

Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

Consumer Guide

The Accessibility for
Manitobans Act

About this Guide

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service became a regulation under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act in November 2015. This law sets out rules to remove barriers to make goods and services more accessible.

Many people in Manitoba face barriers at some time in their lives. Whether they have a disability or face barriers due to illness, injury or age, Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Customer Service ensures that customer service is for **everyone**, including you!

This guide offers easy to read information to help people understand how the law applies to them.

What this guide covers

You'll find information on the most important parts of the law.

What this guide does not cover

The guide does **not** explain everything the law covers. Please visit www.AccessibilityMB.ca for more information. Also, the guide does **not** provide legal advice.

About the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

Who does the standard help?

Many people in Manitoba face barriers to efficient, fair and respectful customer service. Negative attitudes are the most common barrier!

People face a variety of barriers that keep them from using a service intended for the general public. While some disabilities are obvious, many more are not. An injury can affect accessibility in the short-term, and aging can have a long-term impact.

Because there are lots of conditions that reduce accessibility, the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service focuses on **removing barriers**. And what benefits people with disabilities, often benefits everyone. For example, automatic door openers, the electric toothbrush and closed captioning were designed to help people with disabilities, but they benefit all of us.

What are the barriers to accessibility?

- **Attitudinal** barriers are beliefs that limit opportunities available to people with disabilities.
- **Architectural and physical** barriers are features of buildings or spaces that cause problems for many people.
- **Information or communication** barriers prevent people from easily understanding information.
- **Technology** barriers often relate to information and communications. Technology can remove barriers, as texting has for persons who are Deaf, or can create complications, as kiosks do when they rely on users having vision and dexterity in their fingers.

- **Systemic** barriers are policies, practices or procedures that discriminate against people with disabilities.

What services does the law affect?

The standard affects all businesses, organizations and institutions with at least one employee. That means it affects almost all stores, offices or agencies where you buy goods or receive a service. This guide calls all of the above, service providers.

When does the law take affect?

- The **Manitoba government's** deadline to follow the standard was **November 2016**.
- **Public sector organizations' deadline**, such as school divisions, colleges, universities, health authorities, Crown corporations and large municipalities, was **November 2017**.
- **All other organizations, including businesses**, have a deadline of **November 2018** – three years after the standard became law.

What services aren't affected by the law?

There are some services that will not be affected because they are regulated by the Government of Canada. These include banks, air and rail transportation and postal services.

It is important to understand Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Customer Service. The standard sets out rules about the way a business or organization provides goods or services to people disabled by barriers, but **not** what goods it offers.

What does Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Customer Service say?

The standard says everyone should receive efficient, fair and respectful service.

The standard asks service providers to remove barriers to customer service in nine ways:

1. Remove barriers to **communication**. For example, use easy-to-read fonts and plain language.
2. Welcome the use of **assistive devices** to remove or reduce barriers. Examples are hearing technology, descriptive videos or wheelchairs.
3. Welcome **support persons** to enter and remain with the customer. Avoid charges for a support person when possible. Give advance notice to customers if there is an admission fee for support persons.
4. Welcome **people with service animals** to enter a restaurant, store, hotel, taxi or other place where the public, customers or guests are generally allowed.
5. Create **barrier-free access** to goods and services. For example, remove boxes and other tripping hazards from hallways, shovel snow off of ramps and entrance ways. Aisles should be wide enough for all to pass through.
6. Inform the public when there are **temporary barriers** to buildings, spaces or services. An example is when an elevator is out of order.

7. Introduce a process to receive and respond to **feedback**, including what action will be taken to respond to complaints. Make the information about the feedback process available to the public on-site and on websites, and offer alternate formats (e.g., in print, on a phone line, or in person).
8. Ensure employees (including front line staff, policy-makers and managers) receive **training** about *The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)* and The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), as well as training on how to serve people disabled by barriers.
9. **Public events:** The government, regional health authorities, crown corporations, Manitoba's large municipalities, school divisions, colleges and universities must also make their hearings and consultation processes accessible by:
 - announcing events in a manner that is accessible
 - holding events in accessible places
 - inviting requests for disability accommodations

This requirement is recommended, but optional for the private and non-profit sectors.

Some questions you may have regarding accessibility

If you face barriers, you may have many questions about how the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service will affect you. In the next few pages, you'll find answers to some common questions.

What if I need assistance when I enter a business or organization?

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service tells service providers to train all staff to ask – How can I help? – and to know the kinds of respectful help that customers may require.

Am I still a customer, even if I am not buying something?

The word customer is used in a very broad way by this standard. Every Manitoba organization that has at least one employee is considered a service provider, and everyone who receives service from these organizations is considered a customer. This includes students, clients and program participants.

What can I expect from service providers?

- You can expect your service provider to support accessibility and display a positive attitude.
- You can expect to be treated with respect and consideration.
- When speaking with you in person, the service provider's conversation should begin with an offer to help, and include an invitation to explain what, if any, help you require.
- Sometimes, there may be a sign encouraging you to ask for assistance.
- The service provider's language should be respectful and no one should ask what disability you have.
- No assumptions should be made about what you can or cannot do.
- Service providers should be patient when accommodating your needs.

How will service providers make communication easier for me?

- Service providers must try to communicate with you in a way you can understand. You should feel free to explain your communication needs.
- Staff should face you and speak clearly if you request.
- If there is a queuing system, to let customers know who is next in line, visual cues should be spoken and audio cues should also be visual.
- If you are hard-of-hearing or are Deaf, staff may offer to use a pen and paper.
- When you set a meeting in advance with the Manitoba government or a public service listed on page two, you may request an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter.

What about presentations, including PowerPoint presentations and videos that I cannot see (or hear)?

- The audience should be asked, preferably in advance, whether anyone requires a spoken description. (Video sharing sites may also provide basic captioning of videos made available electronically.)
- Presenters may also provide you with printed documents or electronic presentations in advance of the presentation.
- For easy viewing, you may request at least a size 14 or 16 font, non-serif (plain) script, with black on white for clear contrast.

What about access to information and services provided on websites?

- Because many websites are not accessible, and not everyone has a computer, service providers should always offer other ways to access information, fill out forms or pay bills.
- Because documents available electronically are sometimes not accessible for everyone, these documents should be made available in Microsoft Word, rather than a PDF, and provided in other formats upon request.
- In future, the Manitoba government will introduce an accessibility standard for information and communication that will provide specific guidelines.

What if I am accompanied by someone who helps me with daily activities (also called a support person), like shopping or seeing a show?

- Service providers must welcome support people, but recognize that you are the customer, not the support person.
- The service provider will face and speak to you.
- Where possible, there will be no entrance charge or fee for your support person. If there is a charge for support people, the organization should make that information available in advance (e.g., on its website or through on-site posters and bulletins).

What if I need my walker to get around, or if I need my computer or any other assistive device to help me communicate?

- Service providers must allow all assistive devices.
- Service providers will not touch assistive devices without your permission. They will help keep your mobility devices within reach.

What about my service animal that is trained to help me with my disability and goes everywhere I go?

- Service providers must welcome service animals. Service animals have the right to be in any place where the general public is allowed.
- Service providers will not pet, feed, touch or distract your service animal, without your permission.
- You should never be charged extra to have a service animal accompany you.
- For more information, visit the [Manitoba Human Rights Commission website](#).

How should service providers address physical barriers?

- The Manitoba Building Code (Manitoba) guides accessible construction and renovation of buildings. The Customer Service Standard only addresses how to ensure barrier-free physical access to goods and services.
- If a building is not accessible, service providers should offer another way to provide access to goods or services. For example, they may offer a carry-out service.
- Hallways or corridors should be fully accessible, without boxes or containers blocking the way.

- Ramps and doorways should be cleared.
- There should be enough space for a wheelchair or scooter to pass.
- Waiting rooms, restaurants, bars and other public places should have spaces designed to accommodate persons in wheelchairs.
- Service providers that offer features to improve accessibility, such as elevators or ramps, must let you know when these are not available.

How will I be notified when accessible services or features (like an elevator or accessible washroom) are not available?

- Service providers should use signs, announcements and other means of accessible communication (e.g., on websites) to notify customers that accessible services are temporarily unavailable.
- If accessible services are interrupted, reasonable accommodation should be provided wherever possible.

What training do service providers offer to their staff?

- Service providers must train their staff, volunteers and other persons who represent them, to understand barriers and how to serve people with disabilities.
- Service providers must train the managers who develop policies, procedures and practices affecting customer service.

- The training should cover:
 - the communication needs of customers and clients
 - how to help people who use assistive devices
 - policies regarding support persons
 - policies regarding service animals
 - what to do when accessible services aren't available
 - how to receive and provide customer feedback

The Disabilities Issues Office has a Handbook for Employers and Tips for Employees regarding Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Customer Service. It is available on the Accessibility Manitoba website at www.AccessibilityMB.ca.

My community is holding a forum to tell the public about a new residential development. Can I request American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation?

- You can request ASL interpretation and other disability accommodations for public events hosted by government, regional health authorities, Crown corporations, school divisions, colleges, universities and larger municipalities
- Providing disability accommodations is recommended, but optional, for public events hosted by smaller municipalities, the private and non-profit sectors.

If in doubt, contact the event organizers to find out how you can participate and what disability accommodations are available.

How will accessible organizations ensure they are barrier-free going forward?

- Service providers must have policies and processes in place to deliver accessible customer service.
- Larger public sector organizations, businesses and not-for-profit organizations with at least 20 employees, must document their policies. They must also let the public know the documents are available upon request.
- If the policy does not exist or you are not allowed to see it, ask to speak with someone in charge, or arrange a meeting or phone call. If all avenues are closed to you, contact the Disabilities Issues Office.

If I wish to congratulate a business for great service, or if I have an idea on how to improve accessible services, how do I provide my feedback?

- Most service providers want to hear from their customers, whether it's a comment, a complaint or a question. A positive note is encouraging and advice can help improve services.
- The Customer Service Standard requires all service providers to give you a way to offer feedback about their service and receive a response. The response should let you know what action the organization takes.

Why should I give feedback to service providers?

Feedback is a good way to help providers serve you better. You could give feedback:

- when you get goods and services
- when you have ideas about how providers can improve their service

How do I give feedback to service providers?

Providers must have a feedback process that allows you to offer comments in any of the following ways:

- in person
- by telephone
- in writing
- by email
- on website

It can also be by another method discussed by you and the service provider.

What do I tell the provider?

When you give feedback about a barrier, you may want to tell the provider:

- when you experienced a barrier
- what the barrier was
- that you are a person with a disability or are otherwise affected by barriers
- how the barrier prevented you from accessing the service
- ideas about how they can remove the barrier
- how they can reach you if they have questions

What should providers do with my feedback?

- The service provider should inform you that your feedback has been received.
- If you have advised the service provider about a barrier, when possible, the service provider should try to correct that situation.
- If the issue is not easily fixed, someone should get back to you to discuss the reasons, and to explore alternative accommodations that can help provide you with the service you require.

How do I learn more about the accessibility policies and practices of an organization?

Organizations with 20 or more employees and public sector organizations must make documentation available in an accessible format on request, including:

- policies, practices and procedures on providing accessible goods or services
- a description of the process to receive and respond to feedback
- an employee training policy, a summary of training content and when it is provided

The Manitoba government and public sector organizations that are connected to government, also have accessibility plans posted on their websites.

What is reasonable accommodation?

Reasonable accommodation is attempting to remove barriers to full participation in society, and it often involves a simple and inexpensive change to how something is typically done. An example is offering a delivery service for those people who face barriers to entering your establishment.

If a service provider does not offer an accommodation, ask to speak with someone in charge to discuss possible reasonable accommodation. An accommodation is reasonable when there is a process in place and the efforts taken are sufficient. Sometimes an accommodation can become so difficult that it becomes unreasonable or creates an undue hardship.

Some factors that determine whether reasonable accommodation to the point of undue hardship has been made include:

- health and safety concerns
- impact on other employees and service users
- impact on other protected rights
- financial costs

What do I do if a provider does not follow the standard?

If you are having trouble getting goods or services from a provider because of accessibility barriers:

1. You can give feedback.

You may want to give the service provider ideas on how they can serve you better:

- Tell the provider about the trouble you have with their service.
- Make sure the provider understands what you think is wrong with their service. Explain why you cannot access their goods or services.
- Explain your needs to the service provider. Try to help the provider understand your needs.
- Explain to the service provider how they can help you.
- Be specific. Let the provider know what they can do to fix the problem. You can explain what other providers do when they serve you.

- Ask the service provider about their feedback process and what actions are taken in responding to complaints.
- You do not need to tell the provider what disability you have.

2. You can learn more about the standard.

You can visit www.AccessibilityMB.ca for information about the Customer Service Standard, or to read the actual regulation. Think about whether or not the provider is following the rules under the standard. If it is not, you can remind the provider of what they need to do.

3. You can contact an organization that helps people with disabilities.

There are a number of service providers that work with people with disabilities. It may be a good idea to contact one or more of them. Many service providers like to know if the people they represent are having problems getting services. Some may give you information or advice. They may also have people you can talk to if you have problems with a provider. To find an organization, visit the United Way or its online service: www.mb.211.ca and search People with Disabilities.

4. You can contact the Disabilities Issues Office.

The Disabilities Issues Office is part of the Manitoba government, and it is the main office working on The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. It helps businesses and other service providers learn how to become accessible and to meet the accessibility standards.

Quick Links

For more information, visit www.AccessibilityMB.ca

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service (also available in Microsoft Word format)

[Accessibility Standard for Customer Service](#)

Brochure on Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Customer Service (also available in a Microsoft Word format)

[Brochure for Customer Service Standard](#)

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (also available in Microsoft Word format)

[The Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#)

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For more information go to

www.AccessibilityMB.ca

or contact

Disabilities Issues Office

630 – 240 Graham Avenue

Winnipeg MB R3C 0J7

Phone: **204-945-7613** in Winnipeg

Toll free: **1-800-282-8069**, Ext. **7613**

Fax: **204-948-2896**

Email: **dio@gov.mb.ca**

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