



COMPLIANCE

Accessible care



New compliance requirements for clinics and health-care practices in Ontario

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More than 1.8 million people in Ontario have a disability. For many of them, accessing goods, services and employment is a challenge because society does not always, or consistently, consider the accessibility needs of people with disabilities.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is relatively new legislation that places a responsibility on every organization to take proactive steps to become more

accessible. The AODA is particularly important to the health-care industry because of the role health-care providers play in our communities and the extent to which their services are provided to people with disabilities.

Accessibility requirements under the AODA are being phased in over time with the ultimate goal of achieving an accessible Ontario by the year 2025. There are two Accessibility Standards currently in force – the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Customer Service Standards) and the Integrated Accessibility

Standards (Integrated Standards). Both standards mandate the development of accessibility policies and training, though the scope of the latter is broader and addresses accessibility of information and communication – including website accessibility and feedback procedures – employment, transportation and design of public spaces.

The private sector was to have complied with the Customer Service Standards by Jan. 1, 2012. The requirements of the Integrated Standards are being phased in between 2012 and 2021 with compliance deadlines varying depending on whether an organization has fewer than 50 employees (small organization) or 50 employees or more (large organization).

As of Jan. 1, 2016 every private sector organization will have new obligations under the Integrated Standards.

Small organizations will be required to ensure training on the Integrated Standards and the Ontario Human Rights Code, as it pertains to persons with disabilities, is provided to:

- employees and volunteers
- persons involved in developing policies
- persons who provide goods, services or facilities on the organization's behalf

Small organizations are also required to ensure that processes for receiving and responding to feedback from employees, the public and clients are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Finally, small organizations will be required to comply with most of the requirements applicable to large organizations (set out below) by Jan. 1, 2017.

Large organizations will be required to improve accessibility for the public and clients/patients, upon request, by providing information about the organization's goods, services and facilities in an accessible format or with communication supports, in a timely manner and at no additional cost. An accessible format includes, for example, large print, Braille, recorded audio and electronic formats, whereas communication support refers to captioning, plain language and other support that facilitates effective communication.

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