



# Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) Customer Service Training



Melanie Stone

Accessibility Specialist, HR & Corporate Services



## AODA

- Goal: To help make Ontario accessible for all



Photo Caption: This photo is of a woman in a Canadian Sledge Hockey Team jersey, seated in an ice sledge, holding 2 sledge hockey sticks. She is facing the camera with a serious expression on her face. She is holding the sledge hockey sticks with large hockey gloves.



## AODA Components

- The AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) and Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)
- Customer Service
- Information & Communication Standard
- Design of Public Spaces
- Transportation
- Employment



## Thinking about disability

**The AODA uses the Ontario Human Rights definition of disability.** which includes physical disabilities as well as vision, hearing, speech, developmental, learning and mental health disabilities.

**One in 7, to 1 in 5 Ontarians has a disability.**

- **Who are people with disabilities?**
- Disabilities can be visible or non-visible. We can't always tell who has a disability. A disability can be temporary or permanent, and many of us will experience a disability at some point in our lives.
- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 uses the same definition of disability as the Ontario Human Rights Code



## Who is a customer?

- The standards must be followed by:
- the Ontario Government and Legislative Assembly
- all designated public sector organizations, which include municipalities, universities, colleges, hospitals, school boards and public transportation organizations
- private businesses and not-for-profit organizations that have one or more employees in Ontario
- **Who is a customer?**
- A customer can be anyone who is accessing your organization's goods, services or facilities. They may include paying and non-paying members of the public, and individuals your organization might call customers, such as clients, members, patrons or patients.
- Customers can also be other businesses or organizations (also referred to as third parties).



## Ontario Human Rights Definition of Disability

- Defining disability is a complex, evolving matter. The term “disability” covers a broad range and degree of conditions.
- A disability may have been present at birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.
- Section 10 of the Code defines “disability” as: (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 co-ordination, 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. “Disability” should be interpreted in broad terms.



## Ableism

- Discrimination in favour of able bodied people.
- Understanding that the world is built for particular bodies, and workplaces, policies, public spaces, buildings and their contents are often designed in favour of able-bodied people or people without disabilities
- The Supreme Court of Canada — the highest court — has also recognized that there is a social component to disability. It has called this social component “social handicapping.” What this means is that society’s response to persons with disabilities is often the cause of the “handicap” that persons with disabilities experience.



## Who is required to take this training?

- The following people must be trained on serving customers with disabilities:
- all employees and **volunteers** (paid and unpaid, full-time, part-time and contract positions)
- **anyone involved in developing your organization's policies (including managers, senior leaders, directors, board members and owners)**
- anyone who provides goods, services or facilities to customers on your organization's behalf (such as external contact centres or facilities management companies)
- Training must be completed as soon as possible after an employee or volunteer joins your organization.
- Training must also be provided when there are any changes to your organization's accessible customer service policies.



## Customer Service Policies

- The Corporation of the City of London has its own accessible customer service policies.
- We provide information on how to use any equipment or devices available in your organization that can help to provide goods, services or facilities to people with disabilities



## Follow up training will be provided

- More detail on additional tools will be provided in the New Year as we roll out new policies and technology.
- Each committee has different policy requirements under the AODA. Please review the sections applicable to you so that your policy work is informed by accessibility legislation. For example, if you are involved in advising about public spaces, be sure you review the details of the public space standards.



## Customer Service Standard

- Our job is to ensure better accessible structures, programs and services so that we aren't the barrier that prevents people from participation
- The AODA requires commitment to providing quality goods, services and facilities that are accessible to all persons we serve
- We will continue to work with the community and allocate appropriate resources towards the elimination of accessibility barriers in customer service





## City of London Accessible Customer Service Policy

- All of our staff are trained during orientation about how to provide accessible customer service.
- We have a number of tools available for customers to communicate



## Common Mistakes

- Common mistakes
  - Leaning down inappropriately to talk to someone
  - Speaking loudly and slowly without being asked to
  - Being patronizing (good for you! You're outside doing things!)
  - Having different expectations/making decisions on someone's behalf
  - Speaking to a support person/partner only
  - Assuming someone is a support person and not a partner/family member/spouse
  - Offering unsolicited advice
  - Sharing personal stories of disability
  - Assessing someone's disability and worthiness for an accommodation (bathrooms & parking spots are common)
  - Describing people as their mobility aid "We need to move this wheelchair."
  - Moving a mobility aid without direction or permission



## Tips

- Ask before you help. People with disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Don't touch or move a person's equipment (for example, wheelchair or walker) without their permission.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair or mobility aid, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or difficult position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors or elevators.
- 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 if appropriate or invited.



## Visible and invisible

- There are visible and invisible disabilities. There are temporary and permanent disabilities and there are episodic disabilities.
- Many people have disabilities that involve all three or different intersecting disabilities such as mental health and physical disability.
- For this reason, ask how you can help. Needs change and what works one day may not work the next.





## Individuals with vision loss

- Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read documents or signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some people may use a guide dog, a white cane, or a support person such as a sighted guide, while others may not.
- **Tips:**
- When you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the person can't see you. Not everyone with vision loss is blind. Many have some or fluctuating vision.
- Identify yourself and speak directly to your customer if they are with a companion.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed information out loud to them, such as a policy or a bill or schedule of fees. Not everyone can read braille so ask how you can be of assistance.



- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive (for example, "two steps in front of you" or "a metre to your left"). Don't say "over there" or point in the direction indicated.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed. If they accept, lead – don't pull.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the surroundings. For example, if you're approaching stairs or an obstacle, say so.
- If you need to leave the customer, let them know by telling them you'll be back or saying goodbye.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room – guide them to a comfortable location.



## People who are deaf/Deaf or hard of hearing

- People who have hearing loss may identify in different ways. They may identify as deaf/Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.
- A person with hearing loss might use a hearing aid, an amplification device or hearing ear dog. They may have preferred ways to communicate, for example, through sign language, by lip reading or using a pen and paper.



- Once a customer has self-identified as having hearing loss, make sure you face the customer when talking and that you are in a well-lit area so the person can see you clearly.
- As needed, attract the person's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Maintain eye contact. Use body language, gestures and facial expression to help you communicate.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or if possible, move to a quieter area.
- Don't assume that the customer knows sign language or reads lips.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).
- When using a sign language interpreter, look and speak directly to the customer, not the sign language interpreter. For example, say "What would you like?" not "Ask her what she'd like."



## Speech

- Cerebral palsy, stroke, hearing loss or other medical conditions or disabilities may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or express themselves. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.
- 
- **Tips:**
- Don't assume that a person who has difficulty speaking doesn't understand you.
- Speak directly to the customer and not to their companion or support person.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no."
- If the person uses a communication device, take a moment to read visible instructions for communicating with them.
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.
- Confirm what the person has said by summarizing or repeating what you've understood and allow the person to respond – don't pretend if you're not sure.
- If necessary, provide other ways for the customer to contact you, such as email.



## Learning Disabilities

- The term "learning disabilities" refers to a range of disabilities. One example of a learning disability is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when the person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.
- People with learning disabilities just learn in a different way.
- **Tips:**
- Be patient and allow extra time if needed. People with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information or to understand and respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that works for your customer. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.
- Be willing to rephrase or explain something again in another way, if needed.



## Mental Health

- Did you know that one in five Canadians will experience a mental health disability at some point in their lives?
- Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. A person with a mental health disability may experience depression or acute mood swings, anxiety due to phobias or panic disorder, or hallucinations. It may affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things.
- You may not know someone has this disability unless you are told. Stigma and lack of understanding are major barriers for people with mental health disabilities.
- **Tips:**
  - If you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability, treat people with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
  - Be confident, calm and reassuring. Ask the customer for what they need.
  - Listen carefully, and work with the customer to meet their needs. For example, acknowledge that you have heard and understood what the person has said or asked.
  - Respect your customer's personal space.
  - Limit distractions that could affect your customer's ability to focus or concentrate. For example, loud noise, crowded areas and interruptions could cause stress.



## Developmental or intellectual disability

- Developmental disabilities (such as Down syndrome) or intellectual disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities or live independently. Supports, encouragement and inclusion
- **Tips:**
  - Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
  - Don't exaggerate your speech or speak in a patronizing way.
  - Use plain language.
  - Provide one piece of information at a time.
  - If you're not sure of what is being said to you, confirm by summarizing or repeating what was said, or politely ask them to repeat it – don't pretend if you're not sure.
  - Ask the customer if they would like help reading your material or completing a form, and wait for them to accept the offer of assistance.
  - Be patient and allow extra time if needed.



## What creates disabling conditions?

- Expectations of fast pace & quick travel
- Ignorance or dismissive attitudes
- Lack of appropriate support technology
- Lack of creativity/problem solving
- Structural inaccessibility (stairs, poor lighting, temperature fluctuations, flashing lights, lack of snow removal, etc...)
- Inequitable funding
- Fear of doing the “wrong” thing so doing nothing at all
- Fear in the workplace
- Distractions and loud noises
- Not providing enough information for someone to request assistance ahead of time.



## Accommodations

- Support persons for customers with disabilities are common and welcome at all city facilities
- Consent is required if confidential information is going to be discussed
- Support person is free to enter City facilities at no charge
- Speak directly to the customer, not the support person unless you are directed to do so



## Service animals

- Customers with disabilities are permitted to:
- Enter all public City facilities with service animals
- Go anywhere customers normally have access unless excluded by law
- Customer is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal
- Avoid talking to, touching or making eye contact with the working animal
- Employees with disabilities are able to bring their service dogs into any area they are required to work with very few exceptions.



## Service Disruptions

- We are required by law to provide public facing information about all service disruptions.
- If a service/program or building is to be closed or cancelled you should post your service disruption information on your website and other areas easily accessible to patrons.



This photo is an image of a person holding a temporary closure sign. The person's hands are in the photo and their blue shirt is in the background.



## If you host an event or customers be sure to accessible details

- If it applies, inform your customer of the accessible features in the immediate area (such as automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators or ramps).
- Think ahead and remove any items that may cause a physical barrier, such as boxes left in an aisle.
- If the service counter at your place of business is too high for a person using a wheelchair to see over, step around it to provide service. Use a clipboard handy if filling in forms or providing a signature is required.
- Keep in mind that a person's physical disability may not be visible or obvious. For example, a person may have difficulty standing for long periods of time and may ask to sit while waiting to be served.



## Additional Assistance Available

Visit [www.london.ca/accessibility](http://www.london.ca/accessibility)

- You can also call me! 😊
- Melanie Stone, Accessibility Specialist  
ext. 2425 [mstone@london.ca](mailto:mstone@london.ca) or  
[accessibility@London.ca](mailto:accessibility@London.ca)