



Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

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Table of content

<u>Introduction to AODA</u>	3	<u>Principles of WCAG 2.0</u>	14
<u>Understanding Disability</u>	4	<u>Levels of Conformance</u>	17
<u>Myths and Facts</u>	6	<u>Hiring People Living with Disabilities</u>	19
<u>Language and Etiquette</u>	8	<u>Employee Retention</u>	25
<u>Understanding Web Accessibility WCAG 2.0</u>	13	<u>Glossary</u>	29

Introduction to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

In Ontario, approximately 2.6 million people have reported some form of disability. This means roughly one in four Ontarians live with a disability and face challenges in their everyday life. These numbers are projected to grow as the population ages. Ontario’s workforce will need to evolve to be more inclusive of individuals with disabilities, and of the increasing number of older adults continuing to work past the age of retirement.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is an Ontario law that outlines accessibility standards to remove and prevent barriers for people living with disabilities (PLWD) in Ontario. The standards address how PLWD access services, buildings, and employment, and outline how government, businesses, non-profits and public sector organizations can increase accessibility for everyone. As per the Act, AODA compliance is required of every person or organization in Ontario’s public and private sectors that do at least one of the following:

- Provides goods, services or facilities
- Employs people in Ontario
- Offers accommodations
- Owns or occupies a building, structure or premises
- Engages in business activities

Developed in consultation with the disability community, municipalities and representatives from various sectors, the target was to achieve full accessibility in Ontario by January 1, 2025.

The rules and standards that employers, businesses and organizations need to follow depend on the type and size of the organization or business. To find out more about how these standards apply to your business, review the [Government of Ontario’s guide to accessibility compliance for industry](#). Additionally, there are [some self-assessment checklists](#) online to help you identify the requirements that apply to your business.



Understanding Disability

The AODA defines “disability” according to the *Ontario Human Rights Code*:

- 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, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device.
- A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability.
- A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language.
- A mental disorder, or
- An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the [Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997](#) (“handicap”).

Disability is a complex and evolving matter that covers a range of different conditions. There is not a single all-encompassing definition of disability. It can be:

- Visible or hidden
- Mild, moderate, or severe
- Permanent, long-term, short-term, or episodic
- Present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.

Some common forms of disability include:

1. **A physical or mobility impairment** - may be congenital, or the result of injury, aging, or disease and may require the use of mobility aids.
2. **A sensory impairment** - can be from birth, or acquired during someone’s lifetime. Sensory impairment means that there has been a loss or change in one’s senses that impacts daily life. It can include blindness or reduced vision, hearing loss, or chemical sensitivities.
3. **An intellectual or developmental disorder** - can affect how a person develops physically, intellectually, and/or emotionally. They may affect how individuals learn, process information, and problem-solve causing behaviours and reactions that may differ from social norms. Some common examples are Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism spectrum disorder.
4. **A learning disorder** - can affect a person’s oral and written language skills, reading skills, and organizational abilities. Some common examples are dyslexia and dysgraphia.
5. **A mental health disorder** - can affect a person’s mental and cognitive abilities. Some of the common examples are depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Bipolar disorder.

See [the glossary](#) for more detailed definitions.



Myths and Facts

Ontario is home to 2.6 million people who have reported living with some form of disability. The biggest barrier faced by people living with a disability is the stigma they face. Below are some common myths that lead to disability stigma along with some myth busting facts.

Myths	Facts
People living with disabilities are less productive as compared to their peers.	Many PLWD are as productive or even exceed their peers in productivity with access to the right tools. Dealing with the social and physical challenges of living with a disability leads many to develop unique skills and problem-solving abilities. Resilience and adaptability are valuable assets for businesses and organizations.
People living with disabilities have limited career options.	PLWD are thriving in diverse careers. Many organizations in Canada help different sectors hire and retain PLWD. The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) is one such organization that offers disability awareness and confidence training for businesses. Studies have shown that organizations that follow inclusive career development plans produce higher employee retention.

Myths	Facts
It is expensive to accommodate people living with disabilities.	Most accommodations are low-cost or free. If there are any costs to supporting PLWD, there are federal and provincial government grants available to businesses to increase workplace safety for PLWD. Enabling Accessibility Fund (EAP) is a federal organization that provides flat-rate funding to install ramps, accessible doors, etc. Provincially, the Ontario Trillium Foundation provides grants for a one-year term that helps businesses buy equipment and do renovations/repairs to accommodate PLWD. The Assistive Devices Program (ADP) is another Government of Ontario program that may cover 75% of the cost of assistive devices.
People living with disabilities are a liability for the company.	Installing appropriate accommodations in the workplace may increase safety for everyone and provides an opportunity to practice enhanced workplace safety and awareness for all staff.
People living with disabilities have higher rates of absenteeism.	Studies show otherwise. Several studies of inclusive and accessible workplaces show that making a workplace inclusive results in lower absenteeism among PLWD than among their non-disabled peers.
People living with disabilities enhance a company's public image.	Although being an inclusive and integrated workplace may improve public perception, PLWD should not be "token hires" or diversity compliance hires. Hiring PLWD proves to be more beneficial for companies in the long run and should be done with respect and dignity.
People living with disabilities do not integrate well into existing teams.	With proper awareness/sensitivity training and support, many employees gain empathy and improve their communication skills. This strengthens overall team dynamics and supports an integrated environment.

Language and Etiquette

Just as the definition of disability is constantly evolving, so too is how we understand and interact with disability in our communities and in the workplace. The AODA aims to dispel disability stigma and make daily interactions respectful and dignified for everyone. Most of these stigmas and stereotypes stem from historical inaccuracies and affect how we understand and speak about disability. These myths can be easily dispelled by being open minded and learning about the appropriate language and terminology to use when speaking with and working with PLWD.

Always be mindful that:

- **Disability terminology is ever-evolving.** There is no one-size-fits-all approach to understanding disability. It is important to note that accepted terminology will differ by country, region, or individual. Each individual has the right to decide how their disability is referred to or is stated.
- **Do not be discouraged by a lack of proper terminology.** Fear can hinder progress towards inclusion. If uncertain about proper terminology, approach the conversation or relationship in an honest and respectful manner. This demonstrates empathy, creates space for inclusion, and is a first step to understanding the complexity of disability.
- **Disability is only a taboo topic if you consider it a taboo topic.** Having conversations about disability is no longer controversial. While some individuals are still uncomfortable speaking about their disability, many are open to respectful conversation. Remember to only speak or ask about someone’s disability if it is relevant to the task or conversation.

If you are not sure how someone self-identifies, the best thing to do is ask them. Asking something like, “How do you identify?” is an effective way to ensure you use the preferred language of the person you are interacting with.

Here are some guidelines to help ensure the interactions with PLWD are done with dignity and respect:

- **Emphasize people-first language** - Put the person before the disability. For example, don’t say “an autistic person”, instead say ‘a person with autism’. Disability does not define a person.
- **Avoid terms that group people into categories**, such as disabled, blind, deaf, etc. This can create false assumptions of uniformity. All disabilities are unique and require unique accommodations.

- **Refrain from using language that portrays individuals living with a disability as brave or heroic.** Most PLWD aspire to have the same goals and lifestyles as non-disabled peers.
- **Avoid terms that suggest a connection between disability and illness.** Do not use terms, such as “afflicted by”, “suffer from”, etc.
- Steer clear of assuming there are limitations for certain activities and tasks based on preconceived assumptions about disability.
- Instead of using the term “handicapped”, use “accessible”. For example, do not say “handicapped parking” or “handicapped washroom”. Instead, say “accessible parking” and “accessible washroom”.

In addition to language and terminology, being mindful of your behaviour and mannerisms is also important when engaging with PLWD. Be mindful that body language may reveal hidden stigma and misconceptions about disability.

Some general suggestions to consider are:

- **Engage directly** - If someone has a support person or interpreter, continue to converse and ask questions directly to the person you are speaking with rather than the accompanying person.
- **Be mindful of when or how you offer assistance** - Although it is courteous to offer help, it might come off as presumptuous. If it appears as though someone needs help, offer assistance, and proceed only when accepted. Once accepted, listen attentively and follow their directions accordingly.
- **Respect service animals** - Remember that service animals are not pets but are part of a support plan. Avoid interacting with or petting the animals without the owner’s permission. These animals are “working” and should not be distracted.
- **Avoid making assumptions** - Remember that all disabilities are different. If in doubt, ask.
- **Use respectful language** - Be mindful, try not to use outdated terms and be willing to adapt.
- **Respect personal space** - Avoid actions that could be intrusive or uncomfortable, especially in an effort to help without consent.
- **Learn from mistakes** - If the interaction did not go as planned, apologize sincerely and use it as an opportunity to learn from your mistakes.

Here are some language and etiquette tips that promote dignity and respect when interacting with PLWD:

Type of Disability	Stigmatized vs Inclusive Language	Proper Etiquette
Physical or mobility impairment	Instead of... (the) handicapped Please use... A person with a disability Instead of... Bound to a wheelchair Please use... A wheelchair user	When possible, interact at eye level with a person using a wheelchair. • Never lean against or rest on a person's mobility device. • Refrain from physical contact with the device as it may hinder mobility. • If not in use, make space for mobility aids to remain within reach for when they are needed.
Vision impairment	Instead of... The blind Please use... A person who is blind, partially sighted, or a person with visual impairment. <i>* Remember colour blindness is a vision impairment that may also require accommodation.</i>	• Use descriptive language. • Identify yourself providing your name and if relevant, your role. • Always ask before making physical contact. Proceed only if allowed. • Provide clear, descriptive directions, sharing additional details if there are steps or physical barriers. • When relevant, indicate verbally when someone moves, enters or leaves the room. • Review spaces for any physical barriers and keep paths clear.

Type of Disability	Stigmatized vs Inclusive Language	Proper Etiquette
Hearing impairment	Instead of... Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute Please use... A person who is Deaf, a person with a hearing impairment, a person who uses sign language to communicate. <i>*The Deaf community is a distinct cultural and linguistic community, not everyone who is deaf uses sign language or lip-reads.</i>	• Do not interrupt, shout, or raise your voice. • Do not rush them to finish sentences. • Do not finish their sentences for them. • If more clarity is needed, ask them to repeat what they have said or verify that you understood correctly. • Ask how best to communicate with them and use their preferred method of communication.
Mental health disability	Instead of... Mental, psychotic, neurotic, schizophrenic Please use... A person with a mental health disability (broad); a person with a psychiatric disability; a person who has depression (specific).	• Be flexible, patient, and open-minded. • Provide support and assistance when appropriate. • Do not attempt to play therapist. • Do not ask probing questions.
Learning Disability	Instead of... Slow, retarded, mentally challenged, developmentally delayed Please Use... A person with a learning disability	• Speak directly to the person and use clear, concrete, and task-specific language. • Be flexible and adaptive to individual needs. • Allow extra time if needed to complete tasks or responses. • Do not micromanage or judge the methods that people have adapted to complete tasks.

Sources and Tools

- #AbleTo: Downloadable information sheets – <https://ableto.ca/>
- DiscoverAbility Network Toolkits – <https://discoverability.network/>
- Plain Language Training Workshop – <https://accessibleemployers.ca/resource/plain-language-training-workshop/>
- A way with words and images: guide for communicating with and about persons with disabilities – <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html>
- Mental Health Commission of Canada - Language Matters – <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/language-matters/>
- Recommended Guidelines on Language and Terminology – Persons with disabilities https://disability-hub.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Recommended-Guidelines-on-Language-and-Terminology-Persons-with-Disabilities_A-Manual-for-News-Professionals.pdf
- Disability Etiquette - <https://askjan.org/topics/disetiq.cfm>
- Mental Health in the Workplace: An Accommodation Guide for Managers and Staff – https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CMHA_Mental-Health-Works-Guidebook-8.5-x11r.pdf
- The Mental Health Commission’s Practical Toolkit to Help Employers Build an Inclusive Workforce – https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2019-01/aspiring_workforce_toolkit_2019_eng.pdf
- Handbook for Accessible Employment: Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act – <https://www.cdacanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ADO-Accessible-Employment-EN.pdf>



Understanding the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), developed by the World Wide Web Consortium, are internationally accepted technical standards that help make the digital world accessible to people with disabilities. Numerous stakeholders including, disability advocacy groups, government agencies, and accessibility research organizations collaborated to create these guidelines. These are considered a universal standard for digital accessibility.

Although the WCAG is not law, large (50+ employees) private and non-profit organizations and all public-sector organizations are required by the AODA to make their websites accessible. Even for smaller businesses and organizations, it is good practice to design with accessibility in mind. The WCAG outlines success criteria for developers and designers to remove accessibility barriers in the digital environment.

Principles of WCAG 2.0

WCAG standards are rooted in four main principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust, often called POUR.

Perceivable

Information must be perceivable to people using only one of their senses, so they understand all related content.

- **Text Alternatives:** Provide alt text for all images describing their purpose or content. For example, an image of a pie chart should include alt text like: "Pie chart showing quarterly sales distribution."
- **Adaptable Content:** Use semantic HTML (e.g., `<header>`, `<main>`, `<footer>`) to ensure assistive technologies can adapt the content, like converting it to braille or audio.
- **Captions and Transcripts:** Include captions for videos and transcripts for audio content. Example: A training video with captions allows users with hearing impairments to follow along.
- **Distinguishable Elements:** Use high-contrast colour schemes for text and background (e.g., black text on a white background or light-coloured text on a dark background). Avoid relying solely on colour to convey information; for instance, instead of "press the green button to continue," use "press the green button labelled 'Continue.'"

Operable

End-users must be able to interact with all web page elements. For instance, your website should be easily navigable with just a keyboard or voice controls for non-mouse users.

- **Keyboard Accessibility:** Ensure that interactive elements like buttons, links, and forms can be navigated using only a keyboard (e.g., the Tab key).
- **Navigation Landmarks:** Include skip links such as "Skip to main content," which helps users bypass repetitive navigation menus.
- **Avoid Flashing Content:** Prevent seizures by avoiding flashing elements. For instance, a website banner should not flash more than three times per second.

- **Time Controls:** Provide options to extend time limits on forms or interactive quizzes to accommodate users who need more time.

Understandable

The principle is just what it seems—end users must be able to understand web page content and functionality information.

- **Readable Text:** Use plain language for instructions and avoid jargon. For example, instead of "Authenticate your credentials," use "Log in with your username and password."
- **Consistent Navigation:** Keep navigation menus and page layouts consistent across the site. For example, if your "Contact Us" link is in the top-right corner on one page, it should appear in the same place on all other pages.
- **Input Assistance:** For forms, provide helpful error messages. For example, if a user leaves an email field empty, show an error message like: "Please enter a valid email address."
- **Predictable Functionality:** Ensure that actions like clicking a link behave as users expect. For instance, clicking "Add to Cart" should not unexpectedly navigate to a new page without prior notice.

Robust

Your website must effectively communicate information to all users, including users of assistive technologies, and remain compatible with evolving technologies and user needs.

- **Valid HTML and ARIA Roles:** Use proper HTML coding practices and ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications) roles to ensure assistive technologies, like screen readers, can interpret the content correctly.
- **Responsive Design:** Design your website to adapt to different screen sizes and orientations. For example, make sure that menus on a mobile device are touch-friendly and large enough to tap accurately.
- **Test Across Platforms:** Test your website on different browsers (Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Safari) and devices (desktop, mobile, tablet) to ensure it works reliably.
- **Compatibility with Assistive Tools:** Make sure your website can be read and navigated by screen readers like [JAWS](#) or [NVDA](#). For example, include proper labelling for form fields, such as `<label for="email">Email:</label>`.

To find out if your website is accessible and compliant, use the following tools:

[Accessibility Checker](#)

[Web Accessibility Checker - WCAG & ADA Compliance Scanner - AEL Data](#)



Levels of Conformance

There are three levels of conformance with WCAG guidelines.

A = the minimum level requirements any website should be able to meet.

Requirements include:

- Keyboard-only content access.
- Clearly labelled forms with instructions so users know what the forms require.
- Content compatibility with assistive technologies.
- Providing clear information or instructions in additional ways to using just shape, size, or colour.

AA = the mid-range conformance level that represents strong accessibility. It satisfies all Level A and Level AA criteria.

Requirements include:

- Text and background must have the proper colour contrast (a minimum of 4.5 to 1).
- Content organization must have a clear heading structure and follow a logical order (e.g., H1, H2, H3).
- Navigation elements must be consistent throughout every webpage.colour.

AAA = the highest level of conformance, providing exceptional accessibility, but unachievable for certain content. It satisfies A, AA, and 28 additional criteria.

Requirements include:

- A minimum of 7 to 1 contrast ratio for text and backgrounds.
- Sign language translation for pre-recorded video content.
- Expanded audio descriptions for pre-recorded video content.

Practical Steps to Meet WCAG Standards

- Optimize Content
 - Add alt text to all images.
 - Provide transcripts and captions for videos.
 - Ensure text can be resized without breaking the design.

- Improve Navigation
 - Ensure keyboard accessibility for all elements.
 - Add skip-to-content links for easier navigation.
- Design for Contrast
 - Use accessible colour palettes that meet contrast guidelines.Test contrast ratios using tools like Contrast Checker.
- Use Clear, Consistent Layouts
 - Structure content with headings and ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications) roles.
 - Ensure forms include clear labels and error suggestions.
- Test with Real Users
 - Collaborate with people with disabilities to get direct feedback on usability.
- Stay Updated
 - WCAG evolves over time, and the current WCAG version is 2.2 and they are working on WCAG 3. Regularly review guidelines and adapt your site to meet current standards.

Sources and Tools

WebAIM's WAVE Accessibility Tool – WAVE® is a suite of evaluation tools that helps authors make their web content more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

<https://wave.webaim.org/>

Google Lighthouse – Lighthouse is an open-source, automated tool for improving the performance, quality, and correctness of web apps. <https://chromewebstore.google.com/detail/lighthouse/blipmdconlkpinefehnmjammfjpmpbjk?pli=1>

Accessibility Checker - check your websites, provide a score and suggest changes and tips. <https://www.accessibilitychecker.org/>

Free Accessibility Checker - WCAG & ADA checks. <https://silktide.com/toolbar/>

Axe Accessibility Linter is an extension for Visual Studio. <https://marketplace.visualstudio.com/items?itemName=deque-systems.vscode-axe-linter>

Check your website for accessibility with AChecker. <https://achecks.org/achecker>

Aira is an app that connects people who are blind or have low vision to professional visual interpreters for secure access to visual information, anytime, anywhere. <https://aira.io/>

Be My Eyes connects blind and low-vision users who want sighted assistance with volunteers and companies anywhere in the world, through live video and artificial intelligence. <https://www.bemyeyes.com/>

Hiring People Living with Disabilities

Employers and businesses may feel intimidated by the AODA's accessibility mandate if they have no understanding or experience working with PLWD. To help better understand how to offer accommodations in the workplace, this section covers some guidelines for working with people living with disabilities.

Accommodations can be made for:

- Recruitment
- Job interviews
- Hiring and onboarding
- Emergency response plans
- Accessibility plans

Every disability, whether hidden or visible, requires unique accommodations. Employers should keep open communication with their employees and find out more about what accommodations are needed.

Recruitment

Employers should let job applicants know that accommodations will be provided during the hiring process. The job descriptions must include an accessibility statement when posting in a newspaper, store window, or on the website. Let the job applicants know directly via phone, email, or in-person about the accommodations.

[Name of the business] welcomes and encourages people living with disabilities to apply for the **[position]**. Accommodations are available on request for candidates if needed.

Another important recruitment strategy is to outline and list the essential and non-essential tasks for the position. This will help PLWD identify if the job is the right fit for them. For example, listing “Valid [Region/Province] Class G Driver’s License (or equivalent) with at least 5 years of driving experience and no violations or infractions” in a job listing might deter some potential candidates who don’t drive but are able to make alternate arrangements for themselves. They might be fully capable of doing all the essential tasks but not having a valid class G license becomes a barrier for them.

Similarly, job postings should also provide an email address or contact information so that applicants can inquire about or request possible accommodations.

Interview Process

When inviting candidates for interviews, clearly mention the accommodations provided and ask if further help is needed. It is good practice to:

- Let them know that accommodations are available upon request
- Consult with them on how to best meet their needs.

Tips and Resources:

- Trust candidates’ knowledge. PLWD are well aware of the accommodations they need.
- Ensure staff and hiring managers are educated to conduct a bias-free interview.
- Look beyond traditional qualifications and try to identify transferable skills.
- Implement training programs to help PLWD prepare for day-to-day operations.

Some common accommodations people may request during the interview process are:

- An accessible meeting location.
- The use of mobility devices.
- Allowing service animals.
- Quiet places with fewer distractions.
- Straightforward language instead of figures of speech.
- The removal of physical barriers

Some of the general guidelines that interviewees should adhere to when interviewing PLWD are:

- An interviewer and employer cannot request a medical diagnosis as proof of disability.
- An interviewer is only allowed to ask about a disability if it has been disclosed and if it is connected to the essential job tasks and might affect the candidates ability to do the job.
- If the candidate brings in a support person, speak directly to the candidate and not the support person.
- Do not pet service animals or touch mobility devices without the candidates permission.
- Unless requested otherwise, speak at a normal pace and volume.

Below are some examples of how to schedule an in-person or a virtual interview:

In Person

Good afternoon NAME,

I hope you’re doing well. I’m reaching out to share some details about your upcoming in-person interview scheduled for DATE at TIME.

Our office is located at [ADDRESS]. When you arrive, please enter through the front door, turn left, and either take the stairs or use the elevator on the left. If you require the elevator, kindly let us know in advance so we can ensure it’s ready for you. A staff member will greet you either at the entrance, or once you’ve reached our office space.

You may park in our back parking lot, or there is street parking nearby. If you choose to park in our parking lot there will be clear signage guiding you to our office.

You will be meeting with NAME (ROLE) and NAME (ROLE) to discuss the POSITION.

What to Expect:

- *Both interviewers will be present in person, and the interview will take place in our boardroom. You’re welcome to arrive a few minutes early to settle in.*

- *Some potential discussion topics may include A, B, and C.*
- *Attire at our office ranges from casual to business casual, so please dress in whatever makes you feel most comfortable.*
- *Feel free to bring along anything you need to make the interview process comfortable, such as a notepad, writing materials, coffee, water, or a fidget toy.*

Please let us know if you require any sort of assistance or accommodations and we will make sure everything is available to you.

Thank you, and we look forward to meeting you soon!

Virtual

Good afternoon NAME,

I hope you're doing well. I'm reaching out to share some details about your upcoming virtual interview scheduled for DATE at TIME.

Meeting Details:

The interview will be conducted via [platform of choice]. You can join using the following link: [Insert Meeting Link].

Please try to log in a few minutes early to ensure everything is set up and working smoothly. I will be online to greet you and assist with any technical issues.

You will be meeting with NAME (ROLE) and NAME (ROLE) to discuss the POSITION.

What to Expect:

- *The interviewers will join you online, and we'll conduct the conversation as we would in person.*
- *Some potential discussion topics may include A, B, and C.*
- *Our dress code is flexible, ranging from casual to business casual, so feel free to dress in whatever makes you feel comfortable for the interview.*
- *We encourage you to have anything you need to make the process comfortable, such as a notepad, writing materials, coffee, water, a fidget toy or a pet to cuddle.*
- *If you have any questions or experience any technical difficulties before the interview, don't hesitate to reach out.*

Thank you, and we look forward to meeting you virtually!

These are some examples for scheduling interviews. Some candidates might request alternate interview formats, such as a phone interview or a written questionnaire. Employees who design their interview process with intentionality and inclusion ensure that they shortlist a qualified list of candidates.

Once the candidate is shortlisted, let the successful candidate know about the accommodations available and work with them to create their individual accessibility plans. Ensure that these accessibility plans are included in the job offer.

Onboarding

The AODA employment standards state that all public sector organizations, private or not-for-profit, must develop and document a process for writing individual accommodation plans. These are the written documents that list all accommodations employees with disabilities need to make their jobs accessible. Some of these accommodations are mentioned in the previous lesson. Here is a summary of some possible accommodations:

- Appropriate format for document sharing - digital or print.
- Workstation accommodations - quiet space or raised workstation.
- Scheduling accommodations - flex hours or shifts at certain times.
- Structural accommodations - automatic doors, wide spaces to maneuver wheelchairs, and accessible washrooms.

Pre-start Accommodations:

This step should be done before the candidates start date. This is done by working directly with the new hire, managers and supervisors, and when relevant, human resource personnel. It is important to write and document every detail and have the document signed by all involved parties.

In some cases, others may be involved in drafting these plans, such as:

- Union representatives.
- Support persons.
- Doctors or medical accommodation providers.

Remember the worker has the most knowledge of what accommodations they need and should be involved in the process every step of the way.

Accessible workplace setup:

Once the individual plans are finalized, the next step is to set up an accessible workstation.

During this discussion, concentrate on the setup needed to perform the new hire’s job-specific tasks. Some of these accommodations might be:

- Improving access to the workstation.
- Determining communication preferences.
- Outlining accessibility hardware or software needed to perform the job.
- Determining how best to create a focused and organized workspace.
- Outlining strategies to manage any job-related stress and anxieties in the workplace.
- Assuring disclosed disabilities will remain confidential.

Remember that these individual accommodation plans and the subsequent accessible setup are highly confidential and personal. These should only be shared with the team members who are part of the accommodation plans.

A workers accommodation plan may include:

General information

- Workers name, title, department
- Manager or supervisor name(s), title(s), department(s)
- Start and end dates
- How and in what format the information will be shared, to be agreed in advance
- Regular and periodic review of the plans
- Contact information and emergency contacts

Job-specific tasks and day-to-day workflow

- Ensure pathways and entrances to the workplace are barrier-free.
- List any assistive devices such as screen readers, ASL interpreters, or text-to-speech software required or available for the job.
- When possible, provide an ergonomic office setup.
- Provide quiet spaces and low stimuli environments for staff to take breaks.

Some of the hardware and software that should be highlighted in the Individual Accommodation Plans include:

Hardware supports

- Ergonomic tools
- Mobility devices
- Hearing support
- Vision support

Software supports

- Screen readers
- Speech to text converters
- Text to speech converters
- Hearing assistance
- Close captioning
- Automated note-taking and real-time transcription services

Review accommodations before the start date

It is important to review the Individual Accommodation Plans before they are finalized. Both the manager and the worker must be consulted and should sign the plan. If medical validation is needed to support the accommodation plan, it should be attained in a timely manner.

Find the Individual Accommodation Plan and Return to Work Plan formats in the Appendix section.

Employee Retention

After successfully recruiting and onboarding an employee with a disability, the next step is employee retention. High turnover and constant hiring often puts team dynamics at risk and causes businesses to lose revenue. The good news is that managing employees with disabilities is no different than managing their non-disabled peers. All companies need to do is make necessary adjustments and create Individual Accessibility Plans to ensure a smooth transition.

Some suggestions for employee retention include:

- Ensure that new employees feel welcome and include them in various decisions and social activities.
- Provide appropriate training for PLWD focusing on tasks that are most relevant to their roles. Ensure that it is an iterative process and offer fresher courses every few months.
- Explain the tasks in detail and in an accessible format. Remember that the employee knows best what they need so work with them.
- Provide regular constructive feedback about their performance. Review performance data with the employees and work together to identify and bridge performance gaps.

- Establish appropriate mentoring relationships with the existing staff.
- Offer regular check-ins with the employees to review the Individual Accessible Plans. Accommodation needs may change over time. Use regular check-ins to ensure all important aspects are covered.
- Provide a safe space for employees to share concerns with managers, especially involving discrimination or harassment in the workplace.
- Offer workplace sensitivity training to the staff to ensure the workplace is inclusive to all.
- Observe changes in behavior that might be signs of workplace harassment or discrimination.

Making a workplace accessible is more than just offering accommodations and removing physical barriers. Oftentimes, even with accommodations, employees with disabilities face discrimination in the workplace because of social stigma and negative stereotypes.

Here are some ways to ensure PLWD are supported in their career goals and aspirations:

Mentorship and peer support:

- Encourage Employee Resource Groups (ERG) or Affinity Groups where PLWD can share experiences and resources.
- Make sure there is support from colleagues to familiarize new hires with the workplace.
- Establish peer mentorship programs.

Recognition and inclusion:

- Consider employee incentive programs. For example, some employers may offer a day off or gift card as a token of appreciation for completing a project or for excellent attendance.
- Celebrate service milestones.
- Personalized Recognition Programs.

Growth pathways:

- Establish a formal review process and regular feedback loops.

Staff training and support:

- Provide regular professional development opportunities for staff focused on Equity Diversity and Inclusion.
- Emphasize debunking stereotypes and respecting diversity.
- Encourage regular and open conversations about unconscious biases.
- Invite the entire company and staff to participate, share, and learn from these conversations.

Sources and Tools

Hire persons with disabilities - <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/hiring/persons-with-disabilities>

Hire for talent – Helping employers create more inclusive workplaces <https://hirefortalent.ca/>

Employment Accessibility Resource Network – Tools and Resources_ <https://earn-paire.ca/employers/tools-and-resources/>

Acclaim Ability – <https://www.acclaimability.com/>

Canadian Hearing Society: Employment Services – <https://www.chs.ca/employment-services-for-job-seekers>

Canadian Hearing Society: Accessibility Consulting (ASL) – <https://www.chs.ca/accessibilityconsulting>

Causeway Work Centre – <https://www.cve.ca/>

Ontario Disability Support Program - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-disability-support-program>

March of Dimes Canada – <https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca>

March of Dimes: Accessibility Awareness Toolkit – <https://www.marchofdimes.ca/en-ca/programs/es/Documents/Training-Institute-Accessibility-Awareness-Toolkit.pdf>

Neil Squire Society – <https://www.neilsquire.ca/>

Accessible Employers Resources - <https://accessibleemployers.ca/>

Handbook for Accessible Employment: Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act – <https://www.cdacanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ADO-Accessible-Employment-EN.pdf>



Glossary

Accessible formats – sometimes called alternate formats, are ways of presenting printed, written, or visual material so that people with print disabilities can access it.

Accessible workplace - A work environment designed to accommodate various physical, sensory, and cognitive needs.

Accommodations - Adjustments or modifications in the workplace, tasks, or equipment that allow PLWS to perform their jobs.

AODA - Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Assistive technology - Tools or devices that help PLWD perform specific tasks. For example, motorized wheelchairs, speech-to-text software, hearing aids, and ergonomic work setups.

Barrier-free design - An approach to workplace design that removes physical barriers (e.g. ramps instead of stairs, separate washrooms for PLWD, etc) to ensure safety and accessibility for everyone.

Building codes - A building code (also building control or building regulations) is a set of rules that specify the standards for construction objects such as buildings and non-building structures. Buildings must conform to the code to obtain planning permission, usually from a local council. The main purpose of building codes is to protect public health, safety and general welfare as they relate to the construction and occupancy of buildings and structures.

Cognitive accessibility - Relaying information, tasks, and assignments in a way that is understandable for individuals with cognitive or learning disabilities.

Dyslexia - A learning disorder that primarily affects reading and language processing. Individuals with dyslexia struggle with decoding texts and written instructions despite having above-average intelligence. Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and affects how the brain processes written and spoken language.

Ergonomic equipment - Furniture or equipment designed to support the body's natural posture.

Hidden disabilities - Disabilities that are not visible or apparent to others and may not have visible indicators. They include mental health conditions (anxiety, panic attacks, depression), cognitive disorders (ADHD, ADD, dyslexia), or chronic health conditions (diabetes, chronic pain, chronic migraines). Hidden disabilities are often overlooked and ignored. It requires accommodations from the employer to ensure people feel comfortable in the workspace.

Mobility aid - Devices that help individuals with physical impairments to move around easily.

- Neurodivergent** - Neurodivergent is an umbrella term used to describe individuals whose cognitive functioning and brain processing differ from what is considered “neurotypical” or typical cognitive functioning. Neurodivergence includes a range of neurological and developmental differences, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and other conditions that affect thinking, attention, learning, social interaction, or sensory processing.
- Neurotypical** - Neurotypical refers to individuals whose brain functions, cognitive processes, and social behaviors align with what is considered typical or “average” neurological development. Neurotypical people do not have neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or other neurodivergent conditions. The term is often used to distinguish between people who experience cognitive and sensory processing in expected ways and those who are neurodivergent.
- Personal biases** - Unconscious or conscious perceptions about a group of people. For PLWD, these could hinder hiring and workplace culture.
- PLWD** - Individuals who have physical, intellectual, sensory, or mental health conditions that may impact their day-to-day lives, work, or other social interactions. Disabilities may be hidden or visible and can affect various aspects of an individual’s life, including but not limited to employment, mobility, and communication.
- Quiet room/space** - A designated area in the workplace offering low stimulating environment for individuals with anxiety, sensory sensitivities, ADHD, or other neurodivergent disorders.
- Screen readers** - Assistive technology that reads the digital text aloud for individuals with visual impairment, allowing them to use computers and software.
- Sensory-friendly environment** - A workplace designed to reduce sensory stimuli (loud noises, dim lights, scent-free) to accommodate individuals with sensory needs, such as those with ASD, ADD, or ADHD.
- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)** - A condition in which individuals have difficulty processing sensory information resulting in decreased comfort and productivity.
- Stereotypes** - Oversimplifying or generalizing about a group of people. For PLWD, these stereotypes could include biased assumptions about strengths, capabilities, productivity, etc. These stereotypes hinder inclusive practises.
- Universal design** - A design concept that ensures environments, products, and services are usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible without needing modifications.
- Visible disabilities** - Disabilities with noticeable physical indicators and might require the use of assistive devices like wheelchairs, mobility aids, or a service animal. They also include vision and hearing impairment that might not be readily apparent to others.



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