

## **CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION, MUSKOKA-PARRY SOUND BRANCH**

AGENCY: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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**NUMBER:** IX - 20

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**SUBJECT:** Support and Services for People with Disabilities

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### **POLICY**

CMHA is committed to ensuring that consumers with disabilities who access our services and anyone with a disability who visits our premises will be able to use their assistive devices, and guide dogs or other service animals. Staff will provide support to people with disabilities by communicating effectively.

### **PROCEDURE**

#### 1. Assistive Devices

CMHA will provide support for those with assistive devices by:

- using reasonable effort to ensure consumers and people with disabilities who use assistive devices are treated with dignity, independence, integration of services and equality of opportunity
- educating staff about personal assistive devices, including alternative ways to help consumers when personal assistive devices are not able to be used in certain situations
- allowing consumers and people with disabilities who use our services or visit our premises to use their personal assistive devices

We will inform our consumers and people with disabilities about the personal assistive devices available for their use on our premises. We will do this by:

- keeping an updated inventory of assistive devices available for use by consumers and people with disabilities and making that information available to them in accessible formats and locations
- striving to expand our inventory of assistive devices when making budgeting and purchasing decisions

We will identify potential hazards associated with personal assistive devices and develop procedures and practices to reduce or eliminate the hazard.

#### 2. Guide Dogs and other Service Animals

CMHA will provide support with those with guide dogs or other service animals by:

- allowing full access to our premises, unless that area of the organization is not open to the public or other third parties or animals are excluded by other laws such as public health
- recognizing that service animals are not pets, and will not be excluded from the premises under any 'No pets policy'

- educating staff, volunteers, students and others dealing with the public about the use of service animals
- providing training to staff volunteers, students and others dealing with the public on how to interact appropriately with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal
- assisting people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal when they request help with their animal if it is safe and reasonable to do so
- providing other measures to access our services for people with disabilities if their service animal is excluded by law from certain areas of our premises.

## **Definitions**

Guide Dog – This is a dog that has successfully completed the training program at any of the facilities listed in the Blind Persons’ Rights Act and has been qualified as a guide dog.

Service Animal – May also be called “assistance animals”, “assist animals”, “support animals” or “helper animals”. 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 a physician or other health care professional confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

In some situations, the consumer may be unaware that a letter is required, or the letter may be unclear on the need for the consumer to have a service animal with them. A 'best practice' is to allow access to our premises in these situations, with a polite request to bring a letter (or a more readily understood letter) the next time.

## Tips on Interacting With Service Animals

- Treat service animals as working animals, not pets.
- Do not touch, feed, make eye contact or otherwise interact with a service animal without asking first for the owner’s permission. Distracting a service animal may endanger the owner.
- Familiarize the owner with an area for walking a service animal.
- Offer to provide water for the service animal if a consumer with a service animal will be on the premises for some time.
- Provide a garbage container and show the owner where a service animal can relieve itself outside.

## Balancing competing needs and rights

There may be times when the needs or rights of a consumer with a service animal compete with the needs or rights of other consumers. For example:

- a person may have severe asthma and cannot be near fur or feathers
- a person may have a strong phobia about birds, monkeys or other service animals
- Islamic tradition sees dogs as impure and contact with the saliva, snout or tongue of a dog requires purification of the body and clothing

Most people with disabilities or special needs have experience handling these situations and should be asked for their ideas. Staff will be trained to help consumers arrive at a mutually agreeable solution that is based on the severity of the health condition, respects rights enshrined in the Human Rights Code and considers alternatives that are available within the agency.

### 3. Communicating with People with Disabilities

CMHA will communicate effectively with people with disabilities by:

- taking into account individual disabilities when communicating
- educating staff, students and volunteers about providing effective ways of communicating with people with disabilities
- using appropriate language when referring to people with disabilities and taking action when unacceptable words or gestures are used
- soliciting feedback about our communications from clients, consumers, experts and others
- keeping current with communication technology and standards for people with disabilities

Methods of communicating with people with varying disabilities include the following:

**Braille** – Braille is a reading system of raised dots. There is English Braille and French Braille. Grade 1 Braille represents individual letters. Grade 2 Braille represents commonly occurring words or groups of letters.

**Large Print** – Large print uses a set of standards for printed materials that improves readability beyond standard design and formatting. This includes using a larger font size (14 to 16 point) for characters, non-serif fonts, increased spacing and improved contrast.

**Captioning** – Captioning translates the audio portion of a video presentation through subtitles, or captions, which appear on the bottom of the screen. Captioning makes television programs, films and other visual media with sound accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Electronic Text** – Used with computer synthetic voice technology (screen reading software) that enables people with a vision loss or who have learning disabilities to hear a spoken translation of what others see on the monitor.

**Audio Format** – An alternative format for people who are unable to read print.

**Plain Language** – A specific method of communication that is accessible to certain persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

**Easy Read** – A combination of words and pictures that is accessible to persons with learning disabilities.

**Descriptive Video Service (DVS)** – DVS provides descriptive narration of key visual elements – such as the activity, participants and locations – without interfering with dialog or sound effects, making television programs and advertising, films, and other visual media accessible for people with a vision loss.

**Sign Language Video Format** – An alternative format for people who are Deaf is to provide information in sign language in video format.

### 4. Support Persons

CMHA is committed to allowing full access to our premises to people with disabilities and their support persons. We will do this by:

- allowing full access to our premises to people with disabilities and their support persons, unless the area of the Agency is not open to the public or other third parties
- ensuring the person with a disability and his or her support person are able to enter our premises together and that the person with a disability has access to his or her support person at all times while on Agency premises
- educating staff, volunteers, students and others dealing with the public about how support persons will be treated
- providing training to staff, volunteers, students and others dealing with the public on how to interact appropriately with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person
- giving advance notice about the amount, if any, that will be charged for a support person who accompany people with disabilities to events or services held:
  - on Agency premises and sponsored by us
  - held at other venues and sponsored by us

Consent and Confidentiality

In some instances, discussion of the consumer’s personal health information may occur in the company of the support person. Before this occurs, staff must ensure that

- the consumer has consented to have their support person present during these discussions
- the support person has signed a pledge of confidentiality prior to any care being provided to the consumer.

In group activities where there is an expectation of confidentiality, the support person is to be held to the same expectation as the group participants.

Activities where there is a fee charged

In instances where consumers participate in activities where there is an admission fee, staff must determine the fee to be charged to the support person and ensure the consumer and/or support person are aware of the charge prior to attending the event.

**Examples of functions performed by support persons**

<b>Person with a Disability</b>	<b>Support Person’s Functions</b>
Person recovering from mental illness	<p>To help with complex communication tasks such as describing symptoms and understanding medical jargon</p> <p>To help in crowded, noisy settings or high-stress situations such as visits to Emerg, interviews or appointments</p> <p>To ensure rights are respected and situations are handled with dignity and without undue</p>

	interference
Person who is deafblind	To guide, to provide transportation and to provide adaptive communication such as tactile or adapted American Sign language, large print notes, print on palm or two-handed manual signing
Person who is Deaf, deafened, oral deaf	To provide sign language or oral interpretation services - to translate conversation, not to participate in it
Person with a learning disability	To help with complex communication or note-taking
Person with an intellectual or developmental disability	To help with travel, daily activities, complex tasks, taking medication, or to keep them from dangerous situations
Person with a physical disability	To provide personal care such as toileting, bathing and dressing and to help with eating, monitoring medical conditions and travelling
Person with a seizure disorder	To assist in the event of a seizure, e.g. to protect individuals from falls, biting their tongues or choking
Person with a speech impairment who uses an augmentative or alternative communication system (symbol board, electronic communication system)	To relay or interpret a person's communications
Person with vision loss	To read, guide or describe

### **Tips on interacting with a consumer who has a support person**

A consumer with a disability might not introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure which person is the consumer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask.

Once you have determined who your consumer is, speak directly to him or her, not to his or her support person.

Be familiar with your organization's policies, practices and procedures about providing accessible customer service.

Be sure to have a consumer's consent before discussing the consumer's disability or other health matters with his or her support person.