

SISÏTERING

**Accessibility
Plan**

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Message from Former Executive Director

Sistering is committed to ensuring that all women have equitable opportunities to thrive and participate in inclusive communities.

This commitment is reflected in our Mission, Vision and Values, and in our updated Accessibility Policy (2017).

Our Statement of Organizational Commitment underscores our promise to people with disabilities.

“Sistering is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for people with disabilities. We are committed to treating people with disabilities in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in equity, and we are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner. We will do so by meeting accessibility requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and Ontario's accessibility laws.”

At Sistering, disability is not limited to physical disability. Sistering was founded on principles of anti-oppression and social inclusion, with a trauma informed and harm reduction practice model that creates a community of acceptance and belonging. Our approach puts us in a leadership role as we work to break down barriers for all women with disabilities - including psychiatric disability - that affect their day-to-day lives.

Seventy percent of our participants are mental health consumer/survivors or substance users. Many have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, and half have or are experiencing trauma.

Our low barrier service provision provides greater access by ensuring little formal intake and short service restrictions, working with behaviours that may be outside of social norms and being accessible to those with psychiatric disability that might include substance use.

Fostering an atmosphere of social inclusion also breaks down barriers for women with disabilities. The Sistering community provides a sense of belonging, something participants may not experience fully with society at large. Coming from an empowerment perspective, we see community involvement as a key component to ensuring accessibility at Sistering.

Much of the real social inclusion at Sistering happens amongst the women in our community. Said one participant, "Sisters empowering other Sisters!" (<http://theonnc.ca/sistering-social-inclusion/>).

Patricia O'Connell

Former Executive Director

Introduction

Sistering is a 24/7 Drop In, currently a respite during the pandemic, with wraparound services for at-risk, socially isolated women¹ in Toronto who are homeless or precariously housed. For 40 years, we have been serving this diverse community, which includes participants with disabilities. We embrace this diversity – it is an integral part of our fabric.

Sistering strives to meet the needs of its employees and participants with disabilities and is working hard to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. Our organization is committed to fulfilling our requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This accessibility plan outlines the steps Sistering is taking to meet those requirements and to improve opportunities for people with disabilities. Our plan shows how Sistering will play its role in making Ontario an accessible province for all Ontarians.

This Accessibility Plan describes the commitment of Sistering to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities who participate, work and learn in the Sistering community. This includes participants, staff, students, volunteers, and contractors of and visitors to Sistering.

Sistering's Accessibility Plan is divided into two main sections.

Section One highlights past achievements from 2012-2017 to remove and prevent barriers. During this time, we:

- Trained employees, volunteers and students about the Act and our responsibilities
- Ensured our recruiting and hiring processes are accessible and equitable for people with disabilities
- Updated our Accessibility Policy
- Formalized our Individual Accommodation Process for employees with disabilities
- Renovated our space and made it more accessible
- Re-launched our website, which is AODA compliant
- Participated in events such as Mad Pride Toronto, which celebrates the rights, identities, and culture of consumer/survivors

Section Two looks to strategies and actions for 2018-2021. Strategies and actions we focused on include:

- Consulting with participants with disabilities on our Accessibility Plan

¹ We use an inclusive definition of “woman”, and we welcome trans women, genderqueer women, non-binary, and gender expansive people. We recognize that gender is an evolving concept, and we will work to be inclusive.

- Better communicating our feedback mechanisms to participants with disabilities
- Ensuring all staff know how to plan for participants with disabilities in the rare event of a closure of our 24/7 Drop In
- Develop plain language emergency procedures and make them available in accessible formats
- Improvements to our physical space for accessibility for people with disabilities
- To the best of our ability, ensuring Sistering events held outside of Sistering are in accessible venues

Section One: Past Achievements to Remove and Prevent Barriers 2012-2017

Customer Service

- Sistering has remained in compliance with the Customer Service Standard. We give people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our services and products, allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other people as much as possible. **2012 and ongoing**
- Feedback Process. Participants who wish to provide feedback on the way Sistering provides service to people with disabilities can speak to staff or management, email or call staff or management, use the suggestion box, or attend monthly Town Hall meetings. All feedback is directed to the appropriate program and/or staff. Feedback, such as the need to move baggage in order for a person in a wheelchair to access the phone, is dealt with promptly and directly. **2012 and ongoing**
- Service Animals. We welcome participants with disabilities and their service animals. **2012 and ongoing**
- Support Persons. A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have that person accompany them on our premises. Sistering does not charge a fee for anyone to use our services. **2012 and ongoing**
- With a full roster of maintenance providers, Sistering's management commits to completing preventative and emergency maintenance as quickly as possible, on a 24/7 basis, to ensure minimal disruption to service or facilities for participants with disabilities, including washrooms, showers, the elevator, and power-operated doors. **2012 and ongoing**
- Sistering notifies participants with disabilities promptly in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities such as washrooms, showers, and the elevator. A clearly posted notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services if available. The notice will be placed at reception areas, on washroom and shower doors and at the elevator. **2012 and ongoing**

Information and Communications

- All materials are available electronically. **2012 and ongoing**
- We communicate with people with disabilities in ways that respectfully take into account their disability. When asked, we provide information about our organization and its services, including public safety information, in accessible formats or with communication supports. **2012 and ongoing**

- New website launched and is AODA compliant. **2017**
- Improvements to the intercom system helped remove Information and communication barriers and allow us to communicate important messages clearly and loudly to people who have reduced hearing and/or cannot hear clearly. **2017**

Employment

Sistering is committed to fair and accessible employment practices that attract and retain people with disabilities. Sistering has developed human resources procedures in accordance with Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulations (IASR) 2017:

- Notify employees, potential hires, and the public that accommodations can be made during recruitment and hiring.
- Notify new hires and employees that policies and procedures are available for those with disabilities. We follow the Sistering Accommodation Process to develop individual accommodation plans for employees.
- Collect workplace emergency response information; where needed, provide customized emergency information to help an employee with a disability during an emergency.
- Review and modify, if needed, performance management and career development processes to take into account the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities.
- Documented Individual Accommodation Plans. Our process for developing Documented Individual Accommodation Plans includes how the organization will:
 - Include the employee in developing the plan
 - Consider the employee on an individual basis
 - Proceed in getting an expert's opinion on the best way to accommodate the employee
 - Ensure the employee's personal information will be protected
 - Review and update the plan
 - Provide the plan in a format that respects the individual's needs due to a disability **2017 and ongoing**

Training

- Staff attended IASR (Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation) Train-the-Trainer workshops and disseminated information. **2015**
- All employees, volunteers and students completed online training **2017:**
 - Customer Service Standard by Access Forward Ontario
 - Working Together: The Code and the AODA by Ontario Human Rights Commission
- All management completed the online training **2017:**
 - Customer Service Standard by Access Forward Ontario

- The Duty to Accommodate by Ontario Human Rights Commission
- New Hires. Sistering will provide training to employees, volunteers, and other staff members regarding accessibility. All staff are trained. This training will be provided to staff in the initial two-week orientation. Training will include:
 - An introduction to the Human Rights Code that relates to people with disabilities by using online material: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/disability-and-human-rights-brochure-2016>
- An overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, using online training:
 - Online training: Customer Service Standard by Access Forward Ontario
 - Working Together: The Code and the AODA by Ontario Human Rights Commission
 - Introduction to Sistering Accessibility Policy and the opportunity to ask questions
- Staff training on trauma informed practice model. **2013 and 2016**

Other

- Sistering produced an Accessibility Policy and posted it on our website. **May 2013**
- Sistering updated our Accessibility Policy and disseminated it to staff. **2017**
- Wrote Case Study on Sistering and Social Inclusion for via EnAbling Non=Profits for ONN <http://theonnc.ca/sistering-social-inclusion/>. **2015**
- Offered Employment Groups on rights for people with disabilities under the AODA and United Nations Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities. **2012 and ongoing**
- Participation in Mad Pride Toronto annual festival focused on the rights, identities, and culture of consumer/survivors. Staff acted as Co-Administrator, brought participants to help organize and to the events, and gave workshops. **2012 and many subsequent years**
- Staff provided workshops on 'sanism'- discrimination against consumer/survivors - to participants and fellow staff. **2012 and ongoing**
- Staff participated in workshops, events and research with the Empowerment Council, a voice for consumer/survivors at CAMH, and Psychiatric Disabilities Against Violence (PDAV). **2012 and ongoing**
- Staff presented at the Mental Health and Addictions Ontario Conference on a low barrier, trauma informed, harm reduction focused model. **2017**

Section Two: Strategies and Actions Planned for 2018-2021

Customer Service

Sistering is committed to providing accessible customer service to people with disabilities. This means that we will provide the same high-quality goods and services to people with disabilities, with the same timeliness, as we provide for others.

- Consulting with participants with disabilities on our Accessibility Plan. **2018**
- Better communicating our feedback mechanisms to participants with disabilities. **2018 and ongoing**
- Ensuring all staff know how to plan for participants with disabilities in the rare event of a closure of our 24/7 Drop In. **2018 and ongoing**
- Develop a maintenance plan and ensure prompt response times when equipment is broken. **2018 and ongoing**
- Develop plain language emergency procedures and make them available in accessible formats. **2018 and ongoing**
- Improvements to our physical space for people with disabilities. **2018 and ongoing**
- To the best of our ability, ensure Sistering events held outside of Sistering are in fully accessible venues. **2018 and ongoing**
- Continue to plan activities and enact and promote best practice of social inclusion to prevent and overcome attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities. **2018 and ongoing**
- Continue Customer Service initiatives from 2012-2017 listed above. **2018 and ongoing**

Information and Communications

Sistering is committed to making our information and communications accessible to people with disabilities.

- Publish Accessibility Policy and Sistering Accessibility Plan on our website. **2021**
- All web content, such as videos, will be accessible by **December 31, 2020**.
- Continue information and communications initiatives from 2012-2017 listed above.

Employment

Sistering is committed to fair and accessible employment practices.

- Continue employment initiatives from 2012-2017 listed above in accordance with our Accessibility Policy and Individual Accommodation Plan.

Training

Sistering is committed to providing training in the requirements of Ontario's accessibility laws and the Ontario Human Rights Code as it applies to people with disabilities.

- Continue training initiatives from 2012-2017 listed above for new hires, volunteers, and students.

Other

- Continue Sistering's commitment to:
 - Ensuring that the policies, procedures, and practices are consistent with the principles of accessibility and inclusive design
 - Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, and practices for people with disabilities
 - Ongoing identification and removal of barriers to facilities, policies, programs, and services
- Monitor Accessibility Plan and review Progress. **Last reviewed June 2021.**
- AODA Reports filed regularly, in accordance with government deadlines: **December 31, 2017; June 30, 2021; and December 31, 2023.**
- Continue other initiatives from 2012-2017, listed above.