

Toronto

## 3 years after Ontario accessibility report, 'little progress' made, former lieutenant-governor says

### Social Sharing

David Onley says he's disappointed, but the Ford government says the work is happening

[Trevor Dunn](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 06, 2022 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: February 6



David Onley, a former lieutenant-governor of Ontario who has disabilities stemming from a childhood bout with polio, is disappointed with what he says is a lack of progress in making the province more accessible for people with disabilities. (Kelda Yuen/CBC)

Three years after the Doug Ford government received a key report on making Ontario more accessible for people with disabilities, its author says little has been done to achieve its goals and there doesn't appear to be a plan in place to fix that.

While he thought it would be "relatively easy" for the government to fulfil the report's recommendations, David Onley says Ontario is still failing on issues such as employment equity, social assistance and even the physical accessibility of schools and other buildings.

"It's been astounding to me that three years after my report so little progress has been made, especially when one considers that some 23 per cent of the Ontario population are people with disabilities," said Onley, who was Ontario's lieutenant-governor from 2007 to 2014 and has disabilities stemming from a childhood bout with polio.

In early 2019, Onley delivered his review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The report described Ontario as "mostly inaccessible" and slammed the current government, as well as previous Liberal administrations, for failing to follow through on the 2005 law's promise of making the province fully accessible by 2025.

With that deadline nearing, Onley says Ontario has wasted the past three years, even as accessibility becomes a more urgent problem due to the province's aging population.

"For whatever reason, consecutive governments of both major parties have failed to embrace these realities," Onley said.

## **'Business case for inclusion'**

One of the issues Onley would like to see addressed urgently is the [difficulty people with disabilities have in finding a job](#).

He says the provincial government could lead by example by hiring more people with disabilities within the Ontario Public Service.

"Why are they not hiring within the civil service? Why are they not demanding that different employers outside the civil service and the private sector also hire people with disabilities?" Onley asked.

Mark Wafer, a business owner and disability rights advocate, didn't need to be told to hire more people with disabilities. Wafer is deaf and understands the challenges people with disabilities have finding work.

So, he started hiring them.



## **Hiring disabled employees is good for business**

A Tim Hortons franchisee has found that hiring disabled Canadians has boosted his bottom line. It's an approach that's been coined "return on disability." 9:57

For 25 years at Wafer's Tim Horton's locations across Toronto, he hired nearly 250 people with disabilities. The effort, he says, not only improved the lives of his employees, but it was good for business.

"I began to see a pattern and that is that people with disabilities required less supervision," Wafer said in an interview.

"They worked more safely. They were more innovative. They were more productive. I started to see a clear business case for inclusion."

While Wafer believes the government should play an important role in improving employment opportunities, he also wants employers to step up the way he did.

"It has to be a multi-pronged approach. Employers are still buying into misperceptions and stereotypes about what it's like. The onus is on the employers to get with the program," Wafer said

## **Record on accessibility 'abysmal,' group says**

In a news release, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance (AODA) notes that nearly 2,000 days have passed since Onley delivered his report and there is still "no comprehensive plan" to implement its recommendations.

"The Ford Government's record on making Ontario accessible for people with disabilities is abysmal. It initiated a few slow, halting, and inadequate actions on accessibility. However, on balance, it made things worse for people with disabilities," the release said.

As an example, the AODA Alliance says the current government does not allow people who don't have drivers' licences to renew their expired health cards online.

- [Ford government facing legal fight over online health card renewal for people with disabilities](#)

## Cross-government framework established

The Ford government disputes the criticism and says it is committed to creating a province that is more accessible and inclusive for everyone.

In a statement, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility points to the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario program. It's a cross-government framework aimed at improving accessibility in the province and was informed by the recommendations in Onley's report, the statement says.



Raymond Cho is Ontario's Minister of Seniors and Accessibility. (CBC)

The framework focuses on four key areas of improvement, including breaking down physical barriers and employment. Over the course of 2020, public announcements were made to highlight the work being done in these areas.

The statement notes that making Ontario more accessible "takes time" and collaboration between many partners."

## **'They're not solutions'**

For Onley, that time is running out. He says this current framework lacks firm dates and commitments.

It's an approach he also accuses previous governments of taking — one that creates the impression of action and progress, but not the kind needed for fundamental change.

"These governments do not exist to solve problems. They create offices, positions, and ideas. But they're not solutions," Onley said.

"It's a vicious cycle."

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