

Pembroke Regional Hospital: Building a More Accessible Future for All

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pembroke Regional Hospital (PRH) continues to make meaningful strides in its commitment to accessibility, ensuring that every person - whether a patient, visitor, staff member, or volunteer - can experience a barrier-free environment that supports compassionate care, inclusive service, and a welcoming workplace.

While accessibility in public buildings is a legal requirement under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) for which the hospital must submit an annual compliance report, PRH sees it as much more than a mandate and instead, as a reflection of the hospital's values and a vital part of its mission to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all.

"Accessibility is not just about compliance, it's about compassion," said PRH President and CEO Sabine Mersmann. "We are committed to removing barriers, listening to our patients and staff, and ensuring that everyone who comes through our doors feels respected, supported, and empowered."

Over the past year, PRH has implemented a wide range of accessibility improvements. These include the relocation and improved accessibility of Mulvihill Drug Mart and the addition of accessible seating in outdoor spaces as well as benches in areas where those with mobility issues may need to take a break. For those in our region who use alternate means of transportation, an area of our property has been designated for horse and buggy parking complete with a hitching post and signage. Automatic door openers have been installed at all entrances and wayfinding signage continues to be enhanced to help patients and visitors navigate the hospital more easily.

But accessibility at PRH goes far beyond physical infrastructure. The adoption of the Voyce translation service ensures that every patient receives care in their language of choice and a lot of work has been done on the policies around the use of service animals. Assistive devices such as speech and hearing amplifiers, augmentative communication devices, walkers and specialized wheelchairs are provided to patients to allow those with disabilities the ability to communicate, mobilize, and perform activities of daily living independently.

The hospital has also launched a dedicated accessibility email address (accessibility@prh.ca) and feedback form, encouraging patients, visitors and staff to share their experiences and suggestions. Ideas for improvement and feedback are reviewed by the Accessibility Planning Committee, which includes Patient and Family Advisors as regular members.

Wendy Lewis, Co-Chair of the hospital's Patient and Family Advisory Council explained that the advisors also participate on behalf of patients and families in activities such as accessibility walk throughs where they identify accessibility and inclusion opportunities.

“As stated, accessibility is so much more than just the physical aspects of a facility, it’s a culture within PRH that supports the goals of all who come to the hospital for care and services so that their experience reflects and supports their needs,” Mrs. Lewis said.

“Embedding patient feedback is essential to our mission,” Mrs. Mersmann said. “It ensures that our accessibility efforts are grounded in real experiences and meaningful change.”

The hospital’s 2023–2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines a comprehensive strategy to identify, remove, and prevent barriers in four key areas: Information and Communication, Employment, Customer Service, and the Design of Public Spaces. The plan is guided by the AODA and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) and is reviewed annually by the Accessibility Planning Committee.

Among the plan’s priorities are ensuring that the hospital’s website meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, improving the clarity of public communications, and ensuring that all new construction projects are designed with accessibility in mind.

The hospital is also enhancing its recruitment practices to attract and support employees with disabilities.

“As part of our ongoing efforts to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace, we adapt our measures to ensure that all candidates have equitable access to employment opportunities. Whether it is providing the applicant with a written version of the interview questions, ensuring the space is accessible, or offering more time than customary, we want every candidate to have a fair shot at succeeding,” said Ralph Hatem, Human Resources Director, who added that staff requiring assistive devices or accommodations to succeed in their jobs are also supported, and all staff, physicians and volunteers undergo accessibility training as part of their ongoing learning.

The hospital’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee works closely with the Accessibility Committee to ensure that accessibility planning reflects the diverse experiences of people with disabilities, including those related to economic status, gender identity, language, and race.

“Accessibility is more than physical - it’s about communication, understanding, and equity,” Mrs. Mersmann added. “We are proud of the progress we’ve made, and we are committed to doing more.”

To learn more about PRH’s accessibility initiatives or to share your feedback, visit www.pembrokeregionalhospital.ca or contact the Accessibility Planning Committee at accessibility@prh.ca.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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