

About this Pamphlet

This brochure serves as information to all employees about the provisions of the Customer Service Standard of the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (AODA). More detailed information concerning the standard will be provided through online and face-to-face sessions.

Ensuring Accessible Service Provision

The University provides educational services to students, as well as various facilities that support the needs of students, staff and faculty. The University is committed to ensuring its services and facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities, so that they have the same opportunities and benefits as others.

Ensuring accessible service provision includes communicating with persons with disabilities in a way that takes into account their abilities.

What Is a Disability?

Disabilities include past, present and perceived conditions. They range in type and severity and include physical, psychological, learning, intellectual, developmental, cognitive and medical disabilities, as well as hearing and vision loss.

Some disabilities are evident, such as a person with paraplegia who uses a wheelchair. However, the nature or degree of certain disabilities might render them non-evident to others. Chronic fatigue syndrome and learning disabilities, for example, are non-evident conditions. Other disabilities might remain hidden as a result of their episodic nature, such as epilepsy. A disability might become apparent over time through

extended interaction or it might become known only when a disability accommodation is requested. Otherwise, the disability might remain non-evident if the individual chooses not to disclose it.

Disclosing a Disability

Persons with disabilities choose whether or not to disclose a disability based on a number of factors, including the type of relationship, the context of the interaction, their perception of the inquiry (curiosity versus assistance) and their comfort level.

Students who have a disability do not necessarily request service or accommodation or identify themselves on campus as having a disability.

Persons with disabilities who disclose information about their disability are revealing information regarding their own health and body that would ordinarily be considered private between persons who do not know each other well.

How a disclosure is received can affect how a person will approach a new situation or relationship. For example, how a professor responds to a student's disclosure can determine whether the student persists and completes the program. Disclosures should always be received respectfully and sensitively.

If you are unsure of how to assist someone with a disability, ask them – they are their own expert on accommodation.

Website

The University's accessibility website is available at:

www.uoguelph.ca/accessibility.

Communications Strategy

In the coming weeks, please look for the following communications:

1. Memo to all Deans, Chairs and Directors
2. Message in pay stub
3. Information on the University website
4. Article in *At Guelph*

Reporting Service Disruptions

The AODA requires service disruptions to be posted or communicated to individuals. This includes closure of facilities (buildings, entrances, elevators, etc.) and altered schedules (change in office hours). Notification methods can include announcements, postings on websites, emails and outgoing telephone messages.

Acknowledgements

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Ensuring Accessible Service Provision: Tips

Physical Disabilities

Some people may use assistive devices, while others may have conditions such as arthritis, heart or lung conditions and may have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting for long periods.

- Ask before providing help. Persons with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things.
- If the person uses a wheelchair or scooter, sit down beside him/her to enable eye contact and reduce neck strain for longer interactions.
- Offer preferential seating.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, make sure the person is comfortable before you leave him/her.

Hearing Loss

There are different types of hearing loss. Commonly used terms are hard of hearing, deafened, deaf and Deaf. Persons who are deafened or hard of hearing may use devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants or FM systems; they may rely on lip reading. A person with little or no functional hearing may use sign language.

- Ensure you have his/her attention before speaking. Discreetly wave your hand or gently tap the shoulder if needed.
- Reduce background noise.
- Keep your face visible to enable lip reading. If the person is using an interpreter, speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.
- Speak clearly, pacing your speech and pauses normally. Don't shout or over-pronounce words.
- Offer to communicate in writing (pen and paper) as needed.

Tips, continued

Vision Loss

Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Some have limited vision, such as the loss of side, peripheral or central vision.

- Don't assume the person cannot see you.
- To get the person's attention, address him/her directly; say your name; do not touch the person.
- Ask the person in which format she/he would like to receive information.
- When providing printed information, offer to read, summarize or describe it.
- Don't be afraid to use words such as "see," "read" or "look."
- When offering to guide someone, hold out your elbow. Give clear, precise directions.

Deafblind

People who are deafblind have a combination of vision and hearing loss. Many persons who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a person who helps with communicating. Many different ways may be used to communicate, including sign language, tactile sign language, Braille, speech and lip reading.

- Ask the person what will help the two of you to communicate.
- Many people will explain what to do, perhaps giving you an assistance card or note.
- Try to communicate your presence before you get too close in order not to alarm him/her.

Speech or Language Disabilities

Some persons have problems expressing themselves or understanding written or spoken language.

- Don't assume that a person who has difficulty speaking also has an intellectual or developmental disability.

- Allow the person to complete what he/she is saying without interruptions.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no."
- If the person uses a communication board, symbols or cards, follow his/her lead.

Learning Disabilities

Examples include dyslexia (problems with reading and language-based learning), dyscalculia (problems with mathematics) and dysgraphia (problems with writing and fine motor skills.) Having a learning disability does not mean a person is incapable of learning. Rather, it means he/she learns in a different way.

- Ask the person how he/she would like to receive information. For example, if you have written material, offer to read the information aloud.
- Be willing to explain something again – it may take a little longer for the person to process the information.
- Give extra time to complete a task.

Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health disabilities can cause changes in a person's thinking, emotional state and behaviour and can disrupt the person's ability to work. These changes may also affect the way the person interacts with others. With most mental health problems, the symptoms are not static and can improve or worsen over time. These disabilities are often invisible.

- Ask the best way you can help.
- Be patient and respectful. A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty concentrating.
- If there is a concern about physical safety, call Campus Community Police at ext. 52000.
- Ensure the safety of all.

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Intellectual or developmental disabilities such as Down Syndrome can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate and live independently.

- As much as possible, treat persons with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They will appreciate respectful treatment.
- Speak slowly and use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Ask, "Do you understand this?" to check your communication.

Assistive Devices

Assistive devices help a person with a disability do everyday tasks and activities. Such devices include:

- Laptops, pocket recorders, digital audio players.
- Hearing aid, teletypewriter (TTY) for people unable to speak or hear by phone.
- Mobility devices such as scooters, walkers or crutches, magnifiers, white canes.
- Communication boards (which use symbols, words or pictures to create messages), speech-generating devices.

Personal Supports

A support person or service animal may accompany a person with a disability in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs.

- Welcome the support person, but focus service and communication on the individual.
- Service animals are welcomed at the University.
- Do not distract the service animals – this includes talking, petting and feeding.

Accessible Service Provision

Meeting the *Needs* of the Community