

**Submission to BC Accessibility Legislation  
Douglas College  
November 25, 2019**

Douglas College appreciates the opportunity to submit feedback on the framework for Accessibility Legislation in BC.

As BC's largest degree-granting college, Douglas College has demonstrated its commitment to students with disabilities through accommodation and support services since the early 1980s. Thousands of students with disabilities have successfully completed post-secondary credentials and entered careers of their choosing.

Along with our post-secondary partners, we at Douglas are increasingly recognizing, however, that accommodations for individual students, while continuing to be important, are not enough to ensure accessibility of our programs, services, and environments. We recognize the need to proactively design to meet a wide range of needs, not just mitigate barriers for individual students. We look forward to legislation that provides clear standards, reporting, and incentives to support these efforts.

We would like to suggest that post-secondary students – through organizations such as NEADS (National Education Association of Disabled Students) and provincial and local student union groups – be stakeholders invited to participate in consultations and/or opportunities to contribute to the development of standards that impact post-secondary learning environments and experiences. Students tell us that barriers in the built environment, information, communication, and service delivery are daily experiences that make it difficult or require unnecessary ingenuity and energy that divert from post-secondary studies.

We would like to suggest that experts and advocates in mental health and wellness be stakeholders invited to participate in consultation and/or opportunities to contribute to the development of standards. Increasing numbers and complexity of student mental health issues and illnesses is a growing concern in post-secondary. For many, higher education is where symptoms of a serious psychiatric illness first emerge and for many, episodic experiences of mental health issues impact their preparation for and entry into careers. Barriers for people with mental health illnesses are often as invisible as their disability; accessibility standards developed with their input will be stronger.

We would like to suggest that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) be considered as a relevant framework for developing accessibility standards. While UDL is specifically applicable to learning contexts, it is a tool for planning barrier-free access, communication, participation, and inclusion that can be effectively used in many formal and informal learning environments. While we often associate Learning Disabilities only with educational settings, barriers exist for learners in a variety of community, career, and services settings.

Accessibility legislation in other provinces is positively impacting accessibility efforts and initiatives in colleges and universities across Canada, and we anticipate legislation to provide

similar guidance, and incentives for post-secondary institutions in BC. Shared and measurable standards will support consistent, ongoing, and prioritized efforts that can make a significant improvement to accessibility for both students and employees. Douglas College looks forward to contributing to a more accessible BC.