

Understanding Accessible Customer Service

Training Manual for
Tarion Warranty Corporation's
Approved Contractors



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BACKGROUND

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* was passed by the Ontario legislature with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province. Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of this *Act* is to benefit all Ontarians.

The *AODA* allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility that are designed to help make Ontario more accessible.

One of the specific standards that has been developed, and made law, is the Accessible Customer Service Standard. This standard details specific requirements for all service providers.

- The customer service standard is simply about:
 - Understanding that customers with disabilities may have different needs, and
 - Finding the best way to help them access our goods and services

TARION WARRANTY CORPORATION POLICY STATEMENT

Tarion is committed to providing quality goods and services that are accessible to all persons that we serve in a manner that:

- Respects the dignity and independence of each individual;
- Each individual is integrated as fully as practicable into the method of service delivery;
- Ensures an equal opportunity for each individual to obtain and use our goods and services; and
- Allows all persons to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in a similar way.

By considering these principles when developing policies, practices, and procedures, accessibility planning becomes entrenched with the decision making process and satisfies the spirit with which the *AODA, 2005* was enacted.

WHAT IS ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation. For example, a person who is visually impaired may need to have information read aloud to them; an individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down; and someone who uses a wheelchair may need help in finding a route they can use. Accessible customer service is **good** customer service – courteous, helpful and prompt.

Interaction and Communication with Customers who have Disabilities

Always start with people first. In language, that means saying “person with a disability”, rather than “a disabled person”. In any interaction, it means addressing the person’s access and accommodation needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

First and foremost, get to know your customer because many disabilities are invisible. By focusing on your customer, you will better understand their needs. Also, don’t assume what the customer can or can’t do.

Let’s take some time to understand a few different disabilities and review some tips to assist you in providing accessible customer service.

People with Physical Disabilities

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- Don’t touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person’s wheelchair, don’t leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

People with Vision Loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

Tips:

- When you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- Identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the customer.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example, a menu or schedule of fees).
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.

People who have Hearing Loss

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. They may also be oral deaf – unable to hear, but prefer to talk instead of using sign language. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

Tips:

- Once a customer has identified themselves as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and read your lips.
- As needed, attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).

People who are Deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

- A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.

People with Speech or Language Impairments

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Tips:

- Don't assume that a person with speech impairment also has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or a "no".
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.

People who have Learning Disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders. One example is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

Tips:

- Be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.

People who have Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

People who have Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

Tips:

- If you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

As well as learning to interact with customers with disabilities we need to be aware of and understanding of who or what our customers may need to use to assist them in their daily lives.

One such aid that may assist a person with a disability is a service animal.

- A “service animal” is an animal which is specially trained to assist an individual with disabilities.
- An animal is a “service animal” if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or her disability, for example a guide dog wearing a harness.
- If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a “service animal”, then a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability is required.

Tarion is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties. We will also ensure that all staff, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal. Remember the animal is working, he/she is not a pet and you do not need to interact with him/her nor should you distract the animal from its job. When in doubt regarding the role of a service animal simply ask our customer.

Another aid may be a support person, which may mean:

- In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services; and
- May be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

Tarion 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 Tarion’s premises with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on our premises. Remember to speak directly to our customer not their support person. When in doubt regarding the role of a support person simply ask our customer.

An assistive device can also be used as an aid and may include the following:

- wheelchairs, walkers
- white canes used by people who are blind or who have low vision
- note taking devices
- portable magnifiers
- recording machines
- assistive listening devices
- personal oxygen tanks
- devices for grasping
- TTY machines

If a person with a disability requires assistive devices to access Tarion's goods or services, they are allowed to use such devices. Tarion does not however provide such devices. Staff must be aware of such devices and the necessity of our customer's use of them. When in doubt regarding an assistive device simply ask our customer.

DISRUPTION OF SERVICES

Sometimes events may occur that do not allow Tarion to provide a particular service for a short period time.

If there is a temporary disruption in a particular facility or service used to allow a person with a disability to access goods or services, Tarion will give notice of the disruption by posting the reason for the disruption, the anticipated duration of the disruption, and alternative facilities or services that may be available. This posting will be in a conspicuous place on Tarion premises, or by other reasonable methods in the circumstances. If the disruption is anticipated, Tarion will provide a reasonable amount of advance notice of the disruption. If the disruption is unexpected, notice will be provided as soon as possible.

FEEDBACK

Tarion has mechanisms in place for our customers to provide feedback on how we're doing meeting the AODA customer service standards. Customers can also use this process to let us know if they are having difficulties accessing our services.

The public can provide feedback on the accessibility of the provision of goods and services by Tarion in the following ways:

In person or via mail:

Tarion Warranty Corporation
5160 Yonge Street, 12th Floor
Toronto, ON M2N 6L9

By Fax:

1-877-664-9710

By E-mail:

info@tarion.com

Tarion will respond to feedback within 5 - 7 business days of its receipt.

People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you. Just remember to ask how you can help.

It is important to recognize that there are internal and external resources available for you to use to assist you in delivering service to persons with disabilities:

- Review the Government of Ontario Website: <http://www.accesson.ca>
- Review the Website: <http://www.tarion.com>
- The Bell Relay Service Operator is available to assist in placing or receiving calls to/from persons who use a TTY. There is no charge for local calls. To place a call through the BCRS (Bell Canada Relay Service), call: 1-800-855-0511. The Bell Relay Operator will ask if you have used this service in the past. If you have not, they will provide you with simple instructions on how to use the service.
- Book a Sign Language Interpreter* through the Ontario Interpreting Services at the Canadian Hearing Society at: 1-888-363-0373
- Contact: Director, Customer Services at 416-229-3804, 1-877-982-7466 ext. 3804 or info@tarion.com

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Ontario Regulation 429/07

COMPLIANCE FORM FOR TARION APPROVED CONTRACTORS

Contracting Party: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Telephone number: _____

I, _____ have the authority to bind the contracting party

(please print name)

and I verify that our company meets the requirements of the Accessibility for Customer Service Regulation 429/07, Section 6; Training For Staff and will continue to meet these requirements for the duration of the contract or services being provided to Tarion Warranty Corporation.

I agree with the information above

Signature: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Please submit to the Tarion Warranty Corporation, Claims Department prior to the beginning of any contract work for Tarion Warranty Corporation.

**Tarion Warranty Corporation
Claims Department
5160 Yonge Street, 12th Floor
Toronto, ON M2N 6L**