

# Manitoba Government

## Accessible Customer Service Policy

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### Statement of Policy

The Manitoba Government Accessible Customer Service Policy (ACSP) instructs the quality of interaction between government departments and people disabled by barriers when providing information and customer services to the public. The Manitoba Government will create equitable access by eliminating barriers and by responding to individual accessibility needs in a respectful and timely manner. The onus is on government to inform the public of accessibility features and to invite requests for alternate formats or other disability accommodations.

This policy aims at eliminating barriers faced by people with disabilities and is in accordance with the requirements of the Customer Service Standard, under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. It addresses the way government provides services to persons with disabilities, but does not address program entitlements.

### Principles

**Access:** Persons should have barrier-free access to places, events and other functions that are generally available in the community;

**Equality:** Persons should have barrier-free access to those things that will give them equality of opportunity and outcome;

**Universal design:** Providing access in a manner that does not establish or perpetuate differences based on a person's disability;

**Systemic responsibility:** The responsibility to prevent and remove barriers rests with the person or organization that is responsible for establishing or perpetuating the barrier.

### Background

The Manitoba Government has a long history of continually improving services for people with disabilities. This includes implementation of the Manitoba Policy on Access to Government Publications, Events, and Services (MPAG), which was established in 2008 to recognize the increasing role of electronic communication. The MPAG set expectations regarding the quality and accessibility of service provided by public sector bodies to Manitobans with disabilities when providing information, organizing events and offering services.

In 2015, the Customer Service Standard came into force under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. It outlines the requirements for organizations across the province to improve equitable access to the goods and services they provide.

The ACSP will improve the quality of government services provided to Manitobans with disabilities and address the requirements of the accessible standard for customer service.

Statistics Canada's 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability found that over 145,000 Manitobans, or 15.6 per cent of the population aged 15 and over, have long-term conditions or health-related problems that limit their everyday activities. In some cases, the disabilities are visible, for example, when individuals use a wheelchair, cane or service animal. In many other cases, the disabilities are invisible, including mental health conditions or chronic pain.

Statistics also show the likelihood of disability increases with age. So, as the number of senior Manitobans grows in the coming years, so will the number of persons with disabilities.

The equality rights of persons with disabilities are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and The Human Rights Code (Manitoba). Failure to reasonably accommodate\* individual needs in a principled fashion may lead to a formal complaint to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission or a legal proceeding before the courts.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the ACSP is to ensure that people disabled by barriers benefit from equitable access to information and customer services to the public provided by the Government of Manitoba.

## **Scope of Application**

This policy applies to:

- all departments
- all civil servants
- all agents and volunteers must verify that they have received training required by the Customer Service Standard

This policy intends to benefit the full range of people disabled by barriers. These barriers are obstacles that limit access and prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society. See also Section 3.1 of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

## Policy Implementation

As a corporate policy, it is the responsibility of the Manitoba Government to ensure all departments are aware of its practices and procedures.

The government departments must make every reasonable effort to meet the needs of people with disabilities when providing accessible customer service.

Departments will have processes and practices to support policy implementation.

Information and other accommodations will be provided in the most cost-effective format that will reasonably address the needs of the individual. The cost to meet the objective of this policy is the responsibility of the department concerned.

## Practices and Procedures

The Manitoba Government practices and procedures are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, equal opportunity and barrier free access to goods or services. Access to goods and services is reasonably provided by alternate means if a barrier cannot be removed.

1. To provide accessible public information and communication, the Manitoba Government will:
  - 1.1 produce public information in ways that enhance accessibility, for example, using plain language and clear print.
  - 1.2 notify the public that alternate formats are available on request by stating this on all new government publications.
  - 1.3 respond in a timely manner to requests for documents in an alternate format.
  - 1.4 update websites and online information to be accessible according to existing Manitoba Government guidelines.
  - 1.5 advise the public that information about government measures supporting accessibility, including this policy, is available upon request and in alternate formats.
  - 1.6 training employees to communicate in an appropriate manner that takes into account the barrier, when a person has self-identified as being disabled by a barrier.

1.7 use signage with active offer “How can I help?”

2. The Manitoba Government welcomes people using assistive devices. This includes:

2.1 an understanding that staff will be made aware of what assistive devices are.

2.2 reasonably accommodating people using assistive devices if required.

2.3 an understanding that personal assistive devices will not be touched or moved without permission.

2.4 where assistive devices are available someone is trained on how to use them, for example, accessible computer features at an employment training centre.

3. The Manitoba Government welcomes support persons accompanying people with disabilities. This includes:

3.1 training employees on how to treat each party with respect, including speaking directly to the customer and not the support person unless advised to do so.

3.2 ensuring a person with a disability accompanied by a support person has access to that individual at all times when on the premises.

4. The Manitoba Government welcomes persons with service animals. This includes:

4.1 understanding a service animal as defined in The Manitoba Human Rights Code to be “an animal that has been trained to provide assistance to a person with a disability that relates to that person's disability.”

4.2 recognizing that a person may be accompanied by a service animal when he or she seeks to obtain, use or benefit from government goods or services.

4.3 recognizing that service animals may remain with the handler during the provision of a home visit

- 4.4 recognizing that a service animal must be under the care and control of its owner at all times.
- 4.5 training employees on appropriate questions that can be asked if it is not clear that an animal is a service animal.
- 4.6 training employees not to interfere with a working animal without seeking permission of the animal's owner.

5. The Manitoba Government will ensure accessible features of the built environment are available for use as intended, or notice is given. This includes:

- 5.1 clearing passageways and the unobstructed use of accessible features, such as accessible washrooms and ramps
- 5.2 providing public notification when there is a planned or unexpected disruption of accessible services or features services, such as an elevator.
- 5.3 posting a notice at all entranceways, and when possible, on the department's website page.
- 5.4 the reason for the barrier and the estimated timeframe for resolution.

6. To provide accessible public events and meetings the Manitoba Government will:

- 6.1 hold public events in accessible meeting spaces.
- 6.2 meet the communication needs of Manitobans with disabilities on request.
- 6.3 publicize events using methods accessible to people with disabilities.
- 6.4 add to publicity and registration forms that disability supports are available on request.
- 6.5 not charge an additional fee for a support person

7. A feedback and response system about accessible customer service is provided to the public and includes:

- 7.1 public feedback accepted by phone, and email.

- 7.2 notice confirming receipt of feedback should be provided within 48 hours.
  - 7.3 response to the feedback should be delivered within two weeks.
  - 7.4 documented tracking of request and feedback provided.
8. The Manitoba Government will provide training in accessible customer service to all civil servants, agents, volunteers and others who directly provide goods or services to the Manitoba public or to another organization on behalf of the Manitoba Government.
- 8.1 customer service training includes a review of The Human Rights Code (Manitoba), The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), the Customer Service Standard and information required to assist employees understand the following: accessible communication and information, assistive devices, support persons, service animals, temporary barriers, barrier free access, and accessible public events.
  - 8.2 customer service training is delivered to applicable current civil servants, agents, and volunteers as soon as is reasonably practical.
  - 8.3 customer service training is delivered as soon as is reasonably practical to newly hired civil servants once individuals have been assigned applicable duties.
  - 8.4 ongoing training is delivered when there are changes made to internal accessibility policies and practices.
  - 8.5 documentation will be maintained on the accessibility training's content, when the training is to be provided and tracking of number of persons trained.
9. Notification that the ACSP is publically available, including in alternate formats and is displayed prominently on the Manitoba Government's website homepage.

Public documentation includes:

- 9.1 This ACSP and a summary of the provided training.
- 9.2 Manitoba Government Accessibility Plan and updates

## Accountability

Leadership on Manitoba Government accessibility is provide by a steering committee made up of the Clerk of the Executive Council, the Civil Service Commissioner, the Secretary to the Treasury Board and the Deputy Minister of Families. The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of every Deputy Minister.

Departments will have processes and practices to support policy implementation and may develop additional guidelines to meet the purpose of the ACSP. Departments will also maintain records to demonstrate implementation and compliance.

This policy replaces the Manitoba Policy on Access to Government Publications, Events, and Services (MPAG), 2008 and the Manitoba Government Accessible Customer Service Policy (MGACSP) February 13, 2017.

*“original signed by” Fred Meier*

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Approved by the Clerk of the Executive Council

*Updated February 2018*

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Date

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This policy is available in alternate formats, upon request.

\*The Manitoba Human Rights Commission (MHRC) describes reasonable accommodation as a “simple and inexpensive change to how something is typically done, which takes into account a need a person or group has that is based on a protected characteristic.” The MHRC reviews human rights complaints according to both the process used to identify and explore accommodation options for a special need, as well as any substantive decision on the requested accommodation. The duty to reasonably accommodate disabilities is limited by undue hardship to the service provider.