

news release

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ELECTIONS MANITOBA RELEASES ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Elections Manitoba has a new accessibility plan in place, which was developed in consultation with disability organizations and builds on existing practices to provide Manitobans access to voting services.

“Accessibility is fundamental to ensuring free and fair elections,” says Chief Electoral Officer Shipra Verma. “Elections Manitoba has identified accessibility as an ongoing strategic priority. It is enshrined in Manitoba’s electoral laws and is a primary consideration in our practices and policies. We will continue to strive towards eliminating barriers to full participation in the democratic process.”

Under the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (AMA), public sector organizations in the province are required to create an accessibility plan in consultation with people who have disabilities. Elections Manitoba hosted a consultation in May of this year with representatives from seven disabilities organizations in Manitoba as well as the provincial government’s Disabilities Issues Office. Participants reviewed a draft plan, made suggestions and observations and gathered information on existing practices. Their feedback has been an integral part of developing the plan. Participating organizations included:

- Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)/Vision Loss Rehabilitation Manitoba
- Deaf Centre Manitoba
- E-Quality Communication Centre of Excellence
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society of Canada, Manitoba Division
- Inclusion Winnipeg
- Society for Manitobans with Disabilities

Manitoba’s *Elections Act* has several provisions that support voters with disabilities. These include:

- Election day and advance voting places must be accessible to voters with physical disabilities
- Homebound voting, for individuals unable to leave their home due to a disability and for their caregivers
- Braille ballot templates, that fit over a ballot and list candidates’ names in Braille
- Voters may bring someone to assist them in casting a ballot or a voting officer may assist them
- Curbside voting, allowing voting officers to bring the ballot box to a voter in their vehicle

- Voting in hospitals and personal care homes

In addition, under *The Election Financing Act*, any reasonable disability-related expenses incurred by a candidate to allow them to campaign in an election are not considered election expenses. If a candidate receives 10% of the vote, they are reimbursed for these disability-related expenses.

Through the consultation and its own internal review, Elections Manitoba has identified priorities for building on its accessibility practices:

- Training for headquarters and election staff on providing accessible customer service, with an emphasis on creating awareness of the range of disabilities and the importance of respect, listening and dignity. Elections Manitoba will provide in-person and video training sessions developed and presented by the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities. Delivering this training will be part of Elections Manitoba's compliance with the Accessible Customer Service regulation under the AMA.
- Increased promotion of existing voting opportunities for voters with disabilities. Elections Manitoba will partner with disabilities organizations to reach voters who may benefit from this information.
- Develop policies and practices to further enhance accessibility of voting, e.g. allowing voters with assistive applications on their mobile devices to use them at voting places, make easy-grip pencils available at voting places
- Examine the feasibility of having (a) designated voting station(s) with specialized help for voters with disabilities

To see the accessibility plan, visit Elections Manitoba's website at www.electionsmanitoba.ca. For more information on *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*, visit www.accessibilitymb.ca/index.html.

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Elections Manitoba is the independent office of the Legislative Assembly responsible for the administration of provincial elections and byelections.

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