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## Accessible Mainstreet – Tipsheet

# What You Need To Know About Customers Who Have Vision Impairments

Everyone is different in some way. Each of us has a different way of doing things and there are some things we can't do without some help from people, or from machines and products that are easy to use.

Visual impairments reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Impaired vision can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have visual impairments:

- ❖ Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- ❖ Speak normally and clearly.
- ❖ Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- ❖ Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.
- ❖ If you offer assistance, wait until your receive permission.
- ❖ Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- ❖ Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- ❖ If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- ❖ Don't just assume the individual can't see you.
- ❖ Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.

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- ❖ Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.
- ❖ Don't walk away without saying good-bye.
- ❖ Be patient. Things may take a little longer.
- ❖ Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

**Additional Tipsheets can be found at:**  
[www.toronto-bia.com/resources/tipsheets.php](http://www.toronto-bia.com/resources/tipsheets.php)

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*Based on: "May I Help You?" – Welcoming Customers with Disabilities" Resource Package, Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2005*