



BUSINESS ACCESSIBILITY TIPS
and AODA Accessible Customer Service Training Tips



About this guide

BIG IDeA stands for the Business Innovation Guide for Inclusive Design and Accessibility.

BIG IDeA is the first end-to-end platform in Ontario on accessibility for businesses and their customers. We support businesses in becoming accessible and showcase their successes. Learn more at www.bigidea.one

Accessibility Tips

A Guide for Businesses

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Customer Service Training Tips

People with disabilities are a potential goldmine for you! They are the best repeat customers because it's so difficult to find businesses that meet their needs. When you invite people with disabilities into your business they bring their friends and family with them. Something to remember is that 95% of all people will develop some kind of disability in their lifetime. Here are some easy tips to serve the following market segments of people with disabilities:

PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may tire easily or have difficulty walking longer distances.

- if you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone have a place where you can both sit. If your customer uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- don't touch items or equipment (e.g., canes, wheelchairs) without permission.
- if you have permission to move a person's equipment, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

PEOPLE WITH VISION LOSS

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

- when you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the individual can't see you; many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the customer.
- ask if the customer would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (e.g., a menu or schedule of fees).
- when providing directions/instructions, be precise (e.g., say: "the card terminal is to the left of your right hand" rather than "beside your hand").
- offer your elbow to guide customers if needed.

PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. They may also be oral deaf—unable to hear, but prefer to talk instead of using sign language. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing, the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost and/or communication preferences.

- once a customer has identified as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where he/she can see your face and, if able to do so, read your lips.
- as needed, attract the customer's attention before speaking; try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- if your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- if necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (e.g., using a pen and paper).

PEOPLE WITH SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

- don't assume that a person with a speech impairment also has another disability.
- whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no."
- be patient; don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders. One example is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

- be patient—people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.
- try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability; for example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do every day physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

- don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- use plain language.
- provide one piece of information at a time.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

- if you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- be confident, calm and reassuring.
- if a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

PEOPLE WHO USE ASSISTIVE DEVICES

An assistive device is a piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help with daily living (e.g., a wheelchair, screen reader, hearing aid, cane or walker, an oxygen tank).

- don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- don't move assistive devices or equipment (e.g., canes, walkers) out of your customer's reach.
- let your customers know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g., public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms).
- if your organization offers any equipment or devices for customers with disabilities, make sure you and your staff know how to use them. It could be helpful to have instruction manuals handy or an instruction sheet posted where the device is located or stored.



Some examples of assistive devices that your organization might offer

- lift, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices.
- accessible interactive kiosk or a tablet computer, which might offer information or services in images, or on a braille display or through audio headsets.
- wheelchairs.

PEOPLE WITH A SUPPORT PERSON

A support person, such as an intervenor, may accompany some people with disabilities. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things, such as communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs.

Welcome support people to your workplace or business. They are permitted in any part of your premises that is open to the public. If your organization is one that charges admission, such as a movie theatre or bowling alley, provide notice, in advance, about what admission fee will be charged for a support person.

- if you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services, or simply ask.
- speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.



BIG IDeA BUSINESS ACCESSIBILITY IN DEPTH

Portable Debit Machines or Extendable Cord

No item is more important than the debit/credit card reader when it comes to selling. If you get a customer in who is using a wheelchair, having a card reader that is detachable or has a long cord makes a world of difference.



Item Placement

Have items within the eye line of your customer and within reach.

Accessible Washroom or Stall

If your facility happens to have a washroom available, make sure that it is large enough for a wheelchair user to manoeuver. If the door on your bathroom stall swings outward, this will provide even more space. Grab bars at both the side and back of the toilet are also recommended to allow an individual to transfer independently.

Provide a Second Entry (when possible)

If your main entrance cannot be modified to be accessible, consider utilizing your second entrance instead.

Portable Ramps

The first thing that any customer is going to try and do to utilize your services, is get in. Providing a ramp for easy entry doesn't have to cost a fortune. StopGap has been helping business owners by building portable ramps with material donations from community hardware stores and volunteer labour from inspired community members. Businesses with single stepped storefronts are invited to participate and have a custom ramp made at no cost. Another option would be to purchase a portable ramp to bring out as needed. Prices range from \$150 and up. As well, if you're handy, StopGap has blueprints and design software to help you design and construct your own StopGap ramp.

Automatic Doors

Commercial installation of automatic doors can be costly upfront, but if you plan to be in business over the long-term they are something to consider. If this is not an option for you at this time, you may want to install a doorbell for customers who need assistance to ring. A doorbell means you won't be turning away customers and gives you the added bonus of being able to greet the customer at the door.

Barrier Free Pathways and Aisles

Once your customer is inside, you should ensure that all major pathways to key areas/functions of your business are clear of obstacles. Regardless of a person's abilities, it is nice to know that there isn't any tripping hazards, plus if a person can access all areas, they are more likely to have an enjoyable experience and spend more time in your establishment.

Braille Menus, Signage and or Business Cards

Braille menus are available at several major restaurant chains. Braille products are available for clients ranging from small businesses to government agencies. Many organizations provide this service at a reasonable cost.

Large Print in Communications and Documents

Having large print in your communications and documents will help many of your customers. People with low vision will appreciate that they can read about everything you are selling and customers who need glasses to read will be glad to have larger print instead. Consider having documents on a tablet that can support text enlargement and possibly read aloud/screen reading.

Adjustable Lighting Options

Ensuring that overall lighting meets the specific needs of customers and employees by allowing different brightness levels and/or additional lighting resources is key. Ambient mood lighting can be nice for dining establishments, but keep in mind that low lighting might impede some individuals' ability to read the menu or even communicate (in the cases where they are using sign language or lip reading).

Contrasting Colour and Texture Strips on Stairs

Some businesses have multiple levels. In these cases, you should consider laying out texture strips or painting your stairs in contrasting colours. Not only does this contrast prevent hazardous incidents from occurring, but it also allows individuals with low or no vision to navigate more easily, and be able to feel or see the difference in stair heights.

AODA Customer Service Regulation Summary

The information below is a more detailed look at the current legislation. In addition to other BIG IDeA resources, it will help you understand what you need to do to comply.

Who needs to comply? Is my organization included?

All organizations and businesses that operate in Ontario and have at least one employee must comply. The only organizations that do not need to comply are unincorporated sole practitioners and organizations run entirely by volunteers. If you are a sole practitioner but your incorporation documents name you as an employee of your company, you need to comply. Even if you only have part time or part year employees, you still need to comply. One way of looking at it is, if your organization issues T4s, you need to comply.

When do I need to comply?

All obligated organizations must now be compliant.

I don't have "customers". Are you sure this applies to me?

The government chose the word "customer" as shorthand to refer to anyone that an organization provides with goods and services. Students, patients, clients are all included under this term.

What do I need to do?

These eight requirements apply to all organizations with one employee or more:

1. Establish a set of policies, practices and procedures on how you and your employees will provide goods and/or services to customers with disabilities.
2. Ensure that customers with disabilities who use personal assistive devices (e.g., hearing aids, wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen tank), can access your services and/or goods.
3. Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
4. Train all staff to provide accessible customer service. The regulation is clear that it isn't just front line staff but also management that must understand how to provide accessible customer service. You must also train volunteers and contractors if they will be acting on your behalf with patients, clients or customers. **Visit www.bigidea.one/category/resources for free training materials.**
5. Allow people with disabilities to bring a guide dog or service animal with them to your premises, unless otherwise prohibited by law. For example, animals are not allowed by law in a restaurant kitchen or an operating theatre in a hospital.
6. Permit people with disabilities who require a support person to bring that person with them. If you charge a fee, your organization can decide whether or not to waive or lower the fee for the support person.

7. Provide notice in as many ways as possible (e.g., window sign, Google Places, web site) when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access your goods or services (e.g., an elevator, accessible washroom) are temporarily disrupted.

8. . Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how you provide goods and/or services to people with disabilities. **Visit www.bigidea.one to register for a free customer feedback service.**

Organizations and businesses with 20 or more employees are also required to prepare written policies, practices and procedures. Smaller organizations and businesses need to develop such policies, practices and procedures and communicate them to all employees, but don't have to have them written down.

Organizations and businesses with 20 or more employees also need to file regular compliance reports.

What happens if I don't comply?

The government is hoping that most organizations and businesses will see the benefits of providing accessible customer service as a way to provide more effective service to all their customers or clients, gaining loyalty and attracting new clients or customers. The emphasis of the AODA legislation begins with education and support to help organizations come into compliance. If your organization is found to be out of compliance, either through a complaint received, through your submitted report, or through an audit, the government will first attempt to provide the support and information you need to come into compliance. You may also be issued a director's order detailing when and how you must comply. You may be levied an administrative monetary penalty.

How do I get started?

Below we have a simple checklist for you to complete to see how accessible you can make your business.

Area	Tip	To-do	Done
Parking	Do you have access to an accessible passenger drop-off/pick-up area?		
Parking	Is there an open parking space identified with the International Symbol of Accessibility (on a sign and/or on the pavement) as reserved for vehicles carrying persons with disabilities?		
Entrance	Is there an automatic door?		
Entrance	Is there a level entrance or exterior ramp?		
Counter	Is the counter lowered?		
Seating area	Does the seating area have designated viewing spaces for wheelchair users?		

Area	Tip	To-do	Done
Seating area	Are the tables set up to allow for reasonable manoeuvrability for wheelchair users?		
Space	Are the flooring and walls in contrasting colours?		
Elevator	If necessary, is an elevator necessary to access all levels of this building?		
Washroom	Is there an exterior ramp?		
Sale	Is the point of sale machine accessible?		
Menus	Are menus available in different formats such as large print, pictures or a tablet?		
Web Site	Do you have an accessible web site?		
Customer Service	Do you have any signage to let your customers know you support accessibility?		



Post this sign where your customers can see it.



Find out how to make your business more accessible at **www.bigidea.one**

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No challenge too BIG no IDeA too small.

BIG IDeA supports businesses in becoming accessible and works to put a spotlight on their successes.



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