

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Employee Guide





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About this Guide

This guide will serve as a required training tool to educate our internal and assignment employees on how to best provide customer service to every individual they come in contact with. Design Group Staffing Inc. (Agilus) is committed to ensuring that ALL people are treated with respect and dignity and recognize that for people with disabilities there have historically been barriers to accessing goods and services in Ontario. As a result, this guide will explain AODA, define disability and offer guidelines on how to best interact and communicate with persons with disabilities.

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What is AODA?

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This legislation was passed in 2005 and is comprised of standards being developed in five areas:

- 1 Customer Service
- 2 Information and Communication
- 3 Employment
- 4 Transportation
- 5 Built Environment

The purpose of the AODA is to achieve a fully accessible Ontario by 2025 by developing and enforcing standards that will identify and remove barriers for people with disabilities so that they can access goods and services with independence and dignity. The AODA standards are also based on ensuring integration of service and equal opportunity.

The Customer Service Standard, hereinafter referred to as Accessible Customer Service, was passed in 2007 and came into effect January 1, 2010 in the public sector and January 1, 2012 in the private and not-for-profit sectors.

Did you know?

- One in seven Ontarians has a disability.
- 95% of disabilities are hidden.
- It is estimated that one in five Ontarians will be 65 or older by 2025 and half of that group will have some form of a disability.
- More than half a million Canadian adults have some form of vision loss that is not corrected by glasses and more than a million live with some form of hearing loss that is not corrected by a hearing aid.
- Mental illness affects all Canadians either directly or indirectly through a family member, friend or colleague.

What is a disability?

A disability, as defined by the AODA, includes any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement, conditions of mental impairment or developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, mental disorders, and injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the Workplace Safety & Insurance Act, 1997. Disabilities may be visible or invisible. They may be continuous, intermittent or temporary and can vary in severity. Information about a person's disability is personal so must be treated with privacy and confidentiality.



What is Accessible Customer Service?

Accessible Customer Service is flexible service that meets the needs of an individual customer by ensuring dignity and independence. The service is provided in a way that allows a person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people. It allows a person with a disability to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others. It puts the PERSON first and not the disability. Accessible customer service recognizes that people with disabilities have an opportunity equal to that given to others to access goods and services. It also promotes integration in that the good or service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same service in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers unless an alternate measure is necessary to enable the person to access the good or service.

For example,

- A customer who is blind may need to have information read aloud.
- A person who uses a mobility device such as a wheelchair may need help in finding an accessible route.

Accessible customer service also allows for comments and suggestion on how to improve customer service and provides as much notice as possible if there is a disruption in service.

Accessible Customer Service Policy

The Accessible Customer Service Policy for Design Group Staffing Inc. (Agilus) is posted in every branch office in Ontario and is accessible on our websites. All internal and assignment employees are required to read, and sign this policy and then act in a manner that is reflective and supportive of the policy.

The policy addresses training, use of assistive devices, support persons, methods for feedback and notice of service disruptions.



How to interact and communicate with people who have a disability:

General guidelines

- Treat all customers with respect.
- Give customers your full attention.
- Offer a variety of methods of communication.
- Understand the nature and scope of the services you provide.
- Accept and act upon feedback.
- Remember that no one is an expert on all disabilities.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability rather than an interpreter or support person.
- Use “people first” language. For example, “person with a disability” NOT “disabled person”.

ASK...How can I help you?

People with vision loss

Vision disabilities can range from visual impairments that reduce a person's ability to see clearly such as narrow field of vision and colour blindness to total blindness. A person with a visual impairment may or may not wear dark glasses, use a white cane, have a guide dog or be accompanied by a guide.

- Verbally identify yourself before making any physical contact.
- Offer your arm to guide the person but do not grab or pull.
- Speak directly to the person.
- If you are unsure how much the person can see then ask so that you can provide the best service possible.
- If the person uses a service animal do not touch or approach the animal as it is working.
- Verbally describe the setting they are in and identify any potential hazards in their path.
- Do not leave the person unattended without telling the person with the disability you need to leave the room.





People with hearing loss or deafness

There are several types of hearing loss:

Hard-of-hearing: Describes people who have mild to profound hearing loss but still use spoken language to communicate. Most people with this disability can understand some speech with or without an assistive device and can often read lips.

Deafened: Describes people who grew up hearing or hard-of-hearing and who have suddenly or gradually lost their hearing to a significant degree.

Oral deaf: Describes people with severe to profound hearing loss and little or no residual hearing whose preferred mode of communication is speech.

Culturally Deaf: Describes people who identify with and participate in the language, culture and community of Deaf people (this community is commonly identified with a capital “D”) and typically use American Sign Language as their primary means of communication.

- Determine the form of communication the person with the disability prefers to use and make accommodations as necessary.
- Don't shout but do speak clearly.
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth so that it is easier for the person with the hearing loss to read lips if this is how they best communicate.
- If a sign language interpreter is being used then direct your attention to the person with the disability and not the interpreter.
- If a hearing aid is being used then try to speak in an area that has few competing sounds.

People who are deaf-blind

Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss. People who are deaf-blind communicate using special sign language that involves touching a person's hand and may also use other auditory, visual or tactile communication methods such as Braille, and communication boards.

- Don't assume what the person can or cannot do.
- Understand that communication can take some time so be patient.
- Speak directly to the person and not the intervener.
- Do not interfere with the person's service animal.

People with developmental disabilities

Developmental (sometimes also referred to as intellectual) disabilities can affect a person's ability to think and reason and can challenge the person with the disability in expressing themselves, understanding others, moving their bodies and/or controlling their behaviour. A person with a developmental disability may have difficulty with understanding spoken and written information, conceptual information, memory. The disability may have been caused by genetic factors such as Down's Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or by a brain trauma or psychiatric disorder.

- Use clear, simple language and provide information one piece at a time in a step-by-step format.
- Be patient and able to provide examples regarding information.
- Listen carefully and repeat back to the customer what you understood for clarification.
- Don't assume what the person can or cannot do.

People with mental health disabilities

There are three main types of mental health disabilities:

- 1 Anxiety
- 2 Mood
- 3 Behavioural

There is a wide range of disorders that fall under these main categories including; psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, eating disorders and substance abuse and dependence.

- Be respectful and treat each person as an individual.
- Ask what would make him/her most comfortable and provide the accommodations.
- Stay calm even if the customer starts to display unusual behaviour by focusing on the good or service they need and how you can help them get it.
- Eliminate unnecessary noise and distractions.

People with physical or mobility disabilities

There are many types of physical disabilities which can affect functional ability in being able to move and/or coordinate one part of the body. Muscular ability can also be affected through weakness, tremors and paralysis. Physical disabilities may be temporary (broken limb), or occasional (arthritis flare up) or permanent. The disability may be congenital such as Muscular Dystrophy or acquired, such as tendonitis. Physical disabilities may affect one's ability to move independently, have strength or endurance and control or coordinate movement.

- Be aware of potential physical barriers for people with mobility issues.
- Be aware of accessible features in your environment and able to tell the person with the disability about them.
- Respect personal space and do not touch or move mobility devices without permission.
- Provide seating for customers not able to stand for periods of time.
- If servicing a customer from behind a counter that is too wide or deep for you to maintain eye contact, step around it to provide service.

People with communication disabilities

A person with a communication disability may have difficulty in speaking and/or understanding what you say. They may also have difficulty with reading and/or writing. A communication disability DOES NOT imply limited intelligence.

Some typical communication disabilities can include difficulty in pronunciation, variance in pitch and volume and stuttering or slurring.

- Choose a quiet environment to communicate in and be patient.
- Speak in your regular tone of voice. There is no need to speak more slowly or loudly than usual.
- Don't interrupt or try to finish sentences for them.

- Try to ask close-ended questions (“yes” or “no” answers).
- If the person uses a communication board say the letter or word out loud as she/he points to it. You may also find it beneficial to write them down.
- If the person has difficulty understanding you then you can try to write down key words, use gestures, point to objects and picture and use other written resources such as diagrams.

People with temporary or other disabilities

Some disabilities may be temporary in nature as a result of other conditions, accidents or disorders. Joint replacement and effects from a stroke are examples.

Other disabilities can include sensory disabilities. Smell disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odors and smells. Touch disabilities can affect a person’s ability to sense texture, temperature, vibrations or pressure. Taste disabilities can limit the experience of the primary taste sensations: sweet, bitter, salty and sour.

Other disabilities may be the result from a range of conditions such as illness, disease and accidents including asthma, diabetes and cancer.

People who use a service animal

Typically people think of a guide dog when using the descriptor service animal, but there are many other service animals including parrots, monkeys and cats. It may not be obvious that an animal is being used for reasons relating to a disability. If it is not apparent, the person with the disability will usually have a letter from a medical professional stating the animal is a service animal or a certificate proving that the animal has been trained by a professional service animal institution.

- Allow service animals anywhere that the customer normally has access.
- Do not interfere with a service animal by petting or distracting it.

People who use a support person

A support person is someone who accompanies a person with a disability to help with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods or services. It may not always be apparent who a support person is, so if you are unsure if your customer has need of or is using a support person you may ask your customer if he/she has brought anyone to assist them.

- Be aware of the organization’s policy stating if admission fees or any other fees

will be charged to a support person.

- Speak directly to the person with the disability as he/she is your customer.
- Obtain consent from your customer if confidential information is going to be shared when the support person is present.

Resources

If you would like further information on how to provide accessible customer service the following resources may be of interest:

Requirements for each phase of AODA compliance

<http://accessontario.com/aoda/>

Making accessibility easier

<http://www.accessibilityconsultants.ca/aoda-compliance>

Website of the abilities centre featuring information for and about people with disabilities.

www.abilitiescentre.org

Name

Date

Signature