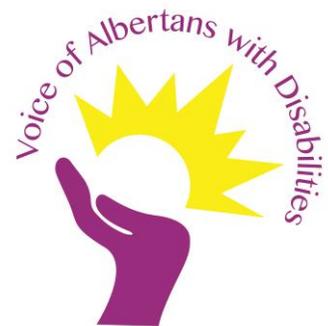


*“The World Health Organization estimates that 15% of the global population, roughly 1 billion people, lives with some form of disability. The accessible travel market presents a golden opportunity for destinations that are ready to receive these visitors, since they tend to travel more frequently during the low season, usually accompanied or in groups, make more return visits and in some parts of the world they spend more than average on their trips.”*

World Tourism Organization  
(2016)

# CREATING ACCESSIBLE HOTELS IN ALBERTA

## Current Practice, Accessibility Tools and Recommendations for Action June 2017



## CREATING ACCESSIBLE HOTELS IN ALBERTA

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## Members of the Project Advisory Committee<sup>1</sup>

Thank you to the members of the Advisory Committee from the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association, Alberta Municipal Affairs, the City of Edmonton, the Human Rights Commission, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind for their knowledge and guidance over the term of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> Three people on the Advisory Committee moved on to other opportunities during the term of this project and we would like to thank them for their work. Judy Ferguson, Executive Director, Voice of Albertans with Disabilities, Donna Graham, Project Co-ordinator, Voice of Albertans with Disabilities and Laura Kemp, Regional Manager CNIB.

## Overview

Voice of Albertans with Disabilities recognizes that lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities overshadows their right to independence. Each province strives to resolve these barriers within the home, places of education or work and public buildings. Our discussions with people with disabilities and policy makers recognize that there are still challenges to accessing barrier-free hotel accommodations.

Barriers such as the physical layout of premises, equipment used, communication methods and misconceptions about people with disabilities remain challenging. In addition, inconsistencies and assumptions of the meaning of “accessibility” leave many consumers with disabilities, service animals and travel companions unsatisfied. Through collaboration with the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) this project was undertaken to identify and provide guidance towards strategies that will improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

An Advisory Committee, including a representative from the AHLA, Alberta Municipal Affairs, the City of Edmonton, Alberta Human Rights Commission, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, has provided guidance to the project and the development of recommendations to begin to address the issues.

**Chapter 1: Current Practice** includes information from:

- a literature review
- surveys and interviews with persons with disabilities
- surveys and interviews with hotel managers/owners
- examination of accessibility assessments

**Chapter 2: Tools to Assess Accessibility** includes three tools that were developed as part of the project to assist with assessing and improving accessibility. This includes:

- templates on an Best Practice Accessible Hotel Rooms and Bathrooms
- a Guest Checklist for consumers to assess Accessible Hotel Accommodations
- a Hotel Accessibility Self-Assessment Guide for hotels to examine key elements of accessibility in their environment.

**Chapter 3: Recommendations for Action** presents three recommendations with a series of actions that will increase accessible lodgings for persons with disabilities in Alberta.

## Current Practice

The international literature review provides both a best practice approach to moving accessibility forward and a legislative approach. The United Nations World Tourism Organization has developed a number of manuals and publications that provide clear direction, rationale and examples of accessible tourism throughout the world and clearly is a leader in encouraging tourism for all. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has been in place since 1990 and provides a wide array of support tools for the hotel and motel industries, as well as compliance reporting requirements. The American Hotel and Lodging Association strongly and publically supports the existence of hotels that are welcoming for all guests. They have created a number of tools to assist their members to meet this goal and be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In Canada, we do not see the same level of best practice tools or legislative approaches to support accessibility within the hotel and lodging industry. Ontario, which has had legislation in place since 2001, is the exception. A partnership between the Government of Ontario, disability organizations and the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association (ORHMA), has resulted in the creation of numerous tools and examples of best practice to assist in meeting the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Manitoba introduced a Customer Service Standard (2014) under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (2013). Private and non-profit organizations must comply with the Standard by November 2018. Nova Scotia has established an Advisory Panel working on recommendations to guide development of accessibility legislation. British Columbia is two years into a ten year plan approach to address accessibility in all areas including accommodations. It is too early to determine the effectiveness of that public policy approach.

The Government of Canada completed a consultation process in March 2017 to determine the interest, feasibility and potential areas that could be part of Canadians with Disabilities Act. Results of the consultation support the development of new accessibility legislation that would improve the quality of life for Canadians with disabilities. The new legislation should engage provincial and municipal governments, be built on existing standards that are working well and be done with leadership from persons with disabilities and organizations representing their voice.

Information gathered within Alberta during this project indicates there is room for improvement on accessibility within the hotel industry. Data from hotels shows there is both a willingness and desire to understand how to give consumers with disabilities a great hotel experience. Hotels that have focused on accessibility are proud of their efforts and want to continue to move towards best practice. Those who are not fully accessible want to know how they might make improvements.

Detailed in the report is information on accessibility elements that are working for people and accessibility elements that need improvement. Some of the more common accessibility elements identified for improvement include:

- having lower counters in reception
- having a front desk system for persons with hearing issues
- improving emergency plans
- addressing issues with accessible bathrooms (size, turning radius, mirrors)
- installing lowered light switches, closet bar, access to heating/cooling controls
- installing appropriate grab bars, vanity cabinets, sink and insulation of pipes in lavatories/urinals/water closet stalls
- doors that are too heavy, not wide enough, close too quickly, or do not swing out
- appropriate bed height (below mattress and from floor to mattress surface)
- showers that often have a lip and are not accessible, and benches in showers with the shower controls too far away to be reached

The Alberta Barrier-Free Design Guide and the Alberta Building Code are viewed as providing a baseline for accessibility. Hotels that viewed their accessibility as exceeding the minimum requirements of Alberta's Barrier-Free Design Guide and the Alberta Building Code indicated that they were part of national and international hotel brands that established higher standards, either as a result of being subject to ADA or a brand standard that was committed to accessibility.

It was noted through the project that hotels would be interested in acquiring a kit which provides persons who are deaf and hard of hearing more accessibility within the hotel and that staff sensitivity and awareness training would be very helpful.

## Tools to Assess Accessibility

The *Creating Accessible Hotels in Alberta* project has created three tools to assist with assessing and improving accessibility.

**1) Templates of Accessible Hotel Rooms and Bathrooms** are provided. These templates meet the requirements of the Alberta Barrier-Free Design Guide and the Alberta Building Code. They include features identified in the *Creating Accessible Hotels in Alberta* project by both persons with disabilities and hotel managers/owners as best practice ideas. It can be used by hotels to conduct a self-assessment on what they can do to improve the guest experience of persons with disabilities at their properties. These examples meet best practices and exceed minimum code requirements of what an accessible hotel room is.

**2) The Checklist for Guests to Assess Accessible Hotel Accommodations** provides a checklist for people with disabilities to use when they are booking an accommodation. It proposes a number of questions that can be used to screen hotels on accessibility specific to individual requirements. It includes questions on accessibility related to mobility, hearing, vision and environmental factors. Feedback from interviews with persons with disabilities indicated that 62% would find this tool helpful.

**3) The Hotel Accessibility Self-Assessment Guide** was created based on the Barrier Free Design Guide and the Alberta Building Code. This tool can help hotels/motels/lodgings to examine key elements of accessibility in their properties. Feedback from the individual interviews indicated 92% of hotel managers are interested in this type of self-assessment tool.

## Recommendations for Action

### Recommendation 1

*Because accessibility, in addition to being a right, is also a highly significant business opportunity,*

*and*

*because there is strong evidence in current practice that a partnership among industry associations, disability organizations and governments has resulted in identification and application of best practice approaches to accessibility,*

*and*

*because there is an interest and passion with partners in Alberta to improve accessibility within the hotel/lodging industry,*

*and*

*because the hotel/lodging industry recognizes the value of making their accommodations accessible to persons with disabilities,*

it is recommended that the Boards of Directors of Voice of Albertans with Disabilities and the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association, in collaboration with other partners implement the following actions:

#### Actions

- a. Develop a three year action plan to address hotel/motel accessibility.
- b. Share the results of the *Creating Accessible Hotels in Alberta*.
- c. Pilot the *Hotel Accessibility Self-Assessment Guide* with hotels and the *Guest Checklist for Accessible Hotel Accommodations* with persons with disabilities.
- d. Promote the *Guest Checklist for Accessible Hotel Accommodations*, the *Hotel Accessibility Self-Assessment Guide* and the *Optimum Hotel Room Templates* to their networks.
- e. Identify and document best practice accessibility examples in Alberta including Brand Standards with accessibility requirements.
- f. Develop hotel/lodging industry training on customer service for persons with disabilities.

## **Recommendation 2**

*Because information collected in the Creating Accessible Hotels in Alberta Project indicated that there are unique challenges related to assuring the safety of hotel guests with disabilities in the event of an emergency,*

it is recommended that the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association, with the support of Voice of Albertans with Disabilities Society, take immediate action to bring attention to the issues and provide support to resolve them.

### Actions

- a. Develop a best practice policy and template for emergency plans for distribution to hotels/lodging.
- b. Voice of Albertans with Disabilities coordinate the development of a kit of assistive devices for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing for use by hotels that can be sold/distributed through the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association.

## **Recommendation 3**

*Because there is considerable evidence that accessibility improves with education, industry guidelines, codes, standards, policy frameworks and legislation,*

*and*

*because the Government of Canada will be developing new legislation to remove barriers and prevent new barriers from being created for persons with disabilities,*

*and*

*because the current accessibility requirements under the Alberta Barrier-Free Design Guide and the Alberta Building Code provide a minimum baseline,*

it is recommended that the Government of Alberta be encouraged to undertake a process to determine how best to address accessibility for hotels/lodging as part of a broader review of accessibility.

### Action

- a. Voice of Albertans with Disabilities will prepare a plan to identify the process to bring this recommendation forward.

