a need for supports in place across all phases of the employment process (from job seeking to interviewing, and training) and within the day-to-day workplace. There is a need to consider non-physical barriers for neurodivergent people.
- **Workplace not reflecting community** – There is a scarcity of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Several respondents shared that they do not feel local government staff reflect the diversity of community members.
- **Training opportunities** – Youth and others with disabilities face challenges finding job experience to put on their resumes and could use volunteer opportunities to help gain experience.

Quotes

- "Possibly having more employment opportunities available for people with all abilities."
- "A lot of application for jobs are done on the computer. We have come to depend to much on electronics and there dose not seem to enough interaction between employee and employer in the hiring process."
- "More temporary, part time, project related work, or flexible hours for those of us that have 'good days' and 'bad days.'"

2.5.6   OTHER EMERGING AREAS

We asked open ended questions to identify other barriers beyond those presented in the Accessible BC Act and the survey focus areas. We asked **"Is there anything else you'd like to share as we develop this Accessibility Plan for the Regional District and its member communities?"** Responses to this, and other questions, identified several additional challenges and suggestions that should be incorporated into the Noah Okanagan Accessibility Plan:

- **Clear organizational leadership** – There is a desire for member communities and the RDNO to demonstrate an understanding of accessibility, willingness to learn from people with disabilities, and visual/vocal support for the community's needs. Multiple suggestions were provided asking for community representatives to attend experiential sessions to better understand the lived experience of people with disabilities. Any training should seek to provide insight on a breadth of experiences including both visible and invisible disabilities.

- **Inclusion of people with disabilities in decision-making** – Respondents shared feeling marginalized in their communities with key issues being a lack of representation in positions of authority and a lack of consultation when decisions are made that impact people with disabilities. There is a desire to include people with disabilities at the centre of decision making to ensure accessibility is not an afterthought.

- **Public education and awareness** – Public understanding of the different experiences people with disabilities have is perceived to be low. There is a desire to address this lack of understanding to improve social dynamics, reduce stigma, and grow awareness of invisible disabilities.

- **Build relationships (internal and external)** – Numerous suggestions identified partnerships member communities and the RDNO could pursue to broadly improve accessibility throughout the community. Suggested partnerships include:
    - **Private sector** – There is a desire to educate and work with members of the business community as well as developers to embed accessible design in private buildings.
    - **Service providers** – 19% of survey participants identified themselves as working for a service provider that supports people with disabilities. Respondents shared a sense of disconnect between service provider efforts and local government efforts and would like to offer their experience in community planning.
    - **Provincial bodies** – Especially with regard to transportation such as BC Transit and handyDART, there is a need for member communities and the RDNO to facilitate conversations with provincial bodies to amplify community challenges and seek solutions.

- **Support for basic needs** – Many respondents shared the financial difficulties associated with having disabilities and facing access to employment. Several respondents identified how living on fixed incomes creates challenges meeting costs associated with fresh food, transportation, and accommodations.

Quotes

- "I don't think people in general are cruel, but most are ignorant of how to treat or be mindful of people with disabilities- especially invisible disabilities. I have witnessed lots of ignorant behaviors by people who lack knowledge or understanding likely because they don't have a friend or loved one with a disability so they are unaware or uneducated. I would like to see the RDNO and our communities promote more thoughtfulness around patience, understanding, courtesy and kindness towards others who may have a disability."

- "Businesses need to be aware when they design their interior areas. They need allow enough room for people with physical challenges/or in a motorized wheelchair can access the business like any other customer.

- "If not already done so, get in a wheelchair and a power wheelchair, spend some time trying to navigate the simple options of an able bodied citizen moving about our communities. Try some of those more challenging crosswalks, or where there isn't one."

- "Physical/mobility challenges can be eliminated through environmental changes. Psychological issues are more difficult as greater stigma still exists around these. How do you turn such things into an everyday experience? Inclusion inclusion inclusion. You can not give these people enough access. Programs that provide this is essential."

3.0 STAFF ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

A survey was designed to seek staff insight into accessibility interventions and future actions across the Regional District. Responses were collected from each of the member communities for a total of 38 submissions.

The following summary of survey responses presents an analysis of findings and is organized according to the categories of questions asked:

- **Demographics** – Which local governments participated and from what department?
- **What is an Accessible Community** – How do staff understand what accessibility is and the elements it includes?
- **Current Context** – What actions are communities taking to improve accessibility and how do they know what is working?
- **Identified Barriers to Accessibility** – What challenges do staff understand people with disabilities face? And what actions could staff foresee undertaking over a three-year plan horizon? What challenges do staff face, organizationally, with implementing these changes?
- **Feedback Mechanism and Committee –** How are staff currently collecting information from the public, and what is their relationship to the Accessibility Advisory Committee?

3.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics at a glance:

- **All RDNO member communities were represented by staff surveys -** The most surveys were received from the RDNO (39%) followed by The City of Vernon (32%). The communities with fewest responses were the City of Armstrong (3%) and Township of Spallumcheen (8%).
- **Staff in a variety of positions completed the survey** – Most staff were connected to Parks, Planning, Development, and Bylaw roles, but responses were also provided by individuals in Human Resources, Emergency Services, Finance, and Administration.
- **Most respondents did not identify as having a disability** – Only 11% of respondents self identified as having a disability, and most did not disclose their disability.

3.2 WHAT IS AN ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY

Staff were asked to respond to the question **"Describe what an accessible community looks like to you."** Responses to this question were compared with the vision of an accessible community described by public survey participants. Overall, responses highlight similar barriers and challenges specific to the built environment, but demonstrate less awareness of other challenges.

- **Built environment focus** - Staff responses generally indicate that awareness of accessibility challenges is primarily focused on the built environment and improvements to support individuals with mobility

impairments. Staff responses broadly describe a community that is accessible for all regardless of age or ability. Most responses address key barriers identified in the public survey such as network connectivity, beach access, universal building and facility design.

- **Limited focus on other barriers -** To a lesser degree, several responses addressed non-physical barriers including communications and information barriers, systemic barriers such as programming costs, and attitudinal barriers that contribute to stigma and feelings of exclusion.

- **Limited inclusion of invisible disabilities -** Although some comments addressed barriers for people with vision and hearing related challenges, very few addressed neurodivergence or invisible disabilities related to mental health.

Distinct from public survey responses, a few staff respondents shared ideas for how member communities can work together and leverage relationships and resources to make more widespread change:

- "A collaborative approach where communities work together to share the costs of infrastructure and services. This ensures that recreation opportunities, along with other essential services, are available to all members, not just a select few. By pooling resources and efforts, communities can create inclusive environments that support diverse needs and promote equal access for everyone, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and community well-being with strategic infrastructure/service provider planning."

3.3   CURRENT CONTEXT

We asked a series of questions to better understand how staff believe accessibility progress is occurring in their community, as well as for information on any community partnerships.

3.3.1   AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Staff responses rated progress toward removing barriers to accessibility more highly than public survey respondents and were generally less likely to identify change as being *Poor* or *Very Poor*. Highly rated categories such as attitudinal improvement were not asked in the public survey, but public responses to open-ended questions indicate that this is a key area of concern. Across both forms of engagement, employment-related improvement emerges as an area that could use further attention.

- **Areas recognized as improving –** Compared to public survey responses, staff were more likely to identify that progress is *Alright*, *Well*, or *Very Well*. The following areas were identified as improving by more than half of respondents:
  - Attitudinal barriers (76%)
  - Physical barriers (68%)
  - Programs and Services, Transportation, Sensory barriers (tied 63%)
  - Systemic barriers (58%)
  - Communications and Information and Procurement (tied 55%)
  - Employment (53%)

- **Focus areas with lowest improvement scores –** Technology emerged as the area where staff identified the least amount of improvement (only 50% answered *Alright*, *Well*, or *Very Well).*

- **Most uncertain focus area – Procurement emerged as the** area with the most staff responses indicating they *Don't Know* how barriers have been addressed (37%)

3.3.2 COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

We asked questions to learn about relationships with external service providers: **"What organizations are serving people with disabilities in your community? How does your municipality interact and work with them?"**

A majority of respondents indicated that they are unaware of their member community's working relationship with any local service providers. While some respondents identified service providers active in their community none, beyond the RDNO, shared that there is a working relationship. A couple service providers identified by the RDNO are receiving grant funding or in partnership for training opportunities.

3.4 ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS

We asked questions to understand what barriers staff observe in their member community as well as ideas for suggested actions to improve accessibility from a local government perspective, as well as any plans their community has upcoming to address barriers to accessibility.

In general, staff are aware of a range of barriers to accessibility. Staff were most likely to identify physical barriers in the built environment and transportation network such as accessibility of buildings, playgrounds, sidewalks, intersections, and limited access to outdoor destinations like lakes and beaches. Communication and programming barriers were also identified.

In general, staff responses did not indicate a high level of awareness of attitudinal and social barriers.

3.4.1 SUGGESTED ACTIONS

We asked staff to share any ideas they have for actions that could be undertaken in the next three years.

- **Education and training** – staff identified a range of training options that would be useful to themselves and or other staff members. Suggestions include:
    - Customer service training
    - Improving HR processes for employment
    - Available accessibility resources and standards such as CSA B651 (Accessible design for the built environment)
    - Accessible website design and technology usage
    - Awareness and understanding of the range of disabilities
- **Collect baseline information** – staff described the importance of setting priorities, and completing audits, and asset inventories to have an understanding of current conditions, and using this information to set future actions and assign resources.
- **Implement accessible design in new builds** – staff described wanting to ensure new buildings, facilities, trails, playgrounds and other infrastructure developed over the next three years embeds accessibility considerations.

3.4.2 BARRIERS TO ACTION

We asked staff to share details that make it difficult to improve accessibility in their community. Many of the responses have a cost component, key themes are shared below

- **Accessible trails and topography** – challenges acquiring land in areas with suitable slope to implement accessible trail routes.
- **Expansive rural network** – challenges associated with extending existing sidewalk network to rural areas due to cost, labour implications.
- **Low ridership in rural areas** – extending transit options to rural areas is difficult without high population density.
- **Ageing infrastructure** – older buildings are challenging and expensive to retrofit for accessibility.
- **Attitudinal barriers** – key to addressing to ensure accessibility is a priority among decision-makers.

3.4.3 UPCOMING ACTIONS

Staff at the RDNO and two member communities shared key accessibility actions that they plan to undertake:

RDNO
- Develop Accessibility Plan
- Widening key existing trails
- Conduct lighting review
- Develop the Greater Vernon Cultural Centre to current accessibility standards

Coldstream
- Provide dock access
- Introducing access to Kal Beach with the inclusion of accessible wheelchair mats

Vernon
- Active Living Centre (Currently under construction)
- Update the Wayfinding Signage Strategy
- Review options to improve front desk

3.5 FEEDBACK MECHANISM AND COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT

The following questions ask about two elements legislated by the Accessible BC Act to be part of developing an Accessibility Plan: the feedback mechanism and establishment and involvement of an accessibility committee.

3.5.1 FEEDBACK MECHANISM

We asked questions to learn how member communities are receiving feedback from the public on accessibility-related issues. We asked **"How does your municipality currently receive feedback on accessibility-related challenges in the community?"** and followed up with **"What would you change with this approach?"**

Most member communities offer multiple methods of providing feedback including:

- In-person

- Providing a dedicated phone number, email address

- Website link to an online form

     ○   Only the RDNO and Vernon identified the option to submit photos, videos, and other media as part of an online form submission.

When asked for opportunities to improve the existing feedback options, the most common answer was including an engagement component to learn from people with lived experience. However, several staff respondents also identified a capacity issue with quickly addressing and resolving requests noting that they often feel they are unable to meet expectations for timelines by community members.

3.5.2   ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

We asked **"How would you like your municipality to collaborate with RDNO's citizen-led Accessibility Advisory Committee?"**

In general, staff responses were supportive of being involved in the Committee, whether through a staff representative or quarterly meetings, and suggested several areas for collaboration including:

- The identification of grants to support accessibility improvements

- Collaborative training and education

- Receive feedback on draft policies and plans (especially those related to planning and transportation)

4.0   NEXT STEPS

All information in this engagement summary will be analyzed alongside other sources of information such as conversations with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, best practices, staff feedback, and Board and Council direction. The following project phase will involve a workshop with members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and key staff from the RDNO and member communities. Findings from this engagement summary and the workshop will support the development of a draft Accessibility Plan with high-level actions that respond to and reflect suggestions and challenges that arose from community engagement.

APPENDIX 1 – SURVEY RESPONSES

ATTITUDINAL QUESTIONS

How is the Regional District and your member community doing at improving attitudes and understanding of disability?

Response	Percentage
Very Well	4%
Well	11%
Alright	37%
Poor	19%
Very Poor	11%
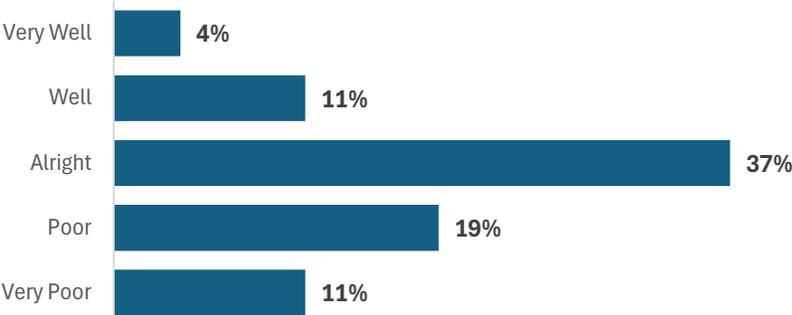
How often do you see people in your community show positive attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities?

Response	Percentage
Always	8%
Often	35%
Sometimes	42%
Rarely	13%
Never	1%
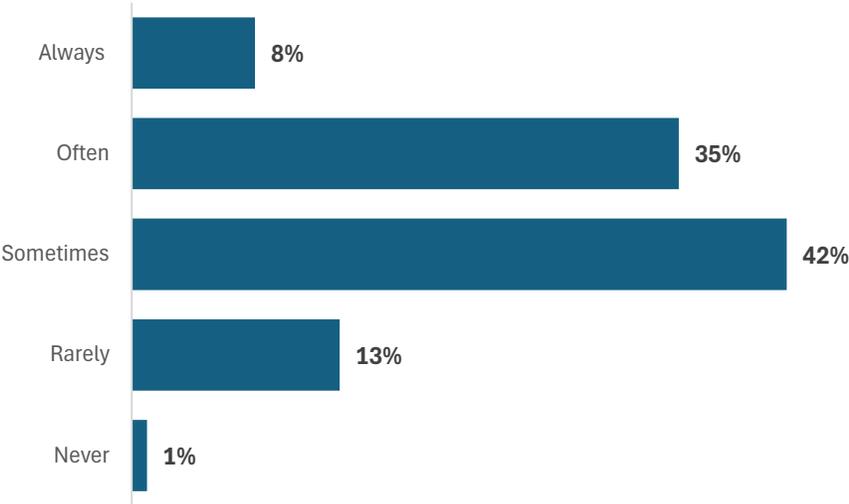
How aware of disability issues do you think people in your community are?

Rating	Percentage
Very High	3%
High	10%
Moderate	40%
Low	35%
Very Low	11%
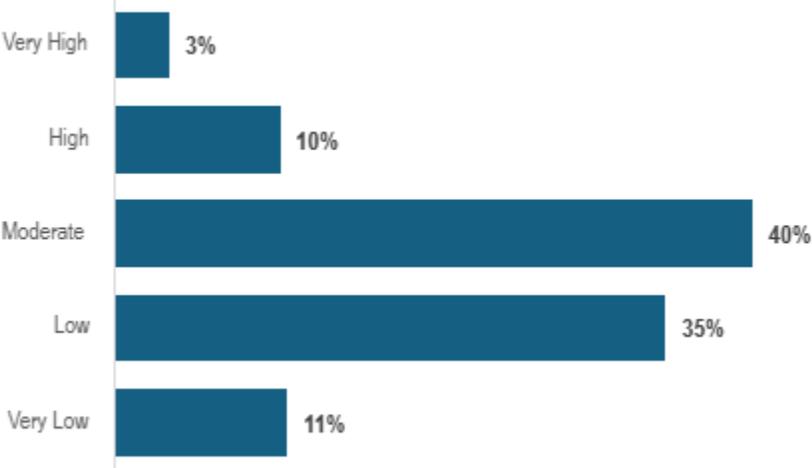
Do you, or someone you support with a disability, feel included in local government spaces, programs, activities, and community engagement?

Rating	Percentage
Always	4%
Often	18%
Sometimes	45%
Rarely	23%
Never	9%
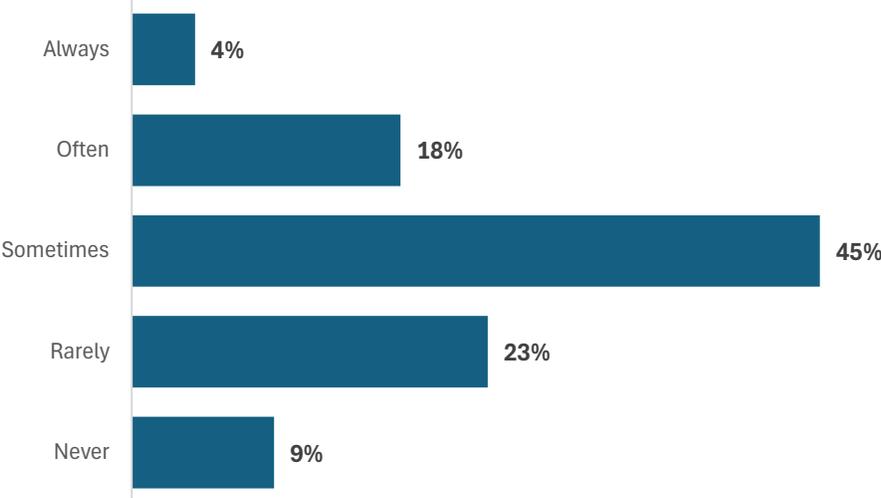
IMPROVEMENT QUESTIONS

How is your member community doing at improving accessibility to physical spaces?

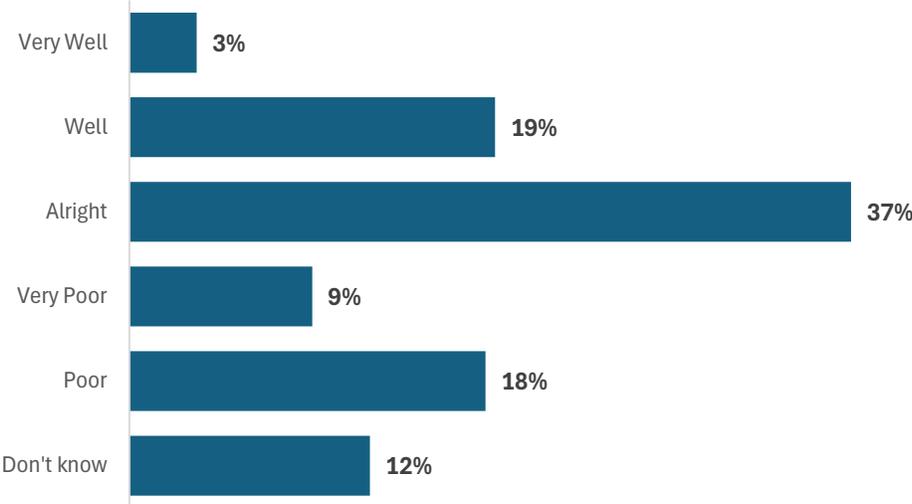| Response	Percentage
Very Well	3%
Well	19%
Alright	37%
Very Poor	9%
Poor	18%
Don't know	12%

Most common challenging areas in community buildings, facilities, or parks.

Area	Percentage
Seasonal maintenance	68%
Building access	61%
Accessible washrooms and change rooms	46%
Seating areas	46%
Building navigation	41%
Wayfinding and signage	30%
Assistive technology	23%
Emergency management	21%
Other	9%
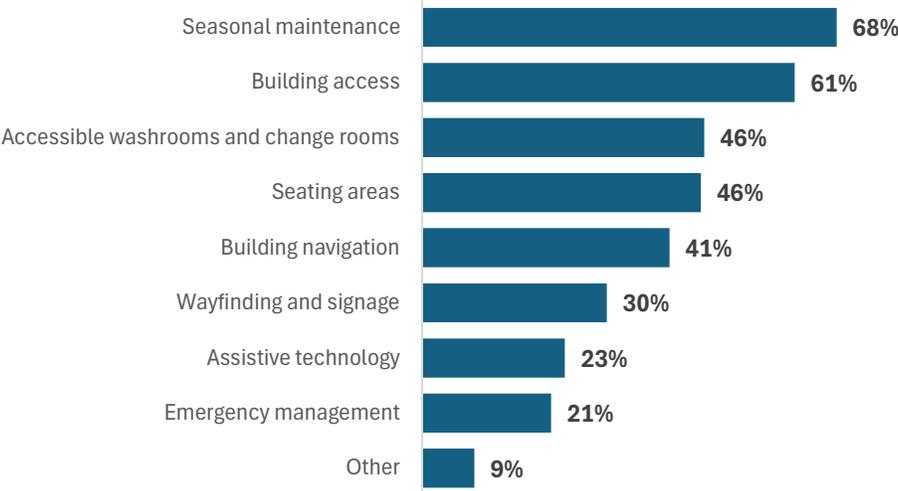
How is your member community doing at improving accessibility with transportation?

Category	Percentage
Very Well	4%
Well	9%
Alright	30%
Very Poor	14%
Poor	24%
Don't know	21%
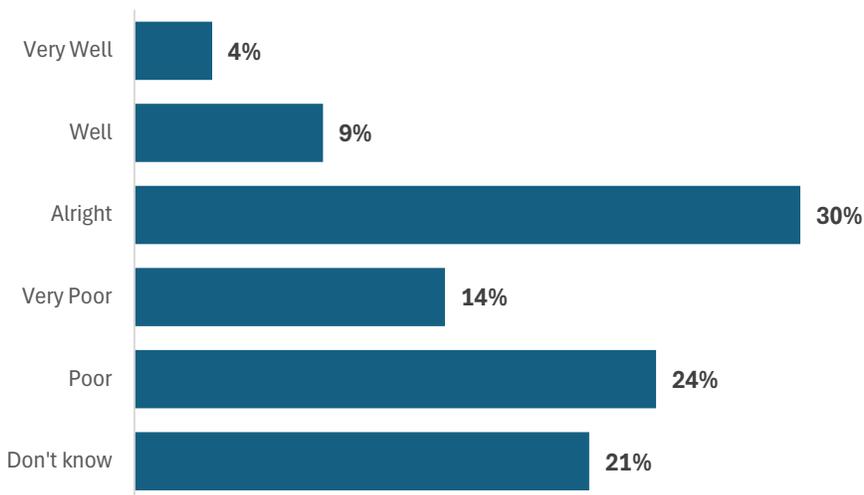
How do you usually get around your community?

Category	Percentage
Drive yourself	79%
Walk	55%
Passenger in a vehicle	54%
Bike, scooter, electric option	28%
Use a mobility aid	26%
Bus	13%
Ride-hailing service	6%
handyDART	4%
Other	1%
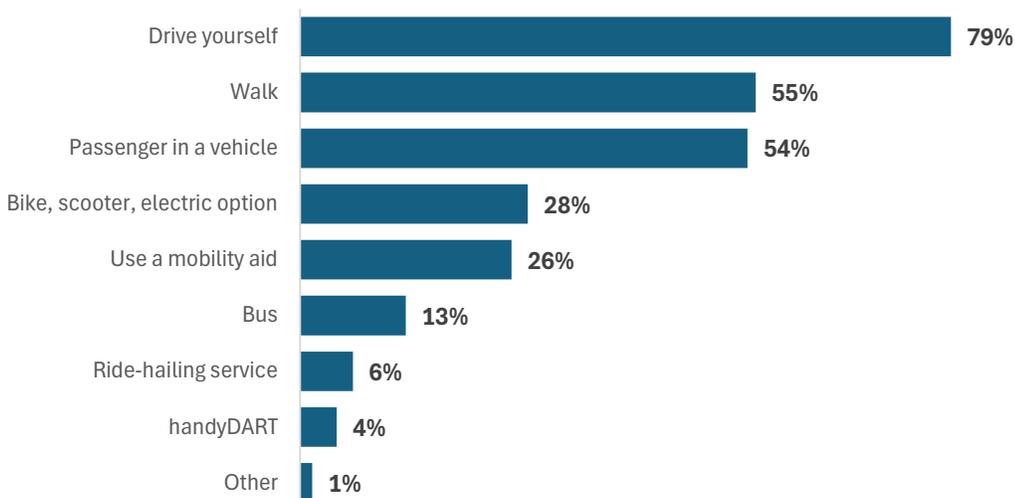
What challenges do you face moving about your community?

Challenge	Percentage
Sidewalks and paths	70%
Personal safety	61%
Seasonal maintenance	54%
Pedestrian crossings	45%
Accessible parking	44%
Lighting	41%
Bus stops	23%
Wayfinding	17%
Other	6%
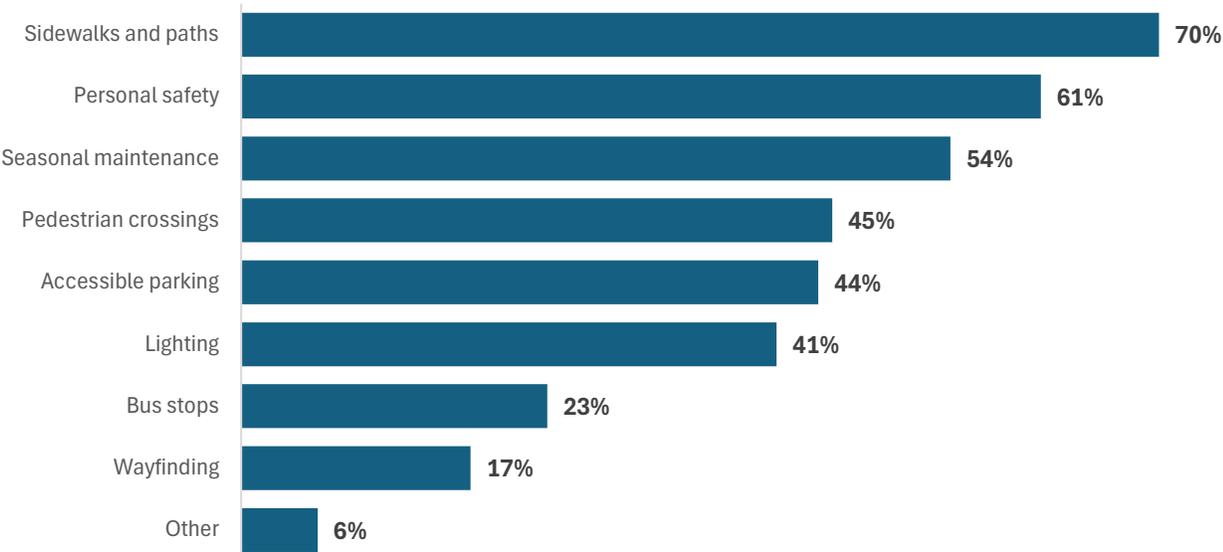
COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

How is your member community doing at improving communications and engagement?

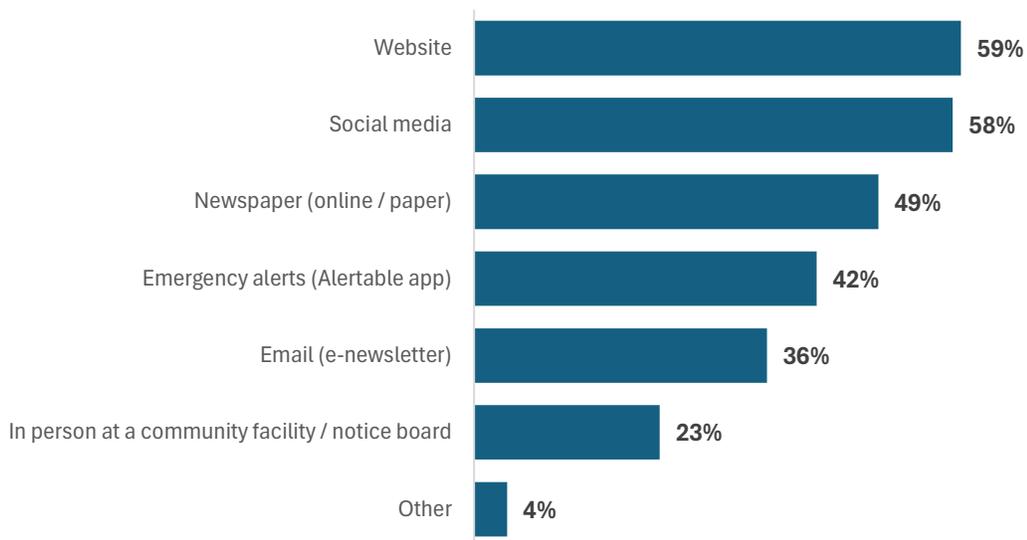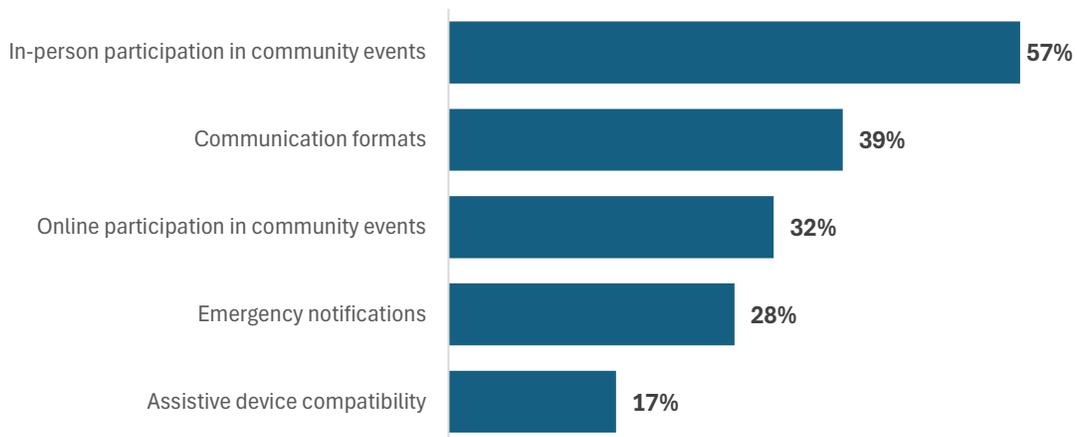| Response	Percentage
Very Well	4%
Well	12%
Alright	36%
Poor	21%
Very Poor	13%
Don't know	12%
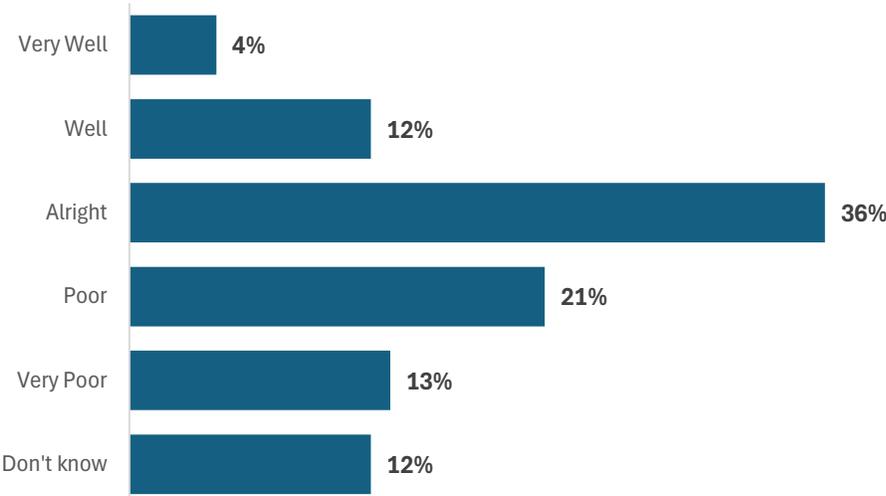
How do you currently access information and communications from your local government. Check all that apply.

Source	Percentage
Website	59%
Social media	58%
Newspaper (online / paper)	49%
Emergency alerts (Alertable app)	42%
Email (e-newsletter)	36%
In person at a community facility / notice board	23%
Other	4%

Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support with a disability, experience accessing information from the Regional District of member municipalities.

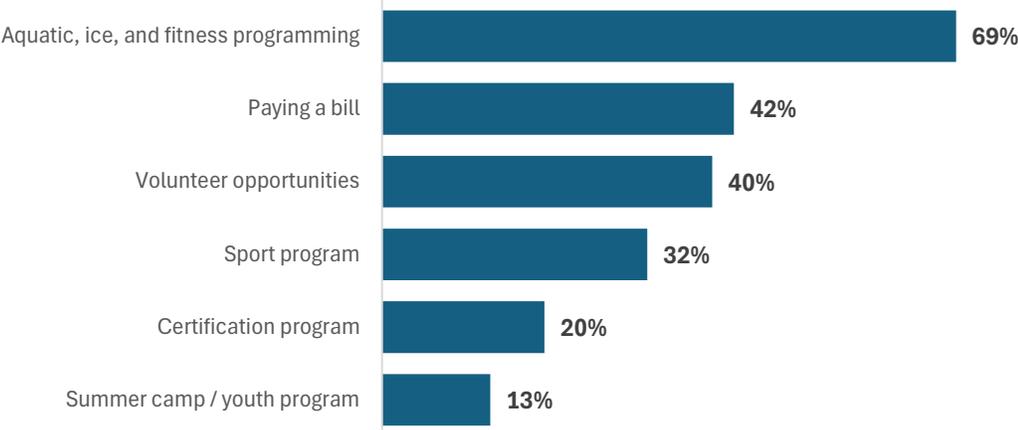| Challenge	Percentage
In-person participation in community events	57%
Communication formats	39%
Online participation in community events	32%
Emergency notifications	28%
Assistive device compatibility	17%

PROGRAM & SERVICE QUESTIONS

How is your member community doing at improving accessibility in programs and services?

Response	Percentage
Very Well	4%
Well	8%
Alright	39%
Very Poor	8%
Poor	19%
Don't know	23%
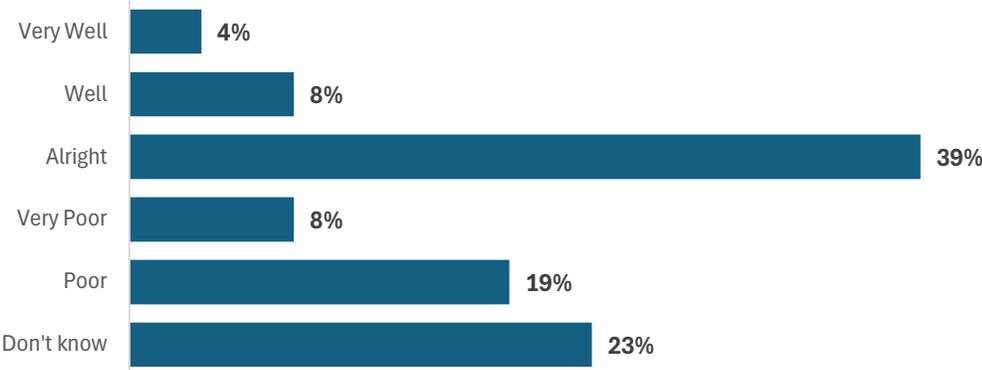
What services and programs offered by your member community do you currently access?

Service / Program	Percentage
Aquatic, ice, and fitness programming	69%
Paying a bill	42%
Volunteer opportunities	40%
Sport program	32%
Certification program	20%
Summer camp / youth program	13%

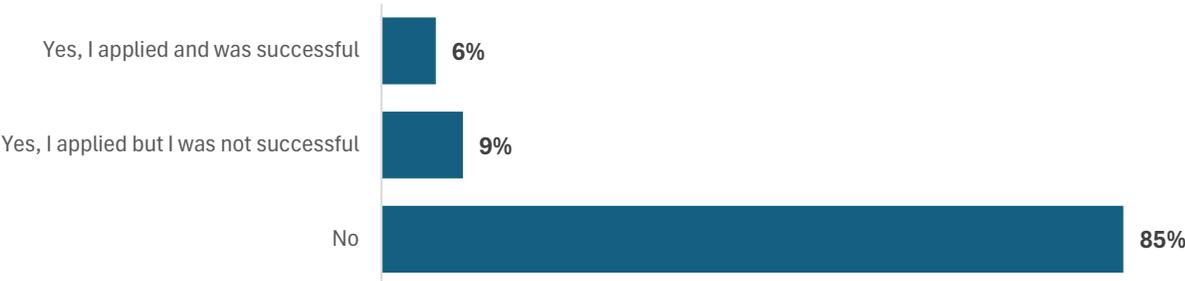**Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support, experience accessing community programming and services.**

Challenge	Percentage
Scheduling and capacity	58%
Program cost	57%
Variety of programs	48%
Availability of accommodations	35%
Staff interactions	32%
Eligibility criteria	26%
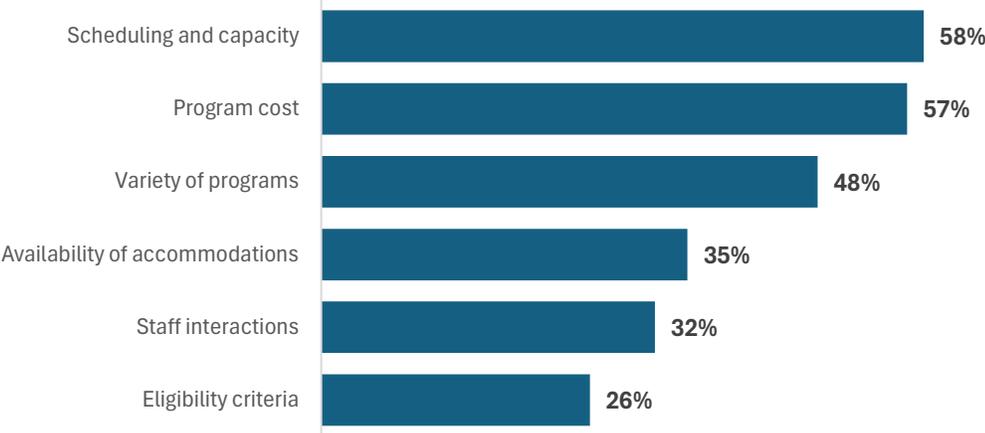
EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

Have you ever applied to work with your municipality or the Regional District?

Response	Percentage
Yes, I applied and was successful	6%
Yes, I applied but I was not successful	9%
No	85%

How is your member community doing at improving accessibility with hiring practices?
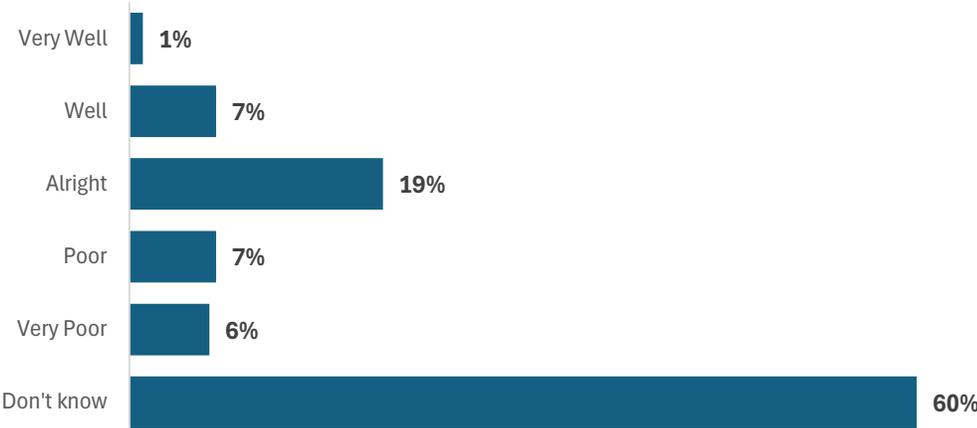
Response	Percentage
Very Well	1%
Well	7%
Alright	19%
Poor	7%
Very Poor	6%
Don't know	60%

Tell us about the types of challenges you, or the person you support with a disability, have experienced with employment offered by the Regional District or your member community.

Category	Percentage
Not Applicable / I do not want to respond	60%
Job eligibility requirements	20%
Workplace culture	17%
Job posting format	13%
Physical workplace	12%
Hiring process accommodations	8%

Cut down.
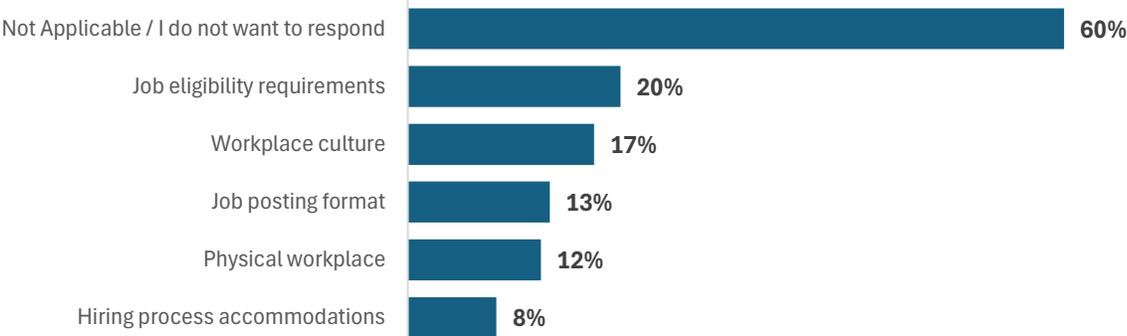
Appendix B – Suggested Action Items

The following list of actions come from community engagement and conversations with the AAC and should be considered when updating the accessibility Action Plan. Some member communities may already be taking steps toward these actions, but future planning can help regionalize actions that are identified as priorities.

Priority Area: Accessible Built Environment and Outdoor Recreation

Focuses on integrating Universal Design into facilities and public spaces. Key considerations include ensuring accessible washrooms, entrances, wayfinding, and parking, as well as improving access to outdoor spaces such as parks, picnic areas, and beaches.

Goal 1
Ensure public buildings meet universal design standards.

Suggested Actions

- Ensure public buildings are designed or retrofitted in alignment with Universal Design Standards that reflect a range of disabilities.
- Work with people with lived experience of disability and draw on best practices and standards to develop accessibility audits for public spaces that support prioritization of accessibility retrofits.
- Collaborate with civic facilities, operations, and parks departments to ensure staff receive training and tools to support the implementation of Universal Design in everyday maintenance and upgrades.
- Ensure adequate accessible parking spaces are available near entrances to public buildings and recreation areas with space and curb cuts for access.

Goal 2
Increase the availability of accessible, universally designed washrooms.

Suggested Actions

- Ensure that new and upgraded washrooms are both designed and installed in alignment with Universal Design Standards and also include features such as auditory and visual alert systems

Goal 3
Implement wayfinding and signage through public spaces that supports navigation by a range of users and considers emergency response.

Suggested Actions

- Review and update wayfinding and signage standards to incorporate universal design improvements such as symbols, pictographs, tactile elements, and plain language.
- Explore embedding creative and innovative technologies (e.g., QR codes, auditory beacons, wayfinding apps, hearing loops) into public spaces.
- Improve emergency signage and wayfinding measures to ensure users with diverse needs can safely navigate public spaces during emergencies.

Priority Area: Safe and User-friendly Transportation Networks

Enhancing year-round access to transportation network by improving sidewalk connectivity, bike lanes, maintenance, and supporting other transportation options (e.g., e-scooters). Identifying opportunities to improve road user safety and ensuring route connectivity to key destinations such as schools and business areas.

Goal 1
Ensure transportation infrastructure is designed and upgraded to meet Universal Design Standards and community safety expectations.

Suggested Actions

- Ensure transportation corridors, trails, and paths, are designed with accessible paths, considering standards for width, grade, surface material, and separation from vehicles where possible.
- Upgrade intersections to meet the needs of all users by aligning curb cuts with crosswalks, installing tactile warning strips, and—where appropriate—adding pedestrian-activated crossing signals with sufficient crossing times.
- Identify key routes to improve or upgrade lighting for pedestrian and active transportation users.

Goal 2
Improve community transportation network connectivity.

Suggested Actions

- Review options to extend pedestrian, active transportation, and public transit routes to key destinations such as schools, business districts, service hubs, high-density seniors communities, and areas currently underserved by transit.

Goal 3
Enhance safety and inclusion for all road and transportation users.

Suggested Actions

- Identify high-use pedestrian areas where traffic calming measures can be implemented to improve road user safety.
- Explore the development of road rule awareness campaigns to educate the public about shared road use, accessibility needs, and common conflicts such as right turns on red, bike lane obstructions, and e-scooter parking.
- Investigate options for inter-community disabled parking placards, and increased awareness of existing options.

Priority Area: Inclusive Programs and Services

Improving how people access community services and recreation by enhancing the user experience through adaptive technology and programming, scheduling adjustments, staff and customer service education, and affordability.

Goal 1

Improve the availability and accessibility of recreation programs and services.

Suggested Actions

- Explore opportunities to implement or extend quiet hour programming for users with sensory needs.
- Explore options to offer popular programs outside of work and school hours.
- Review low cost and subsidized program offerings for opportunities to increase the benefit for individuals and households experiencing financial barriers.

Goal 2

Improve staff capacity to provide tailored supports and knowledgeable responses to customer service requests and during recreation programs and services.

Suggested Actions

- Ensure frontline staff and program instructors have access to tools and protocols to support them in responding to accessibility requests that emerge during program and service delivery.

Goal 3

Incorporate accessibility in the design and delivery of public events and community celebrations.

Suggested Actions

- Develop and implement an event accessibility checklist to guide planning across departments and community partners. The checklist should be based on best practices and on the insight of people with disabilities.
- Ensure event planning processes consider options for accessible transportation to and from the venue.
- Provide accessible viewing areas at public events for attendees using mobility devices, companions, service animals and others who need priority seating.

Priority Area: Accessible Communication and Access to Information

Ensuring multiple forms of communication, addressing web accessibility barriers, and providing customer service training to connect people efficiently and compassionately to the information they need.

Goal 1

Ensure communication materials, community engagement, and civic meetings incorporate best practices for accessibility and that a range of methods are used to reach all community members.

Suggested Actions

- Apply best practices for accessible documents, including plain language, formatting, use of alternative text, and compatibility for assistive technologies.
- Explore alternative platforms to share recordings of municipal meetings to support broader community participation.
- Investigate developing targeted emergency communication strategies that reach vulnerable individuals, including those in group homes, care homes, individuals living alone, and those in rural or isolated settings
.

Goal 2

Improve frontline customer service and response practices.

Suggested Actions

- Review and improve community feedback pathways to ensure accessibility requests are resolved in a timely manner and with streamlined communications

Priority Area: Collaboration and Leadership to Remove Barriers

Establishing a formal approach to including people with lived experience of disability in decision-making. Ensuring diverse voices and experiences are reflected while building external capacity to support a cohesive approach to accessibility (e.g., engaging businesses, healthcare, and the development sector). Improve relationships with service providers and people with lived experience who can help inform accessibility improvements.

Goal 1

Collaborate with community partners to strengthen and promote leadership opportunities.

Suggested Actions

- Seek opportunities to offer training, mentorship, internship, and volunteer positions for people with disabilities, with a focus on youth opportunities.

Goal 2
Increase access to civic participation for people with disabilities.
Suggested Actions

- Continue engaging people with disabilities to identify and remove barriers to participation in civic processes including Council meetings, elections, and community engagements.
- Explore updating protocols to ensure civic processes are accessible, such as providing closed captions and ASL interpretation at in-person and virtual meetings and events.
- Implement multiple methods of communication to provide advance notice of upcoming civic opportunities, events, and meetings so participants can arrange supports as needed.

Priority Area: Educated and Aware Civil Servants and Community Members

Providing education and training opportunities to leaders, staff, and employees of local governments to enhance awareness of how barriers are created and can be removed, and to address attitudinal barriers. Learning opportunities for members of the public and community partners such as businesses, builders, and service providers.

Goal 1
Strengthen accessibility knowledge and practices within participating local governments.
Suggested Actions

- Explore delivering experiential learning experiences for staff and local government officials, ensuring people with disabilities are involved in the exercise.
- Establish a process for monitoring emerging best practices, legislative updates, and innovations in accessibility to inform policy and staff development.
- Explore options to establish a local government partnership table to share resources and collaborate on accessibility initiatives across the region.
- Explore options to update grant evaluation and RFP frameworks to include accessibility criteria.

Additional Actions: Building our Capacity

Acting on this Plan will require some investments in knowledge and skill development on the part of municipal staff and AAC members. The actions in this section are intended to help build the knowledge and skills of those involved in activating the plan.

Goal 2

Collaborate with others to improve accessibility awareness and support action across sectors.

Suggested Actions

- Collaborate with private developers, businesses, tourism operators, and institutions to promote accessibility improvements in buildings, programs, and customer experiences.
- Continue discussions with external partners such as Interior Health, BC Transit, and service providers to address accessibility concerns beyond the jurisdiction of local government.
- Explore methods to regularly seek feedback from community partners and service providers on how local government initiatives are being perceived by community members with disabilities.
- Partner with local service providers and non-profit organizations that serve people with disabilities to align efforts and stay aware of available programs and services in community.