



# Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

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The **Accessibility Standard for Customer Service** is now law in Manitoba. Businesses and organizations will be required to provide customer service that is accessible to all Manitobans.

This document is for information purposes only. This is not legal advice and should be read together with the regulations under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.



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Accessibility means people of all abilities have the opportunity to participate fully in everyday life.

# The Accessibility for Manitobans Act

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act became law in 2013. It provides a long-term, systemic and pro-active approach to dealing with accessibility issues. The Manitoba government's commitment to achieve significant progress by 2023 will make Manitoba more inclusive for everyone.

Following the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, Manitoba will develop, implement, and enforce accessibility standards in:

- employment
- information and communications
- built environment – which may include parks, sidewalks, curbs and roadways.
- transportation

These accessibility standards determine what businesses and organizations in Manitoba must do and by when.

The act builds on the requirements of The Human Rights Code (Manitoba) to create a made-in-Manitoba solution to eliminating barriers. The goal of the act is that Manitobans of all abilities reach their full potential.



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## Did you know...

- Barriers to accessibility are a daily reality for more than 200,000 Manitobans.

# Accessibility benefits us all

Improving accessibility is the right thing to do. It's also the smart thing to do. What benefits people with disabilities, often benefits everyone.

Nearly every Manitoban has a disability, knows someone with a disability or will acquire a disability in the coming years.

## Good service attracts more customers

People disabled by barriers have an estimated buying power of about \$40 billion annually in Canada. They do business, shop and travel with their friends and families in our communities, just like everyone else. Learning how to eliminate barriers may attract customer loyalty and improve service for everyone.

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Barriers to access affect many people,  
not just people with disabilities.

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## Did you know...

- Most disabilities are invisible.

# What is the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service?

In 2015, the Government of Manitoba introduced the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, the first standard in The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. Accessibility standards are the building blocks of the act. They will be introduced gradually to create understanding and to allow for planning among affected organizations.

Accessible customer service means that organizations and businesses provide products or services in an efficient, fair and respectful manner to people of all abilities. Often, this can be done at no cost.

Becoming aware and removing barriers offer new opportunities for people across a full range of disabilities, including physical, vision, hearing, mental health, developmental, learning and other disabilities.

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## What can you do?...

- Accessible Customer Service can be as easy as asking, how can I help?



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An accessibility barrier is anything that limits or prevents a person from being able to receive information, services and goods, or to access space or activities. Attitude can be the biggest barrier.

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# What are barriers to customer service?

- **Attitudinal** barriers are beliefs that limit opportunities available to people with disabilities. Stereotypes and assumptions are attitudinal barriers. An example is thinking that people who cannot communicate verbally have nothing to say.
- **Architectural and physical** barriers are features of buildings or spaces that cause problems for people with disabilities. Examples include store aisles that are too narrow for a person who uses a walker, or a parking lot without spaces designated for people with disabilities.
- **Information or communication** barriers prevent people from easily understanding information. Examples include signs that are confusing or type that is too small.
- **Technology** barriers are often related to information and communications. Although technology should enhance the user experience, it can create new barriers. An example is a website that cannot be accessed by people who are blind and use screen-reading software.
- **Systemic** barriers are policies, practices or procedures that discriminate against people with disabilities. An example is applying a pet policy to service animals.

# How to comply with the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

## Who needs to comply?

The standard applies to public, private and non-profit organizations with one or more employees. It also applies to third parties such as consultants and contractors.

## When do businesses and organizations need to comply with the standard?

Some sectors have more time than others to comply with the customer service standard. The sector you are in will determine when you need to comply.

**The Government of Manitoba** and its departments had until **November 2016** to comply – one year after the standard became law. This ensures that the Government of Manitoba demonstrates strong leadership.

**Public Sector Organizations** have until **November 2017** to comply – two years after the standard has become law. This way, they can build on their accessibility plans required by the act.

The public sector includes Crown corporations, regional health authorities, colleges, universities, school divisions, municipalities and government agencies, boards and commissions.



**Private Sector and Non-profit Organizations** have until **November 2018** to comply – three years after the standard becomes law. This provides them with more time to prepare for compliance.

The private sector includes businesses such as stores and shops, restaurants, hotels, bars, conference centres, as well as charities, places of worship and non-profit organizations.

## What do businesses and organizations need to do to comply with the standard?

The standard includes a number of legal requirements. Organizations and businesses with at least one employee must introduce policies and practices in the following areas:

- Ensure **communication** with a person disabled by a barrier is done in a way that removes the barrier. For example, use easy-to-read fonts and plain language.
- Welcome the use of **assistive devices** to remove or reduce barriers. Do not charge fees for use of on-site assistive devices, such hearing technology, descriptive video, or wheelchairs.
- Welcome **support persons** to enter and remain with your customer. Avoid charges for a support person when possible. If there is an admission fee for a support person, give advance notice to the customer.
- Welcome **people with service animals** to enter a restaurant, store, hotel, taxi or other place where the public, customers or guests are generally allowed.
- Create **barrier-free access** to goods and services, so they benefit everyone as intended. For example remove boxes or other obstructions from hallways.
- Inform the public when there are **temporary barriers** to buildings, spaces or services. An example is if the elevator is out of order.



- 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 readily available to the public on-site, on the webpage and offer alternate format.
- Ensure employees receive **training** on how to serve people disabled by barriers. Include everyone who participates in, or is responsible for, the implementation of policies and practices.

# Additional requirements

Public sector organizations must make public events accessible to people with disabilities by:

- announcing events in a manner that is accessible
- holding events in accessible meeting places
- inviting requests for relevant disability accommodations

Public sector organizations, businesses and organizations with 20 or more employees must:

- document in writing all policies, practices and procedures for providing accessible customer service to people disabled by barriers
- let customers know these documents are available on request

These organizations must have a document, or documents that include:

- general policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people disabled by barriers
- the steps to take when there is a temporary disruption in services or facilities
- an employee training plan
- a description of the feedback process

## ***The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)***

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service requires that training includes the rights and responsibilities covered by The Human Rights Code (Manitoba). The Code overrides any other law, unless that law specifically says otherwise.

The definition of discrimination in The Code includes the failure to reasonably accommodate the needs of individuals or groups such as those with mental and physical disabilities.

Reasonable accommodation means adjusting a rule, or even a physical space, allowing for changes to the way things are usually done. Organizations should have a policy in place to help determine if the accommodation is reasonable. If it is not possible for the provider to grant the request in full, or in part, he/she must show that it would cause undue hardship.

### **Resources**

Go to **[www.AccessibilityMB.ca](http://www.AccessibilityMB.ca)** for the latest information on Manitoba's accessibility legislation, including:

- updates on standards and compliance deadlines
- guides, tools and tips on how to make your organization accessible
- more about The Accessibility for Manitobans Act

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This publication is available  
in alternate formats  
upon request.

## Contact information

Contact us with any questions or  
concerns, or to request information  
in an alternate format.

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