

Kelly Lush

From: Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility <AODAoutreach@ontario.ca>
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AODA Toolbox



What you need to know about Ontario's accessibility laws

The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#) (AODA) is intended to reduce and remove barriers for people with disabilities so that Ontario can become more accessible and inclusive for everyone. Collaboration among businesses, organizations, communities and all levels of government is key to reaching this goal.

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Preparing your **2023** accessibility report



It's an accessibility compliance reporting year

This year, all [public sector organizations](#) and [businesses and non-profits](#) with 20 or more employees are legally required to report on their compliance with the [AODA](#).

Learn about accessibility reporting and get a head start by visiting ontario.ca/accessibilityreport. [Contact us](#) if you need help.

Introducing Assistant Deputy Minister Meenu Sikand

In October 2022, Meenu Sikand joined the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility as Assistant Deputy Minister of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Division. This division oversees the development, implementation, and enforcement of the AODA and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR).

Meenu has experience in government, healthcare, corporate and non-profit sectors. She has led large organizations to dismantle ableism and racism by applying the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) lens.

Meenu is the founder and CEO of Accessibility for All, where she supports and amplifies the voices of people with disabilities and BIPOC populations through an

intersectionality and inclusion lens. She has significant experience in engaging with community stakeholders.

Previously, Meenu led roles at Holland Bloorview Kids, as the Inaugural Executive Lead of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI); Inaugural Co-Chair for the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA) Taskforce on Anti-Racism; EDI Lead for Bloorview Research Institute; and Accessibility Lead.

Also, as the previous Accessibility Specialist at the Region of Peel, Meenu provided accessibility advice to several departments, the Executive Leadership Team, and Regional Council.

Meenu has received many accolades, including the 2020 Senior Executive of the Year award from the Canadian Center for Diversity & Inclusion and the Accessibility Champion Award for the Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee in 2017, and 2020 she was selected to be inducted into the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame.

The customer service standard in the spotlight

The [customer service standard](#) is one of five standards within the [AODA's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation \(IASR\)](#). The standards help identify and remove barriers for people with disabilities so they can access goods, services and facilities.

The requirements under this standard apply to organizations with one or more employees in Ontario and outline the policies that must be in place. This includes the use of service animals and support persons, providing alternate communications methods and staff training.

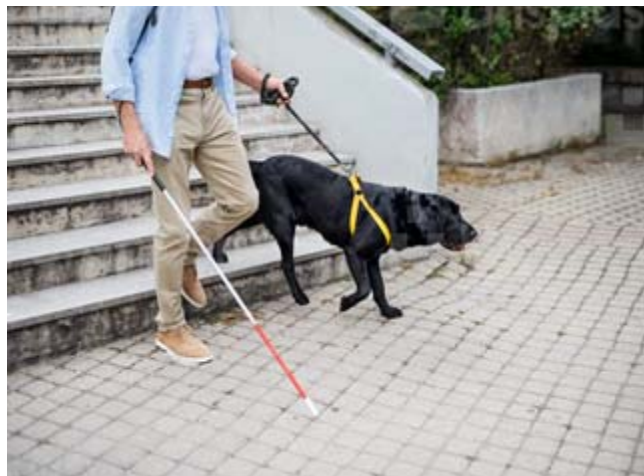
Accessible customer service isn't just the right thing to do but also makes great business sense. Barriers to accessibility are obstacles that make it difficult or even

impossible for people with disabilities to do the things most of us take for granted - like shopping, working or going to a restaurant. People with disabilities will choose a business where they feel welcomed and can easily get the products and services they want.

By following the standards, businesses can attract more customers, remove barriers and make Ontario open for everyone.

For more information visit: [How to make customer service accessible](#).

FAQ: What is a service animal?



Under the [customer service standard](#), an animal is considered a service animal if:

- you can readily identify it through visual indicators, such as a harness or a vest, or
- the person provides documentation (such as a letter or form) from a [regulated health professional](#) that confirms they need the service animal for reasons relating to their disability.

There are many types of service animals besides guide dogs that support people with various types of disabilities, such as: vision loss, hearing loss, epilepsy, autism, physical disabilities, and mental health disabilities.

A person with a disability must be allowed to bring their service animal with them into areas open to the public, such as:

- restaurants
- grocery stores
- taxis

Find more information on [service animals and acceptable documentation](#).

Website accessibility tips



The internet is an essential part of everyday life.

Having an accessible website means that everyone can use your site and get the information, products and services they need. By committing your organization to accessibility, you send a strong positive message that you are open for all and are taking everyone's needs into consideration. Also, website accessibility is good for business.

Catching common web accessibility issues

Review your site on a regular basis to identify and correct issues. For example, test these common features often to make sure they can be accessed by all your clients and customers:

- **Navigation features:** Include menus, and proper heading structures that help visitors find content and know where they are
- **Website content:** Is your information in plain language and is the text easy to read (is it large enough and does it stand out sharply from the background)?
- Do the images have alternative text (ALT) descriptions for people using screen readers?
- Have you included closed captioning, transcripts or audio descriptions for multimedia content?
- **Contact information:** Do people have different options to contact you or provide feedback (for example, by phone, teletypewriter (TTY) or email)?

Find more information on [how to make your website accessible](#).

Law firm creates inclusive opportunities for youth



Through the Ready to Work program and Torys LLP, Andrew got the work experience and leadership skills he needed to enter the workforce.

Torys LLP has implemented initiatives over the years that promote a culture of belonging throughout the firm – from recruitment and talent development to networking and mentoring opportunities.

The law firm offers summer employment opportunities to students to gain work experience, develop leadership skills and network with administrative and legal professionals.

One of Torys' partnerships is with Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital's [Ready to Work program](#). Its goal is to advance inclusion of high school and undergraduate students with disabilities. The Ready to Work program uses an evidence-based supported employment model as well as job coaching to facilitate student success.

This is how the program worked:

Torys reviewed available summer opportunities and candidate profiles with the Holland Bloorview job coach. This adapted selection process removes barriers that candidates may face in interviews.

A job coach provided daily support to both the students and the firm at the start of the employment relationship. New ways of working were introduced. Job tasks were broken down into concise steps to help the students understand more easily. Sometimes colleagues demonstrated how to perform the task so that the students could learn by observing.

Looking back on the experience, Rhoda Seto, Director, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Torys LLP said, "It is critical to our success that we foster an environment where our diverse workforce can thrive as their authentic selves every day. We are incredibly proud of the partnership with Holland Bloorview's Ready to Work program."

Partnerships and resources help employers advance disability and inclusive employment. Learn more about [programs and resources available to help you find and keep skilled talent](#).

Announcements

- Read [Minister Raymond Cho's statement on International Day for Persons with Disabilities](#).
- Read [Premier Doug Ford Statement on the Passing of The Honourable David C. Onley, Former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario](#).
- Learn about the [David C. Onley Award for Leadership in Accessibility recipients](#).
- Find out about the [Memoranda of Understanding signed by Accessibility Standards Canada and the Government of Ontario](#).
- Learn about the award-winning artificial intelligence technology behind [ODEN's Jobs Ability hiring platform](#).
- Provide your feedback to the fourth legislative review of the AODA.
 - Under the AODA, there must be regular independent review of the legislation and its regulation. Rich Donovan, a global expert in accessibility and economic value in the disability market, is currently conducting the fourth legislative review of the AODA and its regulation to gather feedback and determine where improvements can be made. His review must be completed by June 30th, 2023.
 - Have your say by providing written feedback via the [Reviewer's website](#) and check back for further public consultation opportunities, including surveys and virtual town halls.
- Learn about the [Government of Ontario's Design of Public Spaces \(DOPS\) Standard Development Committee \(SDC\)](#).
 - In December 2021, [Minister Raymond Cho](#) established the DOPS SDC. The committee will conduct a review of Ontario's accessible built environment standard under the AODA and the Ontario Building

Code. As part of their work, they will leverage feedback and research on challenges and gaps in the province's accessibility regulations -- including user experiences and implementation issues for obligated sectors, such as municipalities.

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For more accessibility information and resources you can visit ontario.ca/accessibility.


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Ontario 

777 Bay St., Suite 601A
Toronto ON M7A 2J4
1-866-515-2025

ontario.ca/accessibility
AODAoutreach@ontario.ca

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