

eastlink

# **Eastlink Accessibility Progress Report**

**JUNE 2024**

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## GENERAL

Eastlink has been connecting Canadians to communications and TV services for more than 50 years. We have grown from a small cable provider to a national telecommunications company that delivers high speed internet, TV, phone, data services, security, and smart home solutions to residential, business, and public sector customers including government, universities, hospitality, healthcare, and education facilities to seven provinces across Canada. We have team members from coast to coast who share our commitment to care and excellence in everything we do to meet the needs and expectations of our customers and employees and keep them connected.

Eastlink is committed to improving accessibility across all aspects of our organization, to reflect an equitable and inclusive environment for all customers and employees. Developing and publishing our 2023-2026 [Accessibility Plan](#) was the first step on the road to identifying and removing barriers within our organization.

Eastlink's Progress Report provides updates on the progress we have made towards the action items identified in our Accessibility Plan. Eastlink's progress is outlined in the following priority areas as guided by the *Accessible Canada Act*:

- Employment
- The Built Environment
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Communication, other than ICT
- Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities
- Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

The Director of Customer Experience and Continuous Improvement leads our Accessibility Team and receives all feedback, builds action plans to address feedback, and updates Eastlink's Accessibility Plan and Progress reports. To provide feedback, request accessible versions of Eastlink's Accessibility Plan and Progress reports, or receive a description of Eastlink's feedback mechanism, please contact us in one of the following ways:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| (a) By email | <a href="mailto:accessible@corp.eastlink.ca">accessible@corp.eastlink.ca</a>                            |
| (b) By phone | 1-888-888-4030  |
| (c) Online   | <a href="https://eastlink.ca/about/accessibility-services">eastlink.ca/about/accessibility-services</a> |
| (d) By mail  | Accessibility<br>Eastlink<br>PO Box 8660 Station A<br>Halifax, NS<br>B3K 5M3                            |

## CONSULTATIONS

Over the past year, Eastlink has engaged persons with disabilities including disability advocacy organizations, as well as employees, to better understand the progress we have made and what barriers still exist with regards to accessibility.

Our Accessibility Team held virtual and in-person meetings with employees across our organization to provide information on the *Accessible Canada Act*, our internal Accessibility Team, and our feedback mechanisms. We shared the outcomes of our consultations and our employee survey and what we are working on to improve accessibility at Eastlink.

In February 2024, Eastlink conducted an anonymous employee survey, which invited employees, including employees with disabilities, to provide feedback on our progress in implementing the Accessibility Plan over the past year, and to identify any accessibility barriers that continue to exist. Alternate formats or ways of providing feedback were available upon request.

Results from 864 respondents to the employee survey revealed that Employment and the Built Environment are the priority areas where employees feel that improvements should be focused. We also learned that there are opportunities for more communication and awareness of Eastlink's accessibility progress and accessible options for employees.

In November 2023, Eastlink participated in virtual consultations facilitated by the Canadian Telecommunications Association. These consultations were held with disability organizations and persons with accessibility needs to identify what barriers still exist when accessing our mobile services. The virtual sessions were held in English and French with simultaneous interpretation as well as ASL/LSQ interpretation and CART services available.

Throughout the year Eastlink reached out to various disability organizations by email for feedback on our Accessibility Plan progress. Through informal discussions with certain disability groups, we had the opportunity to create awareness of our Accessibility Plan and identify further opportunities to create awareness of our accessibility service offerings.

## FEEDBACK

Eastlink welcomes feedback on accessibility from our employees and the public by email, phone, online and by mail as outlined above. The Director of Customer Experience and Continuous Improvement receives and actions all feedback.

Since the launch of our Accessibility Plan, we have received 42 accessibility-related submissions. Each submission is responded to via the mechanism by which it was received or based on the feedback mechanism requested in the submission.

Most of the feedback received were inquiries related to our accessibility discount and the services we provide for persons with disabilities. Eastlink has also received feedback on billing and rates for persons with disabilities, closed captioning, video relay services, questions around screen readers, and seating issues at our retail locations.

As most of the feedback received related to inquiries about our accessibility service offerings, there are opportunities for creating greater awareness and visibility of our accessibility service offerings as we progress forward. Awareness of our accessibility service offerings was identified as a barrier in our Accessibility Plan, and we will use this feedback to continue to develop strategies to address this barrier.

## EMPLOYMENT

We are committed to providing and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive workplace where all employees can participate. The need to strengthen education and awareness on the availability of support tools and accommodations for employees with accessibility needs was highlighted in our Accessibility Plan. This past year, we have taken steps to increase our accessibility awareness and engage employees on identifying and reducing accessibility barriers.

### Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Employment

- We have created a page dedicated to Accessibility on our internal employee website. This page contains links to information on the *Accessible Canada Act*, Eastlink's Accessibility Plan, our Employee and Family Assistance Program, online courses, and tools and resources within our applications for our employees.
- A Leader guide is in development and will include an FAQ on acceptable hiring practices with a focus on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility.
- A Team Member guide is in development and will highlight Eastlink's commitment to removing barriers for internal hiring.
- The Talent Acquisition team schedules intake meetings with hiring managers to discuss roles and their requirements, including physical, sensory, and emotional efforts required to determine if accommodations may be possible.
- Our People & Culture team attended multiple seminars and job fairs over the past year that had a specific focus on employment for persons experiencing barriers to employment including those with accessibility needs. This team has also met with community organizations who support individuals with accessibility needs including employment coaching and services.
- We have reassessed our hiring and onboarding processes with input from our Employment Equity Committee, feedback from Eastlink's employee survey, and industry consultations. This has resulted in updates to recruitment processes to ensure we incorporate best hiring practices with a focus on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility. The application process now includes an opportunity for candidates to request assistance or an accommodation if needed.

## THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our employees rank the Built Environment as one of the most important priority areas where accessibility initiatives should be focused. Eastlink is committed to reducing barriers in our built environment for our customers and employees. Barriers to accessibility in both our workspaces and retail spaces were identified in our Accessibility Plan. Accessibility needs are being incorporated into our new and existing work environments through the re-design of workspaces and retail locations that put accessibility features at the forefront.

## Workspaces

Eastlink's workspaces are designed to facilitate various business functions across the country and include our offices and Community TV stations. Our Accessibility Plan highlighted barriers regarding inaccessibility of workspaces including entrances to washrooms, parking lots, boardroom access, and kitchen and common areas.

### Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Workspaces

- Our Accessibility Team has met with building stakeholders to discuss and prioritize updates to existing workspaces to incorporate accessibility needs for our employees.
- We have made several updates to some of our boardrooms; this includes redesigning the space to ensure there is ample room for persons with mobility issues, adding the latest video conferencing technology with screens that are visible from all angles, and upgrading the lighting to include dimmer options for those who have sensitivity to lights.
- Chairs have been replaced with ergonomic chairs and workstations have been spaced further apart where needed.
- At Eastlink's corporate office parking lot, signage has been shifted to create larger parking spaces for those with accessibility needs. Additional parking spaces have been added to the accessible parking area and permanent markers have been placed to help identify and mark individual spots.
- Renovations to elevators in Eastlink's corporate office are ongoing and include the latest technology to assist the hearing and visually impaired while riding the elevator. All buttons include Braille for the visually impaired. As well, floor announcements are made upon arrival at each floor.

## Retail Stores

Our retail stores provide customers a space where they can inquire, purchase, or make changes to services as well as receive support with current services. Our Accessibility Plan identified lack of adequate seating as well as height of service counters and digital pads for signing agreements as barriers.

### Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Retail Stores

- A review of each retail location was conducted to ensure accessible seating options are available for customers in all locations.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

Eastlink has multiple ways our customers can communicate with us using ICT. Eastlink also communicates with employees using ICT. Eastlink's Accessibility Plan identified barriers in both our internal and external ICT. The tools Eastlink uses for information and communication purposes have been explored for increased accessibility.

## External ICT

Eastlink's external ICT includes the ways in which we communicate with our customers and the public on our website, online chat, email, electronic documents, telephone, and text message. In our Accessibility Plan we identified barriers regarding difficulty navigating websites, and complexity of phone systems and online chat options for persons with disabilities.

### Progress in preventing or removing barriers in External ICT

- We launched a new, more accessible bill management tool for customers to access their home services accounts. The new tool includes the following accessibility features:
  - Larger font to make it easier to read without having to manipulate screen settings.
  - More user-friendly navigation and brighter more vibrant color scheme with visual images representing Line of Business, Usage, Invoices, and Payments.
  - Simplified process to set up and manage preauthorized payments.
  - A new dashboard to easily review services and scheduled appointments.
  - New Help section with direct links to various support content on our website.
  - Direct connection to our Chat tool so customers do not have to leave the Self Care tool to ask a question via chat or get our phone number to call.
  - New direct link to TV Channel Exchange allowing customers to easily access and manage TV Channel Exchange when logged into My Account.
  - New account switch option on the main page allowing customers to select another account associated with their name without having to log in and out of the bill management tool.
- We started a review of our public website to improve navigation.
- We implemented improvements to our online chat function allowing customers to self-serve in terms of support, making balance inquiries, and accessing appointment details.
- We launched a new, more accessible bill management tool for customers to access their mobile services accounts. The new tool includes the following accessibility features:
  - Larger font and more vibrant colors to make it easier to read without having to manipulate screen settings.
  - Simplified process to add and remove travel options such as easyTravel or Travel Packs making it easier for users to see all their options on one page.
  - Improved process to set up and manage preauthorized payments in less clicks.
  - A new dashboard to easily review all lines on the account and associated usage.

## Internal ICT

Eastlink employees communicate using an internal employee website, learning platforms, as well as Microsoft products such as Teams and Outlook. Barriers identified in our Accessibility Plan included a lack of awareness of the accessibility options available in our current software, and difficulty navigating complex, internal communication systems.

## Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Internal ICT

- We have added informative videos to Eastlink’s new internal Accessibility webpage on the accessibility options available in our software. We have included videos on the *Immersive Reader* and *Read Aloud and Dictate* features available in Microsoft 365.

## COMMUNICATION, other than ICT

Communication, other than ICT, includes the ways we communicate and interact with the public through one-on-one interactions in our retail stores, and our customer care and support teams. Our Accessibility Plan identified that barriers exist when communicating with persons with disabilities as interactions can be specific to each individual and the need for flexibility, education, awareness, and understanding is paramount.

## Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Communication, other than ICT

- Accessibility training was provided to all Eastlink employees in January 2024. Two mandatory courses focused on providing accessible customer service and accessible communication. An additional, optional course was also made available.

## PROCUREMENT OF GOODS, SERVICES AND FACILITIES

As we continue to procure a wide range of technology and software, it is important to ensure that accessibility needs are incorporated in the process. Eastlink’s Accessibility Plan identified that barriers may exist in our current procurement processes and further review of our processes is needed.

## Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

- In 2024, we will begin a review of our internal procurement processes to identify and ensure accessibility requirements are part of the process.

## DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Eastlink provides a variety of services across our serving areas and strives to ensure they are accessible to all Canadians. The lack of awareness of our accessibility products and offerings for customers with accessibility needs was found to be a barrier in our Accessibility Plan.

## Progress in preventing or removing barriers in Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

- Frontline agents receive regular communications regarding the accessibility discount plans, features, and services we provide. Our agents are aware of the Accessibility Team and can forward any feedback from customers to the team.



- Eastlink relocated the accessibility Mobile rate discount information to a more prominent location on the Accessibility Services page of our website for more visibility and awareness.

## TRANSPORTATION

Eastlink does not offer transportation services and therefore have nothing to report.

## REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Eastlink is subject to the following regulatory requirements under the *Broadcasting Act* and the *Telecommunications Act* related to the identification and removal of barriers. These requirements are current as of April 15, 2024.

### TV services – CRTC exemption orders applicable to Eastlink’s TV Services

#### *Product*

- Anglophone systems with over 2,000 subscribers must carry AMI-TV and AMI-audio.  
Francophone systems with over 2,000 subscribers must carry AMI-Télé and Canal M.

### Telecommunications services – Conditions of service & CRTC regulations under the Telecommunications Act

#### General

#### *Financial*

- Contribute annually to fund video relay services (VRS).

#### *Website*

- Promote information about our disability-specific services and products in an accessible manner.
- Incorporate an easy-to-find home page link to the accessibility services section of our website.
- Make information on our website accessible.
- Make accessible any customer service functions that are available solely over our website.
- Make available ASL and LSQ videos promoting the Wireless Code and Internet Code and explaining common terminology.

#### *Customer Service*

- Where customer service functions on our website are not accessible, ensure that persons with disabilities will not incur a charge or otherwise be disadvantaged if they use an alternate avenue of customer service.
- Make our call centre accessible to customers with disabilities by:

- training customer service representatives in handling inquiries from persons with disabilities.
  - familiarizing customer service representatives with the products and services we offer for persons with disabilities; and
  - making our IVR systems accessible.
- Provide paper bills to any customer who self-identifies as a person with a disability for whom e-billing represents a barrier upon request at no charge.

## Wireless

### *Product*

- Make available Message Relay Service including IP Relay Services to our customers including standards for the service. Must report annually on MRS quality of service data.
- Offer accessible wireless plans that meet the need of Canadians with disabilities.
- Offer at least one type of wireless mobile handset that will provide access to wireless service by persons who are blind and/or have moderate-to-severe mobility or cognitive disabilities.
- Take steps to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing Sign language users can make use of VRS in a comparable way to hearing users using voice services.
- Engage in yearly consultations with persons with disabilities and groups representing their interests regarding our accessible wireless plans and the promotion of these plans.
- File annual reports regarding accessible wireless plans and services, consultations with persons with disabilities and groups representing their interests, and promotion and training efforts related to accessible wireless plans and services.
- Make text with 9-1-1 available for hearing or speech impaired persons in areas where the service is available.

### *Customer Service*

- Communicate with customers using plain language.
- Offer an extended trial period of at least 30 days to individuals who self-identify as having a disability. The permitted usage during the trial period must be at least double of permitted usage available under the standard trial period.
- Include a Critical Information Summary with the consumer contract with information about the extended trial period for individuals who self-identify as having a disability.
- Upon request, provide customers with disabilities a free copy of their consumer contract and related documents, including Critical Information Summary, in an alternative format.
- Clearly state on our website the accessibility-specific wireless products and services that are available.

## Internet

### *Customer Service*

- Communicate with customers using plain language.
- Offer an extended trial period of at least 30 days to individuals who self-identify as having a disability. The permitted usage during the trial period must be at least double of permitted usage available under the standard trial period.

- Include a Critical Information Summary with the consumer contract with information about the extended trial period for individuals who self-identify as having a disability.
- Upon request, provide customers with disabilities a free copy of their consumer contract and related documents, including Critical Information Summary, in an alternative format.
- Ensure bill management tools to monitor and manage data usage are accessible to customers with disabilities.

## Telephone

### *Product*

- Make available Message Relay Service including TTY and IP Relay Services to our customers including standards for the service.
- Provide information on dialing plan changes in alternative formats upon request.