

Accessibility- Customer Service

# Welcome!

All people have equal right of access to all goods and services provided by Grand River Hospital.

Service will be provided in a manner that promotes dignity, autonomy, respect, and safety of persons with disabilities and is compliant with The Accessibility for Customer Service Standard of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) .

# Purpose of the AODA Act

Grand River Hospital (GRH) is required to comply with the new AODA legislation beginning with the Customer Satisfaction Standard.

AODA is the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The purpose of the AODA Act is:

- to achieve a fully accessible Ontario by 2025;
- develop accessibility standards; and
- enforce the standards.

Disability is defined as:

- any degree of physical infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness;
- a condition of mental impairment or development;
- a learning disability;
- a mental disorder; or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were received under WSIB.

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

Approximately 1.85 million Ontarians or 1 in 6 Ontarians have some form of disability.

# AODA Standards

The AODA has five standards:

- Customer Service
- Built Environment
- Employment
- Information & Communication
- Transportation

The Customer Service standard is the first to be implemented. Principles of the Customer Services Standard are:

- dignity;
- independence;
- integration; and
- equal opportunity.



# AODA Standards

The Standard requires GRH to:

- establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities;
- set a policy on allowing people to use their assistive devices when using our services;
- ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity;
- communicate with people with disabilities in a manner that takes into account their disability;
- train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public on our behalf;
- allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas at GRH that are open to the public;
- permit people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing the services at GRH;
- provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access the services at GRH are temporarily disrupted; and
- establish a process for people to provide feedback on how GRH provides services to people with disabilities.

Interact and Communicate

# Step One: Think about and learn how those with disabilities communicate.

If one form or method of communication cannot be used, use another form or method or a combination.

A method of communication could be in person, over the phone or online.

A form of communication could include:

- speech (speech may be unclear);
- body language and facial expressions;
- gestures (e.g. wave to signal goodbye);
- pointing or looking at objects and people;
- sign languages;
- writing, typing, or drawing;
- spelling on a letter board;
- pointing to pictures symbols and/or written words on a communication display; or
- using a communication device.

# Step One: Think about and learn how those with disabilities communicate (Cont'd)

If GRH can communicate in a variety of ways, we are more likely to meet the needs of people with a variety of disabilities.

Examples:

- A customer who is speech impaired may use a handheld device to type information to communicate.
- A customer who is visually impaired may require that you read the discharge instruction to them or send the instructions via email because they have a computer that will read the instructions out loud.





# Step Two: Consider approaches for making communication accessible

Depending on the situation and the patient's needs, there are a variety of ways to make communications more accessible:

Make all communication materials more accessible for people with disabilities.

- Sometimes communication can be made more accessible if the needs of people with disabilities are considered during the planning stage.
- Using plain language can help to make a document easier to understand for people with certain types of disabilities.

Change the usual method of communication to meet an individual's need,

- Communication can occur in a variety of ways such as in person, by phone, and online.

Consider approaches for making communication accessible.

- Assistive equipment or devices can be used in communicating with customers with disabilities.



# Step Three: Plan ahead - have options and be flexible

The Standard does not specify a particular way to communicate with people with various disabilities.

Different ways will work for different people and in different circumstances.

It is important for GRH to have options available, to be open to new ideas, and be as creative as possible in order to meet the Customer Services Standard



# Assistive Devices, Service Animals, and Support Persons

How to interact and communicate with people with disabilities who use an assistive device, service animal or a support person.

# Assistive Devices

GRH providers may want to use the assistive equipment or devices that are on site in communicating or assisting people with disabilities.

Some examples of assistive devices available at GRH include:

- wheelchairs;
- walkers;
- commode chairs;
- and TTY (telecommunications device for the hearing impaired).

Some people will bring their own assistive devices (i.e. hearing aids, eyeglasses, personal oxygen tanks, and mobility devices) and it is important that GRH accommodates the use of personal assistive devices.



# Service Animals

Service animals are not pets but working animals that have special training to assist a person to overcome barriers. To be considered a service animal, the animal is used by customers with disabilities to obtain, use, or benefit from our services.

Sometimes it may be readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, for example a guide dog for the visually impaired. However it may not always be obvious that this is a service animal, for example some people have a service animal that alerts them to medical conditions such as seizures.

Any person requiring a service animal should carry a letter signed by a doctor or nurse acknowledging that they are in need of the service animal and what the animal is. If you are unclear if an animal is a service animal you may ask to see the letter. The customer is not required to disclose the reason that they require a service animal. The customer is responsible for the care and control of their animal.

For reasons of infection prevention and control the service animal must remain with their owner at all times. Interaction with others is discouraged. In the event that a service animal and/or owner enters an isolation room or is unable to comply with infection control measures, Infection Prevention and Control must be consulted regarding any special precautions and/or accommodations required.



# Support Persons

A **support person** is an individual hired or chosen by a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or with access to goods or services. Personal care needs may include, but are not limited to, physically transferring an individual from one location to another or assisting an individual with eating or using the washroom. Medical needs may include, but are not limited to, monitoring an individual's health or providing medical support by being available in the event of a seizure.

## Use of Support Persons:

- a support person may be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member, or friend of the person with a disability;
- he or she does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications;
- any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person is welcome to enter GRH premises with his or her support person;
- any situation that would require the separation of the individual and support person (e.g. medical procedures) will be discussed with the individual in advance and appropriate measure taken;
- when a support person is involved, it is important to identify upfront the role of support person when it comes to the discussion of confidential information; and
- where admission fees are charged, provide notice ahead of time on what admission, if any, would be charged for a support person of a person with a disability.

# Case Scenarios

# Scenario One

You are working as a cashier behind the cash register in the GRH cafeteria.

A customer in a wheelchair approaches the counter to buy a coffee. The customer is accompanied by what appears to be a support person.

The customer orders and pays for his coffee. You pour the hot coffee and hand the hot drink to the support person because you believe that the customer cannot hold the hot coffee and operate his wheelchair.

**Was this correct? Did you make an appropriate assumption?**



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**Was this correct? Did you make an appropriate assumption?**

No, if the customer had asked for this service then this would have been acceptable.

Making the assumption that the person can't handle the coffee himself does not respect his independence

# Scenario Two

A person with a developmental disorder comes to GRH with his support person for a ultrasound. The support person sits in the waiting area as the patient approaches the registration desk to explain why he is there.

The staff member at the desk ignores him and asks the support person why they are there.

**If you were to see this situation unfold, would you agree with the staff member's decision to speak to the support person?**

# Scenario Two

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The staff member at the desk ignores him and asks the support person why they are there.

**If you were to see this situation unfold, would you agree with the staff member's decision to speak to the support person?**

Hopefully you would not agree because by ignoring the visitor with the disability and instead speaking to his support person, the staff member has not followed the principle of independence.

# Scenario Three

While you are sitting down for lunch in the eating area in the front lobby by the Tim Horton's, there is a customer sitting with a very large breed dog.

A visitor approaches you and complains that the dog should not be allowed in the hospital because she is very terrified of large dogs.

**How would you address the visitor's concerns?**

# Scenario Three

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A visitor approaches you and complains that the dog should not be allowed in the hospital because she is very terrified of large dogs.

**How would you address the visitor's concerns?**

You would politely explain to the visitor that this may be a service animal dog and that if it is, the dog is allowed to stay with the customer in the hospital which is legislated by the AODA.

You tell the visitor that you will go speak to the customer with the dog and will inquire whether the dog is a service animal.

# Service Disruptions

# Notice of Service Disruption:

GRH will provide the public with a Service Disruption Notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption of facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities such as:

- elevators;
- access ramps;
- handicap parking;
- TTY phones; or
- handicap washrooms.



Information about the disruption will be posted at the location of the disruption. The service disruption will also be posted on the GRH website as soon as practical during working hours.

The website will also refer customers to call the service disruption voicemail box at extension 5655. The service disruption voicemail box will be updated immediately as new service disruptions occur.

# Notice Requirements

The Service Disruption Notice must include information about:

- the reason for the disruption;
- the anticipated duration of the disruption; and
- a description of alternative facilities or services.

A standard GRH template for Service Disruptions is available from Facilities or Security.

The posting of the service disruption is a 24/7 requirement and records must be kept of all service disruptions.



# Difficulty Accessing Goods or Services

# Barriers

Below are examples of barriers that patients or visitors may face and solutions to overcome these barriers.

- Vision Loss
- Learning Disability
- Deaf, Deafened, Oral Deaf, or Hard of Hearing
- Intellectual/Developmental Disorder
- Mental Health Disability
- Physical Disability
- Speech Impairment



When you think about accessibility, it is important to be aware of both visible and invisible barriers. A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability.

# Solutions

- Make it standard practice to describe to patients and visitors the services offered if they are unable to view them due to vision loss.
- Establish the practice of using plain language and avoid technical language when communicating.
- Establish the practice of speaking clearly and making sure that nothing is covering the mouth when communicating with patients or visitors who lip-read.
- Establish the practice of discussing and explaining any documentation provided to customers.
- Break up a lengthy conversation into a series of short ones and speak slowly so that some patients or visitors will not feel overwhelmed with the information.
- Establish the practice of setting aside convenient seating for people with physical disabilities.
- Staff should have access to a pen and paper to communicate through note-writing when requested to do so.

# Feedback Process

GRH is required to provide a method for patients or visitors to provide feedback on how we provide services to those with disabilities.

The GRH website home page has a feedback link that patients or visitors can use to relay their experience at GRH to the Patient Relations Coordinator.

The Patient Relations Coordinator is responsible for following up with every feedback response that we receive. Complaints are documented in Risk Monitor Pro.

GRH is required to make the information about our feedback process readily available to the public. Instructions on how to provide feedback and our process for responding is detailed on our website.

We are also required to notify patients or visitors that documents required under the Customer Service Standard such as our policies are available upon request and in alternate formats.

# Conclusion

GRH is required to meet the legislated requirements of the AODA but it is also very important to understand and believe in the benefits that our customers will receive from a more accessible GRH.

Small steps can immediately improve accessibility such as:

- treating all customers with dignity and respect;
- asking 'How can I help you?';
- speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his or her support person or companion;
- avoid stereotypes and make no assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities the person has because some disabilities are not visible and customers are not required to give you information about any disabilities they may have; and
- be patient; people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. A good start is to listen carefully.

If you encounter someone who needs help and you don't know how to help them, please contact the Patient Relations Coordinator for assistance.

Together we can make GRH a more accessible and comfortable place for those with disabilities in our community.

The GRH Accessible Customer Service Policy can be found in the Administration Manual on Lotus Link; and additional resources can be found on the government Access ON website.