



Nova White Papers – Accessibility Series
CANADA

International Accessibility Standards:

CANADA

Summary

Canada does not have a single consistent national standard for accessible signs. The country has a Canadian Disability Act which requires that public spaces be made accessible, but the provinces, localities, and agencies are allowed to design their own codes and guidelines. Many groups in Canada build their own code off of the guidelines established by the Canadian Standards Association, a non-profit membership organization charged with establishing standards that can be employed by different groups in the country. The Canadian Standards Association's guideline is CAN/CSA B-651 95 Barrier-Free Design. Currently the following codes and guidelines are built off of the CSA's work.

Ontarian's with Disabilities Act: Currently in the process of developing a guidelines that can be incorporated into municipal codes. In the meantime municipalities can develop their own sign codes.

Canadian National Institute for the Blind: This group establishes additional language and best practices that can be incorporated into codes.

Federal Identity Program Guidelines 4.3B Tactile Signage: Sign System and Installation Guide: This set of standards for federal buildings is based on the CSA Barrier Free Design Guidelines and is used for federal buildings.

International Codes: A number of municipalities based their sign codes off of more detailed information found in the International Building Code (Which the ADA is in part based off of).

Canadian Transportation Agency: The agency has adopted its own set of guidelines for transportation facilities.

Highlights from the CSA Barrier-Free Design Guidelines Adapted for the Ontarians with Disability Act(In Progress) and Federal Identity Program

Note that individual agencies and municipalities can alter the guideline. These general guidelines are being noted because they are the most commonly used in Canada. Be sure to identify the specific code be used in a specific project.

Scope

- Tactile sign guidelines are applicable for regulatory, warning , and permanent room identification signs. Visual guidelines are applicable to orientation and informational signs. This approach is similar to the American's with Disabilities Act guidelines.

Braille

- Grade 1 Braille is used in Canada, a form of Braille that complies with the Unified Braille Code, a form of Braille where all letters and numbers are given a Braille equivalent. This form of Braille is not used on signs in the United States and is the primary difference between the two guidelines. Grade 1 Braille also meets the multi-lingual standards in Canada.

Visual Characters

- Visual character guidelines are closely aligned with the International Building Code including color contrast, letter heights for minimum viewing distances as well as specific ratios for stroke width and width to height ratios.

Tactile Characters

- Upper/lower case tactile letters are allowed as opposed to the upper case only requirement in the United States.
- Characters are between 16-50 mm (0.6-2 in) high.
- All characters whether they are visual or tactile should have minimum width to height ratios of 3:5 to 1:1. They must have a minimum stroke width ration of 1:5 to 1:10.
- All tactile characters as well as the sign itself should be smoothly edged.

Sign Height and Location

- Sign heights are recommended at 1500mm (59 inches) off the ground surface.
- If at all possible the sign should be placed on the latch side with a clear area of a minimum 75 mm (3 inches) from the door frame. The sign should be a minimum of 140 mm (app. 6 inches) from the adjacent wall surface.

Contrast and Lighting

- There are no color contrast recommendations but a minimum lighting level of 200lx is required.

Symbols

- All symbols should meet international standards and be within a minimum 150mm (6 inch) field. Corresponding text and Braille must be below the symbol.

Multi-lingual Standards

- Though not in the CSA or the Ontarians with Disabilities Act federal program signs are required to be in English and French including all tactile information and Braille. There are a number of sign systems with template approaches to multi-lingual accessibility signs.

Design Recommendations

- Unlike other countries including the United States, England, and Australia; Canada has not developed one consistent national guideline for individual provinces or specific facilities. It is important to know the pertinent guideline for the municipality, province, or building type.
- Government signs fall under the Federal Identity Guidelines which mandate the use of multi-lingual signs as well as other specific approaches to sign development. Multi-lingual requirements may also be applicable in other provincial or local codes.
- Use only metric units when working with Canadian codes. English equivalents are only approximate and will not be approved by code officials.
- Be sure to measure the lighting level when developing the sign program.
- Grade 1 Braille takes up a significant amount of space on a sign can potentially limit the amount of information that can be used.
- The Canadian code guidelines are moving towards harmonization with the International Building Code. Where the Barrier Free Access Act is in effect and there is no local code it may be possible to substitute the International Building Code.