

### **Our Mission**

Protect, support and strengthen the lives of children, youth, adults and families.

### **Our Vision**

FACS Niagara is a community where the children, youth, adults and families achieve their full potential in safe, supportive environment.

### **Our Values**

We are Caring  
We are Respectful  
We are Collaborative  
We act with Integrity  
We are Accountable

### **Introduction**

In accordance with the regulations outlined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), FACS Niagara has a responsibility and legal obligation to provide information and services in an equitable and accessible manner.

### **Our Commitment:**

FACS Niagara strives to provide our services in a manner that is accessible to all of our clients, and respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. We are committed to offering equal opportunity to access our services and to providing the benefit of the same services, in the same place and in a similar way to all clients. FACS Niagara is committed to providing an environment that is free of discrimination and harassment. The agency seeks to create a climate of mutual respect that reinforces opportunity and allows for each person to contribute fully to the development and wellbeing of the community.

The agency recognizes its responsibility to ensure that every person in its community is protected from unlawful discrimination and harassment in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code". (*FACS Niagara Harassment and Discrimination Policy, January 2005*).

To this end, the agency affirms the rights of all persons, including those with disabilities, to have equal access in employment, education, accommodation or business dealings with the agency. In keeping with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, the agency further affirms its commitment to promoting the following principles in all of its policies and interactions with persons with disabilities:

**Dignity:** Goods and services are provided in a manner that is respectful to persons with a disability and does not diminish the person's importance.

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**Human Resources Policies  
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**Independence:** Accommodating a person's disability means respecting their right to do for themselves and to choose the way they wish to receive goods and services.

**Integration:** Persons with disabilities can access all goods and services. This may require alternative formats and flexible approaches. It means inclusiveness and full participation. This is a fundamental human right.

**Equal Opportunity:** Service is provided to persons with disabilities in a way that their opportunity to access goods and services is equal to that given to others.

**Scope:**

This policy and procedure applies to all employees, Board of Directors,, members of committees, societies or associations established or recognized by the agency , contractors, providers of service or research, volunteers, visitors or the general public, and applicants for admission or employment.

**Definitions:**

**Accessible** means obtainable, usable, readable, audible, visible, understandable, clear, able to be entered and exited, flexible, etc. To be accessible to all people, a variety of accessibility plans are necessary. Ensuring inclusive practices will ensure that all goods and services can be accessed by a larger audience.

**Alternative Formats** refers to alternate ways to provide goods and services. Some alternate formats can be used by everyone, while others are designed to address the needs of a specific user. This may be through forms of communication such as speech or writing, or methods such as in person or over the phone. Other examples are large print, electronic text (Word or html), Braille, sign language interpretation, communication devices, media caption, etc.

**Assistive Devices** are equipment that people with disabilities utilize to assist in their daily lives at home, work, school, etc. Such devices could be a walker, scooter, cane, magnification or specialized learning software, communication board, etc.

**Assistive Technology** is equipment or software such as screen reading, audio recording and voice recognition which people with disabilities use to obtain information and communicate with others. Professors may be asked to supply file formats that are compatible with particular types of assistive technology.

**Disability:** Under the AODA, the definition of "disability" is the same as the definition in the Ontario Human Rights code:

- (a) 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;
- (b) A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- (c) A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- (d) A mental disorder; or
- (e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

### **Providing Services to People with Disabilities**

FACS Niagara is committed to excellence in serving all clients including people with disabilities and we will carry out our functions and responsibilities in the following areas:

#### **Communication**

In order for the agency to communicate with persons with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability; all employees shall be trained in how to interact with people with various types of disabilities. Alternative methods of communication are provided as quickly as possible when requested.

#### **Telephone:**

We are committed to providing accessible telephone service to our clients and the community. We train staff to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language and to speak clearly and slowly. Staff will be trained in TTY (TextNet online TTY) systems. We offer to communicate with customers by email or TTY, if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available. We have delegated a lead contact for TTY.

#### **Assistive Devices**

We are committed to serving people with disabilities who use assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our services. We will ensure that our staff is trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by clients with disabilities while accessing our services.

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**Billing**

We are committed to providing accessible invoices to all of our clients. For this reason, invoices will be provided in the following formats upon request: hard copy, large print, or e-mail. We will answer any questions clients may have about the content of the invoice in person, by telephone or email.

**Use of Service Animals and Support Persons**

We are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal. We will also ensure that all staff, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal. In the area circumstance that a health and safety concern presents itself in the form of a severe allergy to the service animal, all reasonable efforts will be made to meet the needs of all individuals.

**Support Persons**

We are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to enter FACS Niagara's premises with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on our premises, unless a health and safety concern arises regarding the behavior of the support person.

**Notice of Temporary Disruption**

FACS Niagara will provide clients with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. This notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. This notice will be placed at all public entrances and service counters on our premises. If possible, we will make all reasonable efforts to contact those with appointments who are affected by the disruption.

In the case of an office closure, closure information will be placed on the FACS website and advertised through various community media outlets.

**Training for Staff**

FACS Niagara is committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Therefore, no changes will be made to this policy before considering the impact on people with disabilities.

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FACS Niagara will provide training to all employees, volunteers and others who deal with the public or other third parties on their behalf, and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of customer service policies, practices and procedures.

Training will include the following:

- The purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard
- 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
- How to use the TTY and other equipment or devices available on FACS premises that may help with the provision of services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing FACS Niagara's Services
- FACS Niagara's policies, practices and procedures relating to the customer service standard.

Applicable staff will be trained on policies, practices and procedures that affect the way services are provided to people with disabilities. Staff will also be trained on an ongoing basis when changes are made to these policies, practices and procedures.

**Feedback Process**

The ultimate goal of FACS Niagara is to meet and surpass client expectations while serving clients with disabilities. Comments on our services regarding how well these expectations are being met are welcome and appreciated.

Feedback regarding the way FACS Niagara provides services to people with disabilities can be made verbally (in person or by phone) or in writing (email or mail). All feedback will be directed to the Accessibility Coordinator. Clients can expect to receive a response in 7 business days. Complaints will be addressed according to complaint procedures already established in the agency's Internal Complaint Review Process.

**Modifications to this or other Policies**

FACS Niagara is committed to developing customer service policies which respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. FACS develops and updates policies, procedures and practices in such a manner as to respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities, as well as integration and equality of opportunity.

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**Questions about this Policy**

This policy exists to achieve service excellence to clients and community members with disabilities. The public can access copies of accessibility related documents via the website or in print upon request. If anyone has questions about the policy, or if the purpose of the policy is not understood, an explanation should be provided by or referred to, the AODA Coordinator of the FACS Niagara. This document is available in alternative format upon request.

**REFERENCES:**

- Ontario Human Rights Code (2009)
- FACS Niagara Harassment and Discrimination Policy and Procedure (2005)
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)
- Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (2007)
- Guide to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (2007)
- Integrated Accessibility Standards (2011)