



# **Customer Service and Integrated Accessibility Standards Policies**

Creation date: April 4, 2013

Revision dates: September 2020 V2

July 2025 V3

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### 1. Purpose:

Under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (AODA) 2005* all public and private sector organizations must meet the requirements of accessibility standards established by regulation. The AODA was created with the goal of developing standards that would improve accessibility for people with disabilities across the Province of Ontario. This policy establishes both the Customer Service and Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation in the areas of Employment, Information and Communications and Public Spaces for Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) in accordance with Ontario Regulations 429/07 and 191/11.

### 2. Scope and Responsibilities

This policy has been drafted in accordance with the regulation and addresses how HCA achieves accessibility through meeting the regulation's requirements. It provides the overall strategic direction that we will follow to provide accessibility supports to Ontarians with disabilities.

The requirements of the Regulation include the following four (4) items:

- Establishment, implementation, maintenance and documentation of a multi-year accessibility plan, which outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet its requirements under the Regulation;
- Incorporation of accessibility criteria and features when procuring or acquiring goods, services, or facilities;
- Training; and
- Other specific requirements under the Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment and Public Spaces Standards.

### 3. Policy Statement and Organizational Commitment

HCA is committed and guided by the four (4) core principles of Dignity, Independence, Integration and Equal Opportunity and supports the full inclusion of persons as set out in *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

HCA shall use every effort to ensure that we meet the needs of people with disabilities, in a timely manner, through the implementation of this policy.

#### 4. Definitions:

Below is a list of twenty-one (21) definitions in alphabetical order used in this policy:

**Accessible Formats** may include, but are not limited to, large print, recorded audio and electronic formats, Braille and other formats usable by persons with disabilities.

**Accommodation** means the special arrangement made or assistance provided so that persons with disabilities can participate in the experiences available to persons without disabilities. Accommodation will vary depending on the person's unique needs.

**Assistive Devices** are any auxiliary aid such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids (i.e. canes, crutches, wheelchairs, or hearing aids) or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities such as moving, communicating and lifting.

**Beach Access Routes** that are constructed and are intended for pedestrian use by the public and that provide access from off-street parking facilities, recreational trails, exterior paths of travel and amenities to an area of a beach that is intended for recreational use by the public.

**Communication Supports** may include, but are not limited to, captioning, alternative and augmentative communication supports, plain language, sign language and other supports that facilitate effective communications. We will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability.

**Communications** means the interaction between two or more persons or entities, or any combination of them, where information is provided, sent or received.

**Conversion Ready** means an electronic or digital format that facilitates conversion into an accessible format.

**Disability:** Individual with a disability as defined under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005 definition includes:

"Disability" means,

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,

- b) learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- c) mental disorder, or
- d) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; ("handicap")

**IAP** means Individualized Accommodation Plan.

**Information** includes data, facts and knowledge that exists in any format, including text, audio, digital or images, and that conveys meaning.

**Internet Website** means a collection of related web pages, images, videos or other digital assets that are addressed relative to a common Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) and is accessible to the public.

**Maintenance of Public Spaces** means activities that are intended to keep existing public spaces and elements in existing public spaces in good working order or to restore the spaces or elements to their original condition, examples of which include painting and minor repairs.

**Mobility Aid** means a device used to facilitate the transport, in a seated posture, of a person with a disability.

**Mobility Assistive Device** means a cane, walker, wheelchair, scooter or similar aid.

**New Internet Website** means either a website with a new domain name or a website with an existing domain name undergoing a significant refresh.

**Redeployment** means the reassignment of employees to other departments or jobs within the organization as an alternative to layoff, when a particular job or department has been eliminated.

**Recreational trails** means public pedestrian trails that are intended for recreational and leisure purposes.

**Service Animals** are any animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability. A service animal is not a pet, they are a working animal.

**Support Persons** are any person whether a paid professional, volunteer, family member or friend that accompanies a person with a disability in order to help with communications, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

**Unconvertible** means if it is not technically feasible to convert the information or communications. It also means if the technology to convert the information or communications is not readily available.

**Web Content Accessibility Guidelines** means the World Wide Web consortium recommendation, dated December 2008, entitled "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines" (WCAG) 2.0.

## **5. Customer Service Provisions**

HCA is committed to excellence in serving all customers, including people with disabilities, and we will carry out our functions and responsibilities in the following areas:

### **Communication**

We will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability. We will train staff who communicate with customers on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.

### **Telephone services**

We are committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our customers. We will train staff to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language and to speak clearly and slowly. We will offer to communicate with customers by email or through a support person if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

### **Assistive devices**

We are committed to serving people with disabilities who use assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our goods and services. We will ensure that our staff are trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our goods or services.

### **Billing**

We are committed to providing accessible invoices to all of our customers; for this reason, invoices will be provided in the following formats upon request: hard copy, large print attachment to invoice, email, and fax. We will answer any questions customers have about the content of the invoice in person, by telephone or email.

### **Use of service animals**

HCA is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties, unless excluded by law. In the event that a service animal is prohibited from the premises, HCA will ensure that other measures are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from HCA's goods or services.

HCA will ensure that all staff, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal. Service animals must be supervised by their owners and kept in control when used to access HCA's goods or services. Should a service animal be unruly or disruptive (jumping on people, biting, or other harmful behaviour) an employee may ask the persons with disability to remove the animal from the area or refuse access to goods or services. In this event, other reasonable

arrangements to provide goods or services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with disability.

## **Support Persons**

HCA is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be permitted to enter HCA's premises and have access to their support person at all times while on our premises.

No admission fee will be charged to a support person with a disability to any HCA Conservation Area open to the public or third parties where there is a per person fee.

In situations where it is necessary to protect the health and safety of a person with a disability or others on the premises, HCA may require the presence of a support person. HCA will consult with the individual to understand their needs, review health and safety concerns based on available evidence, and determine whether the presence of a support person is the only reasonable way to ensure safe access to HCA's goods or services.

## **Notice of Service Disruptions**

HCA will provide customers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service (e.g. an entrance way that is under repair, or renovations that limit access to an area such as an accessible washroom). Notice of the disruption shall be provided in advance whenever possible and in the event of an unexpected disruption, notice will be provided as soon as possible.

This notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. Notice may be given by posting the information in a conspicuous place on the affected HCA premises and, may also be posted on the website or over the phone on the main line greeting or by such other method as is reasonable under the circumstances.

## **Training for Staff**

HCA will provide training to all employees, volunteers and others who deal with the public or other third parties on their behalf, and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of customer service policies, practices and procedures.

Training will include the following:

- The purposes of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, and the requirements of the customer service standard (Ontario Regulation 429/07)
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person



- How to use any equipment or assistive devices available on HCA's
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing goods and services
- HCA's policies, practices and procedures relating to the customer service standard
- HCA will provide the training as soon as practicable and in a way that best suits the duties of the employees (online, in person etc.) and will keep records of the dates when training is provided

### **Availability of Documents**

HCA shall, upon request, supply a copy of the HCA Accessible Customer Service Policy, along with any practices and procedures that are in place, to any person.

### **Customer Feedback**

Feedback from our customers provides HCA with opportunities to learn and improve. Comments on our services regarding how well those customer expectations are being met are welcome and appreciated.

Feedback regarding the way HCA provides goods and services to people with disabilities can be made by e-mail, telephone, or in writing addressed to the attention of:

Director of Conservation Area Services  
838 Mineral Springs Road  
PO Box 81067  
Ancaster, Ontario  
L9G 4X1  
Phone: (905) 525-2181  
E-mail: [nature@conservationhamilton.ca](mailto:nature@conservationhamilton.ca)

A response either in writing, in person, e-mail or telephone acknowledging receipt of feedback including the action to be taken will be provided to any complaints within 30 days.

### **Exclusions**

This Accessibility Customer Service Standards Policy shall not apply during any period where HCA has declared a "State of Emergency" as defined under the Emergency Management Act.

## **6. General Provisions for the Integrated Accessibility Standards**

This section covers the general requirements of the Integrated Accessibility Standards.

### **Multi-Year Accessibility Plan**

HCA's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines a phased-in strategy to prevent and remove barriers and addresses the current and future requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). HCA will report annually on the progress and implementation of

the plan, post the information on our website and will provide it in alternative formats upon request. The plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years.

### **Procuring or Acquiring Goods, Services or Facilities**

HCA will use accessibility criteria and features when procuring or acquiring goods, services or facilities, except where it is not practical to do so, in which case, if requested we will provide an explanation.

### **Training**

HCA will ensure that training is provided to all employees and regular fee-for-service staff on the requirements of the accessibility standards referred to in the regulation and on the *Human Rights Code* as it pertains to persons with disabilities. Training will be provided as soon as practicable in a way that best suits the duties of the employee (on line, in person etc.). If any changes are made to this policy or the requirements training will be provided. We shall maintain a record of the dates when training is provided and the number of individuals to whom it was provided.

## **7. Information and Communications Standard**

HCA is committed to meet the needs of people with disabilities and will create, provide and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities upon request.

If HCA determines that it is not technically feasible to convert the information or communications or the technology to convert the information or communications is not readily available, we will be obligated to provide the person that requires the information with an explanation as to why the information or communications are unconvertible; and a summary of the unconvertible information or communications.

## **8. Emergency Information**

If HCA prepares emergency procedures, plans or public safety information and makes the information available to the public, we shall provide the information in an accessible format or with appropriate communication supports, as soon as practicable, upon request.

## **9. Feedback**

HCA has a process in place for receiving and responding to feedback and will ensure that those processes are provided in accessible formats and with communication supports upon request. We will notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and communication supports.

## 10. Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

HCA shall be obligated to provide or arrange for accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities for the situations a through to d listed below:

- a) Upon request in a timely manner that takes into account the persons' accessibility needs due to a disability;
- b) At a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons;
- c) Consult with the person making the request and determine suitability of an accessible format or communication support;
- d) Notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and communication supports.

The above does not apply to products and product labels, unconvertible information (such as maps) or communications and information the HCA does not control directly or indirectly through a contractual relationship.

## 11. Website Accessibility

HCA shall make their internet website and web content conform with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 initially at Level A and increasing to Level AA. By January 1, 2014, any new web content will conform with WCAG 2.0 Level A. By January 1, 2021 all internet website and web content will conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA.

## 12. Employment Standard

HCA is committed to fair and accessible employment practices. The Employment Standard builds upon the existing requirements under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in relation to how we provide accessibility throughout the entire employment cycle. It applies in respect to employees and does not apply to volunteers and other non-paid individuals.

The requirements of the Employment Standard shall be met by HCA by January 1, 2016 unless otherwise specified.

## 13. Recruitment

HCA shall notify employees and the public about the availability of accommodations for applicants with disabilities for the three (3) situations below:

- During the recruitment process when job applicants are individually selected to participate in an assessment or selection process;
- If a selected applicant requests an accommodation, HCA shall consult with the applicant and provide or arrange for the provision of a suitable accommodation that takes into account the applicant's disability;

- Notify successful applicants of the policies for accommodating employees with disabilities.

## **14. Employee Notification**

HCA shall inform its employees of its policies used to support its employees with disabilities, including but not limited to, policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to a disability for the two (2) situations below:

- As required to new employees as soon as practicable after they begin their employment;
- Whenever there is a change to existing policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to a disability.

## **15. Accessible Formats**

When requested by an employee, HCA will consult with the employee to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports needed to perform the employee's job and information generally available to employees in the workplace. HCA will consult with the employee making the request to determine the suitable or best way to provide the accessible format or communication support.

## **16. Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP)**

HCA shall have in place a written process for the developing a documented individual accommodation plan for employees with a disability. The process to develop the IAP should include the twelve (12) points below:

- The employee's participation in the development of the IAP;
- Assessment on an individual basis;
- Identification of accommodations to be provided;
- Timelines for the provision of accommodations;
- HCA may request an evaluation by outside medical or other expert, at our expense, to assist with determining accommodation and how to achieve accommodation;
- Employee may request the participation of a representative from the workplace
- Steps taken to protect the privacy of the employee's personal information;
- Frequency with which the IAP will be reviewed and updated and the manner in which it will be done;
- If denied, the reasons for denial are to be provided to the employee;
- A format that takes into account the employee's disability needs;
- If requested, any information regarding accessible formats and communication supports provided;
- Identification of any other accommodation that is to be provided.

## **17. Return to Work**

HCA shall develop, document and have in place a return to work process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require disability-related accommodation to return to work.

## **18. Performance Management, Career Development and Advancement, and Redeployment**

HCA will take into account the accommodation needs and/or individual accommodation plans of employees when providing career development, performance management and when considering redeployment.

## **19. Workplace Emergency Response Information**

HCA shall provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have a disability for the four (4) points below:

- If the disability is such that the individualized information is necessary and the employer is aware of the need for accommodation due to the employee's disability;
- Where an employee requires assistance, HCA shall, with the consent of the employee, provide the workplace emergency response information to the person designated by HCA to provide assistance to the employee;
- As soon as practicable after becoming aware of the need for accommodation due to the employee's disability;
- Review the individualized workplace emergency response information when the employee moves to a different location in the organization, when overall accommodations needs or plans are reviewed and when the employer reviews its general emergency response policies.

## **20. Public Spaces**

HCA shall incorporate accessibility into public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped on and after January 1, 2017. We will ensure that we follow the existing requirements stated under the Design of Public Spaces Standards (Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment) for recreational trails and beach access routes, outdoor public use eating areas, outdoor play spaces, exterior paths of travel, accessible parking, and service related elements. When developing recreational trails, we shall consult with the public and persons with disabilities. We shall also provide maintenance and restoration of public spaces by ensuring our multi-year accessibility plan includes procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements in public spaces and procedures for dealing with temporary disruptions when accessible elements required under this section are not in working order. Accessibility reports shall be provided every three years for large organizations as of December 31, 2014.

## **21. Responsibilities**

HCA's Accessibility Committee comprised of staff from across the organization is responsible for reviewing this policy annually and recommending amendments to ensure on-going compliance with regulated accessibility standards and legislated obligations. The failure to comply with AODA regulations can result in orders and penalties. HCA will provide training to all staff on both the customer service and integrated accessibility standards and supervisors and managers shall ensure that staff are trained and comply with the Policy.