

2024-2025 Accessibility Plan

May 22, 2024

Lakeland (Energy) Networks Ltd.



Lakeland Networks' Accessibility Plan 2024-2025

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1. General

1.1 Statement of Commitment

Lakeland Energy Ltd.'s retail arm, Lakeland Networks, is committed to treating all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in building a culture that respects the dignity and differences of all individuals, in addition to providing everyone with equal opportunity for employment, development, and advancement.

Lakeland Networks is committed to making its communications accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. Our company website has been designed to be WCAG-2.0 AA compliant and meets the Province of Ontario's Accessible Information and Communications Standard (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005). Please note that our website may link to or interface with third-party websites that we do not control. These third-party vendors may not have undertaken the efforts that Lakeland Networks has to comply with WCAG-2.0 AA standards.

Lakeland Networks continually works to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers. We are committed to removing all barriers and facilitating accessibility.

1.2 Contact Information & Feedback Process

Lakeland Networks welcomes your feedback on any accessibility barriers that you may have encountered in dealing with Lakeland Networks or your feedback on the manner in which Lakeland Networks is implementing its Accessibility Plan.

Feedback can be general or specific, but providing more details, such as the date, the name of the webpage, application or activity involved, may make it easier for us to understand your concerns.

You can submit feedback about accessibility or this plan by contacting:

Name & Title: Bobbie-Jo Keith, Accessibility Champion

Email: accessibility@lakelandnetworks.com

Telephone: 1-844-444-4249 x 570 from Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)

Mailing Address:

196 Taylor Road

Bracebridge, ON

P1L 1J9

In-Person:

Visit our reception desk, Lakeland Networks, 196 Taylor Road, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1J9, from Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Eastern Time).

Online Web Form:

The purpose of the accessibility feedback form is to collect information from persons with disabilities who may be experiencing difficulties related to one of the following areas:

1. Content accessibility (e.g. missing closed captions or described video)
2. Digital accessibility (e.g. unable to use assistive technology on the website or app)
3. Facilities

Please fill out the form on our website (<https://www.lakelandnetworks.com/accessibility-statement/>) to provide feedback or receive accessibility support.

Online Chat:

Chat with us using Lakeland Networks' chatbot SAM. The chatbot is in the bottom right-hand corner of our webpage, and there is a priority link for accessibility messages and comments on the first page under the title "Have a Question?".

Information about how to submit feedback is also available on our public website at the following link: <https://www.lakelandnetworks.com/accessibility-statement/>

Accessibility Feedback:

Individuals providing feedback can provide personal information and contact information, but they do not have to. For feedback received by mail, if contact information is provided, an acknowledgement letter will be mailed to the address provided. Feedback provided through telephone involves direct interaction with a Lakeland Networks employee, and therefore, the employee will acknowledge receipt of the feedback. Automatic acknowledgement of receipt will be sent for feedback received by email and web form. Feedback provided in person or by online chat will be acknowledged if contact details are provided. For all feedback related to accessibility, we will endeavour to respond to you within 15 business days, with the exception of feedback received anonymously.

Lakeland understands and appreciates the concerns that you may have with regard to anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Lakeland has adopted a [Privacy Policy](#). You have the right to provide your comments anonymously. Any personal information contained in feedback will be kept confidential unless you provide your express consent to disclose your personal information.

1.3 Alternative Formats

You can request alternative formats of this plan, and a description of our feedback process by contacting Bobbie-Jo Keith, Accessibility Champion.

An electronic version (that is compatible with assistive technology) of this plan can be downloaded immediately from our website at: <https://www.lakelandnetworks.com/accessibility-plan/>

We will provide the following alternative formats within 15 days of the initial request:

- Print
- Large print (increased font size)

We will provide the following alternative formats within 45 days of the initial request:

- Braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or who have low vision can read with their fingers)
- Audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud)

1.4 Definitions

The following definitions apply throughout this plan:

Disability – Any impairment, or difference in physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, or communication ability. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary, or can change over time.

Barrier – Anything that might hinder people with disabilities’ full and equal participation. Barriers can be architectural, technological, or attitudinal, based on information or communications, or can be the result of a policy or procedure.

Accessibility – The design of products, devices, services, environments, technologies, policies, and rules in a way that allows all people, including people with a variety of disabilities, to access them.

2. Consultations

Our consultation approach focused on identifying accessibility barriers experienced by persons living with many different types of disabilities. We engaged with various internal and external individuals to develop our accessibility plan. These consultations helped us put the principles of the ACA into action, especially the laws, policies, programs, services and structures that must take disabilities into account and involve the participation of persons with disabilities.

Internal Consultations

Lakeland Networks’ employees have direct experience of the organization’s internal practices, policies, structures, and systems. This gives them insight into accessibility and barriers within Lakeland Networks. They often interact with stakeholders and the public. This gives them insight into how these groups experience accessibility and barriers when dealing with Lakeland Networks from the outside.

Lakeland Networks began its consultations with its employees by conducting an anonymous and confidential survey. The survey collected feedback from employees, including employees with disabilities, to understand their experience and barriers they may have experienced or know about. The employee survey was deployed at the beginning of August 2023 to all Lakeland Networks employees and other internal parties, which represents approximately 100 individuals, including students, temporary staff, and part-time and full-time employees. Out of 43 responses, 11.6% (5) identified as being a person living with a disability. The respondents were asked to identify the type of disability they have, with many selecting multiple disabilities. The disabilities identified included physical, hearing, vision, learning/developmental, mental health-related, and chronic pain.

External Consultations

Lakeland Networks conducted an anonymous and confidential survey to consult with external stakeholders, including persons with disabilities. The survey collected feedback from customers, including customers with disabilities, to understand their experience and barriers they may have experienced or know about. The customer survey was deployed at the beginning of August through various methods, which included posting on our social media platforms, company website, and notifying customers on their invoices. Out of 21 responses, 23.8% (5) identified as being a person living with a disability. The respondents were asked to identify the type of disability they have. The disabilities identified included physical, chronic pain, hearing, vision, learning/developmental and mental health related.

3. Areas Described under Section 5 of the ACA

3.1 The Build Environment

Addressing build-environment-related barriers will help Lakeland Networks ensure that people using our offices, buildings, and services have barrier-free access. We will continue our efforts and improve planning for new builds. We will continue to work with our employees and external parties to better understand and address barriers experienced by persons with disabilities.

Identified Barriers & Opportunities:

- Sensory issues, specifically with regard to the use of bright fluorescent lighting in office spaces, noise levels, and the increasing use of scented products, such as perfume and cologne, have been identified to create challenges for persons with disabilities.
 - With this, we have taken action by exploring the benefits of integrating light dimmers and covers into our workplace, along with increasing awareness about scents in the workplace and acceptable noise levels.
- Parking concerns, no designated accessible parking spot at the 870 Cedar Lane office building. Limited parking spots are available at the Taylor Road office building when there is a surge of staff in the office (as some employees have a hybrid work setting). This limits the parking available to customers coming into our offices.
 - We are continuously looking to expand our office and parking space.
 - Lakeland Networks will continue to provide flexible work arrangements wherever possible.
- Lack of automatic door opener at the 870 Cedar Lane office building and ramp for wheelchair access.
 - Lakeland will investigate this and update it during the next renovation process.

3.2 Employment

Addressing and resolving employment-related barriers helps ensure everyone has the same employment opportunities at Lakeland Networks. We are committed to a safe and supportive workplace and promoting a culture that values diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

Identified Barriers & Opportunities:

- Team members could have better awareness and understanding of the available accommodations and the barriers experienced by persons with disabilities.
 - To address this, we will continue to update and implement enhanced accessibility training and use feedback to ensure that accessibility standards are integrated across our business, including workplace policies and procedures, employment standards, programs and work environments.
 - Use internal feedback and consultations and collaborate with persons with disabilities to ensure that accessibility standards are integrated across our business – including workplace policies, employment standards, programs, and work environments.
 - Lakeland Networks’ offer letters, external website and internal communications notify employees and the public of the availability of accommodation.

3.3 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

By addressing information and communication technology-related barriers, we can achieve a high standard for digital accessibility. We strive to continuously improve our processes to keep pace with technological advancements in our society.

Identified Barriers & Opportunities:

- Websites may not offer alternate methods of communication for general inquiries or questions.
 - We implemented the use of a chatbot to lessen the delay in inquiry response. The chatbot is in the bottom right-hand corner of our webpage, and there is a priority link for accessibility messages and comments on the first page under the title “Have a Question?”.
 - Lakeland employees are available to customers by email, phone, chatbot, and walk-in during designated office hours.
- There are opportunities to expand the availability of video content with consistent and accurate Described Video (DV) and Closed Captions (CC).
 - Adopt accessibility guidelines for information and communication technology.
 - Adopt universal design principles and best practices in digital accessibility.

We will continue to simplify our processes and use language that is concise and easy to understand. In addition, we will continue to evaluate the accessibility of the information and communications technologies we use when addressing both internal and external audiences.

3.4 Communication, other than ICT

By addressing communication-related barriers, we will improve the accessibility of the documents we create at Lakeland Networks.

Identified Barriers & Opportunities:

- Customers may not be aware that they can request certain types of documents (such as bills and other documents that contain critical information) in alternate formats to meet their accessibility needs.
 - Promotion of accessibility products, services, and alternate options and methods of communications to increase awareness and usage.
 - Ensure accessibility needs are considered in the development of marketing and advertising materials.

3.5 The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

We strive to ensure our procurement practices address accessibility procurement barriers. Addressing these procurement-based barriers will help Lakeland Networks act on the Accessible Canada Act's principles. Specifically, it will help make sure that all persons have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disability.

Identified Barriers & Opportunities:

- Existing procurement practices may not consistently meet accessibility requirements.
 - Continue to evaluate current procurement policies, processes and tools to improve accessibility.

3.6 The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

By addressing the design and delivery of programs and service-related barriers, we aim to ensure persons with disabilities have meaningful options. We want to ensure they are free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities. This includes improving the accessibility of our systems and networks and improving our efforts to provide excellent customer experiences.

Identified Barriers & Opportunities:

- Team members have different levels of knowledge and awareness when it comes to the barriers experienced by customers with disabilities, such as how to respond to inquiries and requests for accommodation.
 - Continue to monitor customer surveys and feedback to identify areas for improvement.
 - Continue to coach and train team members on the best practices in customer service, for example: knowledge on how to send replacement equipment to customers with accessibility challenges.
 - Explore ways to increase further customer awareness of Lakeland Networks' accessibility products and services.

3.7 Transportation

Transportation does not currently apply to Lakeland Networks' operations.

4. Conclusion

This accessibility plan identifies successes, barriers, and next steps to remove those barriers and prevent new ones based on the feedback received through the internal and external consultation phases.

Lakeland Networks is committed to the implementation of this plan for the first three-year cycle, which will provide a solid foundation for a fully accessible Canada by 2040.