

Towards a More Inclusive Library

Tips for complying with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Customer Service Standard

The AODA is a provincial law designed to improve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities by 2025.

- 1 in 7 people in Ontario has a disability. By 2036, it will rise to 1 in 5 as people age.
- Disabilities can be visible, non-visible, they can be permanent or temporary, and many of us will experience a disability sometime in our lives.
- Accessibility is everyone's responsibility and we all must strive to integrate rather than simply accommodate users with disabilities.

Accessible Customer Service

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do because of their disability.
- Be inclusive and respectful. Use appropriate language when referring to people with disabilities (i.e. use "disability" not "handicapped" and remember to put people first by saying "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person").
- Communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take their disability into account.

AODA's Four Principles of Accessible Customer Service

Dignity

- Provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people. Dignified service means not treating persons with disabilities as an afterthought or forcing them to accept lesser service, quality or convenience.

Independence

- A person with a disability is allowed to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.

Integration

- Provide service 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 others, unless a different way is necessary to enable them to access goods, services or facilities.

Equal Opportunity

- Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services, it means that persons with disabilities have the same opportunity as others to benefit from the way you provide goods or services.

General Tips:

- Keep a pen and paper handy and offer them to users to communicate
- Use plain language
- Don't touch or move a person's equipment (for example, wheelchair or walker) without permission.
- Support Person – speak to the user, not their support person
- Service animals – focus on the owner, do not distract the working animal
- Adjust posture/ sit down if needed to provide face-to-face service for someone in a wheelchair or scooter
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to respond or do things.
- Most users with disabilities at the University of Waterloo library will have an invisible disability. A universal and inclusive service approach to all users is key.

Barriers

- A barrier is anything that prevents someone from fully participating in society because of the disability
- What “disables” people isn't a disability – but rather an inaccessible environment. Examples can be physical or structural barriers (stairs or doorways), everyday practices like storing boxes in hallways and obstructing accessible pathways, or providing information in a format not accessible to everyone.
- Proactively identify barriers and report them to your manager or the Coordinator, Library Accessibility Services

For more information, contact:
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