

# Five-Year Review of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

## Project Overview

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) sets out a path to remove, reduce and prevent barriers through the development of accessibility standards in five fundamental areas. The AMA calls for the Accessibility Advisory Council to review the effectiveness of accessibility standards every five years.

The purpose of the council's engagement exercise was to consult with Manitobans about their experiences with the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, including what is working well and what needs improvement. The goal of the standard is to ensure businesses and organizations provide customer service in a way that removes barriers for people with disabilities. Council will use all findings from this engagement and other consultation activities to make recommendations in a final report for the Minister of Families, Minister responsible for Accessibility, in September 2021.

## Engagement Overview

Council began planning this review in late 2020, with members completing pre-consultation meetings with a number of stakeholders in early 2021 to help identify general themes and to create a public consultation road map. To ensure Manitobans had many opportunities to express their perspectives on the standard, council launched a multi-pronged consultation plan, with multiple consultation activities.

As this standard applies to every organization in Manitoba with one or more employees, the council consulted the following groups:

- persons disabled by barriers, including representatives from organizations of persons disabled by barriers
- organizations required to comply with the standard, including small and large municipalities, public sector organizations, the Manitoba government, businesses and non-governmental organizations
- other representatives of the government or government agencies that have responsibilities under the standard

The EngageMB survey was posted from April 30 to May 28, 2021 in English and French and made available in other formats by request. An email from EngageMB announcing the engagement opportunity was sent to approximately 67,000 registered users who had previously participated in an engagement project related to Manitoba’s disability community or indicated an interest in related topics. The Manitoba Accessibility Office also informed its contact list of over 3,000 professional associations and organizations about the survey.

In addition to an EngageMB survey, council completed eight focus groups from April to June of 2021. Council held two webinars on the afternoon and evening of May 13, 2021 with participants from the disability community, municipalities, the public sector, businesses and non-profit organizations, council and individuals from across Manitoba.

### What We Heard

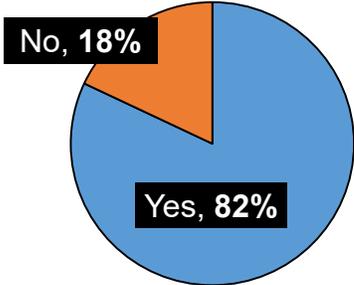
A total of 1,483 individuals visited the EngageMB project on the Five-Year Review of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, with 1,025 individuals participating in the survey and 51 participating in the quick poll.

#### Awareness of Accessibility Legislation

In response to the quick poll, 82 per cent of the participants indicated familiarity with the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, versus 18 per cent who were not.

When asked specifically about the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, 53 per cent had heard of the standard, 35 per cent had not heard of it and 12 per cent of respondents were unsure.

Quick poll: Have you heard of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act?



Prior to this survey, had you heard of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service?

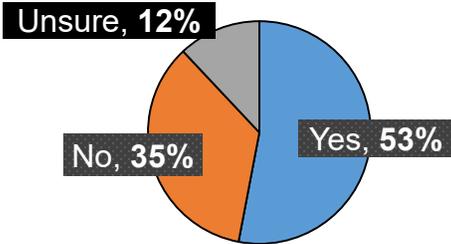
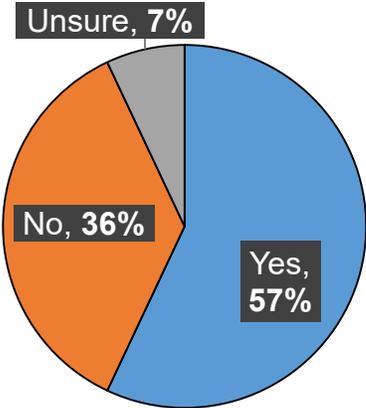


Figure 1: Pie charts identifying participant’s familiarity with Manitoba accessibility legislation (n=1025).

Over half of the respondents (57 per cent) were aware that the standard requires Manitoba businesses and organizations with at least one employee to provide accessible customer service. Thirty-six per cent were not aware and seven per cent were unsure. Fewer respondents (32 per cent) indicated the standard has made a difference in how Manitobans access goods and services, 57 per cent of respondents were unsure, and 11 per cent thought the standard had not made a difference.

**Prior to this survey, were you aware that under the Standard all Manitoba businesses / organizations with at least one employee have responsibilities to provide accessible customer service?**



**Has the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service made a difference in how Manitobans access goods and services?**

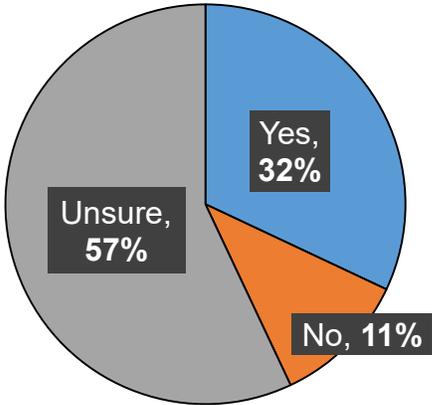


Figure 2: Pie charts identifying participant’s knowledge of the standard and if it has made a difference (n=1025).

**Providing accessible goods and services**

Respondents indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with several statements related to accessible customer service. In response to the statement: “Manitoba’s accessibility laws and standards have changed the way businesses and organizations offer goods and services,” 46 per cent of the poll participants indicated they were neutral or did not know. Overall, 87 per cent either strongly agreed or agreed that access to goods and services is a human right, with four per cent strongly disagreeing. Similarly, 85 per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that it should be a priority for businesses and organizations to be accessible.

Respondents were not as certain whether information provided by the government about accessible customer service is easy to understand. The most common response was neutral (31 per cent), followed by agree (25 per cent) and don’t know (21 per cent). In response to the statement: “I know where to find information about Manitoba accessibility laws and standards,” 48 per cent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed.

In terms of costs, 60 per cent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: “It is too costly for businesses and organizations to make changes to assist those with accessibility needs.” However, 89 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “It is important for businesses and organizations to train staff on how to provide goods and services to people with accessibility needs.”

**Providing accessible goods and services**

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Don't know

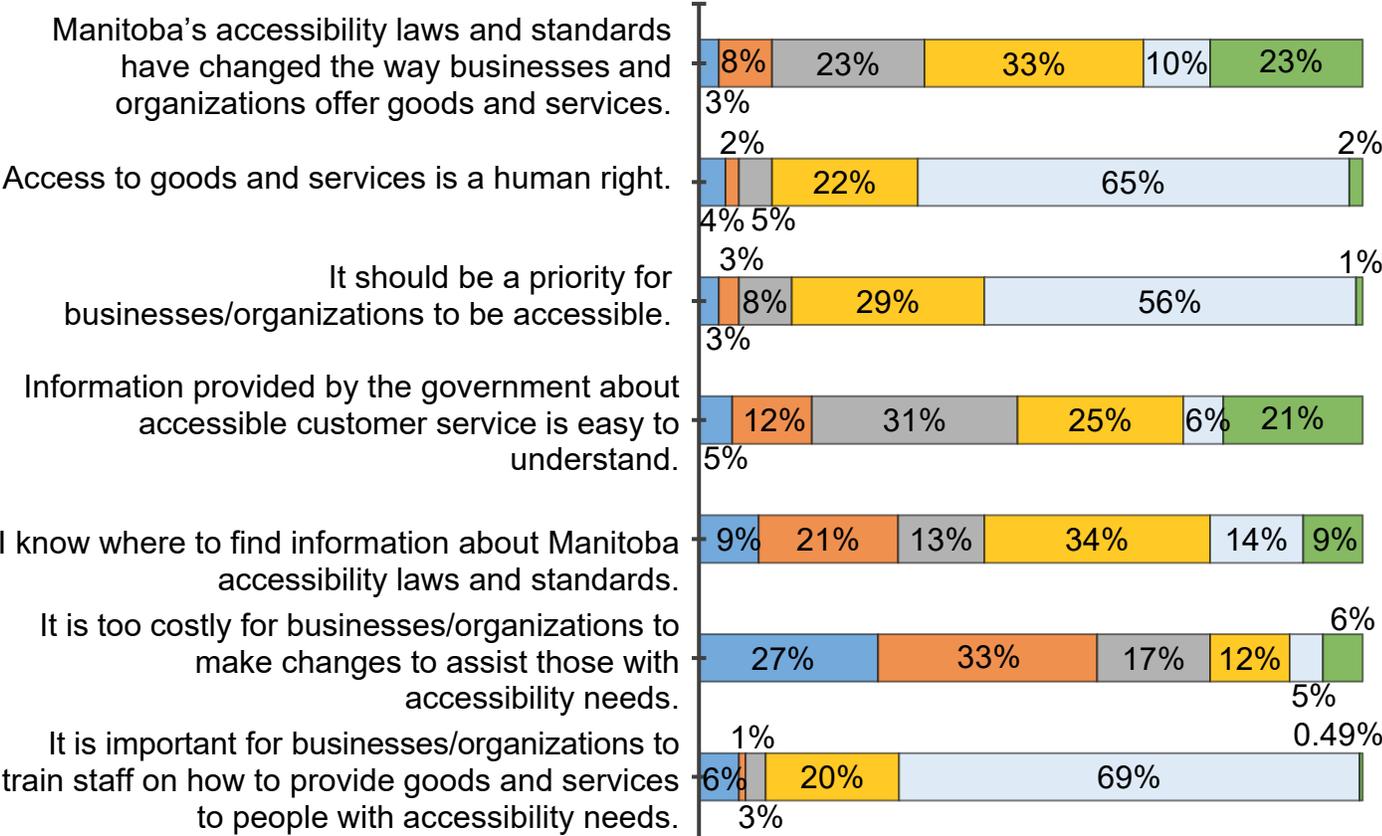


Figure 3: Mandatory questions related to how businesses and organizations in Manitoba can approach providing accessible goods and services for their customers and clients (n=1025).

## **Improving to provide accessible customer service**

Respondents were given examples of how businesses and organizations in Manitoba could improve to provide accessible customer service. They were asked to indicate the extent to which improvement is needed in each area. Substantial improvement needed was the most frequent response to:

- training employees and volunteers on how to provide accessible customer service (44 per cent)
- Maintaining accessibility features (e.g., keeping ramps clear of snow and ice) (42 per cent)
- welcoming feedback from customers and visitors on how to improve accessibility (39 per cent)
- meeting communication needs of individuals with disabilities (e.g., affecting sight, hearing and understanding) (39 per cent)
- accommodating the use of assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs, canes, communication or hearing aids) (37 per cent)
- informing the public when accessibility features are unavailable (e.g., an elevator is broken) (37 per cent)

Some improvement needed was the most common response for:

- allowing service animals in areas where the public can go (33 per cent)
- welcoming support persons who assist customers and clients with disabilities (31 per cent)

## Improving to provide accessible customer service

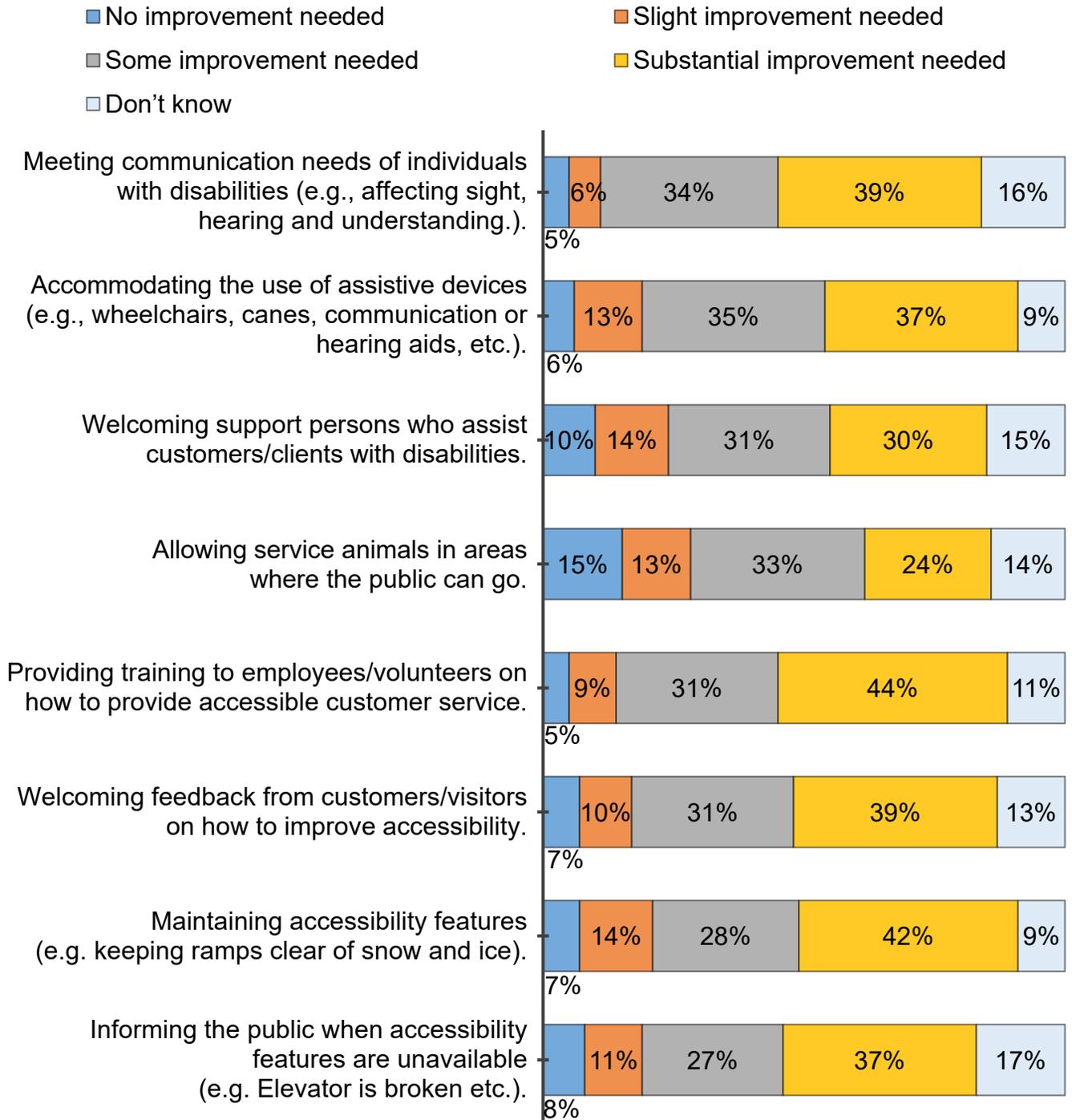


Figure 4: Mandatory questions related to how businesses and organizations in Manitoba can improve to provide accessible customer service (n=1025).

## Open-ended Questions

Respondents tended to focus heavily on improvements they want to see in the built environment – ramps, accessible washrooms, door openers and improved sidewalk clearing. They viewed these as integral to customer service and access to businesses. They had fewer opinions to offer that pertained directly to the requirements of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service. Nonetheless, some key themes emerged.

Respondents tended to favour a multipronged approach to increasing compliance with the standard. They favoured beginning with a softer approach that includes hands-on training for both senior and frontline staff and financial incentives, such as grants and tax rebates for businesses that invest in accessibility measures (particularly retrofits). These respondents indicated that after that work is done, it would be time for a tougher approach to compliance, including audits, inspections, fines and general enforcement.

The survey participants viewed training and awareness as vital to improving customer service. Respondents suggested a public ad campaign, direct outreach and practical advice for businesses, and the creation of online training modules that could be mandatory for new hires. Respondents also felt that an attitude of understanding and patience is often what is really needed to improve customer service (e.g. ingraining the active offer into all interactions.) A number of respondents provided anecdotes to illustrate their points.

When it comes to improving customer service, several practical ideas emerged:

- Encourage businesses to provide their customers with clear messages about the accessibility features they offer on their websites with, for example, a sign on the door. This gives people with disabilities the chance to choose where to take their business and avoids stressful situations.
- Increase the focus of public awareness initiatives and training on invisible disabilities, including sensory issues, autism, chronic pain and cognitive disabilities. Many respondents felt frontline services staff are often ill equipped to deal with these disabilities. They felt the standard should be more explicit in its inclusion of invisible disabilities.
- Listen to and engage people with disabilities. Respondents suggested the Manitoba government and businesses should recruit people with disabilities to design or test any accessibility measures before they put them in place.

A small number of respondents (four per cent) felt the standard and accessibility requirements in general were too onerous and expensive for small businesses. These respondents called for subsidies or grants to help them meet the requirements. Similarly, some respondents felt the provincial government must do a better job of leading by example.

Feedback that was included in the “other” category contained specific examples of locations, infrastructure and systems that respondents felt should be made accessible, along with other comments that could not be grouped.

### Additional Areas of Focus to Improve Access

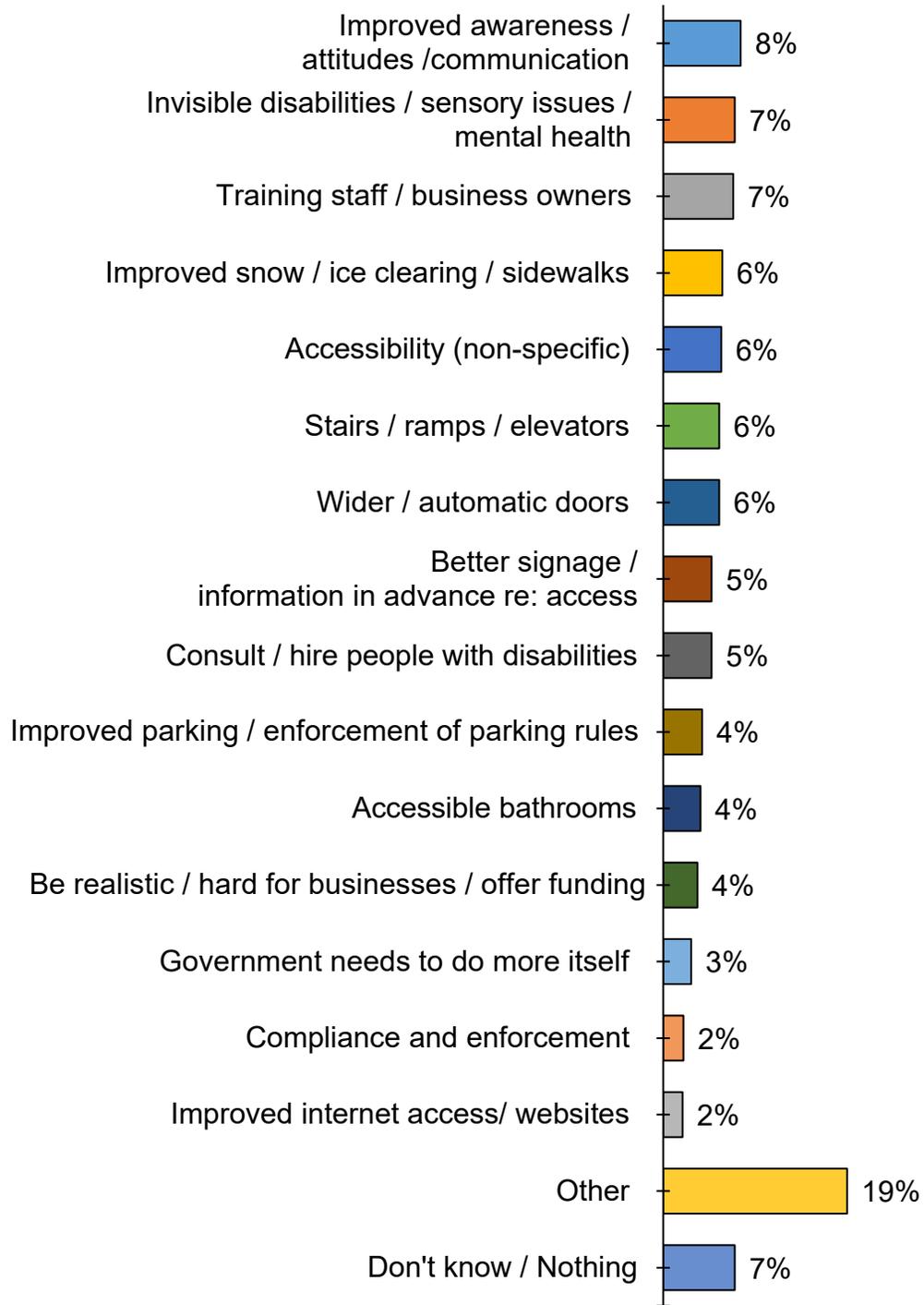


Figure 5: Q. What other areas should businesses and organizations focus on to improve accessibility for all Manitobans? All respondents (N=1,025). Multiple answers accepted. Total will sum to more than 100 per cent.

### Views on Government Role in Supporting Accessibility



Figure 6: Q. What can the government do to better support businesses/organizations to provide goods and services that are accessible for all Manitobans? All respondents (N=1,025) Multiple answers accepted. Total will sum to more than 100 per cent.

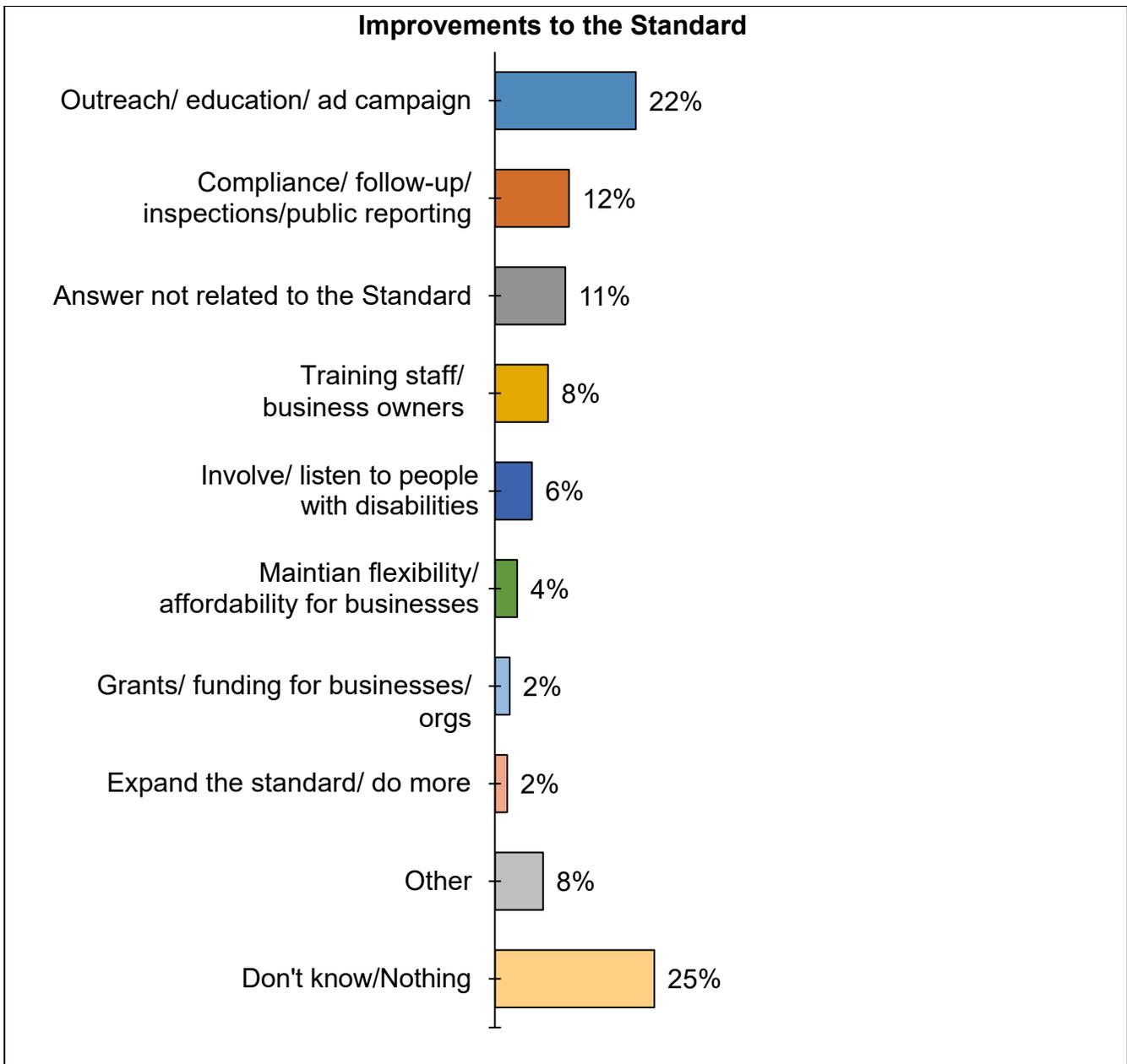


Figure 7: Q. Do you have any suggestions on how the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service can be improved? All respondents (N=1,025). Multiple answers accepted. Total will sum to more than 100 per cent.

## Business and non-profit organization perspective

Respondents were asked to identify whether they were answering the survey as an individual (87 per cent), on behalf of a business or organization (five per cent) or both (nine per cent).

Are you completing this survey...

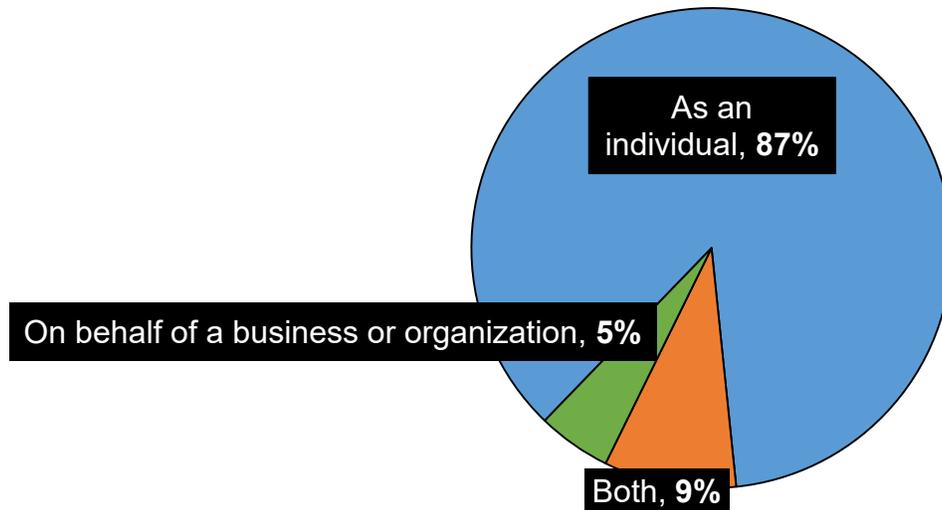
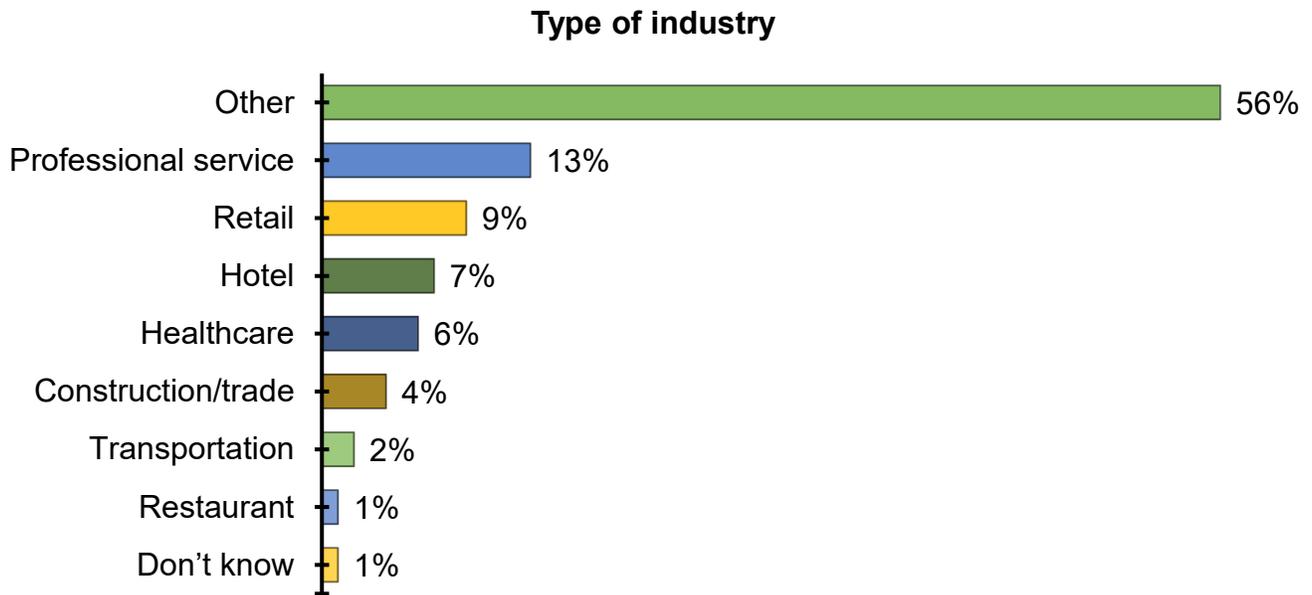


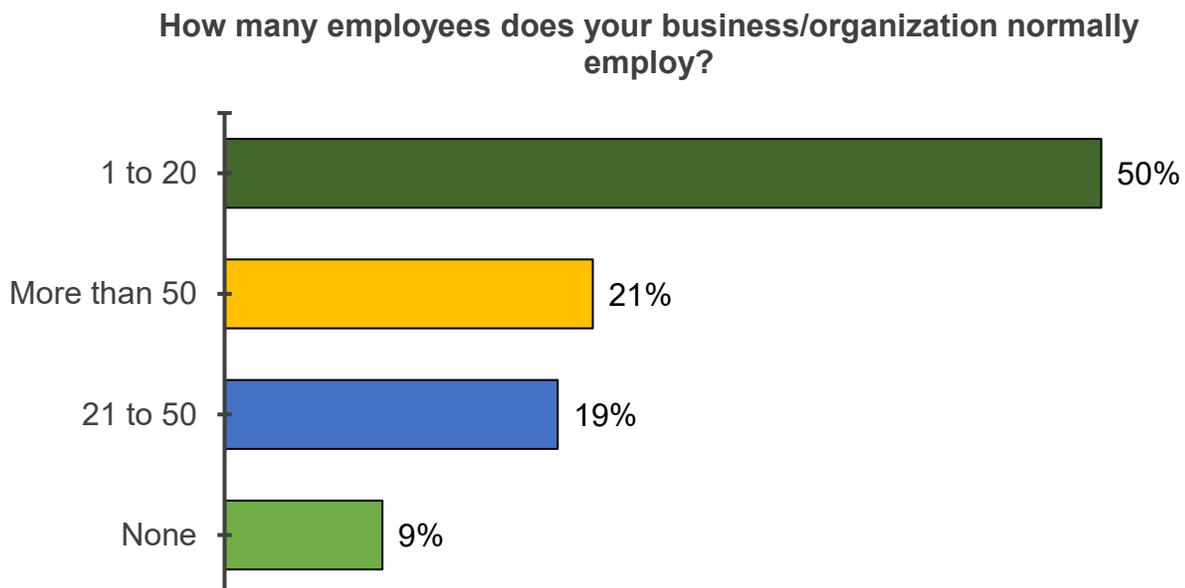
Figure 8: Mandatory question: whether the respondent is participating as an individual, on behalf of an organization or both (n=1025).

Respondents answered the following questions on behalf of their businesses or organizations. The type of industry best represented in the survey responses was professional service (13 per cent), followed by retail (nine per cent). Most respondents (56 per cent) chose other for the type of industry. Other types of industries represented included public sector, non-profit, property management, manufacturing, social services and disability supports.



*Figure 9: Respondents' who answered on behalf of a business or organization by type of industry (n=135).*

The businesses or organizations were small, as the majority of respondents answered that they normally employ one to 20 employees (50 per cent), followed by more than 50 (21 per cent), and 21 to 50 employees (19 per cent) was third.



*Figure 10: Respondents' who answered on behalf of a business or organization grouped by number of employees (n=137).*

## Awareness strategies

Respondents representing businesses and organizations considered ways for the Manitoba government to raise awareness about its accessibility laws. Respondents indicated how valuable various communication methods are to their business or organization. The majority of respondents (60 per cent) indicated that sharing information through social media was very valuable. Fifty-one per cent of respondents also thought it would be very valuable to have SAFE Work Manitoba provide information on accessibility in their regular communications. Somewhat fewer respondents (46 per cent) thought it would be very valuable to create awareness through paid advertising on billboards, bus benches or radio and TV, or to share information through a business association (45 per cent). Respondents were least supportive of sharing information through the mail, with 18 per cent selecting this as not at all valuable.

### Perceived value of awareness-raising strategies for business and organizations

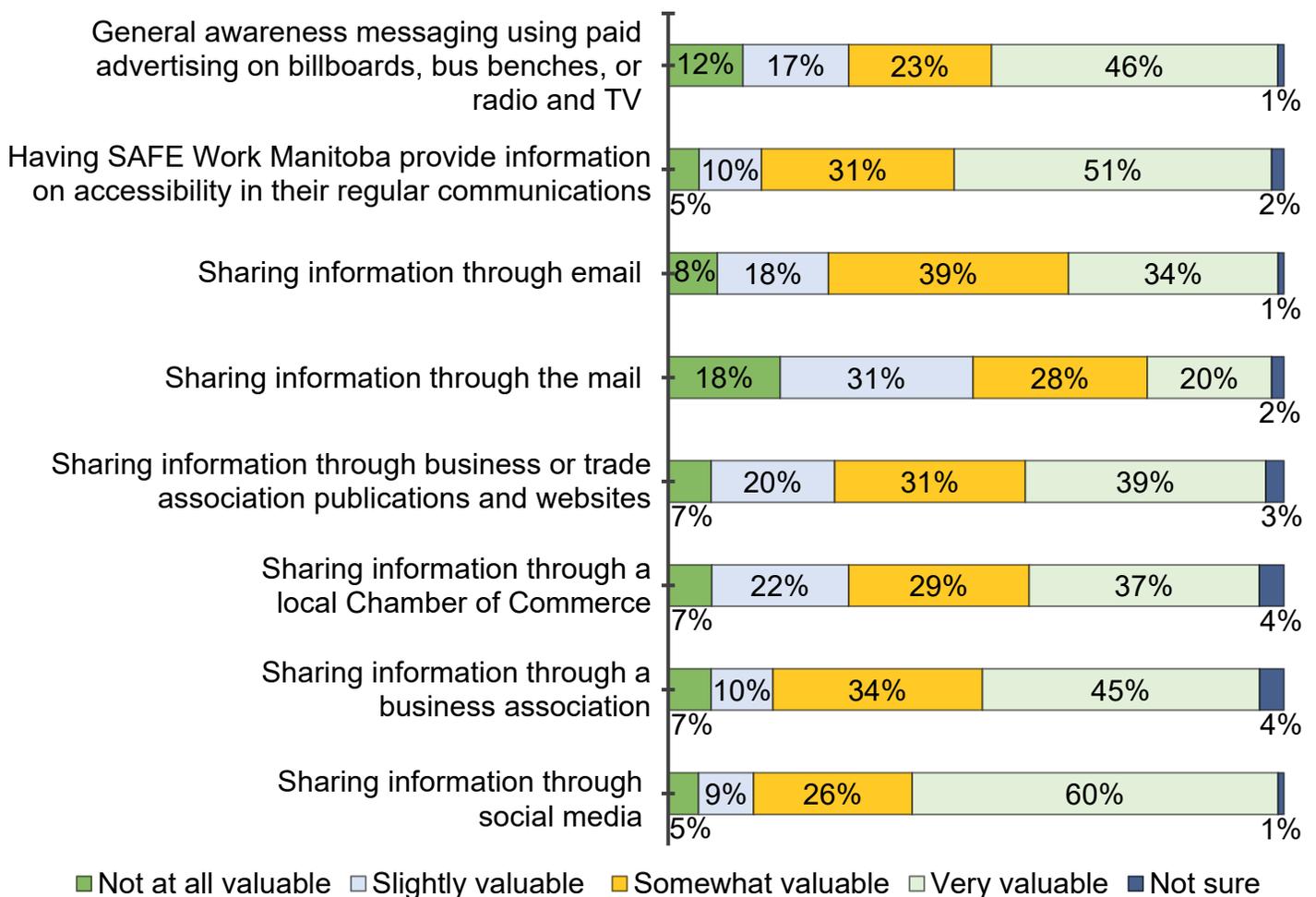


Figure 11: Perceived value of awareness-raising strategies for businesses and organizations. Respondents who answered on behalf of a business or organization (n=137).

## Voluntary Demographic Information

Most respondents answered the voluntary demographic information. The most common age range was 55 to 64 years (27 per cent), followed by 65 to 74 years (22 per cent), then 45 to 54 years (20 per cent).

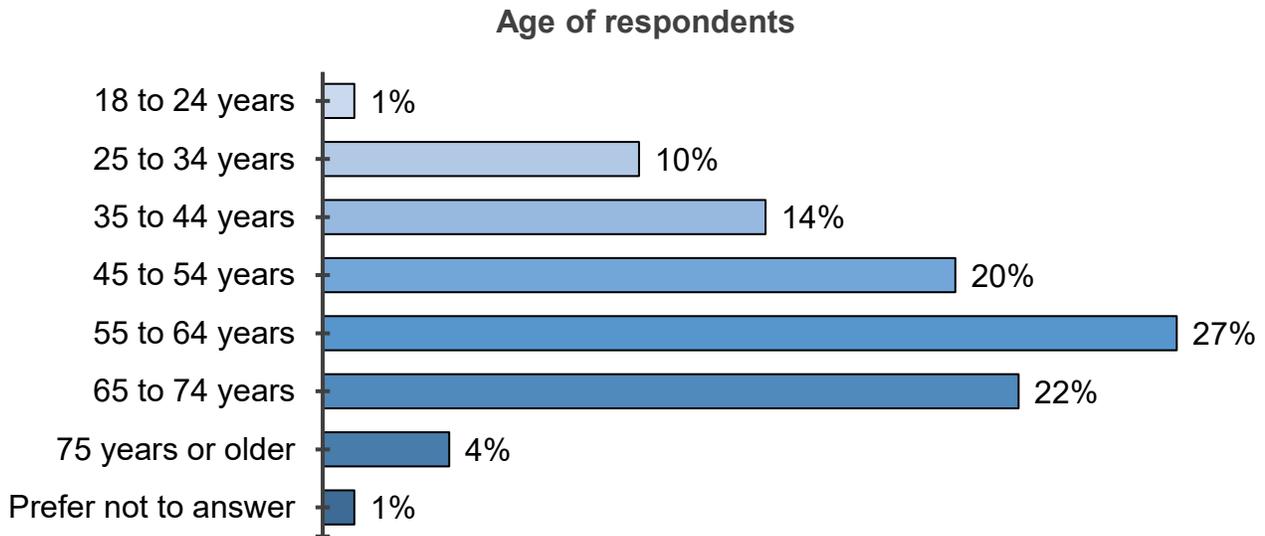


Figure 12: Pie chart showing the age of respondents. Most respondents answered this voluntary question (n=1020).

The majority of the Manitoba respondents (60 per cent) live in the Winnipeg capital region, followed by Southern Manitoba (17 per cent) and then Western Manitoba (nine per cent).

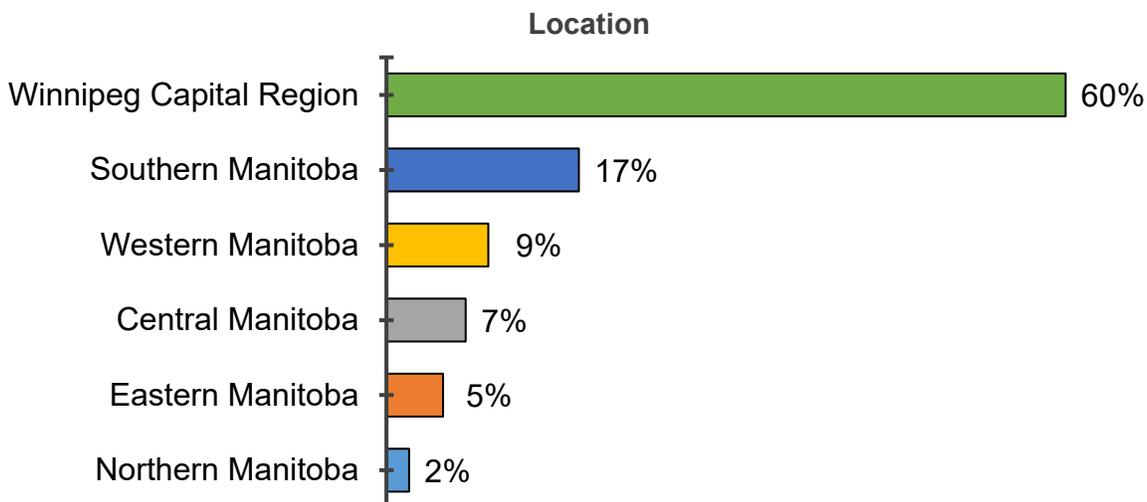


Figure 13: Pie chart showing the location of respondents. Most respondents answered this voluntary question (n=1020).

The survey asked participants if they face limitations in daily activities related to a range of types of disabilities. Respondents could select more than one option. Just over half of the respondents (52 per cent) stated that they did not have a disability. Mobility was the most common type of disability (23 per cent), followed by chronic pain (19 per cent). Ten per cent of respondents were affected by mental health, and the same number had disabilities related to hearing.

The survey also asked respondents whether a household member faced limitations in their daily activities. Half the respondents (50 per cent) responded no, while 40 per cent of respondents stated someone in their household had a disability.

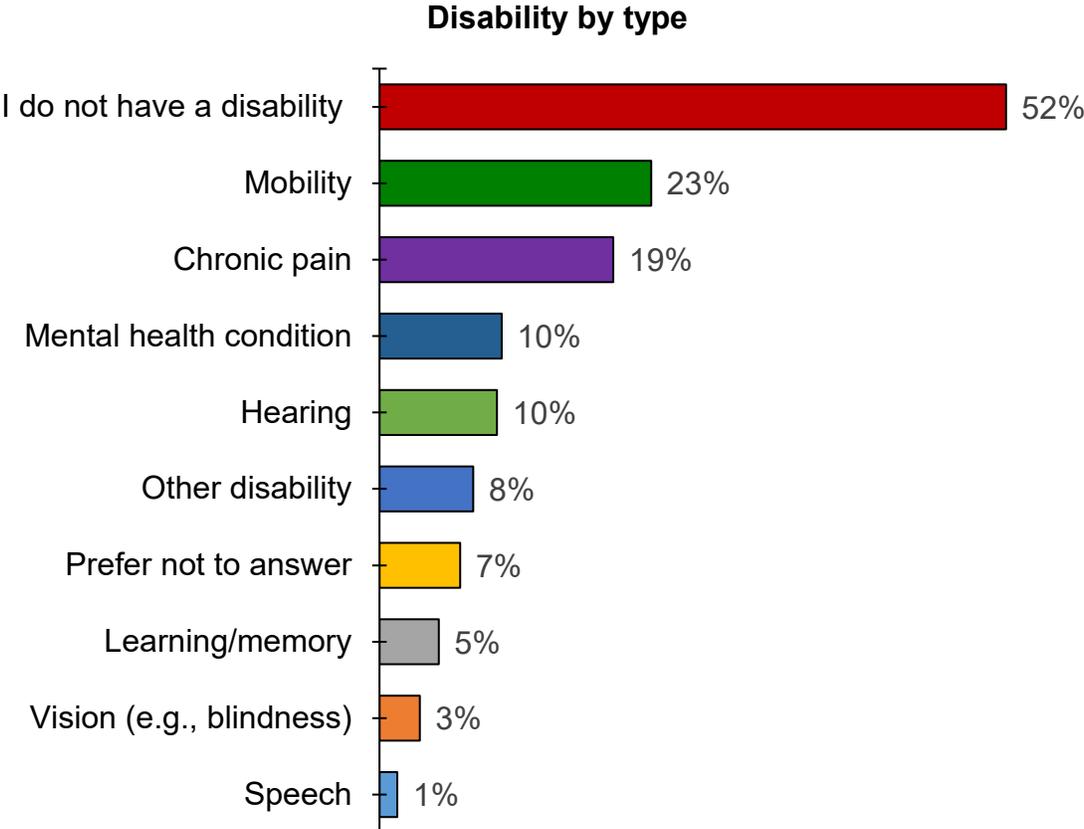


Figure 14: Q. Do you face limitations in your daily activities related to any of the following? Please select all that apply. Totals equal more than 100 per cent (n=1014).

### Household Member with Disability

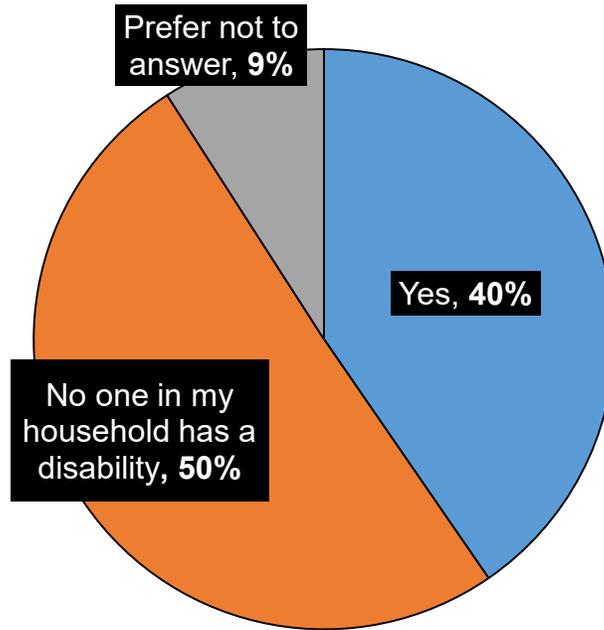


Figure 15: Q. Does a member of your household face limitations in their daily activities? (n=1015).

### Next Steps

The Accessibility Advisory Council has used the data collected to prepare its report and recommendations to the Minister of Families, with a deadline of September 2021.

### Questions?

If you have questions or comments, please contact the Accessibility Advisory Council at [access@gov.mb.ca](mailto:access@gov.mb.ca).