



Accessible Customer Service at Halton Region



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Approximately 28% of Ontarians have a disability. The number of people with disabilities will increase as Ontario's population ages. The word **disability** covers a broad range and degree of permanent and temporary conditions, some visible and some not. A disability can be present from birth, caused by an accident or develop over time and can include a physical, sensory, intellectual, learning or mental health condition.

In Ontario, there are laws that protect people with disabilities from discrimination and require service providers to take actions to ensure access to their goods, services and facilities. The information in this booklet outlines how Halton Region assists people with disabilities in accessing Halton Region's goods, services or facilities.

Halton Region is committed to providing customer service to people with disabilities in a manner that:

- Respects their dignity and independence and is sensitive to individual needs;
- Ensures reasonable efforts are made to provide an opportunity equal to that offered to other customers to obtain goods or services;
- Allows people with disabilities to benefit from the same services in a similar way as other customers; and,
- Is timely, considering the nature of the service and accommodation required.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 – Customer Service Standards

The goal of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) is to make Ontario accessible to people with disabilities. Through the AODA, the Government of Ontario has developed standards that organizations must meet to remove and prevent barriers. Standards have been created in these areas: information and communication; transportation; employment, the design of public spaces and customer service.

Customer service standards are about:

- Ensuring that people with disabilities are able to access goods, services and facilities;
- Accommodating people that need a service animal, a support person, or an assistive device;
- Ensuring people with disabilities are able to provide information or feedback in a manner that works for them; and,
- Knowing what to do if a person with a disability cannot access a service or facility.

Delivering customer service to a person with a disability can mean many things including understanding that individuals may need different types of accommodation.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

People with disabilities are people first – individuals who happen to have a disability. It is important to use “person-first” language such as **“a person with a disability”** rather than **“a disabled person.”**

Make no assumptions about the type of disability a person may have. If you are not sure of how to assist a person, start by asking **“How can I help you?”**

Physical Disabilities

A physical disability may restrict a person's control, speed of movement, coordination, balance, ability to walk long distances or grasp objects, sit or stand for long periods of time.

- Ask before you try to help.
- Respect personal space.
- If you are having a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you are at eye level.
- If you know someone with a physical disability is coming to your venue, remove items that may cause a barrier.

Deafness or Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can range from mild to profound. People who have hearing loss may use hearing aids or other assistive listening and communication devices. A person who is deaf may use an American Sign Language interpreter.

- Before you speak, attract the person's attention. Use eye contact or a wave to connect.
- Speak directly to the person who is deaf and not the interpreter.
- Reduce background noise or move to a quieter location.
- If writing back and forth, keep sentences short.

Blindness and Vision Loss

There are varying degrees of vision loss. Many people who live with vision loss have some vision. Vision loss can reduce a person's ability to read text or signs, locate landmarks, recognize faces or see hazards.

- Some people with vision loss may use a guide dog or a white cane.
- Do not assume the person cannot see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach the person.
- Offer your elbow to guide. If accepted, walk slowly and identify obstacles before you come to them.
- Do not leave the person without advising that you are leaving them.
- Be precise and descriptive with information like "behind you on your left" or "the cup is by your right hand". Avoid phrases like "over here".

Deaf-Blindness

A person who is deaf-blind has some degree of vision and hearing loss. Many people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communication.

- Do not assume what the person can or cannot do. People who are deaf-blind have varying degrees of both hearing and vision loss.

- Speak directly to the person.
- Ask the person how best to communicate.
- Do not leave the person without advising that you are leaving them.

Speech or Language Disabilities

People with speech disabilities may have challenges with verbal communication. Stroke, hearing loss or cerebral palsy may result in difficulties with speech.

- Do not speak for the individual or complete their sentences.
- Do not assume that a person who has difficulty speaking does not understand you.
- Try to ask questions that need only short answers or a nod.
- Be prepared to repeat or re-phrase your sentences.
- Give the person the time they need to get their points across.

Developmental Disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities can mildly or more profoundly limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities or live independently.

- Do not make assumptions about what the person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language, keep sentences short.
- Be prepared to repeat or re-phrase your sentences. Give one piece of information at a time.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can range from mild to severe and can affect how a person receives, expresses or processes information.

- Ask the person how best to accommodate their needs. Provide information in a way that works for them.
- Minimize distractions so that full attention is on communication.

- Avoid complex words or jargon.
- Keep sentences short and clear.

Mental Health Disabilities

There are many types of mental health illnesses including depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disease, anxiety and eating disorders. A person with a mental health disability may experience acute mood swings, hallucinations or panic episodes.

- Do not make assumptions about a person's abilities. Ask how you can help.
- Be patient and reassuring. Speak in a calm manner and present one thought at a time.
- Respect the person's personal space.
- Use plain, clear language.

Helping people who require an assistive device, service animal or support person

Assistive Devices

An assistive device helps a person with daily living activities. It can be a piece of equipment, a tool or technology such as a wheelchair, walker, scooter, cane, hearing aid or assistive listening device.

- People with disabilities are permitted to use their assistive devices in order to access Halton's programs, services or facilities, unless otherwise prohibited by law.
- Do not touch the assistive device without the user's permission.
- Keep the assistive device within the reach of the person.
- Let the person know of the accessible features available on the premises that would be appropriate to their needs.

A number of assistive devices are available at Halton Regional Centre. Please see Appendix 1 for information on how to access them.

Service Animals

People who are blind or have vision loss may use a guide dog but there are also other types of service animals. Service animals assist people with various disabilities and can be trained to open doors, pick up items, predict seizures or alert someone to sounds such as doorbells or telephone rings.

- People with disabilities are permitted to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal and keep it with them in areas that are open to the public.
- Guide dogs or service animals must be supervised by their owners and kept in control when at Halton Region premises.
- In most cases, it is readily apparent that an animal is a service animal. There may be a visual indicator such as a vest or harness worn by the animal. Or, the animal may be doing things to assist a person with a disability.
- If you cannot easily determine that the animal is a service animal, you may ask for documentation to verify that the animal is required for reasons associated with the person's disability.
- Do not touch, talk to or make eye contact with the service animal.
- In cases where the guide dog or service animal is excluded by law, steps must be taken to provide the person with the disability the opportunity to access Halton's goods, services or facilities.

Support Persons

A person with a disability might have a support person accompany them to help with communication, mobility, personal care or to access services. A support person could be a family member, friend, volunteer or a paid worker.

- Allow people to be accompanied by their support person in areas open to the public when accessing Halton Region's programs, services or facilities.
- Speak directly to the person with the disability, not the support person.
- Do not discuss confidential matters in the presence of the support person without first getting consent from the customer.
- Do not charge support persons an admission fee to an event when a fee has already been paid by the attendee.
- In certain situations, Halton Region may deem it necessary to require a support person for a person with a disability in order to protect the health and safety of that person or others. Before making this decision, there must be a discussion with the person with the disability to determine if there is any other reasonable way to protect their and other persons' health and safety.

What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the provider's goods, services or facilities

If you are having trouble assisting a person with a disability or are unsure of what to do, please contact Access Halton by dialing "0" from a Halton Regional landline or "311" from any other phone in the region or contact gabrielle.baldazzi@halton.ca

For more information on accessibility at Halton Region, visit [halton.ca/accessibility](https://www.halton.ca/accessibility)

Feedback

Receiving feedback on the accessibility of Halton's programs, services or facilities is an effective way to help ensure the needs of people with disabilities are being met.

- Allow people with disabilities to provide their feedback in whatever way works for them — in person, by phone or email.

For more information, contact:

Gabrielle Baldazzi
Policy Advisor
Corporate Policy, Department
Administration & Heritage Services
Corporate Services Department
gabrielle.baldazzi@halton.ca
905 825-6000, ext. 7485

Appendix 1 – Assistive Devices Available at Halton Regional Centre

There are a number of assistive devices available at the Halton Regional Centre. There may be occasions when a member of the public who is visiting may need to access or use them. Let the person know of the accessible features available on the premises that would be appropriate to their needs. The following table sets out the items available at Halton Regional Centre and how to access them.

Halton Regional Centre – 1151 Bronte Road, Oakville

Device	How to access or use the device
Accessible lift <ul style="list-style-type: none">Located in West Block near the large collaboration lounge on Level 2 (MacCaskill Lounge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is controlled access to the accessible lift. For assistance in accessing the lift, contact Security at 289 795 4989.
Accessible lift in Council Chambers <ul style="list-style-type: none">Located inside Council Chambers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is controlled access to the accessible lift. For assistance in accessing the lift, contact Security at 289 795 4989.
Adjustable Workstations & Zoom Text Magnifier located in the Employment Resource Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff of the Employment Resource Centre to provide support to clients wishing to use the devices.
Assistive Listening Device for use in Council Chambers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">To access the assistive listening device, contact the Regional Clerk's Office at 905 825-6000, ext. 7110 or clerks@halton.ca
Wheelchairs <ul style="list-style-type: none">Wheelchairs are available at the Main, East and West Block counters and in the First Aid Room located in West Block	<ul style="list-style-type: none">To access a wheelchair, contact Security at 289 795 4989.

