



Compliance Manual for Small Businesses and Organizations:

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

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Breaking Barriers Together



Through the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)**, Ontario is working towards making the province accessible for people with disabilities by 2025.

Under this act, Ontario is developing accessibility standards. These are the rules that businesses and organizations in Ontario will need to follow to break down barriers in important areas of everyday life: customer service, transportation, employment, information and communications, and the built environment, which includes buildings and other structures.

Ontario's accessible customer service standard is now law.



Who has to comply with the customer service standard?

Every business and organization operating in Ontario that:

- provides goods or services to the public or other organizations and
- has at least one employee in Ontario

When do I have to comply with the customer service standard?

Public sector organizations that are named or described in the standard must comply by **January 1, 2010**. All other obligated organizations, including small business, have until **January 1, 2012**.

How do I comply with the customer service standard?

This guide offers suggestions on how to meet the requirements of the standard. There are many ways to meet the requirements. What works for one organization may not work for another, depending on the type and size of the organization. This guide does not, however serve as legal advice. If you would like to know exactly what the standard requires, or for more information and resources about accessibility, visit www.AccessON.ca/compliance.

The standard has certain requirements that all obligated organizations must follow while other requirements apply only to designated public sector organizations and other organizations with 20 or more employees.

Quick fact: Under the standard, employees are staff members who are full-time, part-time and/or working under contract. Volunteers and independent contractors should not be included when counting employees.

How to meet the requirements of the customer service standard

1. Policies, practices and procedures
2. Training
3. Feedback process
4. Communication
5. Service animals
6. Support persons
7. Notice of temporary disruptions of services
8. Documentation



POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities.

1

Steps to consider:

- List your existing policies, practices and procedures. These can range from informal, verbal instructions to formal, written documents.
- Identify any gaps between your policies, practices and procedures and what people with disabilities might need in order to be able to access your goods or services.
- Develop your new or revised policies, practices and procedures using reasonable efforts to ensure that they are consistent with four principles: independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity.

The standard requires you to try to follow these four principles when developing your policies, practices and procedures. Think about how you can best:

- Allow your customers to maintain their independence and dignity. This may mean letting your customers do things in their own way and making sure that all of your customers receive the same level of service.
- Give your customers with disabilities the same opportunity to access your goods and services as other customers.
- Allow customers with disabilities to access your goods and services in a manner that is integrated with other customers, unless an alternate measure is necessary.

You can find a sample accessible customer service policy in Appendix B of the Compliance Manual: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 at www.AccessON.ca/compliance.

- Have a policy about the use of assistive devices by people with disabilities to access your goods or services and any other measures you offer to allow them to access your goods or services. For organizations with fewer than 20 employees, this policy can be informally communicated to staff or included in a formal written document.

Assistive devices include items such as wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, oxygen tanks and electronic communication devices.

Examples:

- 1 A clothing store that has a written “no refunds, credit only” policy decides to include exceptions for customers with disabilities in its policy because its fitting rooms are not wheelchair accessible.
- 2 A coffee shop has a customer with a mental health disability who finds it difficult to be around crowds. After he explains his needs, an employee offers the customer a quiet table away from the busy section of the shop. This allows the customer equal opportunity to enjoy his food and drink.
- 3 During the orientation for new employees, a beauty salon owner points out that it is the salon’s policy to allow customers with disabilities to use their personal assistive devices when accessing services.



**Approximately
1.85 million people in
Ontario have disabilities,
representing 15.5% of
Ontario’s population.**

Approximately 4.4 million people in Canada have disabilities, representing 14.3% of Canada’s population.

TRAINING

Provide training on how to serve people with disabilities to staff, volunteers, contractors and anyone else who interacts with the public, or other third parties on your behalf, and those involved in developing customer service policies, practices and procedures.

2

The standard outlines topics that must be covered in the training. Training must include an overview of the purposes of the AODA and the requirements of the customer service standard, in addition to other topics such as how to interact with people with different kinds of disabilities.

Steps to consider:

- Determine who must be trained. Training must be provided to employees, volunteers, agents, contractors and others who may interact with the public on your behalf, and those who participate in the development of customer service policies, practices and procedures.
- Public sector organizations and other organizations with more than 20 employees must maintain records of the training they provide including the dates on which training was conducted and how many people were trained.
- Determine the content of training. You can find a complete list of the required topics for training, along with some helpful training resources at www.AccessON.ca/compliance.
- Decide on a training format that is appropriate and meets the needs of the people being trained.
- Determine the timing of the training. Training must be done on an ongoing basis whenever changes are made to your policies, practices and procedures on serving customers with disabilities. Also, when a new person is hired or is assigned duties where training is required under the standard, they must be trained as soon as possible.

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.

FEEDBACK PROCESS

Establish a process for receiving feedback on how you provide service to customers with disabilities and how you will respond to feedback and take action on any complaints. Make information about your feedback process readily available to the public.

3

Steps to consider:

- Determine how to receive feedback. Options to consider include in person, by telephone, in writing, by email or otherwise.
- Decide how to respond to feedback, including complaints.
- Determine how to make information about the process available to the public.

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/complaints process are available online.

You can find sample documents for providing notice and obtaining feedback in the Compliance Manual: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 at www.AccessON.ca/compliance.

COMMUNICATION

Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.

4

Steps to consider:

- Think about and/or learn how people with various disabilities communicate.
- Consider approaches for making communication accessible. Depending on the situation and the person's needs, different methods will be appropriate in different circumstances.

The best thing to do is ask your customer how to communicate with them.

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.

The studio is communicating with both of these customers in a way that takes into account their disabilities.

Ten per cent (9.9%) of adults with disabilities have a total income of \$60,000 or more, compared to 19.3% of the non-disabled population.

SERVICE ANIMALS

Let people with disabilities bring their service animals onto any part of the premises that is open to the public, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law.

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If the service animal is excluded by law, use other measures to provide services to the person with a disability.

Steps to consider:

- Identify those parts of your premises open to service animals.
- Develop policies, practices and procedures for serving people with service animals. If service animals are excluded by law, identify other ways for people with disabilities to access your goods or services.

Example:

A car dealership allows service animals in the showroom and sales offices where customers are permitted, but not in areas that are restricted to customers, such as the service bays.



SUPPORT PERSONS

Let people with disabilities bring their support person with them when accessing goods or services on parts of your premises open to the public.

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Some people with disabilities will be accompanied by a support person. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating to helping with mobility or medical needs.

Steps to consider:

- Identify parts of your premises open to the public or third parties.
- Think about how your services are used by people with a support person.
- Develop your admission fee policy if your organization charges an admission fee for support persons. You must let people know ahead of time what, if any, admission will be charged for a support person.

Example:

A theatre posts a notice on its website and at its ticket window stating that support persons will not be charged admission to the show.

Projections show that by 2021 seniors with disabilities will outnumber 25-64 year olds with disabilities. In 2025, the majority of persons with disabilities will be 65 years of age or older – some 1.25 million seniors with disabilities in Ontario.

NOTICE OF TEMPORARY DISRUPTIONS OF SERVICES

Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to access your goods or services are temporarily unavailable.

7

Steps to consider:

- Identify the facilities and services that people with disabilities rely on to access your services.
- Prepare a template of a notice in advance. Your notice must 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 such as on the door to your premises, on your website, or by any other reasonable method.

Example:

A dry cleaning business that needs to remove the ramp in front of their store for a few weeks for repairs posts a sign outside and leaves 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.

You can find sample documents for notifying the public about disruptions in service in Appendix C of the Compliance Manual: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 at www.AccessON.ca/compliance.

DOCUMENTATION

Having the appropriate documentation is crucial in complying with the customer service standard.

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If your organization has 20 or more employees, you must prepare one or more documents that include the following:

- Policies, practices and procedures for providing customer service to people with disabilities
- Policy on the use of personal assistive devices and availability of other assistive measures
- Policies, practices and procedures regarding service animals and support persons. Include what amount, if any, will be charged for admission of a support person.
- Steps to take with a temporary disruption to services or facilities used by customers with disabilities to access your goods or services
- A description of the training policy, including a summary of training content and details about when training will be provided
- A description of the process for receiving and responding to feedback, including what action will be taken on any complaints.

Notify customers that these documents are available upon request.

This requirement can be met by posting a notice at a conspicuous place on your premises, on your website or by another method that makes sense for your business and your customers.

Example:

A business posts a notice on its website stating that its policy documents required by the accessible customer service standard are available online or by requesting them from the office.

Provide documents required under the customer service standard to a person with a disability in a format that takes into account their disability.

You can discuss what options are available and then agree on the format you will provide.



Accessibility Reports

Beginning in 2010, public sector organizations that are named or described in the standard will have to file online accessibility reports with the Government of Ontario regarding their compliance with the standard. Private organizations with 20 or more employees will have to begin filing accessibility reports in 2012.

Organizations with fewer than 20 employees are exempt from filing reports, but must still meet the requirements of the standard.

For more information

You can visit www.AccessON.ca/compliance to learn more about the standard and accessibility reporting, to get tips on how to comply, or to download a selection of tools and resources to help you meet the requirements.

To receive this document in an alternate format, call the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Contact Centre:

Phone: 1-866-515-2025

TTY: 416-325-3408

TTY toll-free: 1-800-268-7095

Fax: 416-325-3407

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For more information or to get this document in an alternate format, contact:

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Contact Centre (ServiceOntario)**

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Website: [**www.AccessON.ca**](http://www.AccessON.ca)

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