



# **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**

## **Customer Service Policies and Procedures**

### **Providing Services to People with Disabilities**

***October 2013***





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# Overview

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## **Vision**

Helping Children, Youth and Families Thrive.

## **Mission**

In partnership with families and the community, the Halton Children's Aid Society's mission is to protect children and enable them to grow and realize their potential within a safe and nurturing environment.

## **Values Statement**

The motivating force behind all of the decisions of the Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS) is based on the core values outlined below.

The Halton CAS believes that:

- Children and youth are valued members of family and community.
- Children, youth and families deserve to be treated with fairness, equity and respect.
- Children and youth have a right to grow, develop and be nurtured – according to their individual needs – within the context of family and community.
- Children and youth are entitled to be protected from harm and receive consistent and supportive care.
- Families are the primary source of safety, stability and nurturing.
- Enabling and empowering children, youth and families to foster healthy relationships is central to all efforts of the Halton Children's Aid Society.
- The uniqueness and diversity of children, youth and families are honoured and respected.
- Families are supported in their efforts to be self-reliant, responsible parents and citizens.
- To be responsive to children, youth and families, a community-based and flexible approach to service delivery that recognizes and builds on strengths is paramount.
- It is an obligation of the Halton Children's Aid Society to advocate for the well-being of families and the protection of children and youth.
- Confidentiality is respected.
- Collaboration with community partners results in improved outcomes for children, youth and families.
- Accountability to children, youth, families, community and donors is critical.
- Employees will be treated with fairness, equity and respect for diversity and the organization will promote innovation and best practices for managing change.





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## Purpose

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- The purpose of this Policy is to ensure the Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS) is compliant with the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) (AODA)*.
- This Policy addresses accessibility policies and standards as outlined in the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)*.
- This Policy applies to all Halton CAS staff, volunteers, students on placement and third parties operating on behalf of the Halton CAS.
- In fulfilling our mission, the Halton CAS strives at all times to provide our services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. The Halton CAS is committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way to all of our clients.
- All client services provided by the Halton CAS and all interactions with the community follow the ideals of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity. The Halton CAS will meet or exceed all applicable legislation regarding the provision of accessible customer service.
- The Halton CAS is committed to excellence in serving all clients including people with disabilities and in carrying out our functions and responsibilities as outlined in written Policies and Procedures.
- Our Policies and Procedures are available in alternate formats upon request.
- The Halton CAS/AODA Customer Service Standards Policies and Procedures address:
  - the use of personal assistive devices;
  - communicating with a person with a disability;
  - the use of service animals;
  - the use of support persons;
  - admission fees for support persons;
  - temporary disruption of services;
  - training staff, volunteers, contractors and other people who interact with the public and/or are involved in developing our policies and procedures; and
  - feedback process.
- A 'customer', as defined by the *AODA*, may be a client, volunteer, visitor to the office, community member, foster parent, donor or any person who has a disability and interacts in some way with the Halton CAS. For purposes of this document, the individuals noted above will be referred to as 'person' or a 'person with a disability.'





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# The Use of Personal Assistive Devices

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS is committed to serving people with disabilities who use assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our services. The Society will ensure our employees, members of the Board of Directors, volunteers, student interns and contractors of the Halton CAS (may be referred to as 'staff') are trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by such persons while accessing our services.
- It is the policy of the Halton CAS to allow people to use their own personal assistive devices to access our services, unless otherwise prohibited by law.
- The Halton CAS will also ensure staff is trained on how to use the assistive devices available on our premises. Currently there is a TTY in the main office Screening Department.
- The Halton CAS can also provide:
  - alternative format documents (upon request);
  - magnifying glasses; and
  - staff assistance.

## Procedures

- As outlined in the Customer Service Standard Training, the Halton CAS staff (and other groups as identified above) will be mindful to:
  - ask permission to touch or handle any personal assistive device;
  - keep assistive devices or equipment within the person's reach;
  - let the person know about assistive devices available on the premises that are appropriate to their needs;
  - ensure all potential barriers to the use of assistive devices are removed where possible; and
  - offer assistive devices in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence.





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# Communication with Persons with Disabilities

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability.
- Staff, volunteers, student interns and any other persons who communicate with clients will be trained on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.
- The Society will offer to communicate with clients by TTY, e-mail, texting, mail, relay services or other methods that may become available if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.
- Any written documents will be provided in an accessible format upon request.
- The types of alternative formats available include:
  - large print;
  - hard copy or email;
  - simplified summaries;
  - Braille (with suitable notice); and
  - explanations provided through in person meetings.
- When providing a document requested by a person with a disability, the Halton CAS will provide an alternative format that takes into account the particular individual's communication needs. This may be as simple as using a notepad to write down information or simply having a staff member read information out loud to a person with a disability.
- When a request is made from a person with a disability for a document in a different format, discussion regarding what options they have available will take place and be mutually agreed upon.
- Requests for alternative methods of communication should be fulfilled as promptly as feasible (no longer than ten business days, unless staff are dependent on an outside service such as needed to transcribe a document to Braille).

## Procedures

- As outlined in the Customer Service Standard Training, Halton CAS employees, members of the Board of Directors, volunteers, student interns and contractors will be mindful to take into account a person's disability when communicating with them.
- Often the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can to assist them. Staff is trained to focus on the person, not their disability.





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# Communication with Persons with Disabilities (cont'd)

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## A. Persons who have physical disabilities

- There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons with physical disabilities include:
  - speaking directly to the person;
  - asking before you help;
  - respecting personal space;
  - describing what you are going to do before you do it; and
  - ensuring the person is not left in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position.

## B. Persons who have impaired vision

- Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. It might be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Some might use a guide dog or white cane – some may not.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons with impaired vision include:
  - not assuming the person cannot see you;
  - speaking directly to the person;
  - offering your elbow to guide them. If they accept your guidance, walk slowly, wait for permission;
  - identifying landmarks for the person; and
  - being precise and descriptive with information.

## C. Persons who are deaf blind

- A person who is deaf blind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. An intervener—a professional support person who helps with communication—will accompany many people who are deaf blind.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who are deaf blind include:
  - speaking directly to a person with the disability, not the support person; and
  - identifying yourself to the support person.





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# Communication with Persons with Disabilities (cont'd)

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## D. Persons who have hearing loss

- People who have hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. These are terms used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who have hearing loss include:
  - attracting the person's attention before speaking with a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand;
  - looking directly at the person;
  - writing notes if appropriate;
  - speaking clearly, keeping your hands away from your face;
  - reducing background noise; and
  - ensuring appropriate lighting.

## E. Persons who have intellectual or developmental disabilities

- These disabilities can mildly or profoundly affect one's ability to learn.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who have intellectual or developmental disabilities include:
  - not assuming what the person can or cannot do;
  - taking time, being patient;
  - providing one piece of information at a time – step-by-step instructions; and
  - using plain language and simple concepts to explain information.

## F. Persons who have learning disabilities

- The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retains information. A learning disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information provided.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who have learning disabilities include:
  - taking your time, being patient;
  - demonstrating a willingness to assist;
  - speaking normally, clearly and directly to the person;
  - providing information in a way that works for the person; and
  - being prepared to explain any materials you provide.







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## Communication with Persons with Disabilities (cont'd)

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### G. Persons who have speech or language impairments

- Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may cause slurring or make pronouncing words difficult. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive device.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who have speech or language impairments include:
  - not making assumptions about the person's abilities;
  - giving the person the time they need to get their point across;
  - asking "yes or no" questions, if possible;
  - not interrupting or finishing the person's sentences; and
  - asking what is the best way to communicate.

### H. Persons who have mental health issues

- Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health issue is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who have mental health issues include:
  - treating the person with the same level of respect and consideration;
  - being confident, calm and reassuring;
  - being conciliatory, not confrontational;
  - asking how best to help if the person is in crisis; and
  - not taking things personally.





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# Use of Service Animals

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal or guide dog on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties. The Society will also ensure all staff, volunteers, student interns and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal.
- If it is not readily apparent the animal is a service animal, the Halton CAS staff or representative may ask the person for confirmation of the animal's status.

## Procedures

- If a health and safety concern arises, such as a person within the Agency suffering from a severe allergy to animals or fear of animals, all reasonable efforts will be made to meet the needs of all individuals, including the person with the service animal.
- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who use a service animal include:
  - allowing persons and their service animals access to all public areas;
  - remembering a service animal is not a pet, it is a working animal;
  - ensuring the person has control and supervision of the service animal; and
  - avoiding talking to, touching or making eye contact with the service animal unless permission to do so has been granted.





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# Use of Support Persons

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to enter the Halton CASs premises with their support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to their support person while on our premises.
- As required by the Halton CAS policies, a support person may be required to sign a confidentiality form.

## Procedure

- The Halton CAS best practices for communicating with persons who requires a support person include:
  - speaking directly to the person with the disability, not the support person;
  - allowing both persons entrance to the premise/activity together;
  - ensuring the person with the disability has access to the support person while on the premises; and
  - asking for consent if confidential information is going to be shared when a support person is present.





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## Admission Fees for Support Persons

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### Policy

- Although the Halton CAS does not typically charge fees for services, the Children's Aid Foundation of Halton (CAFH) does hold special events for which fees may be charged. When an event is held for which fees are charged, a decision will be made regarding the fee to be charged for the support person of an attendee (who may or may not be a client of the Agency). Notice of the fee for support persons will be included in the promotional materials for the special event.
- Note: The Customer Service Standard does not require that you must allow support persons access at no charge or at a reduced fare; it allows the decision on admission fees to be made by the service provider, as long as notice is provided in advance.

### Procedures

- The person responsible for the special event and the event committee will be responsible for the decision regarding admission fees for support persons.





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# Notice of Temporary Disruption

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS will make every reasonable effort to provide as much notice as possible in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. This notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.
- The notice will be placed at all public entrances and in reception areas on our premises.
- In the event of an office closure due to inclement weather, closure information will be announced through local radio and TV outlets.
- If possible, staff, volunteers or other appropriate individual will make all reasonable efforts to contact persons with appointments who are affected by any disruption.

## Procedures

- Notices about the temporary disruption of services will be posted on the website by the Manager of IT or designate.
- Written notices about temporary disruptions will be posted by appropriate personnel in the entranceway and in reception.





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# Training for Staff

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS will provide training to all employees, members of the Board of Directors, volunteers, student interns and others who deal with the public or other third parties (referred to as 'staff') on their behalf, and all those who are involved in the development and approval of customer service policies, practices and procedures.
- Training will be provided as part of orientation training for new employees and on a continuing basis as required.
- A record of training will be maintained by the Human Resources Department.
- Training will include:
  - the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard;
  - how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities;
  - how to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person;
  - how to use all assistive devices available on our premises, or used within our programs, that may help with the provision of services to people with disabilities;
  - what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing the Halton CASs services;
  - the Halton CASs policies, practices and procedures relating to the customer service standard; and
  - staff will also be trained on an ongoing basis when changes are made to these policies, practices and procedures.

## Procedures

- Resources developed by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) will be utilized to provide staff training.
- Other training resources will be incorporated as required.
- All staff will be trained by January 1, 2012. New employees will be trained as soon as is practicable, preferably within the first four weeks of employment.





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# Feedback Process

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## Policy

- The Halton CAS strives to meet and surpass expectations while serving or interacting with any persons with disabilities. Comments on how well those expectations are being met are welcome and appreciated.
- Feedback regarding the way the Halton CAS provides services to people with disabilities can be made verbally (in person or by telephone) or in writing (email or mail), and other methods if available.
- All feedback will be directed to the Director of Human Resources. Persons with disabilities can expect to hear back within ten business days.

## Procedures

- Feedback, including complaints, will be addressed according to complaint categories already established in the Halton CASs Internal Complaint Review Process.
- To provide feedback, persons with disabilities can submit using the following methods:
  - by e-mail: [HR@HaltonCAS.ca](mailto:HR@HaltonCAS.ca);
  - by mail: Halton CAS, 1445 Norjohn Court, Unit 1, Burlington, ON L7L 0E6;
  - in person: Halton CAS, 1445 Norjohn Court, Unit 1, Burlington, ON L7L 0E6; or
  - by telephone: 905.333.4441 (ask for Director of Human Resources).
- Persons are required to leave their contact information should they wish to receive a response. Feedback will be directed to the Director of Human Resources (or designate) and complaints will be addressed in accordance with the Halton CASs policies and procedures.





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## Modifications/Availability/Questions to this or Other Policies

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- The Halton CAS is committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Therefore, no changes will be made to this policy before considering the impact on people with disabilities.
- Any policy of the Halton CAS that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.
- This Policy and related procedures will be available on the Halton CASs website.
- A copy of this Policy will be made available in an accessible format upon request.
- This Policy exists to achieve service excellence to clients and persons with disabilities. If anyone has a question about the Policy, or if the purpose of a policy is not understood, an explanation should be provided by, or referred to the Director of Human Resources (or designate).







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## Definitions

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- The *AODA* and *Ontario Regulation 429/07* contain and refer to various definitions that are relevant to this policy, some of which are set out below.
- **Alternative Format**—any other ways of publishing information beyond traditional printing (i.e. large print, audio format, etc)
- **Assistive Device**—an auxiliary aid such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids (i.e. canes, crutches, wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc)
- **Barrier**—anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.
- **Disability**—shall mean the same as the definition of disability found in the Ontario Human Rights Code:
  - 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 a 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 (“handicap”).
- **Guide Dog**—a dog trained as a guide for a blind person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations (Blind Persons’ Rights Act 1990 s1 (1))
- **Persons with Disabilities**—those individuals that are afflicted with a disability as defined under the Ontario Human Rights Code
- **Service Animal**—an animal acting as a service animal for a person with a disability, if it is readily apparent the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; or if the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability
- **Support Persons**—any person, whether a paid professional, volunteer, family member or friend, who accompanies a person with a disability in order to help with communications, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services

