



## **Advocating for accessibility: Is your neighbourhood walkable for all?**

All pedestrians, including those with wheelchairs, walkers, canes and strollers should be able to navigate your community with an equitable degree of ease and freedom. If this is not the case, there are steps you can take. Some issues may be resolved by directly contacting the appropriate authorities. In Ottawa, you can contact:

**Sidewalk maintenance, including cracked or broken surfaces, refuse, overgrown vegetation, difficult curb cuts**

[ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/your-city-government/contact-city-ottawa](https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/your-city-government/contact-city-ottawa) or dial 311

**Winter maintenance, including snow removal of streets, sidewalks, curb cuts, areas around pedestrian push buttons, provision of salt and sand boxes**

[ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/your-city-government/contact-city-ottawa](https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/your-city-government/contact-city-ottawa) or dial 311

**Bus shelter inaccessibility due to snow**

<https://customerfeedback.octranspo.com>

Other areas: Dial 311

**Community mailbox inaccessibility due to snow**

1-800-267-1177

**Ottawa Hospital Accessibility Services**

Email [accessibility@toh.ca](mailto:accessibility@toh.ca)

613-798-5555 ext. 75535 or 7530

For issues that you cannot resolve on your own, increased community advocacy may be needed.

**Make your community safer: Conduct a pedestrian walk audit**

Did you know?

- You can request a salt or grit box be installed in important high traffic areas that are stubbornly snow covered
- You can request additional snow removal if curb cuts are blocked by snow when side streets are ploughed
- You can request push-to-walk buttons that are blocked by snow can be addressed by calling 3-1-1

Organizing a pedestrian walk audit can be an effective way to gather evidence on the specific improvements that need to be made in your neighbourhood.

Your audit should address four topics: safety, accessibility, convenience and connectiveness, and winter conditions.

### **A) Decide on your audit questions**

What specific hazards are you going to look for? A good starting point is the [Council on Aging of Ottawa All-Season Age-Friendly Pedestrian Safety and Walkability Checklist](#). Review the checklist, tweak and augment it as necessary to meet your needs.

Here's an example of potential questions for each topic.

#### **Safety**

Do you feel at risk on this walk? Issues to note are:

1. The presence of smooth unbroken sidewalks with gentle and appropriate curb cuts
2. Volume and flow of traffic with adequate speed limits and traffic calming measures
3. Adequate stop signs, crossing lights that afford time to cross the street
4. Crossing points free from obstructions that block view of oncoming vehicles (vegetation, cars, snow banks)
5. Area well-lit at night

#### **Accessibility**

Can you reach your destination? Potential problems are:

1. Presence of an obstacle, lamp standard, or litter on sidewalk
2. Need to use roadway for part or all of trip
3. Inability to travel independently due to infrastructure issue
4. Presence of construction zone that does not provide a safe alternative route
5. Cannot reach pedestrian crossing buttons

#### **Convenience and connectiveness**

Are you tempted to journey on the street because the sidewalk causes you discomfort? Some items here may be:

1. The sidewalk, crosswalk, or curb cut is too rough
2. Bus shelters are not accessible
3. Wayfinding signage not present
4. Sidewalk slope too steep
5. You cannot reach your destination almost as quickly as an able-bodied person can

## Winter conditions

Is your journey different depending on the season? Look for:

1. Adequate snow and ice removal, salting and sanding
2. Snow banks a level that allows you to see oncoming vehicles
3. Curb cuts and bus shelters are not blocked by snow

## B) Plan your audit

- Outline the area you are going to audit on a map.
- Decide how you'll track your findings. Everyone can take notes, or you could assign a scribe to log everyone's concerns. You can also have participants input their findings into an application such as Survey Monkey.

## C) Who should you invite?

- Individuals with mobility issues, such as people using wheelchairs, walkers, canes, or who have visual or hearing challenges.
- Representatives of local community organizations and businesses whose clients use the neighbourhood you are auditing.
- People of all ages, including seniors.
- Media – your local and community newspapers, and broadcast media.
- Local government officials, such as City Councillors.

## D) Go for a walk!

- Make sure everyone knows what hazards they are looking for and how they should track them (e.g., electronically, on paper, or in Survey Monkey).
- Ask participants to photograph hazards and note precise locations.

## E) Get your message out

- Collate everyone's findings, and present them in a [report](#) alongside recommendations.
- Send the findings/recommendations to the appropriate people/organizations (e.g., City Councillors, municipal government, city bus company).
- Engage the media – attach the report to a press release and send it to local print and broadcast media.
- Get your community association involved. They can help reinforce your message by sending follow up letters to the people/organizations that received your report.
- If these attempts fail, advocate for changes to your municipality's Pedestrian Plan, attend a Transportation Committee meeting, and remind your fellow auditors of the results of your efforts at the next municipal election
- Remember, your municipality must abide by provincial standards. If they are not high enough, advocate to your MPP.

Persons with disabilities should be able to move about with the same ease and protection as any other pedestrian. Organizing a pedestrian walk audit and taking action on your findings can help make this happen. Good luck!