



Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Customer Service Standard Handbook and Guide

Compliance – January 1, 2012

Serving Our Clients, Members and Visitors

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Mission

Spinal Cord Injury Ontario exists *to assist persons with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities to achieve independence, self-reliance and full community participation*. Our philosophy promotes maximum client independence and involvement.

In support of its mission, SCI Ontario believes in full adherence to the rights of clients in receipt of services.

1. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to be dealt with in a courteous and respectful manner and to be free from mental, physical and financial abuse by the service provider;
2. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to be dealt with in a manner that respects the client's dignity and privacy and that promotes the client's autonomy;
3. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to be dealt with in a manner that recognizes the client's individuality, and that is sensitive to and responds to, the client's needs and preferences, including preference based on ethnic, spiritual, linguistic, familial, gender and cultural factors;
4. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to information about the community services to be provided and to be told who will be providing the services;
5. A client applying for services from SCI Ontario has the right to participate in the service provider's assessment of their needs. A person who is determined to be eligible for service has the right to participate in the development of the plan of service and in the service provider's subsequent evaluations and revisions;
6. A client has the right to consent to or refuse consent to the provision of any community service provided by SCI Ontario;
7. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to raise concerns in connection with the service provided or recommend changes about their community services, without the fear of interference, coercion, discrimination or reprisal;
8. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to be informed of the policies and procedures affecting service provider operations and to receive written information on the procedures for initiating complaints about the service provider;
9. A client receiving services from SCI Ontario has the right to have personal records kept confidential in accordance with the law.

SCI Ontario is committed to the principles and practices of quality management to ensure effective and efficient service delivery to their clients and visitors with disabilities. Client service policies require that each client will have a valid service agreement and policies may be individualized to meet consumer needs. SCI Ontario also ensures that all clients receiving services have the right to be informed of the laws, rules and policies affecting the operation of the service provider.

Definition of Disability

“Disability” means,

- (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 guide dog or other 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*; (“handicap”).

Ontario Human Rights Commission/Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

The History of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) became law on June 13, 2005. Under this landmark legislation, the government of Ontario is developing mandatory accessibility standards that identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in key areas of daily living. The standards apply to private and public sector organizations across Ontario. The goal is for the province to be accessible by 2025.

The five key areas of focus are:

- Customer Service
- Integrated Standard:
 - Information and Communication
 - Employment
 - Transportation
- Built Environment.

The Customer Service Standard is the first standard developed to become a regulation and came into force on January 1, 2008. Compliance is required by January 1, 2012. The standard addresses business practices to provide better customer service to people with disabilities.

Information and Communication, Employment and Transportation have been combined into one standard. The Accessibility Directorate is reviewing the final round of public comments and anticipates the standard will be enacted by July 2011, pending government approval.

The Built Environment public comments are being integrated into the Ontario Building Code, so only one piece of legislation will provide the standard.

The Customer Service Standard (AODA)

Every business and organization operating in Ontario that provides goods and services to the public or other organizations and has at least one employee in Ontario has **to comply by January 1st, 2012**. To meet the requirements of the Customer Service Standard, organizations must:

1. Establish policies and procedures on providing goods or services to clients and visitors with disabilities.
2. Provide training on how to serve clients and visitors with disabilities to staff, volunteers, contractors, and anyone else who interacts with the public or other third parties on our behalf, and those involved in developing customer service policies, practices and procedures.
3. Establish a process for receiving feedback on how we provide service to clients and visitors with disabilities and how we will respond to feedback and take action on any complaints. Make information about the feedback process readily available to the public.
4. Communicate with clients and visitors with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
5. Let clients and visitors with disabilities bring their service animals onto any part of our premises open to the public, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law.
6. Let clients and visitors with disabilities bring their support person with them when accessing goods or services on parts of our premises open to the public.
7. Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to access our goods or services are temporarily unavailable.
8. Document all policies, practices and procedures to providing accessible customer service and notify the public that these documents are available upon request.

Effective January, 2012, organizations with 20 or more employees will have to begin to file online accessibility reports annually with the Government of Ontario, regarding their compliance with the standard, www.accesson.ca

Economic Impact of Accessibility

Disability impacts the lives of many Ontarians and the numbers of people with disabilities is increasing.

- In 20 years, one in five Ontarians are likely to have some kind of disability compared with approximately one in seven today.
- 10 – 20% of the general population have hearing loss; 50% of people over 65 have hearing loss.
- 600,000 Canadians have self-identified as having vision loss.
- 6% of people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair.
- 70% of disabilities are hidden and often forgotten.
- Many of our veterans have disabilities. Men and women, who want to carry on their life activities with friends and family, will demand access to do so.
- It is projected that the older population will double in the next 25 years.

The disability sector is a growing market. Research indicates accessible service attracts more visitors with disabilities, resulting in return visits and increased revenue.

- Persons with disabilities spend an estimated 25 billion a year in consumer spending. An individual with a disability impacts the spending decision of another 12 to 15 Canadians. (Source: Royal Bank, 2000).
- In Canada, Europe and the US, 75% of people with disabilities are physically and financially able to travel. People are living longer and have increased travel income to spend, creating increased tourism opportunities.
- Many communities are adopting age friendly principles focusing on access, to address the needs of the older population.
- A new report, "Releasing Constraints – Projecting the Economic Impacts of Increased Accessibility in Ontario", commissioned by the Province of Ontario, examines the economic impact of achieving substantially higher levels of accessibility on individuals, on markets and on social units. (Report prepared by the Martin Prosperity Group, the Adaptive Technology Resource Centre and the Institute for Competiveness and Prosperity). Highlights include:
 - Positive growth generated by greater participation in the economy.
 - Accelerated growth in the retail and tourism sectors.
 - Increases in individual and family income.

Customer Service Standard – Spinal Cord Injury Ontario’s Procedures

SCI Ontario has had a long standing commitment to accessibility for clients and visitors with disabilities, as exemplified by our Client Bill of Rights. The AODA Customer Service Standard now mandates a requirement to meet the needs of persons with disabilities with clearly defined policies and procedures by January 1, 2012.

In preparing for the compliance requirements, SCI Ontario has made reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies and procedures are consistent with the following principles, as defined by the Customer Service Standard, AODA.

How to interact with people with various types of disabilities:

- All goods and services at SCI Ontario will be provided in a manner that respects the dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity of people with disabilities.
 - Dignity: service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.
 - Independence: service is provided in a way that allows a person with a disability to do things on their own, without unnecessary help or interference from others.
 - Integration and Equal Opportunity: service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other customers, unless an alternate measure is necessary to enable a person with disability to access goods or services. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service. They should also not have to accept inconvenience or lesser quality. Sometimes this may mean that SCI Ontario has to treat individuals slightly differently so that they can benefit fully from the services.

Assistive Devices

SCI Ontario is committed to serving people with disabilities, and ensuring that those who require the use of assistive devices will benefit from the same level of customer service as those who do not use an assistive device.

Procedures:

SCI Ontario respects our independent living philosophy. We are available for support, upon request, and take direction from the client, member or visitor. Do not touch someone’s assistive device unless the person has given you permission to do so.

There are a variety of assistive devices that people may use to support them with activities of daily living, depending on the nature of the disability. Devices may include, but are not limited to:

- Mobility Aids (white and support canes, walkers, scooters, wheelchairs)
- Visual Aids (palmtop notetakers with built-in speech output, Braille watches, magnifying glasses)
- Hearing Aids (cochlear implants, hearing aids)
- Communication Aids (synthesized speech communicators, personal digital assistants)

A Workplace Support Services Assistant can provide assistance, as required.

Communicating with a Client, Member or Visitor

SCI Ontario's procedures take a person's disability into account when communicating with the individual. Two-way communications is a process of providing, sending, receiving and understanding information. To communicate in an effective way, SCI Ontario considers how the disability affects the way that the person expresses, receives or processes communications. Where possible, SCI Ontario asks the client, member or visitor directly the best way to communicate with him/her.

Procedures:

SCI Ontario uses a variety of ways, wherever possible, to make communications more accessible by:

- Considering the needs of people with disabilities during the planning stage of services and communication development.
- Using plain language to make a document easier to read for people with certain learning disabilities.
- Offering information in alternate formats, on request:
 - Hand-write or type information back and forth;
 - Braille;
 - Printed hand-outs of commonly used information;
 - Large print;
 - TTY;
 - Audio assistance;
 - E-mail as an alternate channel to provide accessible communication.

Service Animals

SCI Ontario is committed to welcoming clients, members and visitors with disabilities who are accompanied by a trained, accredited service animal. A service animal may accompany a client, member or visitor or any third party with a disability to all parts of our premises that are open to the public. Service animals may be used for, but not limited to, the following disabilities: vision loss, physical disability, hearing loss, autism, epilepsy etc. Although service animals are most commonly dogs, other service animals could include, but are not limited to, ferrets, monkeys etc. SCI Ontario ensures that all employees, volunteers and others dealing with the public are

properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities, who are accompanied by a service animal.

Procedures:

To be considered a service animal under this standard, it must be readily apparent that the animal is being used because of a person's disability; however, SCI Ontario may request more formal documentation. SCI Ontario does enforce a general By-law that does not permit pets on the premises, including SCI Ontario property surrounding the building. Service animals are not pets - they are working animals. They are used by people with disabilities to overcome barriers much like assistive devices such as a white cane or a wheelchair.

Guide dogs or other service animals, including service animals in training, are allowed to accompany people with disabilities on SCI Ontario premises open to the public.

If the service animal is causing a disturbance for other clients, members or visitors, the person and accompanying service dog may be required to leave the area or SCI Ontario premises.

It is the responsibility of the animal's handler to maintain full control of the animal at all times.

SCI Ontario anticipates there will be special situations and is prepared to make every effort to accommodate the circumstances on an individual basis, as they arise, keeping safety to all clients, members, visitors, staff, volunteers and service animals in mind.

Support Persons

SCI Ontario is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person is allowed to enter SCI Ontario premises with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on SCI Ontario premises.

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.

Procedures:

A client or visitor with a disability, accompanied by a support person, pays regular admission (when applicable) to special events sponsored by SCI Ontario. Fees will not be charged for the support person. Complimentary admission for one support person is the standard. Additional requests are addressed on a case by case basis.

Clients and visitors are informed of this through SCI Ontario's communication to the public.

Temporary Disruption of Service

SCI Ontario is aware that temporary disruptions of services (daily functions – elevators, physical operations; office closures; training, etc.) and programs may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within SCI Ontario's control or knowledge. SCI Ontario makes a reasonable effort to provide advance 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.

Procedures:

The notice is made available for broadcasting news and updates through the following networks, as appropriate.

- www.sciontario.org
- Telephone recordings;
- Public service announcements;
- Temporary signage;
- Twitter;
- Face book.

In the event of an unexpected disruption, advance notice is not possible. In such cases, SCI Ontario provides notice, as soon as possible, through its communication networks.

Process to Receive and Respond to Feedback

SCI Ontario has a process in place for receiving and responding to feedback about the accessibility of goods and services provided to clients, members and visitors with disabilities.

Procedures:

Clients, members and visitors with disabilities can offer their feedback on the accessibility of goods and services in the following ways:

- Through the SCI Ontario Client Satisfaction Survey, if contact name provided;
- On-line at the SCI Ontario web site www.sciontario.org ;
- E-mail and telephone, (re-directed, as required, to the appropriate response employee);
- Annual General Meeting;
- Face book, Twitter, Blogs;
- In writing, where correspondence is re-directed to the appropriate response employee;
- Focus groups;
- In person to SCI Ontario staff, management or volunteers;

The client or visitor is requested to provide their name and contact information (phone, e-mail). Once feedback is received, the following actions are taken to respond:

- The feedback is directed to the appropriate person for action.
- The feedback is assessed for appropriate action. (Note: the customer service standard does not require a response to be provided for all feedback).
- Visitors who provide feedback and request a response can expect a response within five business days.

The feedback process is readily available to the public through:

- A notice on the web site www.sciontario.org;
- A sign in SCI Ontario locations;
- A document describing the feedback process, available on request in different formats;
- Other communication networks, as appropriate.

The notice includes the following:

Dear Valued Client and Visitor,

We strive to improve accessibility for our clients, members and visitors with disabilities. We welcome your feedback. Please call 416-422-5644 or toll free at 1-877-422-1112 or connect via our website www.sciontario.org to share your comments, or request a copy of our Customer Service Standard Handbook and Guide.

*Thank you,
SCI Ontario Management*

Customer Service Training

SCI Ontario provides training to all employees and volunteers and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of customer service procedures on providing goods and services to clients, members and visitors with disabilities. SCI Ontario ensures that third party and others, who deal with the public, have the required AODA training.

Procedures:

Individuals in the following positions are trained by SCI Ontario:

- Board;
- Leadership Team;
- Front Line Staff;
- Volunteers.

After January, 2012, new staff and volunteers will also receive training. This training will be provided as soon as practicable or as soon as it can be done in the circumstances, after an employee or volunteer commence their duties.

A variety of methods and time frames are used including formal and informal training sessions, presentations, train the trainer, Ministry of Community and Social Services web sites, e-training, printed material, handouts, fact sheets, and videos, dependent on need, job descriptions and functions. Training is also included as part of a larger training program, such as basic orientation, training on effective communication or general customer service.

The training content, required by the Customer Service Standard, includes the following:

- The history of the legislation and the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the Customer Service standard.
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person.
- How to use the assistive devices available on the SCI Ontario's premises or otherwise that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing SCI Ontario's goods and services.
- SCI Ontario's procedures relating to the Customer Service Standard.
- On-going training in connection with any changes to SCI Ontario's procedures governing the provision of goods and services to people with disabilities is provided.

An evaluation process is in place for continuous improvement in training content and delivery, via an Evaluation Form.

Training is completed by December 31st, 2011 to be compliant with January 1st, 2012 deadline.

Training is recorded for staff and volunteers and includes name, date and content.

A sustainability plan has been developed and includes:

- Budget guidelines;
- Resources;
- Incorporating access into the orientation program;
- Training updates.

Posting of Documents

Notices are posted, informing the public that the documents required by the Customer Service Standard are available upon request and will be provided in a format that takes a person's disability into account.

Procedures:

Documents are available through the following networks, as appropriate.

- Web site: www.sciontario.org
- Telephone recordings;
- Publications;
- Signage;
- Twitter;
- Facebook

Additional Spinal Cord Injury Ontario's Policies and Procedures to Enhance the Client, Member and Visitor Experience

In addition to compliance with the Customer Service Standard –AODA, SCI Ontario has several additional policies and procedures, and processes to enhance the experience for clients and visitors with disabilities. These include:

- A Workplace Support Services Assistant available to assist employees, clients, members and visitors, on request, at SCI Ontario's Provincial Office.
- No restriction on scooter size in SCI Ontario locations.
- An emergency preparedness manual.
- Automated door openers.
- Accessible kitchens.
- Height adjustable desks.
- Accessible washrooms.