
SECTION: HUMAN RESOURCES

TOPIC: STAFFING

POLICY TITLE: ACCESSIBILITY FOR ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities

Home and Community Support Services of Grey-Bruce (HCSS) is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for people with disabilities. We are committed to treating people with disabilities in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We will do so by removing barriers and being proactive about potential barriers to accessibility. HCSS remains committed to upholding the standards as set out in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) and any other laws further set out.

HCSS understands and acknowledges that obligations under the ADOA and its accessibility standards do not substitute or limit its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code or obligations to people with disabilities under any other law.

Home and Community Support Services of Grey Bruce (HCSS) strives to meet the needs of its employees and clients with disabilities and is working hard to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. HCSS is committed to fulfilling our requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA). This accessibility plan outlines the steps we are taking to meet those requirements and to improve opportunities for people with disabilities.

Training

HCSS is committed to training all staff and volunteers in accessible customer service, equity and inclusion, and person-centred care, annually. This annual training includes a five-part course on the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA. Training will also be given to those who participate in creating and developing HCSS's policies and all other persons who participate in the delivery of the services HCSS provides. Training is related to the specific roles that employees hold within the organization.

Training includes:

- The purpose and requirements of the AODA
- The purpose and requirements of the Ontario Human Rights Code
- How to respond to concerns, complaints, and compliments regarding our accessibility
- Customer Service Standards, including Person-Centred Care
- Handling "blind spots" and "assumptions" head on, and challenging stereotypes
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the workplace

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- 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 equipment or devices available on-site and in HCSS vehicles that may help with providing services to our clientele
 - Automatic door openers
 - Wheelchair lifts and ramps for vehicles
 - Seatbelt extenders
 - Emergency call systems
 - Accessible bathtubs and showers
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing HCSS services

HCSS trains all staff and volunteers as soon as practically possible after being hired or accepted as a volunteer. Training and refresher training happens annually, including any changes to policies.

Assistive Devices

People with disabilities may use their personal assistive devices when accessing our services or facilities. In cases where the assistive device presents a significant or unavoidable health or safety concern, or may not be permitted for other reasons, other measures will be used to ensure the person with a disability can access HCSS services and facilities. Other measures, if applicable, can include:

- Coordinating the use of other services in the community, such as an accessible transit provider or patient transfer system
- Consulting with service providers that specialize in supporting persons with disabilities to explore alternative options to address the identified need
- Offering the use of other assistive devices available to HCSS
- Offering the service in an alternative format

We ensure that our staff are trained and familiar with various assistive devices we have onsite, or in HCSS vehicles that may be used by individuals with disabilities while accessing our services and facilities. The training (if applicable) is provided as a component of the orientation process or as new devices are made available and delivered annually to those employees and volunteers.

Communication

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We communicate with people with disabilities in ways that consider their disability. This may include the following:

- Offering materials, as appropriate, in a larger font size
- In writing, print and handwriting
- Email
- Text
- Mail
- Phone
- Securing the services of another service provider who is trained alternative service delivery formats, such as sign language
- Other identified options customized to the needs of the individual, as appropriate

HCSS will work with the person with disabilities to determine what method of communication works for them.

Service Animals

HCSS welcomes people with disabilities and their service animals. As appropriate, service animals are incorporated into service delivery models, including but not limited to assisted transportation or participation in programs.

When we cannot easily identify that an animal is a service animal, our staff may ask for documentation from a regulated health professional that confirms the person needs the service animal for reasons related to their disability. A service animal can be easily identified through visual indicators, such as a harness, or when it helps the person perform certain tasks.

A regulated health professional is defined as a member of one of the following colleges:

- College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario
- College of Chiropractors of Ontario
- College of Nurses of Ontario
- College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario
- College of Optometrists of Ontario
- College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario
- College of Physiotherapists of Ontario
- College of Psychologists of Ontario

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- College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario
- Additional regulated health professionals from other colleges, able to provide the necessary documentation, as appropriate.

Individuals requiring that the service animal be incorporated into a service delivery model, are asked to disclose this as part of our intake and ongoing registration information for service requests to enable staff to plan accordingly. If another person's health or safety could be seriously impacted by the presence of a service animal, such as a severe allergy will we will do the following:

- Consider all options to try and find a solution that meets the needs of both people.
For example:
 - Creating distance
 - Eliminating in-person contact
 - Changing the time the two receive service
 - Any other way that would allow the person to use the service animal on the premises or as part of the service delivery

If service animals are prohibited by another law, we will do the following to ensure persons with disabilities can access our services or facilities:

- Explain why the animal is excluded
- Discuss with the individual another way of providing the services or facilities

All service animals must meet the following criteria before being permitted to partake in our services or facilities:

- Proof of vaccinations
- Well groomed, with no odour
- Always remain on leash and in control
- During transportation, the animal must be in a carrier or crate
- Good manners, specifically not causing any distractions for drivers or other clients partaking in our services

If a service animal is found to be aggressive, or show any aggression towards others, the owner and handler of the animal will be expected to rectify the situation. If a service animal creates a bio-hazard in a vehicle, or HCSS facility, the owner and handler will clean the hazard, and pay for any additional cleaning costs or damages. Should any animal violate

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any of these terms, HCSS will discuss other options available to the individual, which may include barring the animal from HCSS operations.

HCSS relies heavily on volunteer drivers for the successful operation of the Transportation Department. All volunteers are trained thoroughly in the AODA policies and procedures, as well as outstanding customer service standards. Although the volunteers of HCSS are supporters of accessibility, it is their personal decision to allow an animal in their vehicle. HCSS will work with the client to find a suitable alternative.

Support Persons

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have that person accompany them on HCSS premises and aid them in accessing HCSS services. If a fee is normally charged to a client when accessing services or facilities, HCSS will waive that fee for the support person. HCSS asks that individuals identify their need to be accompanied by a support person at the time of requesting services to ensure that HCSS can make the appropriate arrangements and ensure that we have appropriate capacity.

In certain cases, the organization might require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person for health and safety reasons of:

- The person with a disability
- Others engaged in the service delivery or on the premises

Before making a decision, HCSS will consult with the person with a disability to understand their needs, consider health and safety reasons based on available evidence, and determine if there is no other reasonable way to protect the health and safety of the persons or others engaged in service delivery or on the premises.

Notice of Temporary Disruption

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities for individuals with disabilities, the organization will notify customers promptly. A clearly posted notice will outline the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of

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alternative service options, if available. The notice will be made publicly available in the following ways:

- At the facility, as staff are able to
- Communication with clients by phone
- Communication with clients by email or text
- Social media postings

Feedback Process

HCSS welcomes feedback on how we can provide accessible customer service. Feedback will help us identify barriers and respond to concerns.

Feedback may be provided in the following ways:

- Communicate with the staff member who is coordinating services or provided services on the individual's behalf
- Email at idea@hcssgreybruce.com
- Email at kjones@hcssgreybruce.com
- Phone call at 519-372-2091
- Written letter, addressed to Home and Community Support Services Grey-Bruce, 1350 16th Street East, Unit G-12, Owen Sound, ON, N4K6N7 Attention to: Human Resources

All feedback, including complaints, will be handled in the following manner:

- Service processes that can be adjusted within the parameters of the service delivery area, will be directed and addressed with the Manager of that Service or Program.
- Feedback that is beyond the parameters of the service delivery area will be directed to the Executive Director or Human Resources

Individuals can expect to hear back within 5 business days of the receipt of the feedback. HCSS ensures our feedback process is accessible to people with disabilities by providing or arranging for accessible formats and communication supports, as requested.

Notice of Availability of Documents

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HCSS notifies the public that documents related to accessible customer service are available upon request via a notice on our website.

HCSS will provide these documents in an accessible format or with communication support on request. We will consult with the person making the request to determine the suitability of the format or communication support. We will provide the accessible format in a timely manner, and at no additional cost.

Information and Communications

HCSS has a process for receiving and responding to feedback and the process is accessible to persons with disabilities upon request.

We communicate with people with disabilities in ways that consider their disability. When asked, we will provide information about our organization and its services, including public safety information in accessible formats or with communication supports:

- In a timely manner, taking into consideration the person's accessibility needs due to the disability, and
- At a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons

We will consult with the person making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication support. If the organization determines that information or communication are not possible, without incurring undue hardship, the organization will provide the requestor with an explanation as to why the information or communications are not possible, and a summary of the information or communications in its available format.

We notify the public about availability of accessible formats and communication supports through posted notices, our website, and promotional/referral materials as appropriate.

Employment

We notify employees, job applicants, and the public that accommodations can be made during the recruiting and hiring process. We notify job applicants when they are individually selected to participate in the recruitment process that accommodations are available upon request. We consult with the applicant and provide or arrange for suitable accommodations.

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We notify successful applicants of policies for accommodating employees with disabilities when making offers of employment, as stated in their offer letters. We notify staff that supports are available for those with disabilities as soon as practical after they begin their employment. We provide updated information to employees whenever there is a change to existing policies on the provision of job accommodation that takes into account an employee's accessibility needs due to a disability.

We will consult with employees when arranging for the provision of suitable accommodation in a manner that considers the accessibility needs due to the disability. We will consult with the person making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication supports for information that is needed in order to perform the employees' job, and information that is generally available to employees in the workplace.

Where needed, we will also provide customized emergency information to help an employee with a disability during an emergency. With the employee's consent we will provide workplace emergency information to a designated person who is providing assistance to that employee during an emergency.

We will provide the information as soon as practical after we become aware of the need for accommodation due to the employee's disability. We will review the individualized workplace emergency response information when the employee moves to a different location in the organization, when the employee's overall accommodation needs or plans are reviewed, and when the organization reviews its general emergency response policies.

Our performance management and career development processes take into account the accessibility needs of all employees.

Design of Public Spaces

We will meet the accessibility laws when building or making major changes to public spaces. We are committed to ensuring that our public sites are designed to be accessible including:

- Accessible entrances including ramps and push button entrances
- Accessible washrooms
- Accessible parking
- Service-related elements such as service counters, waiting areas, and workspaces.

Changes to Existing Policies

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HCSS is committed to equal access and participation for people with disabilities through its processes and policies. Any policies of this organization that do not respect and promote the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equality of opportunity for people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

Ongoing Commitment

Our plan shows how we will play our role in making Ontario an accessible province for all Ontarians. This plan is reviewed and updated at least once every five years. We train every employee as soon as practicable after being hired and provide training in respect of any changes to the policies. We maintain records of the training provided including the dates on which the training was provided and the number of individuals to whom it was provided.

Past Achievements

HCSS is committed to ensuring the highest standards of accessibility are met, and at a minimum the requirements of the AODA are met. To ensure the organization is evolving as unmet needs are recognized, employees are encouraged to join our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee. HCSS has included Accessibility in this committee to ensure all voices are heard and promoting an accessible workplace as well.

HCSS will be using the Neurodiversity Audit completed in 2026 to help make our policies and procedures more accessible to both employees and clients.

Strategies and Actions

Customer Service -

HCSS is committed to provided accessible customer service to people with disabilities. This means that we will provide services and facilities to people with disabilities with the same high quality and timeliness as others. Employees of HCSS complete annual training on proper customer service standards, and how to apply those standards to clients with disabilities.

- Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA; 5 Part Course (Surge Learning)
- Concerns, Complaints, and Compliments (Surge Learning)

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- Customer Service: Person Centred Care; 2 Part Course (Surge Learning)
- Blind Spots: Challenge Assumptions (Surge Learning)
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace (Surge Learning)

Information and Communications –

HCSS is committed to making our information and communications accessible to people with disabilities. This means that we strive to ensure we use accessible fonts, all outgoing communication and information is clear and consistent. Clients have multiple avenues to choose from to receive their billing (mailed, emailed, pre-authorized debit). Employees complete annual training on communication and information more accessible.

- Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA; 5 Part Course (Surge Learning)
- Blind Spots: Challenge Assumptions (Surge Learning)
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace (Surge Learning)

Employment –

HCSS is committed to fair and accessible employment practices. This means all managers receive annual training on how to work with different employees, and how to ensure all applicants are offered accessibility measures personal to the applicant, at all times during the recruitment process. HCSS encourages during the orientation process for all new employees to join the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Committee. HCSS also offers any accommodations to all applicants in the job ad, during the interview process, and in our employment contract.

Transportation –

HCSS is committed to accessible transportation services. The organization has a variety of vehicles, all with different accessibility options, to help clients use these transportation services. All drivers are trained properly to use all equipment during the orientation process, as well as during the annual safety refreshers. The accessibility options include: a wheelchair van lifts, seatbelt extenders, wheelchair restraints, wheelchair ramps, and a bus that is wheelchair accessible.

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Design of Spaces –

HCSS is committed to having the office and Day Program locations meet accessibility laws and standards when designing the program and spaces. The Adult Day Program includes a variety of meal options, exercise options, and accommodations for clients. This can include an accessible bathtub, with a lift, and walk in showers. Employees are trained annually in how to use the lifts and different accessible exercise options as well.

Any issues, concerns, or questions can be brought to the attention of Human Resources.