CITY OF VANCOUVER

What We've Heard:

A Summary of Accessibility Community Engagement (2023)

THIS REPORT INFORMS THE

Multi-Year Action Plan (2024) of Transforming Attitudes,
Embedding Change: The City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy (2022)

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1. Executive Summary

The City of Vancouver committed to develop a city-wide Accessibility Strategy and Multi-Year Action Plan in two phases. Phase 1 (2018-2022) put forward definitions, principles, and commitments towards accessibility, and was adopted by Council in July 2022. In Phase 2 (2022 – 2024), broad engagement was undertaken with the disability communities to confirm priorities and develop a multi-year action plan that was adopted by Council in July 2024.

Accessibility is fundamental to everyone's quality of life, well-being and participation in all aspects of society. When the City of Vancouver uses the term "persons with disabilities" it refers to "those who experience physical, mental health, cognitive, communication, intellectual, sensory, or age-related impairments whether they are seniors, others with age-related impairments, or people with lived experience of mental health concerns and/or substance use issues." It is important in the context of accessibility to adopt a broad definition that is inclusive of diverse and complex lived experiences.

Accessibility planning for a municipality requires broad engagement with disability communities to better understand the diverse ways communities navigate and participate in the city. Employing the "nothing about us without us" principle, City staff make sure that the voices of persons with disabilities are centred in the development of all components of Accessibility Strategy and Multi-Year Action Plan targets and activities. Along with this, efforts continue to be made to ensure that individuals who may not be normally included in City engagement processes are sought out and invited to share their experiences.

This report provides an overview of engagement processes undertaken by the City between 2022 to 2024, and a summary of what was heard from the disability communities. The City hosted one virtual broader engagement, along with two in-person engagement sessions. These engagement sessions attracted approximately 239 people from the disabled community.

With all the sessions, participants were asked to share their lived experience as it pertained to the focus areas of the Accessibility Strategy, and to identify whether there was anything in the current strategy that stood out or was missing. Many of the comments heard echoed concerns from previous engagement sessions, which reinforced the Key Areas of Focus in the current strategy. Concerns included experiences of uneven sidewalks; the lack of evacuation procedures for persons with disabilities in many buildings; the lack of housing options for people living with disabilities and support workers; and the need for adult change tables in public washrooms. Participants also requested more plain language on wayfinding signs; more furniture for sitting in multiple locations around the city; establishing scent-free or noise free spaces; and more automatic doors.

> "Auditory system is better too, anything you can listen to is way better. One thing too when we got here, the elevator beeps when the door opens but it doesn't say what floor you are on, and this happens all the time, there are hardly any auditory things. And people think she is a braille reader but she never learned braille. She used to use sign language but not so much anymore."
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

Much like the Phase 1 targeted engagement sessions, similar key themes came out from the broader engagement, as follows:

1. Meaningful engagement with people with lived experience

What we heard: Engagement participants reinforced that their voices and experiences are essential to informing the development of any City policies, plans, strategies, and programs.

What this means for the City: As employed during the development of the Accessibility Strategy and Multi-Year Action Plan, the City utilizes the principle "nothing about us without us" and strives to undertake direct engagement with people with lived experiences to develop all related plans and processes.

2. Increase public education and awareness to counter ableism

What we heard: Engagement participants described how systemic ableism and social stigma are obstacles to their participation in civic life and can result in exclusion of people with disabilities.

What this means for the City: The Accessibility Strategy and the Multi-Year Action Plan provide a definition of ableism that is foundational (i.e., ableism is the belief that persons with disabilities are less valuable or less capable and often underlies negative attitudes, stereotypes and stigma which can lead to discrimination). When ableism is combined with other forms of discrimination due to other intersecting identities (e.g., religion, age, race/ ethnicity, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation) a person may experience compounding forms of discrimination. The City will continue to provide ongoing education about ableism, disability, accessibility, and intersectionality to staff and departments.

3. Increase understanding of the full spectrum of disability

What we heard: Engagement participants described how in many cases their own disabilities, or those of others, can change over time. From this perspective, engagement participants pointed out that everyone experiences a degree of disability at some point in their lives, and in this way, disability is a universal experience.

What this means for the City: The Accessibility Strategy aims to benefit all people across their life course. It recognizes that people are "temporary able-bodied," meaning that disability can come to any person at any time whether it be temporary or permanent. The City's definition of disability is also inclusive of hidden or invisible disabilities since invisible disabilities may be easily overlooked or misunderstood as they may not be easy to spot. Understanding the full spectrum of disability is important in City planning, strategies and services so that everyone is able to be an active participant.

4. Shift to an accessibility culture

What we heard: Engagement participants described that implementing the Accessibility Strategy requires a shift in culture. Systemic change is not just about understanding accessibility, it is also about implementing different ways of doing things within the community.

What this means for the City: Staff are encouraged to adopt a "culture of vulnerability" to dismantle existing attitudinal, behavioural and challenge systemic barriers. The City is encouraged to provide on-going training to staff and to continue to adapt and change service delivery, as well to share ongoing guidance to partners and the private sector through appropriate communications channels. Importantly, there needs to be a concerted effort to ensure that people with disabilities are at decision-making tables.

5. Apply an accessibility lens

What we heard: Engagement participants have advised the City to apply an accessibility lens to how it plans and delivers programs and services. Applying a lens is like wearing a pair of glasses, it helps things to be seen from a different perspective.

What this means for the City: Staff are encouraged to proactively apply an accessibility lens to issues that affect persons with disabilities and continuously evaluate the impact of initiatives on the disability community (i.e., policies, programs, services, or decisions).

6. Instill universal design principles

What we heard: The disability community emphasized that universal design principles need to be the starting point for the Accessibility Strategy. Adopting these principles in the design of infrastructure and environments means they will be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

What this means for the City: Advancing the Accessibility Strategy begins with recognizing that most systems and structures are generally designed for able-bodied people, which requires people that "don't fit the mold" to ask for accommodations. While accommodations may be necessary in some circumstances, universal design lessens the burden of constantly needing to request and push for having accommodations.

7. Implement accountability mechanisms.

What we heard: As the engagement participants expressed their appreciation for the City's work in developing an Accessibility Strategy, they stressed the importance of also monitoring and evaluating the implementation.

What this means for the City: To ensure continuous improvement and that necessary adjustments are made, the City will need processes and accountability measures that will monitor, evaluate and report progress of accessibility on an ongoing basis.

2. Acknowledgements

The City would like to express gratitude to **Elder Patricia** and **Elder Sempúlyan** for opening each of the two in-person broader engagement sessions in a good way. The relationship the City has with the unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílw̓itulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations is central to the work we do.

Thank you to the members of the Accessibility Task Force for their guidance in the development of the *Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change: The City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy (Phase 1)*. They continually challenged, shaped, and shifted the work on the Strategy by asking hard questions as well as reminding staff that the views and perspectives of persons with disabilities must be integrated into all City processes. Partnering with the Task Force created an important bridge towards building and maintaining relationships of trust between the City and the disability community. Some of the members of the Task Force also came out to and assisted with the smooth operation of the broader engagement, which was tremendously appreciated!

The City also wishes to acknowledge the disability organizations, especially **Disability Foundation and Disability Alliance of BC** whose staff provided support during the broader engagement sessions. See Appendix A for a list of disability led or serving community organizations who participated in the engagement sessions.

This report would not be possible without the survey respondents and the community members that participated in-person engagements at the Vancouver Public Library and the Creekside Community Centre, along with the on-line session. The City extends gratitude and appreciation to all of you for sharing your stories with such honesty, integrity, and passion.

A special thanks goes to **Wavefront Centre for Accessibility Communication** for providing the sign language and closed captioning services throughout the engagements. These services played an important role ensuring that everyone could participate fully in the engagement session.

> "We also need to keep in mind that not everyone has access to technology, or is comfortable with technology (seniors)."
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

> "More accessibility in public spaces."
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

3. Introduction

The goal of the broader engagement undertaken in 2023 was to solicit feedback on the Accessibility Strategy, which had been approved by Council in July 2022. Specifically, staff sought to: (a) capture diverse perspectives within the disability communities; (b) flesh out the focus areas and priorities laid out in the Strategy; and (c) identify and add any priorities that may have been overlooked or missing in the Strategy.

Broader engagement involved two in-person events, one on-line event, and an on-line survey launched through the City's platform, Shape Your City. All events took place in May and June 2023. Staff designed the engagement events in a way that would allow each participating member of the disability community to participate in ways that worked for them. This included offering sign language interpreters, respite rooms, providing plain language versions for all written materials, and offering closed captioning on virtual meetings. Accessibility was at the forefront of all engagement techniques so that people with disabilities felt comfortable to have open, honest, and non-judgemental conversations.

4. Community Engagement Process

Designing Engagement Sessions and Promotion

Accessibility in the planning and implementation of the broad engagement sessions was front and centre. The following features were included to ensure that participants could successfully participate:

- All locations were held in accessible venues.
- Staff booked different rooms on the same floor of the venue so that participants could move with relative ease to other sessions.
- A respite room was available for anyone who needed a break.
- Staff encouraged a scent-free environment.
- ASL and closed captioning were provided in all sessions.
- Language interpreters were provided based on participant needs.
- Snacks and refreshments were provided during the in-person sessions.
- Materials were written in plain language and shared in advance.
- Hard copies of the written materials were offered in large print, double sided print, one-sided print, color print, or black and white print.
- A summary of Accessibility Strategy (Phase 1) was provided in the five most spoken languages in Vancouver, including Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Spanish, Farsi, and Punjabi
- A summary report was developed and shared with participants to review and validate before continuing with analysis.

The agenda for engagement sessions included:

- Land acknowledgement
- Overview of Accessibility Strategy
- Overview of City's Next Steps
- Closing Remarks

Promotional materials, including posters and postcards, were distributed to disability organizations, community members, and featured on the City's social media channels. CBC also did a mini radio segment on this, supporting the promotion of the sessions. Staff also purchased a table at the "Abilities Expo" to promote these engagement sessions through the distribution of the postcards. See Appendix B for a copy of the promotion material. There were multiple ways that participants could register for the engagement sessions, including scanning a QR code, signing up via Eventbrite or contacting staff directly.

Overview of Participants

To capture diverse perspectives, participants in the community engagement sessions identified themselves from one of the three categories:

1. People with lived experience of a disability and intersecting identities including age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Participants were given the option to self-identify as having a disability and other identify markers.

2. Family members and caregivers (e.g., parents, guardians, siblings, and support workers) of people with disabilities.

3. Staff or board members from service organizations that work in the disability sector or other organizations delivering services to a range of people that could include persons who identify as having disabilities.

Participants received a guide to help them prepare prior to the engagement session. The guide included information such as the agenda, information about the Accessibility Strategy, the City's commitment to accessibility, and the engagement questions. To reduce barriers to participations, community members could submit expenses incurred for attending the engagement session, including parking, babysitting, or other transportation costs.

In-Person Engagement Sessions

In total, 124 people participated in the in-person engagement sessions held on:

- Friday June 2nd, 2023, from 3:30 – 7:00 pm at the Vancouver Public Library
- Friday June 16th, 2023, from 1:00 – 4:30pm at the Creekside Community Centre.

In these sessions, the room was set up with nine tables arranged around the perimeter of the room. Participants moved to the various feedback tables around the room at their own pace. At each table participants were invited to share their own lived experiences. Each table had a facilitator and a note taker.

These feedback tables represented a focus area along with their primary goal:

Key Area of Focus	Primary Goal
Built Environment and Public Spaces	Ensure access to physical infrastructure in the city by applying universal design principles to built environment.
Transportation Services, Policies and Programs	Ensure persons with disabilities can carry out their daily needs by applying universal design principles to transportation planning and design.
Housing Policies, Programs and Design	Ensure adequate housing options by creating accessible, affordable, market and non-market housing that meets needs of persons with disabilities.
Information and Communication	Ensure connection and wayfinding throughout the city by providing communication supports, accessible websites, formats, and digital content.
Employment	Support a diverse and inclusive workforce by increasing opportunities and reducing barriers in the workforce.
Governance and Engagement	Provide equitable access to municipal programs and services by reducing barriers to participation in civic life.
Capacity and Collaboration	Build capacity and foster collaboration among the disability non-profit sector to better address the challenges of the community.
Advocacy and Working with other levels of Government	Ensure consistent access to public services and participation in public life by integrating and collaborating with other orders of government on accessibility issues.

An additional "miscellaneous" table was set up, which gave participants an opportunity to identify and discuss gaps that were not being addressed in the other eight tables.

After an hour of visiting the various feedback tables, participants assembled into eight break-out groups, representing each focus area. These small break-out groups offered another way to generate ideas that may not have been captured in the previous discussions.

The in-person sessions were supported by staff from various departments within the City, as well as volunteers from partner organizations including Disability Alliance of BC, Disability Foundation, and Community Living of BC – Vancouver Council. City staff and volunteers were assigned to be note takers, facilitators, hosts, or check-in/ reception area. Along with a volunteer orientation manual, an orientation meeting was held for all staff and organization volunteers. The volunteer orientation manual included information on the engagement session, the different volunteer roles, or the background information on the accessibility strategy.

Online Engagement

An online engagement session was held on June 7th, 2023, from 6pm – 8 pm, including 12 participants. In this session, participants had the opportunity to share their feedback about the focus areas and community priorities. Participants were divided into two break-out groups, where they covered four focus areas, along with a facilitator and a note taker. At the halfway point of the online engagement, the groups switched, so the participants could discuss the other four focus areas.

Shape Your City Engagement Survey

In total, 102 people participated in the survey used to capture community's feedback on the Accessibility Strategy. Demographic questions were asked followed by survey questions that related to the focus areas.

To ensure the accessibility of the survey, the length of time to complete the survey was outlined in the introductory paragraph of the survey, with the option of stopping, saving, and returning to the survey on a later date. In addition, 3-1-1 staff were able to support participants in filling out the digital survey.

"Make voting more accessible by having someone who can navigate the system with them."

- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement

"Ask people "what help they need" as opposed to just telling them."

- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement

5. Summary of "What We Heard"

Engagement participants shared many stories about the challenges and barriers that were related to the eight focus areas of the Accessibility Strategy. They were given the opportunity to review community priorities that surfaced in previous engagements and reflect on what resonated and was missing for them. When participants raised issues that were outside the City's jurisdiction, staff compiled these to share with City partners.

Selected comments heard during the engagement sessions are highlighted below, themed by focus area. It should be noted that the word "accessibility" is complex and has different meanings for different people. This can lead to diverse perspectives and contradictory voices, depending on each person's identity and experience.

Focus Area 1: Built Environment and Public Spaces

In general, engagement participants voiced concerns about not always being able to access physical infrastructures in the city. There were calls for increased integration of universal design principles to City buildings and spaces. Below are some specific examples of what we heard in relation to the built environment and public spaces.

Buildings, Stairs and Sidewalks

- Buildings need to accommodate for a wider door and additional corridor width.
- Handrails on both sides of the stairs and ramps are helpful.
- Accessible pathways need better regulations.
- City building projects should be reviewed by accessibility experts.
- New buildings (including 35 storey ones) need ramps to increase safe access and evacuation during emergencies.
- Covered picnic tables and street patios that are wheelchair accessible are helpful in the city.
- Manholes need to cover sidewalks. These manholes often have a missing plastic cap that exposes a hole and can be a major hazard as a crutch would go right through and lead to a fall.
- Maintenance of public elevators and escalators needs to be a top priority.
- Variety of seating options for street use are needed.

Crosswalks/Intersections/Parking

- Consistency of the time given during the crosswalks needs to improve.
- Free parking for support workers would be beneficial to the community.

Air/Scents

- Asbestos and other hazards contribute to disability rates and more attention on this is needed.
- Stronger enforcements around noise level and fragrances are needed as this can be overwhelming.
- Increase building standards for indoor air quality, like schools and hospitals.
- Sensory friendly spaces within public spaces are needed.
- Non-physical barriers, such as lighting, fragrance, and landscaping plants may need to be removed as they can be allergenic.
- Bad air quality is a common concern, including wildfire smoke.
- Building By-Laws
- Developers need to exceed the meet the minimum requirements of the building code. The BC Building Code requires only the bare minimum rather than encouraging people to go beyond.
- Accessibility standards and provisions, including providing outside seating, is needed in private buildings.

Safety

- Safety in the daily experiences of persons with disabilities is an ongoing concern. Laws focusing on inclusive infrastructure are needed.

- Enforcement of the 'no snow dumping' in disability parking stalls is important to community.

- General improvements for public safety are needed including lights in laneways.

- Increase the emergency planning for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities may need to call 9-1-1 separately to receive support to evacuate the building. During building fires, the fire department's strategy is to fight where the fire is, that's where the human resources are dedicated. This approach assumes that all humans can get out of building by themselves.

Wayfinding

- Placing directories at the entrance of buildings or even externally to the building helps to increase navigation.

- Visual cues in wayfinding (e.g., dolphin floor and beaver parking lot) are useful to community.

Focus Area 2: Transportation Services, Policies, and Programs

In general, engagement participants voiced that transportation is key to supporting persons with disabilities to move around the city. Increasing the application of universal design principles to transportation planning and design was emphasized in discussions. Specific examples of what we heard in relation to the transportation are listed below.

Transit Stops

- There are negative impacts when removing 6-16 bus stops for people with disabilities.

- Accessibility and cleanliness in transit stations impact people with accessibility needs, especially those with full dependency on elevators. Lack of bathrooms at stations often results in people using the elevators as a bathroom.

- Transit stations need outlets to re-charge electric wheelchairs.

- Transit stops are further apart, and many stops lack benches impacting the energy level of persons with disabilities.

Education

- Transportation planning needs to integrate an accessibility lens, especially at the design stage.

- Transportation has a huge impact on people with disabilities' ability to socialize and get things done.

- Sensitivity training is important because sometimes some disabilities are not visible, and people are perceived as "drunk" or "under the influence." Training is needed across all levels of government and public institutions including police.

Transportation Infrastructure

- Increase the availability of bicycle parking for 3 wheeled bikes.

- Newer EV stations are important and helpful to the disability community.

- EV station and stall wheelchairs need greater accessibility measures.

Other Mobility Devices

- The impact standing scooters and e-bikes have on people with disability needs to be considered. as transportation issues. Moving at 40km an hour is too fast and needs to be considered as a vehicle. Some of these devices are very quiet, especially for people who are hearing impaired or visually impaired, and pedestrians are getting side swiped which is unsafe.

- Increasing the availability of self-propelled transportation devices, like tricycles, would enable more autonomy for persons with disabilities.

Taxi

- Inexpensive options for wheelchair accessible taxis are needed.

Focus Area 3: Housing Policies, Programs, and Services

Like much of the population in Vancouver, finding housing is a concern for the disability community. Engagement participants noted that there are limited housing options that are accessible, affordable, market and non-market housing that meets their needs. Below are some specific examples of what we heard during the engagement with respect to housing.

Financial

- Increase the housing market to make it affordable for people with disabilities that are supported by social assistance.

Housing for Specific Populations

- Specific housing policies for visually impaired people are limited and important for community.

- There needs to be more halfway homes for people with mental illnesses.

- Affordable homes for those living with cognitive disabilities is a top priority for the disability community.

- The number of group homes for persons with disabilities that are culturally sensitive and provide services in languages other than English are limited.

Not Enough Medical Care

- Shelters that accommodate people with disabilities that use complex medical equipment are important so that people do not end up in hospitals.

Appropriate Housing

- There should be more accessible housing options so that people coming out of hospital with a disability do not end up in long-term care when they can no longer go back to their existing home.
- Bathrooms need to be accessible (e.g., wheel-in bathtub, wheel-in shower) so people can age in one place.
- Kitchens need to be adapted to enable persons with disabilities to cook independently.
- Definition for family for housing programs need to address the realities of disabled people (e.g., need for caregiver).
- The disability community needs a phoneline and financial support for maintenance repairs.

Housing Advocacy

- A housing ombudsperson that oversees housing for persons with disabilities is important for community.

Housing Choices

- People with disabilities should have more choices in selecting roommates in a group home, some people are being targeted by high behavioral roommates.

Housing Air Quality

- Adequate ventilation and air quality control are important with climate change, including heighted heat.
- There should be higher standards for air quality, as well as cooling and heating systems to protect vulnerable individuals from the risks to their health during climate crises (e.g., heat domes) and the spread of viruses.
- A couple of buildings need to be designated as fragrance free environment.

"Should have a designated person for each voting station."

- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement

"Transportation has a huge impact on participant's ability to socialize and get things done."

- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement

Emergency Management

- City plans designed to help get people with disabilities out of building in emergency situations need to be reviewed.

- Accessibility measures in emergency shelters need to include private spaces for support staff.

Focus Area 4: Information and Communication

In general, the disability community expressed the importance of increasing accessible communication and wayfinding by having communication supports, accessible websites, formats, and digital content. Some examples of what we heard from the community with respect to communication are listed below.

Formatting Style

- Its helpful for information to be written in simple words, without tables or graphs. Using other things (besides text) can be confusing.

- Pictures with alt-text descriptions is helpful with communication and readability.

- Print is an important medium that needs to be more available for the blind or sight impaired.

- Voice messages are important and can help increase communication to a wider population.

- Personal connection between staff and the public when providing personal information is important whereas general information can be found on the radio.

Communication Style

- Ensure that the whole story is communicated so that all residents can see themselves in the information shared.

- More human stories need to be shared, including stories people who are non-verbal, have intellectual disabilities or have difficulties communicating or reading.

- Community events need to incorporate accessibility measures so that people with disabilities can participate and understand. Printed material does not help everyone.

> *"There is increasing difficulties getting around the city. For example, the city sidewalks are awful, uneven, tripping hazards, better and more consistent side walk maintenance. Uneven, not even just an issue of cracks."*
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

Awareness of Disability

- Communication materials should avoid using the words "disability" or "handicapped" as these terms are very limiting.

- Public awareness of the needs for the deaf and the hard of hearing is needed. Deafness is often overlooked due to its invisible nature.

- Offer different methods to communicate with the City staff, as some people cannot use technology. Navigating a phoneline menu by pressing 1 for this and pressing 2 for another thing can be confusing and difficult, especially for someone with early dementia.

- Training in patience and kindness towards disabled folks who need to use virtual and phone options, particularly staff who work with lower income disabled people is needed.

Multiple Languages

- Modernize the City of Vancouver by providing QR codes that are read in different languages.

- Simple language is important so people can understand and access the supports they need.

Possible Information for the Website

- Provide photos of the city's terrains on website. This will help with accessibility as people will know ahead of time if there are pebbles, paved, steps or stairs.

- Information about the spread of airborne viruses and how to prevent infections through filtration needs to be updated. The usage of quality respirators is vital to protecting immunocompromised individuals and overall community health, and this helps to prevent further death and disablement!

> "Accessibility is varied, wheelchair accessible needs are different than mental health accessibility needs, more intersectionality is needed as there are also invisible disabilities that should be included too."
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

> "Oral instructions should be provided as opposed to just written."
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

Focus Area 5: Employment

In general, the disability community wants the City of Vancouver to be more diverse and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Increasing people with disability through employment was a key consideration. Some examples of what we heard with respect to employment is listed below.

Awareness/Education

- To employ people with disabilities the system often needs to change. This needs to go beyond superficial awareness trainings and include radical changes to transform the system. This can be uncomfortable.

- Include people with disabilities in different positions and across at all levels of government.

- Short videos, around 8 minutes long, talking about disabilities and the importance of fostering inclusivity are important because this will help make workplaces more accessible and increase awareness of triggers for people with disabilities (e.g., lighting, sound, hearing impaired etc.).

- The City as an employer should have an understanding of disabled employees and their specific requirements so that they can build a schedule for any treatment or exercise programs, medical appointments that they may need to attend.

- Invite organizations to educate the staff on inclusive employment practices to increase employment of people with disabilities, along with other intersecting identities.

- Increase awareness of physical barriers that are not physical (e.g., ones that are sensory, environmental, immunological, such as reducing use of highly allergenic landscaping plants, making sensory-friendly choices) so that a welcoming environment is provided to all.

Job Scheduling

- Job sharing opportunities (e.g., creating 2 to 3 roles for 1 job) is helpful and would encourage people with disabilities to apply for positions in the city.

- Greater flexibility around work hours (e.g. having a 4-day work week or working less than 40 hours a week) would encourage people with disabilities to apply to these positions.

- If a job can be done remotely, it allows person with a disability who can't leave the home to apply for the position.

- Sick leave options and access to remote work is helpful for disabled folks who do not want to disclose all aspects of symptoms. These options allow folks to work or rest in accessible ways and not suffer with symptoms of illness in the workplace.

Accommodations

- Accommodations are needed when people return to work after disability period; this allows them to continue to work at their desired jobs or previous jobs.

- Remote work is supportive and helps to make the workplace accessible.

Job Postings

- Job descriptions, including duties and organizational culture, need to be written in plain language so they are more understandable.

- City job postings that require driving licenses should be reviewed as some people with disabilities cannot apply with those requirements.

- Existing hiring processes that favor people who have had access to certain job opportunities due to their ability and other identity factors need to be reviewed.

- Recruiting opportunities for groups that experience systemic barriers need to increase.

Recruitment Process

- There needs to be opportunities to involve caregivers or advocates in the job search and recruitment process. There are usually community inclusion and outreach workers who are involved in people's lives.

Application Process

- Job application process needs to be inclusive for people with mental illnesses. Uploading a resume then inputting fields can be intimidating.

Training/Education

- There needs to be more professional training or education centres for people with disabilities that can help them develop employment skills (e.g., driver's license, electronics/computer skills).

- Skill-sharing opportunities where disabled people with skills share and teach other people with disabilities are helpful.

Community Organizations

- Greater collaboration among community programs would be helpful as it builds relationships and opportunities.

"Elevators should say what floor you are on when doors open."

- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement

Focus Area 6: Capacity and Collaboration

In general, engagement participants highlighted that the services and programs offered by disability organizations tend to work in silos. They spoke about the importance of working together to build capacity and foster collaboration among the disability non-profit sector to better address the challenges of the community. Below are some examples we heard from community with respect to capacity and collaboration of the disability non-profit sector.

Evacuation Planning

- Disaster and evacuation planning for disabled people needs to be better designed by relevant parties.

Coordination between Levels of Government

- There needs to be greater consistency among the different levels of government and community, including businesses and corporations.

Accountability

- There needs to be greater transparency and accountability on how the city works with disabled or marginalized people. Reparations should be a big part of how the city makes its decisions and acknowledging the harm that has been inflicted upon people.

- Building relationships with people with disabilities would be helpful as a lot of them are not associated with organizations or not part of a formalized group.

Focus Area 7: Governance and Engagement

In general, engagement participants expressed an interest in greater participation in municipal programs and services and the importance of reducing barriers for equitable participation. Below are some examples of what we heard with respect to governance and engagement.

Mentorship/Volunteer Opportunities

- More community-based mentorship programs and volunteer opportunities for persons with disabilities are needed.

- Greater volunteer opportunities need to be made available as these experiences can make a difference.

- Mentorship opportunities that connect youth and older persons, or newcomers with long time residents, and provide life/work coaching are needed.

Resources to Involve People with Disabilities

- People with disabilities need to be involved in equitable way (e.g., they are not tokenized and used for photo-ops). People need to be compensated for sharing their lived experiences.

- Intersectional representation is needed to ensure diversity (ability - physical/ mental/ etc. gender, race, especially Black folks).

- Increase communication and collaboration among organizations serving people with disabilities is important so that there is less competition for funding and there is no redundancy in services.

- Seniors with low income need increase funding supports so that they can participate in community.

- Legal services for people with disabilities are important so that they can attend to their affairs.

Decrease Barriers to Access Services

- People with disabilities would benefit from city-wide access passes so they better access the supports needed.

Emergency Management

- City's emergency preparedness plans are not well equipped to support persons with disabilities in crises situations.

- Instructions or educational resources provided during emergency situations are not always suitable for persons with disabilities (e.g. "duck and cover under table during earthquake is possible with people with mobility issues). Population-specific instructions would help to address this.

- There is a need for greater education in evacuation techniques for people with guide dogs or mobility issues during emergencies other natural disasters.

- Fire and rescue, emergency dispatch staff may not treat people with disabilities with dignity or have active listening skills and cause harm. Additional training for staff helping people disabilities is needed.

Education/Awareness

- Greater understanding around equity needs to be taken into consideration because:

- Disability feels like a 'protected term' where you must have a certain issue/condition and income level to get the title of disability.

- People with disabilities cannot be viewed as the same as people without disabilities even if the have the same income.

- Disability justice needs to be more visible by providing education opportunities that increase the acceptance of people with disabilities.

Policy Review

- Many of the most marginalized groups invest disproportionate amounts of unpaid labour in educating policy makers about issues impacting their community. Compensation policies need to be reviewed with an equity lens. For example, engagement forms that require commitment of time or labour should also include emotional labour, so that it accounts for additional disability-related expenses or disability awareness.

Focus Area 8: Advocacy and Working with Other Orders of Government along with Other Agencies

In general, engagement participants want to see systemic advancements towards accessibility across public institutions that deliver services. There were calls to increase collaboration with other orders of government. Specific examples of what we heard related to advocacy are listed below.

Income

- Poverty is impacting people with disabilities and there needs to be increase supports and access to non-profits serving the disability community.

- Provincial disability pension needs to reflect the rate of inflation, shelter, food, and should continue past the age of 65.

Services

- People with disabilities need accessible housing, social and financial assistance, as well as free/ affordable and accessible healthcare, transit, and education. People are falling through the cracks without these supports.

- Appropriate daycare or child-minding spaces are needed for children with disabilities.

- Built environment across the municipalities need to improve accessibility standards.

- Staff working hospitals and the treating of the elderly need to be more empathetic and understanding.

- The removal of masking mandates in healthcare settings makes it inaccessible and unsafe or many people. This was a decision made at a provincial level, but municipalities can work with the government to change this. Other organizations can adapt safer measures as determined by scientific guidance and the disabled/immunocompromised community.

- Access to health care for people with disabilities needs to increase.

Coordination between Governments/Agencies

- Income assistance programs require collaboration among municipal and provincial governments as well as those who are receiving these supports.

- The City's Accessibility Strategy needs to be adopted by other municipal partners, including VPD, VPL, Parks, Fire.

- Accessibility strategies across municipal and provincial services like health need to be consistent and aligned so that residents' experiences are seamless and consistent across Metro Van.

- Standardize crossing times among municipalities and other partnered agencies.

- Increase collaboration between systems as they do not speak to each other. People with disabilities do not get what they need because it is an able-bodied society.

- Autistic people or people with intellectual disabilities that do not understand verbal commands have a difficult time complying to instructions by VPD law enforcement. This is not because they are criminal but because they do not understand. Mandatory training for all VPD staff and officers interacting with people with disabilities is needed.

Completing Forms

- Completing forms can be time-consuming for people with disabilities and this can deter people from accessing services. Forms need to be simplified.

Cultural Appropriateness

- Some cultures have a lot of shame around disabilities, and we need more culturally specific supports. Organizations providing these types of supports should be resourced.

- People with disabilities need more culturally sensitive programs.

Education System

- Education system has been failing for deaf children and other children with disabilities. Increase the supports for people with disabilities in the education system.

Legislation

- Bill C 22 needs to pass. Do not delay anymore.

- People with disabilities need a system change. There needs to be a commitment to radical change instead of changes that meets a four-year political goal. Right now, the most marginalized people cannot support themselves due to how the systems are designed. This is the biggest barrier for people with disabilities.

Advocacy

- Increase opportunities for the disability community to present their own interests to government so that their income level can meet their needs.

- There needs to be more outreach workers to advocate on behalf of people who cannot advocate for themselves. Some people with disabilities need support to participate in community.

Physical Infrastructure of Services

- Retails need wider aisles and space so that people with disabilities can move freely.

Accountability

- Accountability is needed as it demonstrates that the city is willing to do the work to increase accessibility. It is important for the city to be open and transparent to the disabled community.

6. Conclusion

This report is a summary of what the staff from the City of Vancouver heard during engagement sessions held in May and June 2023 that provided essential lived experience contributions in developing the Multi-Year Action Plan of the *City's Accessibility Strategy, Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change*.

A total of 239 people contributed through these discussions via in-person engagement sessions, an online session, and an online survey. All comments received were coded and analyzed to inform the focus areas in the Multi-Year Action Plan.

It is important to centre the voices of persons with disabilities throughout planning process as they are the experts on the issues that affect them. It is crucial that the City continues to listen to these perspectives during the implementation phase of the Multi-Year Action Plan so that it can materialize its vision for creating a place where all people feel valued, respected and openly welcomed.

> "Cross walks should count down so that user knows how much time remaining to cross."
>
> *- Participant, June 2023 Broader Engagement*

7. Appendices

Appendix A

Acknowledgement of Disability Community Organizations

- The 411 Seniors Centre
- Autism Community Training (ACT)
- Alzheimer's Association of British Columbia
- Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Agencies (AMSAA)
- BC Arthritis Association
- BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society
- BC Centre for Ability
- Blind Beginnings
- Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- Canucks Autism Network
- Community Living BC
- Developmental Disabilities Association
- Disability Foundation
- Disability Alliance of BC
- Family Support Institute
- Health Initiative for Men (HIM)
- Inclusion BC
- Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC)
- MOSAIC
- Neil Squire Society
- PLAN Institute
- RainCity Housing and Support Society
- Rick Hansen Foundation
- Spinal Cord Injury BC
- Vancouver Coastal Health
- Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility
- West End Seniors Network

Appendix B

Promotional Material for 2023 Engagement Sessions

JOIN US!

Are you a person with disabilities, or do you support someone with a disability?

The City of Vancouver is offering two guided discussions.

To attend, scan one of the QR codes or call Karen Lai at **604-675-5926** or email **Karen.Lai@vancouver.ca**

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE #1
Vancouver Public Library,
Central Branch
350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver
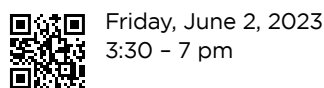
Friday, June 2, 2023
3:30 – 7 pm

eventbrite.ca/e/626353459057

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE #2
Creekside Community Centre
Olympic Village
1 Athletes Way, Vancouver

Friday, June 16, 2023
12:30 - 4 pm

eventbrite.ca/e/626574249447

ASL translation and closed captioning will be available for all sessions. All materials will be provided in plain language English.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Connect with people in the community
- Share your unique perspectives and insights to help inform Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy
- Food and drinks will be provided
- Breakout sessions focused on different areas of accessibility

If you need assistance covering expenses to attend a session (eg. childcare, transportation, etc.) please let us know. Help make Vancouver more accessible for people with disabilities.

By sharing your stories, you will help inform **Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change: The City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy**.

WE CAN'T WAIT TO CONNECT WITH YOU!

For more information visit:
vancouver.ca/AccessibilityStrategy

CITY OF VANCOUVER

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