

Retail Disability Inclusion and Accessibility Toolkit

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1. Purpose

This toolkit is designed to support store leaders and their frontline teams to **hire, support, and retain individuals with disabilities** and to **deliver inclusive, and accessible employee and customer experiences** in their stores. It is designed to be practical, scalable, and usable across store formats and roles.

This toolkit is a resource that has been created based on feedback from Corporate Store Managers across the country, insights gained from surveys associated with DE&I training and workshops, such as, *Understanding, Valuing and Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace*, from the *DE&I Listening and Sharing Sessions for People with Disabilities*, and external subject matter resources. **Please note:** The purple underlined words or hover words referenced below are not compatible with PDF format, so please refer to the **DE&I and Neurodiversity Glossary** for definitions.

Thank you to all Store Managers and teams across the country for sharing your feedback, and experiences in working with employment partner organizations in your local communities!

What's included in the Toolkit – features and resources

- In this Toolkit, each section shares short, practical tips with opportunities to learn more on a subject from the experiences of store managers across the country (identified by this symbol ) , and links to additional resources.
- This Toolkit is designed so that you can refer to a section that may be of interest, without having to scroll through the document to find the content you're looking for.
- **Is Neurodiversity also discussed in this Toolkit?** Yes! Neurodiversity and associated resources are also included in this Toolkit, as Neurodiverse conditions (e.g., autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others) are recognized as disabilities under the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#) and provincial human rights codes.
- Find the definition of purple underlined words in the **Glossary of DE&I and Neurodiversity Terms** in the Toolkit Appendix at the end of this resource.
- Access the [National Disability Employment Organizations Directory](#) in local communities. All regions may not be represented in this new resource however the DE&I team will regularly update this directory based on your feedback.
 - Email to DEI@sobeys.com to provide new or existing partnership contact information.
- **Where to access this toolkit?**
 - This toolkit is hosted in regional Retail Operations SharePoint sites for easy access; **or**
 - Contact DEI@sobeys.com to access the toolkit.

2. Leadership & Store Culture

Guiding Principle

Leading with **Empathy and Intention** helps build a culture of trust, safety and inclusion. Empathy is not a soft skill—it is an important behaviour that builds understanding and allyship and can be effective in mitigating misunderstanding and even conflict.

“Empathy” reflection question: “What does this action tell me about what a teammate may be experiencing and may need?”

What Every Store Team Should Know

Reminders: Disability can be experienced at any point in time over a lifetime, and is intersectional across race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, age and other dimensions of diversity.

Employees are customers too and your biggest brand ambassadors! An inclusive workplace culture can influence business success and brand identity – in the community you serve, and for the overall organization.

1. Model inclusive behaviour from the top by:
 - Building confidence through knowledge and learning opportunities that are shared with teammates
 - Role-model empathy+ intention to create space for dialogue, learning, and care
 - Practice **Active Listening** to support effective conversations
2. Celebrate disability inclusion days and stories – [refer to the Inclusion Playbook](#)
3. Address bias or inappropriate behaviour immediately
4. Make accessibility and inclusion, and neurodiversity regular agenda items in store meetings/huddles)

Examples in the Workplace

I encourage any teammates that are having difficulties with directions or tasks to speak up, and we will do our best to accommodate. Discussion through huddles, managers meetings etc.

Moved the lunchroom to the old community room with elevator access so if wanted, employees that can't do stairs can still participate in the events we have in the lunchroom.

3. Disability Awareness & Confidence Building

Guiding Principle

Accessibility and Inclusion = Good Service for all! Inclusive practices improve experiences for all teammates and customers not just people with disabilities.

What Every Store Team Should Know

Reflection question: How can I understand the diversity in my community so that I can be better prepared to support customers and teammates?

- Refer to your store’s trade area diversity demographic data to help understand who is in your community. Reach out to your District Operator for any questions relating to this data.
- Start with the basics that everyone should be aware of:
 - **Unconscious Bias** and how it can influence workplace interactions
 - Leading with empathy and intention to understand diversity within the workplace
- Disabilities can be **Visible Disability** (e.g. mobility, blindness) or **Invisible Disability** (e.g., sensory, cognitive, mental health, chronic illness).
- Many customers and teammates will not disclose a disability. This is sometimes referred to as **Masking**. The reasons can vary and include fear of being judged unfairly, a desire to maintain independence, privacy and dignity, generational differences, where individuals don’t see themselves as having a disability.
- People are often experts in their own needs—don’t assume, ask respectfully.
- Review [An Introduction to Disability Inclusion e-learning](#) and [Beyond Barriers: A Guide to Disability Inclusion](#)

Example in the Workplace

I wasn’t diagnosed with Dyslexia until age 52, so I didn’t understand why I struggled to be able to read and take in information. I managed my learning disorder but once I got my diagnosis, everything made more sense, and I felt relief to know that this is the way my brain works. I’ve run a very successful store, but now have some tools, like apps available on my computer and phone to assist with how I stay organized, complete tasks, and understand information. My dyslexia hasn’t set me back, in fact it’s part of my success, and now I feel like I can talk openly about this so that others can learn.

Inclusive Language Basics

- Use **Person First** or **Identity First** language based on individual preference.
- Avoid assumptions, pity-based language, or “inspirational” framing.
- Speak directly to the person, not to a companion or support person. An example of this is an individual accompanied by a sign language interpreter, caregiver, family or friend. It is common practice to always address the person, not the support person.

NOTE: This information presented is a guideline only. How people identify with a disability can be very personal, and terms and references can evolve over time, and may be interpreted differently in other languages. It’s important to not assume and not ask about a person’s disability unless that person chooses to disclose their disability.

Examples in the Workplace

Some staff who come from Autism NS or another organization offer support workers for the first few weeks so the new employee can adjust to their new surroundings, and we welcome them in and explain the tasks the employee has to do.

We have staff available to assist blind shoppers

4. Inclusive Hiring & Recruitment Tips

Guiding Principle

Ability-Focused, Not Deficit-Focused: *Emphasizes skills and strengths—not limitations. Diverse perspectives help reflect the communities we serve, uncover innovation, and bring new customer opportunities.*

What Every Store Should Know

Job Design

- Focus descriptions on **essential functions**, not how tasks have “always been done.”
- Use **Plain Language** and inclusive statements (e.g., *accommodations are available upon request*).

Sourcing Talent

- Partner with disability employment organizations, schools, and community agencies (refer to the [National Disability Employment Organizations Directory](#) in your local community).
- Promote opportunities through accessible formats (e.g. screen-reader-friendly postings).

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Interview Best Practices

- Offer adjustments to the job or workplace proactively (e.g., extra time, different formats).
- Ask skill-based questions, not medical or personal questions.
- Evaluate candidates on outcomes, not expected presentation style or eye contact.

Example in the Workplace

Our store has partnered with 2 of our local High Schools for the past 5 years, and most recently the past 2 years with Inclusion NB, giving work experience to individuals with disabilities in their final graduating year... I would have on average 3 to 4 students per school year, attend either in the morning or afternoon for two hours a day. In terms of work, they are tasked with facing products, putting up orders and doing rotation checks.

5. Onboarding & Workplace Adjustments

Guiding Principle

Consistency with flexibility means clear standards paired with **individualized** accommodations and/or adjustments in the workplace.

What Every Store Team Should Know

Accessible Onboarding

- One size does not fit all!
- Provide materials in multiple formats (digital, large print, captions)
- Allow flexible onboarding timelines if needed
- Assign a trained onboarding buddy – a teammate or community employment partner/organization
- Offer disability-related content in onboarding training that raises awareness
- Promote understanding of the diversity of your employees
- Engage 30-60-90-day check-ins to ensure onboarding experiences are on track

Workplace Accommodations

- **One size does not fit all!** Each teammate is unique, therefore their accommodation(s) and/or adjustment(s) in the workplace need to be customized to reflect individual needs
- Legal duty to accommodate is a legal obligation of the employer
- Accommodations follow a defined process

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- Discuss with HRBP

Workplace Adjustments (Retail Examples)

- Modified schedules or break timing
- Task restructuring
- Assistive technology and Apps
- Noise-reducing headsets
- Job coaching
- Visual task aids (images that replace text-based instructions)

Examples in the Workplace:

We have a hearing-impaired employee at the store, and we have implemented for all staff to send him a text message instead of calling him over the intercom

Sweep logs that have pictures instead of written descriptions; Sending information home with employees that do not read or have memory issues - including store functions/events.

For our semi-blind employee, we've made specific accommodations, such as providing a large-font code book and marking the lane divider with bright tape to improve visibility.

Employees with disabilities are paired up with a workplace buddy where required.

We adapted the schedule to fit, established a routine for the employee and made a key ring with images to help him navigate the store.

6. Customer Experience

Guiding Principle

Practice empathy and intention: *Disability crosses all diversity dimensions including, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture, age and socio-economic status. Soliciting customer feedback can bring greater understanding of the barriers (and even greater barriers through these intersections of identity) that some may experience navigating the environment and inform how we can improve the shopping experience.*

What Every Store Team Should Know

A growing demographic of employees and customers

- **People with disabilities** are a powerful customer market – with an estimated [annual disposable income of CDN\\$1Trillion](#) when you include family, caregivers and friends!
- Disability rates increase with age, especially after age 55.
- From 2017 to 2022, mental health-related, pain-related, and seeing disabilities had the largest increases, contributing the most to the rise in the Canadian disability rate.
- Asking customers for feedback on their shopping experience can provide valuable insights to help create adjustments in the workplace that can deliver more inclusive shopping experiences.

Welcoming the Customer

- Offer help—don't impose it.
- Be patient with communication differences.
- Allow extra time when needed.
- Refer to the following e-learning available in People Portal and/or Dayforce:
 - How may I help you? A Guide to the AODA (Dayforce, People Portal Course ID 126)
 - How May I Help-Manitoba (People Portal Course ID 448)

Serving Customers with Different Needs

- **Mobility**
 - Keep aisles clear and accessible
 - Retrieve items when requested
- **Sensory**
 - Respect and be aware of sensory sensitivities (light, sound, touch)
 - Offer quieter checkout options when possible
 - Maintain consistent Sensory Friendly Shopping Hours

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- **Communication**
 - Use clear, simple language
 - Provide pen and paper or digital tools
 - Acknowledge service animals without distraction
- **Service Recovery**
 - Apologize for barriers without blaming the customer
 - Fix what you can in the moment
 - Capture feedback for improvement

Examples in the Workplace

We have 2 motorized carts, Caroline's Cart is available for customers, as well as participate in sensor shopping on Sundays.

We have a customer who shops here and requires some assistance when doing his shopping. Our front-end staff walks with him, holding his arm as a guide around the store, and helps him shop. This is one example of how our team supports customers with disabilities.

Sensory Awareness Night. Celebrating Employees with Disabilities on their National Recognition Days.

Ensuring aisles are clutter free for better ease of shopping for all customers, motorized carts are available in the foyer for any customers who may need them, coaching and training with staff to offer assistance to any customers that ask for help.

7. Physical & Digital Store Accessibility

Guiding Principle

Removing a barrier for one person, can support other individuals in the workplace. Building a workplace “speak freely” culture can uncover new ideas and innovations based on lived experiences that can result in more inclusive experiences for many.

What Every Store Team Should Know

Store Walkthrough Checklist

- Entrances, aisles, counters are accessible
- Mobility devices: Motorized Scooter Carts, [Caroline’s Carts](#). For further information, contact:
 - WestEquipmentProcurement@sobeys.com;
 - OntarioEquipmentProcurement@sobeys.com
 - AtlanticEquipmentProcurement@sobeys.com
- Clear signage with good contrast
- Seating available for customers who need it
- Where possible, ensure tables, point-of-sale systems, and counters have accessible heights.
- Train teammates to guide customers verbally (e.g., “the checkout is 10 feet to your left”).
- Ensure teammates are trained on proper etiquette for service dogs
- Provide assistance in reaching high shelves or navigating the store

Digital Accessibility

- Confirm that accessibility features (e.g. for screen reader use) are enabled in technologies such as self-checkouts
- Discuss assistive technologies such as text to speech apps, noise-cancelling headphones, special nametags, glasses with blue lenses to reduce in-store glare or lighting, to support teammates with sensory sensitivities

Examples in the Workplace:

We have provided name tags that state our team member is partially deaf to give our customers better knowledge.

Code words used to indicate when someone is feeling overwhelmed.

We have a...teammate who is under 4ft and so I saw that when he went through the back shop doors, he couldn't see who was coming and I heard of him almost getting hit. So, I created a window at his height so he can see who was coming so he wouldn't get hit. I put stools at the punch clock, lunchroom, and in the washroom for him to reach the sink etc. I also found he couldn't reach the soap dispensers, so I provide a hand pump soap and keep it in the cabinet in the washroom where he knows it is at.

8. Engaging Community Employment Partnerships

Guiding Principle

Being an inclusive employer that reflects the community can connect better with diverse customers.

What Every Store Team Should Know

- Build partnerships with local disability employment and advocacy organizations to support capacity for new onboarding, job coaching, teammate training, education and awareness
- Participate in community inclusion initiatives by engaging store teams to discuss and activate

Note: These recommendations may not apply to unionized workplaces.

Examples in the Workplace

Jeff Hanevich, Store Manager at Safeway Sherwood Park Mall has partnered with his local [Inclusion Alberta](#) chapter for a number of years in hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities. They provide mentors who support employees with intellectual disabilities during shifts, assist with training, and help teams understand individual needs—creating a welcoming environment for everyone. His “...**staff have really gotten behind seeing...employees succeed...there is a real sense of teamwork and camaraderie that develops. Customers have also commented that they are happy to see us being inclusive employers.**”

Tracy DeWolf, Manager, Sobeys Mountain Road, Moncton, NB, and her store team were recently recognized as Inclusion Champions 2026 by [Inclusion NB](#) for her continued work in providing on the job skills training for high school students with intellectual disabilities.

Our store has partnered with 2 of our local high schools for the past 5 years, and most recently the past 2 years with Inclusion NB, giving work experience to individuals with disabilities in their final graduating year. For instance, I would have on average 3 to 4 students per school year, attend either in the morning or afternoon for two hours a day. In terms of work, they are tasked with facing products, putting up orders and doing rotation checks.... one of the students who has since graduated... now works with us, putting up orders and doing rotations checks in our Grocery department. She is an amazing individual and has become a key member of our team.

Inclusion to me means No one gets left out!... Show your team each and every day that inclusion matters. Reach out to your community to see how you can be of assistance, it goes a long way.

9. Appendix

- [DE&I and Neurodiversity Glossary](#)
- [National Disability Employment Organizations Directory](#)
- [Posters by Topic:](#)
 1. What is Disability?
 2. Disability-Inclusive Language Tips
 3. Unconscious Bias
 4. Workplace Adjustments
 5. Disability in Canada
 6. Inclusive Language
 7. Signs of Sensory Overload
 8. What is Neurodiversity?
 9. Active Listening
 10. All Disabilities Are Valid
- **Links to internal e-learnings, workshops, and resources:**
 - Inclusion Starts with I (Unconscious Bias) (Available in Dayforce; and People Portal, Course ID 1026)
 - An Introduction to Disability Inclusion (Available in Dayforce; and People Portal, Course ID 2118)
 - How may I help you? A Guide to the AODA (Available in Dayforce; and People Portal, Course ID 126)
 - How may I help - Manitoba (Available in People Portal, Course ID 448)
 - Understanding, Valuing and Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace (Email: DEI@sobeys.com)
 - [Beyond Barriers: A Guide to Disability Inclusion](#)
 - [Inclusion Playbook \(March – August 2026\)](#)
- **Links to external resources:**
 - External Webinars: [Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion \(CCDI\)](#) – register an account through your Sobeys email.
 - [The Inclusive Workplace](#)
 - [Canadian Council on Rehabilitation in the Workplace: Disability Inclusive Toolkit](#)
- For questions relating to this Toolkit or the Directory of Partner Organizations, please reach out to DEI@sobeys.com

Thank you for your continued support in advancing accessibility and inclusion at Sobeys Inc.

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Disclaimer - These documents are provided for general information purposes only, and are not intended to be comprehensive or to provide legal advice. The Franchise Operator is solely responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable laws relating to the operation of their store including, but without limitation, provincial occupational health and safety requirements, and are expected to adapt these policies and procedures as may be required to meet the specific needs of their store and employees.

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