



ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

Providing Goods and Services to People with Disabilities

Our Commitment

The County of Hastings strives at all times to provide its goods and services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of all people. The County of Hastings is also committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our goods and services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other customers.

Providing Goods and Services to People with Disabilities

The County of Hastings will provide goods and services to people with disabilities, with particular consideration of the following areas:

Communication

The County of Hastings will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability. Staff who communicate with customers will be trained on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.

The County of Hastings is committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our customers. Staff will be trained to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language, to speak clearly and slowly and to tailor their responses as much as possible in support of the individual.

The County of Hastings will offer to communicate with customers by other means, including relay service or e-mail, if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

Assistive Devices

The County of Hastings is committed to serving people with disabilities who use assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our goods and services. Staff will be trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our goods or services. The County of Hastings will also ensure that staff know how to use the assistive devices which are available on our premises, including electronic door openers and elevators.

Billing

The County of Hastings is committed to providing accessible invoices to all of our customers. For this reason, invoices will be provided in large print or by e-mail, upon request. Any questions customers may have about the content of the invoice will be answered in person, by telephone or e-mail.

Support Persons

When accessing goods, services and facilities provided by the County of Hastings, persons with disabilities may be accompanied by their support person in areas or premises that are open to the public. In situations where confidential information will be discussed, the County will obtain consent from the person with a disability before any potentially confidential information is mentioned. The County may require that a person with a disability be accompanied by a support person when on County premises or participating in County-run programs. This would be required only if, after consultation with the person with a disability and considering all information, County staff determine that:

- a) the support person is necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability and the health and safety of others on the premises; and,
- b) there is no other reasonable way to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability and the health and safety of others on the premises.

Where the County requires a support person to accompany a person with a disability, and where the person with a disability has agreed to the accompaniment, the County will not charge the support person any fees.

Service Animals

When accessing County goods services or facilities, persons with disabilities are welcome to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal and keep the animal with them in areas that are open to the public, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. If a service animal is excluded by law from the premises, County staff will inform the person of the reason why and ensure that other methods are available for the person to access goods, services and facilities.

A service animal should be easily identified through visual indicators, such as a vest or harness worn by the animal, or when it helps the person perform certain tasks related to the person's disability. When the animal is not easily identified as a service animal, County employees may ask the person to provide documentation from a regulated health professional as described in section 80.45 (4) of Ontario Regulation 191/11.

It is the responsibility of the person using the guide dog or service animal to ensure that the service animal is kept in control at all times.

Notice of Temporary Disruption

The County of Hastings will provide customers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. This notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. The notice will be placed at all public entrances and service counters on our premises.

Training

The County of Hastings will provide 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 customer service policies, practices and procedures. Members of County Council, as well as all staff of the County of Hastings will receive this training.

The accessible customer service training will be provided during orientation, in a timely manner after staff commence their duties.

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 automatic door openers and elevators available at the County of Hastings premises
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing the County of Hastings goods and services
- The County of Hastings policies, practices and procedures relating to the customer service standard.

Staff will be trained on policies, practices and procedures that affect the way goods and services are provided to people with disabilities. Staff will also be trained on an ongoing basis when changes are made to these policies, practices and procedures.

Feedback Process

The ultimate goal of the County of Hastings is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving all people, including those with disabilities. Comments regarding how well those expectations are being met are welcome and appreciated.

Feedback regarding the way the County of Hastings provides goods and services to people with disabilities can be made by using a feedback form, by mail, e-mail, or verbally. All feedback should be directed to the Deputy Clerk. Customers can expect a response within thirty (30) calendar days.

Modifications to This or Other Policies

The County of Hastings is committed to developing customer 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.

Any policy of the County of Hastings that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

Questions About This Policy

This policy exists to achieve service excellence to customers with disabilities. If anyone has a question about the policy, or if the purpose of a policy is not understood, inquiries should be referred to the Deputy Clerk of the County of Hastings.