



Accessibility North Accessible Customer Service Policy

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA 2005)

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Purpose

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005 is Provincial legislation that sets out Standards of compliance to ensure that services provided to Ontarians with disabilities is accessible and provided in a manner that uses reasonable efforts consistent with the core principles of:

Dignity – services are provided in a respectful manner consistent with the needs of the individual.

Independence – services for persons with disabilities shall support their independence while respecting their right to safety and personal privacy.

Integration – allow people with disabilities to fully benefit from the same service, in the same place, and in a similar way.

Equality of Opportunity – persons with disabilities are given the same opportunity to benefit from the services provided as other clients.

Scope

Accessible Customer Service will be provided by all employees who communicate with the public, all management and program staff who develop our policies and procedures, all volunteers and any third parties we may contract with.

Our intent is to ensure all persons with disabilities receive customer service in a manner that takes into consideration their disability and offers excellence in customer service.

Definitions and Accompanying Policy

Person with a Disability:

The definition of disability under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is the same as the definition of disability in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

AODA Section 2 states that "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.

Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

Communication is a process of providing, sending, receiving, and understanding information. This section of the regulation is a specific requirement to communicate with an individual with a disability in a way that takes the person's disability into account. This means that you must consider how the disability affects the way that the person expresses, receives or processes communications. The goal is to communicate in an effective way.

Policy

When communicating with a person with a disability, Accessibility North will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

Accessibility North is committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our customers. Staff will be trained to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language, to speak clearly and slowly and to tailor their responses as much as possible in support of the individual.

Access for persons who are deaf is available by TTY telephone. All staff are trained on how to use a TTY and proper etiquette when using TTY telephone.

Accessibility North will offer to communicate with customers by other means, including relay service or e-mail, if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

Support Person

–A person who accompanies a person with a disability to assist him or her.

A support person can be a professional, a family member, a friend, or other person who assists a person with a disability with communication, mobility, personal care, or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

Policy

A support person is a trusted individual chosen by a person with a disability who assists with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods and services. Accessibility North is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person.

Fees are not normally associated with the nature of our business; however, should a situation or event arise, support persons would not be charged any admission fees.

The customer shall determine whether a support person is necessary; however, in the exceptional circumstance where an employee believes that a support person should be in attendance to protect the health and safety of the customer or others, the following criteria shall be used in consulting with the customer:

- When there is a significant risk to the health and safety of the person with a disability or others (the mere possibility of risk is insufficient).
- When the risk is greater than the risk associated with other customers.
- When the risk cannot be eliminated or reduced by other means.
- When the assessment of the risk is based on consideration of the duration of the risk, the nature and severity of the potential harm, the likelihood that the potential harm will occur, and the imminence of the potential harm.
- When the assessment of the risk is based on the individual's actual characteristics, not merely on generalizations, misperceptions, ignorance or fears about a disability.

Please note: Accessibility North would only request a support person on an exceptionally rare occasion.

Service Animal

Service animals are used by people with many different kinds of disabilities. Examples of service animals include dogs used by people who are blind; hearing alert animals for people who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing; and animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure and lead them to safety.

A "Service Animal" is defined in the Act as:

"any animal where it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability and if the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse or other government issued certification confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability".

Policy

Persons with a disability, accompanied by a service animal are welcome at Accessibility North.

If in an unusual circumstance at an event outside of Accessibility North's business office, a service animal is excluded by law, Accessibility North will ensure that alternate means are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use, or benefit from the services of Accessibility North.

If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, i.e. a guide dog without a visible harness, Accessibility North will use extreme discretion in asking the person with a disability to confirm the animal is a service animal by:

- Asking if the animal is a service animal.
- If concern or inappropriate animal behaviour ask for confirmation letter from a physician or nurse of service animal or identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada or a certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school.

Staff will offer the location of fresh water for the service animal and where service animals may be walked to relieve themselves.

Assistive Devices

Personal assistive devices are usually devices that people bring with them, such as, walkers, personal oxygen tanks, magnification devices, wheelchairs, canes, or other mobility devices that assist the person with daily living.

Policy

Persons with disabilities shall be permitted to obtain, use, or benefit from goods or services through the use of their own assistive devices.

Staff will be trained and become familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our services.

Accessibility North will also ensure that staff know how to use the assistive devices which are available on our premises, including electronic door openers.

Exceptions may occur in situations where Accessibility North has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of a person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

In these situations and others Accessibility North may offer a person with a disability other reasonable measures to assist them in obtaining, using, and benefiting from the services of Accessibility North where other measures are available.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that their assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

Notice of Service Disruption¹

The Standard requires that notice to the public be provided when there is a temporary disruption (planned or unexpected) of facilities or services that are usually used by people with disabilities to access goods or services. This notice must include the reason for the disruption, its duration, and if available, a description of alternative facilities or services posted in an obvious place.

Policy

Accessibility North is aware that the operation of its services and facilities is important to the public. However, temporary disruptions in our services and facilities may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within Accessibility North's control or knowledge. Examples of this could be snow days or disruptions in power/heat beyond our control.

Accessibility North will make reasonable efforts to provide notice of the disruption to the public, including:

- The name of the event/service.
- The normal service location being impacted.
- Alternate service locations or service methods.
- Hours of service availability.
- Contact information.
- Any other information deemed appropriate to deliver our service.

Accessibility North will make reasonable efforts to provide prior notice of planned disruption if possible, recognizing that in some circumstances, such as in the situation of unplanned temporary disruption (snow storms), advance notice will not be possible. In such cases, Accessibility North will provide notice as soon as possible.

In the event of a temporary service disruption that would limit a person with a disability from gaining access to our office, goods, or service, Accessibility North will post a notice or otherwise make the disruption known to customers in the following methods and places:

- Website home page.
- Notice on entrance doors.

¹ For examples, see Pages 12 and 13.

Feedback²

The customer service standard requires that a process be in place for receiving and responding to feedback about how you provide goods or services to people with disabilities.

Policy

Accessibility North is committed to providing high quality services to all members of the public it serves. At Accessibility North we regard feedback as a gift as it helps us to identify areas that require change and encourage continuous service improvements. Feedback from a member of the public about the delivery of services to persons with disabilities may be given by telephone, in person, in writing, in electronic format or through other methods.

Information about the feedback process is readily available to the public and notice of the process will be posted on Accessibility North's website and/or in other appropriate locations.

All feedback will be kept in strict confidence and used to improve customer service. In addition, the author of the feedback will be provided a prompt response, within 2 business days, in the format in which the feedback was received outlining actions deemed appropriate, if any.

Feedback will be reviewed at each staff meeting to review and monitor our progress. Should feedback include individual staff members, management will meet with staff member to discuss/remedy.

Accessible Customer Service feedback mechanisms:

- Print format in waiting area, also available in large print and audio.
- *Dear Vivian* link on Accessibility North website.
- Link found on About Us page on Accessibility North website.
- Braille version to be developed.

² For an example, see Page 14.

Training

The Accessible Customer Service Standards requires providers to train staff on how to provide customer service to people with disabilities. Training should help to dispel myths, misconceptions, stereotypes and fears about people with disabilities.

Training must include:

- A review of the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard.
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disability.
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device, service animal or a support person.
- How to use the equipment or assistive devices available on your premises or that you otherwise provide that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing your goods or services.

Under the Act, training must be provided to:

- Every person who deals with the public or other third parties on your behalf receives training, whether the person is an employee, agent, volunteer or otherwise.
- Every person who participates in developing your policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to members of the public or other third parties is trained.
- New staff who deal with members of the public or other third parties or who participate in developing your policies, practices and procedures on the provision of goods or services to the public or other third parties in accordance with the training requirements set out in the standard. Provide the training as soon as is practicable after they are assigned applicable duties.
- Ongoing training in connection with any changes to your policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.

Policy

Accessibility North will ensure that all staff who interact with our customers or create policy/procedures are trained as required by the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service. Ongoing training to ensure excellence in the way we serve our customers with disabilities will be conducted with mini-training and awareness sessions, as part of monthly staff meetings.

The content of the training will include:

- Overall review to ensure and build on awareness of the purposes of the AODA.
- The specific requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07).
- Instruction on Accessibility North's Accessible Customer Service policies, procedures and practices pertaining to the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities; and how to interact and communicate with persons with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing our services.
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or who require the assistance of a support person or service animal.
- Information about the equipment or devices available on the premises of Accessibility North that may help with the provision of services to persons with disabilities.
- Ongoing training during monthly staff meetings.
- Ongoing awareness sessions with other disability service providers to gain additional awareness and insight.

Timeline for Training

Training will be provided as a priority for new hires and included in new employee orientation package. New employees will be required to complete the Accessible Customer Service online training version prior to serving our customers.

Ongoing training will be provided to all staff to ensure ongoing learning, development and employee engagement in providing exception service to our clientele.

Training will also be provided in the event of changes to Accessibility North's policies, procedures and practices governing the provision of services to persons with disabilities.

Training Records

Accessibility North will keep records of all Accessible Customer Service training, to include dates and content of training provided to each employee.

Provision of Accessible Customer Service to persons with disabilities will be reviewed with each staff member at all performance evaluations.

Notice of the Availability of Documents and Format of Documents

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service requires all public organizations, or any organization or business with over 20 employees, to ensure customers are notified that the documents required under the Standard are, “available upon request by posting the notice at a conspicuous place on the premises you own or operate, by posting it on your website or by another method that is reasonable in the circumstances”.

Policy

Although Accessibility North does not fit into the category of organizations required to notify and make available our documents, we choose to exceed the requirements and post/provide our Accessible Customer Service policy and procedures.

Our policy and procedures are:

- When providing a document to a person with a disability Accessibility North will provide the document, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes the person’s disability into account. Staff are instructed to ask our customer if they require information/documentation in an alternative format.
- All forms, documents, and materials will include “Alternative formats available upon request” notation.
- As a work in progress, all existing forms and documents will be made accessible in the following formats:
 - Large print
 - Audio
 - Braille for most common forms/document
 - Web accessibility
 - All existing in-house forms that would be normally available for the public will be reviewed for plain language content and revised where necessary
 - Any future in-house forms that would normally be available for the public will be created with plain language.

Accessibility North uses many governmental documents and requests alternative formats of all documents when ordering materials from a Provincial or Federal program.

A copy of any of our documents is available to anyone who asks for them. Signage will be posted at the entrance to each Accessibility North office in plain view.

Modifications to this and future policies

Accessibility North is committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

Therefore, any changes made to this policy will consider the needs of people with disabilities.

Any policy of Accessibility North that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

Notice of Planned Service Disruption



There will be a scheduled service disruption at our office at 875 Queen Street East. Electrical work is being done and our office will be closed on

Or

Our website is being updated and will be unavailable on

Or

Our _____ is not available/closed/temporarily unavailable.

DATE OF CLOSURE

Our office will reopen on Monday, November 23, 2009.

We apologize for any inconvenience this disruption has caused.

Should you require additional information on the delivery of this service, please call our office at (705) 254-1005, fax us at 254-1354, or E-mail us at info@accessibilitynorth.ca.

Notice of Unplanned Service Disruption



Due to unforeseen circumstances with the snow storm today, our office, at 875 Queen Street East, is closed. The office will be closed until the storm subsides.

For the safety of our customers and our staff we are not available in our office.

We apologize for any inconvenience this disruption has caused.

Should you require additional information on the delivery of this service, please call our office at (705) 254-1005, fax us at 254-1354, or E-mail us at info@accessibilitynorth.ca.

Accessible Customer Service Feedback Form



Thank you for visiting Accessibility North. We value all of our customers and strive to meet everyone's needs. Your feedback is important to us.

To help us better serve you by providing fully Accessible Customer Service, please complete our feedback form using this form or asking us for the form in alternative formats.

Did we respond to your customer service needs today? YES NO

Was our customer service provided to you in an accessible manner?
 YES SOMEWHAT NO (please explain below)

Did you have any problems accessing our goods and services?
 YES (please explain below) SOMEWHAT (please explain below) NO

Please add any other comments you may have:

Contact information (optional):

Thank you.

**This document is available in alternative formats or
visit our website to complete an online survey.**

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www.accessibilitynorth.ca