

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act



An Overview



Overview

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, is the law passed by the Ontario legislature that allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility and to enforce them. These accessibility standards are the building blocks that Ontario will use to make real, measurable, and effective changes to accessibility with the goal to make Ontario fully accessible to all by 2025. Standards have been developed in 5 key areas:

- Customer Service Standard
- Information and Communication Standard
- Employment Standard
- Design of Public Spaces Standard
- Transportation Standard



The standards require organizations to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in key areas of daily living. A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability.

Barriers include:

- **Attitude:** It's hard to change the way people think and act. Some people don't know how to communicate with people who have disabilities. Attitude is a major barrier that is within our power to change!
- **Architectural or structural:** The way a building is designed, from stairs and doorways, to room layout can be a barrier.



-
- **Information and communication:** These barriers can make it difficult for people to receive information and communicate with others.
 - **Technology:** Everyday tools like computers and telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind. This technology, or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information.
 - **Systemic:** These barriers can result from an organization's policies, practices and procedures, especially if they restrict people with disabilities.

The Customer Service Standard is the first of the five standards that will help remove these barriers and lead the way to an accessible Ontario by 2025.



Customer Service Standard

Ontario's Accessible Customer Service Standard came into force on January 1, 2008. This standard required the BCHS to:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing services and support to people with disabilities in a way that works for them,
- Train our employees, volunteers, physicians and others about people with disabilities and what services are available to them,
- Communicate with a person who has a disability in a manner that takes into account their disability
- Give people with disabilities a way to provide feedback on concerns about access to our services, and,
- Give people with disabilities notice when our facilities or services are interrupted and we are unable to provide services for them.



Who is a Person with a Disability?



The definition of disability under the AODA Customer Services Standard is the same as the definition of disability in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

“**Disability**” means:

- a) Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- b) A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- c) A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more processes in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- d) A mental disorder, or
- e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act



GENERAL TIPS FOR PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Treat persons with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs just as you would with any other customer.
- Avoid stereotypes and make no assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities the person has. Some disabilities are not visible and customers are not required to give you information about any disabilities they may have.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?" Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his or her support person or companion.



GENERAL TIPS FOR PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE (continued)

- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. A good start is to listen carefully.
- If you cannot understand what your customer is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves. Be creative and use other ways of communicating if necessary (like using written materials or an assistive device).
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't touch or move assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.
- Make an effort to learn about appropriate language and terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities.



How to interact with customers who have physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Mobility device (i.e., wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, crutches)
- Support Person
- Elevator



How to interact with customers who have physical disabilities

- Speak naturally and directly to your customer, not to his or her companion or support person.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone in a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.
- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Do not lean over him or her or on his/her assistive device.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes or walkers, out of the person's reach.



How to interact with customers who have vision loss

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few people with vision loss are totally blind - many have limited vision, including loss of peripheral or side vision or a lack of central vision. Some people can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Vision loss can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Braille, large print or magnification devices
- White Cane
- Guide Dog
- Support Person, such as a sighted guide.



How to interact with customers who have vision loss (continued)

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer, and speak directly to him or her, even if he/she is accompanied by a companion.
- Don't touch your customer without asking permission. Offer your elbow to guide the person. If he or she accepts, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so. Lead – don't pull.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around him or her. Be clear and precise when giving directions.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't leave the individual in the middle of a room. Always guide the individual to a chair or comfortable location. Always verbally indicate when you are leaving.



How to interact with customers who are Culturally Deaf, orally deaf, deafened or hard of hearing

People who have hearing loss may be Culturally Deaf, orally deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

“Culturally Deaf”, is the term used to describe a person who identifies with, and participates in the language, community and culture of Deaf people based on the use of ASL (American Sign Language).

“Orally deaf” is a term describing a person with a profound hearing loss that uses speech.

“Deafened” describes a person who grew up hearing, or hard of hearing, and either suddenly or gradually experienced a profound loss of hearing.

“Hard of hearing” describes a person who has some degree of hearing loss, but uses spoken work to communicate.



How to interact with customers who are Culturally Deaf, orally deaf, deafened or hard of hearing (continued)

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Hearing aid
- Paper and pen
- Personal and/or phone amplifier devices
- TTY machines
- Hearing ear dog
- ASL Interpreter
- Support person.



How to interact with customers who are Culturally Deaf, orally deaf, deafened or hard of hearing (continued)

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking – with a gentle touch on the shoulder or a gentle wave of your hand.
- Find a quiet and well-lit area in which to communicate.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not the interpreter or support person.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Confirm that your customer understands you.
- Don't assume that the person knows sign language or read lips. If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, e.g.. pen and paper.



How to interact with customers who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind has a combination of vision and hearing loss. This results in difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Braille, large print, magnification devices or communication boards
- Print on paper or use portable white and black boards
- Hearing aid with built-in FM system
- White Cane
- Service animal
- Support Person, such as an intervener



How to interact with customers who are deafblind (continued)

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deafblind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with him or her or give you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate with him or her.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach your customer who is deafblind, but then speak directly to your customer as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't suddenly touch a person who is deafblind or touch them without permission.



How to interact with customers who have speech or language impairments

Some people have difficulty communicating because of their disability. Limitations in speech or language may be due to problems with articulation, voice strength or language expression. They may also be non-vocal. They may prevent the person from expressing themselves or prevent them from understanding written or spoken language.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Communication boards
- Paper and pen
- Speech generating device
- Support person



How to interact with customers who have speech or language impairments (continued)

- Don't assume that because a person has one disability, they also have another. For example, if a customer has difficulty speaking, it doesn't mean they have an intellectual or developmental disability as well.
- Ask your customer to repeat the information if you don't understand.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" if possible.
- Try to allow enough time to communicate with your customer as they may speak more slowly.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Concentrate on the content of the conversation, not the delivery.



How to interact with customers who have mental health disabilities

Mental health disabilities are not as visible as many other types of disabilities. They are medical conditions that impair thinking, feeling and behavior. You may not know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you are informed of it.

A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty with one, several or none of these:

- Inability to think clearly
- Hallucinations (e.g. hearing voices, seeing or feeling things that aren't there)
- Depression or acute mood swings
- Poor concentration or difficulty remembering
- Apparent lack of motivation



How to interact with customers who have mental health disabilities (continued)

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient and supportive.
- Eliminate as many distractions as possible.
- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with your customer to try to meet their needs
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, be calm and professional and ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.



How to interact with customers who have intellectual or developmental disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit the person's ability to learn, communicate, socialize and take care of their everyday needs.

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate that you treat them with respect.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Communication boards
- Speech generating device
- Service animal or support person



How to interact with customers who have intellectual or developmental disabilities (continued)

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences. Provide one piece of information at a time.
- To confirm if your customer understands what you have said, consider asking the person to repeat the message back to you in his/her own words.
- If you cannot understand what is being said, simply ask again.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or support person.



How to interact with customers who have learning disabilities

The term “learning disability” describes a wide range of information processing disorders that can affect how a person acquires, organizes, expresses, retains, understands or uses verbal or non-verbal information.

Learning disabilities can result in different communication difficulties for people. They can interfere with your customer’s ability to receive, express or process information. You may not know that a person has a learning disability unless you are told.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Alternative technology for writing
- Scanning or reading technology
- Tape recorders, mini pocket recorders

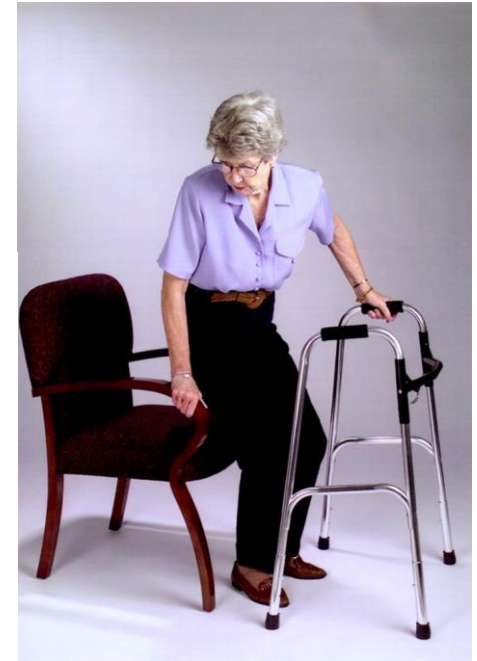


How to interact with customers who have learning disabilities (continued)

- When you know someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can help.
- Speak naturally, clearly and directly to your customer.
- Allow extra time if necessary – people may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Remember to communicate in a way that takes into account the customer's disability.
- If a person needs to remember anything after a meeting, provide checklists or to-do-lists.
- Be patient and willing to explain something again, if needed.



Assistive Devices



An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating or lifting. It helps the person to maintain their independence at home, at work and in the community.

There are a variety of assistive devices that some of your customers may use, depending on their disability. Many will be personal assistive devices, meaning they are owned and brought along by the individual, while others are provided by the Brant Community Healthcare System.



Learn How to Use Assistive Devices

- There are many types of assistive devices available for people who have disabilities. A person with a disability may be able to show you how to use their personal device.
- Don't touch or handle the device without permission.
- Don't move any assistive device out of the person's reach.
- Respect the person's space. Do not lean over the person or on his assistive device.
- If your area has assistive devices available, learn how to use them and where they are kept.



Service Animals



Service animals are animals trained to provide assistance to a person with a disability – they are not pets.

Under the standard, an animal is a service animal if it is readily apparent that the animal is used for reasons relating to his or her disability, or if the person has a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his/her disability.

If a service animal is with a patient, visitor, employee or medical staff member, the animal can access all areas of the hospital except any areas that require special precautions (i.e. masks, gowns etc.) or areas like the Operating Room.



-
- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal.
 - Avoid touching or addressing service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
 - Do not separate the service animal from his/her owner without consent.
 - Avoid making assumptions about the animal – not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses. If you are not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.
 - Remember your customer is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. You are not expected to provide care or food for the animal.



SUPPORT PERSONS



A support person is an individual hired or chosen to accompany a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods and services. The support person can be a paid personal support worker, volunteer, a friend or family member. He/she does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

A support person can access all areas of the hospital that a person with a disability need access to, unless there is a health and safety concern for that person, the patient, or the employee.



-
- A customer with a disability might not introduce their support person. If you are not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting service, or simply ask.
 - Remember to speak directly to the person with the disability not to his or her support person.
 - Ask the person with the disability if they are comfortable with their support person knowing their personal health information and document this.



ASL Interpreters



An American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter is **not** a support person. ASL interpreters are **access** to information, they are bound by a code of ethics, they cannot add/delete information, respond on behalf of the Deaf person and they cannot influence or help them make decisions. An ASL interpreter is not present to support the Deaf person – their only role is to bridge communication between the spoken language and signed language.

ASL interpreters receive specialized training and screening, and are monitored by a governing body.

