

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2026

Enhancing Social Cohesion by Creating Accessible Festivals and Events



Canada

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PARTICIPATION



ACCESSIBILITY



INCLUSION



COMMUNITY



PROJECT START

May 22, 2023



PROJECT END

March 31, 2026



RECIPIENT

Independent Living Canada



PROJECT NUMBER

ASC-23/24-038-C

Advancing accessibility in festivals and events across Canada through lived experience, research, and collaboration.



This project has been made possible by



Accessibility Standards
Canada

Canada



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Executive Summary

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Project Start: 05-22-2023
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Accessibility Standards
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Executive Summary

Accessibility at Canadian festivals and events is improving, but many people with disabilities still face barriers that affect whether they can attend, participate fully, or stay for the entire event. Improving accessibility requires planning for it across the whole festival and event experience, including information, planning, onsite services, and content programming.

What This Study Shows

- Accessibility barriers remain common. 58% of goers reported leaving early, not enjoying a festival or event, or avoiding attendance due to accessibility barriers.
- Accommodation requests are frequent, but barriers are not always reported to organizers.
- Goers emphasize lived participation outcomes such as comfort, affordability, and the ability to stay for the full event.
- Organizers emphasize how accessibility is planned and delivered, including venue barriers, budgets, and planning timelines.
- Accessibility improves most when it is treated as a coordinated, end-to-end system across promotion, planning, services, and content programming.

Between 2023 and 2025, Independent Living Canada asked Canadians to share their experiences with accessibility at festivals and events across Canada. The study gathered the lived experiences of Canadians with disabilities and those who support us (goers).

It also asked people involved in festival promotion, planning, hosting, content creation, performing, supplying security and medical services, venue providers, and those who hold other roles (organizers), to self-report about accessibility. The research then compared organizer self-reporting with goers' lived experiences.

A total of 1,549 people across Canada participated in the study. 1,104 goers completed surveys, 232 participated in focus groups, and 213 organizers responded to surveys.

Of all participants, 56% reported having a disability, 33% reported no disability, and 11% did not answer or preferred not to say. Comment analysis suggests many participants in the last group may also have had disabilities but chose not to disclose this information.

Goers reported frequent accessibility barriers. Over half (52.5%) had requested accommodations, and 58% said barriers had caused them to leave early, not enjoy a festival or event, or avoid attending entirely. Organizers reported receiving accommodation requests at a similar rate (62.8%), but fewer (37.8%) reported hearing about barriers. This may suggest barriers may not always be reported, reporting processes are unclear or feel unsafe, or organizers are not acting on them.

The study analyzed accessibility across three focus areas, Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements, and organized the findings into four categories: Promotion, Planning and Hosting, Services, and Content.

Promotion

Clear accessibility information online and in print before the event is essential. Goers emphasized the importance of knowing what supports are available before buying tickets or arriving onsite. Providing clear accessibility information, accessible ticketing and accommodation request processes, and transparent policies related to support people and service dogs or animals can help people plan their visit with confidence. Reducing or eliminating extra costs for support persons and other accessibility supports can also significantly reduce barriers.

Planning and Hosting

Planning decisions shape accessibility outcomes. Both goers and organizers identified accessible venue selection, step-free routes with stable surfaces, accessible parking and drop-off close to entrances, and clear accessible signage and maps as essential for safety and independent

navigation. Organizers also highlighted practical challenges such as venue barriers, budgets, and temporary event environments. Planning accessibility early and using continuous improvement practices can help reduce barriers.

Services

Essential onsite services help determine whether people can stay and participate comfortably. Goers emphasized the importance of reliable accessible washrooms that are easy to find and well maintained, accessible seating and rest areas located throughout the site, and safe crowd and lineup management. Disability-informed training for staff, volunteers, and security was also identified as critical to ensure accessibility supports are delivered consistently and respectfully.

Content

Accessible content programming environments support full participation. Both groups emphasized the importance of communication accessibility, including captioning and sign language interpretation. They also highlighted the need for sensory-friendly spaces and supports, with clear information about noise levels, lighting warnings, crowd conditions, air quality, scents, and when quiet spaces are available.

Key Findings

Across the study, the same accessibility priorities appeared repeatedly:

- Accessible venues and step-free routes
- Accessible parking and arrival areas
- Reliable accessible washrooms
- Clear and accessible information, signage, and maps
- Accessible seating and rest areas located throughout the site
- Communication supports such as captioning and sign language interpretation
- Sensory-friendly spaces and supports
- Disability-informed training for staff, volunteers, and security

Goers focused on lived participation outcomes, such as being able to stay for the full event, affordability, and reducing the need for repeated accommodation requests. Organizers focused more on how accessibility is planned and delivered, including venue challenges, budgets, timelines, and planning processes.

Conclusions

The findings show that accessibility works best when it is planned as a coordinated, end-to-end system rather than a series of individual accommodations. Accessibility needs to be considered across the entire event experience end-to-end, from promotion and ticketing to arrival, onsite services, and content programming.

While the foundations of accessibility are widely understood, the next step is ensuring these practices are applied consistently across festivals and events of all sizes. This way, accessibility becomes a reliable and expected part of festival and event experiences across Canada.