



**City of Medicine Hat**  
**Community Inclusion Strategy**

**January, 2005**

**CITY OF MEDICINE HAT**  
**COMMUNITY INCLUSION STRATEGY**  
**APPROVED BY COUNCIL JANUARY 10, 2005**

**PREAMBLE:**

All Canadians, including persons with disabilities, have rights and responsibilities under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Research shows however, that too many people with disabilities still face barriers to full participation in society despite the important contribution of policies and programs.

Governments, communities, families, volunteer organizations, learning institutions, the private sector and labour are all important partners in addressing disability issues.

A society in which the opportunities are the same for everyone is enriched by the diversity of its active and contributing members. Therefore, a well designed community which is safe, convenient, comfortable and readily accessible benefits everyone.

**HISTORY/BACKGROUND:**

***Nationally:***

In Canada, people with disabilities were most often institutionalized or excluded from the activities of daily life up to the 1950's.

In the 1950's and 1960's, the federal government introduced provisions for pensions for people with disabilities and later the Canada Assistance Plan, which provided many of the disability-related services and supports that are required in daily life.

Physical accessibility issues were also addressed in the early 1990's through the Federal Government Five Star Program. The City of Medicine Hat participated in this program and received stars in transportation and recreation. This recognition program was eliminated by the Federal Government in 1995.

***Provincially:***

The Province of Alberta has provided financial assistance to persons with disabilities through the AISH Program (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) since 1978. The program was reviewed as part of the MLA Low Income Review in 2002, which recommended enhanced and more flexible financial support for AISH recipients. Medicine Hat City Council has shown its support for the recommendations by forwarding a letter to the Minister of Community Development and by forwarding a resolution to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, endorsing recommendations developed by the Alberta Disabilities Forum.

In 1989, the provincial government established the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Their mandate is to:

- Advise, report to and make recommendations to the Government on matters relating to the opportunity for full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the Province.
- Encourage public discussion through public consultation on all matters relating to the status of persons with disabilities.
- Prepare communication packages containing information respecting disabilities and persons with disabilities.
- Identify and review current and emerging issues and policies at all levels of government affecting and concerning the status of persons with disabilities.
- Review the provision of funding, services and programs for persons with disabilities.
- Make referrals and recommendations to and consult and collaborate with all levels of government, government agencies, volunteer associations, businesses, universities and other persons on matters affecting and concerning the status of persons with disabilities.

In addition, the provincial government provides standards relating to accessibility for new buildings through the Alberta Safety Codes. Barrier free Design Guide was developed in 1999 by Alberta Safety Codes to assist developers in interpretation of the Alberta Safety Codes regarding accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities.

### ***Locally:***

The City of Medicine Hat has shown historical commitment to identifying issues and trends regarding the disabled in our community.

In 1992, City Council established the Advisory Committee on Issues Affecting the Handicapped (ACIAH). The mandate of ACIAH as outlined in the Terms of Reference is to advise City Council and all City Departments on issues specifically related to people with disabilities. A secondary purpose is to advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities to other authorities that formulate policy and/or offer programs that affect people with disabilities.

Since its inception, the ACIAH has played a significant role in advising City Council regarding the inclusion of those challenged in our community. Noteworthy accomplishments of the Committee include:

- Worked with Transit Services on the issues of seat belts on special needs bus, the need for Sunday service and accessible taxis (ongoing representation on Transit Advisory Committee)
- Conducted a housing survey to identify the needs of persons with disabilities in our community. (1992)
- Identified lack of parking spaces and signage around Medicine Hat. Identified need for policy and enforcement. (1992)
- Participated in the federal government Five Star Program (1992 – 1995)
- Forwarded recommendations for amendments to the by-law to ensure needs of the handicapped are met. (1993)
- Correspondence with shopping center officials around the city to create awareness of issues with parking and doorways (1993)
- Worked with City Clerk to ensure accessibility in polling stations during the Public school district #76 by-election. (1993)

- Made recommendations to provide appropriate seating for disabled persons at the Arena. (1996)
- Worked with City Hall staff to ensure accessibility, including the elevators (1996)
- Worked with airport staff to install a special lift at the airport (1997)
- Worked with Kinsmen and local contractors to construct an accessible Lotto Home (1997)
- Provided input in the planning stages for the Leisure Centre on accessibility issues. (1997)
- Recognition of lack of affordable accessible housing in Medicine Hat. (1998)
- Identified need for accessible Recycling Bins and worked with Environmental Services to ensure accessible bins.(1998 – 2002)
- Provided input in the planning stages for the Esplanade (2002)
- Provided input in the planning stages for the South Ridge Recreation Facility (2003)

### **CURRENT TRENDS/ISSUES:**

In the late 1990's and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a transition from a tolerance of accessibility issues to a greater understanding toward full citizenship and community inclusion.

In 2002, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities developed an Alberta Disability Strategy, which states the following vision:

- ✧ That all persons with disabilities are valued as full citizens in all aspects of Alberta society – fully participating in the social, economic and political life of Alberta communities
- ✧ That Albertans with disabilities receive the support they require to achieve a standard of living and quality of life that ensures health, safety, comfort and dignity.
- ✧ That Albertans with disabilities have the rights, freedoms and responsibilities to make choices and determine their own destinies.
- ✧ That education and employment rates are similar to those of the general population – every Albertan with a disability is encouraged to reach for his or her full potential.
- ✧ That Albertans with disabilities are respected as partners and valuable assets in the process of crafting and owning the new Alberta prosperity.

The Speech from the Throne (February 17, 2004), calls for the creation of an Office for Disability Issues, which will work with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and government ministries to encourage greater cross-government coordination and more effective delivery of programs for disabled Alberta, promote positive attitudes toward the disabled and raise awareness of disability issues.

Bill 201, which is an amendment to the Safety Codes to more consistently apply the principles of barrier-free design and access to buildings and facilities covered under the Safety Codes Act, was recently submitted to Caucus for first reading.

The term "barrier-free design" is now frequently being replaced by the phrase "universal design" which takes a holistic approach to the design of buildings by focusing on a hypothetical client with many needs right up-front, rather than on specific barrier-free requirements in a retroactive effort during the design process.

The Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act was introduced in the spring 2003 session of the Alberta legislature and is expected to be proclaimed in the summer of 2004. The legislation is the first of its kind in Canada by providing separate and distinct legislation to cover services for children with disabilities.

#### **SCOPE:**

The issue of physical accessibility continues to be an issue, despite the inclusion of standards in the Alberta Safety Codes, and incentive programs such as the federal government's Five Star Program in the early 1990's.

The Advisory Committee on Issues Affecting the Handicapped, through their persistence and work, has accomplished a great deal since its inception in 1992, but there are many issues left unresolved. To accomplish the ideal inclusive community, it is imperative that issues related to the disabled be integrated in all internal and external discussions and decisions. To ensure this occurs, is beyond the scope and responsibility of a volunteer committee.

For many people, every-day life activities are extremely challenging. From the mother maneuvering a baby stroller through the double doors at City Hall, to the visually impaired student crossing First Street, the senior citizen with arthritis attempting the stairs at the Arena, or the citizen in a wheelchair needing public transportation, many of our citizens face barriers each day. To ensure decisions made within the City of Medicine Hat Corporation include consideration of these most important issues, the dedication of an individual staff is imperative.

The complexity of the issues, coupled with the systemic barriers that exist even within the City of Medicine Hat as a corporation necessitates an assertive comprehensive, multi-pronged approach.

#### **DIRECTION/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. That City Council authorize a review of all disability related policies and a compilation of best practices to remove systemic barriers in employment, goods, services and facilities from internal and other similar sized cities, and that these best practices be endorsed by Council
2. That City Council direct that each Department evaluate its policies, programs and services to identify barriers and develop an Action Plan to remove the identified barriers.
3. That a communication strategy be developed for both internal and external use that supports the principles of inclusion.
4. That City Council adopts a set of accessibility guidelines for all City owned buildings and those that are on City owned land.
5. That City Council adopts a proactive response to accessibility issues with architects and developers.
6. That an employment equity policy be adopted for the corporation and that Council allocate sufficient resources to provide work place accommodations where required.

7. That sensitivity and awareness training and materials on all access, equity and human rights issues be provided to all persons involved with the municipal structure, including elected officials, emergency services personnel, all staff, contractors and persons appointed to city committees.
8. That City Council approve a dedicated staff resource to accomplish the above recommendations, and to
  - facilitate community advisory processes through the Advisory Committee on Issues Affecting the Handicapped,
  - develop and implement awareness and public education programs on access, equity and community inclusion,
  - act as a resource for departments and agencies in the development and implementation of their action plans,
  - liaise with community organizations regarding emerging issues,
  - conduct research on the needs of persons with disabilities and to provide results to departments, committees and Council for use in service delivery and/or policy development.
  - monitor legislative proposals for impact on people with disabilities,
  - implement communication strategies to increase involvement and access to services,
  - promote the City's position to other levels of government and external bodies.