

How to assist people with disabilities

Tip sheet for Heart and Stroke Foundation volunteers



Thank you for volunteering at the Heart and Stroke Foundation. You make a difference and we want to ensure that you and all our volunteers receive the training you need to make the most of your contribution and time.

As a Foundation volunteer, you may be involved in helping us serve members of the public, donors, supporters and other volunteers. The tips and information below will help prepare you to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

At the bottom of this page, you will find a link to a video developed by the Ontario government to show you how to put these tips into action. Please take some time to review this useful resource.

Why should access for Ontarians with disabilities matter to you?

1. The Foundation is committed to providing service excellence to all and ensuring our services are accessible to any volunteer, donor, supporter or customer who has a disability.
2. We want you to understand how to interact and communicate with our diverse user community, including people with disabilities.
3. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is a law passed by the Ontario Legislature. The vision is for a fully accessible Ontario by 2025. AODA requires the Foundation and other employers to provide training for their employees and volunteers.

Top tips to help you with customer service:

1. Always put people first. Focus on the person, not their disability. Use "disability" or "disabled," not "handicap" or "handicapped."
2. On the phone speak naturally, clearly and directly. If you have voicemail, ensure your message is clear and not too fast.
3. If someone cannot enter one of our offices because of a physical barrier, offer to serve them at the entrance.
4. If you're not sure how to help, err on the side of caution and wait until a person describes their situation to you, instead of making assumptions.
5. Allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal or support person. Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
6. Keep assistive devices such as wheelchairs in mind when planning events or selecting venues.

7. Let persons with disabilities provide feedback on how you met their needs and take appropriate action on any complaints.
8. If you cannot understand what the person is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves.
9. Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

Check out our website for [details on our commitment and plan](#).

Four key areas for the Foundation:

Communications: We will communicate with persons with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability. This means employees and volunteers will communicate in a way that enables persons with disabilities to effectively use, receive and request HSF goods, services and facilities. Let us know if you or a client is having difficulty accessing our resources.

Assistive devices: We will ensure that our employees and volunteers who interact with customers, donors and other supporters are familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by persons with disabilities while accessing our services.

Use of service animals and support persons: We welcome persons with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties.

Notice of temporary disruption: We will provide employees and volunteers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by persons with disabilities. The notice will be placed at all public entrances and service counters on our premises.

Want to learn more?

This [video training course](#) was created by the Government of Ontario to help you better serve people with disabilities. It takes about 45 minutes to complete.

Helpful facts

People with disabilities

- About 1.85 million people in Ontario have disabilities; that's 15.5% of Ontario's population, or **1 in 7** Ontarians.
- As the population ages, the number of Ontarians with a disability will increase.
- Accessibility issues are just as important to the elderly, the young and people with temporary disabilities, as well as those with life-long disabilities.

What is AODA?

- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is a law passed by the Ontario Legislature in 2005. The vision is for a fully accessible Ontario by 2025.

Purpose of AODA

- To develop accessibility standards with which employers such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation must comply. Employers must submit their accessibility plans to the government and make them publically available.
- To enforce the standards.

We want questions and feedback

The ultimate goal of the Heart and Stroke Foundation is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving customers with disabilities. Comments on how our services are meeting expectations or how we can improve are appreciated. To submit questions or feedback, please go to the [Accessibility section](#) on our website.