

Customer Service Standards Training



The County of Peterborough
Employees and Volunteers

Table of Contents

Part One: Introduction

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Purpose of AODA
- The Importance of AODA
- County of Peterborough Requirements

Part Two: Serving Customers with Disabilities

- General tips when interacting with persons with disabilities
- Deaf, deafened, oral deaf and hard of hearing
- Deafblind
- Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities
- Learning Disabilities
- Mental Health Disabilities
- Physical Disabilities or Disabilities Affecting Mobility
- Speech or Language Disabilities
- Vision Loss

Part Three: Support for People with Disabilities

- Service Animals
- Support Persons
- Personal Assistive Devices
- Difficulty Accessing Services

Part One: Introduction

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

In 2005 Ontario passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). In 2008, a regulation came into force called the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07). Under the AODA, businesses and organizations that provide goods and services, including the County of Peterborough will have to meet all accessibility standards.

Effective July 1, 2016 the government will be combining the Ontario Regulation 429/07 (Accessibility Standards for Customer Service) with the Ontario Regulation 191/11 (Integrated Accessibility Standards – which addresses the areas of Information and Communication, Employment, Transportation and Design of Public Spaces).

Purpose of AODA

- The goal of this regulation is to make Ontario Accessible by 2025.
- To develop accessibility standards in: goods, services, facilities, accommodations, employment, buildings, structures and premises, all of which present barriers to people with disabilities.

The Importance of AODA

- What will this change mean for the County of Peterborough? When everyone has access to places and experiences, we all benefit. Specifically, we will benefit from the contributions, involvement and spending power from people with disabilities.
- Greater accessibility will help prepare Ontario for the future, our population is aging, and therefore the number of people with disabilities will increase.
- It is the environment that presents barriers for people with disabilities, not the disabilities.

County of Peterborough Requirements

The Customer Service Standard outlines what businesses and organizations in Ontario must do in order to make their goods and services more accessible for people with disabilities:

- **Policies, Practices and Procedures:** Create policies, practices and procedures on providing goods and services to people with disabilities.
- **Key Principles:** Ensure that the organizations policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the key principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.
- **Personal Assistive Devices:** Create a policy allowing people with disabilities to use alternative devices to access goods and services.
- **Communication:** When communicating with a person who has a disability, make sure to do so in a manner that takes into account the disability.
- **Service Animals:** Allow people with a disability to bring their service animals onto the parts of the premises open to the public.
- **Support Persons:** Allow people with a disability to bring their support person onto the parts of the premises that are open to the public. In the case where an admission fee is applicable, let the person know in advance, if any, the cost of admission for the support person. Where a support person is required to accompany a person with a disability for health and safety reasons, the provider must waive any applicable admission fees for the support person.
- **Service Disruptions:** Inform people when facilities or services regularly used by people with disabilities are temporarily unavailable.
- **Training:** Ensure that all staff is trained on how to serve people with disabilities, especially those who deal with the public or other third parties.
- **Feedback:** Set up a process to receive and respond to feedback, including what action will be taken on any complaints.

Part Two: Serving Customers with Disabilities

General Tips for Serving Customers with Disabilities

Some things to keep in mind when serving customers with disabilities:

- Ask “May I help you?”
- Speak directly to your customer.
- Don’t make assumptions about the customers disability.
- Take the time to understand your customer’s needs.
- If you can’t understand your customer, politely ask him/her to repeat it.
- Exercise patience!

Deaf, Deafened, Oral Deaf and Hard of Hearing

A person who is deaf or hard of hearing might use the following assistive devices:

- Hearing aids
- Special telephones
- Sign language interpreters
- Various amplifiers
- Pen and paper

Here are some suggested ways to serve customers with hearing loss:

- Attract the customer's attention before you start to speak. Use either a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Don't shout.
- Make sure you are located in a well-lit area where your customer can see you clearly.
- If the person is using a hearing aid, reduce any background noise or re-locate to a quieter area.

Deafblind

A person who is Deafblind cannot see or hear to some degree. They will usually be accompanied by an intervenor (a professional who helps with communicating using a specialized sign language).

Keep the following suggestions in mind when serving a customer who is Deafblind:

- Speak directly to the customer, not the intervenor.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is Deafblind.
- The customer who is Deafblind will most likely explain to you how to communicate with them.

Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

A person who has an intellectual/developmental disability can mildly or profoundly limit their ability to learn, communicate, do every day physical activities and live independently. Here are some guidelines when serving a customer who has an intellectual/developmental disability:

- Don't assume what your customer can or cannot do.
- Use plain language.
- Make sure the customer understands what you have said. You can ask "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time. Break down the information into simpler concepts, without exaggerating speech or gestures.
- You may want to ask your customer if the information needs to be repeated.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities refers to a variety of disorders that affect how a person acquires, retains, or takes in information. This may become apparent when serving a customer who is having trouble reading or retaining information provided to them. Here are some tips on how to best serve customers with a learning disability:

- Be patient! People with some kinds of learning disabilities make take a little longer to process, understand and respond.
- Provide information in a way that works best for your customer (example: pen and paper).
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide for you customers.

Mental Health Disabilities

Mental Health is a broad classification for many disorders that can range in severity. When serving a customer with a disability it is important to be calm and patient as a mental health disability can prevent a person from thinking clearly, concentrating or remembering.

One in five Canadians are likely to experience a diagnosable mental illness, and 3% of Canadians are likely to live with a serious mental illness. (Source: Canadian Mental Health Association)

Customers who have a mental health disability might experience anxiety due to phobias or panic disorders. They may also experience hallucinations, mood swings and a deep lack of motivation.

A major barrier that a person with a mental health disability encounters is the stigma that is associated with the disorder and the lack of understanding.

Here are some suggestions on how to serve those who have a mental health disability:

- Be confident and reassuring. As with all customers, listen carefully and focus on meeting the customer's needs.
- If the person appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- If a customer appears to show signs of a mental health disability, it may be helpful to keep in mind that the customer's reactions are not connected to you personally. The customer is simply showing you symptoms of mental illness.

Physical Disabilities or Disabilities Affecting Mobility

The common image of someone with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair is a stereotype. Physical disabilities can result from arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations. Here are a few suggestions on how best to serve people with a physical disability:

- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Don't lean over them or on their assistive devices.
- Don't move their assistive devices, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to make sure your customer is ready to be moved and that you describe what you're going to do beforehand. Don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- Inform your customer about accessible features in the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.).

Speech or Language Impairments

Some customers may have difficulty communicating because of their disability. Cerebral Palsy, stuttering, hearing loss or other conditions may cause problems in pronouncing words, slurring or stuttering.

People with a speech or language impairment may use a communication board or other similar assistive devices.

Some suggestions how to best serve customers with a speech or language impairment are:

- Don't assume that just because a person has this disability, they also have another.
- Give your customer whatever time they need to get their point across.

- Ask questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” when possible.
- Don’t interrupt or finish your customer’s sentence. Wait for them to finish.

Vision Loss

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ 3 Million Canadians have difficulty reading conventional text.❖ 9 out of 10 people who come to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) have some degree of vision. |
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Vision loss will sometimes restrict a person’s ability to see signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane while others may not. Some customers may simply need to view written materials in a larger print or use a magnifying glass to assist them.

Some things to keep in mind when assisting a person who has vision loss:

- Don’t assume the individual can’t see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach the customer and speak directly to him/her.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person and wait for them to give their permission before starting to move.
- Identify different landmarks or other descriptive detail to help orient your customer to the environment.
- Don’t leave your customer in the middle of the room. Guide them to a chair or another comfortable location, and make sure you say goodbye before you leave.

Part Three: Support for People with Disabilities

Service Animals

Most people are familiar with a guide dog accompanying people with vision loss. However, service animals can also be useful to people with other types of disabilities:

- Hearing alert animals help notify the individual of events around them.
- Some service animals alert an individual of an oncoming seizure.
- A service animal can also assist people with Autism, mental health disabilities, physical disabilities and much more.

Remember, service animals are allowed anywhere customers normally have access.

You can usually identify a service animal by a harness or sign that they wear. Their owner might also carry a certificate or a letter from a doctor/nurse stating that the individual requires the use of a service animal because of a disability. Keep in mind that there is an expanded list of regulated health professionals who can certify that an individual requires the animal for needs related to disability.

Avoid touching, talking or making eye contact with the service animal as they are working animals and need to stay focused.

Support Persons

A support person helps an individual with a disability by assisting them with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs. A support person can be a professional support worker, a volunteer, family member or a friend of the customer.

- According to the regulation, a support person must be allowed to accompany the person with a disability within the County of Peterborough anywhere that is open to the public or third parties.
- Talk directly to the customer and not to the support person.
- If a confidential matter needs to be discussed, ask the customer if they would like their support person to be present during the discussion.
- Where a support person is **required** to accompany a person with a disability for health and safety reasons, the provider must waive any applicable admission fees for the support person.

Personal Assistive Devices

A customer's personal assistive device can include wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, and hearing aids. Remember that these devices belong to the individuals using them and are a part of their personal space. Do not lean or restrict anyone from being able to move around by holding onto the person's assistive device.

Some examples of other assistive devices that you can offer to help your customers are:

- Elevators
- Escalators
- Information in braille
- Automatic door openers

Remember, you must provide notification when these services are temporarily unavailable.

Difficulty Accessing your Services

When a customer is having trouble accessing your services, there are a few tips on how to best serve them:

- Be patient, flexible and positive.
- Ask: “May I help you?”
- Offer suggestions.
- Offer to communicate with them via a pen and paper where communication is difficult.
- Make sure that their needs are met.