

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act?

Ontarians with disabilities have the right to the same opportunities as everyone else. Too often, obstacles get in their way of doing the things that most of us do without thinking. These obstacles are called barriers to accessibility. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 requires us to break down barriers to make Ontario accessible by 2025.

We will do this by developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards for many of the most important areas of our lives.

2. What is a standard?

A standard is an agreed way of doing something. Standards control the quality, safety and reliability of products and services. Standards can be:

- local or international in range
- voluntary or required by law
- applied to products, services and business processes.

Standards are good for business. They reduce the risk of ending up with a product that is poor quality or unsafe. Consumers have more confidence in products and services that meet certain standards.

3. How will standards improve accessibility?

Sometimes people with disabilities can't do the things they want to because something is stopping them. These are called barriers to accessibility. Here are some examples:

- A customer using a wheelchair who can't shop in a particular store because there isn't an access ramp or an elevator.
- A person with low vision who can't read the menu in a restaurant because the print is too small.
- A student with an intellectual disability who can't fill out a summer job application because the form is not written in a way that is easy to understand.

Setting standards for accessibility means that businesses and organizations that provide goods and services to the public will have to meet certain accessibility rules.

4. Are standards being developed for specific areas?

Yes. Standards are being developed in five areas: (1) customer service, (2) transportation, (3) information and communications, (4) built environment (buildings, structures and public spaces), (5) employment.

5. Who is developing these standards?

This isn't a "do as we say" process. We all have a role to play. That is why we are working with many partners:

- people with disabilities or their representatives
- businesses – small, medium and large
- public sector organizations, such as Ontario government ministries, municipalities, colleges, universities, hospitals
- non-profit organizations

Each proposed standard is being developed by a standards development committee. The five committees – one for each standard – are composed of representatives from all these sectors and organizations.

The public also has the opportunity to review and comment on each of the five proposed standards.

6. What does this mean for businesses and organizations?

When the standards become law, they are mandatory. This means that businesses and organizations will have to comply with the standards, if the standards apply to them.

The standards may apply to businesses and organizations in all kinds of sectors, including:

- accommodation (apartments, condominiums, hotels, motels)
- entertainment and recreation
- hospitals and health care
- Government of Ontario and its agencies
- libraries
- municipalities
- public transportation
- retail
- restaurants
- school boards, colleges and universities

7. How will the standards be implemented?

The act calls for standards to be implemented in stages. This will give everyone enough time to plan ahead and build accessibility improvements into their normal business plans and practices.

Different standards may have different requirements and timelines depending on the size and type of organization. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Businesses and organizations that are affected by a standard may have to file accessibility reports to show that they are meeting their obligations. Organizations that don't comply may face penalties, such as fines.