Best practices for accessibility when working from home

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About Accessibility Standards Canada

- Created under the Accessible Canada Act to:
  - develop and review accessibility standards for federally regulated organizations*; and
  - support and promote innovative research that identifies, removes, and prevents accessibility barriers.
- Accessibility is about creating inclusive communities for all. The Accessible Canada Act promotes the creation of a Canada without barriers.

> ***Federally regulated organizations:** Government of Canada departments and agencies, and private sector organizations like banks and those that operate in the federal transportation network.

About these guidelines

- Practical safety guidelines for employees with disabilities and their managers in times of emergencies or public health crisis. They address accessibility barriers that may exist when working from home.

- The guidelines were created for COVID-19 as guidance but can be used for other emergencies.

- National disability organizations and other stakeholders helped create these guidelines.

- The information is not medical or legal advice. When needed, seek advice from:
  - a public health authority;
  - a legal professional;
  - your union; and
  - your workplace occupational health and safety committee.

Getting started

- Working from home during an emergency presents unique challenges for everyone. Emergencies may create new barriers for persons with disabilities. This may affect their ability to work.

- For example:
  - employees may have to balance work with other duties, like childcare; or
  - employees with disabilities may have unexpected changes to their regular services and supports.

Employees with disabilities and their managers must work together to remove these barriers.

- Managers need to be familiar with their organizations working from home policy. It is their duty to create an accessible online workspace for all employees.

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- Employees need to make their accessibility needs clear and work with their managers to find solutions.
- To allow for a more personalized plan, employees and their managers should discuss these needs often. Accessibility needs can change.

Key takeaways:

- Working from home during an emergency event presents different barriers for everyone.
- Employees with disabilities and their managers both have a role to play in removing these barriers.
- Accessibility needs may change depending on the emergency. Employees and their managers must discuss these needs often.
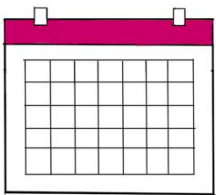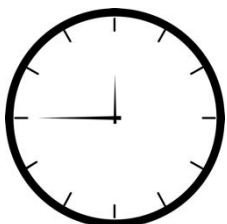
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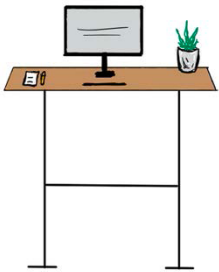
When working from home, employees need the same accommodations as they have at the office.

- This includes adaptive equipment and programs needed to do their jobs.

Scheduling

During an emergency, there are many reasons why employees may need flexible work schedules. For example:

- Employees may need time to care for family members or attend appointments.
- Working from home may make pre-existing health conditions worse because their home may not have the same natural interruptions as an office environment.
- Demonstrate flexibility about when work is completed.
- Example: doing some work in the morning and doing the rest later in the day or evening. The employee would have a break in between.
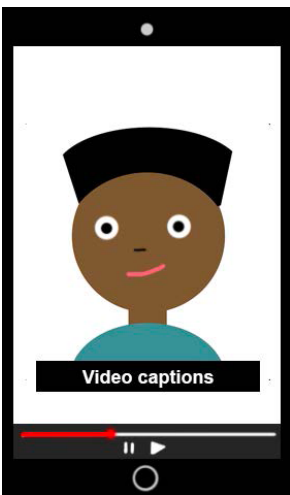
Accessibility of online meetings
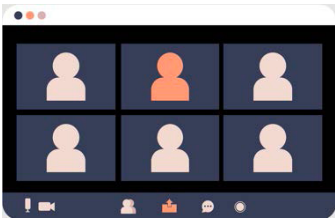
- Before choosing an online meeting platform, consider the following:
  - accessibility needs of employees;
  - accessibility of online platforms; and
  - accessibility of documents, presentations and other meeting materials.

Accessibility needs to consider

Closed Captioning

- Closed captioning is especially useful for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Some of the platforms that offer this service include:
  - Zoom
  - Microsoft Teams
  - Go To Meetings
  - JoinMe
  - WebEx

These platforms work with Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning services.

Sign language interpretation

- Some employees may need sign language interpreters for online meetings.
- Interpreters join meetings by webcam, like any other participant.
- Users who need American Sign Language (ASL) or Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) can "pin" an interpreter to make sure they can clearly see them.

Tips for meeting chairs and hosts

1. Test the platform in advance to be sure that all participants can equally contribute. If things do not work, reschedule the meeting. Address any barriers so that all employees can take part.

2. Introduce yourself and encourage others to say their names every time they speak.

3. Help participants find meeting materials by saying the document name, slide or page number.

4. Mute all participants and stop the video feeds of people not using theirs. This will allow people with weaker internet connection to take part in the meeting.

5. Check in with participants and interpreters to make sure participants are speaking at a good pace.

Internet access

- Internet access is crucial when working from home.
- However, not everyone has access to strong internet. This creates a barrier.
- Offer other options to join meetings, like joining by phone.

Contact us!

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