



Accessible Customer Service

Training Documents for Contractors and Goods and Service Providers

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) was passed by the Ontario legislature with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province. The AODA allows the government to develop standards specific to accessibility that are designed to make Ontario more accessible.

The first accessibility standard to be developed came into effect January 1, 2008, in the form of Ontario Regulation 429/07, "Accessibility Standards for Customer Service" (the Standard).

Under the Standard, Haldimand County must, by January 1, 2010, have trained contractors and goods and service providers (herein referred to as contractors) who interact with the public or other third parties on the County's behalf. Contractors are fully responsible for providing Accessible Customer Service training to all of their staff who provide these services, inclusive of providing this document to their staff. A contractor representative with delegated authority must return a signed [Compliance Form for Contractors](#) to the designated County contact.

DISABILITY CATEGORIES

The enclosed information defines specific categories of disability, and outlines some tips to assist contractors and goods and service providers in providing accessible customer service.

Hearing disabilities

Definition: severe to profound hearing loss; be hard of hearing so use their residual hearing and speech to communicate; deafened, cause to hear poorly or not at all.

Tips for serving customers with hearing difficulties:

- Attract customer's attention before speaking – gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand
- Look directly at the person
- May use pen and paper
- Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face and
- Reduce background noise

Deafblind disabilities

Definition: cannot see or hear to some degree; may be accompanied by a support person (a professional who helps with communication using Sign Language that involves touching the hands of the client).

Tips for serving customers who are deafblind:

- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person
- Identify yourself to the support person

Intellectual or development disabilities

Definition: intellectual development and capacity that is below average; can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently; may have an invisible disability; they may understand you more than you know.

Tips for serving customers who have intellectual or development disabilities:

- Do not assume what a customer can, or cannot do
- Use plain language
- Take your time, be patient
- Ask, "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time; step-by-step instructions
- Offer information in simpler concepts

Learning disabilities

Definition: affects how a person acquires, interprets, retains, or takes in information; in many cases, the individual has average or above-average intelligence; may affect language based learning, mathematics, writing, fine motor skills.

Tips for serving customers who have learning disabilities:

- Take some time, be patient
- Demonstrate a willingness to assist
- Speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer
- Provide information in a way that works for your customer (e.g. use a pen and paper)
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide

Mental health disabilities

Definition: the absence of psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society. Some common features of mental health disabilities are phobias, panic attacks, hallucinations, mood swings, bipolar disorders (depression and manic phases). Mental health disabilities are often an invisible disability.

Tips for serving customers with mental health disabilities:

- Treat customer with the same level of respect and consideration as all customers
- Be confident and reassuring
- Do not be confrontational
- If the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help
- Take customer seriously
- Do not take things personally

Speech or language disabilities

Definition: may have problems communicating; may have difficulty to pronounce words, slur or stutter; may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

Tips for serving customers with speech or language disabilities:

- Do not make assumptions
- Give whatever time the customer needs to get their point across
- Where possible, ask questions that can be answered “yes”, or “no”
- Do not interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences
- May use a pen and paper
- When necessary say, “I do not understand, can you repeat that?”

Physical or mobility disabilities

Definition: a physical or mobility disability can be present at birth, result from disease, injury or impairment and may restrict a person in the following ways, control or speed of movements, coordination and balance, ability to grasp objects, walk long distances, sit or stand for prolonged periods.

Tips for servicing customers with physical or mobility disabilities

- Speak directly to the customer
- Ask the customer if they need help
- Respect the customers personal space
- Do not move any items they may have (i.e., walking cane)
- If the customer asks for your help, do not leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position (i.e., person in a wheelchair facing a wall)

Vision disabilities

Definition: Can be present at birth, result from disease, ageing or injury. Most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision; very few are totally blind. Persons with low, or no vision will probably have difficulty in reading signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Customer may use a guide dog, or a white cane. May need to view written documents in large print, or with a help of a magnifier.

Tips for serving customers with vision disabilities:

- Do not assume the customer cannot see you
- Speak directly to the customer
- If they need wayfinding assistance, offer your elbow for them to hold, if they accept, walk slowly and identify landmarks
- Be precise and descriptive with information
- Do not leave customer

Most importantly, recognize your nervousness and relax!

People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you.

Just remember to ask: **“How can I help?”**

ASSISTIVE OPTIONS

The following provides tips for interacting with customers using assistive devices, customers with service animals, and customers with support persons.

Customers using assistive equipment

- Inappropriate to lean on or reach over them
- Ensure that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the device and to utilize the device unless excluded by law
- Potential barriers to the use of assistive devices must be removed where possible
- Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on the provider's premises or otherwise supplied by the provider
- Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence

Customers with service animals

- Allowed anywhere customers normally have access
- Customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal
- Avoid talking to, touching, or making eye contact with the service animal
- Customer is permitted to keep the animal with them unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises (e.g. areas where food is prepared)

Customers with support persons

- Both persons are permitted to enter the premises together
- The person with the disability is not prevented from having access to the support person while on the premises
- Consent is required if confidential information is going to be shared when a support person is present
- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person