

Northwestern Health Unit Policies & Procedures		Number: BOH 2.07
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Title:	Accessibility	

Approved by:	Board of Health	Approval Date:	Feb. 23/12
Revision Dates:	Nov. 21/14		

ACCESSIBILITY

PURPOSE

This policy informs Northwestern Health Unit Board of Health members, employees, students, volunteers and contractors of health unit obligations and agency expectations of those who deal with members of the public on behalf of the health unit to ensure compliance with the *Accessibility Standards for Client Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)* and the *Integrated Accessibility Standards (Ontario Regulation 191/11)* under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005*.

In addition, the policy and related procedure(s) serve to inform members of the public and employees regarding their rights and health unit obligations with respect to:

1. The provision of services to people with disabilities;
2. The use of assistive devices by people with disabilities;
3. The use of service animals by people with disabilities;
4. The use of support persons by people with disabilities;
5. Notice of temporary disruptions in services and facilities;
6. Training of staff and other health unit representatives;
7. Client feedback regarding the provision of services, including the provision of services to people with disabilities;
8. Notice of availability and format of documents and meetings; and
9. Barrier-free recruitment processes and employment standards.

BACKGROUND

In 2005, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) was passed, giving the Province the mandate to establish standards in accessibility that will apply to both the public and private sector. The government of Ontario committed to establishing accessibility standards in:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment

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In January 2009, the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07* came into effect. This regulation establishes accessibility standards for customer service and applies to every public sector organization and to every other person or organization that provides goods and services to members of the public or other third parties and has at least one employee in Ontario.

On June 3, 2011 the Province of Ontario released the *Integrated Accessibility Standard (IAS), Ontario Regulation 191/11*, which combined the accessibility requirements for information and communication, employment, and transportation, and included general requirements such as policy development, planning, and training. The implementation of the IAS is to occur in a staged approach, meaning that compliance with the different provisions of the standard will be required at different times. The Northwestern Health Unit will be required to meet the IAS between January 1, 2012 and January 1, 2021.

This policy addresses our commitment to accessible and quality client services and to meeting the requirements laid out in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, Board of Health members and any others acting on behalf of the Health Unit.

POLICY

Our Commitment

The Northwestern Health Unit values all of our clients and customers and is committed to providing excellent customer service in every aspect of our business.

We are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner, and will do so by identifying, removing and preventing barriers for people with varying abilities and by meeting the accessibility requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

We are committed to treating all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in integration and equal opportunity. We believe in providing service to everyone.

1. The Northwestern Health Unit will make all reasonable efforts to provide a barrier-free environment for its clients/customers, students, employees, job applicants, suppliers, visitors and other stakeholders who enter the premises and access our programs and services.

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2. The Northwestern Health Unit will:
 - a. Welcome people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal or support person, or who use assistive devices, to our workplaces that are open to the public.
 - b. Provide a notice of temporary disruption in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in services.
 - c. Welcome feedback from all customers, including those with disabilities, and respond to any complaints about service in a timely manner.
 - d. Train all staff to consider people with disabilities in our day-to-day work and to take their disabilities into account when communicating and interacting with them.
 - e. Identify and regularly review our policies and procedures and consider the impact of policy revisions for people with disabilities.
 - f. Upon request, provide emergency and public safety information accessible to people with disabilities, in accessible formats or with communication supports.

3. **Accessibility Principles** – All Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) staff, while planning programs, services, activities and events, and in developing related policies, procedures and practices will abide by the following principles for accessibility.

Dignity

Respect the dignity of people with disabilities by treating them as clients and participants who are as valued and as deserving of effective and full service as any other client or participant.

People with disabilities will not be treated as an after-thought or be forced to accept lesser service, quality, or convenience.

Independence

Allow people with disabilities the freedom to make their own choices, communicate for themselves, and not feel rushed when completing a task, or taking over their task if they prefer to do it on their own.

e.g., A client is required to complete a form prior to an appointment. The client has difficulty completing the form due to arthritis in his/her hands. The staff member offers assistance to the client but the client would like to complete the form on their own. The staff member provides extra time for the client to complete the form on their own without rushing them.

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Integration

Wherever possible, people with disabilities will be allowed to fully benefit from the same programs, services, activities and events in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other clients. Alternative measures, rather than integration, will be used only when the person with a disability requires it or because the agency is not able to provide another option at the time.

Equal opportunity

People with disabilities have the same opportunity to benefit from the way the NWHU provides programs, services, events, and activities. This may mean that we will work with the individual to find suitable alternatives so that they can fully benefit from our programs, services, events, and activities.

Any policy or practice of the NWHU that does not respect and promote the principles outlined above will be modified or removed.

Approved / Revised:

On behalf of the Board of Health

original signature on file

Chair, Board of Health

original signature on file

Chief Executive Officer