

Information and Communications Best Practices for Accessibility

Slide 1

The Human Resources Professionals Association is pleased to present the webinar series: The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and its regulations.

We are proud to introduce volume 3 of this series:

An Introduction to Accessible Information and Communications: Best Practices.

Please allow 60 minutes to view this webinar.

Slide 2

Navigating the webinar: What you need to know.

The icons on the bottom of the screen allow you to navigate the webinar. The arrow pointing right, is the play button. Use this button to play the current slide.

The square comprised of two vertical lines, is the pause button. Use this button to pause the current slide. The small arrows are used to go to the previous slide or the next slide, allowing you to navigate forward or backward through the webinar.

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Slide 3

Downloading attachments.

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A box labelled "attachments" appears above it. Mouse over the box to highlight the contents you wish to download.

When the "Save to My Computer" message appears, click on the link to download and save to your computer for future reference.

Slide 4

Please note:

This webinar is not legal advice.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 and other laws in this webinar are the final authorities.

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Slide 5

This Webinar has three sections, with each section answering an important question about accessible information and communications:

Section A provides answers to Why have accessible information and communications? on slides 7 to 15.

Section B addresses Why is accessible information and communications important to your business? on slides 16 to 24.

Section C outlines How can you deliver best practices in information and communications? on slides 25 to 63. This section provides best practices for providing and receiving accessible information and communications within your organization. It also touches on information and communications requirements in the customer service standard.

Slide 6

The final proposed Accessible Information and Communications Standard is not a law as of March 26, 2010. The purpose of this webinar is to provide practical information and best practices about accessible information and communications.

The information provides an understanding of:

How accessible information and communications is important to Ontarians and good for business.

How to apply five practical steps to start developing a plan for accessible information and communications in your organization.

What are some best practices, including alternate formats and assistive technologies for common communications vehicles.

Where information and communications are requirements in the customer service standard.

Slide 7

Section A is Why have accessible information and communications?

Slide 8

Who are people with disabilities?

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 known as the AODA uses the same definition of disability as the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The definition recognizes visible and non-visible disabilities. The broad range includes physical disabilities, vision, sensory, intellectual or developmental, learning, mental health disabilities and multiple disabilities. The definition includes disabilities of different severity, and disabilities the effects of which may come and go, like arthritis.

Slide 9

The AODA defines a barrier as anything that stops a person with a disability from fully taking part in society because of that disability. A barrier may be:

Physical or structural, examples of which are found in the design of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and room layout. Information and communications are barriers for people to receive or convey information. Examples are small print size, low colour contrast between text and background, confusing design of printed materials and the use of language that is not clear or plain. Some people may have difficulties watching or hearing audio and video presentations. It could also be that the information is not within the reach of a person with physical disabilities.

Technological or lack of it can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers and telephones can all present barriers. Systemic barriers can occur through policies and procedures. These are any practices or rules that restrict people with disabilities from gaining access to your services. For example, denying access to a person with a service animal.

Attitudinal is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome. Some people don't know how to communicate with those who have visible or non-visible disabilities. Some people simply discriminate against people with disabilities because of stereotypes. They may feel that they might offend the individual with a disability by offering help; or, they ignore or avoid people with disabilities altogether.

Slide 10

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, also known as the AODA, became law on June 13, 2005.

The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement and enforce mandatory accessibility standards in five key areas of daily living: Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation, and Built Environment.

The accessibility standards will apply to private and public sector organizations across Ontario.

Besides the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act also known as the AODA, there are other laws on providing access to people with disabilities. Laws that already state people with disabilities deserve respect and equal opportunity are: the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982; the Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985; and the Ontario Human Rights Code, 1992.

The goal of the AODA is an accessible Ontario by 2025.

The AODA is covered in more detail in our first webinar: The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

Slide 11

The first accessibility standard created under the authority of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, is the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service which came into force on January 1, 2008 also known as the customer service standard.

The customer service standard applies to all organizations, both public and private, that provide goods or services either directly to the public or to other organizations in Ontario (third parties) and that have one or more employees in Ontario.

The details of this standard are covered in our webinar #2: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07.

Later in this webinar we will review some areas where information and communications are requirements in the customer service standard.

Slide 12

A proposed Accessible Information and Communications Standard has been submitted to the Minister of Community and Social Services for consideration as law.

The proposed standard outlines how businesses and organizations may be required to create, provide and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible for people with disabilities.

The proposed standard was presented by a standards development committee, made up of representatives from the disability and business communities.

Slide 13

Some considerations for accessible information and communications include:

Accessibility is a component of good communications planning. It is important to consider the communication needs of your entire audience when preparing materials.

Advanced planning and preparation of materials in multiple formats can reduce the time and cost required to respond to individual requests.

The results are improved customer service. Producing print or multimedia materials that are targeted at a population that is likely to have multiple format needs, such as people with disabilities and seniors is smart planning. Many seniors favour material in large print, and people with a hearing loss benefit from captioning on video presentations or video streaming.

Think about all the forms that sending and receiving information and communications can take. There's electronic, verbal, audio, or written to name a few. How can you improve accessibility in communicating with clients, buyers and the public?

Slide 14

Accessibility is a company-wide initiative.

Accessible information and communications needs the support of your whole organization, for example:

HR departments which look at the human elements of accessible information and communications, including training.

IT departments which locate, create, implement and support accessible technologies.

Corporate communications which apply accessible information and communications practices to how they deliver their messages internally and to the public.

Slide 15

Let us quickly review what we have learned:

The AODA became law on June 13, 2005. The purpose is to develop, implement and enforce mandatory accessibility standards in 5 key areas of daily living: Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation and Built Environment. The goal is an accessible Ontario by 2025.

The AODA is in addition to other laws stating people with disabilities deserve respect and equal opportunity: the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service came into force January 1, 2008. It is the first accessibility standard created under the authority of the AODA.

Additionally we learned the definition of a barrier and how accessibility is a company-wide initiative.

Slide 16

Section B addresses why is accessible information and communications important to your organization?

Slide 17

Here are some eye-opening statistics.

Before we start the topic about accessible information and communications, think about the following numbers of people with disabilities according to Statistics Canada:

More than one in seven (1.85 million) people in Ontario have a disability and 1.03 million are able to work.

It is estimated that one in five Ontarians will be age 65 or older by the year 2025.

There are two important implications suggested from those statistics: People with disabilities are a significant segment of the population in Ontario.

As the population ages, the need for accessibility will increase.

Given the above information, it is easy to see why the Ontario government is focusing on accessibility for all Ontarians.

Slide 18

Why have accessible businesses?

People with disabilities eat out, work, travel, shop and do business.

People with disabilities have spending power! A Royal Bank study released in the year 2000 estimated the spending power of people with disabilities to be 25 billion dollars a year in Canada.

Businesses that are accessible attract more customers and improve services for everyone.

To name just a few, travel and tourism, retail and hospitality sectors, all benefit by reaching a previously untapped market when they provide an accessible environment.

Social responsibility is fast becoming a differentiator for business. It's part of your employment brand and your customer brand.

Focusing on accessible information and communications is good for your business.

Slide 19

Industries such as tourism and hospitality are all about getting customers to come to you and then providing an exceptional experience to:

Make them want to visit.

Make them want to stay and spend money.

Make them want to come back and recommend your business to others.

Businesses not only have to focus on accessible information and communications in how they market to this growing customer base, but also deliver on their promises.

If your marketing materials state that you go out of your way to deliver an outstanding experience for people with disabilities, then everything from your built environment to their first interaction at the front desk, their room set-up, the information provided about tourist attractions and hotel services would be accessible.

Remember, people with disabilities also have a circle of people who may use your services because they are accessible or ignore them because they would need to exclude people with disabilities from participation.

Slide 20

The customer service standard under the AODA includes requirements pertaining to information and communication. These requirements include:

Communicating with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

Training staff on serving/interacting with customers with disabilities.

Implementing a feedback process.

Communicating a notice of temporary disruption of services.

Providing documentation required under the standard in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

Slide 21

The Ontario Human Rights Code establishes, in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the principle of access by persons with disabilities to goods, services, facilities and employment.

The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits not only overt discrimination, but also practices that are discriminatory in their effect. Under the Code, to refuse a request for information in an accessible format could be

considered a discriminatory practice and could make your organization liable for complaint.

Slide 22

There are international mandates for accessible internet communication. Accessible information and communications is a global initiative.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was ratified by Canada on March 11, 2010, includes these guiding principles:

Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;

Non-discrimination;

Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;

Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;

Equality of opportunity; and Accessibility.

Slide 23

If you want to do business with the American Federal government your electronic and information technology must be accessible to people with disabilities. Many American States have similar laws.

In 1998, the American Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. Under Section 508 (29 U.S.C. ' 794d), agencies must give employees with disabilities and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others.

Slide 24

In this section B we provided eye opening statistics on people with disabilities and their buying power!

We provided compelling reasons for having accessible businesses, including the potential of untapped markets.

You learned about provincial, federal and international legal mandates regarding accessible information and communications.

Slide 25

Section C is how can you deliver best practices in accessible information and communications?

Slide 26

First off, let's start on the same page as to what information and communications is about. It is how you accomplish any of these three kinds of goals:

To inform the audience about something.

To persuade the audience that what you are informing them about is in their best interest. You're not just providing information, you're often selling them on what you are saying.

To engage the audience to act on what they have just read, learned or understood. These actions could range from calling a business or organization for additional information, buying or selling a product, visiting a facility, eating at a restaurant, staying at a hotel, or enrolling in a course.

Slide 27

This slide introduces a communications model. Communications is not a straight-forward process. It is a balancing act between those sending the message (the sender) and those receiving the message (the receiver).

Senders need to focus on why does a message need to be sent or the **purpose**? Who is the **audience** for this message? Senders determine what **actions**, if any, the receiver should take; determine how the **message** will be stated and choose the most appropriate communications **vehicle** or vehicles by which to send the message. Accessible information and communications means the sender must take into consideration the needs of the receiver (audience) and possible barriers the communications vehicle may inadvertently create.

Receivers will focus on how they are getting the message, the **vehicle** method used and what the **message** states. They will then **interpret** the message they are receiving and determine if they are being asked to take any **actions**. If necessary, the receiver can choose how and what will be said in response to the message through **feedback**.

Feedback helps to overcome what we call the "lost in translation" aspect of communicating. It's not enough to send a message, you want to be sure that the message is being interpreted in the way you intended. By offering alternate methods to receive feedback, the sender is inviting a wider audience to interact with your organization. Alternate methods aid people

with disabilities and allows them to choose their preferred vehicle whether it be electronic, telephone, mail or in person.

Slide 28

What we mean by best practices.

A best practice is a way of doing things that consistently leads to a preferred result. The goal for organizations is to communicate in a manner that takes into account the person's disability. Give the individual equal consideration to review, respond or use information and communications that is also up to date, complete and accurate.

A best practice could be a methodology, process or technique. Your methodology, process or technique will include providing the same availability in terms of time and place as is available to others.

Best practices are both science that is observable and using your heart to make a difference.

Slide 29

Before we get into more detail around best practices to improving accessibility in information and communications, there are five basic guidelines to consider.

The first guideline is put people first. Understand that when we use the terms, "Person with a disability" or "People with a disability", we place the emphasis on the person not the disability.

One of the most difficult barriers to overcome is attitude. That's why guideline 2 is about broadening your horizons and being prepared to put people first. Make it a personal goal to learn how to communicate with those who have visible or non-visible disabilities.

Guideline 3 is be barrier aware. It is important to be alert to visible and invisible barriers faced by people with a variety of disabilities and understand that what may work for one person, may not work for another. Providing alternate methods of information and communication removes barriers for numerous people.

Guideline 4 is about making a statement of commitment to provide accessible information and communications for everyone. I commit to increasing accessibility because... My organization commits to increasing accessibility in this specific focus topic because...

Guideline 5 is keeping your commitment to accessibility top-of-mind. Don't let it get lost or lose energy. Accessibility could mean lots of additional revenue for you from happy customers or increased engagement from your employees because they feel they are committed to something of value.

Slide 30

If we were to give one core recommendation to organizations, it would be to start planning now.

Why start planning now?

When we think about our plans and include accessibility we can avoid costly removal of new barriers.

When we plan for the future to remove existing barriers we are prepared financially.

When we become accessible we benefit from an untapped market.

When we think accessible, we save money. It costs more to correct something than to do it right the first time.

Slide 31

Starting points: there are five practical steps to start developing a plan for accessible information and communications in your organization:

Step 1 is to learn everything you can about accessible communications and think about how it applies to you and to your organization.

Step 2 is assess and analyze your organization's current information and communications vehicles. This is about understanding the barriers people with disabilities face and looking at how your specific communications vehicles may cause barriers.

Step 3 is about connecting accessible information and communications to your customer service standard mandate.

Step 4 begins once you have enough information to start developing a plan to increase accessibility.

Finally, step 5 is about communicating and implementing the plan.

The first three steps, which also make up the bulk of this webinar, are about assessing your current state. The final two steps are about the future. Please note that we are not advising you on what to put into your accessibility plan or how to implement it.

Slide 32

Practical step 1 is to learn everything you can about accessible information and communications.

Slide 33

Be up-to-date on the latest news about accessible information and communications.

Learn about alternate formats and new technologies available to people.

Seek out information to learn about accessible information and communications for people with disabilities. There are downloadable resources that will aid your organization in understanding the wide variety of methods of delivering and receiving accessible information and communications.

Many charities and non-profit organizations also offer valuable information about accessibility for people with disabilities.

Slide 34

People with disabilities may use one or more of the following examples of assistive technologies in communicating with others or in receiving information:

Speech input and synthesized speech input.

Screen readers, screen magnifiers, screen projectors.

Audio recorded information.

Teletypewriter (TTY).

Adjustable signal level and tone on audio devices.

Volume control.

Hands-free data entry and response selection.

Intelligent word prediction software.

Alternative pointing devices, such as mouth sticks.

Keyboard controllers.

Book holders and page turners.

Touch screens.

Remember, a person with a disability may respond slowly. Providing options in alternate formats as well as additional time for response are key to successful interactions with people with a variety of disabilities.

Slide 35

Communication and information is not limited to providing information upon request and taking into account the best method to communicate with a person with a disability. Wayfinding in your spaces, lighting and accessing shelving with documents also need to be considered. Your organization needs to ensure people with disabilities can reach, see and touch your information.

When ensuring people with disabilities can reach your information you may consider height and depth to display accessible brochures (shelving) and provide a clear area for access.

When ensuring people with disabilities can see your information, you might focus on adequate lighting.

When ensuring people with disabilities can touch your information, you may consider visual and tactile indicators throughout your organization's spaces.

The CNIB electronic book, "Clearing our Path" discusses the needs of people who are blind, have a vision loss or low vision.

The Canadian Standards Association is also a recognized leader in this area.

Slide 36

Practical step 2 is to assess your current information and communications vehicles. Communications vehicles are how you communicate. They are vehicles that help you communicate and inform. They can be anything from websites, printed brochures to live communications.

Slide 37

There are many types of communications vehicles all geared towards getting your message out.

For the purpose of this webinar, we will cover eight of the most basic vehicles: visual communications including printed documents and visual video, spoken and audio communications, live communications using the telephone, in-person communications, signs and posters, written and electronic communications including email and signatures, websites, and finally forms and surveys.

Slide 38

Materials that are created to inform and communicate take several formats. Each of the communications vehicles an organization chooses may have barriers for people with disabilities.

When assessing each of your communications vehicles, we will provide information on some suggested best practice solutions to provide accessible information and communications, including alternate formats organizations can use to remove the barriers faced by people with disabilities.

Where possible, we will direct you to resources where you can find additional information and tools. An example is the Manager's Guide to Multiple Format Production, Library Archives Canada.

Slide 39

Visual communications present barriers for people with a vision, intellectual, developmental, learning or physical disability. All print is a

barrier to people who are blind. Small print either cannot be seen or is difficult to see without magnification. Print documents are a barrier for people who cannot hold text documents. Print documents written in complex language are a barrier for people with intellectual, developmental and learning disabilities. There are a variety of solutions:

Large print (with font sizes of 16 to 20 points or higher) is one of the most often requested formats.

You can convert your document to an **audio format**, a **live in-person** communication or to an **electronic** document with supports for comprehension. Electronic text is used with computer synthesized voice technology known as screen reader technology which also has control options to amplify, pause, bookmark and repeat the audio. When using a computer or a personal digital assistant (a PDA), the screen reader will provide a spoken translation to the person at whatever speed the person chooses.

Braille is for people who are blind or deaf-blind. It is a tactile system of raised dots representing letters or a combination of letters of the alphabet. Braille is produced using Braille transcription software.

Descriptive Video Service (DVS) provides descriptive narration of key visual elements – such as the action, characters, locations, costumes and sets – without interfering with dialogue or sound effects, making television programs, films, home videos and other visual media accessible for people who are blind, low vision or have vision loss.

Literature in **plain language** is an alternative for people with intellectual, developmental and learning disabilities. Newspapers and magazines recognize that plain language allows them to reach a wider audience.

Slide 40

The CNIB's "Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines" outlines the following tips for print documents:

Arial and Verdana have been tested as the easiest font types to read. Use them whenever possible. The minimum font size used is 12 point but 14 to 16 point is recommended. Use fonts with a medium heaviness. Where you need italics, instead use the bold enhancement.

High colour contrast for text and background is recommended. Examples are black or dark blue on a slightly off white or yellow background. The reverse also works well.

Bright white can cause glare and eyes can get tired reading. The glare factor in all colours and textures is important to people with a variety of vision loss. In general, these rules are good for everyone.

Avoid using complicated backgrounds or designs and watermarks. There are still visually appealing methods to provide information in accessible formats. Complicated backgrounds often make it difficult for people to read the text.

Try to use colour only in titles or highlighted information. When using colour remember the colour contrast rules.

Do not crowd your text. If you can, place your text in columns. Columns are easier to read and require less peripheral vision.

Remember, design simplicity is the key to success. If you use strong colours, sizes and shapes on the covers of materials or internally, they will be easier to see.

Slide 41

Spoken and audio communications are barriers for people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. A visual alternative such as **pen and paper** is required to communicate.

Other best practices in alternate formats are to have a **structured text transcription** or captioning and a sign language version.

Captioning is required to translate the audio portion of a video or oral presentation by way of subtitles, or captions, which usually appear on the bottom of the screen. Captioning may be closed or open. Closed captions can only be seen on a television screen that is equipped with a device called a closed caption decoder. Open captions are “burned on” a video and appear whenever the video is shown. Captioning makes television programs, films and other visual media with sound accessible to people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

Another barrier is video presentations. **Windowing** enables people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing to read by means of a **sign language** interpreter what others hear in a video presentation or broadcast. The interpreter appears in a corner or “window” in the screen translating spoken word to sign language. Windowing may include open or closed captioning.

Slide 42

Live communications using a telephone present barriers for people who are Deaf, oral deaf, hard of hearing or have a hearing loss and people with physical disabilities. Although many people who are Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing use email to give and receive information, **TTY** (a teletypewriter) is still widely used. Those who use **wireless messaging** pager systems can send and receive email, TTY messages, faxes, text-to-speech and speech-to-text messages, and a text message to any one-way

alphanumeric pager. More cellular phones are now compatible with TTY and hearing aids, and as they become less expensive and easier to use, their use will be more widespread.

Bell Canada Relay Service (BCRS) lets TTY users and hearing people talk to one another by phone with the help of specially trained BCRS operators. Users dictate to the operator the conversation, which is then relayed to the TTY phone. TTY conversation is then relayed to the hearing phone user. This service is confidential and the only cost is any long-distance charges that would regularly apply. Local calls using this service are free. Due to privacy issues and the desire to be independent, people who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing prefer the TTY to TTY option.

Telephone alert systems are a flashing light system on the telephone. Be patient. The person may not be near the telephone or notice the flashing immediately.

Your telephone system should be accessible by being hearing aid compatible, have a volume control and speakers. Telephones require manual dexterity. **Speaker phones** may have to be used when a person cannot physically hold equipment.

Another useful function for people who are blind, low vision, have a vision loss, physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities is **voice-activated commands**. Instead of pressing a number, listeners are requested to say the instruction. "For service in English, say English..."

Slide 43

Here are some best practice tips for communicating with a person with a disability over the phone:

Speak normally, clearly and directly.

Concentrate on what is being said, not the person's voice.

Be patient, don't interrupt and don't finish the person's sentences. Give the person time to explain him or herself.

Don't try to guess what the person is saying. If you don't understand, don't pretend. Just ask again. If you still don't understand, ask again with different words.

If the person is using an interpreter or a TTY line (a teletypewriter), just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter.

If your customer has great difficulty communicating, ask if the person has another preferred method of communicating, for example email. If necessary, make arrangements to call back when it's convenient to speak with someone else.

Slide 44

In-person communications present barriers to people with disabilities including physical access to the public space, not asking how to help, not understanding how to communicate with a customer through a support person, lack of etiquette on the topic of assistive devices, and treating a service animal as a pet.

The first thing to remember is that all customers want to be treated with respect. **Remove physical** and other types of barriers if you can, so people with disabilities can freely move on your premises.

You should distinguish each customer's **specific needs**. If the matter is personal it should be discussed in a private area. If you don't understand what the customer is saying, just politely ask again. When interacting with a person with a disability always make **eye contact** with them, but don't stare. **Speak directly** to the person with a disability not their support person, even if the support person is talking on behalf of the customer. Always ask for **permission** before touching an assistive device and or the customer. Do not touch or address **service animals** since they are working animals and not pets. The best customer service is to ask customers for suggestions on ways to accommodate them.

We recommend two areas to look at to find best practices in face-to-face interactions: The HRPAs webinar: the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, also known as the customer service standard; and the Ministry of Community and Social Services' website video resource, "Talk to Me – Serving Customers with Disabilities".

Slide 45

Best practices also includes making signs or posters with emergency and public safety information a priority and providing alternate methods of communication. Signs and posters are often barriers for people with a vision, intellectual, developmental, learning or physical disability.

Have alternatives for a person who is blind, has low vision or a vision loss. **Verbal and audio** methods of communication are an alternative, as is tactile signage.

A best practice approach is to include **symbols and pictorials**. In emergency situations, symbols and pictorials can rapidly convey a message. Complex language and instructions may not be understood by many people including people with intellectual, developmental and learning disabilities. People with dyslexia read in a variety of patterns that may be

time consuming. Symbols and pictorials can also be understood by people who do not speak English or French.

The **height** of the sign may be difficult for a person in a wheelchair to see. A best practice is to set the sign at eye height range for a person in a wheelchair or scooter which is 1100 mm. (43 inches) to 1300 mm (51 inches).

For planned or unplanned disruption of services in an area that people with disabilities need to access, post information in a **conspicuous location** about why there is a barrier, how long the barrier will exist and when services will resume. This is also a requirement under the customer service standard. Suggested places are in the front entrance, on your website and on the telephone. Place the notice in a public space used by everyone to access the premises.

Some organizations have installed a permanent **empty message alert** sign on the post of an accessible parking spot. By posting the message in large print and symbols, the driver does not need to exit the vehicle and can proceed to another location. Posting the information at an accessibility transit stop can also save the person with a disability from disembarking and having no method to rapidly remedy the situation.

Also offer to provide the information in alternate formats upon request, it is the law.

Slide 46

Written and text communications are barriers for people with a vision, intellectual, developmental, learning or physical disability. Alternate formats already mentioned include **audio and live spoken** communication; e-mail and electronic text formats that are screen reader friendly.

There are free **screen readers** on the internet. Download one and make sure all of your technology-based communication and information can be read by the screen reader. Free screen readers have glitches, learn them and overcome them. Once your document is screen reader friendly, then more expensive screen readers will likely read your document too. By proofreading with the screen reader you will learn whether your communication requires some changes. Use the BCC section of your address portion to send bulk emails and use just one name in the main address section. Otherwise the screen reader will read out all the names and addresses.

Many companies already serve customers at least by telephone or email on an ongoing basis. Having an **email response system** on your website

with a promise to review emails in a reasonable time is good customer service.

Decide how to deal with a situation in which a person with a disability cannot provide a **personal signature** due to their disability. An X is still an acceptable method to obtain a legal signature with appropriate arms length witnesses. It is good practice to have witnesses who are not attached to the benefactor of the signature to make sure there is no discussion about coercion. Keeping an ink pad and ink remover handy to take a fingerprint of the person with a disability is another good method to receive a personal signature. However, you will need to explain and get permission.

Slide 47

Before we get into some top-line solutions to websites, let's focus on who uses the Internet? Everybody.

In fact, the Internet is so critical to our day-to-day lives whether at work or at home that an international organization called the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) was created.

One of the Consortium's primary goals is to develop standards, protocols and guidelines to ensure that the benefits of web-based information are accessible to all people, whatever their hardware, software, network infrastructure, native language, culture, geographic location, or physical or mental ability.

The Consortium provides W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (2.0) that will make content accessible to people living with a wide range of disabilities and also make Web content more usable to everyone in general.

There is a detailed series of charts that outlines how people with disabilities use the web and the various barriers they face: Different Disabilities that Can Affect Web Accessibility. For more information, please refer to the resources list at the end of this webinar.

Slide 48

Providing easy access to information through accessible websites benefits everyone, just remember to follow the W3C Web Content **Accessibility Guidelines**. An accessible website offers the person with a vision loss the ability to change the **colour contrast and font size**. Colour contrast also aids people with a variety of disabilities including dyslexia, intellectual and learning disabilities. Note the default may state black text on white background but the white used is an off white. Always avoid glare.

Documents uploaded to your website can be **screen reader compatible**. If not, your organization may provide an **alternate format** and other communication supports upon request. Prioritizing information requiring immediate alternate formats and educating your staff on providing accessible electronic documents can save time and money. For accessible **downloadable documents** you may need to ensure you are using the appropriate accessibility features for formatting. Not all software supports accessibility and many require specific knowledge on how to use accessibility features. Please check with your software vendor if you need more information.

Encryption codes are not accessible to people who are blind, low vision or have a vision loss. In fact, sighted users often have problems. You may offer a different method to verify you are dealing with an adult. You may provide a **non-biometric alternative** that is accessible to people with disabilities. Biometrics uses verification techniques such as fingerprinting, voice patterns and facial scanning.

You can find out if your website is accessible by contacting a company that specializes in creating websites that meet accessibility guidelines, or that offer software that can maintain a website's accessibility. These companies often let organizations test a few sample pages of their website free of charge. If you would like to better understand the difficulties that an inaccessible website can pose, visit the website of WebAim for various simulations.

Slide 49

Accessible electronic forms and surveys can be barriers for people who are blind, low vision or have a vision loss. The method of setting up the document will determine if a screen reader can read the information in the correct order.

A tip to create accessible documents providing direction to the end user on where to place the answer, is to have everything read from **left to right** with appropriate prompts. This example question asks for a response that is written on one line:

Were you satisfied with our services?

a) Agree_____ b) Disagree_____

A screen reader may have a difficult time reading this question and helping the person with a disability place the answer correctly. The simplest method to get along with the screen reader is to **minimize spacing** and have your questions read like a **column** on the left side.

Were you satisfied with our services?

a) Agree_____

b) Disagree_____

If you have a free screen reader downloaded, you will find the best methods to prepare all electronic documents.

Slide 50

The third practical step is to connect your information and communications to your customer service standard regulation. Customer service in a large part is about to whom and how we communicate.

Slide 51

Review the HSPA webinar: The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, also known as the customer service standard.

For each of the basic requirements in the webinar, identify how accessible information and communications is important to fulfilling the requirement. Use this information in step 4: Developing a plan to increase accessibility in information and communications.

Slide 52

There are 11 basic requirements of the standard. The customer service standard requires that all providers of goods or services that have one or more employees in Ontario, who provide goods and or services either directly to the public or through third parties comply with these requirements. There are additional documentation requirements for organizations with 20 or more employees.

The requirements fit into four themes as follows:

Integrating people with disabilities into your customer service model focuses on policies, practices and procedures, guiding principles and feedback procedures.

Understanding and addressing what people with disabilities may bring with them including personal assistive devices, service animals and support persons.

Communicating effectively with people with disabilities highlights how to communicate on a day-to-day basis as well as how to address important information about admission fees for support persons and disruption of service.

Preparing your staff to deliver exceptional customer service is about training them to deliver customer service to people with disabilities. Your organization will provide training for people who interact with the public or

third parties on your behalf; and training for people who develop your internal policies, practices and procedures.

Slide 53

Suggested best practices in the customer service standard related to information and communications.

Organizations will notify members of the public about the availability of accessible information and communications using a variety of measures to reach persons with disabilities.

There is additional documentation for organizations with 20 or more employees. If you are a provider that must develop and maintain documents under the customer service standard, you must: post the information in a conspicuous place to let your customers know that the documents are available upon request; and provide the documentation to a person with a disability, in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

Slide 54

A best practice approach to the customer service standard on information and communications is that organizations may include in their policies: How they will deal with requests for information and communications in alternate formats.

How they will deal with requests for communication supports and services.

How their procurement policies in information and communication will address accessibility.

The criteria that will be used to determine what information and communications will be made available in plain language.

Slide 55

Organizations shall make all feedback and complaints processes accessible to persons with disabilities. The processes will permit persons with disabilities to identify their communication needs and to communicate using alternate formats, communication supports and services.

Determine how to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in a timely fashion that responds appropriately to the urgency of the situation.

Identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessible information and communications.

Provide information and communication supports, services, resources, products, practices and systems that are accessible to people with disabilities.

Slide 56

Your organization can train employees in providing accessible information and communications. For employees, volunteers and third parties the training may encompass:

The organization's policies, practices and procedures for providing accessible information and communications to and from people with disabilities.

Information and communication barriers and the needs of persons with disabilities.

The organization's resources and tools for providing accessible information and communication supports and services.

A best practice beyond the customer service standard mandate is to also provide information on how to communicate with persons with disabilities in emergency and crisis situations.

Slide 57

Practical step 4 in the process is to develop a plan to increase accessibility.

Slide 58

First review all the information obtained from completing steps one to three. Then involve other stakeholders in developing the plan, including engaging people with disabilities to have input into the plan.

The plan could include:

Goals and objectives.

Stakeholder roles.

Overall recommendations.

Benefits and outcomes.

Resources/costs/time/actions.

How you will measure the success of the plan.

Slide 59

Here is a checklist for communication access.

Does your organization have policies, procedures and practices to ensure that people with communication disabilities can:

Use their preferred method of communicating when receiving your goods and services.

Have their personal communication requirements accommodated in personal meetings, group meetings, through technology, over the telephone and via written communications.

Have access to sign language interpreters, captioners, note-takers, intervenors and communication assistants to be accessed upon request.

Slide 60

Has your organization provided the following training and resources to all staff, volunteers and third parties who interact with the public?

General guidelines for communicating and working with people who have a range of communication disabilities.

Information on how to access community resources for sign language interpreters, captioners, note-takers, intervenors and communication assistants.

Slide 61

The final step 5 in the process is to communicate and implement the accessibility plan.

Slide 62

You will want to address all the new priorities when you communicate your plan. You will decide priority topics to implement first.

As you put your plan into practice; be ready to continue learning and adapting your plan as you refine your policy, practice and procedures.

Determine dates to audit your policy, practice and procedures. See if your organization is completing deadlines.

Perhaps new barriers need to be added to your list. Include a schedule for when your stakeholders will review the outcomes and when management will meet to determine if the plan requires adjustments.

Be prepared to formally re-evaluate your organization's position on a minimum annual basis, especially if you are required to prepare documentation as outlined in the customer service standard.

And finally, celebrate your successes. Communicate the successes to others within your organization.

Slide 63

To summarize section C:

We provided information on a best practice approach to achieve accessible information and communications with basic guidelines and recommended starting points.

We provided a communications model that outlined the balancing act between sender and receiver.

We covered the topic of multiple and alternate formats in information and communication. This section discussion addressed basic communications vehicles including the barriers and solutions for people with disabilities.

We showed where the customer service standard requires best practices in accessible information and communications.

You also now have a checklist for communications access.

Slide 64

As we reach the end of this webinar on best practices in information and communications our discussion is an acknowledgement that communication is the foundation of much of our lives and a basic human right.

There are thousands of people with disabilities in Ontario who use different ways to communicate.

Be prepared to accept various ways of communicating.

The basis of good communication includes a respectful attitude and being a good listener.

The best way to find out how a person wants to communicate with you is to ask them.

Slide 65

Thank you for participating in this webinar. You are now on your way to understanding the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and what you can do to help Ontario to become accessible to people with disabilities by the year 2025.

Please watch for additional webinars in this series on the accessibility standards under the AODA.

Slide 66

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Slide 67

Remember to click on the “paperclip” in the lower right hand corner for a downloadable file containing supporting documents and resources.