

## **Guidelines for Delivering Accessible Customer Service**

**For Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation Volunteers and  
Board Members**

## **Part 1:**

### **Overview**

There may be barriers that keep people with disabilities from fully participating in activities that most of us take for granted.

The ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*** is a law in Ontario whose purpose is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities by 2025. The law allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility and enforce them.

The **Accessibility Standards for Customer Service** is the first standard to be developed and take effect for not-for-profit organizations on January 1, 2012 and is described in this booklet. Other standards will follow at a later date.

This standard means that Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation (DRNPHC) must do the following:

1. Establish procedures for providing services to people with disabilities.
2. Talk with a person in a way that takes their disability into account.
3. Allow people to use their own personal assistive devices (i.e. walker, hearing aids, visual aides) when using our services.
4. Allow people to have their guide dog or service animal in CCD areas that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law (e.g., in a kitchen where food is prepared.).
5. Permit people who use support persons to bring that person with them when using our services at CCD premises which are open to the public.
6. Provide training to staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public or other third parties on our behalf.
7. Have a feedback process so that people can tell us how we are doing in providing service to people with disabilities and what staff will do to respond to complaints.
8. Provide notice when our services are unavailable.

## **Part 2:**

### **Who are people with disabilities?**

#### **What do we mean when we say “disability”?**

Disability as defined by the AODA uses the same definition as the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and includes any degree of physical disability, a condition of mental impairment or developmental disability, a learning disability, and 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.

## Part 3:

### What are Barriers?

A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. There are many types of barriers including the following:

**Attitude** is a difficult barrier to overcome. People may not know if they should offer help and may ignore the person because they don't know what to do or say.

**Architectural or structural** barriers can exist because of the way a building is designed (i.e. stairs, doorways, width of hallways or furniture placement).

**Information and communication barriers** can exist that make it hard for a person to get information. Things like print size, phones adapted for the person who is Deaf, and clear language need to be considered.

**Technology**, or lack of it, can prevent access to information. Tools like computers and telephones can present barriers if they are not set up with accessibility in mind.

**Systemic barriers** can result from how we deliver services if they restrict a person with disabilities, often unintentionally. For example, a clothing store may have a no refund policy but also a change room that isn't wide enough to allow someone in a scooter to enter and try something on before they purchase it.

## Part 4:

### What is Accessible Customer or Client Service?

Accessible service covers a variety of elements DRNPHC is committed to providing service to adults with disabilities in a manner that:

- Respects their dignity and independence;
- Is integrated as fully as possible into the customary method of service delivery;
- Ensures reasonable efforts are made to provide equal opportunity, benefit, to our services for everyone, regardless of disability;
- Is sensitive and responsive to the individual's needs

Accessible customer service means that, in general, each individual may need service provided in a slightly different manner (i.e., A person who is blind may need to have information read aloud).

Simply stated, accessible customer service is good customer service . courteous, helpful, and prompt.

### General tips:

- If you're not sure what to do, ask "How may I help you?"
- Speak directly to the person asking the question.
- Don't make assumptions. Some disabilities are not visible.
- Take the time to get to know the client's needs.
- Be patient. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Make an effort to learn about appropriate language to use when referring to persons with disabilities.
- If you cannot understand what the person is saying, politely ask them to repeat.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals, and avoid eye contact. They are working and have to pay attention.
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

## Part 5:

### How should I interact with someone who uses assistive devices, the assistance of service animal or a support person?

<b>Assistive Devices:</b>	Devices that are a help to individuals (i.e., wheelchairs, walkers, canes, white canes (for vision issues), personal oxygen tanks, etc.).
<b>Do:</b>	Remove potential barriers to the use of devices and offer to help in a way that respects the person's dignity and independence.
<b>Don't:</b>	Lean on or reach over a customer or their devices

<b>Service Animals:</b>	Animals that are specifically trained to assist people.
<b>Do:</b>	Allow service animals to be with their owner, unless excluded by law.
<b>Don't:</b>	Touch, talk to or make eye contact with a service animal.

<b>Support Person:</b>	Individuals who are with a person with a disability to help them access and use goods or services.
<b>Do:</b>	Allow clients and their support person to enter and be together on the premises; get the client's consent if confidential information is going to be shared when a support person is present; Speak directly to the client.
<b>Don't:</b>	Charge an admission fee for the support person if they are exempt from paying.

## Part 6:

### How can I provide excellent service to customers with disabilities?

Always start with people first. When speaking, say "a person with a disability" rather than "a disabled person." When helping, think about the person's needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

Below are some tips to help us provide accessible service:

<b>Hearing Disabilities:</b>	Includes: Deaf (someone with little or no hearing) Hard of Hearing (someone with some hearing and speech) Deafened (someone who has lost part or all hearing . i.e. from injury)
<b>Tips:</b>	Get the client's attention before speaking and then look directly at them; speak clearly; use pen and paper if needed; keep noise to a minimum; remember, not every person who is Deaf uses sign language.

<b>Deafblind Disability:</b>	The person cannot see or hear to some degree
<b>Tips:</b>	Speak directly to the client, not the support person. Do introduce yourself to the support person also. The client may tell you how best to communicate with them.

<b>Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities:</b>	This disability may not be visible. It can limit (in varying degrees) the person's ability to communicate, learn, and live independently.
<b>Tips:</b>	Don't assume what the person can or cannot do; use plain language and step by step instructions; be patient; after helping, ask "Do you need more information?"

<b>Learning Disabilities:</b>	This affects how a person receives and understands information and can affect how a person learns. This may affect their ability to do math, write and their fine motor skills.
<b>Tips:</b>	Be patient; take your time; show you are willing to help; speak clearly; use the method that works for that client (i.e. pen & paper)

<b>Mental Health Disabilities:</b>	This has many disorders that include those affecting how someone feels; how they perceive the world; how fearful someone is; how they perceive themselves and how they feel about food or their body image.
<b>Tips:</b>	Be quietly confident, calm & reassuring; Listen carefully; Ask how best to help; Don't take it personally if the person doesn't stay & talk.

<b>Speech or Language Disabilities:</b>	This can affect how a person is able to speak, pronounce words and may cause them to slur or stutter. They may need to use a communication board or other devices.
<b>Tips:</b>	Give the person time, don't interrupt or finish sentences; Ask question that can be answered with a "yes" or "no"; Use pen and paper if appropriate; don't be afraid to say "I don't understand."

	Can you repeat the question?+
<b>Physical Disabilities:</b>	(includes disabilities that affect mobility) This may affect how a person moves and walks, their balance, their ability to sit or stand and their ability to grasp objects. This can be temporary or permanent.
<b>Tips:</b>	Speak to the client directly; make eye contact (sit if you need to); ask before you help; respect personal space; don't move items that the client uses (i.e. cane); describe what you are going to do; don't leave the client in an awkward, undignified or dangerous position.

<b>Vision Disabilities:</b>	Most individuals who are legally blind have some vision. Some have tunnel vision (loss of side vision) or lack of central vision (cannot see straight ahead); some can see outlines of objects. This affects their ability to read signs and see hazards. They may use a guide dog or white cane and may use a magnifier or reader.
<b>Tips:</b>	Get the client's attention before speaking and then look directly at them; speak clearly; use pen and paper if needed; keep noise to a minimum; remember not every person who is Deaf uses sign language.

**People with disabilities are generally aware that they may need accommodation and will work with you to find appropriate means.**

**Most important is simply to be respectful and ask how we may help.**

## **MANDATORY TRAINING REGISTRATION**

Accessible Client Service Training is mandatory for all DRNPHC staff and volunteers. If you have any questions about how you may best provide service, please ask your DRNPC Administrator, Manager, or Director.

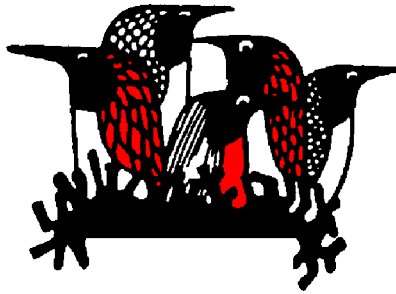
### **Part 7:**

#### **What we should do if for some reason we can't serve a person with a disability?**

When we are unable to provide service (during renovations, technology is not available), it is important that we provide notice as people with disabilities may often go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging a ride.

DRNPHC will do the following: provide advance notice (where possible); provide details where alternatives exist; post a notice on our website, on our phones or in writing. Where possible a notice will be posted at the affected site.

Copies of the Accessible Client Service Policy are available on our website at [www.durham-housing.com](http://www.durham-housing.com) and from any of our service locations.



## Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation

Confirmation of Understanding/Compliance with the AODA

Please return completed form to Durham Region Non-Profit Housing

First and Last Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**By signing above, I confirm that I have read and understood the material contained in the “Guidelines for delivering Accessible Customer Service for Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation Volunteers and Board Members.” That understanding constitutes completion of the mandatory Accessible Customer Service training as required under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (the Act).**

**Please register my compliance with the Act.**

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