

# Greater Sudbury Greater Accessibility



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Braille

Communications Tips  
for Providing

**Great Service**

to Citizens  
with Disabilities







## Introduction

A person with a disability may find it physically or cognitively hard to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

According to Statistics Canada, 16.6% of Canadian adults and 3.7% of children have a disability. Some persons with disabilities have more than one type of activity limitation. While many disabilities are permanent, others occur only at certain times. Some disabilities are visible while other disabilities are not readily apparent.

People with disabilities are people first and it is likely that some of the people you know are people with disabilities. Between 22,000 and 24,000 citizens in Greater Sudbury have disabilities and this number is expected to grow as the population ages. In fact, more than one third of citizens over the age of 65 and more than half of citizens over the age of 75 have a disability. Disabilities impact the lives of people of all ages. In Greater Sudbury 1,000 children under the age of 14 and 1,000 teens and young adults have a disability.

This booklet is designed to assist you in providing excellent service to citizens with disabilities. It provides you with an introduction to different types of disabilities and provides common sense solutions that will make it easier to assist our citizens.

*This document is provided as part of compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the Customer Services Standard (Regulation 429/07).*



## **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)**

The goal of the AODA is to create an “**Accessible Ontario**”, in which persons with disabilities can participate to their full potential in the social and economic life of the province. The primary purpose of the Act is to develop, implement and enforce accessibility. Where there are other laws which address accessibility, the highest level of accessibility must be followed.

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07) is the first accessibility standard created under the authority of the AODA and municipalities must be in compliance by January, 2010.

For more information about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, please see <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcsc/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/> or go to <http://www.accesson.ca/ado/english/>

## **City of Greater Sudbury's Citizen Service Policy**

In 2003, the City of Greater Sudbury adopted a Citizen Service Policy. Staff respond to the needs of our citizens by providing the highest quality service in all municipal facilities, programs and service areas. We exist to serve our community and our goal is to provide citizens with great service that consistently exceeds the citizen's expectations.

**The City of Greater Sudbury promotes a “Can Do” attitude amongst employees.**

In 2009, the policy was amended to include a section specific to the provision of services to citizens with disabilities. That section reads:

- The City of Greater Sudbury respects the independence, dignity, integration, and equality of opportunity of all citizens;
- Persons with disabilities may use support persons, personal assistive devices and service animals when accessing municipal programs, services and facilities;
- Communication with a person with a disability will be done in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.



## Disabilities

Functional limitations are associated with different kinds of disability and affect an individual's ability to perform everyday tasks.

**Physical** disabilities may include paralysis in one or more parts of the body, muscle weakness, difficulties moving or coordinating a part of the body, or tremors. Physical disabilities can be congenital, such as Muscular Dystrophy; or acquired, such as tendinitis. Physical disabilities can affect an individual's ability to perform manual tasks, such as holding a pen, clicking a mouse or twisting a doorknob. They may impact the speed or co-ordination of movement or affect strength, balance and endurance. Physical disabilities may affect the ability to walk, stand for any length of time, bend or manoeuvre, as well as the ability to reach, pull, push or manipulate objects.

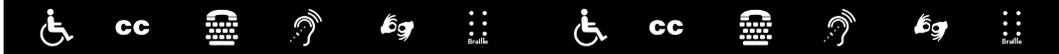
**Hearing loss** includes problems distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words, ringing in the ears and total (profound) deafness. A person who is deaf, deafened or hard-of-hearing may be unable to use a public telephone, understand speech in noisy environments, or pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers.

**Speech** disability is a partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Typical voice disorders include problems with pronunciation, pitch, loudness, hoarseness, noisy breathing, stuttering or slurring. People with severe speech disabilities sometimes use manual or electronic communication devices.

**Vision** disabilities range from slightly reduced visual acuity to total blindness. A person with reduced visual acuity may have trouble reading street signs, recognizing faces, or judging distances. They might find it difficult to manoeuvre or navigate, especially in an unfamiliar place, have a very narrow field of vision, be unable to differentiate colours, have difficulty seeing in low light or at night, or require bright lights to read.

**Deaf-blind** is a combination of hearing and vision loss. It results in significant difficulties accessing information and performing activities of daily living. Deaf-blind disabilities impact communication, learning, orientation and mobility. Individuals who are deaf-blind may communicate using various sign language systems, or may use an intervener to relay information.

**Smell** disabilities may be a hypersensitivity to odours and smells or allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals. Smell disabilities include the inability to smell and being unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.



**Taste** disabilities limit the ability to experience the four primary taste sensations: sweetness, bitterness, saltiness and sourness. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify ingredients in food, spoiled food, or noxious substances.

**Touch** disabilities alter the ability to sense surfaces and their texture or quality, including temperature, vibration and pressure. A person with a touch disability may be unable to detect heat or cold or to sense a wound. Alternatively, a person with a touch disability may be hypersensitive to sound, physical vibrations, or heated surfaces.

**Intellectual** disabilities affect an individual's ability to think and reason. The disability may be caused by genetic factors, such as Down Syndrome, or through exposure to environmental toxins, as in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma and psychiatric conditions. A person with an intellectual disability may have difficulty understanding or using spoken or written information; understanding cause and effect; responding to sensory information, memory, problem solving or reasoning.

**Mental Health** disorders refer to the effects of a mental illness on a person's cognitive, psychological, physiological functioning or behaviour. These impairments can be episodic or chronic. Mental health disabilities refer to the restriction, lack, or loss of ability to perform a task or activity, as a result of attitudinal, structural or system conditions which prevent persons with a mental disorder from participating fully in society. Not everyone with a mental disorder experiences impairment or a mental disability.

**Learning** disabilities are disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, processing, organization and use of verbal and non-verbal information. People with learning disabilities have average or above-average intelligence, but take in information, retain it, and express knowledge in different ways. Learning disabilities affect reading comprehension and speed; spelling; the mechanics of writing; manual dexterity; math computation; problem solving; processing speed; the ability to organize space and manage time; orientation and wayfinding.

**Other** disabilities result from conditions, accidents, illnesses, and diseases, including ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke, and joint replacement surgery.



## **General Communication Tips**

Smile, relax and treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration that you treat all citizens. Please remember to focus on the citizen's service needs, not on their disability. When speaking about disabilities, refer to the person first, using language like “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”.

### **When communicating with a citizen with a disability:**

- Ask how you can help
- Make eye contact and listen carefully
- Speak slowly and use plain language
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Avoid assumptions and interruptions
- Be patient and let the citizen set the pace
- Make sure you know how to use the assistive equipment available at your worksite

### **Sometimes, we can have trouble communicating with others, when that happens:**

- If you don't understand, politely ask again
- Ask if another communication method would be easier.
- Be creative and use common sense
- Assure the citizen that there is plenty of time and allow them to take their time

Please remember that information about disabilities is personal and private and should be treated confidentially. In most cases, you do not need to ask for proof of disability.

### **For more information:**

Contact your supervisor, review the Greater Sudbury; Greater Accessibility DVD available on the CGS Intranet site, or check out <http://www.accesson.ca/ado/english/>



## **Specific Communication Tips**

If either you or the citizen is having trouble understanding:

- Ensure you have their attention and that you are looking directly at the citizen
- Speak clearly and listen carefully
- Repeat the information. If you are not sure that you have fully understood you can politely rephrase what you have heard to ensure mutual understanding, for example, you might say “Am I correct in understanding that...”
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Be patient and give the citizen the time that they need
- Do not interrupt or finish the citizen's sentences
- Write the information down either on a piece of paper or a computer screen

### **If a citizen is having trouble seeing:**

- Identify yourself when you approach the citizen and speak to them directly
- Actively offer to make enlargement on copiers and computer screens or to e-mail the information
- Move to an area with more appropriate lighting, which may be brighter or task oriented
- If asked to guide the citizen, offer your elbow and walk slowly
- Be precise when giving directions or information. Be sure to let the citizen know when you are approaching a doorway, steps or an obstacle.

### **If a citizen is having trouble hearing:**

- Ensure that you have their attention and that you are looking directly at the citizen
- Move to a quieter area with less background noise
- Speak clearly and listen carefully
- Write the information down on a piece of paper or a computer screen

### **If a citizen is having trouble accessing a service:**

- Provide information about accessible features in the environment such as pointing out automatic doors or the location of accessible washrooms
- Remove physical obstacles and ensure wide and clear passageways by removing items such as garbage cans, which can be a tripping hazard or require navigation
- Move to a more suitable space and offer seating if appropriate



## **Print Materials**

There are some simple things that you can do to make print materials more accessible for everyone. Printed material is most readable in black and white and in a simple font like Arial or Verdana. Keep your text large, preferably between 12 & 18 pitch and make sure the design is clear and simple. In Adobe, enable the print feature so that the document can be read by screen reading software.

Many citizens with disabilities make use of specialized software on their personal computers, which assists them in reading and understanding print materials. Offering to e-mail an electronic copy of documents, forms and instructions to the citizen is a much appreciated service. Alternatively, offer to make a photocopy enlargement.

For more information about preparing print materials for use by others, please refer to the CNIB's Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines, available on the internet at: <http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/accessibilities/resources/clearprint/CNIB%20Clear%20Print%20Guide.pdf> or contact Corporate Communications and French Language Services.

## **Public Notice**

It is important to keep citizens informed about service hours, schedules, building access and any changes or disruptions to service. Please contact Corporate Communications and French Language Services about providing public notice.

## **Telephone Calls**

Speak normally, clearly and directly when on the telephone. If a citizen is using TTY or Bell Relay Service, speak normally to the citizen, not to the operator. See the front of your phone book for additional information about the Bell Relay Service and other special needs telephone services. There is a TTY phone in the lobby of Tom Davies Square.



Persons with disabilities may use support persons, personal assistive devices, or service animals when accessing municipal programs, services and facilities. It may not always be immediately obvious when a support person or service animal is in attendance.

## **Support Persons**

Support persons provide assistance and may be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. Support persons provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods or services.

Begin by speaking directly to the person seeking your services, the support person will assist as needed.

## **Personal Assistive Devices**

Personal assistive devices may be equipment or technology that supports mobility or communications. Examples of personal assistive devices can include a magnifying device used to enlarge printed materials, a hearing aid, a white cane, a scooter, wheelchair, a mobility aid or a personal oxygen tank.

Always accommodate the assistive device. Don't touch assistive devices unless you have been asked to do so, or it is an emergency. If you are asked to touch or move a personal assistive device, follow the instructions provided.

## **Service Animals**

Service animals fill a variety of roles. While guide dogs are common, other animals are also used for a variety of tasks, from picking up objects, to alerting an individual to an oncoming seizure. An animal is a service animal 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 has a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability.

Do not look at, communicate with, touch or distract service animals. Service animals are working animals, not pets, and need to pay attention at all times.





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