

Accessibility Standard for Customer Service:

Employers' Handbook

Manitoba's new accessibility standard under *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* means great customer service for everybody.

Accessible customer service is not necessarily about ramps or automatic door openers.

It's about understanding that your customers and clients have a variety of needs. The following topics in this handbook will assist you in developing policies and practices that will help you welcome and better serve everybody.

1. Understand what barriers prevent accessible customer service.
2. Recognize how to provide accessible customer service.
3. Identify the areas that require accessibility policies and practices.
4. Train your staff.
5. Learn about *The Human Rights Code*.

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service applies to all people or organizations in Manitoba that:

- provide goods or services
- have one or more employees

It affects these sectors:

- Manitoba government
- public sector organizations
- private and non-profit organizations and businesses

1. Understand what barriers prevent accessible customer service

What are accessibility barriers?

Many people think disabilities are the barriers, but that is not the case.

Barriers prevent people with disabilities from participating in everyday life. Once you understand what accessibility barriers are, it is easier to identify them. There are many types of barriers, both visible and invisible.

Accessibility barriers limit or prevent a person from being able to get information, service and goods or to enter a space or be part of an activity.

- Attitude, including stereotypes and assumptions, can be the biggest barrier. An example is thinking people who cannot communicate verbally have nothing to say.
- Physical barriers prevent people from accessing your service. Examples include store aisles too narrow for a person with a walker or wheelchair, or parking lots without spaces designated for people with disabilities.
- Communication barriers prevent people from understanding information. An example is a sign that is too small or confusing.
- Technology barriers often relate to information and communication. An example is a website that cannot be used by people who are blind and use a screen reader.
- Systemic barriers are those practices or policies that prevent many customers from accessing your service.

2. Recognize how to provide accessible customer service

Preparing for Accessible Customer Service

Put the customer first and let the principles of independence, dignity, access and equality of opportunity guide you.

Obligations

- identify barriers to accessible customer service
- remove barriers to accessible customer service
- prevent the creation of barriers to accessible customer service
- provide equivalent customer service

To provide accessible customer service, organizations need to:

- review physical barriers that prevent customers receiving service
- consider the communication needs of clients
- allow service animals
- allow assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers and oxygen tanks
- let customers know your accessibility policies and procedures
- let customers know when accessible services aren't available
- Invite customers to provide feedback.
- Understand *The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)* and provide reasonable accommodations.
- train staff on accessible customer service

General tips on providing accessible service

If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "How can I help?" Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.

Avoid stereotypes and make no assumptions about what type of disability the person has. Many disabilities are not visible, and asking personal questions is not appropriate.

Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs.

An active offer is a proactive way to ensure that your information and services are available and accessible to everyone.

For example, include on documents: "Alternative formats available on request." If required, the customer may request larger print, an electronic version, or having the document read out loud. Braille is another less likely request.

Another place to include the active offer is on event posters and meeting notices: "Disability accommodations available by advance request." If required, the participant may request front row seating, a print copy of the presentation or another means of engaging in your events and services. Captioning and ASL are other potential requests.

Review your physical space

Customers with disabilities need easy access to your premises. Sometimes this requires long term planning, but there are many simple and inexpensive ways to make your organization more accessible.

TIPS:

- Organize the space so there is room for wheelchairs, scooters and walkers.
- If clients must wait to be served, consider seating options.

- Use removable or permanent ramps in place of steps.
- In waiting rooms, use public address system and visual boards to call names or numbers.
- Provide accessible parking and sloped curbs near doors.
- Replace door knobs with door levers.
- Keep signage simple with large lettering.
- Keep pathways clear of snow and ice.
- Are there any dangers on your premises and how can you address them? (For example, is there a stand-alone display that may be knocked over?)

Consider a person's disability when communicating with them

There are many different types of disabilities; some visible, others invisible. Disabilities include mobility, dexterity, vision, hearing, speech or language, mental health and intellectual, developmental and learning.

TIPS:

- Consider how people with various disabilities communicate.
- Ask your customers how you can best communicate with them.
- Ask yourself: how can I make communication accessible? Every situation is different and depends on an individual's needs.
- Offer documents in accessible formats, if requested. You can work with your customer to find the right format. For example, you may direct them to your accessible website or read something aloud.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. A good start is to listen carefully.

3. Identify the areas that require accessibility policies and practices

Develop and put in place measures, policies and practices that will help ensure barrier-free customer service, for people with disabilities, seniors, and others

with challenges to mobility, communication, understanding and health concerns.

Allow assistive devices

An assistive device is any piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help them with daily living. Some examples include: a wheelchair, screen reader, listening device, magnifying glass or cane.

TIPS:

- Consider how you will address the use of a customers' assistive device.
- Will you offer helpful measures, such as carry-out service or delivery?

Allow service animals

Service animals assist people with disabilities. The disability may be visible (blind) or invisible (PTSD). Welcome service animals into public areas of your workplace or business.

TIPS:

- A person with a service animal has the right to enter any place where the public is allowed.
- Do you need to do anything different to serve people with service animals?
- Do not apply standard pet policies to service animals.

Welcome support persons

A support person does not have to be a paid support worker. He or she can be a family member or a friend.

Support persons help someone with a disability perform daily tasks. Often people who have a support person are not able to do things by themselves, such as eat

meals, use the washroom or change their clothes. Without support, that person may be unable to access your organization.

TIPS:

- Think about how your services are used by people with a support person.
- Try avoiding fees related to a support person.
- If you charge admission, clearly state the admission fee, if any, for support persons.

Accessible services temporarily not available

Sometimes accessibility features or services require repair or are just temporarily out of service (example: an elevator or accessible washroom). When this happens, let your customers know by posting a notice explaining that there is a temporary disruption of services used by people with disabilities. This should be done whether the disruption is planned or unexpected. Notification on websites is also recommended.

TIPS:

- Make a list of the facilities and services people with disabilities rely on.
- Prepare a template notice in advance. Include: the reason for the disruption, how long the service will be unavailable and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.
- Post the notice in a place where people are most likely to find it (example the entrance door to your business, on your website, another high-traffic area).

**Sorry for the
inconvenience
Elevator is
temporarily
out of order
Please visit our
reception desk
for more
information**

Invite customers to provide feedback

To learn about barriers that exist in your workplace, collect comments from your customers with disabilities. Invite customers to give feedback on how you provide accessible customer service.

TIPS:

- Determine how you want to receive feedback (example in person, by telephone, in writing or by email).
- How will you respond to feedback, including complaints?
- How will you let customers know about the process?

4. Train your staff

Accessible customer service

All staff should be trained in accessible customer service, from senior management to front line staff. See also Training Tips for Employees to get you started.

Who you need to train

You must provide training to:

- all employees and volunteers (paid and unpaid, full-time and part-time positions)
- anyone involved in developing any policies for your organization (including managers, senior leaders, directors, and owners)
- anyone who provides goods, services or facilities on your behalf (such as external contactor or facilities management companies)

The most effective training will be customized to the needs of your organization and must include:

- an overview of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, 2013* and the requirements of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

- Manitoba’s human rights legislation (*The Human Rights Code*)
- reasonable accommodation as set out by *The Human Rights Code*
- your organization’s measures, policies and practices to provide accessible customer service

TIPS:

- Remember to train new staff soon after they are hired, offer and keep track of those trained, and provide on-going training, including as new accessibility standards are introduced.
- Ensure all staff has a copy of, or access to, Tips for Employees.
- For more information and tools, visit www.accessibility.mb.ca

5. Learn about *The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)*

The importance of human rights legislation in Manitoba

***The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)*:** Manitoba’s Human Rights Code prohibits unreasonable discrimination on specific grounds, including physical and mental disabilities. Manitobans are encouraged to take steps to make “reasonable accommodations.” Reasonable accommodation means adjusting a rule, a policy or even a physical space to allow for changes to the way things are usually done.

Service providers should respond to an accommodation request by communicating with the person or group. Ask what the need is and how it can be best met. Good communication, flexibility and co-operation are very important. The facts of each situation and the specific needs of the individual or group must be considered.

In most cases, accommodation is simple and affordable. With flexibility and good communication, accommodation solutions are usually possible.

The duty to reasonably accommodate is often described in human rights law as “accommodation short of undue hardship.” Inconvenience or some financial cost does not usually qualify as undue hardship. However, if accommodation does result in undue hardship, other alternatives still must be explored.

Organizations/businesses should develop a reasonable accommodation request process.

The rights and responsibilities covered by *The Human Rights Code* overrides any other law, unless that law specifically says otherwise.

Make sure you and your staff are familiar with *The Human Rights Code* and the meaning and practice of reasonable accommodation.

www.manitobahumanrights.ca

Sample policies

The following are a few examples of policies that relate to the customer service standard

- **Reasonable Accommodation**
Reasonable Accommodation will be actively offered to ensure accessible customer service is available to everyone. Reasonable accommodation will take place to the point of undue hardship.
- **Service Animals**
Service animals, especially dogs, are increasingly being relied upon to meet the specialized needs of individuals with disabilities including customers with physical, mental and/or sensory disabilities. Persons who are accompanied by a service animal have the same access to all areas where the public is allowed.
- **Accessible Customer Service Training**
All current and new employees receive orientation and ongoing training on accessible customer service.
- **Notice of temporary service disruption**
In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption services, the public will be notified about the disruption, the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

All policies should be accompanied by details of actions or implementations.

Resources

Available in alternate formats upon request

Visit www.AccessibilityMB.ca to learn more.

For more information contact:

Disabilities Issues Office (DIO)

630-240 Graham Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 0J7

Phone: 204-945-7613

Fax: 204-948-2896

dio@gov.mb.ca

Join the #AccessibleMB conversation on Twitter and Facebook

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