

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2027



Prepared by
Halton District School Board

Accessibility Coordinating Committee

This publication is available on the Halton District School Board website at www.hdsb.ca and is available in alternate formats.

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A Message from the Director & Chair

At the Halton District School Board, we are committed to providing a learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community. A key element to supporting our community is the HDSB Multi-Year Accessibility Plan which identifies system needs and priorities and embeds legislation within our policies, procedures and training needs. The Plan draws feedback from our Special Education Advisory Committee and the work of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee to enhance equity of access to programming and our facilities.

Our Accessibility Coordinating Committee is a diverse and multi-disciplinary team that meets regularly to affirm our commitment to policy, identify priorities and find connections and intersectionality of the work highlighted by the HDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan. The Multi-Year Strategic Plan includes our commitments to Equity and Inclusion, Mental Health and Well-Being, Learning and Achievement, Environmental Leadership and Indigenous Perspectives and Awareness. The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan identifies measurable goals across the pillars of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) and, together with the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, supports the rights of equal opportunity for persons with disabilities by identifying, removing and preventing barriers of access. This plan focuses on:

- Customer Service,
- Information and Communication,
- Employment,
- Built Environment,
- Transportation, and
- Systemic Challenges.

As our communities continue to grow and our collective understanding evolves, the importance of accessibility is recognized to not only support those with needs, but also benefit others in the community. We are committed to advancing the efforts of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee to improve equity and ease of access to services the HDSB provides, as well as access to our facilities. Through the commitments in this Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, we can provide an environment that supports all students, staff and the community.

Curtis Ennis
Director of Education

Margo Shuttleworth
Chair of the Board

Background and Commitment to Accessibility

The intent of the ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*** is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province. The goal is for Ontario to be barrier-free and accessible by 2025. The Act requires that school boards:

- review the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan annually;
- consult with people with disabilities in the review and revision of Multi-Year Accessibility Plan; and
- make the revisions of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2027 public.

The Act allows organizations to determine their own priorities and implement them within existing planning processes and using existing resources. The Accessibility Plan 2022-2027 has been prepared by the Accessibility Coordinating Committee of the Halton District School Board. The plan describes:

- measures that the Halton District School Board has taken in the past; and
- measures that the Halton District School Board will implement during 2022-2027 to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

The Accessibility Coordinating Committee identified a number of barriers for people with disabilities and recommended continued focus on identifying, removing and preventing barriers in the areas of attitudinal, policy/practice, physical, architectural, information and communication, employment and transportation.

The Accessibility Coordinating Committee continues to explore strategies to put in place for the following areas covered by *O. Regulation 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Regulation (IAR)* addressing Information and Communication, Transportation, Employment, Customer Service and the Design of Public Spaces.

1. **Aim**

This plan describes the measures that the Halton District School Board has taken in the past and measures that will be taken during the five-year period (2022-2027) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work in, use or access school board facilities and services.

2. **Objectives**

This plan:

- a. Describes the *process* by which the Halton District School Board will identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

- b. Lists the policies, procedures, programs, practices and services that the Halton District School Board will review in the *coming years* to identify barriers for people with disabilities.
- c. Describes the *actions* the Halton District School Board will take in the coming years to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.
- d. Describes how the Halton District School Board will make this accessibility plan *available to the public*.

The annual review of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2027 of the Halton District School Board will be approved by Administrative Council and shared with Trustees and the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for information and input. This process will be in line with the Halton District School Board's governance policy prior to being posted on the Board website.

The Halton District School Board is committed to:

- establishing an Accessibility Coordinating Committee,
- consulting with board employee groups and people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans,
- ensuring school board policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility, and
- improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community

The Director of Education has authorized the Accessibility Coordinating Committee to prepare an accessibility plan that will enable the Halton District School Board to meet these commitments.

The Halton District School Board is committed to the continual improvement of access to school board facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community with disabilities. It is our intent to expand our focus by including more avenues for collaboration with people with disabilities in the annual review of our HDSB Accessibility Plan 2022-2027.

The Halton District School Board Community

The Halton District School Board is a regional school board in southern Ontario, serving approximately 66,000 public school students in the municipalities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville. All four municipalities form the Regional Municipality of Halton. The Region of Halton and the Halton District School Board share the same boundaries encompassing 232,000 acres of land; 25 kilometres of which are along the shore of Lake Ontario.

Regular and alternative curriculum (*The Carolina Curriculum* and *A Functional Assessment and Curricula*) includes a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, core French, technology, employment, living skills, music and arts programs. Information about other programs offered within the Halton District School Board can be accessed at www.hdsb.ca. Special education programs are also provided by the Halton District School Board for students with special education needs.

With total budget revenues of approximately \$855 million, the Halton District School Board operates 90 elementary schools and 18 secondary schools. A team of 222 principals and vice-principals, 15 senior staff as well as more than 4,379 teaching staff, and 2,541 support/non-teaching staff make the Halton District School Board one of the region's largest employers.

Public school supporters in the Region of Halton elect a Board of 11 trustees who establish policies and direction of the Halton District School Board. Two student trustees are appointed each school year. Board meetings occur on the first and third Wednesday of each month. Public sessions for all meetings begin at 7 p.m. All meetings are live streamed on the Board's website at www.hdsb.ca.

The Halton District School Board believes that public education is one of the major cornerstones of a prosperous and democratic Canada. Its essential and critical role must continue through commitment to our mission and guiding principles.

Halton District School Board's Multi-Year Plan (2020-2024)

The [2020-2024 Multi-Year Plan](#), approved by the Board of Trustees in 2020, consists of five key areas of focus. For each area, there is a corresponding commitment. These five commitments define the key strategic work the Board will undertake during these next four years in each area. Within each commitment are goals which further define and clarify the focus of our work.

While there are five distinct areas to the plan, no one area stands alone or above another. There is connectedness and synergy between all areas, with the work in any one area supporting the work in the other areas.

Adaptability, Relationships, Innovation, Communication, Accountability and Engagement are foundational elements of the plan which describe both our values as an organization and how staff and stakeholders will work together to achieve the goals outlined in the plan.

Five Key Areas & Commitments:

Equity & Inclusion

Champion supportive and inclusive practices to ensure equitable access to positive opportunities and outcomes for all.

Mental Health & Well-Being

Strengthen safe and caring environments that promote well-being.

Learning & Achievement

Create learning conditions to elevate student achievement.

Environmental Leadership

Take action for a sustainable world.

Indigenous Perspectives & Awareness

Promote knowledge and understanding of Indigenous perspectives and realities.

The Accessibility Coordinating Committee

The Accessibility Working Group was formally constituted in May 2003 and was transitioned into the Accessibility Coordinating Committee in September 2013. Current members of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee are listed in [Appendix A](#) below.

Accessibility Accomplishments

Measures in Place: Preventing new barriers

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform school board programs, policies, practices and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an environment that is accessible through the annual accessibility planning process to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

During the last several years, there have been a number of initiatives in the Halton District School Board to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. Details on specific measures that have taken place in the last years can be found in the Annual Accessibility Reports on www.hdsb.ca. The following is a synopsis of some of the major accomplishments:

Customer Service

The HDSB continues to provide mandatory training for all new employees on accessibility awareness in order to continue to facilitate change. This training in combination with other initiatives works to create an inclusive environment and common understanding of the accessibility obligations to better serve the staff, students, and community at large.

The HDSB website has an [Accessibility webpage](#) that contains Annual Accessibility Status reports and applicable policies and procedures as it relates to guiding principles for accessibility needs. The website contains an Accessibility Feedback Form for students, staff and community members to share input and/or request information. The site is monitored by the Accessibility Coordinating Co-chairs to ensure timely response. An accessibility email contact has also been established for inquiries and contact.

Information and Communication

Library Services maintains a suite of documents accessible to School Administrators and Library Staff outlining the various options/methods by which HDSB Libraries can support student/staff requests for accessible library resources (e.g., audiobooks, closed-captioned videos).

The Communications Department maintains the Board website and content, which is conformed with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements.

Employment

The Halton District School Board continues to assess accommodation requirements on a case by case basis and uses all relevant information to respond to, and to achieve resolution, in each scenario. HDSB has established practices and procedures by which accommodations are offered throughout employment. The accommodation process can begin as early as application to a job posting and continues throughout the recruitment process and into employment. Job opportunities are advertised through job postings with clear messaging as it relates to HDSB's commitment to accommodations, equity, and collection of voluntary self-identification data.

From the [OHRC Guidelines on Accessible Education](#):

The most appropriate accommodation is one that most respects the dignity of the student with a disability, meets individual needs, best promotes inclusion and full participation, and maximizes confidentiality.

An accommodation will be considered appropriate if it will result in equal opportunity to attain the same level of performance, or to enjoy the same level of benefits and privileges enjoyed by others, or if it is proposed or adopted for the purpose of achieving equal opportunity, and meets the student's disability-related needs.

The aim of accommodation is the inclusion and full participation of students with disabilities in educational life. Education providers must make efforts to build or adapt educational services to accommodate students with disabilities in a way that promotes their full participation.

In Spring 2021, the HDSB conducted a Staff Census to gather and report identity-based data, including those who identify as having a disability, to learn what improvements are necessary for the workplace. HDSB is re-examining how we can better provide an equitable, safe and inclusive workplace for all employees. The HDSB Staff Census asked employees to report on various aspects of their identity including ethnicity, indigeneity,

language, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and disability. In addition to identity-based questions, staff were asked about their experiences with respect to inclusion, safety and sense of belonging. All data was collected on a voluntary basis and in accordance with laws governing privacy and confidentiality.

The HDSB recognizes the importance of mental health and well-being of its employees, specifically as the world has experienced the Covid-19 pandemic and its implications. Initiatives have taken place to assess and improve the mental health and well-being of staff to ensure support and positive outcomes. Training programs continue to be offered to staff to improve personal mental health and well-being and reduce stigma associated with invisible disabilities.

Built Environment

Despite challenges associated with the pandemic, HDSB has continued to invest in upgrades to existing facilities to new standards that support accessible school communities. Investments have been targeted to upgrade washroom accessibility, ramps and door operators, elevator renewal and upgrades as well as new elevators, upgraded fire alarms complete with strobes, and parking and curb cut enhancements to support main entrance access improvements.

Utilizing unique funding from the provincial and federal governments, the Covid Resilient Infrastructure Stream (CVRIS) funding has enabled installation of 56 accessible outdoor learning spaces across the HDSB.

Library Services continues to work in tandem with Facility Services to improve accessibility in school libraries (e.g., replacement of library shelving, raising recessed library floors).

Transportation

The five busing companies comprising the HSTS consortium are required to provide training annually to every school bus driver. Training includes AODA - (Customer Service Standard), sensitivity and diversity.

Other/Systemic

Ongoing training continues to be provided to staff and students that supports accessibility awareness, obligations, and inclusive environments. Training is provided through various departments with a focus on the specific needs of the audience and role.

Accessibility Multi-Year Plan Objectives

Barriers to be addressed under the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

The Accessibility Coordinating Committee will address the barrier groupings during the coming years. Our focus is to continue to raise awareness about the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the Board Accessibility Plan.

It is our intent to expand our focus by including more avenues to collaborate with people with disabilities in the review of our annual accessibility plan. This plan will address at least one area in each of communication, information, attitude, physical, policy/practice and architecture.

The Integrated Accessibility Standard and the Built Environment Standard regulations, made under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, establish accessibility standards and apply to every designated public sector organization and to every other person or organization that provides goods or services to members of the public or other third parties that has at least one employee in Ontario.

Barrier-identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Coordinating Committee is using the following barrier-identification methods:

Methodology	Description	Status
Presentation to Senior Administration	Opportunity for input and feedback	Annually
Presentation to SEAC	Opportunity for input and feedback	Annually
Presentation to Trustees	For information	Annually
Communication with Public	Plan posted on board website	Annually
Accessibility Coordinating Committee	Review the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan annually. Update and report on AODA compliance.	Quarterly Meetings

Below is a sample of continued goals established by the Accessibility Coordinating Committee to continue HDSB’s commitment to accessibility standards:

Customer Service

The HDSB is committed to continuing to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are clear and provide for services that are free of barriers for students, staff, and community members with disabilities.

- Ensure public information is reviewed frequently and posted in a timely fashion for efficient and transparent communication.
- Ensure ongoing training is provided to staff to continue to raise awareness of accessibility needs and importance of removing barriers.
- Ensure libraries provide accessible or conversion-ready formats of materials when they are available and that users are aware of this opportunity.

Information and Technology

The HDSB is committed to continuing to ensure the website and web content is conformed with WCAG 2.0 Level AA.

- Partner with departments and schools to assist in ensuring that content is accessible and available in conversion-ready formats where possible.
- Provide training on assistive technology for library staff.
- Continue to maintain feedback processes for reporting barriers and accessibility issues and respond to accessibility inquiries and requests in a timely and transparent manner.

Employment

The HDSB is committed to continuing to support employees with disabilities, ensuring employment practices are AODA compliant, and supporting employees pro-actively with their mental health & wellbeing.

- Address the health and wellness of all employees through collection of data to inform specific strategies to address gaps and barriers.
- Maintain up-to-date accommodation administrative procedures to ensure consistent process for accommodating employees throughout the employment cycle.

- Continue to ensure applicants are aware that accommodations are available through the recruitment and selection process.
- Through the recruitment process, ensure job information is provided in accessible formats and support individual employee accommodation plans.
- Ensure accessibility and accommodation needs are met through the performance management and career development processes.
- Continue to provide documented individual accommodation plans and support return to work initiatives through clear processes.

Built Environment

HDSB is continuing to build new schools and upgrade existing schools to meet or exceed the requirements of the Ontario Building Code, Section 3.8, Barrier-Free Design. To celebrate the work accomplished to date and reaffirm our commitment to the built environment, the HDSB commits to the following.

- Conduct a new audit of our existing facilities to form a baseline of needs
- Publish this data as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and collaborate across the system to align Board priorities with identified building needs
- Continue to allocate school renewal funding to improve equity of access to our facilities

Transportation

The HDSB is committed to continuing to ensure that it provides accessible transportation services to students with disabilities.

- Continue to develop individual student transportation plans.
- Make available to the public current information on accessibility equipment and features on school transportation vehicles, routes and services.
- Conduct employee and volunteer accessibility training and maintain a record of training provided.

➤ Deploy lifting devices and ramps upon request, ensure adequate time is provided to safely board, assist with safe and careful storage of assistive devices, and allow persons with disability to travel with medical aid.

Other/Systemic

The HDSB is committed to continue to provide appropriate training to all staff around AODA and accessibility. A record of this training will be maintained, including dates on which training is provided and the number of individuals it was provided to.

Communication of Plan

In addition to the public availability of the plan as referenced earlier, the Halton District School Board will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan on the Board's website. The Board will accommodate requests for accessible formats of the Plan.

Questions, comments or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to:

Ian Gaudet, Co-Chair, Accessibility Coordinating Committee

Allison Ippolito, Co-Chair, Accessibility Coordinating Committee

Review and Monitoring

The Accessibility Planning Committee meets quarterly during the year to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of barrier-removal and prevention strategies and to plan for increased accessibility throughout the Board.

The Accessibility Planning Committee will ensure that in respect of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan the following steps take place:

- a) An annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan is prepared.
- b) At least once every five (5) years the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is reviewed and updated in consultation with persons with disabilities, with the Board's Special Education Advisory Committee and other relevant committees.

Definitions

What is a Barrier?

A “barrier” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability, including an architectural barrier, an attitudinal barrier, an informational or communications barrier, a physical barrier, a policy, procedure or a practice, or a technological barrier.

Architectural Barrier: building design, area adjacent to the building, shape of room, size of doorways, etc.

Attitudinal Barrier: staff, students and school community who do not know how to communicate with people with disabilities, discriminatory behaviours, disability awareness

Communication Barrier: difficulties receiving information in person or by telephone, difficulties interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, difficulties receiving training

Information Barrier: inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, etc.

Physical Barrier: objects added to the environment – doors, windows, elevators, furniture, playgrounds, school yards, portables, etc.

Policy or Practice Barrier: rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person performing their job satisfactorily, or from serving the public, or that restrict participation. Policy, practice and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

Technological Barrier: computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, (lack of) assistive technologies

Appendix A

Accessibility Coordinating Committee Membership

Ian Gaudet	Co-Chair Executive Officer, Facility Services & Planning
Allison Ippolito	Co-Chair General Manager, Human Resources
Elaine Westerhof	ACC Secretary, Office Supervisor, Facility Services & Planning
Shelita Walker	System Principal, Human Rights, Equity & Inclusive Education
Dave Bennett	Manager, Purchasing, Business Services
Suzanne Burwell	Specialist, Environmental Sustainability, Facilities Services
Lisa Cadotte	Manager, Employee Health and Wellness
Riley Bolt	Abilities Specialist, Employee Health and Wellness
Donna Danielli	Trustee, Halton District School Board
Heather Francey	Manager, Communications
Joanne Eliuk	Halton Secondary Principals Association Representative
Jane Gibson	Forest Trail, OCTU
Lynn Goodwin	Manager, Instructional Media
Jeanne Carrillo	Manager, Governance and Board Services
David Colley	General Manager, Halton Transportation Services
Danielle MacDonald	Halton Elementary Principals Association Representative
Stacey Farrell-Bangerter	System Vice Principal, Special Education
Terry Janach	Manager of Plant Operations, Facility Services & Planning
Lucielle Morris	Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Representative
Margo Shuttleworth	Trustee, Halton District School Board
Marsha Sulewski	Manager, Recruitment, Staffing & Selection
Cathy Thier	General Manager, Information Services
Pardeep Nagra	Human Rights & Equity Advisor
Heather Francey	Senior Officer, Communications
Chris Lansley	Parent Representative Member
Michelle Pereira	Parent Representative Member
Chris Lebourveau	Community & Employee Representative Member
Beth Reeves-Miclash	Community & Employee Representative Member

Appendix B

Suggested Reference Material/Resources

Note:

In addition to the following resources, school boards are encouraged to consult the links provided on the Accessibility in Ontario website

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-in-ontario>

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act:

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>

Accessibility Rules for educational institutions:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-school-libraries>

Accessibility Planning Resources for School Boards:

Accessibility Ontario – Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-create-accessibility-plan-and-policy>

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01o32>

Human Resources Development Canada, *A Way With Words*

https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/migration/documents/eng/disability/arc/wa_y_with_words.pdf

Ontario Human Rights Commission - *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate* <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/disability-policy.shtml>

Adaptive Technology Resource Centre

<http://www.adaptech.org/en/team/atrc>

Canadian Hearing Services

<https://www.chs.ca/accessibility>

Standards Council of Canada : <https://www.scc.ca/en>

B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design

<https://www.scc.ca/en/standardsdb/standards/20064>

B480-02 Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities

<https://www.scc.ca/en/standardsdb/standards/7716>

Playability Tool Kit: Building Accessible Play Spaces
<http://www.opassoc.on.ca/toolkit.asp>

A Few Key Ontario Organizations:

[Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)

[Canadian Hearing Society](#)

[Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario](#)

[Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada – Ont. Division](#)

[Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario](#)

[Little People of Ontario](#)

[Ontario Brain Injury Association](#)

[Spinal Cord Injury – Ontario](#)

[Le Phénix](#)

[Ontario March of Dimes](#)

[The Easter Seal Society – Ontario](#)

[AboutFace International](#)

[Tourette Syndrome Association of Ontario](#)

[Association for Bright Children](#)

[Halton Down Syndrome Association](#)

[Autism Ontario](#)

Appendix C

About Disability

The Disability Continuum

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles.

Most definitions, however, can be placed on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm.

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80. Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel.

A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable human beings, and that it is barriers, not medical conditions, that are disabling. Disability results when people design a world for their way of living only, without taking into account the natural -- and foreseeable -- variability among human beings. In other words, disability is a consequence of design flaws in the built and human environments.

All barriers are human-made. If design problems cause barriers, than disabilities can be eliminated -- or minimized -- by modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our intuitions about the proper way to do things. If systemic barriers cause disabilities, the

disabilities can be eliminated by modifications to policies, plans and processes. If attitudes cause barriers, then disability awareness, respect and an understanding of positive interaction with people with disabilities will remove barriers.

Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

Disability and the Ontario Human Rights Code

Persons with disabilities may face challenges because of the physical or mental limitations. But the attitudes of other people may also create barriers. Understanding this social aspect of disability is essential.

The Ontario Human Rights Code protects the rights of persons with disabilities to equal treatment in employment, housing, goods, services, facilities, contracts and membership in trades or vocational associations. The Code provides a basic definition of “handicap” to include conditions that have developed over time, those that result from an accident, or have been present from birth. It includes physical, mental, and learning disabilities and it does not matter whether the condition is visible. For example, persons with mental disorders, sensory disabilities (such as hearing or vision limitations) and epilepsy are all protected under the Code.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission cites environmental sensitivities and nut allergies as conditions that may need to be accommodated as disabilities.

Protection for persons with mental disabilities deserves special attention. These persons have the same rights as persons with any other kind of disability. They may, however, have trouble expressing themselves or even identifying that they have a disability. The Code protects people from the unequal effects of discrimination. For example, a person may not actually have a disability, but may be perceived to have one. The Code will protect a person who is the victim of discrimination because another thinks that the person has a disability.

(This information is provided as a public service by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.)

There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities:**

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Avoid referring to the disability, or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Don't just assume the individual can't see you.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people who are hard of hearing or deaf:**

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Avoid referring to the disability, or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Attract the person’s attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:**

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability, or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one’s

ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:**

As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people with learning or cognitive disabilities:**

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person
- Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.

- Avoid referring to the disability, or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:**

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring, and listen to persons with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:**

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Avoid referring to the disability, or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Take some time. Be patient and polite, and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.

- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deaf-blind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some **suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf-blind:**

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability, or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deaf-blind.
- Don’t touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Unless it’s an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Appendix D

Where to Look for Barriers

Barriers	Where to Look
<p>Physical Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Furniture - Chairs - Door knobs - Classroom design - Planters - Locks - Drinking fountains - Telephones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work Stations - Doors - Handrails - Windows - Bathroom Hardware - Security Systems - Seats, tables, counters - Desk
<p>Architectural Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exterior to a building - Parking areas - Hallways - Carpets - Reception areas - Classrooms - Cubicles - Cafeterias - Escalators - Stairwells - Storage areas - Entrances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interior of a building - Drop-off zones - Floors - Lobbies - Offices - Athletic Facilities - Washrooms - Elevators - Stairs - Closets - Lighting - Assembly halls
<p>Information/Communication Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Books - Web-based resources - Bulletin boards - Training - Forms - Fax transmissions - Computer screens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Printed information - Signage - Brochures - Receptionists - Manuals - Equipment labels - Public announcements
<p>Attitudinal Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biases and beliefs - Lack of understanding - Stigmatization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of information / knowledge - Lack of sensitivity / intolerance

* See also Policy / Practice below	
Technological Barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Computers - Standard software - Websites - Mice - Fax machines - TTYs - Appliances - Switches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating systems - Proprietary software - Keyboards - Printers - Telephones - Photocopiers - Control panels
Policy / Practice Barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procurement and purchasing - Recruiting - Testing - Promotion - Regulations - Protocols - Community use of facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job postings – Hiring - Interviewing - Meetings - By-laws - Rules - Safety and evacuation - Accommodating students with disabilities