



WCAT Accessibility Plan

2024 to 2027

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Territorial Acknowledgment.....	2
Why We are Developing an Accessibility Plan	3
WCAT's Accessibility Committee and the Development of the Plan	3
Where We Will Focus Our Plan	4
Offering Accommodations to Parties	4
Website and Communications.....	5
Policies, Practices and Procedure.....	6
Physical Environment	6
Education and Training.....	7
Feedback Mechanism.....	8
Implementing Our Plan	8
Three-Year Action Plan.....	9

Introduction

The Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal (WCAT) is an independent tribunal that hears appeals of decisions made by WorkSafeBC. Our appeals address issues such as:

- What compensation a worker gets when injured
- How much employers need to pay for WorkSafeBC insurance coverage
- Whether WorkSafeBC should issue penalties for health and safety matters
- Whether employers have unfairly penalized workers for raising a health and safety complaint

WCAT also has authority to consider constitutional questions and to apply the *British Columbia Human Rights Code* in its decisions. Some of our appeals are heard through in-person or virtual hearings, and others are decided after the parties provide written submissions.

The people who appear before us include workers, their family members, and employers. Most of the people who start appeals have some help from a professional or legal representative. However, many represent themselves or get help from friends or family.¹

We recognize that all individuals have the right to equal protection and equal benefit under the law, including people with disabilities. No one should be denied a service, or discriminated against when receiving a service, because of their disability. WCAT is committed to making sure that all parties who appear before us can access our services and participate fully in their appeals.

In this accessibility plan, we have identified the areas we want to focus on to make WCAT more accessible to the parties that we serve. The plan explains how the *Accessible British Columbia Act* applies to WCAT and how our committee developed this plan. At the end of this plan, we have provided a three-year action plan to explain how we will achieve our goals. We commit to updating this plan every three years, and to reporting back on how we achieved our goals in our annual report.

Territorial Acknowledgment

WCAT serves communities throughout British Columbia. Our office is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hənq̓əminəm speaking Musqueam people. We acknowledge our traditional hosts and honour their welcome and graciousness toward our work and the people we serve.

¹ For more information on how many parties have representation and the methods of appeal WCAT uses, please see our latest annual report, which is available at:
<https://www.wcat.bc.ca/home/about/>

Why We are Developing an Accessibility Plan

WCAT hears appeals from workers and employers around the province, many of which relate to providing services or benefits to workers with disabilities. The population we serve includes a significant number of people with disabilities.

In 2021, the government of British Columbia passed the *Accessible British Columbia Act* to promote accessibility across British Columbia. The *Accessible British Columbia Act* puts in place a framework for organizations like WCAT to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who are interacting with the organization.

Eventually, the province will also develop new accessibility standards that will address barriers in a range of issues such as employment, education, transportation, and buildings and infrastructure.

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* requires that accessible organizations establish accessibility committees to assist and advise the organization on identifying and removing barriers for people with disabilities who are interacting with the organization.

While WCAT is not yet required by law to have an accessibility committee or an accessibility plan, we recognize the importance of achieving the goals of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, particularly given the population we serve. For these reasons, WCAT has established an accessibility committee and developed an accessibility plan to improve access for people with disabilities at WCAT.

WCAT's Accessibility Committee and the Development of the Plan

WCAT established its accessibility committee in 2024. WCAT's committee is made up of individuals from within the organization. In keeping with the requirements of the *Accessible British Columbia Act* for accessible organizations, at least half of the members of the committee are persons with disabilities, individuals who support persons with disabilities, or are from organizations that support persons with disabilities. At least one member is an Indigenous person.

In 2024 and 2025, the committee met several times to decide where we want to focus our efforts on improving accessibility, and what steps we would take to achieve these goals. We researched what WCAT had done in the past, and also reviewed the accessibility plans of other agencies and tribunals. The committee also took disability awareness training and will continue to build our knowledge in this area.

The committee decided to focus the plan on improving accessibility for members of the public who have appeals or applications with WCAT. WCAT has processes internally to make sure we are accessible for the people who work here. We will also continue, through WCAT's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion initiative, to improve equity, diversity and inclusion internally at WCAT.

Where We Will Focus Our Plan

We want to promote equity, dignity and independence for all individuals. We commit to developing solutions and working to continuously improve our practices. Where possible, we will design our services so that they are accessible to all parties regardless of disability. We also recognize that there is considerable diversity in the disability community, and that our solutions may need to be flexible, in the context of appropriate stewardship of scarce resources. We recognize that improving accessibility at our organization is a process of learning and unlearning.

To achieve our goals, we will focus on the following six areas:

- Ensuring parties know they can ask for **accommodations** at the start of the appeal process or during the appeal. We will also develop a process around responding to requests for accommodation.
- Working to improve the accessibility of our **website and communications**.
- Ensuring that we consider accessibility implications on all major projects and initiatives by improving our **policies, practices and procedures**. This would include expanding our Navigator program to serve people with disabilities.
- Looking for ways to improve the accessibility of our **physical environment** when we hold hearings or meetings at our headquarters, or elsewhere in the province.
- Ensuring ongoing **education and training** for all WCAT staff and vice chairs.
- Developing a **feedback mechanism** so members of the public can provide feedback on accessibility at WCAT, and so that WCAT can work to improve any systemic issues.

Offering Accommodations to Parties

We want to change our practice around offering accommodations so that parties have the opportunity to tell us what accommodations they need at an early stage. We will ask more than once during the appeal process. We want to provide information to parties about what an accommodation is, and how to ask for one. We also want to update our internal processes so we have clearer processes around asking for accommodations.

As part of our research for developing this plan, we surveyed staff and vice chairs to find out what types of accommodations we were already providing. Some examples of the types of accommodations that WCAT has been asked for, and has offered, in the past include:

- Offering American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at the hearing
- Having a support person at the hearing
- Having a guide dog at the hearing
- Deciding not to publish a decision where a sensitive matter would identify an individual with a disability
- Changing the format of the hearing to accommodate a disability
- Changing the hearing location due to accessibility concerns
- Allowing additional time for submissions or rescheduling the hearing because of health-related matters

In some cases, these accommodations were made in response to a request from a party at WCAT. We have also sometimes arranged for an alternative accommodation to the one requested. For example, where a worker asked for specialised medical equipment to attend the hearing in person, WCAT arranged for the hearing to be done virtually instead.

Although WCAT regularly offers accommodations to parties, historically we have not asked parties what accommodations they might need. Therefore, accommodations may only be offered when the party knows to ask, or when WCAT recognizes that there is a barrier to full participation. We recognize that, by not asking, we may be missing an opportunity to remove barriers.

Going forward, WCAT will develop a more formal process around accommodations. More specifically, we will:

- Develop information on our website telling parties how to ask for accommodations
- Ask parties on the notice of appeal, and in our letters, if they require an accommodation to participate
- Develop processes around responding to the request for accommodation, and ensure that each accommodation request is acknowledged
- Address accommodations in WCAT's *Manual of Rules of Practice and Procedure*
- Document the types of requests for accommodation that we receive and the outcome of the requests with the goal of continuously improving accessibility

Website and Communications

We recognize that participating in legal processes can be intimidating. We can help by communicating with parties in a way that is clear and easy to understand.

WCAT has rewritten many of its regular communications, such as its letters, its forms and its website, so that that they are in plain language. We also revised our website so that it has a more intuitive flow, logical tab design and is viewable on a variety of devices, including mobile devices. WCAT will continue to write our communications in plain language and develop internal resources to help our staff and vice chairs write in plain language.

We will also continue to improve our website. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are widely accepted as the standard for digital and web accessibility, and ultimately, WCAT would like to ensure its web content conforms to [WCAG 2 Level AA](#). This standard ensures that information can be accessed by individuals using screen readers, individuals who may be accessing the web through adaptive devices, and those who need audio transcriptions. To this end, we plan to engage a consultant with an expertise in WCAG to review our website and make improvements over the next few years.

Policies, Practices and Procedure

WCAT wants to make sure we consider the effect of any changes to our work on people with disabilities. To achieve this, we will develop an accessibility impact assessment checklist to ensure that accessibility is always considered when we approve new projects and initiatives. For example, we want to make sure that we consider the needs of people with disabilities when we do things like renovate the building, respond to disruptions like a postal strike, develop our emergency plans, or revise our forms, letters and policies.

WCAT would like to expand our Navigator program so that it meets the needs of people with disabilities. WCAT has an established Navigator program for Indigenous people. We recognize that adapting this program to meet the needs of people with disabilities will require more training specific to people with disabilities.

Navigators will work with the person to better understand the accommodation they need and the barriers they face in the appeal process, and to help remove barriers so they have full and fair access. They will also be able to help parties understand the process. For example, if there is an oral hearing, Navigators can discuss any accommodation needed to make sure parties participate in the process. Navigators can also help find a suitable process for a meeting in person, by phone, or by videoconference.

In 2024, WCAT began using a navigated approach with some appeal parties with disabilities. At present, this approach is used when a WCAT staff member or deputy registrar decides that the individual could benefit from such an approach.

Over the next three years, we want to build our capacity in this area so that we provide training specific to working people with disabilities. We also want to tell people at the outset that they can request a Navigator as an accommodation. We will explain what it means to work with a Navigator and give them the opportunity to ask for one.

Physical Environment

Parties access WCAT in many different ways. They may communicate with us in writing, over the phone, or virtually. They may go to hearings at our offices, online, or at an out-of-town location. We want to ensure that the physical environment does not pose a barrier to participating in WCAT appeals.

WCAT has already made some improvements to its office in Richmond, British Columbia, which is where most of our in-person hearings take place. WCAT's offices were renovated between 2020 and 2023. These renovations followed the rules set out in the Richmond Building Bylaws and the British Columbia [Building Code](#), which set out minimum standards for accessibility. The accessibility features in the office include:

- Accessible parking spots in front of the building
- A ramp to enter the building
- Power-operated doors into the building and WCAT offices
- Public access to shared accessible washrooms with a wheelchair accessible sink, grab bars and power-operated door

- Accessible clearances through the doorways
- Renovation of internal spaces used by WCAT staff to include an accessible sink and fridge
- A low-scent environment, where staff and members of the public are asked not to wearing scented personal hygiene products to avoid exacerbating health issues, such as migraines or asthma
- Dimmable lights on both floors and in the hearing rooms, so that brightness can be adjusted to meet individual parties' needs

Additionally, WCAT has established processes so that individuals who cannot attend in person can participate in hearings by phone or videoconference.

We recognize there are further improvements that can be made. Members of the accessibility committee walked through WCAT's public spaces in 2024 and identified the need for further consideration of accessibility features, including, improved signage inside and outside of the building, improved washroom accessibility, and improved access to emergency exits. In 2025, we want to make sure that the signs pointing people to WCAT's offices, to washrooms, and to parking are easier to read. We also want to hire an external consultant to do an accessibility audit to provide advice on other improvements that could be made in the next few years. Additionally, we will work with our occupational health and safety committee to provide more direction on emergency responses for persons with disabilities.

We also hold hearings for our appeals at hotels in other parts of the province. WCAT did a survey of various hotels that we use for oral hearings. We will be reviewing the survey results and making them available to all staff who book hearings. Wherever possible, we will develop a process to make sure we are using hotels and meeting locations that incorporate principles of universal design (such as accessible entrances and washrooms) even where parties have not identified having a disability.

Education and Training

The accessibility committee identified education and training as a key component of our plan. The accessibility committee had training on disability, inclusion and awareness during the summer of 2024. That training was also provided to all staff in the fall of 2024. WCAT staff has also taken training in plain language writing, and training on working with individuals in crisis.

For 2025, we have already organized training for supervisors on neurodiversity in the workplace, and WCAT will also provide site specific training on emergency responses for persons with disabilities. WCAT will also explore opportunities to provide more training that can assist in communicating with individuals with disabilities, including training in plain language writing, and training on WCAG standards.

Going forward, it will be a priority to ensure that vice chairs also receive accessibility and inclusion training as part of their mandatory training sessions. We will also introduce an accessibility and inclusion aspect to the orientation of new staff members, and explore ongoing opportunities for accessibility and inclusion training for staff and vice chairs.

Feedback Mechanism

To better understand what barriers people face when accessing WCAT's services, WCAT has developed a feedback mechanism. This mechanism exists so that people can let us know how we can improve, even when they are not specifically requesting an accommodation. All feedback is reviewed by the accessibility committee.

People can submit feedback through our [online form](#) or:

- By email at: accessibility@wcat.bc.ca
- By mail to Accessibility at 150-4600 Jacombs Road, Richmond, BC V6V 3B1
- By fax to Accessibility at 604-664-7898
- By phone: Call us and leave a voicemail at: 236-235-1575

Feedback that contains personal information is collected by WCAT under section 26(c) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. It is used for the purpose of improving WCAT's accessibility. Parties can submit feedback without providing a name or contact information. If you share your name and contact information, we will only use them for the purpose of improving WCAT's accessibility.

Implementing Our Plan

Creating this plan is an important part of meeting the goals of becoming accessible. We also want to make sure we act on the priorities we have set out in this plan. Our accessibility committee will keep meeting regularly to develop a work plan for the actions we have identified in the plan. Through our feedback mechanism and internal reporting, we will follow up on and report back on our progress in our annual report. We will also review and update our plan every three years.

Three-Year Action Plan

	Completed	2025	2026	2027
Offering accommodations to parties	We undertook a qualitative review of accommodation requests WCAT has received in the past.	Develop information on our website telling parties how to ask for accommodations. Ask parties on the notice of appeal and in our letters if they require an accommodation to participate. Develop processes around responding to the request for accommodation and ensure that each accommodation request is acknowledged. Document the types of requests for accommodation that we receive and the outcome of the requests with the goal of continuously improving accessibility.	Add language to WCAT's <i>Manual of Rules of Practice and Procedure</i> on how to request and address requests for accommodation. Identify ways in which we can apply universal design principles, such as ensuring we use accessible hearing locations.	Conduct a review of accommodations provided since implementation and report back on future steps to remove barriers.
Website and External Communications	Revised our website so that it is in plain language and is easier to navigate.	Develop a webpage with information about requesting accommodations. Develop internal resources to help our staff and vice chairs communicate in plain language.	Engage an external consultant to review website for compatibility with WCAG 2 up to Level AA. Engage an external consultant to review website forms for compatibility with WCAG guidelines up to Level AA, and to review accessibility of forms. Ongoing review of our external documents to make sure they are written in plain language.	Implement changes to move WCAT's website to compliance with WCAG 2 Level AA. Ongoing review of our external documents to make sure they are written in plain language.
Policies, Practice and Procedure	WCAT is using a navigated approach with people with disabilities on some appeals. At present, this approach is used when someone internal to WCAT feels it could benefit the party.	Develop an accessibility impact assessment checklist to ensure that accessibility is always considered when we approve new projects and initiatives. Gradual expansion of the Navigator process so that people with disabilities can request a navigator. We will also adapt the program to ensure it is meeting the needs of people with disabilities. Provide specialized training to staff who will provide navigation services to persons with disabilities.	Implement and report back on process to consider accessibility any time there is a major new initiative or project. Offer Navigator program to all who identify as needing accommodations and who opt-in to the program.	

WCAT's Accessibility Plan

	Completed	2025	2026	2027
Physical Environment	The building has accessibility features including ramps, accessible parking spots, doors with sufficient width. We have undertaken an initial survey of hotels where hearings are met to ensure they meet our needs.	Improved signage. Engage external consultant to conduct an accessibility audit. Arrange to hold hearings at location that are built with universal design features (e.g., accessible washrooms) wherever feasible even when the person has not identified as having a disability. Include direction (specific to occupational health and safety) on emergency response for persons with disabilities in WCAT's training program.	After reviewing our accessibility audit, prioritize and complete any items that are identified as priorities by the committee and the executive. Consider any feedback about the physical environment that comes to WCAT through its formal feedback mechanism, outlined above.	
Education and Training	Training and education for the Accessibility Committee and all staff.	Development of accessibility and inclusion training as part of the orientation for all new employees and training and education for all work groups. Supervisors will receive training on neurodiversity in the workplace. Systems staff will receive training on WCAG 2 Level AA standards and system design. As noted above, there will also be training on emergency responses for persons with disability. Vice chairs will receive ongoing training on disability and inclusion awareness, as well as plain language writing. Identify internal and external resources for information on accessibility and make information available to staff.	Ongoing training for staff and vice chairs in disability and inclusion awareness.	
Feedback Mechanism	Feedback mechanism established. Information made available on WCAT's website.	Monitor and respond as required to feedback on accessibility.	Continue to monitor and respond as required to feedback on accessibility. Report on findings and address systemic accessibility issues.	