



Guidelines for Delivering Accessible Customer Service at the Township of Woolwich



Part 1: Accessible Customer Service at the Township of Woolwich

The Township of Woolwich is committed to providing client-centered service. We know that focusing on meeting client needs will help us build trust and confidence with our community. It's a key focus for our organization, and it's the right thing to do. That's why we are committed to ensuring that we comply with Provincial standards to provide accessible customer service to all our customers including those with a disability.

Provincial Accessibility Standards

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 in five areas:

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

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service is the first of the five standards and will take effect on Jan. 1, 2010. This standard details specific requirements for all service providers, including municipalities.

The following is a summary of the key requirements of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service:

- 1) Establish policies, practices and procedures for providing goods or services to people with disabilities.
- 2) Communicate with a person with a disability in a way that takes their disability into account.
- 3) Set a policy to allow people to use their own personal assistive devices to access our goods or 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 goods or services in premises open to the public or third parties.
- 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 Standards.
- 7) Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how you provide goods or services to people with disabilities. Also outline how you will respond to any feedback and take action on complaints.
- 8) Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on are unavailable.

Part 2: What do we mean when we say 'Disability'?

Disabilities come in many different forms, sometimes obvious and sometimes not.

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.

Part 3: What is Accessible Customer Service?

Accessible customer service encompasses a variety of elements. The Township of Woolwich is committed to providing customer service to persons with disabilities in a manner that:

- Respects their dignity and independence;
- Is integrated as fully as possible into the method of service delivery;
- Ensures reasonable efforts are made to provide an opportunity equal to that offered to other customers to obtain and use our goods or services;
- Allows persons with disabilities to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in a similar way as other customers; in other words, an equality of outcome;
- Is sensitive to an individual's need;
- Is responsive by delivering service in a timely manner, considering the nature of the service and the specific accommodation required

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation for the service we provide.

Some examples of this include:

- 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;
- Someone who uses a wheelchair may need help in finding an accessible route.

Accessible customer service is good customer service — courteous, helpful and prompt.

Part 4: How should I interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices, the assistance of a service animal or a support person?

Assistive Devices:

| Definition | Do | Don't |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devices that 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 Woolwich. • 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. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the customer is permitted to enter the premises with the assistive device and to utilize the device unless excluded by law. • Remove potential barriers to the use of assistive devices where possible. • Offer assistive devices in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence. • Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on the providers' premises or otherwise supplied by the provider. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean on or reach over a customer or their device. |

Service Animals:

| Definition | Do | Don't |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An animal trained specially to assist an individual with a disability. Many times it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to their disability. For example, a guide dog wearing a harness. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow service animals anywhere customers normally have access. • Permit the customer to keep the service animal with him or her, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to, touch or make eye contact with the service animal. |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If it is not apparent that the animal is a service animal, then a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to a disability, or the customer may be asked to present a certificate to confirm that the service animal has been trained to assist a person with a disability by a professional service animal institution. | <p>premises i.e. areas where food is prepared. They are permitted access to dining or food ordering areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave the care and supervision of the service animal with the customer. | |
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Support Persons:

| Definition | Do | Don't |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who accompany a person with a disability to help them with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit customers and their support person to enter the premises together. • Provide the person with a disability access to their support person while on the premises. • Obtain consent from the customer if confidential information is going to be shared when a support person is present. • Speak directly to your customer, not to the support person. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not charge support persons an admission fee or access fee for recreation programming if a PAL card is presented. |

Part 5: How can I provide excellent service to customers with disabilities?

Each table below defines a specific category of disability and outlines some tips to help you provide service to customers.

Always start with person first language, which means by saying “person with a disability”, rather than “a disabled person”. In any interaction, it means addressing the person’s service needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

Deaf-blind Disability:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot see or hear to some degree. • Many will be accompanied by a support person to help them communicate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak directly to your customer, not the support person. • Identify yourself to the support person. • The customer may explain how you should communicate with them. • Use clear, plain print on a contrasting colour on signage. |

Hearing Disabilities:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf — severe to profound hearing loss. • Hard of Hearing — a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate. • Deafened — caused to hear poorly or not at all. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract the customer’s attention before speaking by waving your hand and say ‘hello’ from outside of their personal space. • Look directly at the person. • Use pen and paper to communicate if necessary. • Speak clearly; keep your hands away from your face. • Reduce background noise. • Ensure appropriate lighting. |

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently.• May be an invisible disability. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't assume what the customer can or cannot do.• Use plain language.• Take your time, be patient.• After assisting, ask: "Do you require additional information?"• Provide one piece of information at a time – step-by-step instruction.• Offer information in simple concepts. |

Learning Disabilities:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affects how person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information.• May affect:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– language based learning– mathematics– writing, fine motor skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take some time, be patient.• Demonstrate a willingness to assist.• Speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer.• Provide information in a way that works for your customer (i.e. pen and paper).• Be prepared to explain any materials you provide. |

Mental Health Disabilities:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental illness is not a single disease but a broad classification for many disorders, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, which affect how one feels;– schizophrenia, which affects how one perceives the world; | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be confident and reassuring.• Do not be confrontational.• If the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help.• Take your customer seriously. |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – anxiety disorders which affect how fearful one perceives places, events or situations to be; – personality disorders, which affect how one sees oneself in relation to others; – eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia, which influence how one feels about food and one's body image. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't take things personally. |
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Speech or Language Disabilities:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have problems communicating. • May have difficulty pronouncing words, may slur or stutter. • May use communication boards or other assistive devices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't make assumptions. • Give them time to get their point across – be patient. • Ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no', if possible. • Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. • You may want to use pen and paper. • Say: "I don't understand, can you repeat the question?" |

Physical or Disabilities Affecting Mobility:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May restrict a person in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – control or speed of movements – co-ordination and balance – ability to grasp some objects – ability to walk long distances – ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods • Can be present at birth, result from disease, injury or be temporary. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak directly to the customer. • Ask before you help. • Respect personal space. • Don't move any items the customer may have. • Describe what you are going to do beforehand. • Don't leave your customer in an |

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| | awkward, dangerous or undignified position. |
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Vision Disabilities:

| Definition | Tips for Serving Customers |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision – very few are totally blind. • Low or no vision can restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards. • May use guide dog or white cane. • May need to view written documents in large print or use a magnifier. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume the customer can't see you. • Speak directly to your customer. • Offer your elbow to guide – if they accept, walk slowly. • Identify landmarks along the route. • Be precise and descriptive with Information. • Don't leave the customer without advising them that you are leaving them. |

Most importantly, if you are nervous, relax! People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you; just remember to ask how you can help.

Part 6: What happens if for some reason we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as elevators under repair, 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.

Customers with disabilities may go to a lot of trouble to access services such as booking specialized transit or arranging for their support person to attend. By providing reasonable notice of service unavailability, you can save the customer an unnecessary trip. Notice can be provided by several methods, such as on the Township's website, by telephone or in writing.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible. Please refer to the Accessible Customer Service Policy. Consider offering alternative methods of service while informing those that may be impacted personally.

It is important to recognize that there are internal and external resources available to assist you in delivering service to persons with disabilities:

- Review the Corporate Accessible Customer Service Policy and the Accessibility Plan at www.woolwich.ca.
- Speak to your Supervisor and/or Manager.
- Bell Relay Service Operators (BCRS) are available to assist in placing or receiving calls to and from persons who use a TTY (telephone typewriter or teletypewriter). There is no charge for local calls. To place a call through the BCRS call 1-800-855-0511.
- Book a sign language interpreter at Ontario Interpreting Services www.chs.ca/en/ontario-interpreting-service/ontario-interpreting-services-18.html.
- Contact the Accessibility Coordinator at, 519-669-1647 extension 6005.

Mandatory Training Registration

Thank you for taking the time to review this important information to help you serve customers with disabilities. Your effort will help us serve all of our customers and will help build trust and confidence in our organization. Please complete and submit the registration card to Council and Information Services.

Accessible Customer Service Training is mandatory for Township employees.