



The Good Companions

Supporting a Vibrant Community

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Accessibility Policy

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1. Purpose

The following policy is adopted in accordance of the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429-07* under the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#) (AODA). This policy establishes the accessibility standards for customer services for The Good Companions as well as other accessibility practices and procedures, in accordance with the requirements on *Ontario Regulation 429/07* and the Integrated Accessibility Standards (IASR) in the areas of Information and Communication, Built Environment, Transportation, and Employment in accordance with *Ontario Regulation 191/11* of the AODA.

The purpose of the AODA is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025. In accordance with the purpose of the AODA the programs and services provided by The Good Companions shall follow the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

2. Objectives and Scope

The Good Companions is committed to providing quality programs and services that are accessible to all persons that we serve. This policy applies to all individuals or other third parties who deal with employees, volunteers, members and clients on behalf of The Good Companions, whether the person does so as an employee, program leader, volunteer, agent and/or contractor, or student on placement and ensures that all of our citizens with disabilities are accommodated. It also applies to people who participate in the development of The Good Companions policies, practices and procedures which govern the provision of goods and services.

This policy is required based on the specifications of *Ontario Regulation 429/07* and *Ontario Regulation 191/11* to ensure consistency from all persons delivering programs and services of behalf of The Good Companions.

3. Background

Ontario passed the AODA in 2005, becoming the first jurisdiction in Canada to commit to breaking down barriers through mandatory standards. The AODA allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility that are designed to help make Ontario more accessible.

This policy is drafted in accordance with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service and addresses the following:

- The provision of programs and services to persons with disabilities;
- The use of assistive devices;
- Service animals;
- Support persons;

- Notice of temporary disruptions in programs, services and facilities;
- Training;
- Customer feedback regarding the provision of programs and services to persons with disabilities; and
- Notice of availability and format of documents.

Additionally, this policy also addresses the standards set out in the IASR and includes specific requirements such as:

- Information and Communications;
- Built Environment;
- Transportation; and
- Employment.

4. Definitions

Accessible Formats: Include, but are not limited to: large print, colour contrast, electronic formats, text transcripts of visual and audio information, or email.

Assistive Devices: Any auxiliary aids such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and/or medical aids are often used by people with disabilities to help them with daily living.

Barrier: Anything that keeps a person with a disability from participating fully in society because of their disability.

Communication Supports: Include, but are not limited to: plain language, having a staff member/volunteer read the written information aloud, and other supports that facilitate effective communication.

Disability: Covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and others not. A disability may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. It includes physical, mental, learning disabilities, mental disorders, hearing or vision disabilities, as well as other conditions. The Good Companions follows the definition of *disability* as defined in the AODA.

Service Animal: Service animals are animals that have been trained to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities. An animal is service animal if:

- It is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; and/or
- The person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

Support Person: In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies them in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs.

5. Policy

a) **Provision of Programs and Services to Persons with Disabilities**

The Good Companions will make reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies, procedures, and practices are consistent with the following principles:

- The Good Companions' programs and services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- The provisions of The Good Companions' programs and services to persons with disabilities are integrated with those provided to persons who do not have disabilities unless an alternative measure is necessary. Persons with disabilities are given an equal opportunity to that of persons without disabilities to obtain, use or benefit from The Good Companions programs and services.
- The Good Companions is committed to meeting the communication needs of people with disabilities. When communicating with persons with a disability, The Good Companions will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's abilities.

b) **Assistive Devices**

Persons with disabilities shall be permitted to obtain, use or benefit from programs or services through the use of their own assistive devices. Exceptions may occur in situations where The Good Companions has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of another individual. It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with the disability to ensure that their assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

Assistive devices may include but are not limited to:

- Communication Aids;
- Cognition Aids;
- Personal Mobility Aids;
- Medical Aids.

c) **Service Animals**

Service animals, such as but not limited to, Guide dogs, Hearing dogs, Seizure Response dogs, and other certified service animals shall be permitted entry to all areas and meeting rooms which are open to the public. Service animals are required to be leashed or otherwise properly controlled so that the animal does not run at large.

Service animals are not permitted:

- Where food preparation is being undertaken; or
- As otherwise disallowed by law.

Where a service animal is to be denied access to a facility or meeting room, other accommodations may be afforded, such as:

- Alternate meeting format, such as teleconference/videoconference, where technology permits;
- Deliver the programs or services at an alternate time or location;
- Any other assistive measures available to deliver a good or service to ensure equality of outcome.

The person with a service animal must maintain care and control of the animal at all times. If a service animal is unruly, disruptive (*e.g. barking*), or presents a health and safety concern, the person may be asked to remove the animal from the Centre. Other reasonable measures may be used to ensure the access to programs and services.

d) **Support Persons**

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have that person accompany them while using the programs and services offered by The Good Companions. Support persons may be a family member, friend, or a trained professional.

The Good Companions may require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person if it is deemed necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with the disability or the health and safety of other members, clients, volunteers, and/or staff. This would occur after consultation with the person with the disability and as a means to allow the person with a disability to participate in the programs and services offered by The Good Companions.

Generally, fees will not be charged for support persons. Support persons, for example, are not required to become members at The Good Companions. Support persons shall be permitted to accompany clients, members, volunteers and staff with disabilities free of charge, with a few exceptions.

Support persons **will** be charged fees:

- If they are participating in the program or service beyond the scope of supporting the person with a disability (i.e. - if they are no longer merely supporting an individual with a disability, but rather, using the program and/or service themselves, as a participant in their own right).
- If they are attending an event where they will be consuming food or beverage (i.e. – a support person attends a Special Event, to which a ticket is required, and participates in the event and consumes a meal).

- If there are fees applied against participants by a third party and/or the support person was not pre-registered and/or no vacancy exists. If admission to an event is permitted and fees are payable to a third party, the Support Person is permitted to attend the event at their own cost.

In the event that a support person will be charged a fee, as in the aforementioned circumstances, the person with the disability and their support person will be advised of any associated costs in advance.

e) Notice of Temporary Disruption in Programs, Services and Facilities

The Good Companions is aware that the operation of its programs, services and facilities is important to the public; temporary disruptions in services, programs and facilities, however, may occur. The Good Companions is committed to implementing and maintaining a process to provide notice of any service, program and facility disruptions.

The Good Companions will make reasonable effort to provide notice of the disruption, including information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities/services, if any are available, as soon as possible.

Upon discovering a program, service or facility disruption, all staff are required to immediately report the disruption to the Director of Operations/designate. It is the responsibility of the Director of Operations/designate to immediately begin the process of informing the public. If required, the Director of Operations will also alert the Facilities Coordinator.

To inform the public of temporary disruptions, The Good Companions will provide notice by posting information in visible places such as facility entrance doors, on our website (www.thegoodcompanions.ca), our Facebook page, Twitter account, and by any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances as soon as possible.

All notices shall include:

- Name of the program/event/service being impacted
- The reason for the disruption
- Description of alternate facilities, programs and services, if available
- Contact information
- Anticipated duration

If an unexpected disruption occurs, persons with disabilities will be accommodated by the use of other means possible to deliver the programs and services such as:

- Alternative locations/time;

- If appropriate/required, delivery of the program/service to the person's place of residence; and
- Any other measure deemed appropriate.

f) Training

The Good Companions will provide accessible customer service training to employees, volunteers, students, program leaders and others who deal with the public or other third parties on our behalf. This includes individuals who provide direct service to the public on behalf of the organization and/or anyone who participates in the development of policies, practices, and procedures related to the provisions of our goods and services.

All training, regardless of format, shall have regard for:

- An overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard;
- A review of The Good Companions Accessibility Policy;
- Instruction on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities;
- Instruction on interacting with people with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a guide dog, other service animal or a support person;
- Instruction on the use of any equipment or devices available (e.g. *wheelchairs, etc.*) available at The Good Companions;
- Instruction on what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing services.

Additionally, in order to meet the requirements of section 7 under the IASR (*Ontario Regulation 191/11*), all employees and designated volunteers, as it relates to their duties, will receive training on:

- A review of the requirements of the accessibility standards referred to in the IASR (*Ontario Regulation 191/11*) and on the Human Rights Code as it pertains to persons with disabilities.
- An explanation of The Good Companions' obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the differences between the Code and the IASR.

Timeline for Training: Employees, volunteers, students, program leaders and others who deal with the public, will be provided with training that is relevant to their duties, responsibilities, and interaction with the public. Training will be offered in a variety of formats throughout the year in order to accommodate various learning styles, including, but not limited to online eLearning (video, audio), handouts, and in person/workshop format.

Training shall take place as soon as possible after an individual commences their duties and as a requirement of their orientation process. Training will be provided on an ongoing basis as change(s) occur in policies, procedures and practices governing the provision of programs or services to persons with disabilities. Refresher training will also be provided on an annual basis to all staff.

The Good Companions will maintain records of the training, including the date, the format and type of training, and the names of individuals trained. Training will be provided in a manner that best suits the duties of the position.

To find links to the e-Learning videos please see Appendix A.

g) Feedback Process (Information and Communications)

The Good Companions is committed to providing high quality programs and services to all members of the public it serves. Feedback from the public is welcomed as it may identify areas that require change and encourages continuous service improvements.

In order to request communication support or to receive a document in an accessible format, individuals can complete the Customer Service Feedback Form which is available on our website, can be picked up in person at our Centre, or can be delivered via email or regular mail. Once completed, the form can be submitted by email, regular mail, or in person.

Aside from completing and submitting the Customer Service Feedback Form, requests may also be made by providing feedback:

- **In person:** at The Good Companions (670 Albert Street)
- **By telephone:** 613-236-0428 x 2100
- **By email:** info@thegoodcompanions.ca
- **By Mail:** Accessibility Request
The Good Companions
670 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 6L2

Feedback will then be directed to the appropriate staff person and their supervisor for follow-up. The Good Companions will respond to your request within 14 days.

Once the issues at hand have been addressed, Customer Service Feedback Forms will be submitted to the Executive Director and the Joint Health and Safety Committee who will monitor and review all requests for accommodation, feedback, and complaints to ensure an appropriate response has been provided in a timely and satisfactory manner. All feedback will be kept in strict confidence and used to improve customer service.

h) Accessible Formats and Communications Supports (Information and Communications)

Documents are available in various accessible formats upon request. In order to request communication support or to receive a document in an accessible format, individuals can complete the Request for Documentation in an Accessible Format or Communication Support Form which is available on our website, can be picked up in person at our Centre, or can be delivered via email or regular mail. Once completed, the form can be submitted by email, regular mail, or in person.

Aside from completing and submitting the Request for Documentation in an Accessible Format or Communication Support Form, requests may also be made:

- **In person:** at The Good Companions (670 Albert Street)
- **By telephone:** 613-236-0428 x 2100
- **By email:** info@thegoodcompanions.ca
- **By Mail:** Accessibility Request
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While The Good Companions will respond to your request within 14 days, the timeframe for the conversion of a document into an accessible format or the provision of communication support will vary depending on the format or support chosen. All requests for accessible documents and communication support will be reviewed and responded to in the most cost-effective, efficient, and timely manner.

If The Good Companions finds that the information or communication is unconvertible, The Good Companions shall provide the individual with an explanation as to why the information or communications are unconvertible, and a summary of the unconvertible information or communications.

Please note, that in order to ensure the suitability of an accessible format or communication support provided, The Good Companions will need to consult with the individual making the request for guidance on how we can best meet their needs.

i) Built Environment

In order to meet the Accessibility Standard for the Built Environment and Design of Public Spaces, The Good Companions will incorporate barrier-free principles when building new public spaces or making planned significant alternations to existing facilities or structures.

j) Transportation

The Accessibility Standard for Transportation aims to make it easier for everyone to travel in Ontario. It applies to public modes of transportation such as conventional transportation services (OC Transpo), specialized transportation services (Para Transpo), taxicabs, certain ferries, and public school boards, etc.

The Good Companions is not a provider of specialized or public transit and does not license taxicabs, and is therefore not affected by the Transportation Standard. The Good Companions will, however, educate staff on the availability of accessible conventional and specialized transportation services provided within Ottawa, so that staff can provide this information to clients, members, and volunteers if requested.

k) Employment Standard

The Accessibility Standard for Employment requires all employers to have processes in place to determine an employee's accommodation needs. It builds on the existing requirements already set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code and addresses processes throughout the life cycle of a job, including:

- Informing employees of supports and accessible employment practices;
- The recruitment, assessment or selection process;
- Providing accessible formats and communication support for employees;
- Individualized workplace emergency response information; and
- Performance management, career development and advancement, and redeployment.

The compliance deadline for the Employment Standard is January 1st, 2017. The Human Resources Committee at The Good Companions will be working to meet the aforementioned requirements by or before the compliance deadline.

l) Modifications to this or other policies

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

Note: This policy is delivered in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, Regulation 429-07, and Regulation 191/11 Accessibility Standards for Customer Service and the Integrated Accessibility Standards and is applicable to all policies, procedures and processes for The Good Companions.