

# Requesting Accommodations in the Workplace



## About this Guide

This guide is for service providers supporting clients needing accommodations at work. It will help you discuss with clients what Duty to Accommodate means and how to request and discuss accommodations with employers by:

- Preparing for conversation, collaboration, and compromise to achieve accommodations.
- Helping clients understand their employee rights and discuss accommodation requests confidently with their employers.
- Helping clients communicate their needs effectively, be flexible and creative, and protect their dignity, privacy, and livelihood.

## What is Duty to Accommodate?

In Alberta, employers must accommodate employees' needs covered under the "grounds of discrimination" in the Alberta Human Rights Act. Employers are not obligated to accommodate requests unrelated to a protected ground, such as a preference to leave early to attend a child's sporting activity. Accommodations should work for both the employee and the employer. Employers must provide accommodation up to the point of "undue hardship."

Accommodations can be requested at any time, including before an interview, after accepting a job offer, during onboarding, or anytime the need for an accommodation arises.

## 15 protected grounds

For definitions, please visit the AHRC website at <https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/>

Mental disability

Physical disability

Gender

(including pregnancy and sexual harassment)

Gender identity

Gender expression

Sexual orientation

Race

Colour

Ancestry

Place of origin

Religious beliefs

Age

Marital status

Family status

Source of income

(such as disability pension or government assistance)

## Accommodations can look very different.

### Examples are (more [here](#)):

- Accommodating religious needs: Scheduling a break for employees to attend prayer.
- Accommodating family status: Adjusting schedule to address shifting childcare needs in response to family violence.
- Accommodating pregnancy: Adjusting work duties to avoid heavy lifting or harmful chemicals.
- Accommodating physical disability: Providing an employee with visual impairment a screen magnifier or adjusting an employee's job responsibilities because of a medical limitation.
- Accommodating mental disability: Scheduling breaks or adjusting work duties to ensure performance of an employee with a mental health condition.

## What do I do if my client needs an accommodation from their employer?

### Understand the need and explore accommodation options

- Understand your client's restrictions and needs related to protected grounds.
- Explore potential options for accommodations.
- Share with your client what to expect when exploring accommodation options with their employer.
- Gather information on your client's workplace and who the best contact might be.

## Prepare information to share with the employer

**Clear description.** Support your client in describing to their employer what their restrictions are or their need is (for example difficulty reading text on a screen because of physical disability, requirement to pray at certain times because of religious belief, inability to lift heavy items because of pregnancy), possible options for accommodation, and for how long it is needed.

**Good timing.** Support your client in thinking about when to disclose. The goal is to secure a job that matches the client's skills and needs. There are benefits and disadvantages of disclosing at different stages in the hiring process. For more and Do's and Don'ts of disclosing, visit [here](#).

### Examples of accommodations

- Providing space and time for smudging
- Allowing employees to wash feet in a safe space such as a locker room to prepare for prayer
- Purchasing ergonomic equipment, for example a mouse or chair
- Installing adaptive technology, for example text to voice software
- Providing a safe space to pump breastmilk
- Providing flexible work hours to accommodate school pick up and drop off times
- Allowing beverages in jobs where food and drink are normally not taken to regulate body temperature and thirst during menopause
- Offering time to attend rehabilitation programs
- Allowing employees to wear skirts or pants as part of the workplace uniform

**Supporting information.** Help gather information demonstrating the client's restriction or need.

For example:

- Help your client get a doctor's note that states the restrictions and need for accommodation rather than the diagnosis. Print a [sample form](#) from the Alberta Human Rights Commission to bring to the doctor.
- If accommodation is needed for religious reasons, support your client in contacting a religious leader in their community for advice and a written statement. Ask for a letter stating that the client is a member of the religious community and required to pray at certain times every day.

## Privacy Rights

Employees have privacy rights and do not have to disclose their diagnosis to their employer. The Alberta Human Rights Commission has more information about [obtaining medical information](#).

**Conversation first.** Encourage your client to have a conversation with their manager or supervisor first. It is important to nurture a positive relationship where the employee confidently asserts their rights and considers the requirements of the job at the same time as their own needs. Help your client request a meeting to talk about accommodation options.

## Undue hardship and alternative accommodation

For example, if the employee cannot climb stairs due to a disability, it would be reasonable to assign this task to another employee. Requesting to install an elevator, on the other hand, might constitute undue hardship for the employer.

## Prepare for the conversation.

Plan with your client how the conversation may go:

1. **Set the tone.** Thank the employer for meeting and share some positive experiences at the workplace.
2. **Explain the need.** Focus on how accommodating the need will ensure performance and retainment, rather than on a diagnosis or the need itself.
3. **Provide the details.** Describe accommodation options and the timeframe for which accommodation is needed.
4. **Ask about next steps.** How and when is the employer ready to discuss a solution? Who can support the employee in the process?

## Prepare to discuss the accommodation request

The employer may suggest a different accommodation than what your client asked for. Employers are legally required to provide reasonable accommodation to the point of undue hardship ([What is undue hardship?](#)), but are not required to provide a perfect accommodation or the exact accommodation that your client has requested. The accommodation process is most successful when everyone works together to come up with creative, flexible solutions.

## Document the communication

After the conversation, it is important for your client to document what was said in a follow-up email or using the form “Making a Request for Accommodations in the Workplace”:

*Dear [manager or employer name],*  
*Thank you for the conversation today about my accommodation request and options for [need].*  
*A. We agreed to [accommodation] for [time period]. Please let me know what the next steps are and whether you require additional information.*

**OR**

*B. While we couldn't find a solution that works for both of us today, we decided to brainstorm further options with the support of [Human Resource or Health and Safety Department, a Union, or other supports]. Please let me know when we can meet for a follow-up conversation, and I hope we can come to an agreement then.*

**OR**

*C. You offered (accommodation) which you believe is reasonable. I do not feel it is reasonable for the following reasons (for example, it does not fall within the restrictions or limitations as assessed by a medical professional). Please let me know what further information you may need and when we can meet for a follow-up conversation. I hope, with further information, we can come to an agreement then.*

Help your client understand that their employer may need some time to respond. Support your client in following up with their employer and requesting a response.

Employers must make meaningful accommodations. If they cannot provide full accommodation, an employee can ask for the employer to provide the reasons in writing; however, the employer is not obligated to do so. Once the employer and employee agree on an accommodation, employers may provide the agreement in writing. Support your client in asking for written documents detailing either the reasons why accommodations cannot be made or detailing the agreement on an accommodation.

## Do accommodations affect pay?

An employee should continue to receive the same rate of pay they received before the accommodation if the accommodation does not affect work hours, job duties, or performance.

## Keep the employer informed

Support your client in informing their employer when their need for accommodation has changed or ended. Support your client in any negotiations around modifying or ending accommodations.

## What to do if your client cannot reach an agreement with their employer

If the employer does not agree to accommodate your client's need in any way, support your client in navigating their options:

- Larger workplaces may have a Human Resources, Human Rights, or Health, Safety and Environment Department. Contact them for advice and support.
- If the workplace is unionized, contact the union for advice and support.
- Contact community organizations providing navigation or language support, for example the [Workers Resource Centre](#).

### **Making a complaint will not affect your client's immigration status.**

Call the Alberta Human Rights Commission's [confidential inquiry line](#) at 780-427-7661 or toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000, complete a [self-assessment questionnaire on the Commission's website](#), or email [ahrc.registrar@gov.ab.ca](mailto:ahrc.registrar@gov.ab.ca).

## Making a complaint with the Human Rights Commission

- Support your client in completing a [self-assessment](#) on the [Alberta Human Rights Commission's website](#).
- Based on their response, your client may be able to make a complaint using the online form or by downloading a PDF version.
- If accepted by the Commission, the complaint will be sent to the employer to respond.
- Often, the complaint will be addressed in conciliation where a Human Rights Officer aims to find a resolution agreeable to both the employer and the employee.
- In other cases, the decision may come from the Director of the Commission or a Human Rights Tribunal. To see an infographic about the [complaint process](#), [click here](#).
- Support your client in requesting accommodations during the complaint process if needed. For example, they can request to bring a support person during meetings, translation services, or access to a computer from a Commission office to participate in a virtual conciliation meeting. [More accommodations for the complaint process can be found here](#).

### **What is [conciliation](#)?**

Conciliation is a non-adversarial way to resolve complaints with the help of a human rights officer.

## Other resources

- For inquiries about employment standards, such as pay, overtime, vacation, etc., contact Alberta Employment Standards at 1-877-427-3731
- For inquiries about occupational health and safety, contact Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-866-415-8690
- For workplace related injuries, contact Workers' Compensation Board, at 1-866-922-9221

## Links to Resources

### Alberta Human Rights Act:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/media/1utjxb3e/alberta-human-rights-act.pdf>

### Examples for workplace accommodations:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/issues-at-work/duty-to-accommodate-at-work/>

### Protected grounds:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/>

### Gathering medical information including sample forms:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/issues-at-work/disability-illness-and-injury/medical-information/>

### Do's and Don'ts of disclosing:

<https://alis.alberta.ca/tools-and-resources/resources-for-people-with-disabilities/look-for-work/when-and-how-to-talk-about-your-disability/>

### Undue hardship:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/media/pgrdfmor/duty-to-accommodate-human-rights-guide.pdf>

### Workers Resource Centre:

<https://www.helpwrc.org/>

### Alberta Human Rights Commission's self-assessment questionnaire:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/complaints/am-i-in-the-right-place/self-assessment/>

### Accommodations for the complaint process:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/frequently-asked-questions/>

### Infographic about the complaint process:

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/complaints/the-complaint-process/complaint-process/>

### PolicyWise for Children & Families:

<https://policywise.com/>

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# Requesting Accommodations in the Workplace



In Alberta, employers must accommodate employees' needs. This is covered under the "grounds of discrimination" in the Alberta Human Rights Act. Accommodations should work for both the employee and the employer. This form will help employees and employers during a workplace accommodation process.

## Accommodation - Employee Request

Describe your restrictions, limitations, and needs. For example, "Unable to lift heavy items."

Check the protected ground(s) that relate to your needs:

- Mental and physical disability
- Gender, gender identity, or gender expression
- Sexual orientation
- Race and colour
- Religious beliefs
- Ancestry and place of origin
- Age
- Marital and family status
- Source of income

Suggest options for accommodation.

Describe how accommodating the need will help you at work.

List the supporting information you attached, such as a doctor's note.

How long do you need the accommodation?

Date to discuss the accommodation.

## Accommodation Request - Employer Response

Select all that apply below and provide relevant details.

- Employer and employee agreed on accommodating the need.  
Provide a detailed description of the accommodation below.

How long do you need this accommodation?

Date for check-in discussion on  
how the accommodation is working.

- Employer and employee did not agree on what a reasonable accommodation may be. Provide reasons for why the accommodation cannot be granted.



Employer requests additional information. List what information is needed.

Meeting date to discuss alternative options for accommodation

Employer suggested the following supports for the employee:

Further notes and details from follow-up meetings:

If you need further support, call the Alberta Human Rights Commission's [confidential inquiry line](#) at 780-427-7661 or toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000

This form was developed by:

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