

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation



2024 - 2026 Accessibility Plan



Welcome Message

The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NL Housing) is a crown corporation whose mandate is to develop and administer housing assistance policy and programs for the benefit of low to moderate income households throughout the province.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to improving accessibility and inclusion throughout the province. NL Housing supports this commitment and seeks to remove barriers and enhance accessibility and inclusion in all aspects of its work which are reflective of the Accessibility Act of Newfoundland and Labrador. Key examples include:

- Appointment of a representative of persons with disabilities to the corporation's Board of Directors;
- Inclusion of accessible parking zones at all office locations and accessibility features throughout office buildings;
- Incorporation of accessibility features in our existing and new social housing stock; and
- Incorporation of Universal Design features in our existing and new social housing stock.

Approximately one in four people in Newfoundland and Labrador identify as having a disability which is higher than the rest of Canada, as noted in the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability. People with disabilities experience barriers to participating in their communities throughout the province.

The NL Housing Accessibility Plan will further advance the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's commitment to having a diverse and inclusive workforce, where employees have equal and fair opportunity to participate, contribute and advance in the workplace. The Plan will be continuously monitored, and updated every three years with ongoing feedback from stakeholders.

Achievements to Date

When planning for new builds of social housing units, NL Housing engages in consultations with key stakeholders during and upon completion of construction, and elicits feedback from NL Housing tenants with lived experience in accessible units to ensure new builds meet accessibility needs. In addition to building accessible units, NL Housing is committed to incorporating Universal Design features in every new build.

Increasing the number of accessible units has been a key focus in the construction of NL Housing new builds. In September 2021, NL Housing constructed an eight-unit building on Froude Avenue, St. John's, that was awarded the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certifications (RHFAC) Program. RHFAC is a national rating system launched in 2017 which helps measure the accessibility of buildings and sites based on a consistent methodology, and promotes increased access through the adoption of Universal Design principles. The building includes four wheelchair-accessible, two-

bedroom units on the main level, and four two-bedroom units on the second level. In 2023, NL Housing also constructed six new units in Gander, four new units in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and eight new units in St. John's. Nine, or 50 per cent of these units, were wheel-chair accessible. The Universal Design features used throughout the buildings include:

- 'No step' level entry building entrances;
- Front door landing and rear deck/patio with a turning radius;
- Widened exterior and interior doors and hallways;
- Lowered casement windows with easy operating controls;
- Lever-type door handles;
- Lower kitchen counters;
- Lower sink with accessible knee space;
- Bathroom grab bars;
- Bathroom clear turning radius; and
- Lever door handles on cabinets/drawers.

In October 2023, NL Housing announced the successful proponents of a \$80 million Affordable Rental Housing Program to support private and community housing sector projects estimated to see the construction of over 900 new affordable rental housing homes throughout the province. All projects under the Affordable Housing Program are required to meet accessibility standards (i.e. greater of one or 10 per cent of units) with additional financial incentives provided for projects that exceed accessibility requirements. Projects must adhere to the technical requirements outlined in the request for proposals document including visitable, universal design and accessibility requirements, in addition to all applicable building codes. Units must be of modest criteria and be self-contained residential units with a private kitchen and bathroom facilities. Housing projects that support the development of age-friendly communities enable Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, including older adults with disabilities, to age in place with dignity and autonomy.

NL Housing's Home Modification Program is designed to provide funding to assist homeowners with low-to-moderate income who require accessibility changes to their residences, to enable individuals to remain in their own homes for a longer period. As committed to in NL Housing's 2023-26 Strategic Plan, over the next three years, NL Housing's home repair and accessibility modification programs will be modernized to ensure it will continue to play a key role in supporting the affordability and accessibility needs of low-income homeowners, particularly seniors in rural areas, to age in place. Similarly, over the next three years, NL Housing will focus efforts on improving the sustainability of its own housing stock by increasing the number of accessibility features in NL Housing-owned houses.

Accessibility Goals

- Increased awareness of available resources;
- Increased staff awareness, encouraging staff to become involved and see themselves as part of the process to ensure improvements are made;
- Building a positive image of disability;

- Engaging persons with disabilities in decision-making;
- Increased accessibility in the built environment;
- Increased access to disability-related supports;
- Delivering services with dignity, fairness and respect.

Promoting Accessibility Awareness

NL Housing is committed to promoting and supporting awareness, education and engagement around accessibility and inclusion within NL Housing’s workforce and housing portfolios.

Glossary of Terms

Note to reader: These Terms use person-first language, but we acknowledge that language is a dynamic and personal matter and that it is up to the individual to indicate their language of preference. We further acknowledge that persons with intellectual and cognitive disabilities should be provided, if requested, assistance in the decision-making and participation processes.

Accessibility

This refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities. Accessibility related issues intersect with other groups including, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQAAI+, new Canadians, and seniors.

Accessibility Act

The provincial law enacted to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The Accessibility Act defines the role and responsibilities of the Disability Policy Office and the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board, and addresses standards, compliance, and enforcement.

Accessibility Plan

A plan developed to address the prevention, identification, and removal of barriers in the policies, programs, practices, and services of a public body.

Barrier

Something that makes it harder for some people to participate. The Accessibility Act defines a barrier as “anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, or a barrier established or perpetuated by an Act, regulations, a policy, or a practice.

Disability

As defined in Accessibility Act: “disability includes a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation that is permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that, in interaction with a barrier, prevents a person from fully participating in society”.

Equitable/equity

A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same; equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

Plain language

Clear, conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information.

Public Body

As defined in the Accessibility Act, public bodies include all provincial government, agencies, boards, commissions and committees, municipalities, public educational institutions and private educational institutions.

Statement of Commitment to Accessibility

NL Housing is committed to removing barriers for persons with disabilities to maintain their dignity and independence and providing services and spaces that are accessible to the general public, employees, tenants, and service users. We are actively working to increase the accessibility and visitability of our office buildings, programs and services, as well as our social housing stock.

Focus Areas

1. Programs and services
 - Ensuring the design and delivery of all NL Housing programs and services provide equitable access for all persons.
2. Built Environment
 - Ensuring NL Housing office buildings and all common pathways are clear and easily accessible for all persons.
3. Information and Communication
 - Ensuring all people corresponding with NL Housing can receive, comprehend and share information provided by the public body.
 - Use of inclusive, plain language in public communications.
4. Employment
 - Making the workplace more accessibility-friendly.
 - Supporting persons with disabilities to find and maintain meaningful employment within NL Housing.
5. Education
 - Ongoing accessibility related training and learning.
6. Current and Ongoing Affordable Housing Projects

- NL Housing modifies existing units to enhance accessibility features to meet client need.
- NL Housing designs new builds to be accessible and equitable for all persons.

Actions

1. Programs and services

1. Establish an internal Accessibility Working Group.
 - Responsibility: Department of Policy, Planning, Evaluation and Information Management
2. The Accessibility Working Group to hold semi-annual meetings to monitor progress of planned actions contained in this plan, monitor the federal and provincial accessibility standard development, and update the plan accordingly.
 - Responsibility: Accessibility Working Group
3. Conduct an accessibility audit of NL Housing office buildings to identify any potential barriers or challenges that employees with disabilities may face. The accessibility audit will involve examining the physical environment, technology, and policies to identify areas for improvement.
 - Responsibility: Accessibility Working Group
4. Consider accessibility requirements in new initiatives during the planning phase.
 - Responsibility: Department of Policy, Planning, Evaluation and Information Management

2. Built Environment

5. Installing automatic doors in NL Housing office buildings where required.
 - Responsibility: Department of Maintenance



Photo 1: Accessible push button to open door



Photo 2: Accessible push button to open door

6. Replacement of existing faucets handles with lever handles and lever door handles.
 - Responsibility: Department of Engineering (Asset Manager)

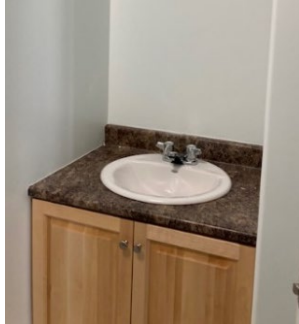


Photo 3: Lever faucets



Photo 4: D-Pull handles on cabinets door

7. Inspection of all thresholds in office buildings to ensure heights meet accessibility requirements where necessary.
 - Responsibility: Department of Engineering
8. All pathway lighting to be inspected to ensure adequate lighting and install lighting where areas are not properly lit for easy path of travel.
 - Responsibility: Department of Maintenance
9. Stairs to comply with accessibility designs. Installing a horizontal strip across all nosing on stairs, along with painting the rise a contrast colour to the run will increase high visibility and prevent slips/trips
 - Responsibility: Department of Engineering



Photo 5: Contrasting colour on the rise and run of stairs

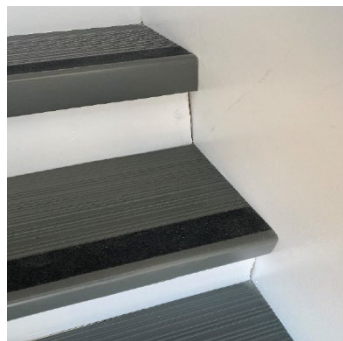


Photo 6: Horizontal strip at nosing on stairs

3. Information and Communication

10. Communications materials to be made available in alternate formats, upon request.
 - Responsibility: Communications
11. Include alt-text on any digital graphs or images to provide description of content where necessary.
 - Responsibility: Communications
12. Update NL Housing's website to promote greater accessibility for service users.
 - Responsibility: Communications
13. Ensure all information uploaded on NL Housing's intranet is easily readable and accessible.
 - Responsibility: Communications
14. All external and internal emails to incorporate consistent font and font size to comply with accessibility standard.
 - Responsibility: Communications and Department of Information Technology
15. Complete an industry scan on accessible standards and assistive technologies that could be utilized in our environment.
 - Responsibility: Department of Information Technology

4. Employment

16. Ensure all employees have the appropriate accessibility equipment to complete their daily duties.
 - Responsibility: Department of Information Technology
17. At the conclusion of every meeting, Management is to ensure the occupied space has all chairs pushed in to allow for accessibility.
 - Responsibility: NL Housing Management Staff
18. Meeting organizers to provide communication and meeting materials prior to all meetings. This will aid anyone who wants to read, review, and comprehend the information in advance.
 - Responsibility: All Departments within NL Housing
19. Collect and maintain information from employment equity reports which indicates the number of individuals employed by the Corporation who self-identify as having a disability.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources

20. Update NL Housing's Workplace Accommodation Policy to be reflective of any changes made by Government of Newfoundland to their Workplace Accommodation Policy.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
21. Compile internal list of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities (e.g., visual, physical, neurodevelopmental, etc.)
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
22. Develop and circulate self-identification survey to include more dimensions for greater understanding of our work population.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
23. Review recruitment process to identify barriers to accessibility.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
24. Update both employee and supervisor onboarding processes to ensure they are inclusive of accessibility considerations.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources

5. Education

25. Provide corporate-wide training for all staff on the requirements of the Accessibility Act.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
26. Roll out updated employee and supervisor diversity and inclusion training
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
27. Provide corporate-wide training which educates all employees about workplace accessibility.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources
28. Provide training on disability awareness and inclusion to support an inclusive culture.
 - Responsibility: Department of Human Resources

6. Current and Ongoing Affordable Housing Projects

29. Review specifications to incorporate universal designs where required
 - Responsibility: Department of Engineering
30. Review construction drawings to include universal design where required
 - Responsibility: Department of Engineering

Report an Accessibility Concern or Idea

If you are aware of an accessibility concern or have an idea for how something can be done better, let us know. You can contact us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Report your concern or idea in the way that is most accessible to you. Alternate format available upon request. Please contact Wayne Follett:

- Using a phone, dial 709-724-3000
- Send an email to wgfollett@nlhc.nl.ca

Evaluation and Monitoring

The NL Housing 2024-2026 Accessibility Plan is a tool that will guide our work to improve accessibility over the next three years.

During review of the Plan, staff will provide updates to the Accessibility Committee on progress made in completing actions to improve accessibility. The accessibility plan will be updated every three years. Updates to the plan will include legislative requirements under the provincial Accessibility standard regulations as they are developed.

To evaluate the success of the plan, NL Housing will:

- Ensure compliance with relevant accessibility laws and regulations in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Investigate and/or evaluate the use of accessibility resources and checklists such as:
 - Accessible Communications Policy
 - Inclusive Public Engagement Policy
 - Plain Language Guidelines
 - PDF Accessibility Checks
 - Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification
 - Accessibility Standards Canada
 - Web Accessibility Checkers
 - Microsoft Word Accessibility Checker
 - Color Contrast Checkers
 - Universal Design NL
- Monitor accessibility in new initiatives during the planning phase.
- Continue to receive, consider and where possible resolve concerns from stakeholders.

Conclusion

NL Housing is committed to creating meaningful and lasting change to improve inclusion and accessibility for employees, tenants, and service users alike. This plan will be updated to ensure compliance and incorporation of accessibility standards as they evolve.

We acknowledge that there is much to be done to incorporate an inclusive and accessible perspective into our organizational outlook. We are enthusiastic about delivering on the actions outlined in this plan and are committed to advancing a more inclusive environment for all.

