VLRC Multi Year Accessibility Strategy 2024-2028

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# Vision Statement

VLRC will live and lead by example in accessibility, inclusion and promoting health equity in vision loss rehabilitation services. We will achieve this by meeting and exceeding accessibility standards and principles in service delivery, and by striving to exceed expectations and set new boundaries in the way we deliver inclusive and equitable care to our clients.

# Guiding Principles

## Accessibility is for everyone

Accessibility is about creating and designing environments, workplaces, and communities that enable every one of us to participate fully without barriers.

How we will do it: We commit to complying with current legislation and guidelines and will audit compliance annually.

## Leading with lived experiences

Lived experience is at the heart of the Accessibility Strategy, bringing a perspective to accessibility that recognizes that individuals’ lived experiences are shaped by their intersecting identities.

How we will do it: We will recruit for a Professional Practice Lead with lived experience who will lead and collaborate with the Accessibility and Inclusion Champions Network.

## Accessibility is a core part of who we are

Accessibility is a way of thinking, doing, living, and is fundamental to our ability to engage and interact with our employees, clients and senior volunteers.

How we will do it: We will embed this philosophy into all onboarding, meeting agendas and training.

## Accessibility is a collective responsibility

Everyone understands the role they play in identifying, preventing and removing barriers, and how they can help support the organization by playing their part in accessibility.

How we will do it: This will be built into all learning and development plans and reviewed annually through the continuous performance review.

## Empowerment and engagement

Given the strategic themes of communication, connection, and collaboration, this principle emphasizes the importance of empowering to actively providing feedback and involvement in shaping accessibility initiatives.

How we will do it: The Accessibility and Inclusion Champions Network will be led by the Professional Practice Lead and will be instrumental in ensuring that collaboration and engagement is at the forefront of this plan.

## Continuous improvement

With a strategic theme emphasizing consistency and a commitment to organizational sustainability, this principle encourages the organization to explore new approaches and best practices to enhance accessibility and adapt to evolving needs and challenges over time. It also aligns with the concept of an Evergreen strategy[[1]](#footnote-1).

How will we do this: We will define measurable outcomes and conduct annual reviews of accessibility practices to align with standards such as Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and any future legislation.

# Operational Objectives

## Learn

### Deepen understanding of the relationship among Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) principles, health equity, and intersectional lived experience through learning opportunities.

* Objective: Provide learning opportunities that deepen knowledge to help employees better understand intersectionality, lived experience, and how actions and behaviours support accessible, inclusive and equitable workplaces and service delivery.
* Objective: Develop and implement policies and procedures for cultural competency training for healthcare providers.

### Information access

* Objective: Rethink approach to the design of data visualization and the way complex information is presented with the goal to ensure that information is accessible, comprehensible, and inclusive for everyone.

### Grow intersectional IDEA knowledge and practice within leadership

* Objective: Implement learning opportunities for leaders to build intersectional IDEA knowledge and confidence in speaking about IDEA efforts, sharing messaging, and demonstrating visible commitment to IDEA.

### Establish VLRC as an “Accessible by Design” Workplace

* Objective: Examine policies and practices against the Accessibility Standards Canada draft employment standards to create an “accessible by design” workplace environment where employees can thrive.

### Commitment to accessibility and inclusion

* Objective: Review and renew accessibility and inclusion commitment for the organization to guide direction of goals and priorities.

### Conduct an evaluation to identify and address accessibility barriers in offices undergoing CARF accreditation

* Objective: To use the Local Office Accessibility Framework to evaluate office accessibility with the goal to identify barriers, take necessary actions to remove barriers, and guide the implementation of improvements to ensure inclusion for everyone.

### Review and refresh accessible procurement policies and practices

* Objective: Embed accessible procurement principles to ensure accessibility is considered at all stages of the procurement process and collaborate with vendors to identify and remove known issues to prevent future accessibility issues with the goal to improve accessibility in instances where current tools are not fully accessible.

## Build

### Build accessibility competencies

* Objective: Develop an intersectional accessibility and inclusion competency framework for VLRC staff.
* Objective: Build a learning and development operations plan (including relevant coursework) for rollout to all staff.

### Develop training resources and implement training on accessible communication

* Objective: To equip staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to create and deliver content that is accessible to a diverse audience.

### Advance knowledge and improve practices through research and innovation in vision loss rehabilitation

* Objective: Develop a strategy for research to improve service delivery and outcomes for individuals with vision loss.
* Objective: Evaluate barriers to equitable service pathway access for the VLRC client population.

###  Leadership in accessibility in healthcare.

* Objective: Establish VLRC as a leader in accessibility policy and practice among provincial and national healthcare service providers.

### Expand diverse representation of emerging leaders in professional development programs.

* Objective: To build accessible and inclusive Talent Development programs, Mentorship programs, and Succession planning that invests in employees and prioritizes the development of a diverse and inclusive talent pipeline.

### Cultivate professional training pipelines

* Objective: Work with the training programs that provide certification for professionals eligible to work at VLRC to grow the representation of diverse lived experiences, including persons with disabilities, within these programs.
* Objective: Increase efforts to recruit persons with disabilities to the VLRC workforce.

### Ensure equitable service delivery to clients.

* Objective: Establish seamless access to our services, by embracing access and equity as a cornerstone of our model of care.
* Objective: Develop culturally competent and inclusive care plans that consider the unique needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds.
* Objective: Ensure accessible communications, information access and services for clients.

### Safe, brave and inclusive workplaces.

* Objective: Ensure that policies and practices are inclusive and protect all employees from discrimination, harassment, and violence, no matter their lived experience, to create a safe, brave and inclusive workplace environment.
* Objective: Introduce a culture of safety, bravery and inclusiveness within organizational leadership through appropriate leadership development and coaching opportunities.
	+ NOTE: For this tactic, the concept of safety refers to physical, emotional and psychological safety.
	+ NOTE: Focus on bravery in the workplace is new.
1. Ensure accessibility, user-centered, and compliant materials through annual reviews.
* Objective: Create an annual review process for the VLRC website and all branded materials.
* Objective: Ensure accessibility compliance by aligning organizational standards, industry best practices and evolving needs of clients.
* Objective: Evaluate and optimize content and structure to enhance ease of use, intuitive navigation and overall user experience.

## Train

### Impact training

* Objective: Develop and launch organization-wide disability sensitivity training for all staff to help employees better understand different perspectives, experiences, and abilities.
	+ NOTE: Currently there are three deployable levels of training (further levels are under development):
		- Impact Level 1: Brightspace course on Understanding Sight Loss
		- Impact Level 2: Live training on accessible documents and accessible meetings
		- Impact Level 3: Participatory theatre/radio play on microaggressions in the workplace

### Train managers on inclusive and accessible recruitment and selection processes and practices

* Objective: Level the playing field for all candidates to remove recruitment bias and discrimination with the goal to recognize diversity and a wide range of abilities.

###  Develop and implement training framework to build competencies among national Board and committee volunteers

* Objective: Ensure board and committee volunteers have competencies and capabilities to apply relevant skills to their work with the organization. (e.g. integrity and respect, accessibility and inclusion, diversity and equity, lived experience, etc.)

## Communicate

### Accessible communications

* Objective: Refresh accessible communication policies to ensure equal access to information for all staff with the goal to improve overall communications effectiveness.

### Ensure that planning and implementation of workplace accessibility supports is reviewed regularly with employees

* Objective: Promote practices that foster employee agency and facilitate two-way dialogue and shared decision making in regular monitoring and evaluation of the appropriateness and efficacy of workplace accessibility supports.

### Establish and maintain an organization-wide Accessibility and Inclusion Champions Network (AICN)

* Objective: To use the AICN to establish and maintain a platform to mobilize employees and drive roadmap of activities that foster a culture of accessibility and inclusion.

### Explore the application of an Employee Resource Group (ERG) framework to the VLRC work environment

* Objective: Understand the demographics of intersectional lived experience within the VLRC staff complement.
* Objective: Determine the feasibility of using ERGs as employee-led platforms to mobilize employees to connect and provide peers with safe spaces, enhance employee well-being, and foster a more accessible and inclusive workplace.

### Implement feedback processes to gather input from employees in accessibility and inclusion efforts

* Objective: Establish feedback mechanisms and tools for employees to provide input on accessibility issues.
* Objective: Implement a process to review and analyze feedback data to identify trends and areas for improvement.
* Objective: Implement a process for addressing feedback and making continuous improvements to accessibility policies and practices.

# Property Objectives

## Integrate emergency response features with indoor navigation solutions

* Objective: Investigate indoor navigation solutions that incorporate emergency response features to enhance emergency response capabilities and preparedness and improve efficient navigation and timely assistance in critical situations.

## Expend the use of beacon technology in leased properties

* Objective: Collaborate with landlords to explore the implementation of beacons in leased properties with office locations.

## Variable lighting

* Objective: Review and refresh the use of variable lighting within our leased properties to enhance lighting requirements where possible.

## Develop accessible emergency safety plans

* Objective: Enhance safety and emergency processes and policies for accessibility and inclusion to ensure that everyone has equal access to safe and effective emergency procedures and responses.

LINKS:

<https://accessible.canada.ca/>

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/glance/>

1. An Evergreen strategy in healthcare refers to a dynamic, adaptable approach to long-term planning and operational improvement that emphasizes continuous learning, improvement, innovation, and flexibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)