

**Municipalities' first action plan:
suggestions for action**

**Companion document to *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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Date

September 8, 2005

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Introduction

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* (hereinafter referred to as the Act) is as follows:

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.*

This document is specifically intended for the municipalities to which the above section of the Act applies. It is a companion document to *Developing an action plan for persons with disabilities – a guide for government departments, public agencies and municipalities* (hereinafter referred to as the action plan guide). Through this document, the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (hereinafter called the Office) hopes to support municipalities as they undertake production of their action plan.

While the Act now requires municipalities to produce an annual action plan, municipal action with persons with disabilities in mind is not new. This document contains examples of such action in ten current sectors of municipal activity that may serve as a guide for your municipality. Existing tools, such as the document *Les municipalités et les personnes handicapées : Guide pour favoriser leur intégration sociale*,¹ have provided a number of municipalities with inspiration and support in fostering initiatives in the area of persons with disabilities. Our document recommends several examples taken from this guide, as well as from the *Guide d'accessibilité et d'adaptation des*

¹ MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES MUNICIPALES ET DES RÉGIONS, *Les municipalités et les personnes handicapées : guide pour favoriser leur intégration sociale*, Québec, 1994.

services gouvernementaux,² which was distributed to municipalities in September 2005. These suggestions, presented for information purposes only and to help you identify possible action in the different sectors of activity, are not exhaustive and do not exclude other options. A lexicon explaining certain terms in the field of adapted services has been appended.

A number of municipalities have already taken concrete action aimed at persons with disabilities and their families in some of these fields. Obviously, these projects may be carried over into their action plans. Annual action plans are intended as works in progress to be built upon, and may address new sectors in subsequent years. It stands to reason that because a first annual action plan must be adopted by December 17, 2005, not all existing barriers can be addressed. By the same token, municipalities are not expected to chart courses of action for all the sectors discussed in this document. We therefore suggest that your action plan be based on the priorities you identify, and, more importantly, on the reality of your municipality. We encourage you to exchange information and share your experiences with many different municipalities. Furthermore, the Office's regional advisors are available to answer your questions.

As indicated in the action plan guide, the companion to this document, we recommend that you specify the means of evaluating implementation of the measures chosen and that you set a clear timetable for each course of action. This way, you will be able to describe the measures taken during the past year to reduce barriers and, if necessary, determine what needs to be done in the coming year. In addition, assigning staff to specific parts of the action plan may help all municipal employees become involved and make the action plan coordinator's job easier. You may also find that external collaboration is beneficial for some courses of action. If so, it should be written into the action plan. For any questions about the process of developing an action plan or understanding its scope, please refer to the action plan guide.

² OFFICE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES DU QUÉBEC, *Guide d'accessibilité et d'adaptation des services gouvernementaux*, Québec, 2005.

1. Physical accessibility and accessibility to public buildings

Although the obstacles that persons with disabilities face are not limited to the physical environment, much can still be done to reduce architectural and physical barriers. A series of very real obstacles to physical accessibility and accessibility to public buildings in your municipality may create handicap situations, particularly for persons with mobility, agility, visual or hearing impairments. Here are some suggestions for tangible means of reducing barriers.

- Increase the accessibility of public buildings and facilities such as city hall, the library, recreational and community centres, the arena, playgrounds, public markets, the tourism office, and parks by installing access ramps, elevators, and automatic doors, setting aside reserved parking spaces and making premises wheelchair-friendly.
- Produce and distribute a directory of accessible public buildings in the municipality (restaurants, theatres, movie houses, concert halls, community centres, etc.).
- Depending on the type of building concerned, get disability associations or other qualified organizations involved in assessing the accessibility of construction or major renovation projects for commercial or institutional buildings before construction permits are issued.
- Make construction professionals (architects, contractors, engineers, municipal inspectors, urban planners, etc.) aware of barrier-free standards by organizing information meetings.
- Make merchants and owners of public buildings aware of the importance of making buildings and facilities accessible to persons with disabilities by organizing information meetings or publishing brochures.

In 2003, the City of Québec released its *Guide pratique d'accessibilité universelle*,³ developed with the Institut de réadaptation en déficience physique de Québec (IRD PQ) and the Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en réadaptation et intégration sociale (CIRRIIS). It inventories barrier-free construction and planning standards for indoor and outdoor spaces.

³ VILLE DE QUÉBEC, *Guide pratique d'accessibilité universelle : Manuel d'utilisation*, Québec, November 2003, 22 p. (www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/fr/ma_ville/acces_guide.shtml).

2. Housing

It is only relatively recently (1976) that construction standards have begun to include measures aimed at making residential buildings accessible, and much remains to be done to fine-tune these requirements. Even though a huge chunk of the residential sector is not regulated, there are certain things that can be done to help reduce barriers or to make it easier for persons with disabilities to find appropriate housing in your municipality.

- Implement methods of facilitating the search for accessible housing by, for example, assisting persons with disabilities in this respect.
- Work with regional partners⁴ in planning the development of adapted residential resources for the persons with disabilities within your territory.
- Urge real estate developers to build housing units based on the principle of universal accessibility⁵ by giving them information about existing standards or by offering them various incentives.
- Encourage the development of social housing projects that include accessible ground-level units by helping to fund these projects or by collaborating in some other way.

⁴ For example, the Conférence régionale des élus (CRE), the Agence régionale de développement des services de santé et de services sociaux, the Office municipal d'habitation, etc.

⁵ The concept of **universal accessibility** is primarily related to building or site design, whereby all visitors or users have equal access throughout public buildings or other public areas (definition taken from SOCIÉTÉ LOGIQUE INC., *Le Bulletin*, press release of April 30, 2004). As such, the concept takes into account situations in connection with all impairments (visual, hearing, motor, cognitive, etc.), even if temporary. Universal accessibility enables people with or without 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.

3. Residential safety

Given their impairments, certain persons with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable in emergency situations. This was clearly established by the Nicolet Commission in the wake of Québec's ice storm in 1998. What follows are suggestions for concrete ways of reducing barriers and of improving the residential safety of persons with disabilities.

- Create a data bank for front-line emergency-response workers informing them of the presence of vulnerable persons with disabilities, and ensure that it is updated regularly.
- Add specific measures for evacuating vulnerable persons with disabilities on your territory to the municipality's emergency-response plan.
- Ensure that emergency-response teams are properly trained in measures for evacuating persons with various kinds of impairments.
- Ensure that the information transmitted to persons with disabilities as part of the process of establishing and deploying emergency measures is adapted (large print or braille, sign language, simplified language, etc.).

In February 2005, the City of Alma received Québec's Civil Security Certificate of Merit for its emergency register for the evacuation of persons with disabilities, an innovative project that required the joint action and cooperation of various organizations within the community.

4. Transportation

The availability of adequate transportation is a prerequisite for the integration and social participation of all citizens, including persons with disabilities. Municipalities should therefore be aware of the provisions of the Act concerning adapted transportation, which obliges them to ensure that all persons with disabilities within their territory have access to paratransit services by the end of 2005.⁶ Here are some suggestions for tangible means of reducing barriers in this area.

- Make it easier for and encourage persons with disabilities to use public transit services by improving accessibility and developing adaptive measures (no charge for attendants, where justified; adapted training in the use of regular public transit; low-floor buses; colour-contrasting strips on the first and last steps of buses; additional lighting; anti-slip flooring; handrails, etc.).
- Give bus drivers special training in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities adequately.
- Facilitate the introduction of quality paratransit services that are tailored to local demand.
- Promote joint action and consultation of all transportation partners in order to improve the services provided to persons with disabilities (public transit and paratransit networks, health and social services network, education community, etc.).
- Ensure that owners of bus stations with inter-city connections are aware of the importance of making their facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

⁶ Section 467.11 of the *Cities and Towns Act* and section 536 of the *Municipal Code of Québec*, as worded as of December 17, 2005, further to the coming into force of sections 62 and 63 of Bill 56, will make it mandatory for municipalities to ensure access to paratransit services within their territory.

5. Signage and parking

Depending on the nature of a person's impairments, certain elements of the physical environment may be of particular consequence. Signage and parking may be very daunting for persons with disabilities, whether they get around by car, on foot, or in a wheelchair. Certain solutions are provided under municipal by-laws, but other recognized measures can also be implemented to improve the ability of persons with disabilities to move about and to increase their safety within the territory covered by your municipality. Here are some suggestions for tangible means of reducing barriers in this area.

- Install audible pedestrian signals, or increase the number thereof, indicating protected crossing at traffic lights (for persons with visual impairments) at crossings located near the city's public services or close to shopping centres, residences or shelters, rehabilitation centres, hospitals, or the places where disability associations meet.
- Ensure that protected crossing time is lengthened to enable persons with reduced mobility to cross safely at the intersections located near these services.
- Ensure that the rules governing reserved parking prescribed by the Québec *Building Code* are obeyed (number of parking spaces, wider traffic aisles, etc.) and see to their application, for example, by conducting regular inspections and asking the police force to rigorously enforce the requirements of the *Highway Safety Code* (by issuing fines).
- Ensure that there is a sufficient number of reserved parking spaces located near public services and businesses (concert halls, post offices, municipal buildings open to the public, etc.).
- Regularly monitor right turns on red lights and make the necessary adjustments at the intersections deemed to be problematic.

In June 2002, during Québec's Week of the Disabled, the City of Blainville conducted an awareness campaign on the issue of reserved parking for persons with disabilities. At a press conference in October of the same year, the city awarded several merchants a certificate of merit for having adding such spaces or brought them up to standard.

6. Employment

From now on, it will be compulsory for municipalities to abide by the new provisions regarding the hiring and continued employment of persons with disabilities as presented in the action plan guide.⁷ Alongside the obligation of **municipalities of 15,000 or more inhabitants** to file their first action plan for persons with disabilities by December 17, 2005, **municipalities with 100 employees or more** that have been subject since 2001 to the *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies* will also have obligations with respect to persons with disabilities.⁸ The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ) will contact the latter to inform them of their responsibilities in this area, after which they will be required to examine their situation and, within roughly three years, develop an affirmative action program specifically for persons with disabilities and report thereon to the CDPDJ. The steps taken and achievements made pertaining to the hiring and continued employment of persons with disabilities could be written into the action plans of the municipalities concerned.

Note that:

- **Municipalities with fewer than 100 employees and with 15,000 inhabitants or more** can opt to include a hiring and job retention policy and related measures for workers with disabilities in their first action plan.
- **The Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity** is responsible for fostering the hiring and continued employment of persons with disabilities. To do this, the Minister must **establish an overall strategy and result-based objectives in collaboration with his or her partners**. The action described above could be part of this strategy,

⁷ See Chapter 1 of the guide, entitled “The Legal Framework for the Action Plans.”

⁸ Sections 58, 59 and 82 of Bill 56, the *Act to amend the Act to secure the handicapped in the exercise of their rights and other legislative provisions*, provide for amendment of the *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies* by adding persons with disabilities to the groups already subject to the Act, as of December 17, 2005.

which is aimed primarily at helping to significantly increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities within the next five years.

- The vast majority of Québec municipalities have **an agency that provides specialized manpower services to persons with disabilities**. For the names of these agencies and information on how to reach them, contact your local employment centre (CLE).
- Emploi-Québec has a series of measures for employers and workers aimed at promoting the hiring and continued employment of persons with disabilities (vocational integration contracts, internships, wage and training subsidies, etc.). To find out more about these measures, contact your CLE or agency that provides specialized manpower services to persons with disabilities.
- **Affirmative action programs (AAPs)** are aimed at rectifying under-representation of workers who are members of groups that suffer job discrimination, including persons with disabilities. They include quantifiable representation objectives by job type or category. First, the CDPDJ determines whether persons with disabilities are under-represented by comparing the agency's personnel data with the latest statistics on persons with disabilities who are qualified or likely to become so within a reasonable timeframe. In cases of under-representation, an affirmative action program must be developed. Such a program must include an analysis of the employment system and, more specifically, of policies and practices that could lead to exclusion, notably in terms of recruitment, training and advancement. The program must also contain a timetable and temporary remedial measures for recruitment and hiring, equal opportunity, and support.

Here are a few examples of good practices.

- **Recruitment:** during public recruiting campaigns, municipalities can systematically inform specialized manpower agencies of job openings. In

newspaper listings and specialized Web sites, municipalities can indicate their interest in hiring a person with a disability or specify that they have an AAP;

- **Selection:** in their application forms, municipalities can include a space for applicants with impairments to indicate any special needs they have. For example, arrangements can be made for written and oral tests and other selection mechanisms by taking into account applicants' impairments (applicants, specialized manpower service agencies, and rehabilitation centres in your region or community can provide help);
- **Hiring:** municipalities can make their human resources staff aware of the integration of new employees with disabilities so that they can be involved in the process. Other measures include making the required physical changes to the workstation and in the workplace, organizing tasks so that persons with disabilities can do the job properly, and having parking spaces for employees with reduced mobility;
- **Making hiring successful:** municipalities can devise a system for ongoing evaluation so that employees with disabilities have the same opportunities for promotion and professional development as other employees.

7. Recreation, culture and tourism

For many citizens, including those with disabilities, recreation, culture and tourism are significant means of achieving personal growth. In fact, for some people, such as those of working age who have not been able to find a job, this type of activity may be the most meaningful one in their lives. Certain relatively simple adaptive measures can boost the social participation of persons with disabilities in your municipality and, in turn, contribute to their personal development. Here are some suggestions for tangible means of reducing barriers in this area.

- Make the private and community sectors aware of the importance of having recreational facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities and inform them of the benefits of accessibility for their business or agency.
- Poll people with disabilities, their families, friends, or associations on their recreational needs, and take their responses into account in the municipality's recreation program.
- Foster disabled persons' access to and participation in the cultural, recreational and outdoor activities generally offered to the public at large by introducing adaptive measures where required (attendants, adapted material, technical aids, multiple formats, trained staff, etc.).
- Foster the integration of children with disabilities in playground activities by hiring any required attendants.
- Have varied and accessible playground facilities for children with impairments in the municipality.
- Organize training sessions to make community development workers aware of the characteristics of persons with disabilities.

- Support the organization of adapted sports for persons with disabilities (wheelchair basketball, goalball [a game adapted to persons with severe visual impairments], wheelchair tennis, etc.).
- Ensure that requests for attendant care services from persons with disabilities are recognized by municipalities' recreational and tourism facilities, and that the various passes for attendants are accepted.
- Make sure municipal libraries develop a collection of alternative-format books (books on tape, in large print or in braille) or add to their existing collection, and use the interlibrary loan system, notably, with the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.
- Make trails in municipal and intermunicipal parks leading to lookout points, picnic areas, washrooms, etc., accessible.
- Set up rest areas so that people in wheelchairs can move about, have a comfortable place to eat, and so forth.
- Make observation points accessible (reached without changes in level or via access ramps, installation of transparent safety ramps, posting of low signboards written in large print or simple language, etc.).

In the summer of 2004, the City of Montréal carried out a recreational attendant project for children with disabilities, which generated 15,000 extra hours of attendant care.

8. Supporting community organizations and families

There are several types of associations for persons with disabilities, their families, and their friends. Some focus on rights advocacy, some on services to their members (counselling and support, respite and crisis care, attendant care, etc.) and some on recreation. Some organizations act on all fronts, but generally with very limited means. Support from municipalities, which is already provided in some cities, can help these organizations carry out their missions, which are of critical importance to persons with disabilities and their families. Parent associations are invaluable sources of information and advice on adapting municipal policy and activities aimed at families. Here are some suggestions for tangible means of supporting families and the community organizations that offer services in your municipality.

- Consult associations for persons with disabilities or parent associations when planning major municipal policies and projects with a potentially significant impact on services and activities for citizens.
- Support community organizations dedicated to integrating persons with disabilities and improving their living conditions and those of their families by offering certain advantages such as adapted premises or equipment rental at discount, financial or professional assistance, etc.
- Devise a family policy that takes into account the concerns of families with members who are disabled.
- Produce and distribute a directory of resources available in your area to families with disabled members, organize information and discussion meetings, etc.

9. Communications

Means of communication—the phone, printed material, the Web, television, and, of course, person-to-person—enable the full exercise of citizenship by all members of a society. Depending on a person’s impairment, these means may have to be adapted to enable the citizen to communicate adequately with various municipal services. Technological breakthroughs in recent years have made several compensatory communication tools available, and more traditional methods (braille, sign language) are just as appropriate today as they were in the past. A lexicon of the most appropriate tools to consider in adapting municipal services has been appended. Here are some suggestions to your municipality for tangible means of reducing barriers to communication.

- Make front-line municipal workers aware of and train them in the special means of communication needed by certain persons with disabilities, so that they can respond adequately to the demand, regardless of the mode of communication used.
- Facilitate phone communication with persons with hearing impairments by using adaptations such as teletype, message relay, simplified phone communication, amplifiers, etc.
- Upon request, offer an interpretation service for persons with severe hearing impairments who communicate using sign language, so that these persons can fully exercise their citizenship at public meetings, for example.
- Make it possible for persons with language and speech impairments, such as aphasia, to express themselves and be understood at public meetings by using adaptive measures (pictograms, interpretation, etc.).
- Upon request, provide the municipality’s main publications in multiple formats (braille, large print, audio documents, QSL video, electronic files, simplified language, etc.).

- Make the municipality's Web site accessible to all persons with disabilities based on Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)⁹ rules so as to make it easier for people with various types of impairments to use the site.

In 2005, the City of Montréal launched a new site, *Accès simple*,¹⁰ for persons with intellectual impairments or severe reading or language problems. *Accès simple* offers three ways of accessing information about the city: simplified text, phonetic spelling and sound. Information is presented simply and using adapted language. The site therefore increases the potential range of response to the diverse needs of all citizens.

⁹ For more information, consult the WAI Web site at www.w3.org/WAI/.

¹⁰ See www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/accesssimple/acs/accueil.shtm.

10. Municipal administration

Municipal councils and senior management can play an important role in establishing information, awareness and follow-up measures that help improve the living conditions of and the services offered to disabled citizens and their families. Their leadership in determining what needs to be done and in orchestrating implementation of the components of the annual action plan is crucial. Here are some suggestions for tangible means for reducing barriers in the field of municipal administration.

- Assign a municipal counsellor to monitor the action plan for persons with disabilities and other related matters.
- Inform persons with disabilities, their families and their associations about the adaptive measures established to enable access to the services and activities offered to the public at large and to special services that could be available to them.
- Make all municipal employees aware of the characteristics of persons with disabilities and of their families.
- Plan activities as part of Québec's Week of the Disabled, held each year from June 1 to 7, or to celebrate the International Day of Disabled Persons on December 3. These activities could focus on informing the general population about or heightening its awareness of the social integration of persons with disabilities and the special needs of their families.
- Encourage the representation of persons with disabilities within municipal organizations such as land-use advisory committees, intermunicipal boards, recreation committees, etc.

- In calls for tender, indicate that accessibility is a factor in awarding contracts for the goods and services the municipality acquires or leases, and that the municipality reserves the right to accept the most advantageous bid in this respect.¹¹
- Establish an issues table or advisory committee to foster the social integration of persons with disabilities and to improve their families' living conditions by involving the various partners within the community.
- Form a committee for monitoring the municipality's implementation of its annual action plan.

In February 2004, the City of Lévis formed an advisory board, *Personnes vivant avec un handicap et Ville*, to study the various issues relating to persons with disabilities and make recommendations concerning policies and courses of action concerning their well-being.

¹¹ This measure enables compliance with section 61.3 of the Act concerning the procurement process. See the action plan guide, and, more specifically, Chapter 1 (The Legal Framework for the Action Plans).

Conclusion

The activity sectors presented in this document will help you identify barriers to the integration of persons with disabilities and decide where action can be taken, based on the priorities established by your municipality. Several municipalities have already adopted a proactive approach with regard to persons with disabilities or their families. For them, the first action plan required by law is an opportunity to continue in this vein. For others, it is an opportunity to systematically take stock of what it means to be a disabled citizen in their municipality. Since the situations in Québec's municipalities are widely different, it stands to reason that their action plans will reflect these differences.

The Office's regional advisors are available to answer your questions about action plans. Appendix 4 of the action plan guide contains information on how to contact them.

Lexicon

- **Teletype** is used by people who cannot use standard telephones. It enables them to have a conversation recorded on paper or displayed electronically.
- **Message relay** provides a connection between a person who is deaf or hard of hearing who uses teletype and a hearing person who does not have teletype. The message relay operator can help the latter make and receive calls from teletype or telephony software users. Furthermore, the operator can help place Voice Carryover or Hearing Carryover calls. Voice Carryover enables a deaf person capable of speech to communicate directly with the person he or she is calling. Hearing Carryover enables people with speech impairments to listen to the other person and use teletype to transmit their message.
- **Simplified telephone communication** consists in using strategies aimed at helping a person who is hard of hearing understand what is being said by, for example, pronouncing distinctly without increasingly voice volume unduly, or re-wording if the listener seems to be having trouble understanding the information you are trying to convey.
- Public telephones with **amplifiers** make phone communication easier for persons who are hard of hearing.
- **Simplified oral communication** means that the message is adapted to the speaker or listener. With some people, level of understanding must be taken into account and the speaker must double-check to ensure that the message has been properly understood.
- Use of **pictograms** can help people who have trouble with verbal communication. For deaf persons who communicate through sign language, natural gestures, mime, drawing, writing and even spelling may be used. Make sure you are positioned so

that hard-of-hearing persons who talk and lip-read can see and hear you when you speak.

- The presence of a qualified sign language, oral, or other **interpreter** is recommended when a person with a hearing impairment this type of assistance in understanding spoken information.
- **Large print** refers to oversize type (16, 22, 26 points or larger), or changes in text layout for documents produced using word processing software.
- **Audio format** is an adaptation used for a written text presented in audio form (cassette, compact disc, etc.).
- **Braille** is a system persons with severe visual impairments can use to read and write. Primarily based on touch, braille uses different codes to transcribe literary, scientific and musical text into a tactile form.
- **QSL (Québec Sign Language) or ASL (American Sign Language) video documents** are used when the content of a written text must be presented in video form by a sign language interpreter. However, use of DVDs is increasingly suggested. Instead of producing four VHS cassettes, for example (QSL, ASL, with French subtitles, with English subtitles), a single DVD can offer all of these options. In addition, DVDs can be viewed on a computer screen and their content can be accessed through a Web link or **modified in various ways**.
- **Simplified written communication** consists in adjusting the content of a written document for people who have trouble understanding the subtleties of language.
- An **electronic file** enables a document to be obtained on diskette or in some other computer medium, depending on the software used. Electronic files are increasingly popular with persons with severe visual impairments who want to access text. Speech generation or enlarged text can be used.