



Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

getting started guide
for employers

organizations with fewer
than 20 employees



becoming accessible

Accessible customer service is not about ramps or automatic door openers.

It's about understanding that people with disabilities may have different needs.

This guide will help you:

- understand the standard and what you need to do
- create your plan on accessible customer service
- train your staff.

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service applies to all people or organizations in Ontario that:

- Provide goods or services, and
- Have one or more employees.

It affects these sectors:

- Private
- Non-profit
- Public

To provide accessible customer service, organizations need to:

Step 1: Create and put in place a plan that:

- Considers a person's disability when communicating with them
- Allows assistive devices in your workplace, like wheelchairs, walkers and oxygen tanks
- Allows service animals
- Welcomes support persons
- Lets customers know when accessible services aren't available
- Invites customers to provide feedback

Step 2: Train staff on accessible customer service



Step 1. create an accessible customer service plan

Develop and put in place a plan that outline how you will provide goods or services to people with disabilities. Put the customer first – and let the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity guide you.

Tips:

- Make a list of what you do every day to provide customer service
- Identify **potential barriers** for people with disabilities. Use this information to refresh existing – or create new – ways of doing things.

Examples:

A clothing store might decide to exclude people with disabilities from its no-refund return policy because its fitting rooms are not wheelchair accessible.

A grocery store has a practice of placing rolls of plastic bags for produce on top of the produce shelves. By placing the rolls lower, people who use mobility devices can access the bags without assistance.



consider a person's disability when communicating with them

Accessible customer service is often about finding ways around barriers faced by your customers. Ensuring staff know what's expected of them when they communicate with customers with disabilities will help you deliver accessible customer service.

Tips:

- Consider how people with various disabilities communicate.
- Ask your customers how you can best communicate with them.
- Ask yourself: how can I make communications accessible? Every situation is different and depends on the individual's needs. Get more details on various **ways to communicate**.

Example:

A dance studio offers their class schedule in paper format at the front desk. When a customer with low vision asks for the schedule in Braille, the manager explains that it is not available in Braille, but is available in an accessible format on the studio's website. This works for the customer because she has a screen reader at home that reads what is displayed on the website.

Another customer, who has a learning disability, is having difficulty understanding a particular part of the schedule and simply asks the manager to read that part to him aloud.

allow assistive devices

An **assistive device** is any piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help them with daily living. Some examples include: a wheelchair, screen reader, listening device or cane.

Tips:

- Consider how you will address the use of a customer's assistive device.
- Will you offer helpful measures, such as carry-out service or delivery?
- Are there any dangers on your premises – and how will you address them? For example, an open flame could be dangerous for someone with an oxygen tank.

Example:

Janet can walk short distances and uses a scooter. It is often difficult to find space in a busy restaurant to park her scooter. She finds it helpful when staff suggest parking options and make space.



allow service animals

Guide dogs are not the only type of service animal. Other kinds of animals can be trained to help people with disabilities too.

Welcome service animals into your workplace or business. If a service animal is excluded by law, provide another way for the person to access your goods and services.

Tips:

- Identify the areas of your premises open to service animals.
- Do you need to do anything different to serve people with service animals?
- How else will you provide service, if service animals are excluded by law?

Example:

A restaurant allows service animals into its dining room and bar but since other legislation prevents animals from entering the kitchen, staff meet with suppliers or sales reps with service animals in the office upstairs.



welcome support persons

A support person does not have to be a paid support worker. He or she can be a family member or a friend.

Support persons help someone with a disability perform daily tasks. Often people who have a support person are not able to do things by themselves, such as eat meals, use the washroom or change their clothes. Without support, that person may be unable to access your organization.

Welcome support persons to your workplace or business. Let people know if you charge an additional fee for a support person. This fee needs to be clearly stated in advance.

Tips:

- Think about how your services are used by people with a support person.
- Decide how you will deal with special situations or services.
- Consider what parts of your premises are open to the public.
- Develop and clearly state the admission fee , if your organization sets a fee for support persons.

Example:

A movie theatre posts a notice on its website and at its ticket window that support persons will be charged 50 per cent of the admission fee when accompanying a person with a disability.

let customers know when accessible services aren't available

Sometimes accessibility features or services require repair or are just temporarily out of service (e.g. an elevator or accessible washroom). When this happens, let your customers know by posting a notice.

Tips:

- Make a list of the facilities and services people with disabilities rely on.
- Prepare a template notice in advance. Include: the reason for the disruption, how long the service will be unavailable and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.
- Post the notice in a place where people are most likely to find it (e.g. the entrance door to your business, on your website, another high-traffic area).

Example:

A dry cleaning business must remove the ramp in front of their store for a few weeks. They post a sign outside and leave a message on their phone explaining the situation. Both the sign and the message explain that repairs are being done, give the date when the ramp will be available again, and offer to meet customers outside if they call ahead in order to pick up or drop off garments.



invite customers to provide feedback

A good way to learn about barriers that exist in your workplace is to collect comments from your customers with disabilities. Invite customers to give feedback on how you provide accessible customer service. Let customers know how to do this.

Tips:

- Determine how you want to receive feedback (e.g., in person, by telephone, in writing or by email).
- How will you respond to feedback, including complaints?
- How will you let customers know about the process?

Example:

An inn posts a sign in its lobby, and includes a notice on the receipt that visitors receive when they check out, informing them that they can submit feedback at the front desk, by phone or through the inn's website. The sign states that details about its feedback process are available online.

step 2. train your staff on accessible customer service

Members of your organization who either work with customers or create customer service plans should be trained. It could be housekeeping staff at a hotel or even an organization's chief policy maker. The most **effective training** will be customized to the needs of your organization and should include:

- An overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard
- Your organization's plans to provide accessible customer service
- How to interact with people with various types of disabilities
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person
- How to use any equipment or devices available at your workplace to assist with providing goods or services to people with disabilities
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing your organization's goods or services.

Tips:

- Determine who needs to be trained. Start with employees, volunteers, agents, contractors and others who interact with the public on your behalf.
- Remember to train new staff soon after they are hired, offer refreshers if you make changes to your plan and provide training on an ongoing basis.
- Use our Training Tips to get your staff on board.

Example:

A toy store employs three full-time sales associates as well as two seasonal part-time employees who take orders over the phone. The sales associates receive training on accessible customer service, and so do the part-time employees because they interact with customers over the phone.

questions?

For more detailed information, you can also read the **Employer Handbook**.

Visit ontario.ca/AccessON.

Or contact:

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

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This document is available in an alternate format on request.

