

Accessibility Training

Background

The goal of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2005) is to make Ontario fully accessible by 2025 by developing and enforcing accessibility standards. The University of Waterloo (“Waterloo”) is committed to achieving accessibility and its requirements established under the AODA.

Customer service standard requirements

The Customer Service standard (one of five accessibility standards within the AODA) outlines a series of different requirements for service providers across Ontario, including Waterloo. To achieve compliance with the standard, Waterloo must:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to persons with disabilities, and ensure that they are consistent with four principles: independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity
- Train everyone responsible for developing these policies, practice and procedures on accessible customer service
- Train anyone who interacts with the public on behalf of the university on accessible customer service

Waterloo’s [Policy 58: Accessibility](#) is the overarching policy that serves to address the above requirements.

The University’s “public”

When it comes to providing accessible customer service to the public, there are many community members the University has to consider. The University’s public includes:

- Our students
- University staff and faculty using campus services;
- residents of the cities and towns in which the university is located;
- visiting alumni and faculty;
- students’ parents and other relatives;
- patients and/or clients of University treatment clinics (e.g. Optometry, Psychology, Pharmacy, etc); and
- representatives from other organizations, e.g., universities, ministry, business partners.

Persons with Disabilities

Since 1962, the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC) has required employers and service providers to accommodate persons with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. The Code has resulted in some progress towards breaking down accessibility barriers in Ontario. However, progress has occurred on a case-by-case, **reactive** basis.

The AODA aims to establish accessibility as a **proactive process** that requires us to consider the types of barriers that exist in our environments and find ways to eliminate them.

One key in providing accessible service is understanding that persons with disabilities may have different needs. It's also about showing sensitivity and respect. Disabilities can be both visible and non-visible: while some disabilities are immediately recognizable, others are not. Disabilities can also be temporary or permanent, chronic or conditional. The AODA uses the same definition of disability as the OHRC, which includes physical disabilities as well as vision, hearing, speech, developmental, learning and mental health disabilities.

Barriers to Accessibility

A barrier is anything that keeps someone from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. Barriers to accessibility comes in all shapes and sizes. Obvious barriers include physical barriers like stairwells without ramps or publicly available elevators, but the most common barriers experienced by persons living with disabilities are embedded into our perspectives, practices, or tucked away in our policies and procedures. Common types of barriers include:

- Attitudinal barrier – e.g. believing people with hearing impairments are unable to enjoy music
- Architectural or Structural barrier – e.g. stairs without ramps or elevators, narrow doorways, and hallways and room layout
- Information or Communication barrier – e.g. small print size, low colour contrast between text and background or not facing the person when speaking, making it difficult to receive or convey information
- Technology barrier – e.g. not including alternative text for images on websites, making it difficult for individuals who use screen readers to access the information.
- Systemic barrier – e.g. setting full course loads requirement as eligibility for services such as residences, scholarships and honours listing.

Service animals

In 2016, the AODA refined its definition of a service animal to:

- the animal can be readily identified... as a result of visual indicators such as the vest or harness worn by the animal; **OR**
- the person provides documentation from one of the regulated health professionals listed in the Integrated Accessibility Standards.

Under the AODA, and as per Policy 58, Waterloo must permit service animals in *all* areas to which the public normally have access. Waterloo has also established [Service Animal Verification guidelines](#) to assist in management of accessibility with service animals.

Support persons

A support person is someone either hired or chosen to help a person with a disability. Support persons may provide one or more types of assistance, such as:

- Transportation
- Guiding a person with a vision loss
- Adaptive communication (e.g., intervenor for someone who is deafblind)

- Interpretation (e.g., ASL/English interpreter, LSQ/French interpreter)
- Note-taking, scribe or reading services (usually arranged by AccessAbility Services)
- Personal care assistance
- Support persons in the event of a seizure (e.g., protect from falls)
- Interpret and speak on behalf of someone with a speech disability

Under the AODA, Waterloo must permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied and assisted by their support persons while accessing goods or services. Under Waterloo's [Policy 58 – Accessibility](#), “(w)here admission fees are charged, the University shall waive all fees for a Support Person of a person with Disabilities”.

Assistive devices

An assistive device is any device that is used, designed, made or adapted to assist people in performing a particular task. Assistive devices enable persons with disabilities to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating, reading or lifting.

Some examples of personal assistive devices include:

- Wheelchairs/Canes/walkers
- Assistive listening devices (FM systems)
- Laptops with screen-reading software or communicating capabilities
- Hearing aids

Individuals should be permitted to utilize their personal assistive devices and have devices with them at all times, as much as possible. Learn the names of people on campus who have information and knowledge about assistive devices just in case you need to contact them. This simple task will help significantly towards enhancing accessible customer service for persons with disabilities.

Interacting with Persons with Disabilities

Here are some best practices for communicating and interacting with anyone with a disability:

- Be respectful.
- Dismiss your stereotypes and avoid making assumptions about a person's disability or capabilities. Many persons with disabilities often talk about being frustrated when people assume what they can or cannot do.
- Speak directly to a person with a disability and not the support person, companion, or interpreter. While this can sometimes be challenging, ignoring or talking over the person with the disability is patronizing and an affront to their dignity.
- Be patient — sometimes communicating with someone with a disability can take a bit longer, requiring you or the other person to repeat yourselves several times.
- Avoid touching or interacting with a service animal.
- Think of the assistive device as an extension of the person's personal space — touch these only if you are asked to.
- When you don't know what to do, it's always best to ask the person with a disability. Start with **"May I help you?"**

- Provide information in a way that works best for that person. For example, even if you have written notes, it may be helpful to verbalize the information too.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of accessible features located nearby, such as accessible entrances, washrooms, elevators, and lifts.

As a representative of Waterloo, you are held to similar requirements and standards required under the AODA. If you have any questions or concerns regarding how to provide accessible customer service within your area, please contact the assigned individual in your department:

Name:

Title:

Email:

Phone number:

Confirmation

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have reviewed all of the above information and understand your responsibility to meet the noted requirements at the University of Waterloo.

Signature:

Printed Name:

Date:

Address:

City:

Province:

Zip Code:

Designated University of Waterloo representative:

Signature:

Printed name:

Job Title:

Date: