

# *Inclusive Customer Service*

*Independence • Dignity • Integration • Equality of Opportunity*

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## Resource Manual For Vendors



**Multilingual  
Services**



## **Background Information**

The Province of Ontario estimates that 15.5 % of the population in Ontario has a disability of some kind. This number will continue to increase as the population ages - most of us will experience a disability at some stage in our life.

Immigration trends over the past decades have created a city with more than 175 distinct cultures where more than 70 languages are spoken.

Brampton is a diverse and vibrant community!

## **Legislated Responsibilities**

The ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*** (AODA) is a Provincial law that was introduced in 2005. It establishes the requirement for the development and enforcement of accessibility standards.

The goal of the AODA is to make Ontario accessible by 2025 and requires the development of standards that relate to:

- Customer Service
- Transportation
- Information and Communication
- Employment and
- The Built Environment

The implementation of the standards will involve the creation of policies and procedures, training, a feedback process, and reports to the Provincial government. The standards have been developed by committees that include people with disabilities, the Provincial government, and representatives of various industries and sectors. The first of the standards, the ***Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, known as Ontario Regulation 429-07***, came into force on January 1, 2008. This regulation is about making customer service accessible for people with disabilities.

The goal of the standard is for every business and organization to provide service to their customers in a way that is accessible to **all** people, including people with disabilities.

There are a number of legal requirements under the standard. To comply, businesses and organizations must:

- Set up policies, practices and procedures on providing goods and services to people with disabilities, including a policy about the use of accessibility supports;

- Have a procedure in place to receive and process feedback and make details of the feedback process available to the public upon request.
- Have a procedure in place to let people know when facilities or services they use to access goods and services are temporarily not available; and,
- Ensure that all staff receives training on how to serve people with disabilities.

### **Inclusive Customer Service**

The City of Brampton affirms that it wants to treat all customers equitably by identifying and removing anything that may create a barrier to accessing our goods, services and facilities.

Inclusive Customer Service is about:

- Putting the **person first**.
- **Flexible service** that meets the needs of each individual customer.
- Understanding that some methods of service **may not work for all** people.
- Allowing for **comments and suggestions** on how to improve customer service.

### **Core Principles of Inclusive Customer Service**

1. **Independence:** Freedom from the control or influence of others, freedom to make one's own choices, freedom to do things in one's own way.
2. **Dignity:** All customers are valued and deserving of effective and full service. People facing barriers are not treated as an afterthought or forced to accept lesser service, quality or convenience.
3. **Integration:** All customers fully benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar ways. Integration means that policies, practices and procedures are designed to be accessible to everyone including people with disabilities.
4. **Equal opportunity:** Having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others.

## **Corporate Inclusive Customer Service Policy**

The City is committed to inclusive customer service by providing barrier-free access to all goods, services, information and resources. All persons employed by or acting on behalf of the City, including agents, volunteers, students, and contractors are responsible for carrying out each service interaction in a manner that positively reinforces customer service excellence by treating each customer with dignity and respect, and by exercising care and attention to individual needs.

The following is a summary of the City's Policy and related Standard Operating Procedures:

- ✓ Communicate with customers in a way that takes into account the person's disability.
- ✓ Allow customers to use their own personal assistive devices, or those which may be offered by the City of Brampton, while using City facilities or accessing City services.
- ✓ Allow customers to be accompanied by a service animal in areas of City facilities that are open to the public, unless excluded by law. If not permitted, provide the service in an alternate way.
- ✓ Allow customers to use a support person when accessing our facilities and services.
- ✓ Provide advance notice of any applicable fees that will be charged for support persons.
- ✓ Provide prompt notice when City of Brampton facilities or services used by persons with disabilities are temporarily disrupted.
- ✓ Train all staff, volunteers, contractors and agents who provide direct service to members of the public on the City's behalf on how to serve customers with various types of disabilities.
- ✓ Receive and respond to feedback from the public about the way we provide service to people with disabilities.
- ✓ Provide copies of policies and standard operating procedures related to inclusive customer service upon request, and in alternate formats as needed.

## **Serving Customers with Disabilities**

A “**Disability**” as defined by the AODA includes:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,

- a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- a mental disorder, or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*;

**Barriers** can be both visible and invisible and include everything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability.

- **Physical Barriers:** Created in the environment and result from the design elements of a building or facility.
- **Systemic and Process Barriers:** Can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information and can be created by technology, or lack of it, and may be a result of an organization's policies, practices and procedures that may restrict people's access to goods, services and facilities.
- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Attitudes and stereotypes about people with disabilities are also major barriers and perhaps the most difficult to overcome because it is hard to change the way people think or behave. Attitude is a barrier that is within our power to change.

**Here are some things to keep in mind when serving customers with disabilities:**

- Be flexible.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "How may I help you?" Customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Speak directly to your customer.
- Not everybody with the same disability will experience the same things. Don't make assumptions about the type of disability a person has.
- All customers have a range of needs and preferences. Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs
- If you can't understand what your customer is saying, politely ask him or her to repeat it.
- You may want to ask if the information you are providing needs to be repeated.
- Exercise patience.

The following are tips for assisting customers with specific disabilities to access our goods, services and facilities:

### Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deaf</b> - severe to profound hearing loss</li> <li>• <b>Hard of Hearing</b> - a person who uses his/her residual hearing and speech to communicate</li> <li>• <b>Deafened</b> – caused to hear poorly or not at all</li> <li>• May use assistive devices, like hearing aids, special telephones, sign language interpreters, various amplifiers or a pen and paper to communicate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract the customer’s attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.</li> <li>• Don’t shout.</li> <li>• Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face.</li> <li>• If the person uses a hearing aid, try to reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.</li> <li>• Look directly at the person.</li> <li>• You may have to use pen and paper.</li> <li>• Speak clearly and keep your hands away from your face.</li> </ul>

### Deaf-blind

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot see or hear to some degree.</li> <li>• May be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.</li> <li>• Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer.</li> <li>• A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.</li> </ul>

## Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intellectual development and capacity that is below average.</li><li>• May mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently.</li><li>• May be an invisible disability.</li><li>• The customer may understand you more than you know.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't assume what a 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 using step-by-step instructions.</li></ul>

## Learning Disabilities

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May impact how a person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information.</li><li>• In many cases the person with the disability has average or above-average intelligence.</li><li>• May affect:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Reading and language based learning</li><li>○ Mathematics</li><li>○ Writing, fine motor skills</li></ul></li><li>• You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way the person acts, asks questions or uses body language.</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 (i.e. pen and paper).</li><li>• Be prepared to explain any materials you provide.</li></ul>

## Mental Health

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May affect a person’s ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember.</li> <li>• The major barrier for people with mental illness is the stigma associated with it and the lack of understanding.</li> <li>• Some common 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 &amp; manic phases)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat your 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 your customer seriously.</li> <li>• Don’t take things personally.</li> </ul>

## Physical and Mobility Related Disabilities

Description	Tips
<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>• May be present at birth, or may result from disease or injury.</li> <li>• May be either a permanent or a temporary condition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask before you help.</li> <li>• Respect your customer’s personal space.</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> <li>• If you have permission to move a wheelchair, remember to make sure your customer is ready to be moved and that you describe what you are going to do beforehand.</li> <li>• Where appropriate, inform your customer of accessible features such as the location of automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, or ramps.</li> </ul>

## Speech and Language Impairment

Definition:	Tips For Serving Customers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have problems communicating.</li> <li>• May have difficulty pronouncing words.</li> <li>• May slur or stutter.</li> <li>• May not be able to express his/her self or understand written or spoken language.</li> <li>• May use communication boards or other assistive devices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't make assumptions – for example, if a customer has difficulty speaking, do not assume that he/she has an intellectual or developmental disability as well.</li> <li>• Be patient, give the customer whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across.</li> <li>• If possible, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.</li> <li>• Wait for the customer to finish, do not interrupt or finish his/her sentences</li> <li>• If you don't understand, ask your customer to repeat the information.</li> <li>• Have pen and paper available to assist if needed.</li> </ul>

## Vision Loss

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most individuals who are legally blind have some vision.</li> <li>• Low or no vision may restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards.</li> <li>• May need to view written documents in large print, or with help of magnifier.</li> <li>• Some customers may use a guide dog or white cane.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't assume your customer can't see you even if they have a guide dog or white cane.</li> <li>• Identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to customer.</li> <li>• Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.</li> <li>• Be precise and descriptive with information.</li> <li>• Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room.</li> <li>• Offer your elbow to guide the person. If they accept, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so.</li> <li>• Don't walk away without saying good-bye.</li> </ul>

The following are tips for assisting customers who use accessibility supports to access our goods, services and facilities.

### Service Animals

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone with vision loss may use a guide dog.</li> <li>• There are service animals that help people with other disabilities as well:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hearing alert animals help people who are deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.</li> <li>○ Some animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.</li> <li>○ Other service animals are trained to assist people with autism, mental health, physical and other disabilities.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Service animals may be wearing a harness or a sign, or may not be identifiable. If the service animal is not identifiable, their owner might carry a letter from a doctor or nurse stating they require the use of a service animal because of a disability. You can ask to see such a letter.</li> <li>• Service animals may be helping someone by opening doors or alerting them to certain sounds.</li> <li>• The customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid touching, talking to, or making eye contact with service animals: they are working animals and need to stay focused.</li> <li>• Allow service animals access to anywhere customers normally have access.</li> <li>• A customer is permitted to keep a service animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises (e.g. areas where food is prepared.)</li> </ul>

## Assistive Devices

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistive devices are a part of a person's personal space.</li> <li>• Examples of personal assistive devices are wheelchairs, canes, walkers and hearing aids.</li> <li>• Elevators, automatic door openers, pool lifts and magnifiers are good examples of commonly used assistive devices that the City may provide.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the person's personal space; it is inappropriate to lean on or reach over assistive devices.</li> <li>• Allow the person to enter the premises with the device and to utilize the device unless excluded by law.</li> <li>• Potential barriers to the use of assistive devices must be removed where possible.</li> <li>• Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on the City premises or otherwise supplied by the City.</li> <li>• Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the persons' dignity and independence.</li> </ul>

## Support Persons

Description	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A support person may be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.</li> <li>• A support person may help your customer in a variety of ways from communicating to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.</li> <li>• The regulation states that support persons must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of your facility or organization that is open to the public or to third parties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both your customer and their support person are permitted to enter the premises together.</li> <li>• Allow the person with a disability to have access to their support person while on the premises.</li> <li>• Confirm with your customer that they want the support person to be present while confidential matters are being discussed.</li> <li>• Speak directly to your customer, not the support person. If you're not sure which person is your customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask.</li> </ul>

## **Serving Customers with Diverse Backgrounds**

In addition to barriers that may affect people with disabilities, our customers may also face barriers related to language and culture.

### **Limited English Speakers**

Language ability varies from person to person and from situation to situation, and persons who speak English as a second (or third) language are able to communicate in English at varying levels. Limited English Speakers may be able to engage in small talk, but not be able to talk about technical issues and they may feel uncomfortable about discussing a sensitive topic in English.

### **Strategies to Improve Communication with Limited English Speakers**

- Be friendly and be respectful.
- Use plain, simple language and make one point at a time.
- Avoid overwhelming your audience with technical jargon.
- Over punctuate your speech. Use pauses liberally, speak clearly and slowly.
- Use visual aids such as sketches and diagrams and write out numbers and important details when possible.

### **Cultural Fluency**

Cultural expectations also serve to complicate communications. Culture influences our entire worldview, which includes our ideas about what is “good” and “bad” customer service. Culture is layered and complex – it is **not** just about ethnicity or race – it is a complex social identity that is the product of all our experiences and interactions. Like learning a language, we can develop cultural “fluency” but this takes time and effort.

### **The Platinum Rule**

You may be familiar with the Golden Rule: “Treat others the way you wish to be treated”.

The key to successful intercultural customer service is the Platinum Rule, which is: “Treat others the way that **they** wish to be treated”. This requires that we are open to different ways of doing things and means that we should put the person first and ask about their needs and preferences.