



# **ACCESSIBILITY SERVICE POLICY**

*Providing Goods & Services  
to People with Disabilities*

## **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

Synergy North strives at all times to provide its services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. We are committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our services and allowing them to benefit from the same services in the same places and ways as other customers.

## **2. PURPOSE / BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (the “AODA”) is a Provincial Act with the purpose of developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for persons with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises.

Under the AODA, Ontario Regulation 429/07 entitled “Accessibility Standards for Customer Service” came into force on January 1, 2008. That Regulation establishes accessibility standards specific to customer service for public sector organizations that provide goods and services to members of the public or other third parties. While in effect for designated public sector organizations since January 1, 2010, such requirements are required of all providers with at least one employee effective January 1, 2012.

This policy is drafted in accordance with Regulation 429/07 and addresses the following:

- the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities;
- the use of assistive devices by persons with disabilities;
- the use of service animals by persons with disabilities;
- the use of support persons by persons with disabilities;
- notice of temporary disruptions in services and facilities;
- training;
- customer feedback regarding the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities; and
- notice of availability and format of documents.

## **3. APPLICATION**

This policy applies to all persons who deal with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of Synergy North, whether the person does so as an employee, member of the Board of Directors, or contractor.

## **4. DEFINITIONS**

### **4.1 ASSISTIVE DEVICE**

A device used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services of persons or organizations covered by the Customer Service Standard.

### **4.2 UTILITY**

Synergy North.

### **4.3 DISABILITY**

- a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, and degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- d) a mental disorder, or
- e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

### **4.4 GUIDE DOG**

A guide dog as defined in section 1 of the Blind Persons' Rights Act is a dog trained as a guide for a blind person and having qualifications prescribed by the regulations under the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

### **4.5 NURSE**

A Registered Nurse or Registered Practical Nurse who is a registered member in good standing with the College of Nurses of Ontario.

### **4.6 PHYSICIAN**

A physician who is a registered member in good standing with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

#### **4.7 SERVICE ANIMAL**

Any animal used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to the disability where it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reason relating to his or her disability; or where the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse that he or she requires the animal for reasons relating to his or her disability; or a valid identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada or a certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school.

#### **4.8 SUPPORT PERSON**

A person who accompanies a person with a disability in order to assist him or her with communication, mobility, personal care, or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

### **5. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

#### **5.1 THE PROVISION OF GOODS AND SERVICES TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Utility will use reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:

- the Utility's goods and services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities;
- the provision of the Utility's goods and services to persons with disabilities are integrated with those provided to persons who do not have disabilities unless an alternative measure is necessary to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the Utility's goods or services and;
- persons with disabilities are given an opportunity equal to that of persons without disabilities to obtain, use or benefit from the Utility's goods and services.

#### **5.2 COMMUNICATION WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

When communicating with a person with a disability, the Utility will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

#### **5.3 NOTICE OF TEMPORARY DISRUPTIONS IN SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

The Utility is aware that the operation of its services and facilities is important to the public. However, temporary disruptions in the Utility's services and facilities may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within the Utility's control or knowledge.

The Utility will make a reasonable effort to provide notice of the disruption to the public, including information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that may be available. The Utility will make a reasonable effort to provide prior notice of planned disruption if possible, recognizing that in some circumstances such as in the case of an unplanned temporary disruption, advance notice will not be possible. In such cases the Utility will provide notice as soon as possible.

When temporary disruptions occur to the Utility's services or facilities, the Utility will provide notice by posting the information on the Utility's website ([www.synergynorth.ca](http://www.synergynorth.ca)), or by any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances.

#### **5.4 ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND OTHER MEASURES THAT ASSIST WITH ACCESSIBILITY**

A person with a disability may provide their own assistive device for the purpose of obtaining, using and benefiting from the Utility's goods and services. Exceptions may occur in situations where the Utility has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of a person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

In these situations and others, the Utility may offer a person with a disability other reasonable measures to assist him or her in obtaining, using and benefiting from the Utility's goods and services, where the Utility has such other measures available.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that his or her assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

#### **5.5 SERVICE ANIMALS**

Persons with a disability may enter publicly accessible premises owned and/or operated by the Utility accompanied by a service animal and keep the animal with them provided the animal is not excluded by law. If a service animal is excluded by law, the Utility will ensure that alternate means are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the Utility's goods and services.

If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, the Utility may ask the person with a disability for a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to his or her disability. The Utility may also, or instead, ask for a valid identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada or a certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that his or her service animal is kept in control at all times.

#### **5.6 SUPPORT PERSONS**

A person with a disability may enter publicly accessible premises owned and/or operated by the Utility with a support person and have access to the support person while on the premises.

The Utility may require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person while on Utility premises in situations where it is necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

A support person, when assisting a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the Utility's goods and services, will be permitted to attend at no charge where an admission fee is applicable.

## **5.7 FEEDBACK**

The Utility is committed to providing high quality goods and services to all members of the public it serves. Feedback from the public is welcomed as it may identify areas that require change and encourage continuous service improvements.

Feedback from a member of the public about the delivery of goods and services to persons with disabilities may be given by telephone, in person, in writing, in electronic format or through other methods.

Information about the feedback process will be readily available to the public and notice of the process will be posted on the Utility's website ([www.synergynorth.ca](http://www.synergynorth.ca)) and/or in other appropriate locations.

## **5.8 TRAINING**

The Utility will ensure that all persons to whom this policy applies receive training as required by the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.

The content of the training will include:

- a review of the purposes of the AODA;
- the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07);
- instruction on the Utility's policies, procedures and practices pertaining to the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities;
- how to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities;
- what to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the Utility's goods and services;
- how to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or who require the assistance of a support person or service animal; and
- information about the equipment or devices available on the Utility's premises that may help with the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities.

### **Timeline for Training**

Training will be provided as soon as practical upon an individual being assigned a position whereby the individual may be required to provide goods or services to a person with a disability. Training will also occur on an on-going basis as changes occur to the Utility's policies, procedures and practices governing the provision of goods or services to persons with disabilities.

### **Records of Training**

The Utility will keep records of the training, including the date on which training is provided and the number of individuals to whom it is provided.

## **6. AVAILABILITY AND FORMAT OF DOCUMENTS**

All documents required by the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, including the Utility's Accessible Customer Service policies, procedures and practices, notices of temporary disruptions, training records, and written feedback processes are available upon request, subject to the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)*.

When providing a document to a person with a disability, the Utility will provide the document, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes the person's disability into account.

## **7. NOTICE OF THE AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS**

Notice of the availability of all documents required by the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service will be posted on the Utility's website, and available through the Utility's Customer Service Department.