



# Accessibility Annual Report 2020

An accessible place for persons with disabilities to work,  
volunteer and experience compassionate care.



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## Executive summary

COVID-19 has presented all aspects of society, including our hospital, with incredible challenges. It has also presented incredible opportunities to innovate in order to adapt to our new reality. Accessibility for our staff and patients continues to be a priority during the pandemic and beyond and is an important part of how we deliver world-class care.

I am proud to share with you some of the key accomplishments that helped us manage the complexities of a health-related crisis. From setting up accessible COVID-19 Assessment Centres to drafting a new Visitor Policy that considered the support needs of our patients with varying abilities, we brought together leaders, ethicists and front-line staff to plan and deliver an effective and flexible response to a dynamic situation using an accessibility lens.

Our work is ongoing, and so too is our determination to keep raising the bar in accessibility. We remain focused on achieving accessibility for all and united in our vision to provide each patient with the world-class care, exceptional service and compassion we would want for our loved ones.

The goal of accessible health care will continue to be the result of meaningful collaborations, determination and perseverance amongst our staff and our partners in the community. I personally invite you to read our 2020 Accessibility Annual Report and encourage you to join us on this exciting journey!

**Renée Légaré, Ph.D., M.Sc., ICD.D**

Executive Vice-President and Chief Human Resources Officer

## New CEO: A champion for accessibility

In July 2020, The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) welcomed Cameron Love as the new President and CEO. Cameron Love is no stranger to both TOH and to the accessibility portfolio. While working at TOH for more than 20 years, he served for many years as Chair of the hospital's Accessibility Committee and worked closely with staff and community partners to advance accessibility goals at the hospital.



**Maxime Boileau (volunteer)** - In February 2015, I was diagnosed with MS. My first and only episode ever - I touch wood every day! - was very aggressive. I was admitted as an inpatient in Neuro, through the Emergency Department at the Civic Campus for one month. Then went through six weeks of inpatient rehabilitation, followed by a year of outpatient treatment at The Ottawa Hospital Rehabilitation Centre.

I started volunteering at The Ottawa Hospital in July 2015. At first, I was only able to volunteer once a week. As I was gaining strength, I also experienced physical and cognitive fatigue. I went from using a wheelchair, to a walker, to a

cane to becoming fully ambulatory today.

I am not able to run, and not too good at stairs, so volunteering in a safe and accessible environment helped me gain more confidence in becoming physically more independent.

Due to my fatigue, Volunteer Resources always went above and beyond to accommodate the hours I was able to volunteer. As the years went by, I helped in other roles, where I needed to use technology. I worked in an office with a computer that had two screens, thus helping with my eye sight. They provided me with an office that had enough lighting, but not too much, as I am sensitive to light. I need balance.

By continuing to gain strength and confidence, I was able to do more and more. The technological tools supported my accessibility needs. I was very happy when TOH migrated to Office 365 a few years ago. That change not only made our lives easier throughout the pandemic, but also allowed the volunteers to continue to serve TOH's patients in a virtual world.

Collectively, we made major gains in productivity before and during this unfortunate crisis, which offered us the possibility of creating tools independently that we couldn't even imagine before. For example, the creation of the virtual information desk presented an ideal alternative for in-person greeting of patients and visitors. And, with different settings like Dark Mode, I had a perfectly complete and accessible technological package.

## Our response to COVID-19 Visitor Policy

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, to protect the safety of patients and staff, TOH and hospitals across Ontario put visitor restrictions in place, in accordance with guidance from the provincial government. In most cases, caregivers were asked not to accompany patients to hospital appointments or visit admitted patients.

TOH understands the benefit to patients, especially vulnerable patients, of having a familiar person present while in hospital to help perform essential functions. Therefore, TOH revised its Visitor Policy to create a new designation: Essential Care Partners (ECPs). An ECP is a support person, chosen by the patient whose presence is considered essential to the safety and well-being of a patient while they are in the hospital.

The ECP designation provides a consistent and equitable way for patients to have access to this support as safely as possible despite visitor restrictions, which is especially important for patients with unique or increased needs.

For the safety of everyone at The Ottawa Hospital, ECPs are scheduled and given infection prevention and control training. Virtual visits are arranged where possible in order to minimize the number of people in the hospital at any one time, while also considering the needs of our patients.

## Accessibility audit at the COVID-19 Assessment Centre

Opened on March 13, the COVID-19 Assessment Centre at the Brewer Arena was the first of its kind in the city and represented monumental teamwork between TOH, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, government partners and many others.

Barrier-free access to the centre was top of mind. TOH's Accessibility Services was asked to provide an assessment of the centre before it opened. The entrance, intake, assessment and waiting areas were carefully assessed and measures were put in place to ensure that accessibility requirements were met. A second assessment was conducted in September to ensure consistency, as well as day to day monitoring by the operations team to ensure that all patients with unique accessibility needs were well accommodated.





## Interpretation services during COVID-19

While there was an early interruption of face-to-face interpretation service due to the pandemic, our interpretation service partners continued to deliver this essential service using options such as over-the-phone, three-way calls and or video interpretation. As these options were already in place and available before the pandemic, the transition was seamless. At no time was immediate access to professional interpretation services for our patients and their health-care teams interrupted.

## Communicator masks

In the spring of 2020, an Infection and Prevention Control protocol required all staff at TOH to wear medical masks while at the hospital, in addition to other personal protective equipment (PPE) as required. Typical facemasks can create a barrier for persons who are deaf, have hearing loss or communication disabilities because they block the ability to see the wearer's entire face. TOH began searching for facemasks with clear windows to enhance lip reading and overall communication between patients and their care teams. This was a challenge because such products were very limited in their availability. In September, TOH received its first order of Health Canada approved "communicator" facemasks, enabling better communication for these patients.

## Offload Medicine Transition Unit (OMTU)

Early in the fall, the provincial government announced special funding to cover the cost of a new Offload Medicine Transition Unit (OMTU) at the Civic Campus of The Ottawa Hospital. Promptly, the OMTU officially opened on January 4, 2021. This temporary unit of 40 new beds will allow the hospital to create additional capacity and help ensure that patients receive the care they need. It will also decrease wait times for patients in the Emergency Departments, as well as reduce ambulance offload times, and allow our paramedic partners to return to the community quickly.

In order to make sure that the OMTU would be as accessible as possible, the hospital struck the Parking Transportation Accessibility Committee (PTAC). This committee continues to meet to discuss any potential issues or public concerns related to access to the OMTU and design of the new structure. The OMTU features several accessibility features. For example, two of the seven washrooms are wheelchair accessible.



## TOH Accessibility Guide

After many months conducting a review of the existing TOH Accessibility Guide, TOH Accessibility Services launched the 2020 edition with a new look, updated information and great tips. Available in both English and French, this guide is a useful tool for people who are new to understanding or working with patients, volunteers and staff with disabilities.

## Accessibility consultant for the new Civic development

Marnie Peters, President of Accessibility Simplified, has been enlisted to play a key role in ensuring that the new Civic development will be a state-of-the-art and universally accessible building. She brings extensive experience in providing comprehensive consultation services for large infrastructure projects and is well suited to manage the complexities of this project as the accessibility expert on the project development team. Her forward-thinking approach expands the idea of accessibility beyond what is required under the present-day building codes in favour of universal design.

## Accessibility training

This year, 2,296 new TOH employees completed the on-line “Accessibility in a Health Care Environment” required training before their first day at work. Sixty-seven new volunteers participated in face-to-face accessibility training sessions that prepared them to provide direct support to patients with disabilities.

Once the in-person restrictions were in place, we migrated targeted face-to-face training to a virtual format. New leaders, as well as new clerks, received their training on accessibility using a virtual format that met their training needs.

Accessibility training was provided to several external agencies; over 125 University of Ottawa medical students, approximately 80 volunteer info-guides at the Ottawa International Airport, and approximately 20 staff members of the National Capital Commission received this face-to-face training. Due to COVID-19, other external training planned for the remainder of the year has been cancelled.

## Clear language and creating accessible documents

TOH's Communications Department continues to provide one-on-one and small-group education and guidance upon request. In addition, a new guide entitled “How to create accessible Word documents” has been developed and posted on myHospital, our intranet. A second guide for creating accessible Excel documents is in progress. Clear language editing services continue to be available to all staff for all types of documents.



**Chris Pichler (staff)** - I have temporal lobe epilepsy which has been medically cleared as incurable. I have undergone three brain surgeries over my lifetime, removing or disconnecting parts of my left temporal lobe. With this rare form of epilepsy, I do not go into convulsions; I go into a “sleepwalking” like episode.

A “sleepwalking” episode lasts, on average, 5 to 10 minutes, before I am fully recovered. However, during one of my seizures, I don't know my name, my wife's name, what a cell phone is, etc. I have no memory of anything that occurred and have no control over any of my actions. Furthermore, it is impossible to wake me from this “sleepwalking” like episode.

Since day one at TOH, my co-workers have been beyond empathetic and compassionate with living and working with my disability.

After suffering a traumatic seizure at work, in the early days, a safety plan was put together for me to announce any warning signs of a seizure. If I ever claimed any warning sign, they would drop whatever they were doing to ensure my safety and make sure that I was not in harm's way. They would stay with me until I knew my name and what theirs was! It has been a pleasure working here, going on two years. I love working with the data and reports I create, and I feel ever more stress free with my disability beyond understood!



## Community partnerships and healthy conversations

Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion takes many forms at TOH. We continue to be an active member of the Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN). This is a United Way initiative where EARN members support best practices for hiring people with disabilities. For more than two years TOH has participated in monthly job match calls, where service providers in Ottawa and TOH match job seekers with employment opportunities at the hospital based on their interests and skill sets. Since becoming a member in late July 2018, we have already made successful matches and found skilled individuals to join our team.

The events that affect our community have a direct effect on the hospital. In support of our employees, patients and the community at large, TOH launched the Healthy Conversation Series, a digital platform where TOH staff, volunteers, community partners, patients and the community could come together to discuss challenging topics. Sparked by recent events in the news, we began the initiative with a series of discussions about racism in health care featuring several black TOH staff who discussed their experiences.

A similar conversation was held on December 3, 2020 in honour of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. It featured four panelists from TOH who shared their insights about what it's like to work in, volunteer for, or otherwise engage with the health-care system. Another healthy conversation was held on December 10, 2020 discussing how to ensure safe and inclusive spaces in health care. These conversations have sparked health discussion on how we can thoughtfully support the community we serve.

## Diversity and Inclusion Council

In December, TOH launched the Diversity and Inclusion Council. The council will help shape and oversee the implementation of TOH's equity, diversity and inclusion strategy and monitor its progress. The committee members will reflect the organization, champion diversity and be role models of inclusive behaviour.

This is only a small sample of the numerous equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives TOH has been engaged in over the last several years, such as our partnerships with Hire Immigrants Ottawa and the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion. We look forward to building upon our successes and our partnerships so that we may further support our people in creating a workplace culture of inclusion and belonging.

## New lobby at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute

On March 6, 2020, the University of Ottawa Heart Institute hosted a ceremony marking the grand opening of the front lobby. The beautiful new lobby is accessible, with central registration and a new and improved gift shop. Signage is clearly posted to help visitors navigate to the S-Level, the link to TOH, and to the Cardiac Devices Clinic. The new, state-of-the-art space is the result of efforts from teams in Planning and Administration, Cardiac Imaging, Prevention and Wellness, Biomed, Information Technology and physicians.



**Chris Bourne (TOH community partner) -**

Back in 1990 I sustained a spinal cord injury when I was hit by a train. I was confronted with the fact that I would be using a wheelchair for the rest of my life and faced a spectrum of unexpected challenges that would require me to dig deep to overcome them. I



spent five months in acute care at the Lyndhurst Hospital in Toronto. It was then that I realized how fortunate we are to have world-class rehabilitation facilities and community support organizations in Ontario to help people like me get back on track and realize our potential.

After I completed rehab in Toronto, I came back to Ottawa to finish university. I started volunteering at The Ottawa Hospital with the P.A.R.T.Y. (Preventing Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth) Program that educates teenagers to recognize risks and make informed choices about risk-related behaviours.

When I finished university, I started working at The Ottawa Hospital Rehabilitation Centre as Coordinator of the Disability Awareness and Prevention Program which required me to manage the P.A.R.T.Y. program and deliver disability awareness training to TOH staff and other external agencies. This allowed me to see the Rehabilitation Centre from a different perspective and get a new appreciation of the essential role that it plays in our community.

I continue to present to the University of Ottawa medical students on best practices in providing health care to people who have a disability. I now work as Regional Services Coordinator with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, an organization that works to create a fully inclusive Ontario and helps people with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities live the life they choose. In my position, I am honoured to work alongside the team at The Ottawa Hospital Rehabilitation Centre and help newly-injured patients address a wide range of issues that they deal with as a result of their new reality.

I have seen the focus that The Ottawa Hospital puts on accessibility and the high quality of services that it delivers. I feel very fortunate to be affiliated as a community partner. Thank you for the opportunity to leverage my insight and experience and help make a difference in the lives of patients at The Ottawa Hospital.

## Health Standard Development Committee

While the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* provides many regulations intended for all employers in Ontario, Mayo Moran, author of the second review of the Act, noted that the health-care sector needed additional regulations. In 2017, the provincial government recruited 20 members from across the province to form the Health – Standard Development Committee (H-SDC). The Ottawa Hospital was present at that table, represented by our Accessibility Services and AODA Compliance Coordinator.

While the recommendations from the H-SDC were meant for hospitals across the province, the members quickly voiced that they should also be extended to include nursing homes, outpatient rehabilitation centers, community health centers, freestanding diagnostic imaging and laboratory facilities, and medical clinics.

After three years of many meetings and small group discussions, the provincial H-SDC submitted its recommendations to the office of the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility as well as Health and Long-Term Care. More than 20 recommendations will now be made available for public review and input in 2021.

## Ontario Health Care Network of Accessibility Professionals (OHCNAP)

During the past two years, the network that was founded here at TOH, has grown to more than 90 members representing both hospitals and long-term care homes from across the province. It provides an excellent opportunity for both hospitals and long-term care homes to exchange best practices, discuss concerns and share news from around the province.



## Accessibility is a journey

With this challenging year now behind us, we've all reached that moment in time when we can reflect on what has been learned and what barriers have been eliminated. We can also start considering what challenges may lay ahead in 2021.

In doing so, we can hopefully come to the same conclusion: accessibility is not a project. Accessibility is a journey of its own. It requires careful planning, the right team and resources in place, and the flexibility to be creative in our resolve to building an accessible health-care system for patients and staff with disabilities.

TOH is greatly privileged to be part of that journey. We would like to thank every individual who came forward with accessibility-related concerns, creative ideas to address them and the desire to work with us in reaching our common goal. With this continued focus and local partnerships, we anticipate another exciting year in 2021.

As always, we welcome your comments, questions and suggestions moving forward. Also, don't forget to share with us your story on how The Ottawa Hospital addressed your accessibility concerns! Send us a note to [accessibility@toh.ca](mailto:accessibility@toh.ca).

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