

Eldon House Accessibility Plan | 2023-2025

Statement of Commitment

Eldon House Heritage Site and Gardens endeavors to provide its services and programs in a way that respects the independence and dignity of all persons and encourages integration and equality of opportunity. This document sets out the provisions and actions that Eldon House has undertaken to ensure that all visitors with disabilities are given the same opportunity to access and benefit from our services in a similar way as other customers whenever possible.

THE PROVISION OF GOODS AND SERVICES TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Eldon House makes every reasonable effort to ensure that its policies, practices, and procedures are consistent with the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity by:

Communication

Eldon House communicates with persons with disabilities in the way that best suits their specific needs.

Assistive Devices

People with disabilities may use their own personal assistive devices, or those provided by Eldon House. A person with a disability may enter any part of our premises that are open to the public with an assistive device, unless not allowed by law. If barriers to the use of an assistive device exist at our premises, these barriers, where reasonably possible, will be removed.

Service Animals

Eldon House welcomes people with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed on the parts of our premises that are open to the public except where animals are not allowed by law. Where an animal is not allowed by law, alternate options will be explored to provide the service to the person with a disability.

Support Persons

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have that person accompany and assist them through the Eldon House premises. Fees for any ticketed program will not be charged for support persons.

Training for Staff

Eldon House provides training to all staff and volunteers who engage with customers or third parties on our behalf. Training occurs at the beginning of employment and at monthly staff meeting thereafter, including:

- The purpose of the AODA and other related legislation, and the requirements of the customer service standard;
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities;
- How to appropriately interact with people with disabilities who use assistive devices or require assistance of a service animal or support person;
- What to do if a person with a disability has difficulty accessing the Museum's goods and services or publicly accessible premises;
- All Eldon House and City of London policies, practices, and procedures relating to customer service standards;
- Staff will also be trained on an ongoing basis in the goal of continuous improvement when changes are made to these policies, practices, and procedures.

Notice of Temporary Disruptions

Eldon House staff provide customers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities. This notice includes information about the reason for the disruption, how long the disruption is expected to last, and a description of any alternative facilities or services, if available.

Accountability and Communication with Eldon House

Anyone who wishes to contact the Museum to discuss the way Eldon House provides goods and services to people with disabilities are welcome to contact the Eldon House by phone, email, social media, through our website, in person, or via the visitor comment book located at the front entrance to the historic home. All comments will be relayed to the Curator Director.

SITE SPECIFIC PROVISIONS FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND THE ELDON HOUSE SITE

The following illustrate the current provisions at Eldon House for people with disabilities as well as plans for improvement in the period of 2023-2025.

Access for persons with Physical Disabilities

Eldon House and its Interpretive Centre are two separate buildings and are linked by exterior pathways in the landscaped grounds. Currently:

- The Interpretive Centre is fully accessible and houses the FADS restrooms that serve the site.
- A graded walkway leads to the front door of Eldon House and provides access to the main floor, however there is no elevator or ramp to the upper level.
- Due to the historic nature of the main Museum building, there is limited physical accessibility to the upper floor of the home. Alternative means of experiencing the upper floor are available for all visitors including a bound volume of still images of each second-floor space with accompanying site plans and a comprehensive video.
- The walkways through the site buildings have adequate room to accommodate the movement of wheelchairs, walkers, and other assistive devices, which are clearly lit and signed.
- Height of didactic panels and interpretive materials are designed to accommodate viewership from a range of viewpoints and movable furniture is available for individuals needing to be seated while touring the Museum.
- Fire exits have been fitted with push-bars, door buttons, and graded ramps where possible.

An additional accessible pathway is being constructed in 2023 to link the two site buildings in compliance with AODA standards. In 2024 a site audit will be conducted jointly between Eldon House staff and the Municipal Accessibility Advisor and Advisory Committee for ongoing improvement planning.

Access for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing

Assistance for visitors who have hearing impairments is available upon entering the Museum, including:

- All interpretive materials provided in written format;
- Interpretive staff who have been trained to enunciate clearly with frontal body placement (specific to lip reading), and utilize assistive devices as needed (voice amplifiers, etc.);
- Mobile video-based interpretation available with designated earphones;
- Closed captioning and described video/image captions have been integrated into all video productions and printed visual communication.

There are plans for staff to develop additional videos by 2025 related to frequently discussed topics with closed captioning to provide further information to those with hearing impairments.

Access for individuals who are blind or visually impaired

Visitors with visual impairments or blindness can expect the following provisions:

- Interpretive materials available in large print format and braille;
- Visual communication designed with AODA standards in mind, including but not limited to: print material, exhibition text, website design, and social media messaging.
- People who are visually impaired should note that certain rooms in the Museum are dimly lit to protect some of the light-sensitive artifacts in the collection. Higher levels of lighting are maintained through the walking routes, didactic panels, and special exhibit areas.
- Lighting can be adjusted at various parts of the Museum upon request.
- Tours are available that are designed to describe elements of the collection and encourage tactile interaction with the 'hands on' components of interpretation.

By 2024, staff will implement further didactic aids for individuals with visual impairment, including redesign of permanent didactic panels to include QR codes to link a user to the website for interactive sharing options.

Access for individuals who have language barriers

Currently, the Museum welcomes many visitors who have language barriers, and has put several provisions in place to assist sharing the narrative of the site by:

- Interpretive introductions and information that have been translated in over twenty-five languages and are available to visitors as they begin their museum experience;
- Translation software is accessible to front of house staff to assist with communication;
- ESL and Cultural Learning organizations who book guided tours are encouraged to bring translators at a ratio of 1:8 for their groups, who will work with museum guides to relay tour/program information.
- Museum staff have received cultural sensitivity training from local settlement organizations.

Work is being conducted by full time staff to add ten more language translations which will be completed by 2025.

Access for individuals who have developmental, cognitive or intellectual impairments

Eldon House respectfully engages individuals and groups of visitors with a range of intellectual abilities and challenges by:

- Accommodating groups/individuals often with pre-planning, utilizing the most appropriate and impactful method available, including: hands on materials, small group sizes, or a variety of media technologies, shared by trained and enthusiastic interpretive staff;
- Interpretive and exhibition text is designed to be clear and concise and accessible to a wide range of intellectual abilities, complimented by visual images and artifacts;
- Hands-on and interactive materials are placed through the historic Museum to aid engagement and focus, including a tactile kit is available for visitors needing physical mobile touchpoints for the duration of their stay.

By 2024, Eldon House will complete the creation of two engagement "backpacks" for visitors to utilize, targeted for individuals with developmental and intellectual impairments.

Access for individuals who have financial barriers

Eldon House aims to remain accessible to a diverse audience and designs its programs and operations accordingly by:

- Keeping the Museum open to the public on a “donation” model;
- Participating in several local and provincial partnerships that remove financial barriers to visitors, including newcomer groups, seniors long term care homes, and education initiatives;
- Eldon House leads outreach programs to groups who may not physically be able to access the Museum in-person, and offers a variety of tactile, digital, and specialized programs, and transportation funded by grant subsidies.

Future improvements being sought by staff annually include additional funding and partnerships that aim to offset program costs, and enhancements to our volunteer program.

Access for youth and senior community members

Seniors and youth make up a significant amount of our visitorship. To engage and accommodate these two demographics, the Museum currently:

- Accommodates tours for all ages on a range of platforms – virtual, in person, and via outreach
- Maintains a volunteer program that engages all demographics;
- Conducts artifact based “reminiscence” programs (“Memory Lane”) targeted to the elderly, those suffering from Alzheimer’s and dementia patients or those with cognitive barriers via outreach to long term care homes, virtually or on-site;
- Shares outreach “kits” with external sites and distributes a bound “memory book” of Eldon House images and narrative points;
- Has on-site activity pages (scavenger hunts, i-spy, etc.) and activity backpacks to engage young children;
- Conducts tours/programs at a pace appropriate to individual needs, with physical supports including railings, movable seating, support materials (hands on, engagement kits, etc.) in a well-lit, controlled route through the Museum.

In 2024-25 Eldon House plans to expand educational offerings to youth by providing activity booklets, which will combine physical workbooks with instructional videos for distanced learning. Additionally, staff will be putting together activity kits for seniors, which will allow continued engagement with memory kits independent of site staff. This will allow long term care homes to engage residents throughout the year at an affordable cost and be inclusive of community members who have severe mobility issues.

Access for individuals who have other disabilities

Eldon House has mechanisms in place to accommodate a myriad of other disabilities, whether seen or unseen, which are built into the organizations training programs and commitment to treat each person with respect, dignity, and inclusion. Eldon House identifies as a safe space for all and upholds the principles of anti-racism and equity, providing a range of inclusive programs, specific to underrepresented groups, including individuals suffering from mental illness, homelessness, those who are differently abled, 2SLGBTQIA+, people of colour, immigrant and Indigenous populations. This area of improvement is actively ongoing and a priority for staff and Board. Eldon House staff are continuing to develop programs and special events which engage minority community members, as featured in the programming and exhibit plans from 2023-2025.

Access to the Museum Collection

Individuals with disabilities have the same level of access to the collection at Eldon House that is afforded all visitors and researchers. Currently, accommodation is made available dependent on the specific disability and needs of an individual. Collection records have been transferred to the PastPerfect Program, as a first step in making collection records more available in a general sense. This work will continue into 2025, when the records will become accessible to the public on our online website platform.

Website Access and Social Media

Eldon House is committed to making its website as accessible as possible for users with disabilities using the WCAG as a guide. Information presented on the website is available in text format on request, is designed with accessible font and can enlarge and translate text. Image captions are described where possible, with improvements planned to be completed by staff by 2024. Website enhancement projects are taken on annually, with accessibility as a priority. Eldon House maintains several social media accounts. All posts follow WCAG standards, and text and video descriptions are embedded where possible. Additional hashtags and website links are available with text readers where possible.

Provisions for Staff

Eldon House is committed to providing equal access to all staff and volunteers beginning with the hiring process and continuing throughout employment or volunteer duration. The highest workplace standards are in place, modification and accommodations are achievable as needed.

RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility of actioning the Accessibility Plan is shared between Board, Staff and Municipal Advisory Partners. The actions listed above are almost exclusively in the purview of full time Eldon House staff, supported and made accountable by the Board of Directors as the plan and annual status report are reviewed and renewed. External funding is sought by staff with Municipal input and capital project oversight. Audits of the facility are jointly conducted by the Curator Director, Accessibility Advisor and Advisory Committee members, every 3-5 years, which prioritize infrastructure projects and budgeting. Ensuring the provisions of the Accessibility plan are enacted is shared between all stakeholders of the Eldon House organization, who collectively enhance the service levels through committed training and regular review.