



# Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005) CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM Mini Workbook



## Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

### Customer Service Standard

#### The AODA – It is the Law!

In Ontario, the AODA became law on June 13, 2005. *The Customer Service Standard*, which is the first of five standards to be legislated under the AODA, is intended to ensure that persons with disabilities receive the level of customer service which we all expect.



The remaining four standards will be rolled out over the next couple of years, with the goal being to create a fully accessible Ontario by 2025.

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service applies to all people or organizations in Ontario that provide goods or services, and have one or more employees. Companies are accountable for training their employees outside of Ontario that serve customers located in Ontario. To provide accessible customer service as set out in the Standards, organizations must:

- Create and put in place an accessibility plan that:
  - Considers a person's disability when communicating with them
  - Allows assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen tanks, etc.
  - Allows service animals
  - Welcomes support persons
  - Lets customers know when accessible services aren't available
  - Invites customers to provide feedback
- Train staff on accessible Customer Service
- Put their plan in writing
- Let customers know how to find their plan (e.g., on their website)
- Offer their plan in accessible formats, like large print, if requested
- Report their progress online

AODA requires employees to have an understanding of how to communicate with and serve persons with different types of disabilities. This document will provide you with basic information to help you do so.

## Did You Know?

About 1.85 million people - or 15.5% of Ontario's population - have a disability. That's about one in seven people. As baby boomers age over the next 20 years, this number is expected to rise to one in five.

Almost half of all persons over the age of 65 have disabilities and by 2025, 1 in 5 Ontarians will be 65 or older.

Disabilities can be both visible and invisible, with invisible disabilities being less obvious.

Disabilities can be temporary or permanent.

The presence and impact of a disability may be periodic. You probably know someone who gets migraines, suffers from severe back pain that comes and goes, or experiences seasonal depression, known as Seasonal Affective Disorder.

## Effective Customer Service



Effective customer service begins and ends with satisfying the customer. Every customer who comes into your establishment has different needs. It makes no difference whether you work in a corporate office, small business, medical office, manufacturing plant, warehouse, store, restaurant or financial institution; to be successful, you must meet or exceed your customer's needs.

It's your responsibility as an employee to treat all customers equitably and with respect. Customers with disabilities are just like any other customer, each having their own particular customer needs. An effective customer service representative can define what those needs are, and satisfy them in the best way possible.

## How to communicate with persons with different types of disabilities

There are many types and degrees of disability. Openly communicating and responding to your customers' needs is the key to excellent service for all. If you're not sure about the best approach, just ask the person with a disability how you can best communicate with them.



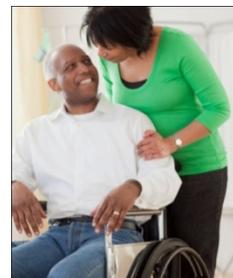
## Persons with physical disabilities

There are many types of physical disabilities, some more obvious than others.

Physical disabilities may restrict a person's ability to move freely, to perform some manual tasks, or to participate in certain activities.

Some physical disabilities are **present from birth**, such as *spina bifida*. Others may be caused by a **disease**, such as *multiple sclerosis* or *Parkinson's*.

And some physical disabilities may be the result of an **accident**, during which the spinal cord or brain is injured.



Only some persons with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury, for example, may use crutches, while someone with severe arthritis or a heat condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

### Tips:

- Talk to the individual directly. Don't direct your comments or questions to his or her support person.
- Ask "*How can I help you?*" Wait until your offer is accepted before providing any help. If the person says they don't need your help, don't take offense or decide not to offer your help in the future. It doesn't mean they don't ever want your help, but that they don't need it at this particular time.
- When helping a person with a physical disability get to where they want to go, remember the following:
  - Walk at a pace that is comfortable for both of you;
  - Never grab, push, or pull when you are guiding someone, and;
  - Don't lean against, push or pull a person's wheelchair or scooter without their permission. And don't move it without first asking permission - even if it's to make space or to allow others to pass by. A person's wheelchair or scooter is considered an extension of their personal space.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation in person, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.



## Persons with a Hearing Disability

'Hearing disability' is a term used to describe the loss of hearing in one or both ears. There are different levels of hearing disabilities:

- *Hearing disability* refers to a complete or partial loss of hearing in one or both ears. The level of disability can range from mild to moderate to severe, and;
- *Deafness*, which refers to the complete loss of hearing in one or both ears.

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.

### Tips:

- Pay attention to the individual's reactions. A puzzled look might mean you need to clarify or repeat your remark. Be patient and ready to repeat any remark that's misunderstood.
- Present a clear and unobstructed view of your mouth, and directly face the individual at all times.
- If the person uses an interpreter, address your comments and questions to the person with the disability, **NOT** to the interpreter.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice.
- Offer a pen and paper to improve communication.
- Never walk in between two people talking in sign language as this will interrupt their conversation.
- To get the attention of a person with a hearing disability and if you are unable to do so in any other way, lightly touch them on the arm or shoulder.



## Persons with a Visual Disability

A visual disability may be a partial or total loss of vision. A common misconception is that people classified as 'legally blind' can't see anything at all. In reality, most of these individuals have some vision, with only a very small percentage having no sight at all.

### Tips:

- Speak in a clear but natural voice – there is no need to shout.
- Speak in your normal manner, using normal body language – relax and be yourself.
- Don't assume the person can't see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach the person.
- Never touch anyone without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If they accept, walk slowly, letting them set the pace.
- Don't touch or address service animals. They're working and must pay attention at all times.
- Never leave without telling the person. Before leaving, guide them to a chair or a place where they'll feel comfortable, and provide them with clear directions to the exit.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.



## Persons with Speech or Language Disabilities

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

### Tips:

- Don't assume that a person with a speech disability also has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or a "no".
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.
- If you don't understand what's been said, politely ask the person to repeat themselves;



## Persons with Learning Disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders. One example is dyslexia, which affects 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.

### Tips:

- Be patient – persons with learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability. For example, some persons with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.
- If a form needs to be completed, offer to help by reading the questions and writing their responses.



## Persons with Intellectual or 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.

### Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what the person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Ensure the individual understands what you have said.
- If you can't understand what's been said, politely ask them to repeat it.
- Speak directly to the individual, not to a support person or companion.



## Persons with 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 individuals may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

- If you sense or know that an individual has a mental health disability, be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you would everyone else.
- Behave in a confident, calm and reassuring manner.
- Listen carefully and ask the person how you can best meet his or her needs.
- If the person appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.



## How to interact with persons who use assistive devices, and how to use any equipment that your organization provides to help customers with disabilities

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.

### Tips:

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



If your organization offers any equipment or devices for persons with disabilities, make sure you know how to use them. It could be helpful to have instruction manuals handy or an instruction sheet posted where the device is located or stored.

## How to interact with a person who has a service animal

Persons with a visual disability may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Service animals help persons who have physical, visual or hearing disabilities. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to other sorts of emergency situations, such as an oncoming seizure. Under the standard, service animals must be allowed on any parts of your premises that are open to the public.

### Tips:

- Service animals are not pets; avoid touching or addressing them.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask the person.



## How to serve a person accompanied by a support person

Some persons with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help the individual with a variety of things from communicating, to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs. Support persons are permitted in any part of your premises that is open to the public

### Tips:

- 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.



## How to assist persons with disabilities who need help 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 can I help you?”**

Finding ways to effectively serve each of your customers in a manner that best meet their particular needs is often more simple than you might think. Keep in mind that the person is your best source for information. Take a moment to find out what their particular needs are in order to provide them with the excellent customer service all of customers are entitled to.

**I have read and understand the contents of this information brochure.**

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**(Name – Please Print)**

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**(Signature)**

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**(Company)**