

7. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The policy and its related procedures will be reviewed as required in the event of legislative changes

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act became law on June 13, 2005.

Under the act, Ontario is making the province accessible by 2025 through accessibility standards. These standards are the mandatory rules that businesses and organizations will have to follow:

- Customer Service
- Transportation
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Design of Public Spaces

Accessibility standards, which will be phased in over time, are developed by people from the business and disability communities. The **first standard** – for **Client service** – is now law.

Public sector organizations need to comply with the standard by January 1, 2010. Private sector and **non-profit organizations need to comply by January 1, 2012.**

Accessibility standard for Customer service for organizations with 20 or more employees:

Accessible client service is not about ramps or automatic door openers. It is about understanding that people with disabilities have different needs.

- To provide accessible client service, organizations need to:

Step 1: Create and put in place a plan that:

- Considers a person's disability when communicating with them.
- Allows assistive devices in your workplace, like wheelchairs, walkers, and oxygen tanks.
- Allows service animals.
- Welcomes support persons.
- Advises clients when accessible services aren't available.

- Invites clients to provide feedback.

Step 2: Train staff on accessible client service.

Step 3: Put their plan in writing; let clients know how to find their plan (website); offer their plan in accessible formats (large print) if requested.

Step 4: Report their progress online.

Consider a person's disability when communicating with them. Accessible client service is often about finding ways around barriers faced by your clients. Ensuring staff know what's expected of them when they communicate with clients with disabilities will help you deliver accessible client service.

LSK will:

- Consider how people with various disabilities communicate.
- Ask your clients how you can best communicate with them.
- Ask yourself: how can I make communications accessible? Every situation is different and depends on the individual's needs.
- Get more details on various ways to communicate.

Ex: a dance studio offers their class schedule in paper format at the front desk. When a Client with low vision, asks for the schedule in Braille, the manager will explain that although it is not available in Braille. It is available in an accessible format on the studio's website. This works for the client because she has a screen reader at home that reads what is displayed on the website.

Another client, 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.

Allow Assistive Devices

An assistive device is any piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help them with daily living. Some examples include a wheelchair, screen reader, listening device, or cane.

LSK will:

- Ask how to accommodate a client with their assistive device.
- Offer helpful measures such as signing attendance boards or carrying school bags to lockers.

- Be aware of any potential dangers on the premises and inform the client and offer an alternative option. For example, an open flame could be dangerous for someone with an oxygen tank.

Allow Service Animals

Guide dogs are not the only type of service animal. Other kinds of animals can be trained to help people with disabilities too. Welcome service animals into your workplace or business. If a service animal is excluded by law, provide another way for the person to access your goods and services.

LSK will:

- Identify the areas of the premises open to service animals.
- If service animals are excluded by law, provide an alternative area for the client to receive services.

Welcome Support Persons

A support person does not have to be a paid support worker. He/she can be a family member or a friend. Support persons help someone with a disability perform daily tasks. Often people who have a support person are not able to do things by themselves (eat meals, use the washroom or change their clothes). Without support, that person may be unable to access your organization. Welcome support persons to your workplace or business. If an admission fee for a support person exists, it must be waived.

LSK will:

- Permit support persons in all areas as the person with the disability.
- Waive any admission fees for the support person.

Let clients Know When Accessible Services Aren't Available

Sometimes accessibility features or services require repair or are just temporarily out of service (elevator or accessible washroom). When this happens, let your clients know by posting a notice.

LSK will:

- Make a list of the facilities and services people with disabilities rely on.
- Prepare a notice in advance which will 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 see it (entrance door, website, high-traffic area).

Invite Clients to Provide Feedback

A good way to learn about barriers that exist in your workplace is to collect comments from your clients with disabilities. Invite clients to give feedback on how you provide accessible client service. Let Clients know how to do this.

LSK will:

- Receive feedback (in person, by telephone, in writing, by email).
- Acknowledge clients who provide formal feedback along with the action taken.