

To Charge or Not To Charge The Support Person



Offering goods and services to a person with a disability may sometimes include providing access to those same goods and services to an individual who acts as a support person.

A support person, who may also be known as an aide, personal support worker, caregiver or support worker is someone who may accompany a person with a disability to provide assistance if and when required or preferred. A support person can include a family member, friend or other person including a paid support worker. The majority of persons with a disability do not travel with a support person but some do and when they do it is important that a business understand the implications of the presence of a support person.

A Support Person's Job Varies Across Situations

The role of a support person may vary greatly not only from person to person and situation to situation but from encounter to encounter. You may experience a situation where a support person plays no obvious role and where the person with a disability acts fully independently. However, on another occasion you may experience that the support worker plays a significant role. The goal of a support worker is often to be invisible until required to take an active role.

Across Canada there are different rules and legislations that recognize the need, in some instances, for an individual to provide support to a person with a disability. In Ontario the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act) requires organizations to allow a support person to accompany a person with a disability while the person with a disability is accessing and receiving goods and services.

Should You Charge Fee for Admissions, Tickets or Seats?

Offering access to a support person in many situations is a matter of human

rights in Canada. For many organizations the presence of a support person offers no disruption and has no cost associated with it. If your business involves selling goods the fact that a support person may help facilitate the purchase does not impact your ability to provide services. However, for some organizations there are challenges and costs associated with the presence of a support person.

In Ontario under AODA the support person would need to be provided with the opportunity to accompany the person with a disability. However, the decision to apply or waive any fee for the support worker is at the discretion of the organization. In other words determining if a support person is required to pay a fee is an organizational choice.

Across Canada organizations have taken a variety of approaches to managing question of fees paid by support workers. Some organizations require the support person to pay the full amount, others offer a discounted amount and others waive the cost completely. For example if you review the policy at the movie chain Cineplex Entertainment their policy indicates that support workers can obtain an "Access 2 Entertainment" card (offered in conjunction with Easter Seals). This card is described as follows:

The Access 2 Entertainment card allows persons with a disability to receive either free admission or a significant discount for their support person at member movie theatres and attractions across Canada.

In this case Cineplex requires the person with a disability pay \$20 for the Access 2 Entertainment card that then allows their support person free access to the movie theater.

There are a variety of factors to consider when an organization decides to charge, discount or waive fees for a personal support worker. Considering the following issues may help you determine what policy your organization will adopt.

- Weigh the cost of lost revenues associated with providing a discounted or free admissions against the potential loss of business from a person with a disability who may not be able to pay for double admissions fees (the persons admission and the support persons).
- Weigh the benefits of being seen in the community in general and the disability community in particular as supportive and the potential increased revenues from persons with a disability who choose to patronize your organization

Once you have a decision ensure it is widely accessible, posted and promoted so that your customers can plan accordingly.

Regardless of your decision it is important to consider this issue and have a position that is widely understood within the organization. The goal of most accessibility legislation is to enable persons with disabilities to function in the community with a smooth access to services. Being prepared with your decision regarding charging fees and widely sharing and promoting your position is an important component of being a prepared organization.