



# AODA / ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

**June, 2020**

In the [United Nations Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19](#), it is stated that persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that they are at higher risk for contracting COVID-19 because they may not be able to access hand-washing or hand-sanitizer, they often rely on physical contact to get support, and they may not be able to access public information. Further, persons with disabilities are at greater risk of developing more severe health conditions and dying of COVID-19.

As we develop COVID-19 Recovery and Response plans, people with disabilities must be considered and included in the planning. Further, all businesses and organizations in Ontario must continue to meet the requirements under one or more of the five (5) accessibility standards of the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#): Accessible Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation and the Design of Public Spaces/Built Environment. We need to ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind in COVID-19 response and recovery. The following are some considerations:

**Consultations:** Planning should include consultations with people with disabilities in the community to ensure that needs are planned for and met. The City of Stratford has an established Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), of which the majority are people with disabilities. The AAC as well as the public and persons with disabilities should be called upon for feedback as the City moves forward with opening up businesses and promoting tourism.

**Home Delivery:** Currently, a number of businesses are offering home delivery. Businesses should consider continuing this service for some time to meet the needs of people with disabilities, seniors and others who are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. A FREE [Access From Home](#) add-on to the existing [AccessNow](#) application has been developed. Businesses can enter their information and potential customers can search to find businesses in their area who are offering home delivery. This is a global app and is supported by the Government of Canada.



**Curb-side Service:** Some people are able to drive to a retail location for curb-side service if home delivery is not an option, it may take some time and effort to disembark, depending on level of ability. Businesses should be open to placing goods directly in the trunk of a customer's car.

**Layout and Design Changes:** Installing automatic door openers and encouraging all customers to use them will reduce the number of touch points on doors and handles, and will make it easier for people with some types of disabilities to move freely and without assistance. Also, wider aisles in businesses allow people to physically distance, and at the same time allow people using mobility devices to more easily navigate the space. People with disabilities have money to spend, but if they cannot get into a business, or navigate the aisles, then they will not go there.

**Information and Communications:** Businesses need to ensure that communications are available in alternative formats so that all people, regardless of ability, have access to the information, especially when it applies to health and safety, physical distancing rules, or any other business-specific rules that may be established. This includes larger fonts for any COVID related signage and verbal communications for people with visual disabilities. Perth County has a higher number of seniors than the provincial average, as well as increasing numbers of people with dementia, and that can put them and others visiting businesses at risk of infection when hearing, vision and/or cognition are compromised. Business owners and staff will need even more patience when working with people who may need extra guidance.

**Hearing loss:** Some people with hearing loss are used to standing closer to the person speaking in order to hear. This makes it difficult to follow physical distancing rules. We may need to speak more loudly, slowly and clearly in order to communicate with people with hearing loss in a safe manner.

**Working from Home:** Some businesses may have employees who are immunocompromised, or at a higher risk for other reasons for contracting COVID-19. They may need to isolate for longer than others. Working arrangements need to be flexible to support their ability to do this, including allowing employees to work from home.

Alternate working arrangements and conditions should be made accessible and inclusive. Digital platforms and new ways of meeting must be accessible to all.