



CATHOLIC CENTRE FOR IMMIGRANTS CENTRE CATHOLIQUE POUR IMMIGRANTS

219 ARGYLE AVE., SUITE 500, OTTAWA, ONTARIO, K2P 2H4 TEL: (613) 232-9634 FAX/TÉLÉC: (613) 232-3660

Purpose of AODA

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) became law in 2005. The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement, and enforce accessibility standards so that all Ontarians will benefit from accessible services, programs, and employment. The goal is to become fully accessible by 2025. The underlying principles of the AODA are based on the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), and include independence, dignity, integration, and equal opportunity.

Ontario businesses must follow the accessibility standards as outlined in the **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regular (IASR)** to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities. There are five standards, including:

- Customer service
- Information and communication
- Employment
- Transportation, and
- Design of public spaces

Organizations with at least one paid employee must comply with the Customer Service standard, while organizations with 20+ employees have additional documentation and reporting requirements.

Definitions

<u>Disability</u>	The AODA uses the Ontario Human Rights Code definition of “disability”, which includes a range of conditions, some are visible and some are invisible. Conditions may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. Disabilities include: visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, learning, and mental health disabilities. For example: Depression is a mental illness that is not visible
<u>Barrier</u>	Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society.
<u>Customer</u>	The person receiving the service.
<u>Redeveloped</u>	Planned significant alterations to public spaces, but does not include maintenance activities, environmental mitigation or environmental restoration.
<u>Service animal</u>	An identifiable, working animal, typically wearing a vest or harness, that assists a person with a disability
<u>Support person</u>	Someone who accompanies a person with a disability to help with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs, or access to goods, services, or facilities
<u>Organization</u>	Any organization in the public or private sector
<u>Large organization</u>	50 or more employees
<u>Small organization</u>	1-49 employees

Compliance Requirements

Each of the IASR standards has its own requirements. Additionally, organizations must:

- Provide training;
- Develop an accessibility policy; and
- Develop an accessibility plan.

AODA training is required if you are a paid worker, a volunteer, or a new worker. Training must be provided if you:

- Provide goods, services, or facilities on behalf of your organization
- Develop an organization's policies (for example, a board member)
- Make changes to your organization's accessibility policies
- Are an existing worker and start a new position

Organizations must keep track of workers' training records, including the name of the worker and the date of completion.

All large organizations must have a written accessibility policy that is available to the public. The policy works in combination with the organization's accessibility plan to outline the steps an organization will take to prevent and remove barriers to employment, and when it will do so. Organizations must also publish annual status reports, and review and update their plans every five years.

Customer Service Standards

By January 1, 2012, organizations must provide goods and services in a way that makes them accessible to people with disabilities. Accessible customer service is about understanding that people with disabilities may have specific needs. It can be as simple as asking **"How can I help?"** and making small changes to meet the need.

All employees and volunteers must be trained on how to:

- Interact and communicate with people who have various types of disabilities, including those who use assistive devices or have a service animal or support person
- Use equipment or devices provided by the service provided that may assist a person with a disability
- Handle a situation where a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing a provider's goods, services, or facilities

People with physical disabilities

In addition to using a wheelchair, anyone who uses an assistive device such as crutches, a can, or a walker, is considered to have a physical disability. However, not everyone with a physical disability will use an assistive device. Some people may have conditions that affect their balance and/or mobility, such as the amount of time they can stand or walk.

Some features that promote accessibility for people with physical disabilities include:

- Accessible parking
- Automatic doors

- Wide and clear pathways
- Accessible washrooms
- Seating
- Ramps in addition to or in place of steps
- Products shelved at a reasonable height
- Handrails
- Signage at various heights

Tips for providing customer service to someone with a physical disability:

- Ask before you help. People with disabilities often have their own way of doing things
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level
- Don't touch equipment (e.g. canes, wheelchairs) without permission
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous, or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors
- Think ahead and remove any items that may cause a physical barrier, such as boxes left in an aisle

People with visual impairments

A visual disability can make it difficult for someone to read, locate landmarks, and/or see hazards such as boxes on the floor. Not everyone who has a visual disability is completely blind; many people have low vision. Do not assume you know how much someone can see. Some customers may use a white cane or guide dog to navigate their surroundings. Others may ask that you act as a sighted guide and will take your arm as you lead them.

Some features that promote accessibility for people with visual impairments include:

- Large print and/or Braille signage and buttons
- Accessible materials such as menus, business cards, and forms
- A clear path free of any items that may be physical obstacles, such as boxes or ladders
- Merchandise at eye level

Tips for providing customer service to someone with a visual impairment:

- When you see someone with a guide dog or white cane, don't assume they can't see you
- Identify yourself when you approach and ask how you can be of assistance
- During interactions, establish eye contact and speak directly to the customer instead of someone else, such as a friend
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (e.g. a menu, or schedule of fees), or let the customer know if you have Braille, large print, or online material that they may be able to read independently
- When providing directions, be precise and descriptive. Give specific directions such as "two steps to the left".
- If you need to leave the customer, let them know by telling them you'll be back or saying goodbye
- Don't leave the customer in the middle of a room – guide them to a comfortable location

People with hearing loss

People with hearing loss may be totally deaf or hard of hearing. Additionally, they may be oral deaf, which means they speak and understand speech by observing your facial movement and body language. Customers may prefer to communicate using a pen and paper, or may use sign language if an interpreter is present. Some will have hearing aids while others will not.

Some features that promote accessibility for people with hearing loss include:

- Detailed signage
- A phone system that supports communication between hearing people and people who are deaf or hard of hearing
- A method of booking appointments online or through text messaging
- Closed captioning on a television, or captions provided for promotional videos

Tips for providing customer service to someone with hearing loss:

- For customers who read lips and faces, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and lips
- If you need to attract the customer's attention before speaking, gently touch their shoulder or wave your hand
- If necessary, ask if another method of communication is easier (e.g. using a pen and paper)
- If the customer uses a hearing aid, you may need to move to a quieter area with less background noise
- Speak directly to the customer, not to an interpreter or friend

People with speech/language impairments

Cerebral palsy, stroke, hearing loss, or other conditions may make it difficult for someone to pronounce words or express themselves. Customers may have impaired speech because they stutter or have a voice disorder. Some people may communicate with communication boards or other assistive devices.

Tips for providing customer service to someone with speech/language impairments:

- Don't assume the customer also has another disability
- Don't assume the customer doesn't understand you
- Keep the interaction simple, asking questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no"
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish the customer's sentences.
- If you are unsure what the customer has said, repeat what you think they said and ask if this is correct.

People with invisible disabilities

An invisible disability can be a cognitive, development, intellectual, mental, or sensory condition that limits a person's behaviours, senses, or activities. You may not be aware that customers have these disabilities unless they tell you. As with all disabilities, don't make assumptions about a person's abilities. If a customer appears to need help, ask them how you can help.

Some invisible disabilities include:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Arthritis
- Brain injuries
- Chronic fatigue

- Gastrointestinal disease
- Epilepsy
- Chronic pain
- Learning disabilities
- Mental illness
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)

Tips for providing customer service to someone with an invisible disability:

- Treat all customers with the same level of respect and consideration
- Remain calm and reassure customers who seem anxious
- Consider moving to a location with fewer distractions, such as loud noises or crowds
- Respect customers' personal space
- Speak normally and use plain language
- Give one piece of information at a time
- Ask if a customer would like help reading information or filling out forms
- Be patient and give customers more time to respond

Service animals

Service animals may be used by people with many different kinds of disabilities, such as blind or low vision, hearing impairment, and epilepsy. Service animals must be welcomed into all areas where the public is allowed.

It may not be readily apparent that the animal is a service animal. Some may wear a harness or vest identifying the service they provide, or the handler may have an identification card. If it is not apparent that the animal is a service animal, the letter of a physician may confirm that the animal is needed due to a disability. Under no circumstances should you ask about the nature of the person's disability.

Tips for providing customer service to someone with a support animal:

- Pay attention to the customer, not the service animal
- Do not touch the animal without asking permission first
- Only the handler should feed the service animal, unless permission has been given
- Be sensitive and respectful; don't ask the person about their disability
- Do not request that the animal be left in a different location while you serve the customer in a publicly accessible location

If a customer who uses a service animal wishes to access a location that the public can enter, but where service animals are not legally permitted, service providers must offer alternative accommodations for the person to obtain goods and services. For example:

- You can decide to have your transactions take place in a separate area
- You may provide a secure area to leave the animal, if the customer is comfortable doing so. In this situation, you must provide support for the person who requires assistance.

Support persons

A support person is someone who accompanies a person with a disability to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs, or with access to goods, services, or facilities. Support persons must be welcomed into all areas where the public is allowed.

A provider of goods or services may only require that a service person be present if they have consulted with the customer and determined that:

- A support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or others
- There is no other reasonable way to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or others

If an organization requires a support person to accompany the person with a disability, the support person must not be charged admission fees or fares, if applicable.

Tips for providing customer service to someone with a support person:

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person requesting goods or services, or simply ask
- Speak directly with the customer, not the support person
- If your organization charges admission fees or fares, be familiar with its policy on fees or fares for support persons

Accessible feedback

Customers must have an easy way to provide feedback on accessibility, and organizations must have a process in place for receiving and responding to this feedback. Customers must be able to offer feedback using accessible formats and communication supports, if needed. The feedback process must be available to the public, such as on the accessibility page of an organization's website.

Accessible forms of feedback may include an organization's website featuring a feedback form, a telephone number or text telephone (TTY), and an email address.

When accessible services are unavailable

If accessible features or services are temporarily unavailable, let customers know by posting a notice. If possible, post a notice ahead of time and include the reason for disruption, how long the service will be unavailable, and alternative facilities or services, if any.

Post notices in places that are visible to the public, and make sure they are posted in several ways so they're accessible to customers with various disabilities.

Information and Communication Standards

This standard requires organizations to:

- Communicate information in ways that work for all employees and customers
- Let the public know if information is available in accessible formats, or communication supports can be provided
 - For example, restaurants with Braille menus, or performance venues with American Sign Language (ASL) interpreted performances
- Work with the person who requested the information to find out what format works best for them.
- Provide accessible systems for customer feedback, for example instead of only receiving hand-written surveys, feedback may be received online or by telephone.

There are six different communication factors to consider:

1. By January 2021, all **websites and web content** must be accessible for those who use computers differently because of their disabilities.
 - a. People must be able to navigate websites using software technologies like speech recognition, screen readers, and screen magnification.
2. Accessible **formats and communication supports** must be available, provided in a timely manner when requested, and cannot cost more than the regular cost of the original format.
 - a. Examples of accessible formats include HTML or Microsoft Word, Braille, large print, audio, described video, text transcripts of visual/audio information, reading information aloud.
 - b. Examples of communication supports are writing, emailing or texting, captions, sign language interpretation, video relay service, assistive listening systems, augmentative or alternative communication devices (letter, word, or picture boards), and rephrasing or restating information in clear language.
3. Workers must receive **emergency information** in accessible formats upon request.
4. Schools must provide **education materials and training resources** in accessible formats when requested, including course and program information.
5. School boards must provide **educators** with accessibility awareness training. This is required for anyone who designs courses, prepares and/or delivers lessons, or are the staff of a school board. Best practice recommends this training also be provided to all people who encounter students with disabilities in their general work.
 - a. This training is intended to help educators identify and meet the needs of students with different types of disabilities, correct barriers in the classroom, and incorporate strategies for students with various disabilities.
6. All **public library materials and resources** must have accessible alternative formats, wherever possible. The public should be made aware of the availability of these materials.
 - a. Libraries of education or training institutions must provide accessible formats for people with disabilities, upon request.
 - b. Some materials are exempt from this requirement, such as special collections, archival materials, rare books, and donations.

Employment Standards

Accommodations may involve the ways an employee with a disability receives and processes information, including information integral to their work or information available to all other employees, such as newsletters or bulletins. Employers must alert all workers whenever there is a significant change to the workplace policy on accommodation.

Recruiting

Accessibility must be a normal part of the recruitment process. Employers must:

- Notify applicants about the availability of accommodation
- Advertise on their website or job posting that the organization welcomes and encourages applications from people with disabilities
- State that accommodations are available

If an applicant makes an accommodation request, the employer must consult with the applicant to determine what accommodation is best suited for them.

Hiring

When making an offer of employment, an employer must:

- Notify the successful applicant of the workplace policies for accommodation of employees with disabilities
- Specify whom the applicant should contact to request an accommodation
- Encourage the applicants to make the request as soon as possible, so it can be ready on the employment start date.

Career development

Employers must ensure their career development processes are accessible. When workers with disabilities are promoted, transferred to new positions, or receive performance reviews, they must be accommodated. They should have access to documents, coaching, and feedback in the formats that work best for them.

Individual accommodation plans

Large organizations must develop and document individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities. The process should include:

- How an employee requesting the accommodation can participate in developing the plan
- How the employee will be assessed on an individual basis
- How the employee can request a representative from the workplace or union to participate in the creation of the plan.
- How the employer can request an evaluation from an outside expert (medical or otherwise) to assist in determining how to achieve the accommodation request.
 - The employer must pay any expenses related to the outside expert
- The steps taken to ensure the employee's personal information remains confidential
- How and when the plan will be completed
- How frequently the plan will be reviewed and updated
- An explanation of why the individual accommodation plan was denied, if applicable.

The plan must be provided in a format that considers the employee's accessibility needs.

Individualized emergency response plan

Employers must ensure the safety of employees with disabilities by providing an individualized emergency response plan, when necessary. Employers should work with the employee to create the plan and seek out volunteers to help the worker in the event of an emergency. The personalized emergency response plan should include the name of the worker with a disability, the worker's department, and any specific information about the workplace or location of the employee. The worker and volunteer should be trained on the plan.

Emergency planning

In case of emergency, the employer should collect a worker's personal emergency contact information.

Any assistance methods or devices needed by the worker should be listed, such as whether the worker needs assistance or a volunteer to safety exit the building, and how to move workers with mobility impairments. Detailed information such as the kind of device(s) a worker uses (such as a walker,

wheelchair, etc.), the location of the equipment or device(s), and how to use the equipment or device(s) should also be included.

It is recommended that buildings have multiple emergency signals, such as audio, visual, and vibratory alarms. Individuals with disabilities must be made aware of the emergency alerts and how employees will be notified. Volunteers should notify the employee of emergency alerts, even with multiple types of emergency signals.

Visual signage should be legible for anyone to read, contain images, Braille, and large print to guide workers. A public address (PA) system can offer additional emergency assistance by offering clear directions to individuals with disabilities so they can safely exit the building.

Exit routes should be safe for everyone to use. For example, if stairs are the only option for exiting the building, the employer should offer backup aids such as a stair-descent device. Elevators are not a safe option for exiting the building in an emergency.

Exit paths should be clear of obstructions, doors should be labelled appropriately, such as with Braille, and a volunteer must be contacted to assist the worker to exit safely.

Return to work process

Large organizations must have a return to work process in place for employees who have been absent due to a disability and require accommodations to return to work. This process does not apply if the employee's illness or injury is covered by the return to work provision under any other law.

The return to work process must be in writing and include the steps taken by the employer to transition the employee back to work, and the individual accommodation plan.

Transportation Standards

This standard applies to both conventional and specialized transportation companies. These companies must notify the public of any information about accessibility equipment and features of their vehicles, routes, and services. The information must be provided in accessible formats upon request.

Companies must:

- Train workers and volunteers on how to use accessible equipment and features safely
- Train on what to do if accessible equipment or features stop working or there are accessibility barriers, such as construction
- Make sure people with disabilities are safe during emergencies, and emergency response plans are accessible to the public
- When accessible equipment is not working, find other ways to accommodate and ensure that equipment is fixed as soon as possible.

Companies must fulfill the AODA technical requirements for special features, such as lifting devices, steps, grab bars/handrills, floor surfaces, lighting, signage, stop requests and emergency response controls.

Conventional transportation includes buses, streetcars, subways, trains, and ferries. These service providers must:

- Upon request, deploy lifting devices, ramps, or portable bridge plates
- Ensure the person with a disability has enough time to board, be secured, and disembark
- Assist with storing mobility aids and assistive devices
- Allow a person with a disability to travel with a medical aid
- Ensure passengers can board or disembark at the nearest safe accessible location along the vehicle's route, if a stop is not accessible
- Drivers must report inaccessible stops and temporary barriers
- Ensure there is an accessible way to transport passengers with disabilities if their services will be disrupted and the organization knows about this in advance
- Ensure people with disabilities can access other payment options, should they not be able to use certain payment options because of their disabilities
- Not charge more than the usual fares for a support person, and should provide transportation to a support person free of charge
- Provide designated and marked priority seating for people with disabilities. These areas must be located near vehicle entrances, and signs should advise passengers to vacate the area if it is needed by a passenger with a disability
- Provide visual and verbal announcements of routes and stops on their vehicles
- Store assistive devices in an area where owners can reach them, when safe to do so.
 - If they must be placed in storage compartments, they must be returned to the owner as soon as possible
- Not charge a fee for the storage of mobility aids and assistive devices

Specialized transportation service providers must:

- Create an eligibility process with an independent appeal process and information about the application/appeal process must be made available in accessible formats upon request
- Allow passengers to book travel on the day of travel, or up to three hours before the end of organization hours on the day before travel, if advanced booking is required
- Allow passengers to book travel in accessible ways
- Allow companions and dependent children to travel with passengers, if there is space
- Inform passengers about the length of delays, if services delays are half an hour or more after a scheduled pick-up time

If an organization operates both conventional and specialized transportation, it is required to:

- Charge fares that are less or equal to that of the conventional transportation
- Provide the same fare structure and payment options, and additional payment options if passengers need them
- Provide the same hours and days of service as those offered by conventional transportation

If conventional and specialized transportation are offered by different companies in the same location, the specialized transportation company may not charge more than the highest cost of conventional transportation.

Taxi owners and drivers must not charge a person with a disability a higher price than they would charge a person without a disability for the same trip. They must not charge additional fees for storing a mobility aid, such as wheelchair or walker.

Public school boards that provide **school transportation for students** must:

- Provide integrated accessible school transportation services when possible
- When that is not possible, or is not the best option for the student due to the nature of their disability or safety concerns, the school board must provide appropriate alternative accessible transportation services
- Develop individual school transportation plans for each student with a disability, in consultation with parents/guardians of students with disabilities
 - These plans include details of the needs of the student, and plans for boarding, securement, and deboarding
- Identify and communicate the roles and responsibilities of the transportation provider, parents/guardians of the student; the student; the operator of the vehicle; and, the appropriate school staff

Design of Public Spaces Standards

This standard applies only to new construction and major alterations to existing structural features, covering:

- Recreational trails and beach access routes
- Outdoor public eating areas like rest stops or picnic areas
- Outdoor play spaces, like playgrounds in provincial parks and local communities
- Outdoor paths of travel, like sidewalks, ramps, stairs, curb ramps, rest areas, and accessible pedestrian signals
- Accessible parking (on and off street)
- Service-related elements like service counters, fixed queuing lines and waiting areas
- Maintenance and restoration of public spaces

When designing public spaces, organizations must:

- Consult with the public and persons with disabilities before building or renovating recreational trails or beach access routes to determine the need for, location and design of trail amenities, rest areas, passing areas, viewing areas, and other pertinent features
- Ensure any change in the level of a trail or beach access route has a slope or ramp, and ramps must comply with the technical requirements of the standard
- Ensure outdoor public eating areas in parks, hospitals, and universities include picnic grounds and outdoor tables in parks
- Large organizations make at least 20% of their tables accessible, with knee/toe clearance, level and firm surfaces, and clear ground space to approach the table
- Ensure outdoor public play areas incorporate accessibility features such as sensory and active play components for children and caregivers with various disabilities
- Ensure outdoor play spaces include a firm and stable ground surface built to prevent injury, and clearance for children and caregivers of all abilities to move through the space

Outdoor paths of travel, like walkways and sidewalks, must meet general technical requirements, including minimum width and height clearances; stable and slip-resistant surfaces; and slopes or ramps at any changes to the level. Where applicable, they must also meet standards regarding stairs, curb ramps, depressed curbs, or accessible pedestrian control signals.

The development of **accessible parking (on and off street)** must include:

- Consultations with the public and persons with disabilities about the need, location, and design of accessible spaces for on-street parking
- Consultations with municipal accessibility advisory committees, where applicable
- Ensure off-street parking includes Type A parking spaces that are wider, with signage designating it as “van accessible”
- Ensure off-street parking includes Type B standard parking spaces
- A designated number of accessible parking spaces, based on the number and types of all parking spaces
- Access aisles (space between parking spaces) in off-street parking, so people can enter and exit their vehicles

Construction of **service-related elements** such as service counters, fixed queuing guides, and waiting areas must include:

- At least one publicly accessible counter for each type of service provided
- Queuing lines wide enough for persons with mobility aids
- Cane-detectable guides
- A minimum of 3% of total seats that are accessible

Preventative and emergency maintenance must be performed to ensure public spaces with accessibility-related equipment and features are safe to use.