

The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the
**Accessibility for Ontarians
with Disabilities Act**

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The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to providing a safe and inviting place for our employees and for those that attend worship and use our facilities. This is evident in our *Leading with Care Policy*. To continue that commitment, we are providing guidelines for accessibility in our buildings.

Included at the end of this document is a template that you can use to develop and implement an accessibility policy within your congregation. The template can also be downloaded from the website at presbyterian.ca/aodatemplate. It will cover all aspects of 'customer service', which is the first step in implementation under the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)**, which has now come into effect.

For churches of less than 20 employees, the goal is to suggest ways that you will interact with people with disabilities. Suggestions are contained in the pages that follow. If there are more than 20 employees, there must be a formal training session for employees and a submission to the government. The number of employees does not include volunteers.

The first step is "customer service" but if you can do more to help those with disabilities, please do so.

There is more information available on government websites as outlined at the end of the document.

Thank you for participating in a program to make your church a more accessible place.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

2012

COMPONENTS of the ACCESSIBILITY for ONTARIANS with DISABILITIES ACT 2005: (AODA)

Customer service (January 1, 2012), Built Environment (No date set:Nds), Employment (phase in by 2017), Information and Communications (Customer Service 2012; Other areas will be phased in by 2025),Transportation (Not applicable directly to churches),

BUILT ENVIRONMENT:

The Accessibility Standard for the Built Environment will remove barriers in buildings and outdoor spaces for people with disabilities. The Minister made a public statement that existing buildings will not be required (at this time) to be retrofitted to meet accessibility requirements. The standard will only apply to new construction and extensive renovation (Ministry of Community and Social Services). Work is continuing on this standard but it does not have an effect on churches at the present time. However, the effect on new buildings and any extensive renovation could be in the act when it is passed.

CUSTOMER SERVICE:

NOTE: At the present time, the only compliance for churches is customer service. The "customer service" component is effective for churches on January 1, 2012.

Customer Service refers to those that we interact with in our buildings in various ways (parishioners, community, children, seniors etc.) as well as those that engage us in religious service (weddings, funerals, baptisms).

There are several points listed below that should be considered:

- Environment includes physical space as well as people delivering services (ministers, leaders, church staff etc.).
- A safe environment includes: 1. identifying risks; 2. determining if we can eliminate or minimize risk and then 3. action to address the risk. (personal comment: Leading with Care page 21).
- Establish policies, practices and procedures.
- Use of the four core principles: Independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.
- ALLOWANCES: use of personal assistive devices; use of guide dogs or other service animals; use of support persons.
- Staff training is a **necessity** to implement the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing programs, goods and services to participants with disabilities.
- Use reasonable efforts to ensure that your policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the core principles of dignity, independence, integration and equality of opportunity.
- Set a policy on allowing participants to use their assistive devices to access your programs, goods and services and about any other measures you offer to enable them to access your programs, goods and services.

COMMUNICATION:

- Communicate with a participant with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
- Offer a variety of methods of communication.

SERVICE ANIMALS:

- Let participants with disabilities bring their service animal onto any part of your premises open to the public or third parties, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law.

SUPPORT PERSONS:

- Let participants with disabilities bring their support person with them when accessing programs, goods or services on your premises.
- Where admission fees are charged, provide notice ahead of time on what admission, if any, would be charged for a support person or participant.

TEMPORARY DISRUPTION OF SERVICE:

- Provide notice when facilities or services that participants with disabilities usually use to access your programs, goods or services are temporarily unavailable.

TRAINING:

- Provide training on how to serve participants with disabilities for: staff, volunteers, contractors, those involved in developing your policies, practices and procedures, and anyone else who interacts with participants on your behalf.
- Establish a process for receiving feedback on how you provide service to participants with disabilities and how you respond to feedback and take action on any complaints. Make information about your feedback process readily available to your congregation and the public.

TYPES OF DISABILITIES:

For each of the nine disabilities listed below, there are a few tips for welcoming people.

For each of these disabilities, there is more information on the Ministry of Community and Social Services web site.

Vision:

- Verbally identify yourself and be sure to say good bye when finished the conversation.
- Do not touch or approach the service animal.
- Never touch the person without permission unless it is an emergency.
- Speak normally and clearly.

Hearing:

- Attract the person's attention before speaking.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking.
- Always ask how you can help. Do not shout.
- If possible, be in an area that has few or no competing sounds.
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information.

Physical:

- Speak normally and directly to the individual.
- People with physical disabilities have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Remove obstacles and rearrange furniture to give them clear passage.
- Do not touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, unnecessarily unless it is an emergency.

Intellectual or Developmental:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in sentences.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Use examples in your communication.
- Be supportive and patient.

Learning:

- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person.
- Take some time-people with some kinds of learning disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Allow extra time for task completion where necessary.

Mental Health:

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with the person to meet their needs.
- If someone appears to be in crisis, ask them the best way to help.
- Try to reduce stress and anxiety.

Speech or Language:

- If you do not understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Do not interrupt or finish the person's sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Try to be in a quiet environment.
- Be patient, respectful and willing to find the best way to communicate.

Deaf-blind:

- Some people who are deaf – blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Make sure you identify yourself to the intervener.
- Speak directly to the person as you normally would, not the intervener.
- Be patient in your communication
- Do not touch the person except in an emergency.

Disabilities related to other senses:

- There could be other disabilities related to smell, touch or taste. As a church, we need to be sensitive to all people that are in our midst. These sensitivities could include the inability to sense certain smells; lack of touch sensations or an inability to experience certain tastes.

REMEMBER: Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

TERMINOLOGY:

Within society generally and especially within the church, it is important to be sensitive in customer service to our congregants. Therefore we should use proper words in our conversation. Below are some examples and suggestions from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

USE	DO NOT USE
disability or disabled	handicap or handicapped
a person with a disability	disabled person or crippled
seniors	aged or elderly
a person who is blind	the blind
a person who is deaf	the deaf
a person who uses a wheelchair	wheelchair bound
a person with a mental illness	crazy
a person with an intellectual disability	mentally retarded
seizures	fits, spells, attacks
a person who has muscle spasms	spastic
a person with a brain injury	brain damaged
a person without a disability	normal

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS:

- Treat everyone with dignity and respect
- Ask those that come to your church for any reason: "how may I help you?"

SUMMARY:

The "Accessibility Standard for Customer Service" pamphlet in Ontario summarizes the requirements into 11 areas:

1. Establish policies, practices and procedures
2. Use reasonable efforts to ensure that your policies, practices and procedures are consistent with core principles.
3. Set a policy on allowing people to use personal assistive devices.
4. Communicate in a manner that recognizes the disability.
5. Allow service animals where permissible.
6. Allow a person with a disability to bring a support person with them.
7. If there is a fee or free will offering, provide a notice ahead of time for the support person.
8. Provide notice ahead of time if there will be a facility or service disruption.
9. Train staff and volunteers who are developing policies and procedures for customer service.
10. Train staff and volunteers in customer service.
11. Establish a feedback process.

REFERENCES:

The above information will assist you to establish a policy and from this material you can look at the many excellent references that are on-line that will assist you in developing a policy for your church.

The provinces in Canada have established websites to assist in developing policies. For example in

Saskatchewan: <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/office-disability/>

Ontario: <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/accessibility/index.aspx>

Prince Edward Island: <http://www.peicod.pe.ca/index.php>

Church communities have developed guidelines that can be references for us.

www.united-church.ca/files/local/duty/accessibility.rtf

http://www.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/disabilityconcerns/disability_inclusionhandbook.pdf

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

(name of congregation)

Sample Accessibility Policy for Presbyterian Congregations

We will use reasonable efforts to ensure that people who have disabilities and who attend worship or participate in any of our programs and services will be treated with dignity.

Assistive Devices

We will ensure that our staff is trained and familiar with various assistive devices that are used by people with disabilities while participating in or attending our services or programs.

Communication

We will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability.

Service Animals

We welcome people with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed into our worship areas and into most other areas of the church subject to consideration for those with severe allergies.

Support Persons

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be welcomed to have that person accompany them into the church.

If the church is offering a program where fees are charged [fees will not be charged for support persons] or [insert amount] [will be charged to the support person] for admission to [insert name of congregation]. We will notify congregants and visitors of this through a notice posted on our bulletin boards and [include any other means by which your congregation will notify customers of fee].

Notice of temporary disruption

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or programs that participants with disabilities usually attend **[list services/facilities]**, **[insert name of your congregation]** will provide notice promptly. This clearly posted notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

The notice will be placed at **[list all locations where this notice will be made available]**.