

ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER
SERVICE GUIDE

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BURLINGTON • ONTARIO



Accessible Customer Service

The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#) – Ontario regulation 429/07, Accessibility Standards for Customer Service became law in 2005 and is the first of its kind in Canada. The goal of the act is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. Ontario is developing mandatory, province-wide standards to achieve this goal and to improve accessibility. Standards are being developed in key areas of everyday life including:

- Customer Service
- Employment
- Transportation
- Information and communications
- The built environment

This guide will give you a basic overview on how to best interact with a person with a disability so that you may provide our services in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities and to help you to understand your obligations under the customer service standard. It explains the standard in plain terms.

This guide is not legal advice. Many sections of the standard regulation are included in this document but not all. To obtain a copy of the official version of the standard regulation, please see below:

Compliance resources

For further information that will help providers comply with the customer service standard go to the Ministry of Community and Social Services website at www.AccessOn.ca/compliance.

To get a copy of the regulation

To view the official wording of the regulation, go to [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#) or [Loi de 2005 sur l'accessibilité pour les personnes handicapées de l'Ontario](#)

For more information or to get this document in an alternate format, contact:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Contact Centre (*ServiceOntario*)

Toll-free: 1-866-515-2025

TTY: 416-325-3408 / Toll-free: 1-800-268-7095

Fax: 416-325-3407

Website: www.AccessON.ca

Free e-learning course

Serve-Ability: Transforming Ontario's Customer Service

In English: http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcss/serve-ability/FLASH_Eng/index.html

In French: http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcss/serve-ability/FLASH_Fre/index.html



This e-learning course is a free Accessible Customer Service Training video available online in an audio/visual format.

Background

Why does Ontario need accessibility standards?

Several laws in Ontario address accessibility and some requirements have existed since the 1980s. Since then, progress on accessibility has been made in some areas and by some organizations.

Despite this, accessibility remains limited. People with disabilities still do not have equal access to services, employment, transportation, information or buildings that others in Ontario enjoy. They cannot count on accessibility being available. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 was passed with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province.

What is the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)?

AODA Section 1.

Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of this Act is to benefit all Ontarians by,

- (a) developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025; and
- (b) providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and of various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), is a law passed by the Ontario legislature that allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility and to enforce them. The standards are made into laws called regulations, and they provide the details to help meet the goal of the AODA. The AODA is the foundation on which the standards are built.

The purpose of the accessibility standards is to move organizations in Ontario forward on accessibility. The standards will set requirements in a number of key areas and will be reviewed at least every five years. New requirements may be added. Ontario will move step by step towards accessibility that is widespread and commonplace, accessibility that people with disabilities can count on, on a daily basis. In this way Ontario will fully benefit from the contributions, involvement and spending power of people with disabilities.

Further, increasing accessibility will help prepare Ontario for the future. As the population ages, the number of people with disabilities will increase. Visitors and tourists, along with their friends and family will need to travel, shop, use programs, services, and information and to access buildings, parks, and other places in a way that is accessible to them.

What other accessibility standards are expected?

The customer service standard is the first standard developed under the AODA. Other proposed standards are being developed in the areas of transportation, information and communications, employment and the built environment. Like the customer service standard, the other proposed standards are being developed by standards development committees. The committees are made up of people with disabilities or their representatives, representatives of the business community, the broader public sector and the Ontario government.

How does the AODA relate to the customer service standard?

In addition to being the foundation for the customer service standard, the AODA has some specific requirements and rules that must be considered when reading the standard. The key areas of the AODA that should be considered are outlined below:

I. Who is a person with a disability?

The definition of disability under the AODA is the same as the definition of disability in the Ontario Human Rights Code. This is the definition of disability that applies to the customer service standard.

AODA Section 2.

In this Act,

“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 a 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 of the processes involved 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, 1997;

The definition includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities, and disabilities the effects of which may come and go.

Example: A person with arthritis has a disability that over time may increase in severity.

Example: A person with a brain injury has a disability that is not visible.

Example: A person with multiple sclerosis has a disability that causes her to experience periods when the condition does not have an effect on her daily routine and other periods when it does.

It is important to understand that information about a disability is personal and private and must be treated confidentially. In most cases it will not be necessary to ask for proof of a disability. Through implementing the customer service standard, accessibility will simply become part of every day service delivery. Some providers such as schools, colleges and universities may require proof of disability because of the type of services that they provide. In such cases, these providers may be subject to privacy-related laws with respect to that information.

II. The customer service standard and other laws

AODA Section 3.

Nothing in this Act or in the regulations diminishes in any way the legal obligations of the Government of Ontario or of any person or organization with respect to persons with disabilities that are imposed under any other Act or otherwise imposed by law.

[AODA Section 38.](#)

[If a provision of this Act, of an accessibility standard or of any other regulation conflicts with a provision of any other Act or regulation, the provision that provides the highest level of accessibility for persons with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, employment, accommodation, buildings, structures or premises shall prevail.](#)

There are other laws related to accessibility that may apply to organizations covered by the customer service standard, such as the Ontario Building Code Act, 1992 and the Ontario Human Rights Code. The AODA and the customer service standard do not replace or change what you must do under these and any other laws. For example, a provider must still comply with the Ontario Human Rights Code, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in goods, services or facilities, accommodations, contracts, employment, and vocational organizations. The AODA and the customer service standard have not changed the rules that exist under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Where the standard sets different rules than other laws, a provider may have to comply with both. For example, a provider must comply with the rules of the Ontario Human Rights Code, in addition to new rules under the AODA and the standard such as to provide a process for receiving feedback about how it provides service to people with disabilities.

III. What if the standard conflicts with other laws?

If two laws conflict with one another, Section 38 of the AODA states that the law that provides the higher level of accessibility is the law that must be followed.

IV. How will this standard be enforced?

The AODA allows for enforcement of the customer service standard through inspections, compliance orders and administrative penalties. Details of enforcement will be set out in a new regulation that is planned for 2008.

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

Key requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures for providing goods or services to people with disabilities.
 - Communicate with a person with a disability in a way that takes their disability into account.
 - Permit people to use their own personal assistive devices to access goods or services.
 - Permit people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal in areas that are opened to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.
 - Permit people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public.
 - Train Volunteers and staff or others who interact with the public or other third parties on behalf of the Festival on the requirements as outlined in the Customer Service Standards.
 - Establish a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way goods and services are provided to people with disabilities.
 - Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on are unavailable.
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Sound of Music Accessible Customer Service Policy Statement

Burlington's Sound of Music Festival Inc. is committed to providing accessible customer service to people with disabilities. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure the Sound of Music Festival's goods and services are provided in a manner that:

- respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.
- provides goods or services to persons with disabilities and others must be integrated unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis, to enable a person with disability to obtain, use or benefit from the goods or services.
- provide an opportunity equal to that given to others to obtain, use and benefit from the goods or services.
- permits people with disabilities to use assistive devices, service animals and/or support persons as is necessary to access Sound of Music Festival goods and services.

This policy applies to all persons who interact with members of the public on behalf of the Festival, whether the person does so as an:

- Employee
- Volunteer
- Contractor
- Student placement

Understanding Disability

Disabilities can take many forms. They may be permanent or temporary; developmental or physical; severe or mild; for the young or the old; or any combination of disabilities. A person can be born with a disability or someone could become injured resulting in a temporary or permanent disability. Some disabilities are visible and many are non-visible.

Word Choices

Choosing positive words can empower people. Inappropriate terms convey inaccurate information and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

The notion that people with disabilities are inspirational, brave and courageous for living successfully with their disability is a myth. The fact is a person with a disability is simply carrying out the activities of daily living when they drive to work, go to a movie, pay their bills or participate in a sporting event. They just may do it in a way that is different than you.

People with disabilities are 'people first' – unique individuals who also happen to have a disability. Use words that put the person first, referring to them as a "person with a disability" or "person with hearing loss."

Instead of this	Please say this
The Handicapped	Person with a disability
Normal	Person without a disability, non-disabled
The Blind, the visually impaired	Person who is blind, person with a visual impairment, person with a vision loss
The Deaf	Person who is deaf, person who is hard of hearing, person with a hearing loss
Physically challenged	Person with a disability
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	Person who uses a wheelchair, scooter
Suffers with, victim of, afflicted with, stricken by	Person with a disability, person with cerebral palsy, person who has multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.
Handicapped parking	Accessible Parking
Handicapped washroom/bathroom	Accessible washroom/bathroom
Mental, insane, crazy	Person with a mental health disability, person with a mental illness
Mentally retarded, slow, feeble minded, retarded	Person with an intellectual disability

How to Interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities

Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them. Here are some suggested tips to interact and communicate with people who have various disabilities:

People who are deaf-blind

A person who is deaf-blind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

- **Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.**
- **A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note.**
- **Do not try to communicate from across the room or table.**
- **Do not leave without saying goodbye.**

People who have hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. These are terms used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

- **Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.**
- **Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.**
- **Do not cover or have anything in your mouth when speaking.**
- **Speak directly to the deaf person, not the interpreter.**
- **Ask one question at a time.**
- **Speak naturally, with normal expression and at a normal pace.**
- **In group settings, talk one at a time.**
- **If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.**
- **If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).**
- **When writing back and forth, keep sentences short.**

People who have physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

- **If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.**
- **Ask before you help. Offer assistance but don't insist.**
- **Speak directly to the person.**

- **If a countertop is too high or wide to interact comfortably with a customer, step from behind it to provide service.**
- **Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission.**
- **If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.**

People who have vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

- **Don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.**
- **Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.**
- **Speak naturally at a normal pace and tone.**
- **Don't leave without saying goodbye.**
- **Ask your customer if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them.**
- **When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.**
- **Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.**

People who have learning disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

- **Be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.**
- **Ask your customer how to best accommodate their needs.**
- **Minimize distractions so that full attention is on communication.**
- **Keep sentences short and clear, avoid complex words or jargon.**
- **Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.**

People with speech or language impairments

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

- **Don't assume that a person with speech impairment has another disability.**
- **Talk to people with speech impairments as you would talk to anyone else and speak in your regular tone of voice.**
- **Tell the person if you do not understand what they are trying to say. Ask the person to repeat the message, tell you in a different way, or write it down.**
- **If a customer is difficult to understand, concentrate on content not voice.**
- **Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no".**
- **Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.**

People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

- **Treat a person with mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.**
- **Talk to the person as you would talk to anyone else in your regular tone of voice, using plain language avoiding complex ideas and jargon.**
- **Be confident, calm and reassuring.**
- **Accept the customer, do not judge or "talk down" to them.**
- **Pay attention to non verbal cues.**
- **If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.**

People who have intellectual / developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

- **Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.**
- **Use plain language.**
- **Keep sentences short.**
- **Provide one piece of information at a time.**
- **Use concrete examples.**
- **Maintain a polite attitude.**
- **Be prepared to repeat and rephrase your sentences.**

How to interact with people who use assistive devices

An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Personal assistive devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

- **Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.**
- **Allow customers to keep and use their assistive devices as needed.**
- **Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.**
- **Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g., public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, etc.).**

Bell Canada Relay Service (BCRS) lets TTY users and hearing people talk to one another by phone with the help of specially trained BCRS operators. Users dictate to the operator the conversation, which is then relayed to the TTY phone. TTY conversation is then relayed to the regular phone user. This service is confidential and the only cost is any long-distance charges that would regularly apply. Local calls using this service are free. **The Bell Relay Number is 1-800-855-0511.**

How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal

People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the standard, you are required to allow service animals on the parts of your premises that are open to the public or to other third parties, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. You may ask a person for a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that their animal is required for reasons relating to their disability if it is not readily apparent.

- **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.**
- **Avoid making assumptions about the animal. If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.**
- **It is not appropriate to ask the nature of the disability of the service animal handler.**

How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a support person

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervenor. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the standard, a support person must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of your premises that is open to the public or to third parties. If your organization charges admission, you are required to provide notice, in advance, about what admission fee will be charged for a support person.

- **If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services, or simply ask.**
- **Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.**

What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing your goods or services

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask how you can best help. Remember that your customers are your best source for information about their needs. The solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Disruption of Service – Reasonable Notice

What happens if we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that there will be disruptions in services, such as elevators under repair, renovations of buildings or outdoor spaces or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

Customers with disabilities may go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging for their support person to accompany them. By providing reasonable notice that a service is temporarily unavailable you can save the customer an unnecessary trip.

Notice can be provided by several methods and usually it is a good idea to use more than one method to provide notice. Notices on your website, a broadcast announcement when calling by telephone, a notice in the paper or a temporary sign are all ways to inform customers of service disruptions.

Disruption of Service – Unexpected Disruptions

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible. Think about how you might offer another way to access the service when informing the customer who may be affected.

Remember...

Being able to interact and communicate in an appropriate way to individuals with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service, and sometimes the best approach is to ask the person how you can best serve them.

- Always treat anyone with a disability with the same respect and courtesy that you would offer to everyone else.
- Treat and speak to adults with disabilities as adults.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability not to the intervenor, companion, assistant or interpreter who may be with them.
- Don't shout; speak clearly and distinctly, and at a moderate pace.
- It's okay to use words like "see," "walk," or "hear." Don't avoid common expressions when they fit naturally into the conversation.
- Offer assistance to a person with a disability if it seems appropriate, but wait until the offer is accepted before you help. If you are helping and aren't sure what to do, ask.
- Let a person with a disability make their own decisions regarding what they can or cannot do. Do not make assumptions.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog or service animal from doing its job.

Mandatory Training Registration

Thank you for taking the time to read and understand this important information. Your effort will help us better serve all participants of the Sound of Music Festival, including people with disabilities.

As required by law under Section 6 of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Accessible Customer Service Training is mandatory for all Festival employees, volunteers, contractors who act on behalf or represent Burlington's Sound of Music Festival.

Now that you have completed your training, please be sure to sign our registration sheet at the Volunteer Centre when you come in for your first shift. We will retain your signature in our files and make a note of your successful completion of the Accessible Customer Service Training in your Volunteer profile.



Four Fabulous Days of Free Music!

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