

# Executive Summary

The project *A Neurodivergent Lens: Recommended Practices for Neuroinclusivity* was executed by the Accessibility Institute at Carleton University, with funding from Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC). It is crucial that standards developers consider neurodivergence when creating standards. The principal goal of this project was to, as an initial step, generate a set of recommended practices that will support standards developers in applying a neurodivergent lens to standards development. By promoting neuroinclusivity in both the content of standards and the standards development process itself, we have the opportunity to increase the accessibility of environments, which are typically designed for individuals with neurotypical cognitive styles. Neurodivergence is a descriptive category that recognizes the diversity of cognitive functioning and typically encompasses non-visible disabilities such as, but not limited to, autism, ADHD, and learning disabilities.

The project engaged with members of the neurodivergent community, as well as standards development professionals to carry out the following objectives:

- Identify some of the accessibility barriers and facilitators for neurodivergent Canadians
- Conduct targeted community consultation to find constructive solutions to inform the creation of the recommended practices and supporting toolkit
- Inform and assist standards development agencies to create more robust and inclusive future standards

In order to meet these objectives, the project team conducted literature reviews, environmental scans, as well as community-focused research including focus groups, interviews, and surveys with members of the neurodivergent community, and individuals who work in standards development. In the first phase of this project, neurodivergent individuals were asked to discuss the barriers and facilitators to accessibility that they experience, and standards development professionals were asked about accessibility considerations in the standards development process, knowledge gaps about neurodivergence in the profession, and preferred ways to access information. The preliminary themes found from the focus group data were then shown back to the neurodivergent participants for their feedback. After their feedback was incorporated, we identified the following key themes:

## Barriers to Inclusion

- Sensory overload hinders participation in daily activities

- Different communication styles and obscure and complicated systems lead to confusion and cause barriers to access
- Lack of support, flexibility, clarity, and understanding are barriers to access
- Neurotypical privilege, expectations, prejudices, and stigma limit inclusion

#### Facilitators to Inclusion

- Sensory-friendly environments are more accessible
- Clear communication and directions relieve stress and facilitate understanding
- The availability of choice within environments promotes autonomy, accessibility, and comfort
- Supports (i.e., social support, assistive devices, as well as accommodations and accessible practices) promote inclusivity
- Awareness and education about neurodivergence encourage inclusion
- Freedom and availability to use personalized meaningful strategies promote accessibility

#### Recommendations for neuroinclusion from the neurodivergent community to standards developers

- Need increased awareness and education about neurodivergence to change attitudes and perceptions
- Create simple, clear standards and easily accessible procedures to advance neuroinclusion
- More diverse and neurodivergent voices need to develop standards and do research

Based on these findings, a draft set of recommended practices to promote neuroinclusivity and accompanying resources were created. In the second phase of this research, both the neurodivergent community and individuals involved in standards development were asked to review and share their feedback on the draft recommended practices and select resources. After their feedback was considered, a set of five key recommended practices to promote neuroinclusivity in the standards development process were created. These recommended practices are broken down into 21 actionable sub-recommendations. The recommended practices are:

1. Use education to improve awareness, reduce stigma, address attitudinal barriers and adjust neurotypical expectations related to neurodivergence to increase neuroinclusivity.
2. Ensure that diverse and neurodivergent voices are involved in research and standards development
3. Reduce ambiguity in communication, processes, and procedures

4. Recognize and accommodate the sensory needs of neurodivergent people
5. Design proactively and be responsive to the needs of neurodivergent people

In addition, this report also includes an implementation guideline which outlines the sub-recommendations as applicable to relevant key stages in the standards development process.