

Woodstock General Hospital

## ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE



A guide for  
staff, students  
and volunteers

# ACCESS

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## THE NEW PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION

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In 2005, the government of Ontario set a goal of making the province completely accessible to people with disabilities by 2025. To reach this ambitious target, the province enacted legislation called The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

The act sets out minimum requirements that all public and private sector agencies must fulfill as well as fines those agencies could face for non-compliance.

There are five areas or standards of accessibility identified in the act: customer service, information and communication, built environment (bricks and mortar) and transportation. The first to be approved with compliance deadlines and mandates is the customer service standard.

The Accessible Customer Service Standard came into force in July 2008. Public sector agencies like hospitals, school boards and municipalities must comply with its requirements by 2010 and private sector agencies like stores, banks, hotels and doctors' offices must comply by January 2012.

Following the requirements of this standard, the hospital has created an Accessible Customer Service policy which includes procedures covering the use of assistive devices, use of service animals, use of support people, notices of service disruption, training of staff, volunteers and board members and a feedback mechanism for public input.

The new policy is consistent with the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity. It will be made available both internally, to all staff, volunteers and affiliates, and externally to the public at large, and it will be available in a variety of formats (Braille, large print, electronic version, etc.) upon request.

Everyone who works, volunteers or has input into the policies at Woodstock General Hospital will be trained in the contents and application of the new WGH Accessible Customer Service policy.

## WHAT IS DISABILITY?

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The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 defines a disability as:

(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”)

## DISABILITY IN ONTARIO

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About 1.85 million people in Ontario have a disability according to this definition. That’s roughly one in seven people, or 14 per cent of the total population.

Nationwide, Canadians with disabilities have a combined spending power of \$21 to \$25 billion per year; this is bound to rise substantially as the seniors population in Canada doubles by 2025.

## WHAT IS ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE?

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Accessible customer service is flexible service that meets the needs of individuals, including individuals with disabilities. Under the provisions of this act, as well as under the Ontario Human Rights Code, no one can be refused service because of a disability. We at WGH are committed to providing the highest possible level of customer service to all of the people we serve.

To put this commitment into action when serving people with disabilities is quite simple.

We will put the person first, understanding that some methods of service may not work for all people and wherever possible providing our services in a way that works best for the individual. We will welcome comments and suggestions on how to improve in accessible customer service. And we will provide as much notice as possible if there is a disruption in service that is used by people with disabilities.

When in doubt about whether a person is disabled, or about how best to meet their needs, we will simply ask. “How can I help you?” is a good opening to a positive, courteous interaction. All that remains is to listen to the response and respect it.

### ACCESSIBILITY AT WGH

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Here at Woodstock General Hospital, we have an Accessibility Plan which is reviewed on a yearly basis with input from an external panel of community members with disabilities. We also have an accessible customer service policy created by our Accessibility Working Group, a WGH team which meets regularly to discuss accessibility issues in the hospital. Both documents are available on the WGH website.

The hospital's Accessibility Co-ordinator is Janis Humeston. She can be reached at Ext. 2286.

## **ASSISTIVE DEVICES**

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Some people living with disabilities may require assistive devices to help them function and increase their participation in routine activities. These may be mobility devices like wheelchairs, walkers or scooters; computer software or hardware; or sensory devices such as hearing aids.

We must make allowances for assistive devices in the hospital. We cannot prevent people living with a disability from participating in our services when they have an assistive device. Instead we should welcome these devices, since they can help us serve that person in a meaningful way.

## **SERVICE ANIMALS**

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A service animal is an animal specifically designated and trained to assist someone living with a disability. They are designated by the job they do, rather than by their breed or type. We are accustomed to seeing working guide dogs or even a seizure dog in our daily lives, but there are also rats, mice, cats, parrots, monkeys, pigs, snakes, or even miniature horses being used as service animals.

Anyone who requires the assistance of a service animal should have proof of that animal's function, in the form of a signed note from a Doctor or Nurse. If a person with a service animal is unable to provide this proof, the animal may be denied access to the building, but some other mutually-agreed upon accommodation should be arranged. For example, if the animal cannot accompany the person, perhaps a support person could come along, or a staff member could assist the person while they access our services.

Our accessibility policy states that service animals will be allowed within the facility, unless the animal is excluded by law or hospital policy surrounding infection prevention and control, health and safety or hygiene concerns. In that case an alternative arrangement should be made, as described above.

## **SUPPORT PEOPLE**

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Some people living with disabilities may require the help of a support person. This might be a paid professional, volunteer, family member or friend who may accompany the person to the hospital to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with otherwise accessing goods and services.

A support person accompanying a person with a disability is to be permitted access to all hospital facilities. Some restrictions may apply where the service delivered would pose a threat to the well-being of others or the support person, for example during radiological procedures or in the operating room. The hospital will make alternate arrangements in such cases.

## **FEEDBACK MECHANISMS**

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Notices in customer service areas will notify patients and visitors that their feedback is welcomed for the continual improvement of service.

Contact information will be provided on the Woodstock General Hospital website so that members of the general public can provide feedback regarding accessibility issues. These issues will also be addressed in inpatient exit surveys. Patient and visitor feedback, both positive and negative, can be entered by staff members into the SERS system for tracking and follow-up by appropriate managers.

## **NOTICE OF SERVICE DISRUPTION**

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The Woodstock General Hospital will give notice of temporary disruptions to services or facilities used by people with disabilities, including the reason(s) for the disruption, anticipated length of the disruption and a description of any available alternative facilities, services or resources.

This notice will be posted both at the hospital in a conspicuous public area and on the WGH website, as required.

## DOCUMENTS

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We generate many documents at the hospital to communicate various bits of information to patients and visitors. There are some people with disabilities for whom these traditional documents can be difficult to use and understand. For this reason, we are committed to making our documents available to people in a variety of formats that suit their needs, upon request.

Alternate formats for people with visual disabilities could include large print, electronic format (we could e-mail documents to the home) or Braille. Other people with disabilities may prefer to have a document read aloud to them. Someone for whom English is a second language may find a diagram helpful, or may want to call on the services of an interpreter. **A comprehensive list of people willing to act as interpreters is available on The Artery.** This list also includes information on how to contact an American Sign Language Interpreter to assist a person with a hearing disability, upon request, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you are interacting with someone who is relying on the services of an interpreter, be sure to address the person directly rather than focusing on the interpreter.

Under the provisions of the AODA, the hospital must make all documents related to our accessibility plan, policy and procedures available to the general public upon request. These documents, too, should be made available in the format that best suits the user.

## KEEP IN MIND

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- Each person may need a slightly different kind of accommodation.
- Some individuals may never disclose any information about their disability or may refuse accommodation; we must respect this.
- The principles of accessible customer service can apply to both internal and external customers (ie. co-workers ).

### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- A range of functional limitations, from minor difficulties in moving or co-ordinating parts of the body, through muscle weakness, pain, fatigue, tremors or paralysis
- Physical disabilities can be congenital, like Muscular Dystrophy or Arthritis, or acquired, like tendonitis
- Physical disabilities can be permanent, as in permanent paralysis; temporary, as in recovery after surgery or injury; or variable, as in Multiple Sclerosis
- A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:
  - Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or gripping a door knob
  - Move around independently
  - Control the speed or co-ordination of movements
  - Reach, pull or manipulate objects
  - Have strength or endurance



### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space - don't touch, move or lean on them
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service
- Provide seating for those who cannot stand in line
- Be patient - give the person time to proceed
- When giving directions to people with mobility limitations, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs and hills.

# HEARING DISABILITIES

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## WHAT THIS MEANS:

- Hearing loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words
- Hearing loss may be congenital or acquired
- Hearing loss may occur or be experienced differently in each ear
- The person may be unable to use a public telephone, understand speech in noisy environments, or pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers, depending on their level of hearing loss



## TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Some deaf people may use sign language or require the services of an American Sign Language interpreter to communicate. Always direct your attention to the deaf person and not the interpreter.
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information, but keep in mind that for the culturally deaf, who communicate using sign language exclusively direct word-for-word translation may be very difficult
- Face the person with the hearing disability head-on and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth
- Attempt to talk in a quiet space. Hearing aids can amplify background noises as well as other nearby conversations.
- Don't shout
- Speak clearly
- Consider providing information or directions in alternate forms (verbal, written, pictures)

### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- A range of disabilities, from slightly reduced visual acuity to total blindness
- Vision loss can result in:
  - Difficulty reading or seeing faces
  - Difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
  - Inability to differentiate colours or gauge distances
  - A narrow field of vision
  - The need for bright light or contrast
  - Night blindness
- The person may be unable to use a public telephone, understand speech in noisy environments, or pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers, depending on their level of hearing loss



### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Verbally identify yourself to the person and gain permission before making any physical contact
- Do not touch or speak to any service animal person may have with them
- Be precise when giving directions
- Do not assume that the person cannot see you
- Verbally describe the setting, form and location as necessary
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull.

## DEAF-BLINDNESS

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### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss
- The person may have significant difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities
- People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, and / or communication boards
- Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an intervenor, who relays information, facilitates auditory and visual information and acts as a sighted guide. The intervenor will sign on the individual's hand

### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Direct your attention to the person, not the intervenor
- Understand that communication can take some time; be patient

## SPEECH DISABILITIES

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### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- It involves the partial or total loss of the ability to speak
- The person may have difficulty with pronunciation, pitch, volume, hoarseness, breathiness, stuttering or slurring



### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Whenever possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Verify your understanding; ask yes/no questions
- Offer alternate forms of communication (ie. written)
- Be patient; don't interrupt or finish their sentences for them

## INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- A person's ability to think and reason is affected
- This may be caused by genetic factors, like Downs Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins, as in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders
- The person may have difficulty with understanding written and spoken information, processing conceptual information, perception of sensory information and memory



### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Use clear, simple language
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- Remember that the person is an adult; and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions
- Be patient and verify your understanding

## MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

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### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- It includes an range of disorders, usually defined as anxiety, mood or behaviour focused
- People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated, act aggressively, be perceived as pushy or abrupt, be unable to make a decision, or exhibit erratic behaviour

### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Treat each person as an individual and try to make him or her as comfortable as possible while attending to his or her needs
- Try to reduce stress or anxiety
- Stay calm; focus on the service they need and how you can help

## LEARNING DISABILITIES

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### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- It includes a range of disorders, both visible and invisible, that affect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing
- People with this disability have average to above-average intelligence, but take in and process information differently
- People with this disability may have difficulty with reading, problem-solving, time management, way-finding and processing information



### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Respond to any and all requests for verbal information and assistance with courtesy
- Be patient and allow for extra time when necessary
- Remember that the person is an adult; and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions

## OTHER DISABILITIES

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### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- Smell: The inability to sense smells, or hypersensitivity to odours
- Touch: Affects a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration or pressure, either in reduced ability or hypersensitivity
- Taste: Can limit the experience of the four taste sensations (sweet, bitter, salty and sour)

### TIPS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- Don't judge; simply offer assistance and be patient

## ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

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For more information on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005, or the various forms of disabilities, please contact the following:

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario  
1-888-520-5828 or 1-888-335-6611 (TTY)  
<http://www.accesson.ca/>

Office for Disability Issues (Government of Canada)  
1-800-622-6232 or 1-800-926-9105 (TTY)  
<http://www.sdc.gc.ca/>

Government of Ontario: Equal Opportunity  
<http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/>

City of Woodstock  
519-539-1291  
<http://www.city.woodstock.on.ca/>

CNIB 519-752-6831 or 416-480-8645 (TTY)  
<http://www.cnib.ca/>

Canadian Hearing Society (London Regional Office)  
519-667-3325 or 519-667-3323 (TTY)

Canadian Mental Health Association of Oxford County  
(519)-539-8055 Crisis Line: (519)-539-8342  
[branch@cmhaoxford.on.ca](mailto:branch@cmhaoxford.on.ca)  
<http://www.cmhaoxfore.on.ca/>

Community Care Access Centre-Oxford  
519-539-1284  
[mail@oxford.ccac-ont.ca](mailto:mail@oxford.ccac-ont.ca)

# HOW TO DOCUMENT ACCESSIBILITY FEEDBACK USING THE SERS SYSTEM



- Select the icon titled “SERS LIVE– Online Incident Form” on any WGH computer desktop

- Log in using your first initial and last name– the same is used for the password

Please select the task you wish to perform:

- Select “Report event”

- Complete the details of the event and select “ENVIRONMENT” under General Event Type. When completed select “Next”

- Fill out the details of the person affected. When completed, select “Next”

- Complete the event details including date & time, location, etc. When completed select ‘Next’

- Under Specific Event Type, select “accessibility concern”. When completed select “Next”

- When you have completed the details you will be able to view the event summary. Make any necessary changes as required

- Once you’re satisfied that everything is accurate, click “Submit Event”

*Thanks for documenting accessibility feedback in the SERS system!*