

# Building Workplace Resiliency

Understanding Accessibility  
for Ontarians with Disabilities  
Act (AODA) Requirements



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# 1. Executive Summary

With an increasingly aging workforce and growing number of workers in Canada identifying as having one or more disabilities, accessibility has become one of the foundations of an inclusive and equitable workplace. Canada's bio-economy is always in need of highly skilled and specialized workers and cannot risk losing talent due to a lack of accessibility in the workplace.

This guide highlights the importance of accessibility in Ontario's bio-economy, specifically within the framework of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Ensuring accessibility is not only a legal obligation but also a moral imperative that enhances diversity and productivity by creating an environment where all employees, regardless of their abilities, can contribute effectively.

This guide will highlight key pieces of the act with a focus on employment standards, providing a high-level understanding of the requirements and a more detailed understanding of the compliance measures and reporting businesses in the bio-economy must undertake. By concentrating on employment standards, this guide aims to assist companies in the bio-economy with fostering accessible hiring practices, workplace accommodations and career development opportunities for employees with disabilities and provide them with [the information and resources required to ensure reporting is compliant with AODA requirements.](#)

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**Who needs to comply with AODA?** All organizations in Ontario who have one or more employees are required to comply with AODA requirements. This applies to private and public businesses and spans all sectors, including the bio-economy.

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## 2. Overview of AODA Accessibility Standards

### 2.1 AODA: An Overview of Key Standards

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) enacted in 2005, mandates the development and enforcement of accessibility standards to make Ontario accessible by 2025. According to the act, an accessibility standard will apply only to a person or organization that:

- a) Provides goods, services, or facilities.
- b) Employs one or more people in Ontario.
- c) Offers accommodations.
- d) Owns or occupies a building, structure or premises or;
- e) Is engaged in a prescribed business, activity, or undertaking or meets other requirements as may be prescribed.<sup>1</sup>

There are currently five key standards under the AODA. These standards include:

- Customer Service Standard.
- Information and Communications Standard.
- Employment Standard.
- Transportation Standard.
- Design of Public Spaces Standard.

The table below summarizes the five key standards under the AODA. This resource will primarily concentrate on the Employment Standards, as they can play an important role in helping organizations promote accessible hiring practices, workplace accommodations, and career development opportunities for employees with disabilities in Ontario's bio-economy. Additionally, this guide will delve into the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>

reporting requirements necessary for businesses to remain compliant with the AODA, ensuring transparency and accountability in their accessibility efforts.

**TABLE 1: AODA Standards Requirements**

AODA Standards	Requirements
<p><b>Customer Service</b></p> <p>Requires organizations to provide accessible customer service to people with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train staff on how to interact with people with various types of disabilities.</li> <li>• Allow for the use of service animals and support persons in publicly accessible areas.</li> <li>• Implement a process for receiving and responding to feedback on the accessibility of services.</li> <li>• Ensure that policies and procedures regarding the provision of goods and services to people with disabilities are in place.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Information and Communications</b></p> <p>Ensures that information and communications are accessible to persons with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accessible formats and communication supports upon request.</li> <li>• Make websites and content accessible.</li> <li>• Ensure that emergency procedures, plans and public safety information are available in accessible formats.</li> <li>• Notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and supports for communications.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Employment</b></p> <p>Ensures that Ontario businesses with more than one employee have fair and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure applicants are aware that accommodations are available to them during all phases of the recruitment process.</li> </ul>



AODA Standards	Requirements
<p>accessible employment practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement accommodation plans tailored to individual employees and return to work processes for employees with disabilities.</li> <li>• Ensure that performance management and career development processes consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities.</li> <li>• Provide accessible formats and communications support to all job-related or training-related information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Transportation</b></p> <p>To make transportation services accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that conventional and specialized transportation service providers meet specific technical and operational standards.</li> <li>• Provide accessible transit facilities and information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Design of Public Spaces</b></p> <p>To ensure that public spaces are accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make new and redeveloped public spaces accessible, including outdoor public eating areas, exterior paths of travel, accessible parking and service-related elements such as counters and waiting areas.</li> <li>• Ensure that maintenance and restoration of accessible public spaces are done to preserve accessibility features.</li> </ul>



## 3. Employment Standards Under AODA

The Employment Standard was implemented to ensure that candidates with disabilities are not overlooked during any phase of the employee lifecycle. The standard can also help organizations attract and retain qualified and capable candidates who may otherwise have been overlooked due to bias and stereotypes about people with disabilities.

### 3.1 Recruitment and Hiring

Under the AODA, organizations must ensure their recruitment processes are accessible to people with disabilities. This includes:

- **Job Advertisements:** Clearly stating that accommodations are available for applicants with disabilities in job postings. This ensures that potential candidates know that the organization is committed to accessibility from the onset and that job descriptions are written using inclusive language (See Table 2 below for examples).
- **Application Processes:** Providing accessible formats and communication supports upon request and providing accommodations for applicants when a request is made. This could involve offering application forms in large print, braille or electronic formats that are screen reader friendly.
- **Interviews and Assessments:** Offering accommodations for interviews and assessments to ensure candidates with disabilities can participate effectively. Such accommodations might include providing sign language interpreters, accessible interview locations, virtual interviews, or extended times and formats for job-specific assessments.
- **Making an Offer:** When making an offer, employees should inform the successful candidate about accommodation policies and provide any additional information the employee will need to ensure that accommodations can be made and provided before their start date.

**TABLE 2: Discriminatory vs. Inclusive Language for Job Descriptions**

Discriminatory Language	Inclusive Language
Walks through the laboratory to make sure investigational products are correctly stored.	Ensures investigational products are correctly stored.
Talk to employees on a regular basis to provide feedback.	Communicate with employees regularly to provide feedback.
Accurately writes-up information in logs, on forms and other required documents.	Accurately completes logs, forms and other required documents.

The Government of Ontario provides many tools to help businesses accommodate persons with disabilities during the recruitment process. An example of resources available to all employers in Ontario is this [accessible recruitment process checklist](#).

## 3.2 Individualized Accommodation Plans

Companies in the public sector, private sector, and non-profit organizations with 50 or more employees are required to develop and document a process that lists all the accommodations employees with disabilities need to make their jobs accessible.<sup>2</sup> These plans should include:

- **Outlining the Employee's Accommodation Needs:** Documenting the specific needs of the employee based on their disability ensures that employees with disabilities will be accommodated in a way that respects their dignity and considers the individual's unique needs.
- **Specifying the Accommodations to be Provided:** Detailing the specific actions and supports that will be put in place to meet the employee's needs ensures accountability and demonstrates the organization's commitment to providing the required accommodations.
- **Including Timelines for Review and Updates:** Set regular intervals for reviewing and updating accommodation plans to ensure they remain relevant and meet the employees' needs.
- **Involvement of the Employee and Relevant Experts:** Ensure the employee is involved in creating their accessibility plan. Seeking feedback and suggestions from those the plan impacts, is the best way to safeguard that your company is getting it right. Where necessary also include medical or accessibility experts to ensure that plans are both comprehensive and appropriate.

## 3.3 Accessible Workplace Information and Communication

Employers must ensure that all workplace information is accessible to employees with disabilities. This includes:

- **Policies and Procedures:** Making all workplace policies and procedures available in accessible formats, which means presenting written or visual materials in alternative ways so that individuals who do not read print can access it.
- **Training Materials:** Providing training materials in formats that can be accessed by all employees. This can include providing alternative text to describe images when content is read aloud to individuals using screen readers, providing simulations to help illustrate or apply difficult material and using various software or programs that can help facilitate learning. Other

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<sup>2</sup> <https://aoda.ca/individual-accommodation-plans-in-ontario-workplaces/>

examples include providing closed captioning for live or pre-recorded training sessions or developing a script before training and having it accessible to participants that need it.

- **Emergency Information:** Ensuring that emergency procedures and information are accessible. This could involve providing laboratory safety procedures and emergency plans in accessible formats and conducting evaluation drills that accommodate employees with disabilities.

## 3.4 Performance Management and Career Development

The AODA requires that performance management, career development, and advancement processes consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities. This means:

- **Adjusting Performance Management Processes:** Modifying performance evaluations to accommodate disability-related needs, such as providing additional time or alternative formats for performance assessments.
- **Ensuring Accessible Career Development Opportunities:** Providing training and development programs in accessible formats and locations. For example, if an employee with a physical disability is offered a development program offsite, make sure that the location where the program is taking place is accessible for that individual.
- **Providing Necessary Supports:** Ensure that persons with disabilities can access mentoring programs, accessible training materials and tailored career planning sessions to support career growth.



## 4. Steps for Implementing AODA In Your Organization

### 4.1 Assessment and Planning

The first step towards AODA compliance is through the assessment of current practices and the identification of potential barriers. This can involve:

- **Conducting Accessibility Audits:** Companies should evaluate both the physical and digital environments to identify accessibility gaps in their organization. For example, your company should examine whether laboratory spaces are designed to accommodate employees with mobility devices and check whether your employees have access to and are able to use compatible screen readers.
- **Consulting Employees with Disabilities:** Gathering feedback from employees with disabilities is a key component of the assessment and planning process. Direct consultation with these employees enables your organization to gain a deeper understanding of their needs and challenges. This approach ensures that solutions are effectively tailored to meet both the employees' requirements and organizational needs. For example, engaging a colleague with a disability in the testing and decision-making process for purchasing or developing new tools to support accessibility.
- **Developing an Action Plan:** Once gaps, challenges and needs are identified, creating a detailed plan to address them will keep your organization on track, accountable and accessible.

## 4.2 Accessibility Policy and Plans

Organizations must develop policies, procedures and plans that support accessibility. These can include:

- **Creating an Accessibility Policy:** In Ontario, all non-profits and businesses must develop and uphold accessibility policies. These policies should clearly articulate the organization's dedication to addressing the accessibility requirements of individuals with disabilities. While small businesses, such as many of those in the bio-economy, are not mandated to formally document these policies, it is advisable to do so. However, businesses with over 50 employees must keep documented records of these policies to remain compliant with the AODA.<sup>3</sup> (See Appendix A for a sample accessibility policy)
- **Developing Procedures for Providing Accommodations:** Fostering an inclusive environment requires having clear and accessible procedures for employees to request accommodations. Establishing straightforward guidelines on how to make these requests and how they will be implemented will facilitate the process for employees and enhance overall inclusivity throughout the organization.
- **Developing a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan:** Larger organizations (over 50 employees) are required to develop, review and update multi-year accessibility plans that outline their strategies to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility. Where applicable, plans should be posted on the organization's website and provided in an accessible format. The Government of Ontario website provides numerous [resources to support organizations with developing the multi-year plan](#), including a sample multi-year plan template.
- **Regular Reviews and Updates:** To remain compliant, it is important to ensure that all policies, procedures and plans are reviewed regularly and updated when necessary.

## 4.3 Training

Implementing a comprehensive training program for all employees is essential to ensure that everyone in your organization understands their roles and responsibilities under the AODA. Training programs should cover the core principles of accessibility, such as the AODA standards that apply to your organization and focus on practical skills for effective interaction and communication with individuals with various disabilities.

- **AODA Requirements and Standards:** It is critical to educate employees about the legal requirements and specific standards they must follow. For example, without training on AODA

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/guide-accessibility-compliance-industry>

employment standards, hiring managers may overlook the importance of disability inclusion when writing job descriptions. Hiring managers who receive proper training on AODA standards and requirements can avoid these oversights which can lead to job postings that inadvertently create barriers for people with disabilities.

- **Interacting with People with Disabilities:** Providing disability awareness training is crucial for fostering an inclusive work environment and ensuring compliance with AODA standards. However, to truly build awareness and debunk myths associated with disabilities, it is essential to incorporate interactions with people who have lived experiences with disabilities. Engaging directly with individuals who navigate life with disabilities helps employees develop genuine empathy and understanding. This firsthand exposure enriches training, making it more impactful by breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions. By increasing awareness through these meaningful interactions, employees contribute to creating a workplace that is not only inclusive but also authentically supportive and compliant with AODA standards.
- **Providing Accommodations:** It is crucial for anyone responsible for addressing accommodation requests within an organization to receive proper training. Train managers and HR staff on the procedures for providing accommodations to ensure they understand the legal requirements and best practices. This training equips them to handle requests efficiently, fairly and in compliance with regulations. Proper training also helps prevent misunderstandings so that accommodations are provided consistently and effectively across the organization.





## 5. Monitoring and Reporting

Effective monitoring and reporting are crucial components of AODA compliance. They ensure organizations not only meet the required standards but continuously improve accessibility practices. Regular monitoring can help organizations identify gaps or areas that require improvement, while reporting provides accountability and transparency.

All Ontario businesses and non-profit organizations, except those with fewer than 20 employees, must submit an accessibility compliance report every three years. Public sector organizations are required to submit their reports every two years.<sup>4</sup> The accessibility compliance report is a critical document that confirms that an organization is adhering to the accessibility standards set out by the AODA and serves as a formal declaration that the organization is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible environment for people with disabilities.

### 5.1 Completing an Accessibility Compliance Report

#### Accessing the Report Template:

The template for the accessibility report can be found directly on the [Government of Ontario website](#). Ensure the most current template version is downloaded to meet the latest requirements.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://files.ontario.ca/msaa-bnp-learn-how-to-complete-your-accessibility-compliance-report-en-2023-07-07.pdf>

### Gather Required Information

- To complete the compliance report, you must provide your organization's legal, name, business number, number of employees in your organization, the name and contact information of the individual certifying your report (see certification below for details), and the category of your business.<sup>5</sup>
- Collect data on all planning and initiatives undertaken during the reporting period.
- Document all training that was provided to employees regarding accessibility.
- Include details of any accommodation made for employees or clients/customers with disabilities.

### Complete the Report

- Follow instructions on the [template](#) to fill out the report.
- Ensure all sections are completed as required.

### Certification

- The report must include a statement certifying that the information is accurate and complete.
- The statement must be signed by the individual preparing the report or a director, senior officer or other responsible person with authority in the organization.
- Reports can be filed manually or electronically.

## 5.2 Common Questions in the AODA Compliance Report

The last reporting deadline for non-profits and businesses with 20 or more employees was December 31, 2023. This report provides examples of common questions related to the 2023 reporting template, along with tips on how to best comply with the standards.

Please note: If your organization has not yet completed a report, you must still do so using the 2023 report template. It is important to always use the most up-to-date templates on the Government of

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aoda.ca/completing-your-accessibility-compliance-report/#need>

Ontario Website. The next reporting deadline is in December 2026, and the template will be updated to reflect any changes made to the AODA.

### Question 1: Support Persons

Example question (20-49 Employees): Does your organization ever require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person when on your premises?

#### If yes:

Does your organization do the following before requiring a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person on your premises:

- Consult the person with a disability?
- Determine a support person is necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with the disability or others on site?
- Determine if there is no other way to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability or others on the premises?
- **How to Comply:** If you answer 'yes' to this question, your organization may only require a support person to accompany a person with a disability in very limited circumstances and when there are no other available options.

### Question 2: Individualized Workplace Emergency Response Information:

Example question (50+ Employees): Does your organization employ any persons with disabilities for whom you have provided individualized workplace emergency response information?

- **How to comply:** If you employ persons with disabilities, ensure that you have documents confirming the provision of individualized workplace emergency response information.

## 5.3 Steps to Compliance

Ontario has established a sequence of steps to help organizations, including those in the bio-economy, achieve compliance with AODA and its accessibility standards. The goal is to bring organizations into compliance using a progressive compliance and enforcement approach which includes:

- **Education and Outreach:** The Ontario Government provides resources and supports to educate organizations about their responsibilities under the AODA. Organizations are encouraged to attend training sessions and access online resources to understand their obligations.
- **Audits:** Organizations that miss a reporting deadline or fail to comply with accessibility standards under the AODA are subject to audits. These audits will assess whether organizations are meeting their accessibility requirements and identify areas for improvement.

- **Sanctions and Penalties:** If an organization continues to be non-compliant, the government may escalate to sanctions and penalties. Penalties can include significant fines, emphasizing the importance of organizations adhering to accessibility standards.

## 5.4 Resources and Support

Successfully navigating the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) can be challenging but there are many resources available to support organizations in achieving and maintaining compliance with the act and its standards. These resources have been designed to provide comprehensive guidance, expert advice and practical tools to help businesses and non-profits create accessible environments for employees and customers.

- **Government Websites:** The Ontario Government offers resources and guidelines on AODA compliance. These resources include detailed explanations of the standards, compliance deadlines, reporting templates, and step-by-step guides to help organizations understand their responsibilities. Key websites include the [Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility](#) and [How to Submit Your Accessibility Compliance Report](#).
- **Accessibility Consultants:** Small organizations with limited internal HR resources may benefit from hiring an expert to assist their organization with various aspects of AODA compliance. These professionals offer services such as accessibility audits, policy development, and strategic planning to identify and address barriers to accessibility. Engaging an accessibility consultant can help organizations in the bio-economy provide tailored advice and practical solutions to meet their unique needs.
- **Community Organizations:** Community organizations and advocacy groups representing people with disabilities can offer valuable insight and support. These groups can provide feedback on accessibility initiatives, help organizations better understand the lived experiences of people with disabilities and offer resources for developing more inclusive practices within your organization. Partnering with community organizations can enhance an organization's approach to accessibility and ensure it aligns with the needs of current and future bio-economy employees who are part of the disability community. Examples of these community organizations include CNIB and [ODEN](#).

## 6. Acknowledgements

BioTalent Canada would like to thank the partners, wage subsidy employers, and project supports that took the time to complete the survey for this report. Your continued support in the research conducted by BioTalent Canada has been integral in the development of the products and services that shape the future success of the Canadian health and biosciences sector.

## 7. Partners

<p><b>Platinum</b> Innovative Medicines Canada</p> <p><b>Gold</b> Applied Pharmaceutical Innovation Bioscience Association Manitoba BioVectra Inc Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) STEMCELL Technologies</p> <p><b>Silver</b> adMare BioInnovations Ag-West Bio Inc. BioAlberta BIOQuébec Business Wire Canadian Alliance for Skills and Training in Life Sciences (CASTL) Gowling WLG HealthPartners Life Sciences British Columbia Life Sciences Nova Scotia Life Sciences Ontario McGovern Management Group Inc (MMGI) PEI BioAlliance Stem Cell Network</p>	<p><b>Bronze</b> Bioenterprise Corporation Canada Bioindustrial Innovation Canada Blue Branch Borden Ladner Gervais (BLG) Brock University City of Mississauga Commissioning Agents International Canada CEWIL Canada (Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada) Corporate Traveller Canada EMILI (Enterprise Machine Intelligence and Learning Initiative) Integrated Project Services (IPS) Meeturtalent Inc Montréal Invivo Notch Therapeutics Research NB Riipen – Advance Ontario Science to Business Network ZeroOne Strategic McMaster University – DeGroot School of Business Northeastern University – Toronto Campus Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology Toronto Metropolitan University University of Alberta University of British Columbia – Faculty of Science University of Calgary- Schulich School of Engineering University of Manitoba University of Toronto University of Toronto – Master of Management of Innovation program University of Victoria – Biomedical Engineering University of Waterloo York University</p>	<p><b>Supporting</b> BioBenefits BIOTECanada Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC) Canurta City of Toronto Glyconet Medtech Canada Ontario Bioscience Innovation</p> <p><b>Showcase</b> BioConnect Eurofins CDMO Alphora Inc Global Institute for Food Security Laboratories Charles River Ottawa Hospital Research Institute Providence Therapeutics Holdings Inc Resilience Biotechnologies Sanofi Pasteur Limited Xenon Pharmaceuticals Inc Zymeworks Inc.</p> <p><b>Academic</b> Carleton University Langara College Loyalist College Queen’s University Red River College University of Guelph Western University</p> <p><b>Would being part of a national bio-economy network of employers be an advantage for you?</b> Email Soufiane at <a href="mailto:info@biotalent.ca">info@biotalent.ca</a> to find out more.</p>
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# Appendix A: Sample Accessibility Policy

## Introduction

At (company name) we are committed to creating an inclusive environment where all individuals, including those with disabilities, can access our services and advances in (enter product or service) research and development. We believe in facilitating accessibility to empower innovation and collaboration within our communities.

## Purpose

This policy outlines our commitment and approach to ensuring accessibility for our employees, customers, and partners with disabilities, which is in alignment with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

## Scope

This policy applies to all employees, clients, and partners of (company name), encompassing all areas of our operation, from research and development laboratories to strategic partnerships and digital communications.

## Policy Statements

### 1. Accessibility in our Physical Workplace

- Our workplace, including labs, offices and meeting spaces, will be accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- We will reassess our work environment regularly to ensure we continue to identify and remove barriers in our current environment.

### 2. Accommodations in Employment

- Our company accommodates candidates throughout the recruitment process and employees during employment.
- We will provide the support tools and adjustments requested and required for employees with disabilities to perform roles effectively.
- We will provide employees with clear and accessible information on how to request accommodation.
- We will notify employees, potential hires and the public that accommodations can be during the recruitment and hiring processes.

### 3. Accessible Communication

- All communication materials, including research publications, digital content, and marketing materials, will be available in accessible formats when requested.

#### 4. Training

- We will provide relevant AODA training to all employees, on how to effectively implement accessibility practices within the workplace.
- Specialty training will be provided to employees directly involved in hiring, customer interaction and facilities management to ensure they can assist employers/customers or partners with disabilities.

#### 5. Feedback and Continuous Improvement

- We welcome feedback on our accessibility practices from employees, customers and partners to ensure continuous improvement.
- We provide opportunities to share feedback via email, phone number, and/or a specific person.

## Commitment

At BioTalent Canada, we are committed to fostering an inclusive and accessible work environment. It is our goal to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities through the implementation of this policy. This policy will be reviewed annually and will be in compliance with the current legislation. Additionally, BioTalent Canada has created employer resources such as [Resiliency Resources](#), [The PetriDish™](#), [Compensation Guide](#) [National Occupational Standards](#).



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