

Advocis' Accessible Customer Service Policy





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History

In 2005, the Ontario government passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA) with the clear objective of providing full “accessibility” for Ontarians with disabilities by 2025. To achieve this goal, the government is developing accessibility standards that all private, non-for-profit and public sector employers must meet. Under this Act, the Ontario government is putting accessibility standards in place in the following areas:

- Customer Service
- Employment
- Information and communications
- Transportation
- Built environment

The first area, accessibility standards for customer service comes into full force for non-for-profit employers on January 1, 2012. The accessibility standard for customer service applies to all people or organizations in Ontario that provide goods or services, and have one or more employees. It is the government’s intent that by meeting these standards, our society as a whole will eventually eliminate the barriers to access facing those citizens with disabilities.

Important Statistics

- 1 in every 7 Ontarians currently have a disability
- Less than 2% of Canadians with a disability require the use of a wheelchair
- The majority of disabilities are not readily apparent and may include invisible disabilities such as: anxiety, asthma, developmental disabilities and diabetes
- As the population ages it is expected that 1 in 5 Ontarians will have a disability

The AODA and governing regulations are enforced by the Ministry of Community and Social Services who can apply monetary penalties to individuals as well as companies for violations to the Act depending on the severity of the infringement.

Commitment

The Financial Advisors Association of Canada (Advocis) is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities. This policy is intended to meet the requirements of *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07* under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, and applies to the provision of goods and services to the public or other third parties, not to the goods themselves.

Definition of Disability

Disability – the term disability as defined by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, refers to:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- a learning disability, or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- a mental disorder; or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

Examples of disabilities include but are not limited to:

- Hearing impaired
- Vision impaired
- Speech impaired
- Restricted mobility
- Mental health, intellectual disability, learning disability
- Amputee
- Prone to seizures

The definition also includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities and disabilities of which the effects may come and go, for example;

- A person with arthritis has a disability that over time may increase in severity
- A person with a brain injury has a disability that is not visible
- A person with multiple sclerosis has a disability that causes them to experience periods when the condition does not have an effect on their daily routine and other periods when it does

Guiding Principles

Companies are required to make every reasonable effort to ensure that their policies, procedures and practices are consistent with the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity. It is important for Advocis staff to remember that customers have different needs and learning what those needs are requires patience and a willingness to learn. The new customer service standard is geared to eliminating stereotypes and discrimination of people with disabilities by setting the expectation for all providers of goods and services to consider the needs of their customers and to make any required changes.



When assisting a customer with a disability, all Advocis employees should follow these four guiding principles;

Independence - the freedom of control or influence such as allowing a customer with a disability to make their own decisions, to complete the task at their own pace, in their own way, maintaining their independence.

Dignity - treating all customers with a disability as valuable and deserving of effective and full service just as any other customer. No customer with a disability should be treated as an after thought nor should they be expected to accept lesser quality service.

Integration - providing services to people with disabilities in the same fashion as other customers. Integration means that policies, practices and procedures are designed to be accessible to everyone including people with disabilities.

Equal Opportunity – a person with a disability has the same opportunity, benefits, options, chances and results as any other person. In the case of services it means that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to benefit from the way you provide goods or services as others. It should not be an inconvenience for a person with a disability to access goods or services, nor should they have to accept lesser quality service or more inconvenience.

Scope

This policy applies to the provision of goods and services at the premises operated by Advocis.

This policy applies to employees, volunteers, agents and/or contractors who deal with the public or other third parties that act on behalf of Advocis, including when the provision of goods and services occurs off the premises of Advocis such as in: delivery services, call centers, vendors, drivers, catering and third party marketing agencies.

The section of this policy that addresses the use of guide dogs, service animals and service dogs only applies to the provision of goods and services that take place at premises owned and operated by Advocis.

This policy shall also apply to all persons who participate in the development of Advocis' policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods and services to members of the public or third parties.

Barriers

Barriers are defined as something that keeps a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society. It is important that employees recognize these barriers

Barriers can be visible or invisible and include the following:

- Attitude
- Architectural or structural
- Information and communication
- Technology
- Systemic



Attitude

Attitude is a barrier that refers to the way people think and behave. In most instances, attitude is often the most difficult barrier to overcome however; it is definitely within our power to do so with the assistance of education and training. For example, not understanding how a hearing loss affects a person's ability to communicate can lead to stereotypes and misconceptions about the person's mental health.

Architectural and Structural

These types of barriers result from the design and layout of a building or facility. Stairs, doorways, shelves, the width of hallways or the space around furniture can all be considered architectural barriers. For example, stairs and narrow corridors can make it difficult for someone in a wheelchair to navigate throughout a facility.

Information and Communication

Information and communication are shared between people in many different forms such as verbal, written or through pictures or symbols. It helps to first consider how the disability affects the way the person expresses, receives and processes information then you can adjust or modify the way you interact and communicate with them. For example, the use of technical jargon may be confusing, or make it difficult or impossible to convey or receive a message.

Technology

Technology has advanced tremendously and in some cases, can actually be an aid/assistive device however in other cases technology can become a barrier if not set up with accessibility in mind. For example, an ATM allows us to use technology to access our banking however if they are not set up with accessibility in mind, they can be impossible for those with disabilities to use.

Systemic

Systemic barriers result from the way we are accustomed to doing business and are often unintentional but occur when a policy or procedure is set up without first considering the needs of all potential customers. For example, a store that plays loud music to attract customers makes it extremely difficult for a person using a hearing aid to hear what the staff is saying.

Customer Service Standards

In accordance with the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07*, this policy addresses the following Customer Service Standards:

- A. The Provision of Goods and Services to Persons with Disabilities;
- B. The Use of Assistive Devices
- C. The Use of Guide Dogs, Service Animals and Service Dogs
- D. The Use of Support Persons
- E. Notice of Service Disruptions
- F. Customer Feedback
- G. Training
- H. Notice of Policy Availability



A. The Provision of Goods and Services to Persons with Disabilities

Advocis will make every reasonable effort to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity (as defined under Guiding Principles on pages 3 & 4). It is the expectation that all Association staff will adhere to these principles by;

- ensuring that all customers receive the same value and quality of service
- allowing customers with disabilities to do things in their own ways, at their own pace when accessing goods and services as long as this does not present a safety risk
- using alternative methods when possible to ensure that customers with disabilities have access to the same services, in the same place and in a similar manner
- taking into account individual needs when providing goods and services
- communicating in a manner that takes into account the customer's disability

B. The Use of Assistive Devices

An assistive device is a technical aid, communication device or other instrument that is used to maintain or improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities. Personal assistive devices are typically devices that customers bring with them to assist in hearing, seeing, communicating, moving, breathing, remembering and/or reading. Some examples of assistive devices include, wheelchairs, scooter, screen readers, sign language interpreter, oxygen tank, monocular, hearing aid, cane/crutches, TTY (teletypewriter), artificial limb, white cane and speech generating device.

Only in cases where the assistive device presents a safety concern or where accessibility limitations might be an issue will other reasonable measures be used to ensure the access of goods and services. For example, open flames and oxygen tanks cannot be near one another. Therefore, the accommodation of a customer with an oxygen tank may involve ensuring the customer is in a location that would be considered safe for both the customer and business.

All employees should be aware that any person with a disability may use their own assistive device as required when accessing goods or services provided by Advocis unless it poses a safety concern. The Association does not provide assistive devices for use by its customers.

On the occasion that a customer with a disability requires elevator access to Advocis' office, then prior arrangements should be made with the customer to obtain access through the east wing elevator and employee office entrance (located in front of Advocis' boardroom). It is important to note that the west wing elevator (inside Advocis' office) should only be used in the event that the east wing elevator is not operable. Prior arrangements are required with building management in order to use the west wing elevator for this purpose.

C. The Use of Guide Dogs, Service Animals and Service Dogs

Customer with a disability who are accompanied by a guide dog, service animal or service dog must be allowed access to premises that are open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law. "No pet" policies do not apply to guide dogs, service animals and/or service dogs.

A guide dog is defined as a highly-trained working dog that has been trained at one of the facilities listed in Ontario Regulation 58 under the *Blind Persons' Rights Act*, to provide mobility, safety and increased independence for people who are blind.



As reflected in *Ontario Regulation 429/07*, an animal is a service animal for a person with a disability if:

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

As reflected in *Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario Regulation 562* a dog other than a guide dog for the blind is a service dog if:

- it is readily apparent to an average person that the dog functions as a service dog for a person with a medical disability;
- or the person who requires the dog can provide on request a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires a service dog.

Exclusion Guidelines

If a guide dog, service animal or service dog is excluded by law (see applicable laws below) Advocis will offer alternative methods to enable the person with a disability to access goods and services, when possible (for example, securing the animal in a safe location and offering the guidance of an employee).

Applicable Laws

Food Safety and Quality Act 2001, Ontario Regulation 31/05: Animals not intended for slaughter or to be euthanized are not allowed in any area or room of a meat plant. It also makes an exception for service dogs to allow them in those areas of a meat plant where food is served, sold or offered for sale to customers and in those areas that do not contain animals or animal parts and are not used for the receiving, processing, packaging, labelling, shipping, handling or storing of animals or parts of animals.

The Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario Regulation 562 Section 60, normally does not allow animals in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold or offered for sale. It does however allow guide dogs and service dogs to go into places where food is served, sold or offered for sale. Other types of service animals are not included in this exception.

Dog Owners' Liability Act, Ontario: If there is a conflict between a provision of this Act or of a regulation under this or any other Act relating to banned breeds (such as pit bulls) and a provision of a by-law passed by a municipality relating to these breeds, the provision that is more restrictive in relation to controls or bans on these breeds prevails.

Recognizing a Guide Dog, Service Dog and/or Service Animal

If it is not readily apparent that the animal is being used by the customer for reasons relating to his or her disability, Advocis may request verification from the customer.

Verification may include;

- a valid identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada
- a certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school
- a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons related to the disability



Care and Control of the Animal

The customer that is accompanied by a guide dog, service dog and/or service animal is responsible for maintaining care and control of the animal at all times.

Allergies

If a health and safety concern presents itself for example in the form of a severe allergy to the animal, Advocis will make all reasonable efforts to meet the needs of all individuals.

D. The Use of Support Persons

As reflected in *Ontario Regulation 429/07*, a 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, medical needs or access to goods and services.

If a customer with a disability is accompanied by a support person, Advocis will ensure that both persons are allowed to enter the premises together and that the customer is not prevented from having access to the support person.

In extenuating circumstances there may be times where seating and availability prevent the customer and support person from sitting beside each other. In these situations Advocis will make every reasonable attempt to resolve the issue.

In situations where confidential information may need to be discussed, consent must be obtained from the customer to ensure that the support person can be privy to such conversation where confidential information is discussed.

E. Notice of Disruptions in Service

Service disruptions may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within the control or knowledge of Advocis. In the event of any temporary disruptions to facilities or services that customer's with disabilities rely on to access or use Advocis' goods or services, all reasonable efforts will be made to provide advance notice. In some circumstances such as in the situation of unplanned temporary disruptions, advance notice may not be possible.

Notifications will Include

In the event that a notification needs to be posted the following information will be included unless it is not readily available or known:

- goods or services that are disrupted or unavailable
- reason for the disruption
- anticipated duration
- a description of alternative services or options

A Service Disruption Notice form is attached for use in this event.



Notification Options

When disruptions occur Advocis will provide notice by one or all of the following options:

- posting notices in conspicuous places including at the point of disruption, at the main reception entrance, the nearest accessible entrance to the service disruption and/or on Advocis' website
- contacting customers with appointments (by the applicable staff person or department)
- verbally notifying customers when they are making a reservation or appointment
- by any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances

F. Customer Feedback Process

Feedback is one way the Association can determine how well we are doing in providing quality service to customers with disabilities and where there is an opportunity for improvement.

Advocis therefore offers the following methods of communication to provide positive or negative feedback on the service provided to customers with disabilities. Customers can contact Karen Beier, Director, Human Resources as follows;

- By Phone at - 416 342-9854
- By Fax at 416 444-8031
- By Mail at – 390 Queens Quay West, Suite 209, Toronto, ON, M5V 3A2
- By E-mail at – kbeier@advocis.ca

Any Advocis customer that provides feedback will receive acknowledgement of their feedback, along with any resulting actions based on their concern or complaint submitted.

G. Training

The customer service standard requires employers to train staff on providing customer service to people with disabilities. This training must be given to everyone in an organization who deals with members of the public as well as third parties who act on behalf of a company. Training must also be given to anyone who develops policies, procedures and practices. Those who must be provided with training include employees, volunteers, agents and contractors or others who could reasonably be expected to:

- Interact with the public on behalf of Advocis
- Participate in developing Advocis policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to members of the public or third parties

This includes: salespersons, drivers, vendors, event operators, call centers as well as third party marketing agents.

Training Provisions

As reflected in *Ontario Regulation 429/07*, regardless of the format, training will cover the following:

- A review of the purpose of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*
- A review of the requirements of the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07*
- Instructions on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.
- Instructions on how to interact with people with disabilities who;



- use assistive devices
- require the assistance of a guide dog, service dog or other service animal
- require the use of a support person (including the handling of admission fees)
- Instructions on how to use equipment or devices that are available at our premises or that we provide that may help people with disabilities
- Instructions on what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing your services
- Advocis' policies, procedures and practices pertaining to providing accessible customer service to customers with disabilities

Training Schedule

Training must be provided to all current employees, volunteers, contractors and others by the applicable compliance date of January 1, 2012. After this date, any new employees, volunteers, agents and contractor who deal with the public or act on Advocis' behalf will receive training upon the commencement of their said duties. Revised training will be provided in the event of changes to legislation, procedures and/or practices.

Record of Training

The customer service standard requires every organization keep a record of the training provided under this section including the dates on which training is provided and the number of individuals to whom it is provided.

H. Notice of Policy Availability

It is a requirement under the AODA customer service standard that employers notify customers that the documents required by this regulation be made available upon request and when applicable that it is in a format that takes into account the customer's disability. If a customer requires a copy of this document in a different format than what is provided herein, please contact Karen Beier. This document must be sufficiently detailed to address the issues required and to verify that we are in compliance with the requirements of the standard. The notice may be given by posting this information in a conspicuous place owned and operated by the employer or any such other method as is reasonable in the circumstances.

Therefore a copy of Advocis' AODA Policy will be available upon request by any Advocis customer, will be available at the reception desk and on Advocis' website.

Summary

Advocis is focused on eliminating discrimination and providing equal opportunities for all persons with a disability.

Implementing policies and procedures that provide accessible goods and services to our customers will increase customer satisfaction and essentially provide an accessible workplace for all Advocis customers.

A safe and healthy workplace, free from barriers simply makes good business sense.

Be Smart, Be Aware, Be Informed, Be Safe.



Administration

Any policy of Advocis' that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

If you have any questions or concerns about this policy or its related procedures please contact Karen Beier, Director, Human Resources by e-mail at kbeier@advocis.ca or by phone at extension 9854.

This policy and its related procedures will be reviewed as required in the event of legislative changes.

Advocis Disruption of Service Notification

Please put the following notification on Advocis Letterhead prior to posting.

Dear Valued Customers,

The (insert goods or services that are unavailable) will be out of service as (insert reason for disruption) from (insert appropriate date) until (if known, insert appropriate date).

The following alternative services and options are available:

- (list options)

We regret any inconvenience this may cause. If you have questions or concerns, please contact (Name, Title, E-mail, telephone).

Thank you for your understanding and patience, we appreciate your business.

Management

Tips

The following TIPS on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities has been provided by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them.

There are many types and degrees of disability. Openly communicating and responding to your customers' needs is the key to excellent customer service for all. Here are a few tips for interacting with people who have various disabilities.

1. 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 have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or 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.

2. 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.

Tips:

- 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 they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example, a menu or schedule of fees).
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.



3. People who have 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 and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

Tips:

- Once a customer has identified themselves as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and 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 (for example, using a pen and paper).

4. People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

- A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.

5. 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.

Tips:

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



6. 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.

Tips:

- 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.

7. People who have intellectual developmental disabilities

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

Tips:

- Don’t make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

8. 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.

Tips:

- 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.

9. People who use assistive devices

An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Personal assistive devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

Tips:

- Don’t touch or handle any assistive device without permission.



- Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and 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, etc.).

If your organization offers any equipment or devices for customers with disabilities, make sure you 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 include:

- Lifts, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices
- Accessible interactive kiosk, which might offer information or services in Braille or through audio headsets
- Wheelchairs

10. People who use a service animal such as a guide dog or other service animal

People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the standard, service animals must be allowed on the parts of your premises that are open to the public. In some instances, service animals will not be permitted in certain areas by law (for example, a restaurant kitchen).

Tips:

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. Avoid touching or addressing them.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal ask your customer.

11. People who are accompanied by a support person

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervenor. 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 from communicating, to helping with 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.

Tips:

- 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.



12. People with disabilities who need help accessing your goods or services

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask "How can I help you?"

Your customers are your best source for information about their needs. A solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Learn More

You can get more information related to accessibility for Ontarians at ontario.ca/AccessON.

Acknowledgement & Agreement

I, _____ (Employee Name), acknowledge that I have read and understand Advocis' Accessible Customer Service Policy, Practices and Procedures and that I agree to adhere to this Policy. I further understand that if I violate this Policy, I may face corrective action, up to and including termination of employment. I also confirm that I have completed the mandatory training requirement, Serve-Ability: Transforming Ontario's Customer Service, provided to me.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____