
The Future of Accessible and Healthy Communities

As conversations surrounding accessibility continue to evolve, there are many factors that truly inclusive communities must take into account. Ramps, elevators, and mobility aids are important examples of accessibility, but accessibility extends far beyond physical barriers. It also includes the products we use, the air we breathe, and the ability to safely participate in daily life without exposure to harmful environmental triggers.

For people living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), better ventilation and source control measures — such as fragrance-free practices, lowest-VOC emission products, and least-toxic alternatives — can help create healthier indoor environments. These measures reduce exposure to harmful chemicals, which can make a significant difference in daily life. Together, they can greatly improve quality of life, accessibility, participation, and inclusion.

As awareness continues to grow, communities across Canada are beginning to ask an important question: what would it look like to create healthier, more accessible spaces for everyone?

The True Meaning of Accessibility

Accessibility discussions have traditionally focused on physical accommodations and visible disabilities. However, it is equally important to recognize MCS and other invisible disabilities.

Exposure to fragrances, cleaning products, pesticides, smoke, poor indoor air quality, and other environmental triggers commonly found in workplaces, schools, healthcare settings, public transportation, and community spaces can have serious impacts on the health and well-being of people living with MCS.

When these factors are overlooked, it can become extremely difficult for individuals with MCS to complete their education, participate in the workforce, attend meetings, access healthcare, or

even enter public buildings safely. Recognizing environmental health as an accessibility issue is essential to building truly inclusive communities.

Healthy Environments for All

One of the most important aspects of improving environmental accessibility is that healthier indoor environments benefit everyone — not only people with MCS. Cleaner indoor air, improved ventilation, reduced chemical exposure, and fragrance-free practices can support the health, comfort, productivity, and well-being of the broader public.

Children, older adults, people with asthma or other respiratory conditions, indoor workers, and many others may benefit from these changes.

In recent years, awareness surrounding indoor air quality and safer public environments has also continued to grow. Schools, workplaces, healthcare facilities, conference centres, and organizations are increasingly exploring ways to create environments that prioritize both inclusion and health.

Often, small changes can have a meaningful impact. Prioritizing source control, selecting the least toxic and lowest-emission products, increasing airflow, choosing fragrance-free options, and educating communities about MCS can help create safer and healthier spaces for all.

The Value of Community and Advocacy

Healthier and more accessible communities do not happen on their own. Change is driven by advocacy, education, collaboration, and the voices of people with lived experience.

Through our work with members and communities across Canada, EHAC-ASEC and ASEQ-EHAQ have witnessed firsthand the strength, resilience, and dedication of the environmental health community.

To continue building momentum, it is essential that people with MCS, caregivers, healthcare professionals, researchers, advocates, organizations, and policymakers continue working

together. These conversations help foster understanding, reduce stigma, and build momentum for broader discussions surrounding environmental health, indoor air quality, and accessibility.

Most importantly, they help communities move toward a future in which environmental accessibility is considered from the outset — not as an afterthought.

Towards the Future

Looking ahead, building healthier and more accessible communities will require ongoing education, empathy, and action. Organizations, institutions, employers, governments, and community leaders will need to broaden their understanding of inclusion and recognize the important role environmental health plays in accessibility and participation.

While significant work still remains, there is also hope. Awareness of MCS continues to grow. Conversations surrounding indoor air quality and healthier environments are becoming more common. Advocacy efforts are helping drive policy discussions, improve understanding, and strengthen community awareness.

Every discussion, accommodation, policy improvement, and educational initiative helps move us closer to a future where more people can safely and fully participate in community life.

By continuing to support one another, we can help build communities that are not only more accessible, but also healthier, more welcoming, and more inclusive for everyone.