

## Excellent Customer Service

By providing service that welcomes people with disabilities, you can offer better service to everyone. Treating all your customers with individual respect and courtesy is at the heart of excellent customer service.

You can broaden your customer base by welcoming everyone, including customers with disabilities. By learning how to serve people with differing disabilities, you can attract more customers and improve your service to everyone.

## Serving Customers Who Have Disabilities Affecting Speech over the Phone

- Speak normally, clearly and directly
- Concentrate on what's being said
- Be patient, don't interrupt and don't finish your customer's sentences
- Don't try to guess what your customer is saying. If you don't understand, don't pretend. Just ask again
- If you're not certain what was said, just repeat or rephrase what you've heard
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter or a TTY line, just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter
- If your customer is having difficulty communicating, make arrangements to call back when it's convenient to speak with someone else



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## Serving Customers with Disabilities that Affect Mobility or Speech



## How Physical Disabilities May Affect Mobility

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 with moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Physical disabilities can be present at birth, result from disease or injury, or be temporary in nature. They may restrict a person in the following ways:

- Control or speed of movements
- Coordination and balance
- Ability to grasp some objects
- Ability to walk long distances
- Ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods

## Serving Customers with Physical Disabilities Who Use a Wheelchair

“Customer” refers to a person seeking or receiving a service

- Try to put yourself at eye level and speak directly to them
- If a counter is not low enough to be reached by a wheelchair user, come around to the front of the counter to talk to the customer, and offer a stable surface for them to write on if needed
- Make sure the physical space in which you serve customers can accommodate wheelchairs and other assistive devices. E.g. walker

- Know where accessible telephones, washrooms, water fountains, and eating areas are located
- When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles (curbs, stairs, steep hills, etc.)
- Respect their personal space. Don’t touch, lean on, hang things on, or push or pull their wheelchairs unnecessarily, unless it is an emergency

## Serving Customers with Disabilities Who Do Not Use a Wheelchair

- Speak directly to the customer, not their support person
- Ask before you help, as people with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things
- Describe what you are going to do beforehand. E.g. “I’m going to hold your elbow to help you across the street”
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you
- Respect personal space
- Don’t touch any assistive devices unnecessarily, unless it is an emergency
- Don’t move any items they may have
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Be mindful of furniture or equipment that may be an obstacle and re-arrange as necessary
- Don’t leave a customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position

## Serving Customers with Disabilities that Affect Speech

Some people have problems communicating, which could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or an inability to express oneself or comprehend written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

- Don’t make assumptions
- Just because a person has one disability doesn’t mean they have another. For example, if a customer has difficulty speaking, don’t assume they have an intellectual or developmental disability as well
- Ask yes/no questions, if possible
- Be prepared to use pen and paper if needed
- Pay attention, be patient, and wait for the person to complete a word or thought. Give your customer whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across. Do not finish it for the person
- Ask the person to repeat what is said, if you do not understand. Tell the person what you heard and see if it is close to what he or she is saying
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools
- Be prepared for various devices or techniques used to enhance or augment speech. Don’t be afraid to communicate with someone who uses an alphabet board or a computer with synthesized speech

*Continued on reverse.*