



# **UNDERSTANDING ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**Employee Booklet**

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## Section #1

## Background

The Accessibility for *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) was passed by the Ontario legislature with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the Province.

The purpose of the accessibility standards is to move organizations in Ontario forward on accessibility. The standards will set requirement in a number of key areas and will be reviewed at least every five years. New requirements may be added. Ontario will move step by step towards accessibility that is widespread and commonplace. The goal of the Act is to make the Province of Ontario completely accessible by 2025.

The first standard to come into effect on January 1, 2010 is the Customer Service Standard. This standard directs the Town to:

1. Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities.
2. Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
3. Set a policy on allowing people to use their own personal assistive devices to access our goods and use our services.
4. Allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of our premises that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.
5. Permit people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public or third parties.
6. Train staff, volunteers, contractors, agents, and any other people who interact with the public on our behalf, as well as those who have input into policies related to service delivery, on a number of topics as outlined in the Customer Service Standard.
7. Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how we provide goods or services to people with disabilities and how we will respond to any feedback and take action on any complaints.
8. Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access or use our goods and services are temporarily disrupted.

## **Section #2: What is Accessible Customer Service?**

The Town of Wasaga Beach is committed to providing exceptional and accessible service for its customers. Goods and services will be provided in a manner that is based upon the principles of **dignity, independence, integration** and **equal opportunity** to all of its customers. The provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities will be integrated wherever possible. Persons with disabilities will benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other customers.

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation.

For example, a person who has a vision disability may need to have information read aloud to them; an individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down; or someone who uses a wheelchair may require help in finding a route that they can use. Accessible customer service is simply good customer service; courteous, helpful and prompt.

## **Section #3: What can I do?**

Always start with people first. In language, that means saying “person with a disability” rather than a “disabled person”. In any interaction, it means addressing the person’s service needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

A “Disability” as defined by the AODA includes:

- 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 deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or 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*.

Each table below defines a specific category of disability and outlines some tips to help you provide service to your customers.

**Intellectual or Development Disabilities:**

Definition:	Tips for serving customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual development and capacity that is below average</li> <li>• Can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently</li> <li>• May be an invisible disability</li> <li>• They may understand you more than you realize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't assume what the customer can or cannot do</li> <li>• Use plain language</li> <li>• Take your time, be patient</li> <li>• Ask: "Do you understand this?"</li> <li>• Provide one piece of information at a time – step-by-step instruction</li> <li>• Offer information in simpler concepts</li> </ul>

**Learning Disabilities:**

Definition:	Tips for serving customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affects how a person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information</li> <li>• In many cases, the individual has average or above-average intelligence</li> <li>• May affect:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Language based learning</li> <li>○ Mathematics</li> <li>○ Writing, fine motor skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take some time, be patient</li> <li>• Demonstrate a willingness to assist</li> <li>• Speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer</li> <li>• Provide information in a way that works for your customer (e.g. pen and paper)</li> <li>• Be prepared to explain any materials you provide</li> </ul>
<b>Respectful Language:</b>	<b>Out-Dated Language</b>
Learning Disability	Retarded, slow, idiot, brain damaged, special-ed

## Mental Health Disabilities:

<b>Definition:</b>	<b>Tips for serving customers:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined as the absence of psychological wellbeing and satisfactory adjustment to society</li> <li>• Some common features of mental health disabilities are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Phobias, panic attacks</li> <li>○ Hallucinations</li> <li>○ Mood swings</li> <li>○ Bipolar disorders (depression and manic phases)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat our customer with respect and consideration</li> <li>• Be confident and reassuring</li> <li>• Do not be confrontational</li> <li>• If the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help</li> <li>• Take the customer seriously</li> <li>• Don't take things personally</li> </ul>
<b>Respectful Language</b>	<b>Out-Dated Language</b>
Mental Health Disability	Crazy, insane, wacko, nuts, hyper-sensitive

## Speech or Language Disabilities:

<b>Definition:</b>	<b>Tips for serving customers:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have problems communicating</li> <li>• May find it difficult to pronounce words</li> <li>• May slur or stutter</li> <li>• May use communication boards or other assistive devices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't make assumptions</li> <li>• Give whatever time they need to get their point across</li> <li>• Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no", if possible</li> <li>• Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences</li> <li>• May have to use a pen and paper</li> <li>• Say: "I don't understand, can you repeat that?"</li> </ul>
<b>Respectful Language</b>	<b>Out-Dated Language</b>
Speech Impediment	Stupid, slow

## Physical or Disabilities Affecting Mobility:

Definition:	Tips for serving customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May restrict a person in the following ways:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Control or speed of movements</li> <li>○ Coordination and balance</li> <li>○ Ability to grasp objects</li> <li>○ Ability to walk long distances</li> <li>○ Ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Can be present at birth, result from disease, injury, or be temporary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak directly to the customer</li> <li>• Ask before you help</li> <li>• Respect personal space</li> <li>• Don't move any items they may have</li> <li>• Describe what you are going to do beforehand</li> <li>• Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous, or undignified position</li> </ul>
Respectful Language	Out-Dated Language
Mobility Disability, Physical Disability	Handicapped, physically challenged, deformed, cripple

## Vision Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips for serving customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision – very few are totally blind</li> <li>• Low or no vision can restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards</li> <li>• May use guide dog or white cane</li> <li>• May need to view written documents in large print, or with help of magnifier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't assume the customer can't see you</li> <li>• Speak directly to your customer</li> <li>• Offer your elbow to guide</li> <li>• If they accept, walk slowly, wait for permission</li> <li>• Identify landmarks</li> <li>• Be precise and descriptive with information</li> <li>• Don't leave the customer</li> </ul>
Respectful Language	Out-Dated Language
Blind, person who is blind	Invalid, handicapped

## Hearing Disabilities:

Definition:	Tips for serving customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hearing Impaired</b> – sever to profound hearing loss, hears poorly or not at all</li> <li>• <b>Hard of Hearing</b> – a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract customer’s attention before speaking – lightly touch their shoulder or wave your hand</li> <li>• Look directly at the person</li> <li>• May have to use pen and paper</li> <li>• Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face</li> <li>• Reduce background noise</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate lighting</li> </ul>
Respectful Language	Out-Dated Language
Hearing impaired Hard of hearing	deaf

## Deafblind Disability:

Definition:	Tips for serving customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot see or hear to some degree</li> <li>• Many will be accompanied by a support person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak directly to your customer, not the support person</li> <li>• Identify yourself to the support person</li> </ul>

Most importantly, recognize your nervousness and relax! People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you. Just remember to ask how you can best help.

Note: The suggested “respectful language” and “out-dated language” examples are guidelines around terminology as opposed to rules. What is acceptable for some might not be for others. Remember that if you are not sure, just ask!

## **Section #4**

### **How should I interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive equipment, the assistance of a service animal or a support person?**

1. Let's understand what the different assistive options are:

#### **Assistive Equipment**

- Devices that people may bring with them or that are already on the premises and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by the Town of Wasaga Beach.
- Assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, walking canes, not taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

#### **Service Animal**

- An animal which is specially trained to assist an individual with disabilities.
- An animal is a "Service Animal" if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or her disability, for example, a guide dog wearing a harness.
- If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a Service Animal, then a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability may be requested.

#### **Support Person**

- In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communications, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services is considered a Support Person.
- May be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

2. Now let's take some time to understand how you should interact with persons with disabilities who may use one or more of these assistive options.

#### Customers using **Assistive Equipment:**

- It is inappropriate to lean on or reach over them.
- The person is permitted to enter the premises with the device and to utilize the device unless excluded by law.
- Potential barriers to the use of assistive devices must be removed where possible.
- Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on our premises.
- Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence.

#### Customers with **Service Animals:**

- Service animals are allowed anywhere customers normally have access.
- The customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal.
- Avoid talking to, touching, or making eye contact with the service animal.
- The customer is permitted to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is excluded by law.
- If an employee has a severe allergy to a service animal, the employee will explain the situation to the customer with the service animal or ask another employee for assistance to ensure that the customer is provided access to goods and/or services.

#### Customers with **Support Persons:**

- Both persons are permitted to enter the premises together.
- The person with a disability must not be prevented from having access to their support person while on the premises.
- Consent is required if confidential information is going to be shared while a support person is present.
- Support persons are non-participants and allowed free admission to the Town of Wasaga Beach services being accessed by the person with a disability whom they are accompanying.
- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person.

## Section #5

### **What happens if for some reason we cannot serve a person with a disability?**

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as the lift under repair, renovations that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

People with disabilities may often go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging a ride. By providing advance notice, you can save that person an unnecessary trip. Notice can be provided on the Town's website, by telephone or in writing.

In the event of an unexpected disruption of service, provide notice in a variety of ways and as quickly as possible. Consider offering alternative methods of service while informing those that may be impacted personally.

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#### **Additional Resources:**

- Review the Town of Wasaga Beach Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy located on the website
- Review the Ministry of Community and Social Services – Accessibility website – [www.accesson.ca](http://www.accesson.ca)
- Speak to your Supervisor and/or Manager
- Contact: Twyla Nicholson, Town Clerk, 429-3844 ex 2223

**Section #6**

**Sign Off**

**Please detach and return the completed sign-off sheet to the Town Clerk:**

I have read and understand the contents of the Town of Wasaga Beach Accessible Customer Service Employee Booklet:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Department Head: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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