
ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE

BACKGROUND

The Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation, enacted under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), came into force for the public sector in 2017. The purpose of this procedure is to outline the Division's commitment to providing goods, services, and facilities that people with disabilities can use and benefit from equally, ensuring customer service is accessible to all Manitobans. Accessible customer service is provided when all persons who are reasonably expected to seek to obtain, use, or benefit from a good or service have the same opportunity to do so. This procedure is based on key principles, including respect for the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities and equal opportunity.

DEFINITIONS

Barrier

For a person who has a physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory disability, a barrier is anything that interacts with that disability in a way that may hinder the person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis.

Service Animal

Refers to an animal that has been trained to aid a person with a disability that relates to that person's disability. There is no standardized documentation, training program, or certification for service animals in Manitoba; therefore, any animal trained to perform disability-related tasks, including those that are self-trained, is considered a service animal. This may include animals referred to by handlers as "therapy dogs," "comfort animals," or "companion animals," provided they perform a specific disability-related task.

Support Person

A person who accompanies an individual who is disabled by a barrier to support them in obtaining, using, or benefiting from a good or service, or to assist them with communication, mobility, personal care, or medical needs.

Assistive Device

A technical aid, communication device, or other instrument used to maintain or improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities, such as a wheelchair, walker, or hearing technology.

PROCEDURES

1. Policy Implementation and Barrier-Free Access

- a) The Division shall establish and implement measures, policies, and practices respecting barrier-free access to the goods or services it provides.
- b) In implementing these measures, the Division must identify existing barriers to accessible customer service and seek to remove the existing barriers it is responsible for.
- c) The Division shall seek to prevent new barriers from being created.
- d) If an existing barrier cannot reasonably be removed, the Division shall seek to ensure that persons disabled by the barrier are provided access to the good or service by alternate means, whether on a temporary or permanent basis.
- e) A fee or charge relating to accommodating a person who is disabled by a barrier shall be imposed to the individual only if the organization cannot reasonably accommodate the person otherwise.

2. Communication and Information

- a) When communicating with a person who self-identifies as being disabled by a barrier, the Division shall make reasonable efforts to ensure the communication is done in a manner that considers the barrier.
- b) Staff will meet communication needs by offering to communicate in different ways, such as writing things down, reading things out loud, providing a translator, or taking extra time to explain things.
- c) If a person with a disability needs an accessible format or help to communicate, the Division will work with the person to provide the format or support that will meet their needs at no additional cost to them if the Division can reasonably accommodate the need.
- d) The Division will make the availability of accessible formats and communication supports publicly known.
- e) The Division shall ensure its public-facing websites and web content meet or exceed applicable digital accessibility requirements.

3. Use of Assistive Devices, Support Persons, and Service Animals

- a) The Division's practices shall recognize that a person disabled by a barrier may use assistive devices to remove or reduce the barrier, and measures must reasonably accommodate the use of those devices.
- b) Staff will accommodate the use of assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and communication or hearing devices.

- c) A person disabled by a barrier may be accompanied by a support person when seeking to obtain, use, or benefit from the Division's goods or services.
- d) The person disabled by a barrier and their support person be permitted to enter the premises together, and the person should be able to have access to the support person at all times while on the premises.
- e) The Division welcomes service animals and shall allow service animals in all public areas.
- f) If the need for a service animal is not obvious, staff may ask if the animal is trained to assist with a disability-related need and what type of assistance it provides. Staff must not ask for the individual's specific medical diagnosis, nor is it appropriate to request that the service animal demonstrate the task for which it is trained.
- g) The Division recommends that service animals wear a harness or vest, but recognizes this identification is not required by law in Manitoba.
- h) Service animals must be under the care and control of their handler at all times through a leash, tether, voice, signal, or other effective means.
- i) An animal may be excluded or asked to leave the premises if it is misbehaving and the handler cannot effectively control it (e.g., excessive barking, growling, jumping, or aggressive behavior). If an animal is excluded, the Division will seek other reasonable measures to ensure the person can access the service.
- j) While documentation is not required for brief customer service, the Division may request documentation—such as a letter from a regulated health professional or trainer—confirming the need for a service animal for ongoing interactions involving students, staff, or volunteers.
- k) Staff and the public shall not pet, talk to, or feed a service animal without the handler's permission, as it may distract the animal from its work.

4. Maintenance and Notice of Disruption

- a) The Division must ensure that any aspect of its built environment intended to facilitate barrier-free access (e.g., automatic doors) is available for use in the intended manner.
- b) In the event that an accessibility feature is temporarily unavailable, notice must be given to the public via the website, social media and signage at the site.
- c) The notice must prominently display the reasons for unavailability, an estimate of when the unavailability will cease, and details of alternate means, if any, available to access the goods or services.
- d) This notice should be prominently displayed on the applicable premises and on the organization's website, if any, or be given by other reasonable means.

5. Feedback Process

- a) The Division must make reasonable efforts to ensure it provides a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the accessibility of its goods or services in a manner suitable for persons disabled by barriers.
- b) The process should document resulting actions, and that documentation must be made available on request.
- c) Feedback may be provided in person, by telephone, in writing, by email, or by other communication technology as required.

6. Training and Documentation

- a) The Division must ensure that mandatory training about accessible customer service is provided to staff who implement accessibility policies and to staff responsible for developing accessibility policies.
- b) Training must be provided as soon as reasonably practicable after a person is assigned the applicable duties.
- c) Ongoing training must be provided in connection with changes to the Division's measures, administrative procedures, and practices respecting barrier-free access.
- d) Training content must include instruction on:
 - i. How to interact and communicate with persons disabled by barriers.
 - ii. How to interact with persons disabled by barriers who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a support person or service animal.
 - iii. How to use any equipment or assistive devices available to assist persons disabled by barriers.
 - iv. What to do if a person disabled by a particular barrier is having difficulty accessing a good or service.
 - v. A review of *The Human Rights Code*, *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*, and the *Customer Service Standard Regulation*.
- e) The Division must record its training policy within the Accessibility Committee's meeting minutes, including a summary of the training content and the schedule for when training will be delivered.
- f) The Division must document its measures, administrative procedures, and practices under this procedure, and provide a copy of the documentation on request. Notice must be given that this documentation is available upon request.

7. Accessibility of Public Events

- a) The Division must take reasonable measures to ensure that public events (including meetings, hearings, and consultations required under an enactment) are accessible.
- b) Notice of the event must be given in a manner that is accessible to persons disabled by barriers.
- c) The event should be held in a meeting space that is accessible.
- d) Notice should be given that persons disabled by barriers may request that relevant supports be provided.
- e) The physical and communication needs of persons disabled by barriers must be accommodated upon request, when available and reasonable, with prior notice provided.

References:

- [*The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*](#)
- [Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation](#)
- [*The Human Rights Code \(Manitoba\)*](#)
- [Relevant Provincial and Federal Legislation and Regulations](#)
- [Swan Valley School Division Administrative Procedure 203: Digital Citizenship](#)
- [Swan Valley School Division Administrative Procedure 210: Safe and Caring Schools](#)
- Manitoba Education Guidance on Service Animals (2026)
- [Manitoba Human Rights Commission Service Animal Guidelines](#)