Accessible Customer Service Policy

Intent

All goods and services provided by Autism Ontario will follow the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity.

This policy meets the requirements of the customer service standards included in the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.* It applies to the provision of goods and services to the public or other third parties, not to the goods themselves.

Definitions

Assistive device: A technical aid, communication device, or other instrument that is used to maintain or improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities. Personal assistive devices are typically devices that customers bring with them, such as a wheelchair, walker, or a personal oxygen tank, and that might assist in hearing, seeing, communicating, moving, breathing, remembering, or reading.

Disability: As defined by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, and the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, refers to:

- 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;
- A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- A learning disability, or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- A mental disorder; or
- An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

Guide dog: A highly trained working dog that has been trained at one of the facilities listed in Ontario Regulation 58 under the *Blind Persons' Rights Act*, to provide mobility, safety, and increased independence for people who are blind.

Service animal: A service animal for a person with a disability if:

1. The animal can be readily identified as one that is being used by the person for reasons relating to the person's disability, as a result of visual indicators such as the vest or harness worn by the animal; or
2. The person provides documentation from a member of one of the following regulated health professional colleges confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability:
    - College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario;
    - College of Chiropractors of Ontario;
    - College of Nurses of Ontario;
    - College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario;
    - College of Optometrists of Ontario;
    - College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario;
    - College of Physiotherapists of Ontario;
    - College of Psychologists and Behavior Analysts of Ontario; or
    - College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario.

Support person: In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies them in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs, or access to goods and services.

Guidelines

The Provision of Goods and Services to Persons with Disabilities

Autism Ontario will make every reasonable effort to ensure that its policies, practices, and procedures are consistent with the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity by:

- Ensuring that all of the individuals and families we serve receive the same value and quality;
- Allowing people with disabilities to do things in their own ways, at their own pace when accessing goods and services, as long as this does not present a health and safety risk;
- Using alternative methods, when possible, to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the same services, in the same place and in a similar manner;
- Taking into account individual accommodation needs when providing goods and services; and
- Communicating in a manner that takes into account the individual's disability.

The Use of Assistive Devices

Individual's Own Assistive Devices

Persons with disabilities may use their own assistive devices as required when accessing goods or services provided by the organization.

In cases where the assistive device presents a health and safety concern or where accessibility might be an issue, other reasonable measures will be used to ensure the access of goods and services, up to the point of undue hardship.

For example, open flames and oxygen tanks cannot be near one another. Therefore, the accommodation of a person with an oxygen tank might involve ensuring the individual is in a location that would be considered safe for both the individual and the organization.

Alternatively, where elevators are not present and where a person requires assistive devices for the purposes of mobility, service will be provided in a location that meets the needs of the individual.

Guide Dogs and Service Animals

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a guide dog or service animal will be allowed access to premises that are open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law. "No pet" policies do not apply to guide dogs or service animals.

Staff may respectfully ask if an animal is a service animal and will not ask the nature of the person's disability or purpose of the animal.

Food Service Areas

A person with a disability who is accompanied by guide dog or service animal will be allowed access to food service areas that are open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law.

Other types of service animals are only permitted into areas where food is served, sold, or offered for sale due to the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, Ontario Regulation 493/17.

Exclusion Guidelines

If an individual's guide dog or service animal is excluded by law (see applicable laws below), Autism Ontario will offer alternative methods to enable the person with a disability to access goods and services, when possible. For example, the organization might accommodate a person's disability by securing the animal in a safe location and offering the assistance of an employee to facilitate the delivery of goods and services.

Applicable Laws

Dog Owners' Liability Act, 2005: If there is a conflict between a provision of this legislation or of a regulation under this or any other act relating to banned breeds (such as pit bulls) and a provision of a by-law passed by a municipality relating to these breeds, the provision that is more restrictive in relation to controls or bans on these breeds prevails. Staff will respectfully explain that the service animal must be removed from the public area due to a municipal by-law and make alternate arrangements or provide the service outside the public area.

Recognizing a Guide Dog or Service Animal:

If it is not readily apparent that the animal is being used by the person for reasons relating to their disability, Autism Ontario may request verification from the individual.

Care and Control of the Animal:

The person who is accompanied by a guide dog or service animal is responsible for maintaining care and control of the animal at all times.

Allergies and Other Health and Safety Concerns

If a health and safety concern presents itself, for example, in the form of a severe allergy to the animal, Autism Ontario will make all reasonable efforts to meet the needs of all individuals. Pursuant to the organization's obligations under the *Human Rights Code* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, each customer's accommodation needs will be considered on a case-by-case basis, up to the point of undue hardship.

Due diligence needs to be paid to address health and safety requirements. For example, if a person's health and safety could be seriously affected by the presence of a service animal on the premises open to the public, management must fully analyze all options for safely accommodating the service animal. Options could include creating distance between the two individuals to eliminate in-person contact, changing the time the two individuals receive service, or using air purifiers and other measures that could allow the person to use their service animal on the premises.

In very exceptional circumstances where a service animal becomes out of control, causing a clear disruption or a threat to the health and safety of others, and the animal's behavior is not corrected by the owner, a person with a disability can be asked to remove their service animal from the premises.

As a courtesy, particularly if the person and service animal have been in attendance on the premises for a long time, staff may ask whether the animal requires water, may designate an area in which the service animal can relieve itself, or ask whether the staff can be of assistance pertaining to the service animal.

The Use of Support Persons

If a person with a disability is accompanied by a support person, Autism Ontario will ensure that both persons may enter the premises together and that the individual is not prevented from having access to the support person.

There may be times where seating and availability prevent the individual and support person from sitting beside each other. In these situations, the organization will make every reasonable attempt to resolve the issue.

In situations where confidential information might be discussed, consent will be obtained from the individual before any potentially confidential information is mentioned.

Admission Fees

Where the organization requires a support person to accompany a person with a disability, and where the person with a disability has agreed to the accompaniment, the organization will not charge the support person any fees or fares.

Notice of Disruptions in Service

Service disruptions may occur for reasons that may or may not be within the control or knowledge of Autism Ontario. In the event of any temporary disruptions to facilities or services that persons with disabilities rely on to access or use goods or services, reasonable efforts will be made to provide advance notice. In some circumstances, such as in the situation of unplanned temporary disruptions, advance notice may not be possible.

If a notification needs to be posted, the following information will be included unless it is not readily available or known:

- Goods or services that are disrupted or unavailable;
- Reason for the disruption;
- Anticipated duration; and
- A description of alternative services or options.

Notification Options

When disruptions occur, Autism Ontario will provide notice by:

- Posting notices in conspicuous places, including at the point of disruption, at the main entrance, and the nearest accessible entrance to the service disruption, or on the organization's website and social media platforms
- Contacting customers with appointments;
- Verbally notifying customers when they make a reservation or appointment; or
- By any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances.

Notice of Availability of Documents:

This document and other policies and practices related to the provision of goods and services for people with disabilities will be made available on request, and when an alternate format is requested and all reasonable efforts will be made to provide them in the requested format.

Service User Feedback

Autism Ontario shall provide the individuals and families we serve with the opportunity to provide feedback on the service provided to people with disabilities. Information about the feedback process will be readily available to all service users and notice of the process will be made available on the Autism Ontario website. Feedback forms, along with alternate methods of providing feedback verbally (in person or by telephone) or written (handwritten, delivered, website, or e-mail), will be

available upon request. Feedback forms may also be sent to individuals and families who attend Autism Ontario events.

Submitting Feedback

Customers can submit feedback to:

Toll Free: 1-800-472-7789
hr@autismontario.com,
1179 King St. W, #004
Toronto, ON M6K 3C5

Users of our services who wish to provide feedback by completing an on-site feedback form or verbally can do so to any Autism Ontario employee.

Those who provide formal feedback will receive acknowledgement of their feedback, along with any resulting actions based on concerns or complaints that were submitted.

Training

Training will be provided to:

- Every employee of or volunteer with Autism Ontario;
- Every person who participates in developing the policies of Autism Ontario; and
- Every other person who provides goods, services, or facilities on behalf of Autism Ontario.

Training Provisions

Regardless of the format, training will cover the following:

- A review of the purpose of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*;
- A review of the requirements of the customer service standards;
- Instructions on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities;
- Instructions on how to interact with people with disabilities who:
    - Use assistive devices;
    - Require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal; or
    - Require the use of a support person (including the handling of admission fees);
- Instructions on how to use equipment or devices that are available at our premises or that we provide that may help people with disabilities;
- Instructions on what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing our services; and
- Policies, procedures, and practices of the organization pertaining to providing accessible service to persons with disabilities.

Training Schedule

Autism Ontario will provide training as soon as practicable. Training will be provided to new employees, volunteers, agents, and contractors within the first three months of employment or involvement with the organization. Revised training will be provided in the event of changes to legislation, procedures, policies, or practices.

Administration

If you have any questions or concerns about this policy or its related procedures, please contact:

Toll Free: 1-800-472-7789
hr@autismontario.com,
1179 King St. W, #004
Toronto, ON M6K 3C5

This policy and its related procedures will be reviewed as required in the event of legislative changes or changes to organization procedures.

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