



PURPOSE OF THE AODA, 2005

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (or “the Act”) is a provincial law. Its goal is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025 by developing and enforcing accessibility standards.

The **Accessibility Standards** are the legal requirements that organizations in Ontario must follow to become more accessible to people with disabilities. The standards are found in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation which was established under the Act and address key areas of daily life, including: individual service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and design of public spaces.

FOUR CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE AODA

DIGNITY: What does the principle of dignity mean?

1. Policies, procedures and practices that respect the dignity of a person with a disability are those that treat them as those who are as valued and as deserving of effective and full service as any other customer.
2. Program delivery needs to take into account how people with disabilities can effectively access and use services and show respect for these methods.

INDEPENDENCE: What does the principle of independence mean?

1. Independence can mean freedom from control or influence of others freedom to make your own choices or it may mean the freedom to do things in your own way.
2. People who may move or speak more slowly should not be denied an opportunity to participate in a program or service and a staff person should not hurry them or take over a task for them if they prefer to do it themselves in their own way.

INTEGRATION: What does the principle of integration mean?

1. Integrated services are those that allow people with disabilities to fully benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers.
2. Policies, practices and procedures are designed to be accessible to everyone including people with disabilities. Sometimes alternative measures, rather than integration, might be necessary to better serve the person because the person with a disability requires it.
3. If you are unable to remove a barrier to accessibility, you need to consider what else can be done to provide services to people with disabilities.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: What does the principle of equal opportunity mean?

1. Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others.
2. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service and they should also not have to accept lesser quality or more inconvenience.

Accessibility Overview & Tips

Information or Communications Barriers

These happen when a person can't easily understand information. Examples include print that is too small to read and websites that don't support screen-reading software.

Technology Barriers

These barriers occur when a technology can't be modified to support assistive devices such as a website that doesn't support screen-reading software or documents.

Attitudinal Barriers

These are barriers that discriminate against people with disabilities. Examples include thinking that people with disabilities are inferior and assuming that a person with a disability wants help.

Systemic Barriers

These barriers occur when an organization's policies, practices or procedures discriminate against people with disabilities.

Talking about Disabilities: Choosing the Right Words



Here are some tips that can help make your communication with or about people with disabilities more successful:



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use "disability" not "handicap."• Put people first. "Person with a disability" puts the focus on the person instead of their disability.• For specific disabilities, say "person with epilepsy" or "person who uses a wheelchair." | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid statements that make it seem like a person with a disability should be pitied such as "victim of," "suffers with," or "stricken with" a particular illness or disability. |
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If you're not familiar with the disability, wait until the individual describes their situation to you, instead of making assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

Tips on Serving Customers with Disabilities

- Treat people with disabilities with respect and consideration.
- Patience, optimism, and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Smile, relax, and keep in mind that people with disabilities want to experience helpful customer service.
- Don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible. Take the time to get to know your customers' needs.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "How May I help you?"
- If you can't understand what someone is saying, just politely ask again.
- Ask before you offer to help — don't just jump in. Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Look at your customer, but don't stare. Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or a piece of equipment.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

Understanding Specific Disabilities

There are many kinds of disabilities. They can be visible, hidden, permanent or occur only at certain times. Here are some types of disabilities:

- deaf-blind
- hearing
- intellectual
- developmental
- learning
- mental health
- physical
- speech or language
- vision

Disabilities vary. Being hard of hearing is different from being Deaf. Having low vision is different from being legally blind. A disability can happen to anyone at anytime. Some people are born with a disability. For others, the disability results from an illness or an accident. Sometimes it happens because the person is getting older. In fact, as our population ages, many of us may eventually face some kind of limitation. According to Statistics Canada, by 2031, seniors will account for between 23% and 25% of the total population. That's double the current senior proportion of 13%.

Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deaf-blind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.



Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:



- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to your customer as you normally would, not to the intervenor.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deaf-blind.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency.

Hearing Impairments

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hearing impaired may require assistive devices when communicating. They may also use e-mail, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.



Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:



- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where your customer can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- 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. Make sure you have been understood.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf may be different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

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 one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

Customers with an intellectual or developmental disability may understand more than you think. They will appreciate the respect and consideration that you show them.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:



- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or they can be more pronounced. They can interfere with a person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has a learning disability unless you are told, or notice the way a person acts, asks questions or uses body language.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have learning disabilities:



- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to your customer.
- Take some time — people with some kinds of learning disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Be courteous and patient and your customer will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

It is possible that you will not recognize a person with a mental health disability unless you are informed of it. Therefore, usually, it will not affect customer service at all.

But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let your customer tell you how you can best help.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have mental health disabilities:



- Treat a person with a mental health disability with respect and consideration.
- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with your customer to meet their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

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.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:



- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, unnecessarily unless it's an emergency.
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).
- Remove obstacles and rearrange furniture to ensure clear passage.

What You Need to Know when Dealing with Customers with Disabilities Over the Phone



Here are some tips on serving customers with disabilities on the phone:



- Speak normally, clearly and directly.
- Don't worry about how their voice sounds. Concentrate on what's being said.
- Be patient, don't interrupt and don't finish your customer's sentences. Give your customer time to explain him/herself.
- Don't try to guess what your customer is saying. If you don't understand, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- If you're not certain what was said, just repeat or rephrase what you've heard.
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter or a TTY line, just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter.
- If your customer has great difficulty communicating, make arrangements to call back when it's convenient to speak with someone else who can be of help.

Speech or Language Impairments

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.



Here are some tips on serving customers with speech or language impairments:



- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a customer has difficulty speaking; don't assume they have an intellectual or developmental disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask your customer to repeat the information.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Be patient and polite, and give your customer whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Vision Disabilities

Vision disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability. Others may use a guide dog or a white cane.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have vision disabilities:



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.• Speak normally and clearly.• Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.• If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.• Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.• Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.• If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't just assume the individual can't see you.• Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.• Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.• Don't walk away without saying good-bye.• Be patient. Things may take a little longer. |
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The content of this booklet is courtesy of www.accesson.ca.