

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

<b>TITLE: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Compliance</b>	<b>POLICY NUMBER: A-4-310</b>
<b>APPROVED BY: Chief Executive Officer</b>	<b>DATE: December 2010 (O), August 2014 (R), March 2023 (R) December 2023 (R)</b>

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Cota is committed to creating an environment that is accessible to all persons and that treats all members of the community with respect and dignity. As such, and in keeping with the standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and the Ontario Human Right Code, Cota will strive to continuously improve the accessibility of services and meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Cota will do this by working to eliminate or reduce barriers, including physical, environmental, attitudinal, communication, technological, and systemic that may prevent the full participation of persons with disabilities in Cota’s services and supports. Everyone has a role in creating an equitable and inclusive environment, as well as in the accommodation process and the identification, removal, and/or reduction of accessibility barriers.

Cota is committed to meeting its current and ongoing obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code respecting non-discrimination. Cota understands that obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) 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.

Cota is committed to excellence in serving and providing goods, services or facilities to all customers including people with disabilities. Our accessible customer service policies are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

### **TRAINING**

We are committed to training all staff and volunteers in accessible customer service, other Ontario’s accessibility standards and aspects of the Ontario Human Rights Code that relate to persons with disabilities.

Training of our employees and volunteers on accessibility relates to their specific roles and is delivered upon hire via our online learning platform iLearn as well as through Cota’s orientation.

Training includes:

- purpose of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* and the requirements of the Customer Service Standards
- our policies related to the Customer Service Standards
- how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities
- how to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person
- what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing our organization's goods, services or facilities

We maintain records of all training completed by individuals, as well as records of dates on which training is provided and attendance.

## **ASSISTIVE DEVICES**

People with disabilities may use their personal assistive devices when accessing our goods, services or facilities. In cases where the assistive device presents a significant and 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 our goods, services or facilities.

## **COMMUNICATION**

We communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability. We will work with the person with disabilities to determine what methods of communication work for them.

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 account the person's accessibility needs due to 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 communications are unconvertible, the organization shall provide the requestor with:

- an explanation as to why the information or communications are unconvertible; and
- a summary of the unconvertible information or communications.

We notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and communication supports via:

- our website
- posters at our sites

We meet internationally-recognized Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA website requirements in accordance with Ontario's accessibility laws.

## **SERVICE ANIMALS**

We welcome people with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and third parties. When we cannot easily identify that an animal is a service animal, our staff may ask for documentation (template, letter or form) from a regulated health professional that confirms the person needs the service animal for reasons relating to their disability. A service animal can be easily identified through visual indicators, such as when it wears a harness or a vest, or when it helps the person perform certain tasks.

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

- explain why the animal is excluded
- discuss with the customer another way of providing goods, services or facilities

## **SUPPORT PERSONS**

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have that person accompany them onto our premises. In certain cases, Cota might require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person for the health or safety reason of the person with a disability or others on premises.

Before making such a decision, Cota will

- consult with the person with a disability to understand their needs
- consider health or safety reasons based on available evidence
- determine if there is no other reasonable way to protect the health or safety of the person or others on the premises

## **NOTICE OF TEMPORARY DISRUPTION**

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities for customers with disabilities, this organization will notify customers promptly. This clearly posted notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services/supports, if available.

This notice will be made publicly available in the following ways:

- Signage posted clearly throughout the site(s) impacted
- Calls made to staff, volunteers and service users
- If more than one site is impacted, Cota may also post on our website and/or social media accounts

## **FEEDBACK PROCESS**

Cota welcomes feedback on how we provide accessible customer service. Customer feedback helps us identify barriers and respond to concerns. Cota strives to ensure our feedback process is accessible to people with disabilities by providing or arranging for accessible formats and communication supports, upon request.

Feedback may be provided in the following ways:

- Direct communication with members of the program team (e.g. service providers, program managers)
- Calling the Performance & Quality Improvement department via Cota's main reception line or toll free number
- Emailing the Performance & Quality Improvement department via [feedback@cotainspires.ca](mailto:feedback@cotainspires.ca)
- Mailing in a written letter to a physical site, particularly the 550 Queen office
- Completing the feedback form on Cota's website

All feedback, including complaints, received regarding accessibility will be handled in accordance with Cota's policy on Service User and Other Stakeholder Formal Complaints (A-4-270). All feedback will be directed to the Director of Performance and Quality Improvement. Customers can expect to receive acknowledgement of their feedback within 5 business days of Cota receiving the information. Where the feedback is a formal complaint, Cota strives to investigate and resolve formal complaints within a month of initiation. Complainants can expect to receive verbal and/or written response a month after their feedback is received by Cota.

## **NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS**

Cota notifies the public that documents related to accessible customer service are available upon request by posting a notice in the following ways:

- On our website
- At our sites

## **RECRUITMENT**

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

We notify successful applicants of policies for accommodating employees with disabilities when making offers of employment. We notify staff that supports are available for those with disabilities as soon as practicable 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 take 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 takes into account the accessibility needs due to disability.

We will consult with the person making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication supports specifically for:

- information that is needed in order to perform the employee's 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 practicable 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 accommodations needs or plans are reviewed
- when Cota reviews its general emergency response policies.

We have a written process to develop individual accommodation plans for employees. We have a written process for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require disability-related accommodations in order to return to work.

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

Employees with disabilities will be provided with individualized accommodation plans. Cota will collaborate with employees who submit medical documentation for accommodation to complete this plan.

## **DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACES**

We will meet accessibility laws when building or making major changes to public spaces. Our public spaces may include:

- service/reception desks/counters and waiting areas

## **CHANGES TO EXISTING POLICIES**

Any policies at Cota that do not respect and promote the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity for people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

### **Disability**

The term "disability" is defined as follows in the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, and c.H.19, as amended from time to time.

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 co-ordination, 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.

### **Accommodation**

The term "accommodation" has been described as follows in the Ontario Human Rights Code: Under the Code, organizations, including their officers, managers, supervisors, and union representatives are required to prevent and remove barriers and provide accommodations to the point of undue hardship

A clear and effective accommodation policy and procedure ensures that accommodation seekers feel comfortable raising their accommodation needs, and that accommodation requests are effectively dealt with.

### **Duty to Accommodate**

An employer, facility, and service provider is obligated to take steps to eliminate the systemic, attitudinal, or physical barriers that exclude individuals or groups protected under the Code from participating in all aspects of employment, use of facilities and service provision.

### **AODA Standards**

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act has mandated accessibility standards to remove barriers in important areas of everyday living for persons with disabilities. The vision behind the act is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities by 2025. The AODA Standards include: customer service, transportation, information, communication, employment and physical environments.

### **Client, Consumer, Customer**

A person who inquires about our services, accesses our services, or does

business with us.

**Worker**

An employee, student, volunteer and/or contracted agent of Cota

**Barrier**

Anything that prevents a person with disabilities from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including physical, architectural, informational, communications, attitudinal, technological and/or economic barriers. This may also include barriers created by organizational standards (policies, etc)

**Assistive Device**

Any device that persons bring with them such as white canes, walkers, vision aids such as binocular or monocular, magnifiers or oxygen tanks, hearing aids or service animals.

**Service Animal**

An animal is qualified to be a service animal:

- If it is readily apparent the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; or
- The person provides a letter from physician or nurse confirming the use of the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

**Assistive Communication Devices**

Aids or software that are used to help persons with disabilities communicate. Examples of assistive communications devices are test readers, amplifiers, screen magnifiers, voice boxes, etc.

**Regulated Health Professional**

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
- College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Performance & Quality Improvement Team**

- Update statement of commitment, policy, and accessibility plan for the organization, every five (5) years or sooner if changes apply
- Submit any accessibility reporting requirements as directed provincially
- Ensure the training is completed for all employees in AODA, AODA customer Service, and Accommodation. Retain accurate training records for all employees
- Ensure multi-year plan is followed and reporting is completed and submitted by applicable deadlines

### **Leadership Team**

- Promote and respect the rights of persons with disabilities
- Maintain awareness and knowledge of the requirements of the AODA
- Identify/remove barriers that may limit services/employment for persons with disabilities
- Respond to requests from employees with disabilities to develop and implement an individualized accommodation plan. Management may also suggest a plan to an employee or ask if they require workplace accommodations
- Design workplace emergency response plans and information for disabled employees, identifying buddies to help support employees with emergency response plans as needed
- Review accommodation plans and emergency response plans annually or as needed
- Post signage to inform of accessibility disruptions as required
- Accommodate staff with mental health or addiction disabilities as per OHRC guidelines that will not result in “undue hardship” in significant costs for Cota

### **Human Resources Team**

- Ensure all relevant HR policies are in place and reviewed/updated as legislative changes and needs arise.
- Support the business in identifying/removing barriers, addressing/communicating accommodation needs and emergency response plans for persons with disabilities
- Accept requests for accommodation from employees in good faith, unless there are legitimate reasons for acting otherwise

### **Communication Team**

- Ensure accessibility tab is visible on website
- Ensure relevant policies and practices relating to AODA, feedback and complaint processes are posted on the website
- Ensure website meets or exceeds minimal compliance for accessibility standards.

### **Workers**

- Promote and respect the rights of persons with disabilities
- Maintain awareness and knowledge of the requirements of the AODA
- Identify barriers that may limit services/employment for persons with disabilities
- Inform employer and union of what their personal disability-related needs are related to their job duties in writing
- Participate in any accommodation process or plans, emergency response plans, as needed to complete, address, or update any required plans



- Provide supporting information about the needs and limitations relating to their disability, including information from health professionals where required
- Participate in any training provided by the employer on AODA standards and demonstrate the required accessibility practices within the workplace as they arise
- Comply with any applicable accommodation plans. Provide updates about necessary modifications or when the accommodation is no longer required

**References:**

A-8-190 Orientation Policy

A 4-270 Service User and Other Stakeholder Formal Complaints Policy

A-4-220 Service User Rights and Responsibilities Policy

A-8-110 Hiring Process Policy