

Is Your Place of Business Accessible

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Joan and Preeti are the franchisors of a small chain of fast-food restaurants. Each restaurant is owned and operated by a different franchisee. Each franchisee has up to ten employees. Three of the five franchised restaurants are in neighbourhoods where there are long-term care facilities and retirement homes, so each restaurant has a percentage of customers who suffer from a disability. One of their franchisees has just called to ask about a reminder they've received from the Ontario government about complying with new accessibility standards by January 1, 2012. She wants to know when the franchisor (Joan and Preeti) is going to take care of the new requirements.

Ensuring accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities is the law—even for small businesses.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) sets out the province-wide accessibility standards in five key areas of daily living: customer service, employment, information and communications, transportation, and the built environment. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (“Customer Service Standards”) is the first of these standards to become law. Public sector employers were required to comply by 2010 and now it is the turn of the private sector. All organizations in Ontario that provide goods or services to the public or other third parties, and have at least one employee, must comply with the regulation by **January 1, 2012**.

As the franchisor, Joan and Preeti could set some uniform standards for compliance with the new legislation that would be applicable to all of their franchisees. However, they have opted to put the onus on each of their franchisees to comply with the Customer Service Standards, so it is up to each franchisee to decide what they will do to comply with the new regulations.

Each business with at least one employee must comply with a number of requirements including, but not limited to, the following:

How to Comply

Each business with at least one employee must comply with a number of requirements including, but not limited to, the following:

- establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities, including having a policy about



measures the organization offers to people with disabilities to access the goods and use the services. For example, a restaurant with steps at the entrance might provide directions to a side door that would be more accessible to people using wheelchairs or walkers.

- Train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public or third parties on the organization's behalf.
- Communicate with disabled customers in a manner that takes their disabilities into account. In this example, a restaurant might provide a large-print version of a menu or have the server read the menu to the customer.
- Allow people who use service animals such as guide dogs to bring the animals into premises that are open to the public.
- Provide notice if facilities or services for disabled customers will be temporarily disrupted.

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