



# Accessible Customer Service Policy

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## 1. Purpose / Background Information

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) is a law that was passed by the Province of Ontario, which allows the government to develop and enforce specific standards for accessibility. The standards are intended to achieve accessibility for persons with disabilities with respect to customer service, transportation, the built environment, information and communication, and employment.

The customer service standard is the first standard developed under the AODA, through *Ontario Regulation 429/07* entitled "Accessibility Standards for Customer Service", which came into effect on January 1, 2008. The Regulation establishes accessibility standards for the provision of goods and services to members of the public. Public sector organizations are required to comply with the Regulation by January 1, 2010.

This policy has been drafted in accordance with the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429-07)*, and addresses the following:

- the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities;
- notice of temporary disruptions in services and facilities;
- the use of assistive devices by persons with disabilities;
- the use of service animals by persons with disabilities;
- the use of support persons by persons with disabilities;
- customer feedback regarding the provisions of goods and services to persons with disabilities;
- training for all persons outlined in Section 2 below; and,
- notice of the availability and format of documents.

## 2. Application

This policy applies to all persons who deal with members of the public, and other third parties, on behalf of the City of Quinte West. This requirement applies whether the person is considered an employee, a member of Council, an agent, a consultant, a volunteer, a student on placement, or otherwise, as well as all persons who participate in developing the policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods and services to members of the public or other third parties.

This policy applies to all services offered at facilities owned, leased, or operated by the City of Quinte West, as well as all public events hosted by the City, regardless of where the event takes place. The policy also applies to all external groups and agencies that use facilities owned, leased, or operated by the City of Quinte West to hold a public event.

Every license or contract issued for municipal projects, services, programs, or products must include a clause regarding third party compliance with the Accessible Customer Service Policy.

### 3. Definitions

#### Assistive Device

A device used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services of organizations covered by the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429-07)*. Assistive devices may include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, canes, oxygen tanks, and electronic communication devices.

#### Braille

A system of writing for the visually impaired that uses characters made up of raised dots.

#### City

The City of Quinte West

#### Disability

- a) 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, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a 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 service animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- d) a mental disorder; or,
- e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

#### Nurse

A Registered Nurse, Registered Practical Nurse, or Nurse Practitioner, who is a registered member in good standing with the College of Nurses of Ontario.

#### Physician

A physician who is a registered member in good standing with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

#### Service Animal

Any animal used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to the disability, where it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to their disability, or where the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that they require the animal for reasons relating to their disability. Service animals may include a variety of animals used to assist with sight or hearing, to detect seizures, or to provide any other form of assistance necessary to a person with a disability.

#### Support Person

A person who accompanies a person with a disability in order to assist them with communication, mobility, personal care, or medical needs, or with access to goods or services

## 4. Mission & Vision Statement

The Accessible Customer Service Policy has been written to comply with the mission, vision and values statement adopted by The City of Quinte West.

### Mission

To enhance the quality of life for present and future generations by providing progressive, professional services and leadership that reflects the needs of all those who work, live, visit, or play in the City of Quinte West.

### Vision

We are a progressive, innovative corporation with satisfied citizens and employees. Our fiscal health enables us to update our infrastructure and grow our business community. We support a high quality of life for all of our citizens and they value the services we provide.

The City of Quinte West is a community that recognizes that people are our most valuable asset. We create opportunities for all people to enjoy our City and contribute as productive citizens. We will work to prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities on City properties and services. We will also create public awareness and educate both the public and private sectors regarding the requirements of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, the *Ontario Building Code*, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

## 5. Customer Service Policies

### a. The Provision of Goods and Services to Persons with Disabilities

The City of Quinte West will use all reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:

- the goods and services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities; and
- the provision of the goods and services to persons with disabilities are integrated with those provided to persons who do not have disabilities, unless an alternative measure is necessary to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the City's goods and services.

### b. Communication with Persons with Disabilities

All municipal communications will be written in a manner so that the intended audience understands the message clearly. This will be done using the principle of "plain language", which is defined as language that avoids obscurity, inflated vocabulary, and convoluted sentence structure.

When communicating with a person with a disability, the City will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

The City trains all persons who communicate with customers on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.

### Telephone Services

The City of Quinte West is committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our customers. The City will train all relevant persons to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language, to speak clearly and slowly, and to tailor their responses as much as possible in support of the individual.

The City will offer to communicate with customers in person, by e-mail, or by computer based software services (i.e. Nextalk) if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

### Website Services

The City of Quinte West is committed to maintaining its website and providing on-line resources that are fully accessible to our customers.

### Billing

The City of Quinte West is committed to providing accessible invoices and bills to all of its customers. For this reason, invoices and bills will be provided in the following formats upon request: hard copy; large-print; and, electronic.

The City will answer any questions customers may have about the content of an invoice or bill in person, through the regular postal service, or by telephone, Nextalk or e-mail.

### Meetings

All persons responsible for scheduling, planning and conducting meetings in facilities will endeavour to ensure that they are accessible to persons with disabilities.

### Additional Communication Services

Should a customer require an alternative form of communication not listed above, such as a document printed in Braille or the need for the services of a sign language interpreter, the City will make every possible attempt to accommodate those needs. In order to accommodate certain requests and services, the customer may be required to provide advance notice to the City.

The costs of any additional communication services will be covered by the department that normally handles the information and services. For example, if a customer requests a copy of their tax bill in Braille, the Tax Department will be responsible for covering those costs.

## Public Education

The City of Quinte West is committed to promoting public awareness and educating the public about the Accessible Customer Service Policy, as well as the various accessible services and facilities that it provides.

### **c. Notice of Temporary Disruptions in Services and Facilities**

The City of Quinte West is aware that the operation of its services and facilities is important to the public. However, temporary disruptions in the services and facilities may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within the City's control or knowledge.

The City will provide notice of the disruption to the public, including:

- information about the reason for the disruption;
- its anticipated duration; and,
- a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that may be available.

Where the disruption to the service or facility is planned, the City will provide notice in advance of the disruption. However, in the case where the disruption is unplanned, the City will provide notice as soon as possible.

When temporary disruptions occur to the City's services or facilities, the City will provide notice by posting the information in relevant visible locations, on the City's website, and/or by any other method that is reasonable and applicable under the circumstances.

### **d. Assistive Devices**

A person with a disability may provide their own assistive device for the purpose of obtaining, using and benefiting from the City's goods and services. Exceptions may occur in situations where the City has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of a person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

The City may offer a person with a disability other reasonable measures to assist them in obtaining, using and benefiting from the City's goods and services, where the City has such other measures available.

It is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that their assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

The City will also ensure that staff, and all other applicable persons identified in Section 2 of this Policy, know how to use the following assistive devices that are available in many City facilities: elevators, Nextalk systems and FM audio system. Please note that not all buildings contain these assistive devices.

## **e. Service Animals**

A person with a disability may enter premises owned or operated by the City of Quinte West accompanied by a service animal, and may keep the animal with them if the public has access to such premises and the animal is not otherwise excluded by law. If the service animal is excluded by law, the City will ensure, where possible, that alternative means are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the City's goods and services.

At times it may be difficult to differentiate between a person with a disability using a service animal and an individual being accompanied by a pet. If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, the City may ask the person with a disability for a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to his or her disability. If proper documentation is not produced, then the person may be asked to remove the animal from the premises.

It is the responsibility of the person with the disability to ensure that their service animal is kept in control at all times. This will include controlling the behavior of the animal (e.g. barking or growling), cleaning up after the animal (e.g. defecation), and being responsible for any damage the animal may cause to property.

## **f. Support Persons**

A person with a disability may enter premises owned or operated by the City of Quinte West with a support person, and is entitled to have access to the support person at all times while on the premises.

The City may require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person while on City premises in situations where it is necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with the disability or the health and safety of others.

In situations where privacy and consent issues are applicable, a support person may be subject to the same confidentiality requirements as the person with a disability that they are assisting. A support person may be required to sign a waiver with respect to any privacy or confidentiality issues.

In order to accommodate a person with a disability and their support person at an event where attendance is by pre-arranged seating, advanced booking may be required. Admission requirements will be clearly posted on the City's website, and at the entrances and customer service areas of all applicable facilities.

### Admission Fees

The following policies apply to support persons and admission fees:

- Where an admission fee is charged to gain access to an event, facility, or service, and the revenue from the fee is payable directly to the City, the support person is permitted to attend at no cost; and,

- Where an admission fee is charged to gain access to an event, facility, or service, and the revenue from the fee is payable to a third party (e.g. a concert provider), the City will encourage the third party to allow the support person to attend at no cost.

## **g. Feedback**

The City of Quinte West is committed to providing high quality goods and services to all members of the public it serves. Feedback from the public is welcomed, as it may identify areas that require change and encourage continuous service improvements.

Feedback from a member of the public about the delivery of goods and services to persons with disabilities may be given by the Nextalk system, in writing, in electronic format, or through other methods. All feedback will be directed to the relevant Department, and customers can expect an acknowledgement of their message within five (5) business days. All personal information collected will be managed in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)*. A copy of all complaints will also be filed with the City Clerk's Office, in order to maintain a record related to compliance with the customer service standard.

Information about the feedback process will be readily available to the public, and notice of the process will be posted on the City's website and/or in other relevant locations.

## **h. Training**

The City of Quinte West ensures that all persons to whom this policy applies receive training as required by the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)*.

The content of the training will include:

- a review of the purposes of the AODA;
- the requirements of the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)*;
- instruction on the policies, procedures and practices pertaining to the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities;
- how to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities;
- what to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the City's goods or services;
- how to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or who require the assistance of a support person or service animal; and,
- information about the equipment or devices available on the premises that may help with the provision of goods or services to persons with disabilities.

### Timeline for Training

For all persons described in Section 2 of this policy that are involved with the City of Quinte West at the time that this policy is approved by Council, training must be completed by January 1, 2010. In all other instances, training will be provided as soon as possible upon an individual being assigned the applicable duties, as well as on an ongoing basis as changes occur to the policies, procedures and practices governing the provision of goods or services to persons with disabilities.

### Records of Training

The City of Quinte West will keep records of the training, including the date on which training is provided, the number of individuals to whom it is provided, and the nature of the training that is provided. The names of individuals trained will be recorded for municipal administrative purposes. All personal information collected will be managed in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA).

## **6. Availability of Documents**

All documents required by the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429-07)*, including the City's Accessible Customer Service policies, procedures and practices, notices of temporary disruptions, training records, and written feedback process are available upon request, subject to the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA).

Where a person with a disability requests a document in an alternate format, the City will provide the document or the information contained in the document, (where suitable advance notice is given) in the format that is requested and that takes the person's disability into consideration.

Notice of the availability of all documents required by the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)* will be posted on the City's website, and will be made available through the City Clerk's Office.

## **7. Amendments**

All amendments to the Accessible Customer Service Policy must be approved by Council.