



## ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2017-2019

Legal Aid Manitoba (LAM) is an Agency of the Government of Manitoba and employs civil servants who are employees of the Government of Manitoba. The Accessibility Plan for LAM relies upon the existing Government of Manitoba policy: *Manitoba Policy on Access to Government Publications, Events, and Services* which provides the Accessibility policy for Legal Aid Manitoba.\*

### **Part 1: Baseline Report**

#### A. Overview of Programs and Services

LAM provides constitutionally mandated and discretionary services on behalf of the Government of Manitoba to eligible persons in need of legal services to secure their basic legal needs. Areas of coverage vary in accordance with available funding, but may include Criminal, Family, Immigration and Refugee, Public Interest litigation, and specified areas of Administrative law (such as Residential Tenancy and EIA hearings and appeals).

LAM operates in all regions of the province, coordinates legal services with other legal services providers, NGO's and stakeholder groups to ensure the quality, cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the legal services provided to applicants. LAM services include:

1. Informal telephone inquiries and referrals;
2. Brydges 24 hour On-Call advice services for persons arrested or otherwise detained in custody provided free of charge and without financial eligibility restrictions;
3. Duty Counsel Services including same day in court assistance with bails, remands, guilty pleas, etc. provided free of charge and without financial eligibility restrictions;
4. Application intake and assessment for criminal, family , I&r, EIA

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## B. Accessibility Achievements

As an organization with a longstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion, LAM has attempted to incorporate barrier-free accessibility in its business activities and service provision. LAM has:

- Fostered a culture of client service that focuses on respectful and patient interaction, and accommodation of differently abled people, extended to all those attending, working at, or receiving services from, LAM, and accommodation of differently abled people;
- Incorporated barrier-free standards wherever possible in the design and construction of new Administrative offices and Community Law Centres in accordance with applicable building codes and government standards;
- Ensured barrier-free access to Legal Aid offices in every local service area in the province;
- Responded in a timely manner to remove barriers identified, and/or accommodate specific needs of staff and clients;
- Pioneered the inclusion of Online and telephone application services available throughout the province;
- Web based video conferencing services for remote communities and reduced mobility clients;
- The availability of “on demand” 3<sup>rd</sup> line telephone interpretation services in 155 languages that are not dependent on location; and
- The pro-active publication of policy manuals, program, and public information related materials on a new website with scaling and tools to assist the visually impaired.

People employed at LAM are employees of the Government of Manitoba, civil servants, and, in large measure, members of collective bargaining units within the civil service. The Government of Manitoba Accessibility Plan is applied with respect to human relation functions within the control of LAM wherever possible.

## C. Accessibility Barriers

Consultations conducted in the development of this plan identified barriers to accessibility that continue to exist at LAM.

The most significant barriers identified, which this plan aims to address, are:

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#### Attitudinal barriers:

- Some staff are not aware of the laws and policies in place respecting accessibility and accommodation, and/or do not appreciate the significance of not making services accessible;
- Some staff believe accessibility issues are a legitimate reason to refuse to accept/refer a case; and/or,
- Some staff conflate accessibility based difficulties with attitudinal difficulties, or are impatient and categorize clients frustrated by accessibility issues as unreasonable

#### Systemic barriers:

- Services provided by private bar lawyers are not subject to, and vary considerably in their adoption of barrier-free standards and accommodation of accessibility issues;
- Inconsistent knowledge of support resources (e.g. service providers, assessment tools and expertise, equipment, and facilities);
- Paucity of resources to accommodate accessibility needs, particularly in northern and rural locations; and/or
- Inconsistent policies, processes, programs, and “in time” funding for tools to address accessibility issues

#### Information and communication barriers:

- Inconsistent employee awareness of communications and practices appropriate for interactions with members of the disability community (e.g., appropriate terminology, tools, effective approaches to accommodation)

#### Technological barriers:

- Website is not universally compatible with screen reading technology

#### Physical and architectural barriers:

- Some offices are not independently accessible for persons with a limited range of motion or muscular strength (particularly in remote and rural locations), in particular:
  - limited size or quantity of public or staff parking spaces;

- ▷ doors and stairs that present barriers to individuals with limited range of motion or muscular strength;
- ▷ barrier-free washrooms (electric wheelchair friendly);
- ▷ braille signage, documentation, forms;
- ▷ visual fire alarm and/or personal safety warning indicators

## **Part 2: Accessibility Plan**

### A. Statement of Commitment

Legal Aid Manitoba (LAM) as a government agency and public service provider of the Manitoba government is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for persons with disabilities. LAM is committed to the principle of inclusion and to meeting the needs of people who face barriers. LAM staff will treat persons with disabilities in ways that allow them to maintain their dignity and independence.

### B. Policies

Manitoba Government Policy:

- Access to Government Publications, Events and Services
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy
- Removing Employment Barriers Policy
- Barrier-Free Recruitment Policy

Legal Aid Manitoba General policy manuals, and Case Conduct Manual

### C. Actions

Within the first year LAM will investigate and assess, provide a feasibility report on, and where feasible, an implementation plan for, each of the following:

#### 1. General Measures

- Review and update all LAM policy Manuals, specifically to address accessibility concerns on a regular basis but no more than every 5 years.
- Create and circulate a general policy and procedure for reporting accessibility issues and monitoring resolution of issues raised;

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- Review and update procedure manuals to ensure procurement process includes review of purchases through an accessibility lens;
- Undertake a consultation with private industry service providers to encourage and publicize barrier free and accessibility friendly office spaces and services

## 2. Customer Service

- Provide mandatory on-board training and a minimum of two yearly training opportunities to all existing staff respecting accessibility policy, standards and resources available to address accessibility issues and reduce stigma;

## 3. Employment

- Provide additional information internally for employees to increase awareness of the role of Human Resources and resources available to address accessibility issues in the workplace.
- Ensure that emergency plans and business continuity plans are provided in a format that accommodates employees with disabilities.

## 4. Information and Communications

- Ensure the LAM and Government of Manitoba Accessibility are published in accessible formats on both the internal and external website, and available in paper form on request at all LAM offices;
- Ensure the LAM Policy on reporting, and means to report, accessibility issues is published in accessible format on both the internal and external website, and available in paper form on request at all LAM offices;
- Review and consider providing basic LAM signage in braille form at all Legal Aid Manitoba Offices and create an implementation plan for having forms/documents universally compatible with standard document and digital readers.
- Explore the feasibility of, and where feasible develop an implementation plan to provide at least one document reader in a private space in all LAM offices.

## 5. Built Environment

- Ensure that barrier-free standards continue to be incorporated in all design plans for LAM offices.

- Ensure that visual fire and safety alarm systems are incorporated in all new LAM offices;
- Review and establish transition plans to ensure all rural and remote offices accommodate barrier-free and LAM accessibility standards.