

Accessible Services for People with Disabilities

Effective January 1, 2010

Purpose

This policy describes how LAO provides services accessibly to people with disabilities.

The policy addresses the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and is available to the public at www.legalaid.on.ca by clicking the Accessibility link at the bottom of every page.

Throughout this policy, the term “clients” is used to refer to clients of Legal Aid Ontario and our contacts, including, but not limited to our partners in the justice system and other members of the public with whom we interact.

Our commitment to Accessible Services for People with Disabilities

Legal Aid Ontario strives at all times to provide its services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. We are also committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our services and allowing them to benefit from the same services with the same level of quality and timeliness as others.

We will carry out our functions and responsibilities in the following areas:

Communication

We communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability. We train employees who communicate with clients on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.

Telephone services

We are committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our clients. We train staff to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language and to speak clearly and slowly.

We communicate with clients by TTY (teletypewriter) if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

LAO's TTY is located in the Client Service Centre. The Client Service Centre will relay messages from clients received by TTY to other parts of the organization.

Service by TTY is provided with the same timeliness and quality as service provided over the telephone by the Client Service Centre.

Written communication

We are committed to providing accessible communication to all of our clients and contacts. Written information includes, but is not limited to, legal account information, certificates, letters, forms, brochures and email.

For this reason, written communications will be provided, in the following formats, upon request:

- Hard copy
- Large print
- Portable document format (PDF)
- Microsoft Word

We will provide brochures, public policies, manuals and other public information by email or on compact disk (CD). If these formats are not sufficient to accommodate a client's disability, LAO will communicate with the client to work toward acceptable accommodation.

We will answer any questions clients or contacts may have about the content of written communication in person or by telephone.

Online services

LAO's online services include various accessibility features. The accessibility features for each online service are listed below.

Public Website – www.legalaid.on.ca

- Assistive technologies like screen readers employed by people with visual disabilities interact properly with the site
- Appropriate table markup and alternative text are available throughout for use with screen readers
- The site is compatible with standard browsers with accessibility features like screen and text magnification
- Location listings can be updated in real time by Area Offices and Duty Counsel, allowing up-to-the minute reporting of accessibility interruptions such as construction and maintenance of ramps and elevators
- The location search tool includes a locally submitted photo for each office

Where online services are not accessible to people with disabilities, services are available on the phone, in person or at an LAO location.

Assistive devices

We are committed to serving people with disabilities who use personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our services. We deliver our services in a way that accommodates the needs of people who use assistive devices.

Examples of assistive devices that may be used by clients include:

- Mobility device (i.e., wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, crutches)
- TTY (Teletypewriter)
- Amplification systems or assistive listening devices
- Computerized notetakers

We ensure that our staff are trained and familiar with assistive devices offered by LAO that may be used by clients or contacts with disabilities while accessing our services. A list of available assistive devices is posted on the information page for each LAO location.

We will also ensure that staff with access to the following assistive devices know how to use them:

- TTY (Teletypewriter)
- Elevators
- Automatic door openers

Welcoming service animals

We are 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 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.

Staff with allergies to animals

In some positions, staff who regularly provide services to the public may spend time with clients in a small enclosed space, such as an interview room. Employees with severe allergies to animals who are not able to spend time in close proximity to a service animal are asked to inform their manager about the allergy immediately.

Managers of employees with disclosed allergies are responsible for accommodating the employees' allergies while maintaining timely service to people with disabilities accompanied by a service animal.

Welcoming support persons

Legal Aid Ontario accepts and welcomes the presence of interpreters, support persons and other necessary personnel who accompany, assist and support persons with disabilities who are dealing with Legal Aid.

LAO takes the view that, in most cases, the presence of a support person or interpreter will not adversely affect the solicitor and client relationship or the confidentiality of information provided to legal aid staff, including counsel.

In the rare circumstance where legal advice is being provided and the LAO employee feels that the presence of a support person or interpreter might threaten the confidentiality of the solicitor and client relationship, the legal aid client with a disability will be advised of the concern and given the choice to proceed with or without the support person or interpreter present. The legal aid applicant may be asked to confirm their decision in writing.

Notice of temporary disruption

Legal Aid Ontario provides clients with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. This notice includes information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

Notices will be placed on the location information pages of our website at www.legalaid.on.ca.

Training for staff and third party service providers

Legal Aid Ontario provides training to all employees, volunteers and others who deal with the public or other third parties on their behalf and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of policies, practices and procedures that affect clients and contacts.

Employee Training

All employees must complete accessible customer service training within three months of starting work at LAO. This training is part of the new employee orientation program.

Training will include the following:

- 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 the accessibility devices available in an employee's work location.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing Legal Aid Ontario's services
- Legal Aid Ontario's policies, practices and procedures relating to ensuring accessible client service.

Training for Third Party Service Providers

Third party service providers who deal with the public or other third parties on LAO's behalf must meet the requirements of Section 6(2) of the AODA's customer service standard (Ontario Regulation 429/07) to qualify as a vendor and as a pre-condition of completing a contract to provide services.

Feedback process

We welcome comments and complaints about the accessibility of our services. Clients who are unhappy with our services are encouraged to talk to us. If clients are not satisfied with the first response, clients may file a formal, written complaint using the *Complaint Form*.

Legal Aid's complaints policies and processes are available online at <http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/getting/complaints.asp> and in person from any LAO employee.

The goal of LAO's complaints process is to improve the quality of services we deliver.

Modifications to this or other policies

We are committed to developing client 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.

Related Policies

The following policies support the provision of accessible services to people with disabilities:

- Complaints policy
- Facilities and Leasing Policy
- New Employee Orientation Policy
- Training and Development Policy

Questions about this policy

This policy exists to achieve service excellence to clients and contacts with disabilities. If anyone has a question about the policy, please contact info@lao.on.ca or Legal Aid Ontario at 416-979-1446.