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ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated October 30, 2009 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve the proposed Accessible Customer Service Policy as outlined in Attachment 1 of this report.
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to local municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees, and to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee for their information.

2. PURPOSE

This report outlines the proposed Accessible Customer Service Policy which is one of the requirements to meet compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07. Under this Regulation, public sector service providers must establish a corporate policy to govern the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities.

3. BACKGROUND

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) came into effect on June 13, 2005, with the goal to ensure that all Ontarians with disabilities have full and equal access to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises by January 1, 2025. This goal will be achieved through the development, implementation and enforcement of five provincially-set accessibility standards relating to customer service, transportation, information and communications, employment and the built environment. Ultimately, both public and private sector organizations will be required to implement these standards in phases.

Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

The AODA will eventually replace the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA), however the Province has indicated that the ODA will remain in effect for the foreseeable future. Until all standards are finalized into regulation, all organizations, including local municipalities and the Region, must continue to implement both Acts simultaneously. This includes the continued development, implementation and monitoring of annual accessibility plans.

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service is the first regulation to be implemented under the AODA

The first regulation under the AODA, the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, was filed as Ontario Regulation 429/07 on July 27, 2007 and came into effect on January 1, 2008. York Region, as a designated public sector organization under the AODA, must comply with the regulation by January 1, 2010.

Implementation activities towards achieving compliance with this first regulation are being led by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer. The Community and Health Services Department leads the corporation in the development of policies and procedures. It also monitors compliance for this regulation and all other regulatory standards under the AODA.

The role of the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) changes under the AODA, from advising Regional Council on annual accessibility plans as required under the ODA, to reviewing and advising Council on the Region's compliance with the new accessibility standards. Until the ODA is repealed, the YRAAC will continue to have responsibilities under both Acts.

The key implications of this regulation for York Region were discussed in Clause No. 5 of Report No. 7 of the Community Services and Housing Committee at the Regional Council meeting of November 20, 2008.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service are now law

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service came into effect on January 1, 2008. Under this regulation, the Region must establish a policy governing the provision of its goods and services to persons with disabilities by January 1, 2010. The policy must provide corporate direction on the following:

- Use of assistive devices that enable a person to access Regional goods and services.
- Use of service animals and support persons in Regional facilities and programs.

- Procedure to notify the public of temporary disruptions to goods or services.
- Process for receiving and responding to feedback on how services are provided to people with disabilities.
- Customer service training to staff, volunteers and agents working on the Region's behalf about the provision of goods and services to people with disabilities.

Key implications of the Accessible Customer Service Policy for York Region

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation, under which this policy is a requirement, is broad and may be open to challenge and alternate interpretations. Additionally, this is the first of five regulations and until the others are released it is a "stand alone" regulation. For the purpose of this policy, the interpretation of providing equal access to goods and services refers to the model of accessible customer service only. The remaining standards will direct other aspects of accessibility, including the built environment, transportation, information and communications, and employment.

As each standard is developed and released, the impacts and implications for York Region will be closely monitored, including areas where the standards overlap. The Accessible Customer Service Policy will require ongoing review to ensure compatibility and harmonization with the other regulations and will be revised as necessary.

Regional departments have responsibilities under the Accessible Customer Service Policy. Respective processes will need to be put in place, with the support of the Community and Health Services Department. Each Regional department will also be required to review their own internal policies, practices and procedures to ensure they follow the policy.

Accessible Customer Service Policy

The proposed Accessible Customer Service Policy (*see Attachment 1*) outlines the policies, practices and procedures required to provide accessible customer service to customers with disabilities.

The content of the policy is in compliance with the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, AODA. This policy supports and builds upon the existing York Region Customer Service Strategy (2001) and was written in an easy to understand format as an opportunity to exhibit one method of making documents more accessible to some people with disabilities.

The development of this policy was completed using inter-jurisdictional best practice examples, the province's compliance guidelines and in consultation with the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer as the lead department, the ODA/AODA Staff Committee, Legal Services and the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Each Regional department is responsible to ensure that its own policies, practices and procedures comply with those contained in this policy. To promote this goal across the Region, a corporate initiative outlining this requirement was included in *Access-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan* under the ODA. Progress on this initiative will be reported in the annual Accessibility Plan Progress Report in December 2009.

Next Steps

A comprehensive communications strategy will be developed by the Community and Health Services Department to promote the Accessible Customer Service Policy practices and procedures to both Regional staff and the public. This strategy will include communication and compliance supports to Regional departments who have individual responsibilities under the policy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no provincial funding to support the implementation of regulations under the AODA

York Region is responsible for costs associated with implementing the five AODA regulations, including the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service which was the first to be passed into regulation. The full costs to make York Region accessible under the AODA cannot be estimated at this time. Costs can only be assessed incrementally as the Province releases the multiple regulations on a staggered basis.

The costs to implement the basic training requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service were approved in the 2009 Operating Budget at a one time cost of \$133,000. These funds have been earmarked to develop and deliver customer service training modules for staff, volunteers and agents working on the Region's behalf as legislated under the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation.

Additional costs will arise as each Regional department implements the required processes. Any additional costs that will arise will be recorded and reported to Regional Council as part of annual AODA compliance reporting processes.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Under the AODA, each municipality is required to develop their own policy in compliance with Ontario Regulation 429/07. The Region will continue to build on the strong relationships and valuable networks already established in the local municipalities. This will be achieved by continuing to meet and share reports and information with the Municipal Staff Reference Group (a network of accessibility planners from each of the

local municipalities, school boards and hospitals in York Region), the local municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region is a proven supporter of accessibility for all residents. In moving forward with the implementation of the AODA, including the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation, the Region will continue to integrate accessibility planning into business practices and processes across all departments.

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee will continue to play a critical role in making York Region accessible by providing direct input into the implementation, compliance and monitoring of all accessibility standards under the AODA.

This policy outlines policies, practices and procedures required to provide accessible customer service to our customers with disabilities. It ensures that residents with disabilities accessing our goods and services will receive customer service that respects their dignity and independence while providing service at the same time and in the same way as all other customers. The document meets one of the compliance requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch at Ext. 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report).



STATUS
Council Approved Y N
CAO Approved: Y N

TITLE: Accessible Customer Service Policy	NO.: Approval Date: Last Updated:
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POLICY STATEMENT:

The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) is committed to providing excellent customer service to all residents, including people with disabilities. When serving residents with disabilities, reasonable efforts shall be made to provide the same level of service given to other customers and service shall be provided in a manner that respects their dignity and independence.

APPLICATION:

To all York Region Employees (Union, Non-Union and Students), Volunteers and Agents who are acting or providing services on behalf of York Region, or who help develop policies about how York Region offers services to people.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide corporate direction and to outline how York Region is meeting the requirements of Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. Each Regional department will be required to review its own internal policies, practices and procedures to make sure they follow this corporate policy.

DEFINITIONS:**(Accessibility) Standard:**

A “standard” explains an accepted way of doing something. It states what the requirements are, who has to meet them, and by when.

Agent:

An “agent” means someone who deals directly with members of the public to provide a program or service on behalf of York Region.

Assistive Devices:

“Assistive devices” means technical aids, communication devices, or medical aids modified or customized that are used to increase, maintain or improve how a person with a disability can function. An assistive device may be as simple as a pen and paper used to assist a person to communicate. Other examples may include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes used by people who are blind or have low vision, note taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping. Assistive devices may accompany the customer or already be on the premises, and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by York Region.

Examples of some assistive devices currently used in York Region facilities:

- Amplification System (Volume can be increased)
- Audible Signals (signals can be heard)
- Automated Next Stop Announcements (used on the bus)
- Cane
- Elevator
- Fire Alarm Strobe Lights (flashing lights)
- Fold down grab bars (used in washrooms)
- Monitor (larger screen)
- Portable Ramp (ramp can be carried)
- Power Door (the door opens automatically)
- Stair Lift
- TTY(Telephone Teletypes)
- Walker
- Wheelchair

Disability:

A “disability” is:

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device.
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability.
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language.
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

Dignity:

“Dignity” means service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.

Documented Consent:

“Documented consent” means that the person with a disability has given consent for a support person to attend a confidential interview and that the consent is documented by Regional staff on the consent form. The person’s consent can be written, verbal, by nod of a head or by other methods that confirm consent, depending on the type of disability.

Equal Opportunity:

“Equal Opportunity” means service is provided to a person with a disability in such a way that they can access goods and services equal to that given of others.

Guide Dog:

A “guide dog” means a dog trained as a guide for a blind person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations (*Blind Persons’ Rights Act, R.S.O. 1990*).

Independence:

“Independence” means when a person with a disability is allowed to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.

Integration:

“Integration” means service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other customers, unless an alternate measure is necessary to enable a person with a disability to access goods or services.

Policies, Practices and Procedures:

“Policies, Practices and Procedures” refer to how a business or organization provides goods and services to people with disabilities.

Regional Department:

For the purpose of this policy, a “Regional Department” refers to each the following:

- Community and Health Services Department
- Corporate Services Department
- Environmental Services Department
- Finance Department
- Planning and Development Services Department
- Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
- Transportation Services Department

Service Animal:

An animal is a “service animal” for a person with a disability if it is obvious that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to help with his or her disability; or if the person provides a letter from a doctor or nurse that says that the person needs the animal to help with his or her disability (*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, Ontario Regulation 429/07, Accessibility Standards for Customer Service).

Support Person:

A “support person” means another person that goes with a person with a disability to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or to get goods or services (*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, Ontario Regulation 429/07, Accessibility Standards for Customer Service).

Temporary Disruption:

A “temporary disruption” means a short term planned or unplanned disruption to facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to get goods and services.

Potential temporary disruptions at the Region may include, but are not limited to: evacuations due to fire, flood, road closures, mechanical failures, elevator out of service, courts moved or cancelled, and failure of telephone or technology equipment or bus detours.

DESCRIPTION:**Background**

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*, was created with the goal of developing standards that would improve accessibility for people with disabilities across the province. The AODA allows the Provincial Government to develop specific standards of accessibility and enforce them.

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07) came into effect on January 1, 2008. The customer service regulation is the first standard developed under the AODA. Under this standard, York Region and other service providers must establish policies, practices, and procedures that guide the offering of goods and services to people with disabilities.

Objectives

- a) This policy is meant to meet one of the requirements of Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the AODA. It applies to the offering of goods and services, not to the goods themselves.
- b) This policy aims to make sure that people with disabilities are given the same chance to get, use and benefit from York Region’s goods or services. Reasonable efforts will be made to make sure that goods and services offered by the Region are given in a way which:
 - Respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.
 - Is offered in the same way as other customers, unless a different way of offering the service is necessary, either on a temporary or permanent basis, and
 - Gives everyone the same chance to get, use and benefit from the goods and services.
 - Communicates with a person with a disability in a way that takes the person’s disability into account (see “Accessible Customer Service at York Region: Tips for Serving Customers with Disabilities,” [Appendix A](#))
- c) This policy supports and builds upon the existing York Region Customer Service Strategy (2001).

When developing or revising policies, practices and procedures, the Region shall use its best effort to make sure that the policies, practices and procedures match the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity (see definition section of this policy).

(See “Accessible Customer Service at York Region: Practices and Procedures,” [Appendix B](#), for suggested practices and procedures to carry out this policy).

1. Use of Assistive Devices

People with disabilities may use their own personal assistive devices, or those which may be offered by the Region, while getting goods and services given in any premise owned, leased, occupied or operated by the Region.

If a person with a disability uses an assistive device, the person will be allowed to go into all York Region premises with the device and to use the device, unless not allowed by law. Where the device is not allowed by law, staff will provide a reason and look for other ways for the person to get the goods and/or services. Possible barriers to the use of assistive devices will be removed where they can be.

Regional staff, volunteers and agents working on the Region’s behalf will be trained on how to use the assistive devices available in their workplace, that relate to the job they do (see the Customer Service Training section of the policy).

Departmental Responsibilities

Each Regional department will:

- Develop and maintain a list of assistive devices available in their office locations.
- Develop and maintain a list of job positions that may need to know how to use specific assistive devices to help customers get our goods and services.
- Train select staff on the assistive devices available in their workplace that relate to the job they do.
- Monitor training and keep records of who has been trained, on which assistive devices and when.
- Give these records to Community and Health Services Department upon request.

Each Regional department will inform people with disabilities of the assistive devices available for their use on York Region premises. This information may be posted on a sign, a brochure or on the website.

The Community and Health Services Department will offer ongoing support to Regional departments to assist with compliance, including providing templates for record keeping.

2. Service Animals and Support Persons

Use of Service Animals

Service animals are allowed to go with any person with a disability while getting goods and services given in any premise owned, leased, occupied or operated by the Region, except where animals are not allowed by law.

If a person with a disability has a service animal with them, the person will be allowed to enter areas of York Region premises that are open to the public with the animal, and to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is not allowed by law. Where an animal is not allowed by law, or may affect the health and safety of other customers, other ways will be explored in order to provide service to a person with a disability.

Departmental Responsibilities

Each Regional department will:

- Develop and maintain a list of areas within their premises owned, leased, occupied or operated by the Region where an animal is not allowed by law.
- Make sure that staff in these locations are aware that animals are not allowed by law and know how to offer service a different way.

Use of Support Persons

Support persons are allowed to go with any person with a disability in any premise owned, leased, occupied or operated by the Region.

If a person with a disability is helped by a support person, the person with a disability may stay with the support person while getting any of York Region's goods and services.

Sometimes permission by the person using a support person is needed before letting the support person be at a private meeting or interview.

If a person with a disability is helped by a support person and is going to a private meeting or interview at the Region, it may be appropriate for the person with a disability to give documented permission for the support person to attend. Each Regional department must have a practice in place for getting permission in these situations.

Sometimes the Region may determine that a support person is needed to go with a person with a disability to protect the health and safety of all persons.

Staff at the Region may require a person with a disability to have a support person with them when on the premises, but only if a support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or the health or safety of others on the premises. The decision on this need will be made based on the level of risk and according to specific requirements in each service area.

Admission Fees

Each Regional department must tell the public about how they charge fees to support persons. If support persons are charged a participant fee, advance notice must be given about the amount that the support person must pay. Notice about fees for support persons may be posted on a sign, a brochure or on the website.

Departmental Responsibilities

Each Regional department will:

- Determine which private meetings or interviews (if any) are considered confidential and would require documented permission for a support person to attend.
- If not currently in place, develop a departmental process for recording and maintaining records of client consent.
- Make sure staff that hold private meetings or interviews follow this process.
- Post admission fees for support persons, using corporate communication practices in place.
- If not currently in place, develop a departmental process for determining when a support person is required to accompany a person with a disability to protect the health and safety of all persons.

Community and Health Services Department will offer ongoing support to departments to assist with compliance with the policy, including providing templates for records as requested.

3. Notice of Temporary Disruption Process

Notice Requirements

If there is a temporary disruption in facilities or services used by people with disabilities, notice of the disruption must be provided.

Each Regional department responsible for the affected facility or service shall notify the public, including people with disabilities, of any temporary disruptions.

If the temporary disruption is to a departmental program or service, each Regional department responsible for the affected program or service will notify the public directly in the most effective way, using corporate communication practices in place.

These disruptions may be planned or unplanned, in whole or in part.

Notice must include information about the reason for the disruption, how long it will likely last, and details about other facilities or services, if any, that are available.

Notice may be given by posting the information on the premises, on the Region's website, voicemail messaging or by any other reasonable method. Each Regional department will consider which people with disabilities will be most affected by the disruption and make sure the information is communicated to match their needs.

Departmental Responsibilities

Each Regional department will:

- Develop a departmental process for notifying the public, including those with disabilities, about disruptions to facilities, programs or services.
- Identify other methods of service delivery, if appropriate.

The Community and Health Services Department will develop templates for use by departments to notify the public.

(See "Notice of Temporary Disruption" notice templates to notify the public about disruptions in service to a washroom, elevator and program/service, [Appendix C](#)).

4. Customer Service Training

Training Requirements

The Region must make sure that the following persons receive training about giving goods or services to persons with disabilities:

- **those who deal with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of the Region, whether the person does so as an employee, agent, volunteer or otherwise, and**
- **those who participate in developing policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to members of the public or other third parties.**

The training must include a review of the purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 and teach about the following matters:

- How to interact and talk to persons with various types of disabilities.
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or need the help of a service animal or a support person.
- How to use equipment or devices available on York Region premises or otherwise supplied by the provider that are available in the person's workplace, that relate to the job they do and that may help with providing goods or services to a person with a disability, and
- What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having a hard time getting the provider's goods or services.

Training must be given to each person as soon as possible after he or she is assigned the applicable duties. New staff will get this training through the required Customer Service Core Competency Workshop offered through Corporate Services Department (Corporate Learning).

Ongoing training must be provided in connection with changes to policies, practices and procedures governing the giving of goods or services to persons with disabilities.

Each Regional department must make sure that all staff, volunteers and agents working for them receive this training. Records must be kept by both individual departments and Corporate Services Department (Corporate Learning) regarding the training provided, including the dates on which the training was provided, the number of individuals to whom it was provided, and the names of those who were trained. This training does not replace any training requirements of professional associations.

Departmental Responsibilities

Each Regional department will:

- Develop and maintain a list of volunteers and agents working on their behalf.
- Take appropriate steps to determine which agents deal directly with members of the public to provide a program or service on behalf of York Region.
- Ensure appropriate contract language is included on contracts for agents who deal directly with members of the public.
- Make sure that all staff, students, volunteers and agents working on their behalf receive the required Accessible Customer Service training.
- Monitor and keep records of who has been trained and when.
- Submit these records to the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer and Community and Health Services Department upon request.

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer will:

- Monitor and refine the Accessible Customer Service training module and resources, as needed.

Community and Health Services Department will:

- Offer ongoing support to departments to assist with compliance, including providing tools for procedures, templates and record keeping.

Corporate Services (Corporate Learning) will:

- Using the Corporate Learning Registration System (CLRS) keep record of who has received the training and when.
- Submit these records to the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer and Community and Health Services upon request.
- Offer the training to new staff through the required Customer Service Core Competency Workshop offered through Corporate Learning.

5. Feedback Process

Feedback Requirements

Each Regional department will collect and respond to feedback about the way they provide goods and services to people with disabilities.

Feedback from the public can be submitted to York Region by website, email, in person, by mail, program survey, online web form, by fax, using TTY or by another communication technology. Some Regional departments have their customer service feedback processes already in place. These will continue under this policy.

Feedback about the way York Region provides goods and services to people with disabilities should follow the York Region Customer Service Strategy standard, at a minimum. If the situation is urgent or requires faster action, Regional departments must work to meet the urgency. If the situation is complex, Regional departments must work out timelines together with the customer to find a solution.

Each Regional department will:

- Make sure staff responds to feedback according to the York Region Customer Service Strategy standard, at a minimum.

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer will:

- Post a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the manner in which the Region provides its goods and services to people with disabilities on the website.

Community and Health Services Department will:

- Offer ongoing support to departments to assist with compliance.

6. Notice of Availability of Documents

Documents Available Upon Request

As required by the Regulation, York Region will prepare one or more documents, describing the following, and provide them upon request to any person:

- York Region's policies, practices and procedures about the offering of goods and services to people with disabilities.
- York Region's policies, practices and procedures about the use of service animals and support persons.
- The steps York Region will take to notify people about a temporary disruption of facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities.
- York Region's policy on providing training on accessible customer service.

- York Region's process for receiving and responding to feedback on the offering of goods and services to people with disabilities.

If York Region receives a request for these documents, the documents or information will be provided in a format that both parties agree with and that takes into account the person's disability.

Notice of how to request documents will be posted in obvious places on premises owned or operated by the Region and the Region's external website.

Requests for documents required by Ontario Regulation 429/07 Accessibility Standards for Customer Service are to be forwarded to the Community and Health Services Department, Program Manager AODA/ODA.

Community and Health Services Department will:

- Make sure that notice of how to request documents will be posted in obvious places on premises owned or operated by the Region and the Region's external website.
- Provide required documents upon request and in other formats (large print, CD and electronically).

RESPONSIBILITIES:

Regional Council will adopt policies as required under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

The Corporation (including all Departments, Senior Management and Staff) will make sure that:

- All requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* have been met by January 1, 2010.
- The requirements of this policy are included in all Regional departmental policies, practices and procedures.
- Accessibility requirements related to the implementation of this Regulation are part of the annual budget and planning processes.
- Staff are allowed to attend required training.

The Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), as Regional departmental lead for the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* is responsible for:

- The coordination, Regional implementation and monitoring of the customer service training and feedback process of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

The Community and Health Services Department, as corporate coordinator for the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* is responsible for:

- The corporate coordination, development of policies and procedures and monitoring of compliance for all Regulations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* are complete, including the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07.

Directors/Managers/Supervisors will make sure that:

- The implementation requirements of this policy are happening within their departments, branches and units.

AODA/ODA Staff Committee is responsible for:

- Leading their respective department in achieving compliance with the Regulations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for:

- Reviewing and advising Regional Council through the Community and Health Services Committee on how the Region is complying with the Regulations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

All Regional Employees are expected to comply with this policy.

NON-COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY:

All Regional Employees (Union, Non-Union and Students), Volunteers and Agents who are acting or providing services on behalf of The Regional Municipality of York, or who help develop policies about how York Region offers services to people, are expected to comply with this policy. Employees who fail to comply with this policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

REFERENCE:

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005
- Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001
- Ontario Regulation 429/07 Accessibility Standards for Customer Service made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005
- Ontario Human Rights Code
- Compliance Manual: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Guide to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Report No. 7 of the Community Services and Housing Committee Regional Council Meeting of November 20, 2008: Update on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 – Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)
- The Regional Municipality of York Customer Service Strategy, June 7, 2001
- Blind Persons’ Rights Act
- Ontario Regulation 562 under the Health Protection and Promotion Act
- Ontario Regulation 31/05 under the Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001
- The Regional Municipality of York’s Multiple Format Guidelines, 2007
- The Regional Municipality of York’s Accessible Meeting Guidelines, 2007

CONTACT:

Program Manager AODA/ODA
Community and Health Services Department

APPROVAL INFORMATION

CAO Approval Date:

Committee:

Clause:

Report No:

Council Approval:

Minute No.

Page:

Date:



Accessible Customer Service at York Region: Tips for Serving People with Disabilities

York Region is committed to offering its goods and services in ways that respect the dignity and independence of people with disabilities, allowing them to get the same services, in the same places and a similar way as other customers. The following tips will make sure customers are served in ways that take the person's disability into account.

Physical Disabilities

Physical disabilities include a range of ways that physically limit a person's body from carrying out daily activities. It can range from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body, through muscle weakness, tremors and paralysis. People may be born with physical disabilities, such as Muscular Dystrophy, or it may happen at some point in their lifetime, such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or grip a door knob.
- Move around independently.
- Control the speed or coordination of movements.
- Reach, pull or use objects.
- Have strength or stamina.

Tips for serving customers who have physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to your customer, not to the support person who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask if they would like help.
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space. Don't touch, move or lean on them.
- Provide your customer information about accessible features that are close to them (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter.
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service.
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand in line.
- Be patient. Customers will tell their needs to you.

Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing

Hearing loss may cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who is deaf, deafened, or hard-of-hearing may be unable to:

- Use a public telephone.
- Understand speech in noisy places.
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers.

Tips for serving customers who have hearing disabilities:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Always ask how you may help. Do not shout. Speak clearly.
- Be clear and use specific information when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth.
- A person who is deaf may use a sign language interpreter to communicate. Always direct your attention to the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.
- Any personal (e.g. financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area that is not noisy.
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information.

Deaf-Blindness Disabilities

Deaf-blindness disabilities are a combination of hearing and vision loss. A person who is deaf-blind has great difficulty getting information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness makes communication, learning, orientation and mobility difficult. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, including Braille, telephone devices, communication boards or a combination of these systems. Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener who helps the person understand what is being said and seen, gives information and acts as a sighted guide.

Tips for serving customers who are deaf-blind:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- A customer who is deaf-blind 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.
- Do not touch or address a service animal. It is working and has to pay attention at all times.

- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it is an emergency.
- Understand that communication can take some time. Be patient.
- Direct your attention to your customer, not the Intervener.

Vision Disabilities

A person with a vision disability has difficulty seeing clearly. Vision disabilities can include a loss of side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means the person cannot see straight. Very few people are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person only sees ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Vision loss may result in:

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces.
- Difficulty moving around in unfamiliar places.
- Difficulty seeing colours or distances.
- A narrow field of vision.
- The need for bright light or contrast.
- Night blindness.

Tips for serving customers who have vision disabilities:

- Say who you are before making physical contact.
- Do not touch or address a service animal. It is working and has to pay attention at all times.
- Verbally describe the setting, form and location as necessary.
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it is an emergency.
- Do not leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Do not walk away without saying good-bye.

Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by the person's genetic makeup, such as Down's Syndrome, or because they were exposed to a toxic substance, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders. A person with an intellectual disorder may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information.
- Understanding concepts.
- Being aware of sensory information.
- Memory.

Tips for serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use clear, simple language.
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information.
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions.
- Be patient and verify your understanding of what they need.
- If you can't understand what is being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant.

Speech Disabilities

Speech disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Typical disabilities include problems with:

- Pronunciation.
- Pitch and loudness.
- Hoarseness or breathiness.
- Stuttering or slurring.

Tips for serving customers with speech or language disabilities:

- If possible, talk in a quiet environment.
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish their sentences.
- Ask them to repeat as necessary, or to write their message.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no.'
- Verify your understanding of what they need.
- Have patience, respect and willingness to find a way to communicate.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities include a range of disorders that affect the getting, keeping, understanding and processing of spoken and non-spoken information. People with a learning disability have average or above average intelligence, but take in and work through information and express knowledge in different ways. Learning disabilities can result in difficulties in:

- Reading.
- Problem solving.
- Time management.
- Finding the way.
- Processing information.

Mental Illness

Mental illness disabilities result from a range of mental illnesses and disorders. There are, however, three main types of mental illness:

- Anxiety.
- Mood.
- Behavioural.

People with mental illness may seem edgy or frustrated, act forcefully, seem to be pushy or abrupt, be unable to make a decision, start laughing or get angry for no apparent reason.

Smell Disabilities

Smell disabilities may involve not being able to smell odours or be overly sensitive to odours and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.

Touch Disabilities

Touch disabilities may affect a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration or pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature, or the opposite, numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations.

Taste Disabilities

Taste disabilities may limit the experience of the four main ways we taste: sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or unpleasant substances.

Other Disabilities

Other disabilities result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses and diseases including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, being overly sensitive to substances in the environment, disorders that make a person have seizures, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement.

Disabilities are not always visible or easy to identify.

TERMINOLOGY – SPEAKING ABOUT DISABILITIES

The following is taken from the *Ministry of Community and Social Services*.
http://www/css/gpv/pm/ca/mcss/english/howto_choose.htm]

“Words can influence and reinforce the public’s perception of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction,” which means that the person is thought of in a negative way. Here are some general tips that can help you communicate with or about people with all types of disabilities more successful:

- Use *disability* or *disabled*, not *handicap* or *handicapped*.
- Never use terms such as *retarded*, *dumb*, *psycho*, *moron* or *crippled*. These words are very demeaning and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say *person with a disability*, rather than *disabled person*.
- If you don’t know someone or if you are not familiar with the disability, it’s better to wait until the individual describes his/her situation to you, rather than to make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

September 2009



Accessible Customer Service Policy Appendix B

Accessible Customer Service at York Region: Practices and Procedures

The following practices, procedures and examples have been created to make sure customers with disabilities have the same chance as others to get York Region goods and services. Please note that responding to the needs of customers is not limited to the examples provided. As always, common sense, patience, respect and a willingness to find the best way to help should be used when serving customers with disabilities.

Match Communication to Type of Disability

Communicate with a person with a disability in a way that takes the person's disability into account. Where possible, ask the person directly how to best communicate with them. It may be necessary to offer the information in another format such as in large print, on CD or by use of Braille. If using a telephone is not the best way for a customer to talk or is not available, staff may offer to communicate information to a customer in person, by TTY or similar technology, email or in writing.

Service Animals

Service animals are allowed to go with any person with a disability while getting goods or services offered by York Region. Where an animal is not allowed by law, other arrangements must be explored in order to provide service to a person with a disability. For example, if a guide dog is not allowed by law in a particular area, a person with low vision or no vision might need someone to guide him or her while the animal waits in a safe location. Another option is to bring the goods and services to the person in a part of the building where the animal is allowed. Always discuss solutions with the customer.

Where a service animal may affect the health and safety of other customers, staff should discuss the situation with both customers and make every effort to meet the needs of both people. For example, if a person using a guide dog goes to a meeting where another person in the meeting is allergic to dogs, a solution that both agree with should be made. Some solutions include seating the two people at opposite ends of the room or offering different meeting dates where possible.

Support Persons

Support persons are allowed to go with any person with a disability while getting York Region services. Some services, however, are confidential, such as an Ontario Works intake interview. Confidentiality of customers must be protected. If a person with a disability uses a support person and is attending a confidential meeting or interview at the

Region, the person with a disability may need to provide documented permission for the support person to be in the meeting.

Each Regional department must have a practice in place for obtaining consent in these situations. For example, if a person who is deaf, deafened or hard of hearing is applying for Ontario Works and brings a Sign Language Interpreter to the confidential intake interview, staff should get documented consent from the customer for the Sign Language Interpreter to go into the interview.

Staff at the Region may require a person with a disability to have a support person when on the premises, but only if a support person is needed to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or the health or safety of others on the premises. The decision on this need will be made based on level of risk. For example, staff may request a person who is blind or has low vision to bring a support person to guide them through a tour of an operations facility when hazard to the person, such as debris on the floor, may exist.

Admission Fees

Each Regional department is required to let people know their practice of charging fees to support persons. If a participant fee is charged, such as an admission or registration fee, notice must be given ahead of time about the amount, if any, that the accompanying support person must pay. Notice regarding fees for support persons must be clearly posted. This may involve posting a sign or including the information in a printed document or on the website.

Temporary Disruptions

If there is a temporary disruption in facilities or services used by people with disabilities, notice of the disruption must be given as soon as possible. Some examples of temporary disruptions at the Region may include, but are not limited to evacuations due to fire, flood, etc., road closures, mechanical failures, elevator out of service, courts moved or cancelled, failure of telephone or technology equipment or bus detours.

Notice must be given as soon as possible. This may include posting the information in obvious places on the premises (for example, on entrance doors, at information kiosks, service counters, on bulletin boards, etc.), on the Region's website, voicemail messaging or by reasonable methods.

Consider which people with disabilities will be most affected by the disruption and make sure the information is communicated to them in a way which matches their needs. For example, if an elevator is temporarily unavailable, post a sign at all entrances and at a height that will allow a person using a wheelchair or scooter to read it. Other options

could include providing a map with directions to another elevator or accessible washroom, or asking customers to let us know they are coming ahead of time so that other services can be provided, if possible.

Feedback Process

Each Regional department will collect and respond to feedback about the way they provide goods and services to people with disabilities, using Regional departmental processes that are already in place. Feedback should follow the York Region Customer Service Strategy standard, at a minimum:

- If feedback is received by the department not looking after the goods and/or services, it must be sent to the correct department.
- Regional departments must note receipt of the feedback.
- If action is needed, it must be done within a reasonable period of time after the first note of receipt.
- If the situation is urgent or requires faster action, Regional departments must work to meet the urgency. If the situation is complex, Regional departments must work out timelines together with the customer to find a solution.

In addition to regular customer service satisfaction surveys that programs may use, there are various departmental feedback processes currently used by the Region, including, but not limited to:

- York Region: info@york.ca (general inquiry email)
- Community and Health Services: *York Region Health Connection* 1-800-361-5653 (public health-related inquiries)
- Community and Health Services: Contact Centre 1-888-762-0401 (social services-related inquiries)
- York Region Transit: transitinfo@york.ca, on-line feedback form, 1-866 MOVE YORK (668-3987) (transit-related inquiries or comment)
- Transportation Services: Customer Action and Response System (CARES) (internal departmental customer service response system)

This contact list will be updated as individual departments confirm details of the feedback process(es) they have established for use under the requirements of this policy.

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Notice of Temporary Disruption of Service

ELEVATOR OUT OF SERVICE

Elevator **[number or location e.g. Elevator #1, at the end of this hall, etc.]**

will be out of service from:

Day Month Year to Day Month Year

for **[insert reason for disruption e.g. routine maintenance, repair, etc.]**

To access the upper levels of this building please use

Elevator **[number or location e.g. Elevator #1, at the end of this hall, etc.]**

We apologize for any inconvenience.

If you have questions or concerns, please call **insert contact information including extension.**

Thank you.



Notice of Temporary Disruption of Service

PROGRAM/SERVICE CHANGE

The **[insert name of program or service]**
has been **Cancelled/postponed/moved** effective
Day Month Year to Day Month Year
due to **[insert reason for cancellation,
postponement, move e.g. inclement
weather, building maintenance,
emergency etc.]**.

For **[insert name of program or service]**
please go to **[insert description of alternate
facilities or services, if available]**.

We apologize for any inconvenience.

If you have questions or concerns, please call the
**[insert name of program or service contact
information including extension]**

Thank You.



Notice of Temporary Disruption of Service

ACCESSIBLE WASHROOM OUT OF SERVICE

The accessible washroom will be out of service from

Day Month Year to Day Month Year

for **[insert reason for disruption e.g. routine
maintenance, repair, etc.]**

Please use the accessible washroom which is located
[location e.g. at the end of this hall, etc.]

We apologize for any inconvenience.

If you have questions or concerns, please call **insert
contact information including extension.**

Thank You.