

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)



Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Purpose

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is a provincial law. Its goal is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities, and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to allow for their full participation in the life of the province.

Accessibility standards

Accessibility standards are the legal requirements that organizations in Ontario must follow to become more accessible to people with disabilities. They address key areas of daily life, including:

- customer service
- information and communications
- employment
- transportation
- design of public spaces

Definition of Disability

Did you know that 1 in 7 people in Ontario have a disability?

What is a disability?

- Disability covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and others not. A disability can be temporary or permanent. Many of us will experience a disability at some point in our lives.
- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 defines a disability to include physical disabilities as well as vision, hearing, speech, developmental, learning and mental health disabilities.

Being Alert to Barriers

A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from participating fully in society because of their disability. The environment around us presents both visible and invisible barriers for some. These can be physical, attitudinal, information, technology or systemic.

Physical Barriers: The result of building designs that prevent those with disabilities from accessing a physical space.

Attitudinal Barrier: The way people think or behave that create a barrier with how we communicate or provide a service to those with a disability.

Information Barrier: How information is provided and received which can cause challenges in how it is received.

Technological Barriers: Technology or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers, telephones, and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.

Systemic Barriers: an organization's policies and procedures can sometimes unintentionally prohibit access to information or services

Customer Service Standards

Create accessible customer service policies. St. Mary's makes reasonable efforts to ensure that these policies are consistent with the key principles of *independence, dignity, integration* and *equality of opportunity*.

- Consider and respond to an individual's request to their preferred method of communication.
- Allow assistive devices and support animals in the hospital.
- Welcome support persons to be with the patient and waive any fees or fares.
- Inform the public when accessible facilities or services are unavailable.
- Provide a customer feedback system to support suggestions regarding accessibility.
- Actions for changes will be communicated and be made available.
- Train our team on excellent customer service and how to interact with those who have a disability.

Customer Service Standards

Who is a customer?

A customer can be anyone who is accessing your organization's goods, services or *facilities*. Customers may include:

- Paying and non-paying members of the public
- Individuals your organization might call customers, such as clients, members, patrons or patients.
- Other businesses or organizations

Accessibility is Built on Four Principles

When serving our customer we need to remember these four key principles:

Independence: Providing opportunities for all people to do things on their own without the assistance of others if they so choose

Dignity: Providing services that maintain an individual's self worth and respect

Integration: Making services available that allow all individuals to benefit in the same way regardless of their ability

Equality of opportunity: Providing the same opportunities and services that do not discriminate against persons on the basis of race, color, age, sex, national origin, religion, or mental or physical disability

Providing Excellent Customer Service

We are all responsible for providing excellent customer service to our customers. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Ask your patient/client, "How may I help you?"
- Please do not touch assistive devices without asking first.
- Speak directly to your patient.
- Don't make assumptions about the types of disability a person has.
- Take the time to get to know your patients' needs
- Needs and preferences can change over time, we need to adapt to the needed changes
- If you can't understand what your patient/client is saying politely, ask him or her to repeat it
- Speak to the patient not the support person
- Serving customers with disabilities is about showing sensitivity and respect.
- Exercise patience

Service Animals

There are several reasons why an individual may use a service animal. Service animals include guide dogs for persons with vision loss and alert animals for those with hearing loss or a seizure disorder.

A support animal is considered a service animal if:

- It is easily identifiable as a service animal through visual indicators, such as a harness or vest, or
- The person with a disability provides documentation from a *regulated health professional* that confirms they need the service animal for reasons relating to their disability.
- Please do not touch or distract a service animal.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer. You may ask to see their documentation from a regulated health professional.
- The customer is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. However, you can provide water for the animal if your customer requests it.

Support Persons

A support person can be a paid personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or friend. A person with a disability is permitted to bring their support person with them to any area of your premises that is open to the public or to *third parties*.

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting service, or simply ask.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.
- It's good practice to confirm with your customer whether they want the support person to be present while confidential matters are being discussed.

Ontario Human Rights Code

The AODA originated from the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Code is a provincial law that gives everybody equal rights and opportunities without discrimination in specific areas such as jobs, housing and services. The Code's goal is to prevent discrimination and harassment to those with disabilities which include:

- Physical limitations
- Mental health issues
- Developmental and learning disabilities
- Hearing or visual disabilities
- Communication disabilities
- Epilepsy
- Drug and alcohol dependencies
- Environmental sensitivities

It is our legal duty provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities in a way that best meets their individual needs.

Feedback and Suggestions

St. Mary's has an Accessibility Committee. Its responsibilities include:

- Identifying barriers and suggest improvements for people with disabilities
- Reviewing efforts to remove and prevent barriers
- Making recommendations
- Responding to accessibility issues brought to the committee's attention
- Developing an Annual Accessibility Plan which is available at www.smgh.ca/accessibility