

Unit 1: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

In this unit, you will learn:

- About the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

What is the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act?

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is a law in Ontario that allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility and to enforce them.

AODA Section 1.

Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of this Act is to benefit all Ontarians by:

- a. developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025; and
- b. providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and various sectors of the economy in the development of accessibility standards.

The standards require the people or organizations identified in the standard to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in key areas of daily living. Barriers keep people with disabilities from fully participating in activities that most of us take for granted. The customer service standard is the first standard to come into effect under the AODA.

The Government of Ontario is working with different standards development committees to develop other standards in the areas of transportation, information and communications, the built environment and employment. These committees include people with disabilities or their representatives, business owners, government representatives and members of the public.

The standards development committees propose standards for government consideration and the government may adopt them by regulation. Once adopted by regulation, the standards will impose

requirements to make these areas more accessible to people with disabilities. They may apply to private and public sector organizations across Ontario.

Who are people with disabilities?

When we think of disabilities, we tend to think of people who use wheelchairs and who have physical disabilities that are visible and obvious. But disabilities can also be invisible. We cannot always tell who has a disability. The AODA uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code.

AODA Section 2.

In this Act, “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 coordination, 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.

What are barriers?

When you think about accessibility, it is important to be aware of both visible and invisible barriers. A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability.

Attitude is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because it's hard to change the way people think or behave. Some people don't know how to communicate with those who have visible or invisible disabilities – for example, assuming someone with a speech problem has intellectual limitations and speaking to them in a manner that would be used with a child; or forming ideas about the person because of stereotypes or a lack of understanding. Some people may feel that they could offend the individual with a disability by offering help, or they ignore or avoid people with disabilities altogether. Remember, attitude is a major barrier that's within our power to change.

Architectural or structural barriers may result from design elements of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and even room layout.

Information and communication barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. For example, a person who is Deaf cannot communicate via standard telephone. Things like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background, confusing design of printed materials and the use of language that isn't clear or easy to understand can all cause difficulty.

Technology, or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.

Systemic barriers can result from an organization's policies, practices and procedures if they restrict people with disabilities, often unintentionally – for example, a clothing store with a "no refund" policy and no way for someone in a scooter to enter the change room.

Unit 2: The Customer Service Standard

What is the customer service standard?

Ontario's accessible customer service standard is now the law. It came into force on January 1, 2008. People, businesses and other organizations that provide goods or services to the public or to other businesses or organizations in Ontario ("providers") have legal obligations under the standard. The standard is aimed at making their customer service operations accessible to people with disabilities.

The customer service standard is the first of five standards that will help lead the way to an accessible Ontario by 2025.

As a worker, you must:

- Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account their disability.
- Let people with disabilities bring their service animals onto the parts of the premises open to the public or other third parties, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises.
- Let people with disabilities be accompanied by their support persons while on the parts of the provider's premises open to the public or other third parties.
- Be aware of the OWCS process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way the organization provides goods or services to people with disabilities.

Unit 3: How to interact and communicate with customers who have disabilities

In this unit, you will learn:

- General tips on providing service to customers with disabilities
- Tips on how to interact and communicate with customers:
 - Who have vision loss
 - Who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing
 - Who are deafblind
 - Who have physical disabilities
 - Who have mental health disabilities
 - Who have intellectual or developmental disabilities
 - Who have learning disabilities
 - Who have speech or language impairments.

Tips if you visit or deliver to your customers with disabilities at home

Tips if you talk to customers with disabilities on the telephone.

General tips on providing service to customers with disabilities

- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?" Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his or her support person or companion.

- Avoid stereotypes and make no assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities the person has. Some disabilities are not visible and customers are not required to give you information about any disabilities they may have.
- Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs just as you would with any other customer.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Make an effort to learn about appropriate language and terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities.
- If you cannot understand what your customer is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

Tips on how to interact and communicate with customers who have vision loss

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Many 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 people can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some of these customers may use a guide dog or white cane, but others may not. Sometimes it may be difficult to tell if a person has vision loss.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Braille
- Large print
- Magnification devices
- White cane
- Guide dog
- Support person such as a sighted guide.

General Tips

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Don't touch your customer without asking permission.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If he or she accepts, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so. Lead – don't pull.

Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around him or her.

- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show him or her to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- If you need to leave your customer, let him or her know you are leaving and will be back.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to him or her, even if he/she is accompanied by a companion.
- There is generally no need to raise your voice because the person does not necessarily have hearing loss. Say your name even if you know the person well as many voices sound similar.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, e.g., two steps behind you, a metre to your left, etc. Don't use "over there" or point in the direction.
- If you're uncertain about how to provide directions, ask the person how to do so.
- Do not be afraid or embarrassed to use words such as "see", "read" and "look." People with vision loss also use these words.
- When providing printed information, offer to read or summarize it.
- Offer to describe information. For example, verbally itemize the bill or explain what the specials are or what is on the menu.

Tips on how to interact and communicate with customers who are Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing,

People who have hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

- People who are profoundly deaf may identify themselves as culturally Deaf or oral deaf. In Deaf culture, indicated by a capital "D," the term is used to describe a person who has severe to profound hearing loss, with little or no hearing.
- Oral deaf is a term describing a person who was born deaf or became deaf before learning to speak, but is taught to speak and may not typically use American Sign Language.
- The term "deafened" describes a person who has lost their hearing slowly or suddenly in adulthood. The person may use speech with visual cues such as captioning or computerized note-taking, speech-reading or sign language.
- The term "hard of hearing" describes a person who uses their residual hearing (hearing that remains) and speech to communicate.

The person may supplement communication by speechreading, hearing aids, sign language and/or communication devices.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Hearing aid
- Paper and pen
- Personal amplification device (e.g., Pocket Talker)
- Phone amplifier
- Relay Service
- Teletypewriter (TTY)
- Hearing ear dog
- Support person such as a sign language interpreter.

General Tips

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Generally, the best way is by a gentle touch on the shoulder or with a gentle wave of your hand.
- Ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Move to a well-lit area, if available, where your customer can see your face.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking. Some people read lips.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, using a pen and paper.
- Be patient if you are using a pen and paper to communicate. American Sign Language may be your customer's first language. It has its own grammatical rules and sentence structure.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not the interpreter or support person.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Confirm that your customer understands you.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area, if possible, so the person can hear or concentrate better.
- Don't assume that the customer knows sign language or reads lips.

Tips on how to interact and communicate with customers who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind can neither see nor hear to some degree. This results in difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Braille
- Large print
- Print on paper (using black felt marker on non-glossy white paper or using portable white and black boards)
- Communication boards
- Hearing aid with built-in FM system
- Magnification equipment such as monocular or magnifier
- Teletypewriter (TTY)
- White cane
- Service animal
- Support person, such as an intervenor.

General Tips

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deafblind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with him or her or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with him or her.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deafblind, but then speak directly to your customer as you normally would, not to the intervenor.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't suddenly touch a person who is deafblind or touch them without permission.

Tips on how to interact and communicate with customers who have 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.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Elevator
- Mobility device (i.e., wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, crutches)
- Support person.

General Tips

- Speak naturally and directly to your customer, not to his or her companion or support person.

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone in a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.
- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Do not lean over him or her or on his or her assistive device.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach.
- Don't touch assistive devices without permission. If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, remember to:
 - Wait for and follow the person's instructions
 - Confirm that your customer is ready to move
 - Describe what you're going to do before you do it
 - Avoid uneven ground and objects
 - Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate area (i.e., automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.).

Tips on how to interact and communicate with customers who have mental health disabilities

Mental health disabilities are not as visible as many other types of disabilities. You may not know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it.

Examples of mental health disabilities include schizophrenia, depression, phobias, as well as bipolar, anxiety and mood disorders.

A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty with one, several or none of these:

- Inability to think clearly
- Hallucinations (e.g., hearing voices, seeing or feeling things that aren't there)
- Depression or acute mood swings (e.g., from happy to depressed with no apparent reason for the change)
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty remembering
- Apparent lack of motivation.

If someone is experiencing difficulty controlling his or her symptoms, or is in a crisis, you may want to help out. Be calm and professional and ask your customer how you can best help.

Types of assistance your customer might use:

- Service animal
 - Support person.
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Unit 4: Assistive Devices

In this unit, you will learn:

- What an assistive device is
- About some commonly used assistive devices
- How to interact with a customer who uses an assistive device

What is an assistive device?

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. It helps the person to maintain their independence at home, at work and in the community.

What are some commonly used assistive devices?

There are a variety of assistive devices that some of your customers may use, depending on their disability. Many will be personal assistive devices, meaning they are owned and brought along by the individual, while others may be provided by your organization. The following are examples of some devices you may come across when serving your customers with disabilities:

People who have vision loss

- Digital audio player – enables people to listen to books, directions, art shows, etc.
- Magnifier – makes print and images larger and easier to read
- Portable global positioning systems (GPS) – helps orient people to get to specific destinations
- White cane – helps people find their way around obstacles

People who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf, hard of hearing

- FM transmitter system or other amplification devices – boosts sound closest to the listener while reducing background noise
- Hearing aid – makes sound louder and clearer
- Teletypewriter (TTY) – helps people who are unable to speak or hear to communicate by phone. The person types their messages on the TTY keyboard and messages are sent using telephone lines to someone who has a TTY, or to an operator (Bell Relay Service) who passes the message to someone who doesn't have a TTY.

People who have physical disabilities

- Mobility device (e.g., a wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, crutches) – helps people who have difficulty walking
- Personal oxygen tank – helps people breathe

People who have learning disabilities

- Electronic notebook or laptop computer – used to take notes and to communicate
- Personal data managers – stores, organizes and retrieves personal information
- Mini pocket recorders – records information for future playback

People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities

- Communication boards (e.g., a Bliss board) – used to pass on a message by pointing to symbols, words or pictures
- Speech generating devices – used to pass on a message using a device that "speaks" when a symbol, word or picture is pressed.

How do I interact with a customer who uses an assistive device?

- Many customers with disabilities will have their own personal assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, scooters or walkers. Don't touch or handle an assistive device without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to:
 - Wait for and follow the person's instructions.
 - Confirm that your customer is ready to move.
 - Describe what you are going to do before you do it.
 - Try to avoid uneven ground and objects.
 - Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

Don't move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.

Respect your customer's personal space. Don't lean over him or her or on his or her assistive device.

Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment (e.g., automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Unit 5: Service Animals

In this unit, you will learn:

- What guide dogs and service animals are and how to interact with a customer who uses a service animal.

Guide dogs and other service animals

What is a service animal?

Think of a service animal as an animal with a job to do for a person with a disability. Examples include guide dogs and animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure and lead them to safety.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 refers to the definition of "guide dog" under the Blind Persons' Rights Act, which states that: a guide dog is a dog that has been trained as a guide for a blind person at one of the facilities listed in Ontario Regulation 58 under the Blind Persons' Rights Act. The Ministry of the Attorney General may issue identification cards to identify a person who is blind and his or her guide dog.

The customer service standard requires you to let people with disabilities use their service animals on the parts of your premises open to the public or to third parties unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises.

Under the standard, an animal is a service animal if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability, or if the person has a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability. If it is not obvious that the animal is a service animal, you are not required to allow the animal on your premises if the person does not have a letter from a physician or nurse, or an identification card from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The following chart lists some types of service animals, key tasks they perform and those who use service animals.

Service Animal	Key Tasks	Users
Autism assistance or service dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeps a child from running into danger and provides assistance when sensory stimulus is heightened. Dog is attached to the child's waist by a belt and a leash held by an adult 	People with autism or other developmental/intellectual disabilities
Guide dog, dog guide or seeing eye dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows directions of owner, alerts owner to changes in elevation (e.g., curbs, stairs) and obstacles 	People with vision loss
Hearing ear, hearing, sound alert or hearing alert dog, cat or animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alerts owner to sounds often by a nudge or pawing and leads him/her to the source of the sound. May use a special signal to alert owner to fire alarm 	People who are Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing
Psychiatric service dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retrieves and prompts the person to take medicine, retrieves or activates medical alert, leads person out of crowds, etc. 	People with mental health disabilities
Service or mobility dog or animal, special skills dog or animal (Small ponies or miniature horses are used but are not as common).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May pull wheelchairs, carry objects, pull items, turn handles or push buttons such as door openers. Larger dogs may provide balance support. 	People with physical disabilities
Seizure, seizure alert, seizure assist or seizure response dog or animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steers owner from danger during a seizure, activates medical alert Can alert owner to an oncoming seizure 	People who have epilepsy or other seizure disorders

The standard doesn't require that service animals be formally trained, but most service animals in Ontario are trained at organizations in Canada or in the United States. Service animals are used in many countries around the world and so visitors to Ontario may also use service animals.

Tips on interacting with a customer who uses a service animal

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal.
- Avoid touching or addressing service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Avoid making assumptions about the animal. Not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses. If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.
- Remember your customer is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. You are not expected to provide care or food for the animal. However, you could provide water for the animal if your customer requests it.

How do I serve a customer if their animal is not allowed because of another law?

Where an animal is excluded by law from your premises, consider explaining why the animal is excluded. Explore or discuss with your customer another way of providing goods or services. For example:

- Bring goods or services to the person in a part of your premises where the animal is not restricted.
 - Offer a safe location where the service animal can wait, if the person is able to be separated from the animal while obtaining the service, and offer assistance to the person with a disability while he or she is separated from the service animal.
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Unit 6: Support Persons

In this unit, you will learn:

- Who are support persons and how to interact with a customer who has a support person with them.

Support persons

Who is a support person?

A support person is an individual hired or chosen to accompany a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods or services.

Personal care needs may include, but are not limited to, assistance with eating or using the washroom. Medical needs may include, but are not limited to, monitoring someone's health conditions, providing injections and providing support when someone has moderate to severe seizures.

The support person can be a paid personal support worker, volunteer, a friend or a family member. He or she does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Customers with disabilities must be allowed to use their support persons while accessing your organization's goods or services on the parts of the premises open to the public or third parties. If your organization charges for admission, you are required to have a policy regarding what amount, if any, is charged for support persons. Advance notification of a fee, if any, is required.

Functions of support persons

The following chart contains some examples of functions performed by support persons:

Person with a Disability	Support Person's Functions
Person who is deafblind	To guide, to provide transportation and adaptive communication such as tactile or adapted American Sign language, large print notes, print on palm or two-handed manual signing

Person who is Deaf, deafened, oral deaf	To provide sign language or oral interpretation services – to translate conversation, not to participate in it
Person with a learning disability	To help with complex communication or note-taking
Person with an intellectual/developmental disability	To help with travel, daily activities, prompting medication, complex tasks, or to keep them from dangerous situations
Person with a mental health disability	To help with communication tasks such as completing complex forms. To help in environments such as crowded, noisy settings or high-stress situations such as interviews
Person with a physical disability	To provide services related to travelling, personal care such as toileting or eating, monitoring medical conditions
Person with a seizure disorder	To assist in the event of a seizure, e.g. to protect the individual from falls
Person with a speech impairment who uses an augmentative or alternative communication system (symbol board, electronic communication system)	To relay or interpret a person's communications
Person with vision loss	To read or to guide

Tips on interacting with a customer who has a support person

- A customer with a disability might not introduce their support person. If you are not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask.
- Once you have determined who your customer is, speak directly to them, not to their support person.
- Be familiar with your organization's policies, practices and procedures about providing accessible customer service.

Unit 8: What to do if a customer with a disability is having difficulty accessing goods or services

In this unit, you will learn:

- What you can do to help your customer access goods or services.

What can I do to help my customer access goods or services?

All customers have their own specific needs or preferences. Being positive, flexible and open to suggestions will help to create a good customer experience. A good starting point is to ask your customer how you can help them access your goods or services.

Often, good customer service for people with disabilities can be achieved through simple and effective solutions to challenges. For example:

- Your customer is in a wheelchair and cannot enter the place where you work because of a step at the door. You could offer to serve her at the door.
- Your customer is Deaf and does not have a sign language interpreter with him. Ask him, in writing, if using a pen and paper to communicate would be a good way to serve him.
- Your customer cannot access some of the products in the shop where you work because they are displayed on counters that are too high to reach from her scooter. Offer to bring the products to the customer who will be able to feel, see, touch or smell the goods herself and maintain her independence.
- The brochure for the services offered where you work cannot be read by your customer who has low vision. Offer to read it out to him.

Remember, your customers are your best source for information about their needs. Ask them what you can do to help them. They will likely appreciate your attention and consideration for their needs.