

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service for the Municipality of South Huron

1. Purpose

The Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) provides for the development of standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises.

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Reg. 429/07 (attached) that came into effect January 1, 2008 are the first set of standards developed. The objective of the customer service standard is to ensure that persons and organizations providing goods and services in the Province of Ontario provide accessible customer services for persons with disabilities.

As an employer, and a provider of services, the Municipality of South Huron is committed to ensuring its services are provided in an accessible manner. The Municipality of South Huron will promote accessibility through the development of policies, procedures and practices and by ensuring they consider people with disabilities.

2. Our Mission

We are committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our goods and services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other customers.

3. Our Commitment

In fulfilling our mission, the Municipality of South Huron strives at all times to provide its goods and services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

4. Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions apply to this customer service standard:

Accessible Customer Service – policies, processes and practices that relate to an interaction between a person with a disability and a provider of goods and services that result in an equivalent response to the customer requirements of the person with the disability.

Assistive Devices – an auxiliary aid such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids.

Customer – any person who receives or seeks to receive goods or services, voluntarily or involuntarily from a person or organization in the private, public and non-governmental sector.

Customer Service – policies, processes, and practices that relate to an interaction between a customer and a provider of goods, services and/or information.

Employee – persons in an employee-employer relationship.

Organization – municipalities and associations/organizations that provide goods and/or services to the public.

Service Animal – defined as either a “guide dog” as per Section 1 of the Blind Persons Rights’ Act or a “service animal” for a person with a disability.

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

5. Scope

This standard applies to customer service interactions within the Municipal organization including, but not limited to, those:

- a) Delivered in person, by telephone, electronically or by mail, using oral, visual or written means;
- b) received voluntarily or involuntarily;
- c) delivered by employees or volunteers, or third parties on behalf of the person or organization;
- d) Facilitated through accessibility providers accompanying or acting on behalf of the person with a disability.

This standard requires the Municipality to provide accessible customer service, except in situations where persons and organizations can demonstrate that doing so would:

- a) Fundamentally alter the nature of the service;
- b) Compromise public safety or personal privacy;
- c) Result in statutory non-compliance.

6. Principles of Accessible Customer Service

In achieving accessible customer service for persons with disabilities, the Municipality shall incorporate the following core principles into their customer service policies, processes and practices:

- a) Equity – Customer services for persons with disabilities shall be provided in a manner which is inclusive and equitable;
- b) Independence – Customer services for persons with disabilities shall support their independence, while respecting their right to safety and personal privacy;
- c) Dignity – Customer services for persons with disabilities shall be provided in a manner that respects the dignity of persons with disabilities;
- d) Responsiveness – Customer services for persons with disabilities shall be responsive to their customer service requirements and delivered in a timely manner, considering the nature of the service and the accommodation required;

- e) Sensitivity – Customer services for persons with disabilities shall be provided in a manner that is sensitive to their needs.

7. Accessible Customer Services Requirements

The Municipality shall establish and maintain policies, processes and practices to deliver accessible customer services for persons with disabilities. In establishing and maintaining policies, processes and practices, the Municipality shall:

- a) Prevent the creation of barriers to accessible customer service;
- b) Identify barriers to accessible customer service;
- c) Remove barriers to accessible customer service;
- d) Offer equivalent customer service.

8. Procedures and Practices:

The Municipality is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities and we will strive to effect and achieve the following:

- a) Communication will be considered, in a manner that takes into consideration a person's disability;
- b) Staff will receive appropriate training;
- c) Persons with disabilities accompanied by a guide dog or service animal will be permitted in those areas of the premises owned or operated by the Municipality of South Huron that are open to the public;
- d) Persons with disabilities accompanied by a support person will be permitted to be accompanied by that support person in premises open to the public;
- e) Admission fees will be waived for a support person who accompanies a person with a disability;
- f) Notice will be provided when municipal facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access Municipality of South Huron services are temporarily disrupted. The Municipality of South Huron will establish a feedback process to allow people to provide feedback on how we are providing services to persons with disabilities;
- g) The Municipality of South Huron will allow persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by the Municipality of South Huron.

8.1 Communication

The Municipality of South Huron will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability and the Municipality will offer to communicate with customers by means of communication and if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available, the forms include: email, fax, TTY if available

If the Municipality is required to give a copy of a document to a person with a disability, the Municipality of South Huron shall give the person the document, or the information contained

in the document, in a format that takes into account the person's disability. Material printed in-house and publications produced on behalf of the Municipality of South Huron will contain a note indicating: "Alternate formats are available upon request" and include relevant contact information.

Alternate formats considered by the Municipality of South Huron and the person with the disability will include, but are not limited to:

a) Print Requests:

Requests for alternate formats should be honoured in the most practical manner depending on the media chosen, the size and complexity of the document, the quality and source of the documents, the feasibility of the request (including the cost) and the number of documents to be converted. It should be noted that when a request for one of these formats is received and deemed feasible, staff should make every attempt to respond to the request in the most practical manner and to the satisfaction of the requestor. If it is determined that the format requested is not feasible, then other alternate methods of providing the information should be explored that will still meet the needs of the requestor (for example, explaining the information verbally etc.).

Feasibility will be determined based upon cost in relation to size of document and time associated with processing document requests.

The time frame attached to the conversion process varies depending on the media chosen, the size, complexity, quality of source documents and number of documents to be converted. Documents shall be returned in a timely manner depending on the factors previously noted.

Conversion shall be processed in-house wherever possible. When a member of the public requests a piece of Municipal documentation in a multiple format, the department of origin shall be responsible for the cost of the conversion, materials and distribution, not the public requestor.

In-house printing, where possible, should be acquired in future to the CNIB's Clear Print Standards.

8.2 Assistive Devices

The Municipality of South Huron will allow persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by the Municipality.

Should a person with a disability be unable to access Municipal services through the use of their own personal assistive device, the Municipality of South Huron will ensure the following measures:

- a) Determine if service is inaccessible, based upon individual requirements.
- b) Assess service delivery and potential service options to meet the needs of the individual.

- c) Notify person with disability of alternative service and how they can access the service, temporarily or on a permanent basis.

8.3 Support Persons

The Municipality of South Huron 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 allowed to enter the municipal facilities with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on our premises.

The Municipality of South Huron reserves the right to request the person with a disability be accompanied by a support person, in the event that it is considered necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability or others on the premises.

The Municipality of South Huron will waive admission fees for support persons who accompany a person with a disability, into facilities where admission is charged.

- a) The person with a disability should notify a staff member about the presence of the support person.
- b) If there is confidential information to be disclosed, consent must be received from the person with the disability.

8.4 Service Animals

For the purpose of this policy, an animal is a service animal for a person with a disability:

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

The Municipality of South Huron 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. The Municipality will ensure that the person is permitted to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law.

If a service animal is excluded by law from the premises, the Municipality shall ensure that other measures are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the Municipality's goods or services.

8.5 Notice of Temporary Disruption

The Municipality of South Huron will provide customers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the Municipal facility or services usually used by people with disabilities.

Notice of the disruption must include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternate facilities or services, if any, that are available.

The Municipality will provide notice by posting the information at a conspicuous place on premises owned or operated by the provider of goods or services, as well as by posting it on the County of Huron website. If the Municipality of South Huron website should expect a temporary service disruption, advance notice will be provided, where possible

8.6 Customer Feedback

The ultimate goal of the Municipality of South Huron is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving customers with disabilities. Comments on our services regarding how well those expectations are being met are welcome and expected.

The Municipality shall establish and maintain an accessible process to obtain, consider and take necessary action on feedback with respect to accessible customer services, including any complaints. The member of the public with the complaint or concern should first have a discussion with the staff person who is involved in the situation or their direct manager.

a) To submit a complaint:

Should a member of the public wish to make a complaint regarding the service they have received:

- i. The member of the public with the complaint or concern should have a discussion with the staff person at the Municipality of South Huron who is involved in the situation.
- ii. Should the discussion not resolve the complaint or the member of the public is uncomfortable discussing the issue with the staff person, the member of the public should fill out a complaint form. The staff person can assist the member of the public with the complaint form in a manner that takes into consideration their disability.
- iii. The information to be provided by the member of the public should include their personal contact information, the date, a description of the complaint, and what the member of the public requests to resolve the complaint. This information should be documented on the complaint form.
- iv. The complaint should be forwarded to the manager responsible for the department and the appropriate corporate department.
- v. The department manager will attempt to resolve the complaint in a timely manner, with the assistance of the appropriate Municipal department.
- vi. The member of the public will be contacted once a resolution has been reached.

b) To submit a suggestion:

Should a member of the public wish to provide the Municipality of South Huron with a suggestion on how to improve our service:

- i. Member of the public will inform staff member of suggestion.
- ii. Staff member will assist member of the public in filling out the suggestion form, should they require assistance.
- iii. Member of the public will be notified in a timely manner of how the Municipality of South Huron will proceed with their suggestion.
- iv. Staff response should include: an explanation of how we will implement the suggestion, a response indicating further investigation or an explanation why we are unable to implement the suggestion.

All complaints and suggestions should be recorded on a complaint form, and forwarded to the department head and the appropriate corporate department.

8.7 Training for Staff

The Municipality of South of Huron shall ensure that the following persons receive training about the provision of its goods or services to persons with disabilities:

- a) Every person who deals with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of the Municipality, whether the person does so as an employee, agent, volunteer or otherwise.
- b) Every person who participates in developing the Municipality's policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to members of the public or other third parties.
- c) The training will include a review of the purposes of the Act and the requirements of this policy and instruction about the following matters:
- d) How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disability, as outline in this policy and procedures.
- e) How to interact with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal or the assistance of a support person, as outlined in this policy and procedures.
- f) How to use equipment or devices available on the provider's premises or otherwise provided by the provider that may help with the provision of goods or services to a person with a disability.
- g) What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the provider's goods or services.

The Municipality will log and retain records which will record the details of the training provided, as well as the name of the person, location, and date the training was completed.

The Municipality of South Huron will customize the training going forward, based on the actual experiences usage of the persons with disability in Municipality of South Huron owned or operated facilities and legislative requirements.

9. Financial Implications

The Municipality may incur costs in implementing staff training required for meeting the accessibility standards for customer service. The other potential financial implication is in regard to non-compliance with the law. Enforcement provisions exist under the AODA that did not exist previously under the ODA. Inspectors will have the power to request documents and records. Every person guilty of an offence under the Act can be fined up to \$50,000 per day or part day on which the offence occurs or continues to occur. The Municipality can be fined up to \$100,000 per day or part day on which the offence occurs or continues to occur.

10. Modifications to this or other policies

The Municipality is committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Any changes made to this policy will take into consideration the impact on people with disabilities.

11. Questions about this policy

This policy exists to achieve service excellence to customers with disabilities. If anyone has a question about the policy, or if the purpose of a policy is not understood, an explanation should be provided by or referred to the Manager of Corporate Services.