

The Case for a Government Sponsored Interior Design Practice Act

Why an Interior Design Practice Act?

ARIDO is seeking the introduction of a Government sponsored Interior Design Practice Act to regulate the practice of interior design in Ontario.

Currently in Ontario, there is no law to prevent unqualified persons from practising interior design. The purpose of a Practice Act is to protect the public and significantly enhance consumer protection by limiting the practice of interior design to qualified, regulated and insured professionals, similar to architecture and engineering.

Members of the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO) join voluntarily and agree to meet strict professional requirements and adhere to Standards of Practice and a Code of Ethics. However, there is no legal requirement for persons offering interior design services to belong to ARIDO or to meet its standards.

Although there is a law protecting the title of “Interior Designer,” there is currently no law preventing an unqualified person from practising interior design in the province of Ontario. An Interior Design Practice Act would protect consumers. Legislation would authorize ARIDO to establish mandatory standards for competency and would ensure that all persons practising interior design meet those standards.

What is Interior Design?

Interior design is not interior decorating. Interior design is a profession with a unique body of knowledge that has evolved over the past 70 years. An independent study commissioned by ARIDO in 2000 and later updated in 2010 by all North American design associations, called the *Body of Knowledge*, has been adopted as the North American model for the profession. The *Body of Knowledge* research measured the profession of interior design against an objective set of professional criteria developed to determine whether a profession should be granted self-regulatory status.

The profession of interior design in Ontario meets these criteria, including the need for:

- A formal, profession-specific body of knowledge;
- Rigorous educational and experience standards, as well as practical training requirements and an independently administered, standardized professional examination;
- A demonstrated willingness to favour the public interest, including the establishment of a Code of Ethics, professional Standards of Practice and a Complaints and Discipline process to respond to consumer complaints and protect the public, that its members currently voluntarily adhere to; and,
- Participation in a mandatory continuing education program.

Interior designers are formally trained to design spaces that enhance and protect the health and safety of the public.

They are trained in:

- Building and fire codes;
- Sustainability and energy efficiency;
- The flammability and toxicity of materials;
- Space planning and interior construction;
- Design for special needs populations; and,
- Product quality and durability.

The scope of practice includes, but is not limited to:

- Designing and programming interior functional requirements;
- The development of optional solutions, with the related pros and cons of each;
- Project management; tendering of all goods and services involved;
- Quality control to ensure compliance with contract documents and regulatory codes; and,
- Creative development of identity and branding.

Interior design includes the development of all public interior spaces, such as corporate offices, health and long-term care facilities, restaurants, retail stores and shopping malls, academic institutions, airports, detention centres and public facilities. All work is performed under the guiding principles of safeguarding the public while creating effective interior spaces that achieve the client's objectives and balance practical design solutions with technical requirements and aesthetics.

What Would an Interior Design Practice Act Do?

A Government sponsored Practice Act would limit the practice of interior design to qualified practitioners and authorize ARIDO to establish and enforce mandatory standards for competency and to ensure that all persons practising interior design meet those standards.

A Government sponsored Practice Act for Interior Design would:

- Protect the public by limiting the practice of interior design to qualified, regulated and insured professionals;
- Provide a legal definition of the scope of practice of interior design to help consumers distinguish between the responsibilities of interior designers and the services of other design professionals;
- Regulate interior design in public buildings, such as health and long-term care facilities, detention centres, academic institutions, airports, corporate and government offices, restaurants, retail stores and shopping malls, and other public facilities;
- Be consistent with the principles of the Ontario Building Code and with the legislation governing both architects and engineers, which sets out specific types of buildings that already require the services of an architect or engineer for structural purposes;

- Exempt residential and business structures less than 600 square metres (6,450 square feet) from the requirement to use an interior designer;
- Establish minimum standards of competency, including education, experience, and independently administered, standardized professional examinations;
- Require anyone practising interior design to adhere to Standards of Practice and a Code of Ethics;
- Require that ARIDO's governing Council include members of the public appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council;
- Set up a Complaints and Discipline process accessible to the consumer, to ensure that the standards are enforceable;
- Authorize ARIDO to require members to participate in a mandatory continuing education program;
- Protect the health and safety of the public by requiring the services of an Interior Designer for interiors of buildings where the services of architects and engineers are currently required; and,
- Not impact on the practice of architects and engineers.

Consumers would benefit from legislation that:

- Ensures standards of competency and continued professional development for anyone practising interior design;
- Requires interior designers to carry professional and general liability insurance and authorizes ARIDO to require participation in a mandatory continuing education program;
- Provides direct access to an enforceable Complaints and Discipline process for consumers and assists them in identifying qualified, regulated and insured professionals; and,
- Authorizes ARIDO to regulate the profession and prohibit unqualified individuals from practising interior design, calling themselves interior designers or holding themselves out as a qualified interior designer.

Why now?

Ontario has been experiencing an unprecedented increase in construction activity over the past several years. The interior design industry in Ontario employs thousands of people and generates over \$10 billion of economic activity in the province annually related to this activity. Continual developments in construction techniques and materials and the current increase in building activity in Ontario reinforce the need for regulated professionals to design interior spaces.

The practice of interior design has evolved over the past 70 years. Recently, there have been societal changes that have increased public attention to health, safety and welfare in public spaces. Emphasis on indoor air quality, sustainability, energy efficiency and employee performance drive the need for more highly qualified interior design practitioners. These changes have influenced the growth of interior design's specialized knowledge as it relates to health, safety and welfare.

An Interior Design Practice Act would create a regulatory framework for interior design. Ontario-trained interior designers are recognized as leaders in their profession around the world, working globally in the United States, South America, the Middle East and Asia. An interior design Practice Act in Ontario will leverage the skills and competencies of Ontario-trained interior designers by establishing standards that will be recognized in the global market. This will position Ontario to benefit from a strong interior design sector for years to come.

Summary

The profession of interior design is ready for self-regulation, with more than 1,800 Interior Designers having demonstrated their unanimous support for self-regulation by voluntarily joining ARIDO and meeting its professional standards.

There is a compelling case for the introduction of a Government sponsored Interior Design Practice Act. If passed, this Act would:

- Enhance public health, safety and consumer protection;
- Recognize the professional evolution of interior design as a profession;
- Recognize the significant role interior designers play, alongside architects and engineers, in the design and construction of public interior spaces;
- Ensure only qualified professionals are on project teams;
- Position Ontario as a global leader in interior design;
- Respond to a public requirement for effective and safe practice of interior design, especially given the current increase in building activity in Ontario; and,
- Authorize ARIDO to regulate and govern the practice of interior design throughout the province.

ARIDO believes there is a strong public interest case for the self-regulation of interior design, and that a Government sponsored Bill would receive the support of all parties in the Legislature and from industry stakeholders, including architects and engineers.

The self-regulation of interior design is cost neutral to the Government and requires no Government funding.