



This learning module is about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (commonly referred to as the "AODA"), the customer service standard and how to interact with people who have various disabilities.

Overview of the AODA Legislation:

The province of Ontario became the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop comprehensive legislation to prevent or remove the everyday barriers that people with disabilities face when trying to access goods and services. You are taking this training to learn more about one of the regulations or "standards" of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act: The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, also referred to as the "Customer Service Standard".

- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act became law in 2005
- Purpose is to develop, implement, and enforce accessibility standards in both the public and private sector
- Goal is to make Ontario accessible by 2025

Accessibility is about removing barriers, not a person's disability.

The Five Standards of AODA:

In addition to the Customer Service Standard that you are learning about today, Ontario is developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in:

- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment

Who must comply with the AODA and its regulations or standards?

- All organizations that provide goods or services either directly to the public or to other businesses or organizations
- Have one or more employees in Ontario
- This includes public, non-profit and private sector organizations

Customer Services Standard

To comply with this standard, organizations must:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to persons with disabilities
- Train employees and others in the organization who interact with the public, in the above
- Provide alternative communication methods (including documents). Establish a process for receiving and responding to feedback on accessible customer service
- Provide notice of any temporary disruption to services or facilities a person with a disability might use

Principles of AODA Customer Service

All policies, practices and procedures should be consistent with the following principles:

- Dignity and Respect
- Independence
- Integration, and
- Equal Opportunity

Who are “Customers”?

Under the Customer Service Standard, customers are the people who use, rent or purchase your organization’s products or use its services, if the products or services are available to the public or a third party. Your customers are the men, women, youth, children, parents of children you assist, supervise, counsel, advise, as well as any other businesses or organizations, including government, to whom you provide services or goods. Under the Customer Service Standard, agency partner representatives who support your work may also be considered customers of your organization. You might refer them as clients, consumers, residents, students, or workers. At the CAS we use the terms **service users** or **individuals**.

What is a Disability?

There are many different types of disabilities and many definitions of “disability”. A very simple definition is “a condition which may restrict a person’s mental, sensory, or mobility functions to undertake or perform a task in the same way as a person does who does not have a disability”. The AODA uses the Ontario Human Rights Code’s (OHRC) definition of disability.

What is a Barrier?

Barrier, as defined by the AODA, means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his/her disability, including a physical barrier, architectural barrier, information or communication barrier, attitudinal barrier, a policy, procedure or a practice.

What are Assistive Devices?

According to the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, assistive aids and devices are used to replace, compensate for, or improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities. They include a broad range of items such as mobility and visual/hearing aids, orthotics/prosthetics, speech devices, medical supplies, environmental controls, and respiratory devices and so on.

Service Animal Definition:

As defined by the AODA, an animal is a service animal for a person with a disability;

- a) If it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his/ her disability; or
- b) If the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

Service animals include, but are not limited to "guide dogs".

Support Person Definition:

Under the Customer Service Standard, “support person” means, in relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

Words with Dignity:

Every person is a complex and unique being; a disability is only one aspect of an individual.

Instead of	Please use
Aged (the), the elderly	Seniors
Customer	Service User, Individual, Person
Autistic	A person with Autism or Autism spectrum Disorder
Birth defect, congenital defect	A person with a disability since birth or congenital disability
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	A person with vision loss, low vision, A person who is blind
Brain damaged	A person with a brain injury
Wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair
Crazy, insane, psycho, mental, mental patient, unsound mind, schizophrenic	A person with a mental illness, disorder, depression
Cripple, crippled, lame, physically challenged	A person with a disability, physical disability, mobility aid or arthritis
Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the), Deaf and dumb, deaf mute, Deaf-Blind (the)	A person who is deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, deaf-blind
Handicapped (the), patient, the disabled	A person with a disability
Hidden disability, invisible disability	Non-visible disability
Learning disabled, learning disordered, dyslexic	A person with a learning disability
Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile	A person with an intellectual disability

If you're not familiar with the disability, wait until the individual describes their situation to you, instead of making assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

Types of Disabilities:

In the following pages we will look at categories of disabilities and the best ways for you to communicate with individuals who have disabilities. Treat everyone with respect. Take time to find out how you can help people access your services. Ask "How may I help you?"

Physical Disabilities

Definition: Physical disabilities may affect a person's ability to:

- Coordinate movement of parts of the body or control speed of movements or move independently
- Reach, pull, bear or transfer weight, manipulate objects using fine motor skills
- Have strength or endurance
- Can be present at birth, result from diseases, injury or be temporary

Communicating:

- Speak normally and directly to the individual
- Ask before you help, accept the answer
- Respect the individual's personal space
- Provide information on accessible features of the immediate environment
- 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. Individual will identify their needs to you
- Don't make assumption about a person's disability based on what you can see

Hearing Loss

Definition: People with hearing loss may have some problems distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words, or they may experience total loss of hearing. There are different types of hearing loss like *profound hearing loss or deaf, or hard of hearing, deafened or Culturally Deaf.*

Culturally Deaf: Culturally Deaf people identify and participate in the language, culture and community of Deaf people and communicate using a signed language such as American Sign Language / ASL

Communicating:

- Make sure the individual can see you
- Look and speak directly at the person not the interpreter, maintain eye contact
- Be patient , pen and paper are great ways to communicate
- Speak clearly and naturally, at a moderate pace, don't shout
- Reduce background noise
- Ensure appropriate lightings, do not obstruct the area around your mouth
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary

Speech Disabilities

Definition: Speech disability is a partial or total loss or absence of the ability to speak. Typical speech disabilities include problems with pronunciation, pitch and loudness, hoarseness or breathiness and stuttering or slurring.

It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express one or understand written or spoken language.

Communicating:

- If possible communicate in a quiet environment
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish their sentences
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no' and verify your understanding
- Be patient, respectful and willing to find a way to communicate
- Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices. Ask the person how best to communicate with her or him

- If you do not understand what is being said, do not pretend to know; tell the person that you do not understand and allow him or her to repeat the communication

Vision Loss

Definition: Vision disabilities range from slightly reduced visual acuity to total blindness.

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficulty manoeuvring in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colour or distances and night blindness
- The need for bright light, or contrast

Communicating:

- Verbally identify yourself and do not shout
- Speak directly to the individual
- Be clear and precise when giving directions
- Don't leave the person without letting them know
- Don't touch or talk to a guide dog (remember it is working)
- Offer your arm to guide the person
- Never touch the individual without asking permission unless it is necessary

Deaf-Blindness

Definition: Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss.

- Deaf-blind disabilities interfere with communication, learning, orientation and mobility
- They navigate with the aid of white canes, service animals and electronic navigation devices
- Individuals who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards and any combination thereof

Communicating:

- 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 person 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 the service animals
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency
- Understand that communication can take some time, be patient
- Direct your attention to the individual, not the Intervener

Intellectual Disabilities

Definition: Intellectual disabilities are non-visible. They affect the ability to think and reason. A person with an intellectual disability may have difficulty:

- Language-understanding and using spoken and written information
- Concepts-conceptual information
- Perception-perception of sensory information
- Memory and recognizing problems, problem –solving and reasoning

Communicating:

- Allow additional time to communicate with the person
- Treat the person with respect, as you would everyone you encounter
- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do
- Use clear, simple language, and speak directly to the individual, not to their companion or attendant
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information and don't use jargon
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions
- Be patient and verify your understanding
- Provide one piece of information at a time

Mental Health Disabilities

Definition: The absence of psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society. People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated; act aggressively; be perceived as pushy or abrupt; be unable to make a decision; start laughing or get angry for no apparent reason.

Communicating:

- Treat the individual with the same level of respect and consideration
- Be confident and reassuring
- Do not be confrontational
- If the individual is in crisis, stay calm and ask how best to help
- Take the individual seriously
- Don't take things personally

***If you're not sure what to do, ask the individual, "How may I help you?"
If something isn't working, ask what you can do differently.***

Learning Disabilities

Definition: Learning disabilities may affect verbal and non-verbal information received, retained, understood and processed.

People with a learning disability have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways. They may have difficulties in:

- Reading
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Processing information

Communicating:

- Take your time, be patient. It may take a little more time for the person to understand and respond
- Ask the person what is the best way to communicate with her or him
- Provide information in a way that works for the individual
- Speak normally, clearly and make eye contact directly with the person
- Be prepared to explain the information you provide

Other Disabilities

- Smell disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or hypersensitivity to odours and smells. They may have allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food
- Touch disabilities can 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 can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations; sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances
- Other disabilities result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses and diseases including ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDs, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement