

Making Your Business Accessible for People with Disabilities



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Small Business & The AODA

Accessibility Benefits Everyone

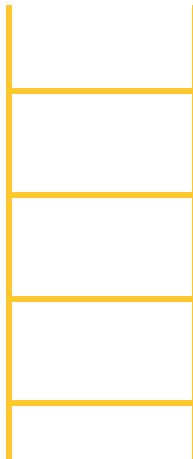
Nearly 2 million people in Ontario have a disability—that's about one in seven individuals. People with disabilities and their families are a growing consumer market that small businesses cannot afford to ignore. They are also an underused source of great employees. By employing and serving people with disabilities, businesses like yours can attract more customers and improve services for everyone.

What Is the AODA?

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) requires businesses and organizations in Ontario to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. The goal of the law is for Ontario to be accessible by 2025 so that people with disabilities can participate more fully in communities.

To reach this goal, the Government of Ontario is developing and enforcing mandatory province-wide accessibility standards in key areas of daily life:

- customer service
- information and communications
- employment
- transportation
- design of public spaces





Are You a Small Business?

The AODA defines private and not-for-profit organizations with one to 49 employees in Ontario as small businesses.

Working Together: Ontario Human Rights Code & the AODA

The Code and the AODA work together to promote equality and accessibility. The goal of the Ontario Human Rights Code is to provide for equal rights to create a climate of respect where everyone feels part of the community and can contribute fully. The Code says people with disabilities must be free from discrimination. It also says their needs must be accommodated.

While the Code and the AODA work together, they have some important differences. Under the Code, when a person with a disability needs accommodation, there is a duty to accommodate. This means organizations may need to provide an individualized response to an accommodation request. The Code applies to all Ontario organizations.

The AODA sets accessibility standards that organizations must meet. The human rights principles of the Code help to inform and guide how AODA standards are to be met. The AODA standards apply to all organizations (public, private, and not-for-profit) with one or more employees in Ontario, although requirements depend on an organization's type and size.

What Is a Disability?

Many people think of disabilities as noticeable physical disabilities—such as someone using a wheelchair. But not all disabilities are visible, and you can't always tell who has a disability.

Disabilities can include physical limitations and mental health, cognitive or intellectual development, learning, hearing, or vision disabilities. They also can include epilepsy, substance addictions, environmental sensitivities, and workplace injuries.

Accessibility Policies



Small businesses in Ontario must have accessibility policies for employing and providing services for people with disabilities. You have the flexibility to create policies and practices that best fit your existing work culture and business practices, as long as they meet the needs of people with disabilities.

These policies don't have to be written down, but it's essential that your policy is clearly defined and communicated to staff, even if it's not on paper. You must have policies on the accessibility of:

- customer service
- information and communications
- employment
- design of public spaces

The guiding principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity should be the foundation for all your accessibility policies. The law allows for flexibility in how you meet the requirements of the standards as long as they meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Principles of Accessibility

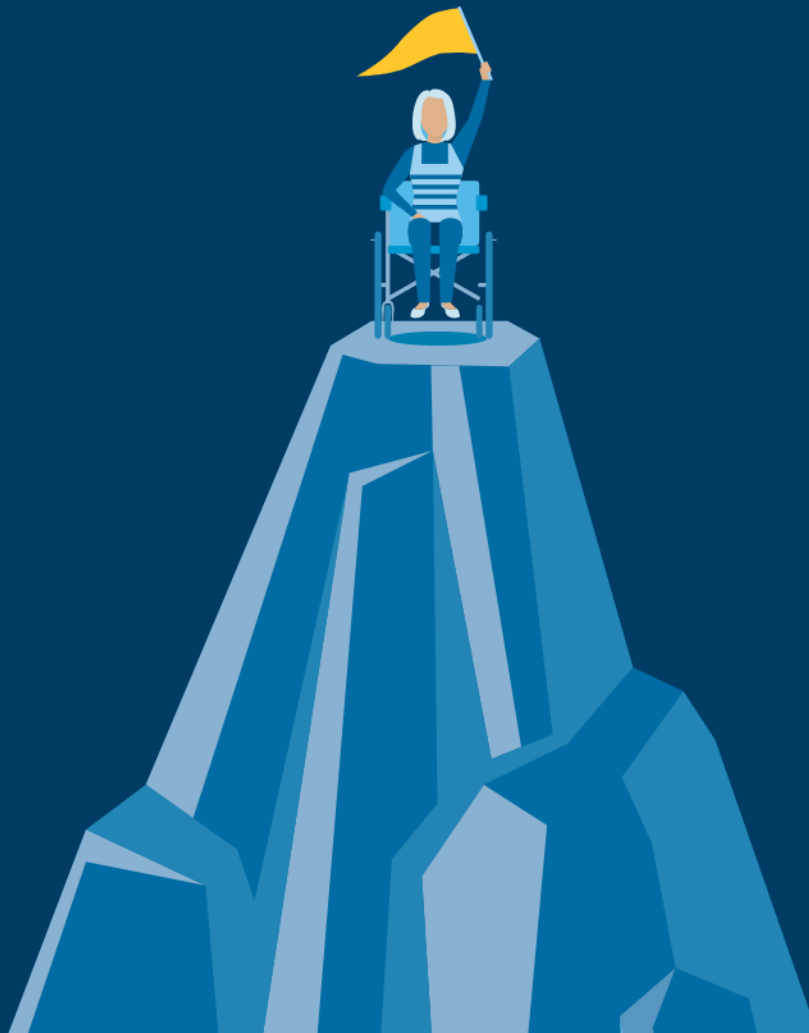
Dignity: Provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.

Independence: Allow a person with a disability to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.

Integration: Provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to access the same products and services in a similar manner, to the extent possible, as other customers.

Equal opportunity: Ensure that customers with disabilities have the same access to your goods, services, or facilities as other customers.

Customer Service

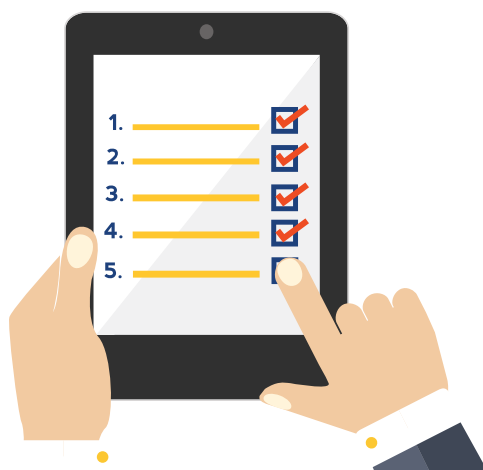


Customer Service Standards Checklist

- ☐ **Establish policies** on serving people of all abilities.
- ☐ **Allow people to use their own personal assistive devices**, along with any other assistive tools or services your organization offers.
- ☐ **Communicate with the person with a disability** in a way that takes their needs into account.
- ☐ **Welcome service animals** in those areas of your business that are open to the public.
- ☐ **Permit a support person** to accompany the customer.
- ☐ **Post a notice** if admission fees are charged for a support person.
- ☐ **Provide notice of disruption of service** when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access your business are unavailable.
- ☐ **Train staff, volunteers, contractors**, and any other people who interact with the public on your behalf, on accessible customer service standards. Ensure that anyone involved in developing policies, practices, and procedures (e.g., managers) also receives training.
- ☐ **Establish a feedback process** that allows customers with disabilities to comment on their experience.

Establish Policies

Small businesses must develop, implement, and maintain policies about how they will serve people with disabilities. You have the flexibility to create policies and practices that best fit your existing work culture and business practices, as long as they meet the needs of people with disabilities. Small businesses are not required to document their accessible customer service policies, but it's important that your policy is clearly defined and communicated to staff, even if it's not on paper.



Service Animals

Service animals assist people with disabilities. The most common service animals are dogs, but other species, such as monkeys, ferrets, and miniature horses, are used to provide support.

Clearly identify the areas of your premises where service animals are not allowed because the law prohibits them, such as kitchens. Provide another way to offer your service if the law prohibits a service animal from an area.

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Most service animals are identified by a “uniform” such as a harness or vest.

Alternatively, the person may have a letter from a regulated medical professional verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability. If the animal cannot be readily identified a business is within its rights to request to see this documentation. Documentation can be provided by:

- audiologists and speech-language pathologists
 - chiropractors
 - nurses
 - occupational therapists
 - optometrists
 - physicians and surgeons
 - physiotherapists
 - psychologists
 - psychotherapists and registered mental health therapists
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Support Persons

Support persons help people with disabilities perform daily tasks, such as helping with communication, mobility or personal care. If your business charges admission fees, like at a movie theatre, consider waiving fees for the support person. Otherwise, you are required to clearly disclose the fee in advance.

Disruptions to Service

You must provide notice of any disruptions that might affect customers with disabilities. This includes facilities or services that are temporarily unavailable (e.g., accessible washroom, elevator). The notice should include the reason for the disruption, the expected duration, and information about alternatives.

Train Your Staff

You must train all your employees and volunteers on:

- the purpose and requirements of the AODA and the Ontario Human Rights Code
- your organization's accessibility policies and any changes that are made to those policies
- how to interact and communicate with people with various disabilities
- how to interact with people with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a service animal or support person
- how to use assistive devices that you provide that may help people with disabilities access your services
- what to do if a person has difficulty accessing your services

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Free Online Training Modules from [AccessForward.ca](https://www.accessforward.ca)

- General Requirements
 - Information and Communications Standard
 - Employment Standard
 - Design of Public Spaces Standard
 - Transportation Standard
 - Customer Service Standard
-



Ontario Human Rights Training Resources

Available at <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/elearning>

- Human Rights 101
 - Working Together: The Code and the AODA
 - Ableism and discrimination based on disability
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Establish a Feedback Process

Your customer feedback process must be accessible to people with disabilities. This means you must provide accessible formats of customer feedback forms or communication supports to anyone who requests them. If a person with a disability asks for an accessible format, work with them to figure out how best to meet their needs.



Information and Communications



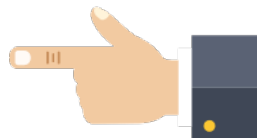
Information and Communications Standards Checklist

- ☐ **Develop a policy** on accessible information and communications.
- ☐ **Provide accessible formats and communication supports** to anyone who requests them in a timely manner and at no additional cost.
- ☐ **Make processes for receiving and responding to feedback** accessible for people with disabilities by providing accessible formats and communications supports.
- ☐ **Provide accessible public safety and emergency information.** When asked, provide publicly available emergency information, like evacuation plans or brochures, in an accessible format.
- ☐ **Notify the public** of the availability of accessible formats and communication supports.

Consider a person's disabilities when communicating with them. Don't make assumptions about how to make your service accessible. Where possible, ask the person directly how to communicate with them and ensure that your employees are prepared to communicate with customers who have various types of disabilities.

Tip: Make your communications accessible from the very beginning.

Use plain language or include closed captions in videos on your website. You could also change the method of communication to meet an individual's needs. For instance, you could handwrite or type information that is usually delivered verbally, or have large-print formats of print documents.



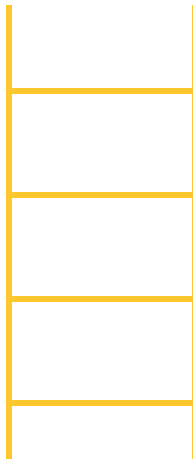
Accessible Information and Communication Policies

You must develop a policy to ensure that your information and communications practices are accessible for people with disabilities. Small businesses are not required to document their policy, but it must be clear.

Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

All businesses in Ontario are required to provide information in an accessible format or communication supports to anyone who requests them. You are not required to have a library of alternatives to standard print sitting on a shelf at all times, but do your best to fulfill requests in a timely manner. You must be able to provide the information in accessible formats as soon as possible and at no additional cost.

You must consult with the person with the disability to determine their accessibility needs and what type of support is suitable for them.



Accessible Information & Communication Supports

- accessible electronic formats such as HTML and MS Word
- braille
- accessible audio formats
- large print
- text transcripts of visual and audio information
- reading the written information aloud to the person directly
- exchanging handwritten notes (or providing a notetaker or communication assistant)
- captioning or audio description
- assistive listening systems
- augmentative and alternative communication methods and strategies, such as letter, word, or picture boards and devices that speak out messages
- sign language interpretation and intervenor services



Processes for Receiving and Responding to Feedback

You must have a process for receiving and responding to feedback from customers. If you are asked, you must provide accessible formats of customer feedback forms or communications supports.

Provide Accessible Public Safety and Emergency Information

If you have publicly available emergency plans or public safety information, you must provide it in an accessible format or with appropriate communications supports, as soon as possible, to anyone who requests it.

Notify the Public of the Availability of Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

You must notify the public that you will provide accessible formats of information or communications supports for anyone who requests them. This can take the form of a posting on your website or a public notice posted on your premises.

Above and Beyond: Accessible Websites and Web Content

Small businesses with under 50 employees are not obligated under the AODA to have fully accessible websites and online content. It's still a good idea to make your website easy for everyone to access. Large organizations must conform to the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 at Level A. For information on how to make your website accessible to everyone, check out [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#).

Employment

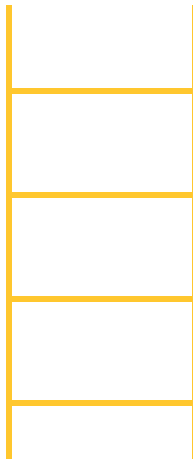


Accessible Employment Standards Checklist

- ☐ **Develop a policy** to ensure your hiring practices are accessible for people with disabilities.
- ☐ **Make it clear that people with disabilities are welcome and that you will accommodate** their needs, on request, during all stages of the hiring process and throughout their employment.
- ☐ Consider the needs of employees with disabilities in **performance management and career development processes**.
- ☐ **Make staff aware of policies to support employees with disabilities**, including the availability of job accommodations.
- ☐ **Provide information in a format that is accessible** to the specific needs of employees with disabilities when requested.
- ☐ **Provide individualized workplace emergency response information** for employees with disabilities.

Accessible Employment Policies

You must develop a policy to ensure that your hiring and employment practices are accessible for people with disabilities. Small businesses are not required to document their policy, but it must be clear.



Accessible Hiring Practices

Job notices should inform applicants that accommodations are available on request throughout the hiring process. This can be verbal, written into application forms, or included in a job posting.

Tip: Posting Job Notices Online

- Some job posting sites are not accessible, so choose a job posting website that is accessible to everyone.



When inviting job applicants to an interview, state that accessibility accommodations are available on request to support their participation. Here are some examples:

- Materials and information about the job are provided in advance of the interview for people who have a learning disability.
- Materials are offered in large-print format for people who have a visual disability.

Connecting Job Seekers With Disabilities With Opportunities

There are community organizations that help connect businesses with job seekers with disabilities. Their services are often free.

These organizations will take the time to learn about your business needs and pre-screen candidates to ensure that they have the necessary skills to complete the job.

- Ontario Disability Support Program: Employment Supports Service Providers
https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/social/odsp/employment_support/EmploymentServiceProviders.aspx
- Discover Ability Network
<https://discoverability.network/>





Accessible Interviewing Checklist

- ☐ **Location of the interview:** Is your office accessible to an individual who uses a walker or wheelchair?
- ☐ **Format of the skills assessment tests:** Are your assessment tests accessible to an applicant with a disability? Do the tests allow a candidate to demonstrate their knowledge and skills?
- ☐ **Room set-up for in-person interviews:** Is your interviewing room set-up accessible? Is it brightly lit, with minimal distractions?
- ☐ **Interviewing timelines:** Can an individual with a disability perform in the interview within the timelines expected? Time restrictions can be stressful, so consider stretching your time allowances to let individuals show their best qualities.
- ☐ **Support:** Consider allowing a support person to attend the interview, as they may be able to articulate applicants' abilities or interpret interview questions so the applicants can best represent themselves.
- ☐ **Paperwork:** Are your forms and paperwork accessible for people with vision loss or a learning disability? Consider alternate formats, like large-print forms.

Notifying Successful Candidates

New hires must be informed that job accommodations are available at any time upon request. New employees should be told who they can speak with if they wish to arrange an accommodation. This will ensure that every employee has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Career Growth

The AODA requires that employers consider an employee's accessibility needs when they hold formal or informal performance reviews or change job tasks, roles, and responsibilities.

Some employers may be uncomfortable about addressing a performance issue with an employee with a disability. Employers can set clear performance goals with employees so there is an objective standard by which to judge the performance. This gives all employees equal opportunity to correct their behaviour and to learn on the job.

Tip: Consider the location of the conversation or other ways to help individuals process information.

For example, an employee with hearing loss may need to have a performance review in a quiet place; someone with a learning disability may need to record a conversation about how they can improve.



People naturally want to grow and progress in their job. Every employee has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment. This includes equitable access to training, transfers, and promotions. In reality, a person with a disability may need additional accommodations in order to take requisite training or engage in less formal on-the-job activities—the types of career development activities needed to learn, grow, and advance.

The AODA employment standards ask employers to consider two aspects of accessibility. First, is the informal or formal training accessible? Consider the location of the training, accessibility of a facility, whether training materials need to be adapted. Second, are accommodations needed so the employee can participate in new career development activities. Does the employee's accommodation plan (if they have one) need to be adapted?

Informing Employees of Accessibility Supports

Employers must inform all employees (new and existing) of the supports available for employees. Supports include job accommodations, access to alternative formats of information, adaptive technology, etc. Keep in mind that people's health and requirements can change over time. Employees should be reminded from time to time that accommodations are available to support their continued success and well-being.

Accommodating Employees

Employers have a duty to accommodate employees as fully and as promptly as possible in their job by eliminating barriers and ensuring that they have all the supports they need to perform their job. This allows people to benefit equally and take part fully in the workplace. The most appropriate accommodation is the one that best meets the individual needs of the person with a disability. You are exempt only if it would cause undue hardship—a very high test.

Employers must accommodate employees in the following ways:

- Accept requests for accommodation in good faith.
- Act promptly, even if it means creating a temporary solution before a long-term one can be put in place.
- Ask only for information needed to provide the accommodation. For example, you may need to know that someone with vision loss is unable to read printed material, but not how or why she lost her vision.
- Actively seek appropriate accommodation solutions, and ask for expert help if needed.
- Cooperate with other parties where necessary.
- Respect the dignity and privacy of the employee asking for accommodation, and make sure the accommodation process doesn't lead to reprisals against that person.

- Cover the costs of accommodations, such as any needed medical or other expert opinions or documents, to the point of undue hardship.

Under the AODA, small organizations are not required to have a formal written process for the development of documented individual accommodation plans. However, small business owners may want to implement a simple process (such as the one described below) for accommodating employees with disabilities.

- **Communicate the right to accommodation:** The Ontario Human Rights Code says that when a person with a disability needs accommodation, there is a duty to accommodate. Employers must inform their employees that they will accommodate an employee's needs upon request.
- **Recognize the need for accommodation:** An employee can often talk directly to an owner or manager about a workplace challenge. There is no set formula for accommodation. Some accommodations can benefit many people, but what works for one person may not work for others. You must consider individual needs each time a person asks to be accommodated. Together, the employee with a disability and the employer work together to figure out an accommodation that will address a particular issue. Employees usually know their own needs best and may provide practical solutions to challenges, but you may want to consult with an expert about appropriate accommodation measures that are also cost-effective.
- **Implement, monitor, and review the accommodation plan:** Once you have both agreed to appropriate accommodations and have documented them in a plan, they should be implemented as soon as possible. Many accommodations can be made easily and inexpensively. Once the accommodation has been put into place, the employer should review it regularly with the employee to determine if:
 - the accommodation measure is appropriate and overcomes the workplace challenge
 - the nature of the disability has changed, requiring a different measure
 - the workplace or job has changed, creating new challenges for the employee

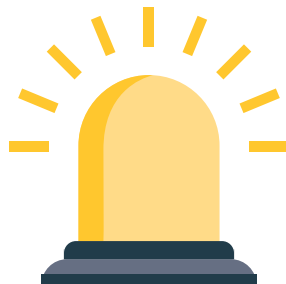
Emergency Response Information

You must provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees with disabilities if the disability makes it necessary and the employer is aware of the need.

For instance, an employee who can't hear a fire alarm will need to know how and when to exit the building in case of a fire.

If the employee requires assistance, with the employee's consent, you must provide the information to anyone designated to help them in an emergency.

Emergency response information should be reviewed whenever the employee moves to a different location, whenever the employee's overall accommodation plan is reviewed, and when you review your general emergency response policies.



Design of Public Spaces



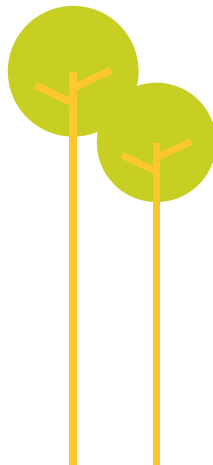
Design of Public Spaces Standards Checklist

- ☐ **Develop a policy** on accessible design of public spaces.
- ☐ **Provide accessible off-street parking in newly built parking areas.**
- ☐ **Make newly built service counters and waiting areas functional** for people with low vision and people who use mobility aides like walkers or wheelchairs.
- ☐ **Consult with the public and people with disabilities when creating or changing recreational trails and beach access routes.**

The law on the accessibility of public spaces applies only to new spaces and those that are being redeveloped. Examples of redevelopment are moving a waiting area to a new location within a building or replacing the tables in an outdoor eating area. You are not required to change existing spaces.

Accessible Design of Public Spaces Policies

You must develop a policy to ensure that your public spaces are accessible for people with disabilities. Small businesses are not required to document their policy, but it must be clear.



Accessible Off-Street Parking

If you are building new parking spaces or redeveloping existing parking spaces, you are required to include accessible parking spaces and clearly mark all accessible spaces with the required signage.

- Include two types of parking spaces for people with disabilities in your off-street parking:
 - A wider parking space that has a minimum width of 3.4 metres and signage that identifies the space as “van accessible.” There must be at least one of these wider parking spaces where there are 12 parking spaces or fewer.
 - A standard parking space that has a minimum width of 2.4 metres.
- Designate 4 per cent of the total number of parking spots as accessible parking spaces. In smaller parking lots, there should be one accessible space for every 12 other spaces. Larger parking lots (more than 100 parking spaces) have different ratios of required spaces for people with disabilities.
- Include access aisles that allow people to get in and out of their vehicles in accessible parking spaces. Access aisles can be shared by two parking spaces. They must be 1.5 metres wide, be marked with diagonal lines, and extend the length of the parking space.
- Clearly mark accessible parking spaces with an accessible permit parking sign.

See **Part IV.1 of the Integrated Accessibility Standards** under the AODA for technical requirements for accessible parking.

Service Counters and Waiting Areas

When creating or redeveloping indoor or outdoor reception desks, ticketing windows, food service counters, and check-out counters, you must adhere to guidelines set out by the standards:

- Make at least one service counter low enough to allow for a person using a wheelchair to interact with the person providing service. There should also be enough room under the counter for the knees of a person sitting in a wheelchair.
- Make all service counters accessible if your organization has a single waiting line for all of them.
- Provide at least one accessible counter for each of your organization's services (e.g., a grocery store must offer at least one accessible service counter for each of its express, self-service, and regular service lanes).

Your business may have permanent queuing guides, permanent fences, or railings that guide customers through a line up and follow a set path:

- Ensure that the fixed waiting line is wide enough for people with disabilities to move through easily with their mobility aids (e.g., wheelchairs, scooters, canes, crutches, and walkers) and make sure they can make it around corners.
- Ensure that people who are blind and using white canes can navigate the fixed waiting line (e.g., by tapping railings set close to the ground).

Your business may have a permanent waiting area where seats are fixed to the floor:

- When constructing a new waiting area with fixed seating, make sure at least 3 per cent of all seats are clear floor space for people using wheelchairs. (Make sure there's room for one wheelchair at a minimum.)

Recreational Trails

When building new public recreational trails or beach access routes, or changing existing ones, you must consult with the public and people with disabilities about accessibility. Consultation should cover the following:

- the slope of the trail
- the need for and location of ramps on the trail
- the need for, location of, and design of rest areas, passing areas, viewing areas, and amenities
- any other pertinent features

See **Part IV.1 of the Integrated Accessibility Standards** under the AODA for technical requirements for recreational trails.



AODA Requirements for Small Business



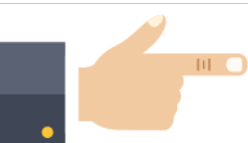
Summary

If you have one to 49 employees, you must:

- ☐ **Have accessibility policies for employing and providing services for people with disabilities.**
 - Tell your employees and customers about your policies.
- ☐ **Provide accessible customer service.**
 - Train your staff to serve customers of all abilities.
 - Welcome service animals and support persons.
 - Put an accessibility policy in place so employees, volunteers, and customers know what to expect.
- ☐ **Provide accessible public safety and emergency information.**
 - When asked, provide publicly available emergency information, such as evacuation plans or brochures, in an accessible format.
- ☐ **Provide accessible emergency information to staff.**
- ☐ **Consider accessibility when purchasing or designing self-service kiosks.**
- ☐ **Train your staff on Ontario's accessibility laws.**
- ☐ **Make it easy for people with disabilities to provide feedback when asked.**
- ☐ **Make your public information accessible when asked.**
- ☐ **Make your employment practices accessible.**
 - This includes how to hire, retain, and provide career development opportunities for all your staff.
 - Provide documents in accessible formats when requested.

☐ **Make new or redeveloped public spaces accessible.**

- recreation trails and beach access
- parking lots
- service counters
- fixed waiting lines
- waiting areas with fixed seating



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AODA Compliance Reporting

If you have 20–49 employees, you were required to file an accessibility compliance report by December 31, 2017.

Submit your compliance report here:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/completing-your-accessibility-compliance-report>

What's included in the December 2017 compliance report?

- your basic business information (mailing address, legal name, business number)
 - information on how you're implementing customer service standards for:
 - service animals
 - support persons
 - employee training
 - accessible ways to seek, receive, and respond to feedback
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Accessible Employment Resources

Employers need resources to create an inclusive workplace for people with disabilities. Find them here.

- Self-assessment tool
- Employers' toolkit
- Accessibility research
- Webinars, recorded workshops, and more



Visit conferenceboard.ca/accessibility.aspx



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