



“May I Help You?”

Understanding Accessible Customer Service

For alternate formats of this document, e-mail
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Part #1: Background

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. One of the specific standards that have been developed is the **Customer Service Standard**. This standard details specific requirements for all service providers.

The following is a summary of the key requirements:

1. Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities.
2. Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
3. Set a policy on allowing people to use their own personal assistive devices to access our goods and use your services.
4. Allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of our premises that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.
5. 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 or third parties.
6. Train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public or other third parties on our behalf on a number of topics as outlined in the customer service standard.
7. Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how you provide goods or services to people with disabilities and how you will respond to any feedback and take action on any complaints.
8. Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access or use your goods or services are temporarily disrupted.

Part #2: What is Accessible Customer Service?

The City of Mississauga is committed to providing customer service to persons with disabilities in a manner that:

- respects their **dignity** and **independence**;
- is **integrated** as fully as practicable into the method of service delivery;
- ensures reasonable efforts are made to provide an **opportunity equal** to that given to other customers to obtain and use our goods and services; and
- allows persons with disabilities to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in a similar way to other customers.

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation.

For example, a person who is blind may need to have information read aloud to them; an individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down; and someone who uses a wheelchair may need help in finding a route they can use. Accessible customer service is **good** customer service -- courteous, helpful and prompt.

Part #3: What can I do?

Always start with people first. In language, that means saying “person with a disability”, rather than “a disabled person”. In any interaction, it means addressing the person’s service needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

Let’s take some time to understand the definition of different disabilities and some tips to assist you in providing accessible customer service.

A “**Disability**” as defined by the AODA includes:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- a mental disorder, or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; (“handicap”)

Each table below defines a specific category of disability and outlines some tips to help you provide service to customers.

Hearing Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf - severe to profound hearing loss • Hard of Hearing - a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate • Deafened – caused to hear poorly or not at all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract customer's attention before speaking - gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand • Look directly at the person • May have to use pen and paper • Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face • Reduce background noise • Ensure appropriate lighting

Deafblind Disability:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot see or hear to some degree • Many will be accompanied by a support person (A professional who helps with communication by using sign language that involves touching the hands of the client) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak directly to your customer, not the support person • Identify yourself to the support person • Customer likely to explain to you how to communicate with them • Use clear, plain print on a contrasting colour

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual development and capacity that is below average • Can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently • May be an invisible disability • They may understand you more than you know 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume what 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 instruction • Offer information in simpler concepts

Learning Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affects how person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information • In many cases individual has average or above-average intelligence • May affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ language based learning ○ mathematics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (i.e. pen and paper) • Be prepared to explain any materials you provide

Mental Health Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defined as the absence of psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society• Some common features of mental health disabilities are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ phobias, panic attacks○ hallucinations○ mood swings○ bipolar disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat customer with the same level of respect and consideration• Be confident and reassuring• Do not be confrontational• If the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help• Take customer seriously• Don't take things personally

Speech or Language Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have problems communicating• May be difficult to pronounce words, slurring or stuttering• May use communication boards or other assistive devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't make assumptions• Give whatever time they need to get their point across• Ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no', if possible• Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences• May have to use pen and paper• Say: "I don't understand, can you repeat that?"• If necessary, paraphrase what has been said

Physical or Disabilities Affecting Mobility:

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May restrict a person in the following ways:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ control or speed of movements○ coordination and balance○ ability to grasp same objects○ ability to walk long distances○ ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods• Can be present at birth, result from disease, injury or temporarily	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak directly to the customer• Ask before you help• Respect personal space• Don't move any items they may have• Describe what you are going to do beforehand• Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position

Vision Disabilities:

Definition	Tips For Providing Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most individual who are legally blind have some remaining vision - very few are totally blind• Low or no vision can restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards• May use guide dog or white cane• May need to view written documents in large print, or with the help of a magnifier	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't assume customer can't see you• Speak directly to customer• Offer your elbow to guide• If they accept, walk slowly, wait for permission• Identify landmarks• Be precise and descriptive with information• Don't 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 you can help.

Part #4: How should I interact with persons with disabilities?

1. **First**, let's take some time to understand the various assistive options that are used to support persons with disabilities.

“Assistive Devices” are:

- Devices that people may bring with them or that are already on the premises and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by the City of Mississauga.
- Assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes used by people who are blind or who have low vision, note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

“Service Animal” is:

- Any animal that provides essential assistance to a person with a visible or invisible disability
- If you cannot easily identify that the animal is a service animal, you can ask the person to provide documentation from a regulated health professional
- The documentation must confirm that the person needs the service animal for reasons relating to their disability

“Support Person” means:

- In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.
- May be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

2. **Next**, let's take some time to understand how you should interact with persons with disabilities who may use one or more of these assistive options.

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 providers' premises or otherwise supplied by the provider.

- Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the persons' 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 him or her 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 a 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.
- If a participant fee is charged (e.g. admission or registration fee), the fee must be waived for the accompanying Support Person. Speak directly to your customer, not the Support Person.

Part #5: What if we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that from time-to-time there will be disruptions in service, such as an elevator under repair, renovations that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

People with disabilities may often go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking specialized transit or arranging a ride. By providing notice, you can save that person an unnecessary trip. Notice can be provided on the City's website, by telephone, or in writing.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice in a variety of ways and as quickly as possible. Please refer to the Temporary Disruption of Service template on [Inside Mississauga](#) . Consider offering alternative methods of service while informing those that may be impacted personally.

It is important to recognize that there are internal & external resources available to assist you in delivering service to persons with disabilities:

- Review the [Corporate Accessibility Policy](#).
- Review your Occupation Specific Operational Procedures.
- Speak to your Team Leader, Supervisor and/or Manager.
- Contact the City of Mississauga's Accessibility Planning section.
- Review the [Internal Accessibility Planning website](#).
- Visit the City's [External Accessibility Planning](#) website.
- Visit the [Access Forward](#) and [Accessibility Directorate of Ontario](#) websites.
- The [Bell Relay Service](#) (BRS) operator is available to assist in placing or receiving calls to/from persons who use a TTY. There is no charge for local calls. To place a call through the BRS, call: 1-800-855-0511.
- Book an [American Sign Language Interpreter](#) by contacting the Canadian Hearing Society at 1-855-656-3748 or requests@oischs.ca.