

# SLMHC Accessibility Training

- Defining "Disability"
- The Ontario Disabilities Act (ODA) and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and their purpose
- Interacting with people of differing ability levels
- Accessibility Standards Development:
  - 5 common standards, with a focus on Customer Service
- What does Accessible Customer Service look like at SLMHC?

## Course Overview

### Who is a person with a disability?

The definition of **Disability** is:

"Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, including diabetes, epilepsy, brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device; a condition of mental impairment or developmental disability; a learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language or; a mental disorder or; an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan

established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997."

Note that this definition includes: disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities, and disabilities of which the effects may come and go.

## **Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)**

Under the Human Rights Code there is a duty to accommodate everyone, including people with disabilities.

**ODA** was passed in 2001 to improve opportunities for people with disabilities by identifying and removing barriers to full participation in everyday life.

Click here to view [ODA](#)

Under the ODA, each organization must:

- Develop annual accessibility plans
- Consult with people with disabilities to develop plans
- Make plans available to the public
- Have an Accessibility Advisory Committee

## **Disabilities and Accessibility: How They Tie Together**

According to Statistics Canada, approximately 14 percent (1.85 million) Ontarians have a disability. This number is predicted to grow to approximately 20 percent within 20 years. All of us may experience some form of disability throughout our lives.

Ontarians with disabilities have untapped potential to contribute to labour market. The unemployment rate of Ontarians with disabilities

is 5 times higher (26%) than unemployment rate of Ontarians without a disability (5%).

With the growing rate of disability, the issue of accessibility, (how people with disabilities access everyday services), is an issue of growing importance.

## **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities ACT (AODA)**

**AODA** was passed in 2005 to ensure a more accessible Ontario for people with disabilities by 2025.

AODA requires all service providers, including health care institutions, to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities within their organization.

Often it is barriers, not disabilities, that prevent people with disabilities from participating in everyday life.\*

Click here to view [AODA](#)

The **AODA Vision** is to:

- Inform the population and cause a change in attitudes, values and behaviour towards accessibility.
- Meet the increased demands of the aging population.
- Develop standards in order to provide accessible services to everyone.

## **Disabilities**

The following sections contain tips on how to better serve people with the following disabilities:

- Speech Impairments

- Mental health disabilities
- Intellectual or developmental disabilities
- Deafness/hearing loss
- Blindness/vision loss

## General Guidelines

- Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient.
- Speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer, do not speak to their support person.
- Ask before you help.
- Don't touch any assistive devices without permission.
- Don't assume anything about what a person with a disability can and cannot do.
- If you don't understand, don't guess, ask them to repeat the information.
- Just because a person has one disability, doesn't mean that they have another.
- Don't assume a person with a disability requires assistance or extra attention for every visit.

## Speech Impairments

- If you don't understand, don't assume. Ask the customer to repeat the information.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, a pen and paper.
- It may take the customer longer to communicate what they need, be patient and understanding.

## Mental Health Disabilities

- Be confident and reassuring and listen to your customer.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- It may take the customer longer to communicate what they need, be patient and understanding.

## Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand, don't pretend, just ask again.

## Deafness or Hearing Loss

- Always ask in a normal voice how you can help, don't shout.
- Reduce background noises (such as a radio or ringing phone) as

this will be picked up by a hearing device and can cause confusion.

- Look at and speak directly to your customer.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, a pen and paper.
- Don't put your hands in front of you mouth when speaking.
- It may take the customer longer to communicate exactly what they need, be patient and understanding.

## Visual Impairments

- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Don't touch any service animals – they are working.
- Don't walk away without saying goodbye.

## Service Standard Development

AODA requires that service providers establish standards development committees to address barriers to accessibility that have a major impact on daily living for people with disabilities.

The approach:

- Common standards may apply broadly to all persons and organizations in Ontario and may address barriers common to all sectors.
- There are **5 service standards**, each of which will be described below.

## Five Service Standards

**1. Customer Service** – Service delivery to the public. Could include business practices and employee training.

**2. Built Environment** – Access to, from and within buildings and outdoor spaces. Could include counter heights, aisle/door widths, parking and signs, as well as pedestrian access routes and signal systems.

**3. Employment** – Hiring and retaining employees. Could include employment practices, policies and processes such as job advertisements and interviewing.

**4. Information & Communications** – Information processing and communication. Could include publications, software applications and web sites.

**5. Transportation** – An accessible transportation standard is being developed that is unique to this sector.

## Our Customer Service Standard

- Accessible customer service policy, procedures and practices
- Staff training
- A feedback method

- Alternate communication methods
- Notices of service disruption

Everyone in the organization that provides services for our customers must understand their role and responsibility in providing excellent and accessible customer service.

## **Customer Service Best Practices**

Offer excellent, accessible customer service to every person; treat them as you would like to be treated. Make customers feel comfortable, valued, respected, appreciated and maintain their sense of dignity.

Every customer is an individual, and service must be tailored to meet their specific needs (within reasonable guidelines). Use effective communication, courtesy and teamwork to address customer needs and concerns. Take ownership of the service you provide.

## **Customer Service Follow-up:**

- Listen to the customer and respond promptly
- Do what you say you are going to do
- Communicate effectively
- Make the customer's experience positive and memorable
- Follow up internally and externally to resolve issues
- If clients have a complaint or compliment, be sure to follow the SLMHC Complaint Process



## **References and Resources:**

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

<http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/accessibility/customerService/trainingResourcesAODA/unit1.aspx>

Government of Ontario. Ministry of Community and Social Services (2006)

<http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/>