



Office for Disability

Improving Access to Buildings

An inaccessible built environment can present a barrier for people with a disability in everyday life, such as entering public buildings, using stairs, opening doors, hearing public announcements and reading signs.

Accessible buildings and facilities enable equal use of the built environment for all people. In particular, accessibility allows dignified and non-discriminatory entry and use of buildings, facilities and services by people with a disability.

Accessibility audits and checklist

Specialist advice about the accessibility of the built environment can be obtained from building professionals. In particular a professional can be engaged to conduct an access audit of the built environment (see Further information). Whilst not an alternative to an access audit, non-professionals can obtain general information about accessibility from a built environment accessibility checklist. A checklist will give some indication of elements that require improvement.

Planning actions in the short, medium and long term

Whether resulting from an access audit or prompted following the use of an accessibility checklist a number of areas will often be identified for improvement. Most improvements will not be able to be actioned immediately. Start by isolating the improvements that can be done at low costs. Next it is suggested that tasks be broken down into actions that can be done in the short term, medium term and long term. Some actions will require forward planning so they can obtain a budget allocation.

Incorporating built environment access improvements in a DAP

Planned changes to improve the accessibility of the built environment can be captured in an organisation's disability action plan (DAP). As an organisational planning tool, a DAP is a proactive approach to identifying and planning the removal of access and participation

barriers. It can assist in reducing discrimination that people with a disability may experience when using programs, services and facilities.

Because a DAP outlines what actions an organisation plans to carry out and the timeline for their completion, it demonstrates a commitment to improving accessibility. The Australian Human Rights Commission notes that an action plan can be used as part of a defence should a complaint be made against an organisation.

Consulting with people with a disability will assist to prioritise the actions to be addressed. This can be done as a component of developing a DAP.

Leased buildings and facilities

Many organisations rent or lease buildings, rather than owning premises. A landlord as the building owner has a responsibility under discrimination law, so it is important to bring to the attention of the landlord any identified gaps and deficits. Such items can be the point of future lease negotiations, depending if they involve minor or major works. The Australian Human Rights Commission provides the example of a business leasing a small old building that cannot be made accessible because of technical or cost reasons. In this case, the only way to fix this problem may be to move when the current lease expires.

Further information

See also the Office for Disability fact sheets 'Access Audits' and 'Access to Buildings' www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au

If you would like to receive this document in an accessible format, contact the Office for Disability:

Telephone: (03) 9208 3015

Email: OFD@dpcd.vic.gov.au

TTY: (03) 9208 3631

Fax: (03) 9208 3633

This material has been produced by the Office for Disability, Department of Human Services, for use by VicHealth as part of the 'Everyone Wins' framework.