



Township of Centre Wellington

## **Accessible Customer Service Guide Book**

Understanding Accessible Customer Service

### Section 1 - Background

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) was passed by the Ontario Legislature with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province.

The AODA allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility that are designed to help make Ontario more accessible.

One of the specific standards that has been developed, and made law, is the Accessible Customer Service Standard. This standard details specific requirements for all service providers.

In order to comply with the legislation, the Township of Centre Wellington must complete the following by January 1, 2010.

1. Establish policies, practices and procedures to provide goods or services to people with disabilities.
2. Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
3. Set a policy on allowing people to use their own personal assistive devices to access the Township's goods and use our services.
4. Allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of our premises that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.
5. Permit people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing the Township's goods or services in premises open to the public.

6. Train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public or other third parties on our behalf on a number of topics as outlined in the customer service standard.
7. Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how the Township provides goods or services to people with disabilities and how the Township will respond to any feedback and take action on any complaint.
8. Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access or use the Township's goods or services are temporarily disrupted.

## Section 2 - What is Accessible Customer Service?

The Township of Centre Wellington is committed to providing customer service to persons with disabilities in the following manner:

- respects their dignity and independence;
- is integrated as fully as practicable into the method of service delivery;
- ensures an opportunity equal to that given to other customers to obtain and use the Township's goods and services, and
- allows persons with disabilities to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in a similar way to other customers.

Accessible customer service can mean many things. It is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation.

A person who is blind may need to have information read aloud to them; an individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down, and someone who uses a wheelchair may need help in finding a route they can use. Accessible customer service is good customer service which is courteous, helpful and prompt.

## Section 3 – What Can I do?

Always start with people first. Ask, how can I help? Offer to provide alternate formats of electronic documents. Say “person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person”. In any interaction, address the person's service needs rather than focus on the disability. Individuals with disabilities are aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you. Just remember to ask how you can help.

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

- 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*; (handicap”)

Each of the following tables defines a specific category of disability and outlines some tips to help you provide service to your customers.

<b>Hearing Disabilities:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
<p><b>Deaf</b> – severe to profound hearing loss</p> <p><b>Hard of Hearing</b> – a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate</p> <p><b>Deafened</b> – caused to hear poorly or not at all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Attract customer’s attention before speaking-gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand</li> <li>-Look directly at the person</li> <li>-May have to use pen and paper</li> <li>-Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face</li> <li>-Reduce background noise</li> <li>-Ensure appropriate lighting</li> </ul>

<b>Deafblind Disability:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cannot see or hear to some degree</li> <li>-Many will be accompanied by a support person (A professional who helps with communication by using sign language that involves touching the hands of the client)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Speak directly to your customer, not the support person</li> <li>-identify yourself to the support person</li> </ul>

<b>Intellectual or Development Disabilities:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Intellectual development and capacity that is below average</li> <li>-Can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently</li> <li>-May be an invisible disability</li> <li>-They may understand you more than you know</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Don't assume what 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 – step-by-step instruction</li> <li>-Offer information in simpler concepts</li> </ul>

<b>Learning Disabilities:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Affects how person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information</li> <li>-In many cases individual has average or above-average intelligence</li> <li>-May affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Language based learning</li> <li>-Mathematics</li> <li>-Writing, fine motor skills</li> </ul> </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>

<b>Mental Health Disabilities:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Defined as the absence of psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society</li> <li>-Some common features of 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 customer with the same level of 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 customer seriously</li> <li>-Don't take things personally</li> </ul>

<b>Speech or Language Disabilities:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-May have problems communicating</li> <li>-May be difficult to pronounce words, slurring or stuttering</li> <li>-May use communication boards or other assistive devices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Don't make assumptions</li> <li>-Give whatever time they need to get their point across</li> <li>-Ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no', if possible</li> <li>-Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences</li> <li>-May have to use pen and paper</li> <li>-Say "I don't understand, can you repeat that?"</li> </ul>

<b>Physical or Disabilities Affecting Mobility:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Serving Customers
-May restrict a person in the following ways: -Control or speed of movements -Coordination and balance -Ability to grasp same objects -Ability to walk long distances -Ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods -Can be present at birth, result from disease, injury or temporarily	-Speak directly to the customer -Ask before you help -Respect personal space -Don't move any items they may have -Describe what you are going to do beforehand -Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position.

<b>Vision Disabilities:</b>	
Definition	Tips for Providing Service
-Most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision – very few are totally blind -Low or no vision can restrict ability read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards -May use guide dog or white cane -May need to view written documents in large print, or with help of magnifier	-Don't assume customer can't see you -Speak directly to customer -Offer your elbow to guide -If they accept, walk slowly, wait for permission -Identify landmarks -Be precise and descriptive with information -Don't leave customer

Section 4 - How should I interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive equipment, the assistance of a service animal or a support person?

The definitions of different assistive options are as follows:

**Assistive Equipment**

- Devices people may bring with them or that are already on the premises and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by the Township of Centre Wellington.
- Assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes used by people who are blind or who have low vision, note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

## **Service Animal**

- An animal which is specially trained to assist an individual with disabilities.
- An animal is a “Service Animal” if it is readily apparent the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or his disability, for example a guide dog wearing a harness.
- If it is not readily apparent the animal is a “Service Animal”, then a letter from a physician or nurse confirming the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability is required.

## **Support Person**

- In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods and services.
- May be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

## **Interacting with someone who uses an assistive device**

Take some time to understand how you should interact with persons with disabilities who may use one or more of the assistive options.

### Customers using **Assistive Equipment**:

- Inappropriate to lean on or reach over them
- Ensure the person is permitted to enter the premises with the device and to utilize the device.
- Potential barriers to the use of assistive devices must be removed where possible.
- Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on the providers’ premises or otherwise supplied by the provider.
- Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the persons’ dignity and independence.

### Customers with **Service Animals**:

- Allowed anywhere customers normally have access.
- Customer is responsible for the care, supervision and control of the Service Animal.
- Avoid talking to, touching or making eye contact with the Service Animal.
- Customer is permitted to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises (eg. areas where food is prepared).

### Customers with **Support Persons:**

- Both persons are permitted to enter the premises together.
- The person with a disability is not prevented from having access to the Support Person while on the premises.
- Consent is required if confidential information is going to be shared when a Support Person is present.
- Speak directly to your customer, not the Support Person.

### Section 5 – Disruption of Service

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as an elevator under repair, recreational services suspended, renovations that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

People with disabilities may often go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking fitness classes or arranging for swim lessons. By providing notice, you can save that person an unnecessary trip. Notice can be provided on the Township's website, by telephone, or in writing.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice in a variety of ways and as quickly as possible.

If you have any questions regarding the provision of services, please contact the Clerk's Department at 519-846-9691, Ext 242.