



MED-HEALTH LABORATORIES LTD.  
1216 Lawrence Ave West, Toronto, ON-M6A 1E2

Section:	<b>Safety Policy &amp; Procedures</b>
Document Name:	AODA Serving Customers with Disabilities
Document ID:	9241
Status:	Current
Version:	1.2

## SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

### Common Disabilities

- Deaf, deafened, oral deaf and hard of hearing
- Deaf blind
- Intellectual/developmental disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health disabilities
- Physical disabilities or disabilities affecting mobility
- Speech or language disabilities
- Vision loss

### Some things to keep in mind when serving customers with disabilities:

- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?" Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Speak directly to your customer.
- Not everybody with the same disability experiences the same things. Don't make assumptions about the types of disability a person has. Your customers are not required to tell you about their disabilities.
- Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs just like you would with any other customer. Some disabilities are not visible.
- All customers have a range of needs and preferences and so do your customers with disabilities.
- If you can't understand what your customer is saying, politely ask him or her to repeat it.
- You may want to ask if the information you are conveying needs to be repeated. Ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Exercise patience.

### Serving Customers with Disabilities –

#### Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing

People who experience hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. People experiencing hearing loss may use assistive devices, like hearing aids, special telephones, sign language interpreters, various amplifiers or a pen and paper.

Here are suggested ways to serve customers with hearing loss:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. For example, try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Don't shout.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.

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### Serving Customers with Disabilities - Deafblind

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some degree. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling.

Keep these suggestions in mind when you serve a customer who is deafblind:

- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deafblind.
- A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.

### Customers with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently.

You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way the person acts, asks questions or uses body language. However, they may understand you more than you realize.

An example of a developmental disability would be Down Syndrome.

Here's some guidance:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said. You can be direct and ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time. You can break down the information into simpler concepts, without exaggerating speech or gestures or being patronizing.
- You may want to ask if the information needs to be repeated.

### Learning Disabilities

Let's talk about learning disabilities. This refers to a variety of disorders that affect how a person acquires, retains, or takes in information. People with learning disabilities just learn differently. Learning disabilities affect people from all backgrounds and are not caused by culture, language or a lack of motivation.

Learning disabilities are specific impairments that can result in problems with reading and language-based learning (dyslexia), problems with mathematics (dyscalculia), or problems with writing and fine motor skills (dysgraphia).

This disability may become apparent in your customer service interaction when the person has difficulty reading material or taking in and processing the information you are providing.

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### Some tips:

- Take some time — people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process, understand and respond.
- Provide information in a way that works for your customer. For example, keep a pen and paper handy. That way, you can explain, and then review and repeat the information using your notes. If you're discussing confidential information, consider giving the notes to you customer or offering to destroy them.
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide for your customers.

### Mental health disabilities

Mental health. The important thing to remember: focus on completing the transaction in a calm, patient way and meeting the customer's needs. Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember. Mental health disability is a broad classification for many disorders that can range in severity. Customers may experience anxiety due to phobias or panic disorder. Hallucinations, mood swings, and a deep lack of motivation may be signs of a mental health disability. A person may have a clinical depression or bipolar disorder.

The major barrier for people with mental health disabilities is the stigma associated with it and the lack of understanding.

Here are some suggestions:

- Be confident and reassuring. As with all customers, listen carefully and focus on meeting the customer's needs.
- If the person appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- If a customer appears to show signs of a mental health disability, it may be helpful to keep in mind that the customer's reactions are not connected to you personally, as a service provider. The customer may simply be showing symptoms of mental illness.

Did you know that one in five people in Ontario will experience a mental health issue at some point in their lives?

### Customers with physical disabilities or disabilities affecting mobility

The common image of someone with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair is a stereotype. For example, physical disabilities can result from arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations. Here are some tips, but there are more in the **Resources Section**:

- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things, so it's a good idea to ask before you help.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Don't lean over them or on an assistive device.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes or walkers, out of the person's reach.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to make sure your customer is ready to be moved and that you describe what you are going to do beforehand. Don't leave the individual in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

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- In some situations, inform your customer of the accessible features in the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.).

### Customers with speech or language impairments

- Don't assume that just because a person has this disability, they also have another.
- Give your customer whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no," if possible.

People who experience hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. People experiencing hearing loss may use assistive devices, like hearing aids, special telephones, sign language interpreters, various amplifiers or a pen and paper.

Here are suggested ways to serve customers with hearing loss:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. For example, try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Don't shout.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.

### Customers with vision disabilities

Did you know that few people who are blind have no vision? According to CNIB, nine out of ten people who come to CNIB have some degree of vision.

Three million Canadians have difficulty reading conventional text.

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or white cane; others may not. Some customers simply need to view written materials—like documents, receipts, menus, brochures, instructions or labels—in large print, or with the help of a magnifier.

### Serving Customers with Vision Loss

Keep in mind....

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to him or her.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If they accept, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.
- If you're giving directions or providing any information, be precise and descriptive. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Guide them to a chair or a comfortable location. Don't walk away without saying good-bye.

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## Customers with service animals

You've probably seen someone with vision loss who uses a guide dog. There are other types of service animals who help people with other disabilities as well.

- Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- Animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.
- Service animals trained to assist people with:
  - Autism,
  - Mental health disabilities
  - Physical disabilities and
  - Other disabilities.

You might recognize service animals when they wear a harness or a sign, or when they are helping someone. Their owner might carry a certificate or a letter from a doctor or nurse that states that the individual requires the use of a service animal because of a disability. You can ask to see such a letter. You might also observe the animal helping someone by opening doors or alerting them to certain sounds.

The customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal.

Avoid touching, talking to or making eye contact with the service animal: they are working animals and need to stay focused.

## Serving Customers with Support Persons

Some people with disabilities that you encounter will be accompanied by a support person.

A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend of the person with a disability. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the regulation, support persons must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of your organization that is open to the public or to third parties.

A customer with a disability might not introduce their support person. If you're not sure which person is the customer, you could take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask. Once you've determined who your customer is, then speak directly to him or her not to the support person.

MHL ensures the following before requiring a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person on your premises:

- Consult with the person with a disability?
- Determine a support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or others on premises?
- Determine that there is no other way to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or others on premises?

It's also good practice to confirm with your client or customer that they want the support person to be present while confidential matters are being discussed.

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For health and safety reasons, a customer is consulted for any needs and take specific steps for access to premises or services.

Any fee or fare for the support person is waived.

**Serving Customers with Personal Assistive Devices**

- Assistive devices are part of people’s personal space
- Respect personal space
- Know how to operate any assistive devices your organization provides

Let’s talk about assistive devices. Most assistive devices used by people with disabilities are “personal assistive devices” – such as wheelchairs. They belong to the person using them and they are part of that person’s personal space.

So, it’s generally inappropriate to lean on or reach over them. Also, it wouldn’t be a good practice to restrict anyone from moving around by holding onto the person’s personal assistive device.

There are many assistive devices that you won’t even notice at first glance, such as a hearing aid. And some aren’t used all the time, like a speech amplification device or a white cane.

**Serving Customers with Disabilities - Devices that Help People with Disabilities Access Your Services**

**TTY - Teletypewriter:**  
Sends typed messages across phone lines

**Relay Service:**  
1-800-855-0511

Operator is intermediary

Free for local calls

Standard long-distance charges apply



Let’s consider for a moment the assistive devices in your operation that may help with the provision of goods or services to customers with disabilities. The standard says that you must be trained on how to use them. Ideally, you should have instruction manuals handy, perhaps a summary instruction sheet.

One of the more common assistive devices is a TTY line.

TTY stands for Teletypewriter (Teletype), a type of telephone that allows callers to send typed messages to each other across phone lines.

TTY users can directly call other TTY numbers or they can connect with a Relay Service. A standard phone user can also place a call to a TTY user through the Relay operator. You give the operator your

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name, the name of the person you are calling, and the number you wish to reach. Using the Relay Service locally is free. For long-distance, any standard long-distance charges would apply.

A handy “how-to” for both TTY and Relay System calls is provided in the **Resources Section**.

**Serving Customers with Disabilities - Devices that Help People with Disabilities Access Your Services**

Other Assistive Devices

- Keyboard
- Pen and paper
- Pointing device
- Information in braille
- Automatic door opener
- Hearing and amplification devices



Examples of other assistive devices that can help you serve your customers would be alternative keyboards for people who have difficulty with conventional ones.

Or, you might have software that enables people with disabilities to communicate with you using a computer.

Elevators, escalators and automatic door openers are assistive devices.

Under the standard, you must provide notification when these services are temporarily not available.

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**Serving Customers with Disabilities - If there are Difficulties**  
**Accessing Your Services Difficulties accessing services:**

- Be flexible – possible prior appointment to accommodate for service
- Availability of parking spot with a clear sign and ground level entry door accessibility, washroom.
- Ask: “May I Help You?”
- Solicit suggestions
- Offer to communicate via pen and paper
- Retrieve out-of-reach products
- Confirm that needs are met

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Sometimes your customers will have difficulty accessing your services. Most customers have specific needs or preferences. Being positive, flexible and open to suggestions will help to create a good customer experience.

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your services, a good starting point is to ask how you can best help them.

Often, there are simple solutions. For example, your customer is Deaf and doesn't have a sign language interpreter. You could ask him, in writing, if using a pen and paper would be a good way to serve him. Remember, if you're discussing confidential information offer to return the notes to the customer or to destroy them.

Perhaps your customer can't reach some of the products in your shop because the displays and counters are too high. You could offer to bring the products to him or her.

If the menus in your restaurant are unreadable to someone with vision loss, you could offer to read the menu aloud.

Be prepared to help with doors if your business doesn't have automatic door openers.

**Customer Feedback Process**

The survey/feedback mechanism is available in an accessible format and communication supports, on request. (Service Satisfaction Survey Form). Please refer to feedback procedure.

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### Key Points:

To summarize -

- the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the vision behind it for making Ontario accessible by 2025;
- the customer service standard, deadlines for compliance and what's required to comply;
- the standards' specific customer service requirements;
- tips on interacting with people with various disabilities;
- interacting with people who have --
  - service animals;
  - support persons;
  - assistive devices; and
- what to do if a customer with a disability is having difficulty accessing your services.

### Reference:

Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment – website:

[Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility](#)

[The Ontario Human Rights Commission – Learning modules `Working Together: The Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA. \(Document for staff Training\)](#)

<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/accessibility/customerService/Over20.aspx>

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