



Training Resource for Small Businesses and Organizations:

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)



Breaking Barriers Together



Whether your organization is large or small, attracting every potential customer is essential to your business. Improving your services for customers with disabilities can help you increase your customer base and your bottom line.

Being accessible to customers with disabilities isn't just the right thing to do, it's also the law.

Through the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, the province is becoming more accessible for people with disabilities. Under the act, accessibility standards are being developed. These are the rules that Ontario businesses and organizations must follow to break down barriers for people with disabilities.

What's new?

Ontario's first standard under the act — customer service — is now law. This standard applies to all businesses and organizations that provide goods or services and have at least one employee. Under this standard, businesses must train staff about serving customers with disabilities. This training must be provided to everyone who:

- deals with members of the public or other third parties (e.g., business clients)
- develops customer service policies.

What do small businesses and organizations need to do?

Public sector organizations that are designated in the standard must comply with the standard and provide training by January 1, 2010. All other obligated organizations, including private and non-profit, need to comply by **January 1, 2012**. From these dates forward, updated training must be provided if your policies, practices or procedures on the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities change.

This booklet will provide an overview of each of the required training topics. You can use it to develop your own training program for your employees. It does not, however, serve as legal advice. If you would like to know exactly what the standard requires, or for more information and resources about accessibility, visit www.AccessON.ca/compliance.

This training will help you and your staff better serve the needs of customers with disabilities. This training will also help you comply with the training requirements in the customer service standard.

This document is for information purposes only. This is not legal advice and should be read together with the official language of the standard. To view the official wording of the regulation, go to www.e-laws.gov.on.ca, and click on “Current Consolidated Law” to do a keyword search for “429/07”.

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1

A review of the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was passed in 2005. The goal of the act is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. Ontario is developing mandatory, province-wide standards to achieve this goal and to improve accessibility. Standards are being developed in key areas of everyday life including:

- Customer service
- Employment
- Transportation
- Information and communications
- The built environment, including buildings.

The standards are developed by committees that include people from the disability and business communities. The public then has an opportunity to review and comment on each standard before it is finalized.

AODA

CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD

Designated public sector organizations and organizations with 20 or more employees must:

- Document in writing all their policies, practices and procedures for providing accessible customer service and meet other document requirements set out in the standard
- Notify customers that the documents required under the customer service standard are available upon request
- When giving documents required under the customer service standard to a person with a disability, provide the information in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

**Obligated businesses and organizations must comply
with the customer service standard starting**

JANUARY 1, 2012

To comply, all obligated businesses and organizations must:

- Set up policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the key principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity
- Have a policy on assistive devices used by people with disabilities to access your goods or services and a policy outlining any other measures you offer to enable them to access your goods and services
- 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 your premises open to the public or open to other third parties, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law
- Let people with disabilities bring their support persons with them when accessing goods or services on the parts of your premises open to the public or open to other third parties
- Let people know ahead of time what, if any, admission fee will be charged for a support person
- Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to access their goods and services are temporarily unavailable
- Ensure that everyone who deals with the public on your behalf, as well as everyone involved in developing your customer service policies, receives training on topics outlined in the customer service standard
- Set up a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the manner in which you provide goods or services to people with disabilities, including what action will be taken on any complaints. Make the information about the feedback process readily available to the public.

**This is a summary of the requirements of the customer service standard.
More information is available at www.AccessON.ca/compliance.**

2

How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities



Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them. Here are some suggested tips to interact and communicate with people who have various disabilities:

People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

TIPS

- **Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.**
- **A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note.**

People who have hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. These are terms used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

TIPS

- **Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.**
- **Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.**
- **If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.**
- **If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).**

People who have physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

TIPS

- **If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.**
- **Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission.**
- **If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.**

People who have vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

TIPS

- **Don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.**
- **Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.**
- **Ask your customer if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example, a menu or schedule of fees).**
- **When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.**
- **Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.**

People who have learning disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

TIPS

- **Be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.**
- **Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.**

People with speech or language impairments

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

TIPS

- **Don't assume that a person with a speech impairment has another disability.**
- **Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no."**
- **Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.**

People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

TIPS

- **Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.**
- **Be confident, calm and reassuring.**
- **If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.**

People who have intellectual / developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

TIPS

- **Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.**
- **Use plain language.**
- **Provide one piece of information at a time.**



A photograph of a man with a hearing aid on his neck talking to a salesperson in a clothing store. The man is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The salesperson is wearing a dark suit jacket and is holding a pen and a clipboard. A large yellow number '3' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

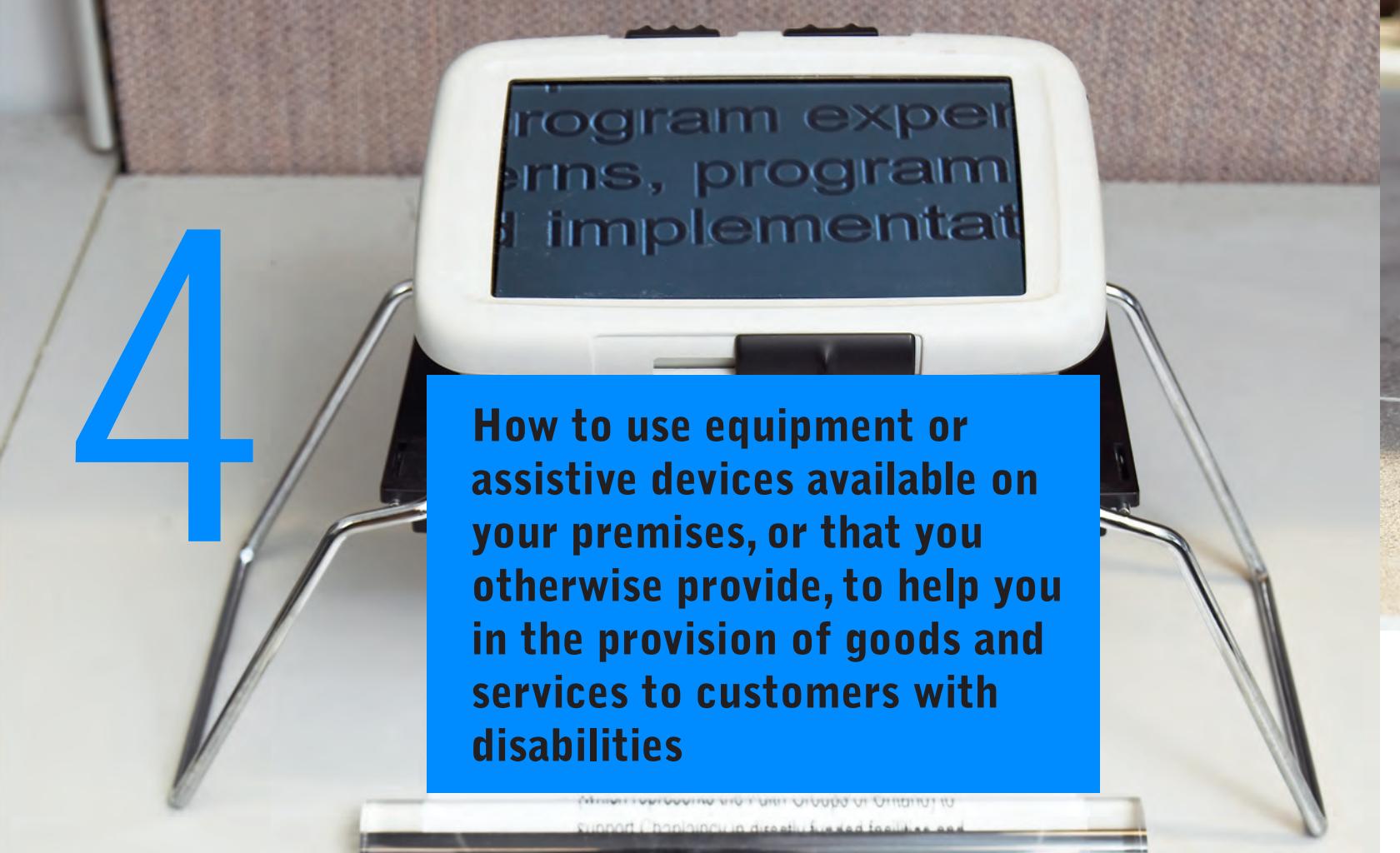
How to interact with people who use assistive devices

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. Personal assistive-devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

TIPS

- **Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.**
- **Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.**
- **Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g., public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, etc.).**

4



How to use equipment or assistive devices available on your premises, or that you otherwise provide, to help you in the provision of goods and services to customers with disabilities

If your organization offers any equipment or devices for customers with disabilities, you and your staff must be trained to use them. It could be helpful to have instruction manuals handy, an instruction sheet posted where the device is located or stored, and instructions available, on request, in alternate formats.

Some examples of assistive devices that your organization might offer include:

- Teletypewriter (TTY), which allows callers to send typed messages across phone lines
- Lift, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices
- Accessible interactive kiosk, which might offer information or services in Braille or through audio headsets
- Wheelchair
- Computer with adaptive software, such as JAWS for those individuals unable to read print.

5

How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal

People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the standard, you are required to allow service animals on the parts of your premises that are open to the public or to other third parties, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. You may ask a person for a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that their animal is required for reasons relating to their disability if it is not readily apparent.

TIPS

- **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. If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.**

6

How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a support person

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervenor. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating, to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the standard, a support person must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of your premises that is open to the public or to third parties. If your organization charges admission, you are required to provide notice, in advance, about what admission fee will be charged for a support person.

TIPS

- **If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services, or simply ask.**
- **Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.**

What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing your goods or services



If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask how you can best help. Remember that your customers are your best source for information about their needs. The solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

ACCESSIBILITY BENEFITS US ALL

According to the Royal Bank of Canada, people with disabilities have an estimated spending power of about \$25 billion each year in Canada. That's a market no business can afford to overlook.

GOOD SERVICE ATTRACTS MORE CUSTOMERS



Serve-Ability: Transforming Ontario's Customer Service

www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcsc/serve-ability/splash.html

This e-learning course will improve the quality of your customer service, help you better serve customers with different disabilities and help you meet your legal obligations under the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.

At www.AccessON.ca/compliance you'll find information and resources to help you understand how to comply with the regulation.

Please note: This document is for information purposes only. This is not legal advice and should be read together with the official language of the standard. To view the official wording of the regulation, go to www.e-laws.gov.on.ca, and click on "Current Consolidated Law" to do a keyword search for "429/07". Or contact ServiceOntario (listed below) to order a copy.

For more information or to get this document in an alternate format, contact:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Contact Centre (ServiceOntario)

Toll-free: 1-866-515-2025

TTY: 416-325-3408 / Toll-free: 1-800-268-7095

Fax: 416-325-3407

Website: www.AccessON.ca

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