

**Developing an action plan for
persons with disabilities – a guide
for government departments, public
agencies and municipalities**

**Section 61.1 of the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their
rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (R.S.Q.,
c. E-20.1)**

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Foreword

This reference document is the follow-up to a preliminary version published in July 2005 (in French only) and distributed to the government departments, public agencies and municipalities concerned. It is provided solely for information purposes and does not constitute legal advice. The role of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (hereinafter referred to as “the Office”) is to advise and assist government departments, public agencies and municipalities in developing their action plans for persons with disabilities, in accordance with the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (R.S.Q., c. E-20.1, hereinafter referred to as “the Act”). For questions pertaining to the interpretation of the Act and how it applies to your organization, please consult your legal department, which may in turn contact the Office’s legal department as needed.

This guide is a work in progress. Since an updated version will eventually be published, comments or information intended to improve the content are welcome and may be sent to the Office, either via a link on its Web site at www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca, or by e-mail to the Direction de l’évaluation, de la recherche et de l’intervention nationale (DERIN) at derin@ophq.gouv.qc.ca.

The official text of the Act is available on the Web site of the Office (in French only) at www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca (click on “Renseignements généraux”) or in English on the Web site of Les Publications du Québec, at www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/accueil.en.html. Print and alternate-format versions of this document are available free of charge from the Direction des communications of the Office by dialling 1 800 567-1465. Electronic, Word and PDF versions are also available on the Office’s Web site at www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca.

Introduction

Full-fledged social integration of persons with disabilities is not yet a reality, despite the considerable progress made over the past 25 years. Even today, these people are often faced with social and physical barriers that hinder their integration and force them to limit or reduce their social, education and professional activities, thereby curtailing their aspirations to live their lives in accordance with their ideals and their efforts to participate more actively in society and to make a unique, significant contribution thereto. Reducing, eliminating and preventing these barriers is thus essential to ensuring persons with disabilities equal opportunity to participate in all dimensions of life.

Bill 56, assented to in December 2004, substantially amended the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights* and stipulated that their integration into society should be on a par with that of other citizens. This means, among other things, that government departments, public agencies and municipalities must adopt, on an annual basis, an action plan designed to reduce barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities. More specifically, the Act stipulates that this action plan must identify the barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities and the measures to be taken in the coming year to remedy the situation. This plan must be considered an ongoing and constantly evolving process.

The Office has decided to support the organizations concerned, primarily by publishing this reference document intended for government departments, public agencies and municipalities, as well as a document entitled *Municipalities' first action plan: suggestions for action*, which targets municipalities in particular. The Office can also provide support to government departments, public agencies and municipalities, which may contact it by telephone or e-mail or organize meetings, depending on their needs. Appendix 4 of this document lists the contact information of the resource people at the Office who are at your disposal to help you develop and implement your organization's action plan.

In March 2005, the Office published a document (in French only) entitled *Guide d'accessibilité et d'adaptation des services gouvernementaux: Les services de l'État, c'est aussi pour les personnes handicapées*. This guide suggests implementing adaptation measures based on the various characteristics of persons with disabilities to ensure that the services offered to the population at large are accessible to all. Its goal is to help government departments and agencies broaden access to government services for persons with disabilities. In many respects, its content is also applicable to the municipal context, and thus is a valuable tool for any organization preparing to draft an action plan. We strongly encourage government departments, public agencies and municipalities to consult it. It is available on the Web site of the Office at www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca and has been distributed to all Québec government departments and agencies.

Why an action plan?

An action plan aimed at identifying and reducing barriers describes what the organization intends to do to facilitate the integration of disabled persons and ensure their full participation in community life, like any other citizen. In this regard, it facilitates the short-, medium- and long-term planning of the actions to be taken with a view to reducing barriers that the organization has identified. Thus, the action plan charts the best way forward for achieving this goal. It is an effective way of keeping a record of the improvements made and those to come, better determining the objectives to meet and fostering coherent actions. Several government departments, public agencies and municipalities have already taken measures that have considerably lessened barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities. In this regard, the advantage of an action plan is that it gives each organization an overview of what they have accomplished and what remains to be done. It should be noted that the action plan is a work in progress and, as such, can always be improved.

Outline

This guide comprises several chapters intended to help you draft and implement your action plan. The first chapter provides information on the legal framework for the action

plans, while Chapter 2 helps readers understand the concept of barrier as it relates to the definition of “handicapped person”. The third chapter sets out elements to make developing the action plan easier, while chapters 4 and 5 deal, respectively, with the steps to follow in drafting the plan and the phases of adopting, disseminating, monitoring its implementation and updating it annually. Finally, to clarify the process, two sections look at the historical context of the action plan and the situation of persons with disabilities in Québec (see appendices 1 and 2).

Chapter 1: The legal framework for the action plans

By amending the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights*, the Québec government's aim was not only to continue making the public and private sectors accountable for the needs of persons with disabilities, but also to reinforce this trend. In fact, section 1.1 of the Act calls for greater involvement of government departments and their networks, municipalities, and public and private agencies in helping disabled persons integrate into society, while section 1.2 outlines the policy directions that must guide the Office and its partners in all the actions they take with respect to persons with disabilities.

The accountability approach advocated by the Act is reflected, in particular, by the new responsibilities given to several government representatives, such as producing an action plan aimed at facilitating the integration of persons with disabilities in their respective sectors of activity. Section 61.1 of the Act stipulates that government departments, most public agencies, and municipalities with a certain number of residents must adopt and disseminate an action plan for persons with disabilities on a yearly basis.

Section 61.1

Not later than 17 December 2005, every government department or public agency employing at least 50 persons and every local municipality with at least 15,000 inhabitants shall adopt an action plan identifying the barriers to integration handicapped persons encounter in the sector of activity of the department or agency, and describing the measures taken over the past year and those to be taken in the coming year to reduce barriers to integration in that sector of activity. The action plan includes any other element determined by the Government upon recommendation of the Minister, and must be prepared and published annually.

In this provision of the Act, the use of the expression “sector of activity” clearly reflects the legislator’s concern with ensuring that these plans target all activities of all partners. Thus, the action plan must be developed with a concern for activities that pertain to the fulfilment of an organization’s mission and purpose, the carrying out of its duties and

powers (regulations, programs, services, etc.), and related areas (communications, procurement, etc.). In other words, the organization must take into account the characteristics of disabled persons in its particular sector of activity (***transportation, education, recreation, etc.***), both in terms of the services or activities it offers to the public at large, but also of its activities that are specific to persons with disabilities, where applicable. These two aspects apply, for example, to ***legislation, policies, regulations, programs, services, etc.*** Finally, the organization must also take into account disabled persons in its administrative activities such as ***procurement, human resource management policies, etc.*** In the case of a government department or public agency, the action plan can also apply to the networks that fall under its jurisdiction.

This section also stipulates that the action plans of government departments, public agencies and municipalities must identify the barriers to integration in their sector of activity. The definition of “barrier” does not refer solely to physical accessibility, but must be interpreted in a broader sense, taking into account social and political dimensions as well (see Chapter 2 for a definition of “barrier”). For an organization, the concept of barrier thus encompasses ***legislation, policies, regulations, access to various programs such as reception, information and Web sites, as well as services, human resource management policies, etc.*** In short, each government department, organization or municipality concerned must perform a self-review, putting itself in the shoes of disabled persons and determining whether there exist barriers to their integration in its sector of activity (i.e. in the services or activities they offer to the general public, activities targeted specifically at disabled persons, and administrative activities) and, if so, what can be done to reduce them.

Characteristics related to employment

As concerns the hiring and continued employment of persons with disabilities in particular, it is important to keep in mind that other legislative provisions will apply to the government departments, public agencies and municipalities contemplated by section 61.1 of the Act. As of December 17, 2005, many of them will be subject to the new

provisions of the *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies* (R.S.Q., c. A-2.01).¹ Until then, government departments and agencies whose employees are subject to the *Public Service Act* (R.S.Q., c. F-3.1.1) must comply with the provisions of this Act concerning the hiring program for persons with disabilities that is in force in the Québec public service. In fact, all labour market partners, including the departments, agencies and municipalities subject to section 61.1 of the Act, will eventually be obliged to implement the government strategy² for the integration and continued employment of persons with disabilities, which is under the responsibility of the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity. The action plan could thus refer to the actions undertaken or planned in respect of the hiring program and the integration strategy, according to the legal framework that governs them.

Other sections of the Act

Other provisions of the Act must be taken into account when drafting and monitoring the implementation of the action plans aimed at reducing barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities.

Section 61.3 of the Act stipulates that:

¹ The purpose of sections 58 and 59 of Bill 56, the *Act to amend the Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights and other legislative provisions*, assented to on December 17, 2004, is to amend the *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies* by adding persons with disabilities to the groups already subject to the Act. The complete list of these groups can be found on the Web site of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse at www.cdpdj.qc.ca.

² Section 63 of the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* stipulates the following:

“The minister responsible for Chapter III of the *Act respecting the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and establishing the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail* (chapter M-15.001) must facilitate the integration of handicapped persons into the labour market by formulating, coordinating, monitoring and assessing a strategy for the integration and continued employment of handicapped persons, and by establishing result-based objectives. The objectives must be determined in cooperation with labour and employers' groups.

The Office, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère du Développement économique et régional et de la Recherche, the Ministère des Finances, the Ministère de la Justice, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère des Transports, the Ministère du Travail and the secretariat of the Conseil du trésor, in particular, shall be partners in this work.”

Section 61.3

When purchasing or leasing goods and services, as part of their procurement process, government departments, public agencies and municipalities must consider whether or not the goods and services are accessible to handicapped persons.

Thus, the government departments, public agencies and municipalities concerned could, for example, include in their action plans measures linked to the organizational process of purchasing and renting goods and services based on their accessibility for persons with disabilities, whether in terms of policies, in-house directives, guides or call for tender specifications. The organization could also reserve the right to accept the bid to supply goods and services that is the most advantageous in terms of accessibility.

For government departments and public agencies, section 61.4 of the Act stipulates that:

Section 61.4

Not later than 17 December 2005, the government departments and public agencies shall appoint a coordinator of services for handicapped persons within their respective entities, and send the Office information on how to contact the coordinator. The coordinator may be the same person as the delegate or respondent referred to in section 6.1 or 7.

Any communication from the Office under this Act may be addressed to the coordinator.

By appointing such a coordinator, the government departments and public agencies concerned can use this opportunity to entrust him or her with the responsibility for overseeing the drafting of the action plan and monitoring its implementation.

The Office's roles and responsibilities concerning the action plans for persons with disabilities

Among the powers granted to the Office, section 26.3 of the Act stipulates the following:

Section 26.3

The Office may assist a person required to prepare and produce an action plan or a document under this Act.

The Act clearly defines the Office's roles and responsibilities, stipulating, in subparagraph (a.1) of the third paragraph of section 25, that it shall:

Section 25

advise the Minister, the Government, its departments and their networks, the municipalities and any other public or private agency on any matter affecting handicapped persons, and analyze and assess laws, policies, programs, action plans and services offered and formulate any recommendations it considers appropriate.

Finally, it is important to specify that the production of annual action plans by the various departments, agencies and municipalities will help enrich the Office's efforts to update the *On Equal Terms* policy document³ in conjunction with all partners, as stipulated in section 73 of Bill 56, as well as contributing directly to the reduction, elimination and prevention of barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities.

³ OFFICE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES DU QUÉBEC, *On Equal Terms. A policy for prevention and social integration of handicapped persons*. Drummondville, Les Publications du Québec, 1984, 350 p.

Chapter 2: Understanding the concept of barrier as it relates to the definition of “handicapped person”

To clearly situate the concept of “barrier to integration,” it is important to first understand what is meant by a person who has a disability, or “handicapped person”, as the Act calls it. To clarify this concept, we have referred here to other closely interrelated concepts that will help you comprehend the full scope of the action plan. Here are the main ones:

Definition of “handicapped person”

Bill 56 amended the definition of “handicapped person,” which appears in paragraph (g) of section 1 of the Act as follows:

A person with a deficiency causing a significant and persistent disability, who is liable to encounter barriers in performing everyday activities.

To understand the reality of persons with disabilities, it is important to distinguish between different concepts. In this regard, the conceptual framework of the handicap creation process (HCP)⁴ is informative (see Appendix 3). Its main concepts include *impairment*, *disability*, *environmental factors*, *life habits*, as well as *social participation* and *handicap situation*.

Important concepts

Thus, according to the HCP, the concepts of ***impairment*** and ***disability*** refer to realities specific to a person’s body and mind. *Impairment* refers primarily to an abnormality of organic function, whereas *disability* refers to a functional limitation due to an impairment.

⁴ Réseau international sur le processus de production du handicap/Canadian Society for the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps, *Classification québécoise: Processus de production du handicap*, Québec, 1998.

There are different types of disabilities. According to the classification of the Réseau international sur le processus de production du handicap (RIPPH),⁵ they may affect:

- hearing
- sight
- speech
- motor activities
- intellectual activities
- mental health or behaviour

It should be recalled that disabled persons do not form a homogeneous group; their personal characteristics are many and varied.

The concept of **life habits** corresponds to the accomplishment of everyday activities or social roles. Accomplishing these life habits fully corresponds to a situation of **social participation**, whereas the inability to do so constitutes a **handicap situation**.

Environmental factors can act as either **barriers** or facilitators in the carrying out of everyday activities. These factors include **social aspects (social organization, values, etc.)** and **physical aspects (barrier-free architecture, signage, communication, etc.)**. In this context, it is the interaction between personal factors (impairment and disability) and environmental factors that facilitates or impedes the accomplishment of a life habit, resulting, in the latter case, in a handicap situation.

Thus, **adaptation** is the action of increasing access to an existing environment in order to meet the specific needs of a person with a disability. The principle of **universal accessibility** is an interesting concept, since it “ensures that all users benefit from the opportunities offered by a given environment in equal measure”⁶ and thus takes into account situations in connection with all disabilities (visual, hearing, motor, cognitive, etc.), even if temporary. Universal accessibility enables people with or without

⁵ Canadian Society for the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps, “Évolution canadienne et internationale des définitions conceptuelles et des classifications concernant les personnes ayant des incapacités, Analyse critique, enjeux et perspectives,” *ICIDH and Environmental Factors International Network*, vol. 9, n^{os} 2-3, July 1998.

⁶ SOCIÉTÉ LOGIQUE INC., *Le Bulletin*, press release of April 30, 2004. [Free translation]

impairments to have access to public buildings or areas, to find their way around and to move within these areas, and to use the services and take part in the activities offered.

Based on this model, it is thus possible to reduce, eliminate and even prevent handicap situations, even if a person's impairment or disability is permanent, by acting on environmental factors in such a way as to facilitate the accomplishment of life habits. The organization of government and municipal services and the way they are delivered are major environmental factors for all citizens, including persons with disabilities. As a result, it is possible for government departments, public agencies and municipalities to reduce, eliminate and even prevent handicap situations for the disabled by working to reduce barriers.

Chapter 3: General guidelines to make developing the action plan easier

Your organization's commitment

Certain elements can make the process of producing and implementing the action plan more efficient, for example, obtaining a commitment from the organization to significantly reduce and eliminate barriers to the integration of disabled persons in its sector of activity. This commitment may include a statement specifying the organization's will to reduce these barriers and an affirmation of the values underpinning relations between citizens, including disabled persons, and the organization.

Appointing a coordinator

Whether it be a government department, public agency or municipality, your organization can identify the branch or department best qualified to help draw up the action plan. A general, comprehensive knowledge of the organization's activities is an asset to be considered when making this choice. Moreover, the sector chosen should already be responsible for activity planning, since this could facilitate the development and implementation of the action plan.

More specifically, appointing a person responsible for coordinating your organization's action plan means that this person can see to incorporating the various elements of the plan into a coherent whole and ensure that the various steps involved in developing, implementing and monitoring it are properly organized. In government departments and public agencies, this coordinator can be the person described in section 61.4 of the Act, while in municipalities, the person required is someone who is likely to assume leadership in drawing up the action plan and who has in-depth knowledge of all the municipality's sectors of activity.

To implement the action plan, the coordinator will need information from the various branches or departments of the organization. To obtain it, he or she should occupy a certain position in the organization's hierarchy and be given a clear mandate with which

all the personnel is familiar.

Setting up a working group

Setting up a permanent working group responsible for producing an annual action plan is another option. In this way, the responsibility for this substantial undertaking is shared among several people, and the resulting plan is likely to be superior in quality.

The input of persons with disabilities and their families and representatives to this working group can certainly contribute to the quality and relevance of the action plan, for example, in identifying the barriers to be eliminated and the courses of action to be followed. Although the coordinator should have in-depth knowledge of the organization's sectors of activity, he or she will probably not have all the expertise necessary to identify the barriers faced by disabled persons in each sector and the means of reducing, eliminating or preventing them. In this regard, asking persons with disabilities or their representatives for advice can be helpful. The Office will also provide, on request, the contact information of disability associations that can assist government departments, public agencies and municipalities in this phase of drawing up the action plan. The working group should take the special needs of persons attending its meetings into account, for example, by ensuring that the meeting venue is barrier-free, that the documents are adapted, or that an interpreter is present, as the case may be.

Consulting reference documents and resource people at the Office

Having access to relevant information and reference documents can also be helpful in developing the action plan. As mentioned in the introduction, the document *Guide d'accessibilité et d'adaptation des services gouvernementaux: Les services de l'État, c'est aussi pour les personnes handicapées* can be useful in this regard. In addition, since certain organizations have already carried out studies on the various adaptation measures that disabled persons may require, contacting them and exchanging ideas may be beneficial.

Lastly, as mentioned earlier, resource persons are on hand at the Office to help you out. Please refer to Appendix 4 for their contact information.

Four facilitating factors for developing your action plan

IN BRIEF
Committing to the process and designating a branch or department to be responsible for the action plan
Appointing a coordinator responsible for overseeing the action plan
Setting up a working group
Consulting reference documents and resource people at the Office

Chapter 4: Presenting your organization's action plan

Based on the above information, this chapter suggests a process for drafting your organization's action plan by outlining a series of easy-to-follow steps.

Steps in drafting your action plan

IN BRIEF
1. Prepare an overview of your organization and its sector(s) of activity
2. Describe the measures put in place over the past year
3. Identify the barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities in your sector of activity
4. Establish a level of priority for each barrier identified based on the criteria defined by your organization
5. Describe the measures planned for the coming year

1. Prepare an overview of your organization and its sector(s) of activity

This phase can provide an opportunity to introduce your organization and its environment. For example, for a government department or a public agency, information on its mission, the number of employees, the type of services it offers to the population or the network to which it belongs may be specified. For a municipality, this same overview may include similar information as well as data on the number of inhabitants, the territory served, etc.

This phase also allows you to identify the sectors of activity that relate to your duties. The idea is to sum up, in your action plan, the specific niches in which your organization is involved and the ensuing activities. This means taking into account both general activities targeting the public at large and, where applicable, activities specific to the disabled population.

Thus, government departments and public agencies should focus on a few broad sectors of activity, for example, transportation, education, employment, housing, health

and social services, culture, tourism, recreation or research. However, each of these sectors may encompass several types of activities that need to be addressed in the action plan, such as legislation, policies, regulations, programs, services, procurement and human resource management, to name just a few.

Municipalities are generally responsible for several sectors of activity, such as the accessibility of public spaces and buildings, housing, residential safety, transportation, recreation and culture. The document entitled *Municipalities' first action plan: suggestions for action*, which is also distributed along with this guide, was designed specifically for municipalities. We encourage them to read it in order to obtain more concrete information in this regard.

It should be noted that this phase also affords the opportunity to introduce the working group responsible for the development of the action plan, where such an entity exists.

2. Describe the measures put in place over the past year

When drawing up the first action plan, it stands to reason that you will not be able to describe the measures put in place in the preceding action plan, since none existed. However, your organization may have implemented some accessibility measures in previous years. This phase gives you the opportunity to gather information on the organization's activities that have improved accessibility for persons with disabilities in your sector of activity. ***These may include the adaptation of your Web site for use by persons with disabilities, the modifications required to make the sidewalks of your municipality barrier-free, the adoption of an evacuation procedure for persons with reduced mobility in the event of an emergency, or the launching of a campaign to make your personnel aware of the limitations of persons with hearing impairments.*** A section of your action plan could be used to describe these past measures. It should be noted that in subsequent years, an updated action plan describing the measures taken to reduce the barriers identified in the previous plan must be drawn up.

3. Identify the barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities in your sector of activity

As mentioned in Chapter 2, a **barrier** is a factor in the social or physical environment that facilitates or impedes the accomplishment of a life habit, resulting, in the latter case, in a handicap situation. Obviously, this concept is very broad and goes far beyond physical accessibility. Some barriers may be physical, such as architectural, material, communication, technological, or information barriers, while others may be social, such as barriers arising from certain policies, practices, behaviours or attitudes. Here are some examples:

Examples of barriers

A doorknob that is hard to turn for people with limited upper-body strength
A doorway to a conference room that is too narrow for wheelchairs
Important information posted on a bulletin board that is too high for persons of small stature to see
Documents that are published solely in print format, and therefore not accessible to persons with visual impairments
A receptionist who ignores or makes no effort to help a person with an intellectual impairment
The absence of an evacuation procedure for persons with reduced mobility
A new program designed by your organization for the public at large that does not take into account the specific characteristics of disabled people
A public assembly at which no assistive devices are provided for persons with speech disorders

Identifying barriers is a crucial step in drafting the action plan, and they must be considered from a broad perspective. However, the idea is not to conduct an exhaustive analysis of all barriers during the first year, since eliminating them is an ongoing venture. Thus, drafting and implementing the action plan should be seen as a long-term, changing process for your organization.

According to the a broad interpretation of the concept, barriers can be found everywhere, which means that it is important to diligently seek them out and identify

them. ***The services or activities your organization supplies to the general population and specifically to persons with disabilities, where applicable, as well as its various management activities, are all areas to be examined when seeking to identify potential barriers.***

At this stage, there are several methods you can use to pinpoint the barriers existing within an organization. The idea is to select the one that best suits yours, based on its specific characteristics. It is also advisable to specify, in the action plan, the methods used to identify the barriers that exist in your sector of activity.

One method consists of ***listing the barriers the organization has already been made aware of, either by studies or reports or through a complaint-filing process. The participation of the personnel can also be solicited in different ways, for example, through brainstorming sessions, surveys, suggestion boxes, consultation groups, etc.***

Furthermore, ***the input of persons with disabilities and their families or representatives*** is valuable in identifying barriers, since these people may perceive barriers that able persons do not. ***This input may be gleaned from employees in the organization who are disabled or have a disabled friend or relative, or from the community (users of the organization's services, community groups, disability associations, disabled students, seniors' groups, etc.).*** Also, ***specific reference documents (for example, on the physical accessibility of the premises)*** can be consulted.

Some barriers identified within an organization can be quickly and easily reduced or eliminated, which will make them a lower priority for this year and in future.

4. Establish a level of priority for each barrier identified based on the criteria defined by your organization

Once you have finished gathering information on existing barriers, your organization should determine which ones should be given priority over the coming year. To do so, it

is a good idea to rank them in order of importance based on certain criteria defined beforehand by the organization, such as ***how frequently a facility or service is used, the concrete impact a barrier may have on the lives of persons with disabilities, the technological means available to reduce the barrier, and the leeway for taking into account the characteristics of persons with disabilities and their families when implementing new measures intended for the general population.*** Ideally, the barriers that constitute the greatest impediment for persons with disabilities should be the first ones addressed in your organization's action plan.

Obviously, the cost of reducing or eliminating barriers is a non-negligible aspect for the organization, but it should be noted that this does not have to be a costly undertaking. In fact, it is possible to reduce, eliminate and even prevent certain major barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities with a minimal outlay or even free of charge. ***For example, a room's furnishings can be arranged within a clearly marked space so as to make it easier for persons with visual impairments to get their bearings, proper lighting can be installed in a building's rooms and corridors, glass doors and walls can be equipped with colour-contrasting strips, spaces can be kept accessible by avoiding the addition of too many pieces of furniture, and background music can be played at an acceptable volume.***

5. Describe the measures planned for the coming year

In this last phase, the aim is to determine, for each barrier identified as a priority in the action plan for the year ahead, the actions or measures planned to reduce or eliminate it. To do so, your organization can adopt methods similar to those suggested for the identification of barriers.

Certain elements are important in the drafting of the action plan and fairly easy to include, for example, ***identifying a person responsible for reducing or eliminating each barrier ranked as a priority in the plan.*** This person can ensure that the measures or actions decided upon by the organization to reduce the barrier in question are implemented. In this way, a number of people can work on the various barriers under the supervision of a coordinator, where applicable.

In addition, to better understand their scope, ***each of the measures envisioned in the action plan can be accompanied by information on how your organization intends to assess the progress made*** through concrete, verifiable and measurable monitoring and evaluation of the measures selected. For example, an organization that observes inadequacies in its customer service to persons with disabilities may choose to provide appropriate training to its personnel assigned to this department, on a medium-term basis. Thus, the organization could deem that, in the first year, training 50% of these employees is an easily measurable target (since the number of employees who receive this training is easy to determine and validate). The organization should also set aside, as soon as possible, the resources to be devoted to reducing or eliminating the designated barriers, to help better plan ahead. These resources may be financial, human or material.

Respecting deadlines for the reduction or elimination of barriers is also important in successfully implementing your action plan, and timelines should be established in conjunction with the organization for the year to come. Following a detailed schedule makes it easier for the coordinator and others involved to monitor the various steps in the process.

It should be recalled that many barriers can be quickly and easily reduced or eliminated. Simple improvements to make include ***ensuring that hallways are not blocked by cumbersome objects, thereby allowing wheelchairs to move about freely; lowering bulletin boards on which important information is posted for persons of small stature; setting aside parking spaces in the organization's parking lot for persons with disabilities; and making customer service staff aware of the different characteristics of persons with disabilities.*** Striving continually to reduce and eliminate existing barriers will help your organization be on the lookout for the appearance of new ones.

Chapter 5: Adopting, distributing, monitoring the implementation of and updating the action plan annually

Suggestions to help you adopt, distribute, monitor the implementation of and update the action plan annually

IN BRIEF	
1. Adoption:	Have the action plan adopted by a resolution of the municipal council, a resolution of the board of directors, or approval of the minister or deputy minister
2. Distribution:	Publish the action plan annually Make the action plan available in different formats and distribute it through different channels
3. Monitoring of the implementation:	Establish measures that allow the implementation of the action plan to be monitored
4. Annual updating:	Mandate the coordinator or the working group to update the organization's action plan annually Review the preceding year's action plan and include the barriers to be reduced or eliminated for the year to come

1. Adopting the action plan

Once your action plan has been drawn up, it may be adopted by a resolution of the municipal council, a resolution of the board of directors, approval of the minister or deputy minister or other means, depending on your organization.

2. Distributing the action plan

Pursuant to the Act, the action plan must be made public. As concerns this legal obligation, it would be advisable to indicate in your plan the ways in which it will be made public and updated annually. All the staff members of your organization should have familiarized themselves with the action plan prior to this stage. There are many ways to publicize the plan, for example, by making it available in different formats (*print*

and electronic versions and alternative formats) and distributing it via a number of channels ***(posting it on your organization's Web site, making an abridged version available to the public along with the information required to obtain the complete plan, providing a copy in your offices for consultation, sending copies on request, etc.)***. Announcing the completion and publication of your action plan in a ***public notice or press release*** or during a ***press conference*** are other options that can be envisioned.

Finally, the Office encourages you to notify it when your organization's action plan is published (see Appendix 4 for contact information).

3. Monitoring the implementation of the action plan

Although drawing up the action plan is important, implementing it is the crucial phase in the process. Therefore, once it has been adopted, measures that allow its implementation to be monitored must be put in place. It should be noted that ongoing evaluation allows the necessary adjustments to be made quickly, and facilitates preparation of the coming year's action plan. Regular evaluation also helps determine the actual impact of the various actions carried out. Other monitoring mechanisms can also be used, such as meetings with staff members who are directly involved in developing the action plan. Monitoring can also be used to ensure that the action plan is being implemented in all of the organization's sectors of activity. It should be recalled that inclusion in the action plan of information on how your organization intends to assess the progress made can also facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of its implementation.

4. Annual updating of the action plan

As mentioned earlier, the action plan must describe the measures taken over the course of the past year and those planned for the coming year, with a view to reducing the barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities in the sector of activity concerned. The coordinator or working group may be mandated to update the organization's action plan on an annual basis. This phase calls for reviewing the preceding year's action plan and including the barriers to be reduced or eliminated, in order of priority, for the year to come.

It should be noted that accessibility measures may be planned over a horizon of three or five years, but action plans must be developed and published annually.

Conclusion

The Office has published this reference document primarily for government departments, public agencies and municipalities that are subject to section 61.1 of the Act, with a view to assisting them in the drafting and publication of their action plans. Great strides have been made in recent years in the social inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. However, as a society, we need to further step up efforts to reduce, eliminate and prevent barriers to their integration. This guide can thus serve as a reference for any organization wishing to be inclusive of disabled persons in its sector of activity.

In the past, several government departments, public agencies and municipalities have implemented concrete measures for disabled persons and their families within their respective sectors of activity. For these organizations, drafting their first action plan, as prescribed by the Act, will be an opportunity to take these measures one step further. For others, it will be an opportunity to systematically take stock of what it means to be a disabled citizen in their context. Thus, given the widely differing realities of the various organizations in Québec, their action plans should reflect these differences.

The action plan is a work in progress that will undoubtedly be enriched year after year. Given the deadline of December 17, 2005, it is obvious that not all existing barriers will be addressed. You are thus encouraged to focus your actions on the barriers you consider priorities, considering your organization's specific context.

Finally, Appendix 4 of this document lists the contact information of the resource people at the Office who are at your disposal to answer any questions you may have on the subject of the action plans.

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Appendix 1

Historical context of the action plans for persons with disabilities

In June 1978, in the wake of a series of studies and public hearings, the Québec government adopted the *Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights*, a piece of legislation that also established the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec. A few years later, in 1985, Québec developed a multi-sector government policy entitled *On Equal Terms*. Through these three key initiatives, Québec affirmed its commitment to fostering the recognition and exercise of the rights of the disabled on a par with those of other citizens and to facilitating their social, school and workplace integration.

Since 1978, major progress has been made in the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, who now, for the most part, live in their communities and receive most services from the same providers as the rest of the population. They can thus aspire, more than ever before, to participating actively in all aspects of society and exercising their citizenship fully. The implementation of the Act has done much to foster the creation of a considerable number of supports intended for persons with disabilities, with over 325 active measures⁷ currently in force to assist them and their families.

Despite the considerable progress made over the past 25 years, the numerous studies and reports⁸ published in recent years show that the objective of full-fledged social participation has not yet been achieved for persons with disabilities, due to persistent barriers to social, school and workplace integration and significant socioeconomic disparities. The measures designed for persons with disabilities, which are often underfunded, do not always meet the demand, and substantial gaps remain in terms of

⁷ OFFICE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES DU QUÉBEC, *Projet de loi n° 56 Loi modifiant la Loi assurant l'exercice des droits des personnes handicapées et d'autres dispositions législatives: Mémoire de l'Office des personnes handicapées du Québec* (DERIN-1175), Drummondville, Direction de l'évaluation, de la recherche et de l'intervention nationale, Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 24 août 2004, 24 p.

⁸ Camirand, J., J. Aubin, N. Audet, R. Courtemanche, C. Fournier, B. Beauvais, R. Tremblay et autres, *Enquête québécoise sur les limitations d'activités 1998*, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2001, 516 p.

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access to different services.

Still today, persons with disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Québec society. This is why, after more than 25 years, it was high time to substantially revise and update the Act adopted in 1978, so that it could better contribute to the integration and social participation of persons with disabilities, the exercise of their citizenship and improved support measures for their families. Thus, after several years of work, the National Assembly adopted, on December 15, 2004, Bill 56, the *Act to amend the Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights and other legislative provisions*. This revised Act gives new impetus to the social challenge of integration and attaches particular importance to making all public and private players accountable for their actions. It is from this commitment to accountability that stems the obligation for every government department or public agency employing at least 50 persons and every local municipality with at least 15,000 inhabitants to adopt an action plan, with a view to reducing the barriers to integration disabled persons encounter in their various sectors of activity.

Appendix 2

The situation of persons with disabilities in Québec

The data used to profile the situation of persons with disabilities in Québec are taken mainly from the 1998 Enquête québécoise sur les limitations d'activités (EQLA), Québec's health and activity limitation survey, conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec. As in most similar surveys conducted in Canada or elsewhere, the concept of "disability"⁹ is used to estimate the number of disabled persons and glean more information about their situation, since it is easier to measure. The existence of a disability may mean that the person has difficulty hearing, seeing, walking or climbing stairs in manner that is generally considered normal.

Thus, according to the EQLA, approximately 15% of the Québec population living in a private household (i.e. their own home)¹⁰ had a disability in 1998, for an estimated population of 1,086,800. The disability rate has risen steadily in recent years, from 10.4% in 1986 to 11.5% in 1991 to 15.2% in 1998. In general, the disability rate increases with age, from 9% for children aged 0 to 14 to 13% for persons aged 15 to 64 to 42% for the 65-and-over age group. Over half of the population aged 75 and over has a disability, regardless of gender. Population aging is due to longer life expectancy but also to declining birth rates, with the result that the proportion of persons aged 65 and over is constantly increasing. It can thus be estimated that the number of persons with a disability will rise significantly in the coming years. According to population forecasts, this number should reach 1,253,175 in 2010 and 1,308,000 in 2020.

A few characteristics

Still according to the EQLA, the most widespread disabilities among adults (aged 15 and over) are those related to mobility (difficulty walking, going up or down stairs, standing for more than 20 minutes, etc.), agility (difficulty getting into and out of bed, dressing and undressing, grasping or handling an object, cutting food, etc.), hearing, intellectual activities and mental health. Among children, the most common disabilities are emotional or behavioural disorders or intellectual impairments, followed by learning

⁹ See Chapter 2 for a definition of the main concepts describing the reality of persons with disabilities.

disabilities. Close to half of all disabled adults and one quarter of all disabled children have two or more disabilities. Finally, 61% of adults are mildly disabled, while 39% have a moderate or severe disability.

The socioeconomic profile of a disadvantaged population

According to the EQLA, close to 80% of adults aged 15 and over with a disability are disadvantaged, which means that they are dependent on other people for the carrying out of their daily life activities and household tasks, or that their disability, without making them dependent on others, causes them activity limitations at school, in the workplace or at home. Disability, and the disadvantage that often results, has a definite impact on these people's participation in society, which is reflected in a much lower level of social, economic, personal and physical well-being than that enjoyed by persons who are not disabled. Persons with disabilities have lower incomes, experience more solitude and isolation, have lower levels of schooling, participate less in the labour market, incur more expenses related to their disability, experience greater psychological distress, and have a more negative perception of their physical and mental state of health.

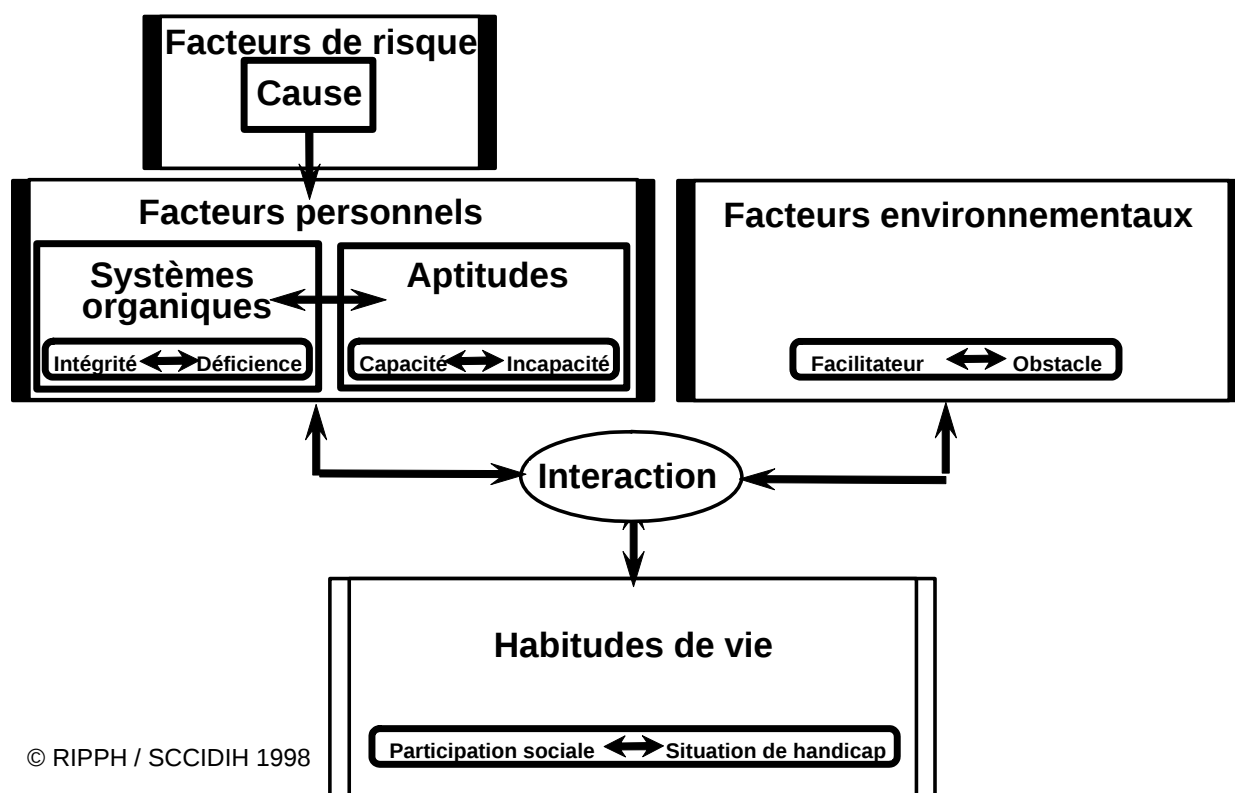
(cont.)

¹⁰ Excluding persons living in institutions, such as hospitals or nursing homes, and in non-institutional settings such as religious communities or boarding houses.

Appendix 3

The handicap creation process: understanding the causes and consequences of disease, trauma and other injury to personal integrity and development

Processus de production du handicap : modèle explicatif des causes et conséquences des maladies, traumatismes et autres atteintes à l'intégrité ou au développement de la personne



Appendix 4

**Contact information of the resource persons at the
Office des personnes handicapées du Québec**

For government departments and public agencies

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'évaluation, de la recherche et de l'intervention nationale 309, rue Brock, 2 ^e étage Drummondville (Québec) J2B 1C5 Fax: (819) 475-8409 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Any Bussière Policy Advisor for Québec Telephone: (819) 475-8596 Toll free: 1 800 567-1465 E-mail: any.bussiere@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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For municipalities and local health and social services network development agencies

Bas-Saint-Laurent Region – 01

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Est 337, rue Moreault, RC 14 Rimouski (Québec) G5L 1P4 Fax: (418) 727-3535 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Johanne Blanchette Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 727-3889 Toll free: 1 888 727-3889 E-mail: johanne.blanchette@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Jean Letellier Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 727-3890 Toll free: 1 877 727-3892 E-mail: jean.letellier@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Saguenay Region – Lac-Saint-Jean – 02

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Est 1299, avenue des Champs-Élysées Bureau 105 Chicoutimi (Québec) G7H 6J2 Fax: (418) 698-3546 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Robert Lavoie Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 698-3544 Toll free: 1 866 680-1907 E-mail: robert.lavoie@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Capitale-Nationale Region – 03

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Est 979, avenue de Bourgogne, bureau 400 Sainte-Foy (Québec) G1W 2L4 Fax: (418) 528-0277 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Henri Bergeron Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 644-2167 Toll free: 1 866 680-1905 E-mail: henri.bergeron@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Jean Dupont Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 643-5732 Toll free: 1 866 680-1898 E-mail: jean.dupont@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Jocelyne Gauvin Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 644-1826 Toll free: 1 866 680-1904 E-mail: jocelyne.gauvin@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Mauricie Region – 04

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale du Centre 100, rue Laviolette, RC 19 Trois-Rivières (Québec) G9A 5S9 Fax: (819) 371-6931 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Sandra Ayotte Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 371-6927 Toll free: 1 866 680-1924 E-mail: sandra.ayotte@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Estrie Region – 05

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale du Centre 200, rue Belvédère Nord, RC 01 Sherbrooke (Québec) J1H 4A9 Fax: (819) 820-3337 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Carole Thomassin Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 820-3773 Toll free: 1 866 680-1936 E-mail: carole.thomassin@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Montréal Region – 06

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Ouest 500, boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest Bureau 15.700 Montréal (Québec) H2Z 1W7 Fax: (514) 873-4299 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Johanne Fortin Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (514) 864-2994 Toll free: 1 866 680-1918 E-mail: johanne.fortin@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Robert Allie Director Telephone: (514) 873-9707 Toll free: 1 888 873-3905 E-mail: robert.allie@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Monique Racicot Secretary Telephone: (514) 873-3393 Toll free: 1 888 873-3905 E-mail: monique.racicot@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Outaouais Region – 07

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Ouest 170, rue Hôtel-de-Ville, bureau 8.200 Gatineau (Québec) J8X 4C2 Fax: (819) 772-3098 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Cécile Chrétien Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 772-3115 Toll free: 1 866 680-1934 E-mail: cecile.chretien@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Brigitte Vincelette Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 772-3114 Toll free: 1 866 680-1933 E-mail: brigitte.vincelette@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Abitibi-Témiscamingue Region – 08

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Ouest 255, avenue Principale, RC 04 Rouyn-Noranda (Québec) J9X 7G9 Fax: (819) 763-3566 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Claude Lacasse Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 763-3889 Toll free: 1 866 680-1930 E-mail: claudelacasse@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Claudette Deault Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 763-3893 Toll free: 1 866 680-1932 E-mail: claudette.deault@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Côte-Nord (09) and Nord-du-Québec (10) regions

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Est 625, boulevard Laflèche, RC 703 Baie-Comeau (Québec) G5C 1C5 Fax: (418) 295-4008 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Améline Bourque Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 295-4094 Toll free: 1 866 680-1940 E-mail: ameline.bourque@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Marie-Josée Dufour Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 295-4006 Toll free: 1 866 680-1895 E-mail: marie-josée.dufour@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Region – 11

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Est 96, montée de Sandy-Beach, bureau 1.05 Gaspé (Québec) G4X 2W4 Fax: (418) 360-8812 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Jean-Aimé Francoeur Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 360-8814 Toll free: 1 866 680-1897 E-mail: jean-aimé.francoeur@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Chaudière-Appalaches Region – 12

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Est 979, avenue de Bourgogne, bureau 400 Sainte-Foy (Québec) G1W 2L4 Fax: (418) 528-0277 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Marc Savoie Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (418) 643-9097 Toll free: 1 866 680-1899 E-mail: marc.savoie@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Laval Region – 13

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Ouest 500, boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest Bureau 15.700 Montréal (Québec) H2Z 1W7 Fax: (514) 873-4299 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Irène Mandalenakis Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (514) 873-2450 Toll free: 1 866 680-1913 E-mail: irene.mandalenakis@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Lanaudière Region – 14

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale du Centre 40, rue Gauthier Sud, bureau 2000 Joliette (Québec) J6E 4J4 Fax: (450) 752- 6975 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Jacqueline Thibeault Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (450) 752-6973 Toll free: 1 866 680-1915 E-mail: jacqueline.thibeault@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Région des Laurentides – 15

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale du Centre 85, rue de Martigny Ouest, C-RC-02 Saint-Jérôme (Québec) J7Y 2R8 Fax: (450) 569-3030 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Guy Gilbert Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (450) 569-3028 Toll free: 1 866 680-1912 E-mail: guy.gilbert@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Fernande Hamelin Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (450) 569-3027 Toll free: 1 866 680-1909 E-mail: fernande.hamelin@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Région de la Montérégie – 16

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale de l'Ouest 500, boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest Bureau 15.700 Montréal (Québec) H2Z 1W7 Fax: (514) 873-4299 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Robert Allie Director Telephone: (514) 873-9707 Toll free: 1 888 873-3905 E-mail: robert.allie@ophq.gouv.qc.ca Monique Racicot Secretary Telephone: (514) 873-3393 Toll free: 1 888 873-3905 E-mail: monique.racicot@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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Région du Centre-du-Québec – 17

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec Direction de l'intervention collective régionale du Centre 309, rue Brock Drummondville (Québec) J2B 1C5 Fax: (819) 475-8550 Teletype: 1 800 567-1477	Guyline Pépin Regional Policy Advisor Telephone: (819) 475-8580 Toll free: 1 866 680-1938 E-mail: guyline.pepin@ophq.gouv.qc.ca
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