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## Peel event makes accessibility a priority



**Accessibility Plan.** From left, Madeleine Meilleur, minister of Community and Social Services for the province of Ontario, Meenu Sikand, Region of Peel Accessibility planning specialist, and William Goursky, chair, Peel Region Accessibility Advisory Committee look over a copy of Peel Region's Accessibility Plan at the International Day of Persons with Disabilities Conference held at the Embassy Grand Convention Centre. *Photo by Bryon Johnson*  
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Peel Region has taken steps to eliminate barriers for people with disabilities, but much more needs to be done, says William Goursky, chair of the Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee.

That topic and more will be discussed today at the Embassy Grand Convention Centre in Brampton, site of Positive Images of Disabilities, an all-day conference to raise awareness of accessibility issues in Peel.

Several people with disabilities who have made important contributions to the community will be recognized at the event.

David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, will be awarded the the Region of Peel's 2009 Accessibility Award.

"These people are not superheroes," Goursky said of the award recipients. "They have disabilities and regardless of any barrier that has been placed in front of them, they've overcome those barriers to become successful."

According to recent statistics, 171,030 people in Peel, or 15 per cent of the region's population, have a disability. And experts say that as the population ages, so will the need for more accessible housing.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, passed in 2005, mandates that municipalities, school boards and organizations remove all barriers by 2025.

Earlier this year, Regional councillors approved a Universal Accessible Standard report calling for all new social housing to be more accessible by ensuring there's adequate turning space for wheelchairs and that fixtures such as light switches and thermostats are installed lower on walls.

"What this means is that each new building that's going up now will have a degree of accessibility," Goursky said.

"Universal access means that anyone, regardless of ability or age, will be able to live in their home without barriers. It also means I, if I am in my wheelchair or walker, (will be) able to go anywhere I want and not be turned away."