

Purpose of the AODA

People with disabilities should have the same kind of opportunities as everyone else. To make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025 the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requires businesses and organizations to provide accessible environments for people with disabilities.

What is a “disability”?

The AODA uses the Ontario Human Rights Code’s definition of “disability.” This definition includes physical, mental health, developmental and learning disabilities. A disability may be visible or not visible.

Accessibility Standards

Businesses and organizations that provide goods and services to people in Ontario will have to meet specific accessibility standards in five important areas.

Customer Service

The Ontario government is working to make Ontario more accessible to people with disabilities and to everyone who lives and visits the province. That's why Ontario has developed a new Accessible Customer Service Standard. All businesses with at least one employee will have to comply with the new standard by January 1, 2012.

The customer service standard will help people by:

- understanding that customers with disabilities may have different needs, and
- finding the best way to help them access your goods and services

Transportation

The proposed Accessible Transportation Standard will make it easier for people to travel in Ontario. This includes:

- people with disabilities

- older Ontarians, and
- families traveling with children in strollers.

The proposed Accessible Transportation Standard focuses on making transportation services accessible, including buses, trains, subways, streetcars and ferries. Some requirements include:

- providing on-board announcements of stops and connections
- establishing criteria and processes to determine eligibility for specialized transit services; and
- having features such as grab bars and allocated spaces for people with mobility disabilities.

Information and Communications

The proposed Accessible Information and Communications Standard outlines how businesses and organizations will have to create, provide and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible for people with disabilities.

The proposed Accessible Information and Communications Standard will require obligated organizations to:

- provide information and communication to people with disabilities in a way that accommodates their disability, and
- make websites accessible.

Employment

The goal of the proposed Accessible Employment Standard is to help employers create equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The proposed standard means that obligated organizations will have to:

- deliver accessibility awareness training to employees
- accommodate persons with disabilities in the recruitment process
- develop individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities, upon request
- deliver individualized workplace emergency information to employees with disabilities
- take into account the accommodation needs of employees with disabilities in existing performance management, career development and redeployment processes
- develop procedures for return-to-work of employees who are absent from work due to a non-workplace injury or illness that uses individual accommodation plans, where appropriate.

Built Environment

The Final Proposed Accessible Built Environment Standard provides recommendations to government on how to remove barriers in buildings and outdoor spaces for people with disabilities.

The standard was developed by a committee composed of people representing:

- disability communities
- not-for-profit organizations
- broader public sector
- businesses, and
- building industry.

Reasonable Effort to Meet Principles

The AODA states that all businesses must make a “reasonable effort” to meet the AODA guiding principles. There are as many “reasonable efforts” to meet the principles as there are ways to create accessibility. You can create accessibility by changing a procedure, installing an assistive device, or simply by taking individual needs into account when you offer services. Each business or organization needs to determine how to create accessibility based on its services, the type of business or organization, its resources and its options available at a given time. There’s nothing in the standard that says an organization’s measure for accessibility has to be set in stone; indeed, your business or organization may very well find that one method of providing accessibility works well at one time, but another works better at another point in time. You may also find a customer-service measure that you know will work very well for people you serve with disabilities, but you’re not in a position to provide that measure—an assistive device, for example—at the present time. In that case, you should make plans, such as a timetable, for implementing that new measure in the future, and use other accessible means of providing the same service in the meantime.

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