

A close-up photograph of a person's hand resting on the black rim of a wheelchair wheel. The person is wearing a dark blue shirt. The background is plain white.

# Accessible Customer Service

A Guide for Staff  
and Volunteers

# Did you know?

## Did you know?

1.5 million people in Ontario have a disability

## Did you know?

People with disabilities travel, shop and do business just like everyone else

## Did you know?

“Disability” may involve:

- physical impairment
- sensory impairment
- cognitive or intellectual impairment
- mental or developmental disorder
- various types of chronic diseases

## Did you know?

Excellent customer service includes treating **all** customers equitably, with respect and dignity, and with courtesy.



# Overview

The City of Cambridge is committed to providing excellent customer service to all residents and visitors, and to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

To do this, we must recognize the diverse needs of all of our residents – including the needs of people with disabilities.

In 2008, the Government of Ontario launched the Accessible Customer Service Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Its goal is to ensure that people with disabilities get the same level of customer service as everyone else.

The law requires that all public and private sector organizations in Ontario, including the City of Cambridge, identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessible customer service. It also states that all Council members, staff and volunteers, must be trained on how to provide accessible customer service.

This guide will give you tips on how best to interact with a person with a disability, so that you can provide excellent customer service to all Cambridge residents.

If you are ever unsure about what to do in a situation, or what services the City of Cambridge offers to people with disabilities, please contact Andrea Riley, Co-ordinator of Corporate Accessibility Planning and Inclusion Services  
Tel: 519.4681 x 4689 TTY: 519.623.6691  
rileya@cambridge.ca

## **When interacting with a person with a disability, remember the T.A.L.K. principle:**

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**T** = Take the time to ask “May I help you?”

**A** = Ask - don’t assume. Never assist unless asked.

**L** = Listen attentively and speak directly to the customer

**K** = Know the accommodations and special services that are available

If you notice a person is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask how you can best help. Be patient – and remember your customers are your best source of information about their needs. The solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.



## How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities

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Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them. Here are some tips:

### People who are deaf/blind

A person who is deaf/blind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deaf/blind will be accompanied by a support person who helps with communication (see page 11).

#### TIPS

- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.
- A customer who is deaf/blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or note.

### People who have hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. These are terms used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

#### TIPS

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).

## People who have physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

### TIPS

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

## People who have vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, located landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog (see page 10) or a white cane, while others may not.

### TIPS

- Don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- Ask your customer if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example, a menu or schedule of fees).
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.

## People who have learning disabilities

The term “learning disabilities” refers to a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

### TIPS

- Be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer’s disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.

## People with speech or language barriers

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices (see page 9).

### TIPS

- Don’t assume that a person with a speech limitation has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no”.
- Be patient. Don’t interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences.

## People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

### TIPS

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

## People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

### TIPS

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

## How to interact with people who use assistive devices

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An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Personal assistive devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

### TIPS

- Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.
- Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g., public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, etc.)



## How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal

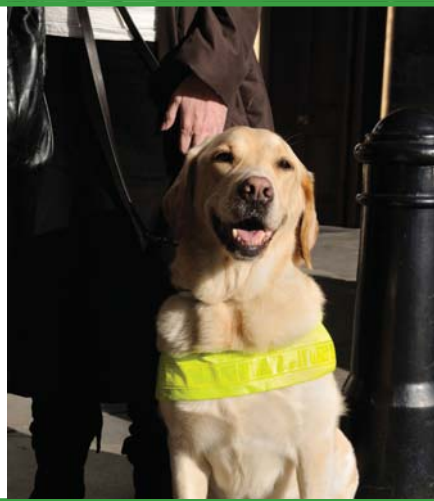
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People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the accessible customer service standard, service animals are allowed on the parts of the premises that are open to the public or to other third parties, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. You may ask a person for a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that their animal is required for reasons relating to their disability if it is not readily apparent.

### TIPS

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal.
- Avoid touching or addressing service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Avoid making assumptions about the animal.  
If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.



## How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a support person

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Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervenor. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating, to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the accessible customer service standard, a support person must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of the premises that is open to the public or to third parties.

The city will waive admission fees for support persons who accompany a person with a disability into facilities and/or programs where admissions are charged.

### TIPS

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting the goods or services, or simply ask.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.



**For more information on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, or the accessible customer service standard, visit [www.accessON.ca](http://www.accessON.ca)**

Information on pages 5 through 11, adapted and re-printed with permission from the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Town of Markham.

**[www.cambridge.ca](http://www.cambridge.ca)      519.740.4681 ext 4689**

Alternate formats available upon request.

## **POLICY**

*City of Cambridge*

### ***Accessible Customer Service Policy***

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#### ***Purpose:***

The City of Cambridge is committed to being responsive to the needs of all its residents. To do this, we must recognize the diverse needs of all of our residents and respond by striving to provide services and facilities that are accessible to all. As an employer, and a provider of services, the City of Cambridge is committed to ensuring its services are provided in an accessible manner.

The City of Cambridge will promote accessibility through the development of policies, procedures and practices and by ensuring they consider people with disabilities. To do this we must ensure the policies, procedures and practices address **integration, independence, dignity and equal opportunity**.

#### ***Principles:***

Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure the following:

- (i) That goods and services be provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- (ii) The provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities, and others, will be integrated unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporarily or permanently, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the goods and services.
- (iii) Persons with disabilities will be given an opportunity – equal to that given to others – to obtain, use and benefit from the goods and services.

#### ***Key Practices:***

Procedures and practices will strive to reflect or achieve the following:

- (i) Communication will be considered, in a manner that takes into consideration a person's disability.
- (ii) Staff will receive appropriate training.
- (iii) 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 City of Cambridge that are open to the public.
- (iv) Persons with disabilities accompanied by a support person will be permitted to be accompanied by that support person in premises open to the public.
- (v) Admission fees will be waived for a support person who accompanies a person with a disability.
- (vi) Notice will be provided when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access City of Cambridge services are temporarily disrupted.
- (vii) The City of Cambridge will establish a feedback process to allow people to provide feedback on how we are providing services to person's with disabilities. The City of Cambridge will allow persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by the City of Cambridge.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Support Persons**

Support person means, in relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

The City of Cambridge will allow people with disabilities, who require, to be accompanied by a support person in all City owned and operated public facilities. *The City of Cambridge reserves the right to request a 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 City of Cambridge will waive admission fees for support persons who accompany a person with a disability, into facilities and/or programs where admission is charged.

- (a) Member of public 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.

### **Feedback Process**

To submit a complaint:

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

- (a) The member of the public with the complaint or concern should have a discussion with the staff person at the City of Cambridge who is involved in the situation.
- (b) 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.
- (c) 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.
- (d) The complaint should be forwarded to the manager of the department, then distributed to the appropriate staff person responsible for the delivery of the service(s) in question for discussion/follow up.
- (e) The department manager will attempt to resolve the complaint in 5 business days with the assistance of the appropriate staff within the department.
- (f) The member of the public will be contacted once a resolution has been reached.

To submit a suggestion:

Should a member of the public wish to provide the City of Cambridge with a suggestion on how to improve our service:

- (a) Member of the public will inform staff member of suggestion.

- (b) Staff member will assist member of the public in filling out the suggestion form, should they require assistance.
- (c) Member of the public will be notified in a timely manner of how the City of Cambridge will proceed with their suggestion.
- (d) 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.
- e) All complaints and suggestions should be recorded on a corporate complaint form, and forwarded to the appropriate *department head*.

### **Service Disruption**

If, in order to obtain, use or benefit from a provider's goods or services, persons with disabilities usually use particular facilities or services of the provider (for example, elevators) and if there is a temporary disruption in those facilities or services in whole or in part, the City of Cambridge shall give notice of the disruption to the public.

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 (i.e. an alternative route is a sidewalk or road is under construction).

Notice will be given 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 City of Cambridge website.

If the City of Cambridge Website should expect a temporary service disruption, advance notice where possible, keeping with the conditions of section 1.23.9, shall be provided on the website.

### **Service Animals**

For the purpose of this policy, a 'service animal' is defined as either:

- (i) A "guide dog," as defined in section 1 of the *Blind Persons Rights' Act*, or
- (ii) A "service animal" for a person with a disability. 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.
  - (c) Service Animals must be;
    - In the direct care of the handler at all times
    - Handlers of the Service Animal will ensure the safety and wellbeing of other patrons and/or participants in the program/facility.
    - In the event that the presence of the service animal presents a problem for staff and/or other patrons, the handler will work with city staff to explore alternatives to accommodate the needs of all parties involved, to the greatest extent possible.

The City of Cambridge will allow the person and the animal onto all City of Cambridge owned and operated public facilities that are open to the public, and 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 provider of goods or services shall ensure that other measures are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the provider's goods or services.

### **Format of Documents**

Should the City be required to give a copy of a document to a person with a disability, the City of Cambridge 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 Corporation of the City of Cambridge should contain a note indicating, "alternate formats are available upon request" and include relevant contact information.

The City of Cambridge and the person with a disability will try to agree upon the format to be used for the document or information, subject to section 1.23.19 of this policy.

Alternate formats that should be considered by the City of Cambridge and the person with the disability will include, but are not limited to:

(i) 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 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 (e.g. Audio CD or explaining the information verbally etc.).

- (a) Employee receives request from member of the public for alternate format.
- (b) Employee fills out alternative format request form.
- (c) Forwards request onto the appropriate corporate department;
- (d) The department head of the appropriate corporate department determine feasibility;
- (e) Proceeds with alternate format request.
- (f) If not feasible; contact individual with feasible solution.

(ii) ASL Interpreter Request:

- (a) Employee receives request from public for ASL Interpreter.
- (b) Employee fills out alternative format request form.
- (c) Forwards request onto the relevant department.
- (d) The department or the City Clerk contacts Canadian Hearing Society to make request.
- (e) Once Canadian Hearing Society confirms attendance of ASL Interpreter, the department or the City Clerk contacts individual.
- (f) If ASL Interpreter is not available, individual will be contacted with an alternate solution.

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 City 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 adhere to the CNIB's Clear Print Standards.

## **Training**

The City of Cambridge 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 City, whether the person does so as an employee, volunteer, contractor or otherwise.
- (b) Every person who participates in developing the policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to members of the public or other third parties.

The training will include a review of the purposes of the Act and the requirements of this policy and instruction about the following matters:

- (a) How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disability, as outline in this policy and procedures.
- (b) 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.
- (c) 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.
- (d) What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the provider's goods or services.

The City of Cambridge 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 City of Cambridge will customize the training going forward, based on the actual experiences, usage of the persons with disability in Cambridge owned or operated facilities and legislative requirements as they come down from the province.

## **Assistive Devices**

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

Should a person with a disability be unable to access City services through the use of their own personal assistive device, the City of Cambridge 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.