

# How to attract more customers and great staff by providing better access to your business



# A Guide for Small Business



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# Message

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In Australia over 4.3 million people, or 18.5 percent of the population, have a disability. The definition is broad and includes a wide range of chronic medical conditions, learning disabilities, mobility problems, intellectual disabilities, mental illnesses and sensory impairments. Together with their friends, families, and carers the number of people affected by a disability is bigger still - and every one of them is a potential customer or employee.

As a small business, quality service is one of the most important things you can offer. This guide aims to help you, the small business owner, understand how to improve access to your goods and services for a large part of our community you may be missing out on - customers who have a disability and their companions.

This guide also invites you to consider the benefits of employing staff with disability, staff that have been shown to be reliable, productive, affordable and good for business.

The guide starts with a checklist to help you identify where you are currently at in relation to access and inclusion. It includes information about the benefits of improving access, your responsibilities, and lots of tips on how to improve access and inclusion at your business. There is also information about who you can contact for support.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Sev Ozdowski'.

Dr Sev Ozdowski OAM  
Director, Equity and Diversity  
Western Sydney University  
August 2014

# Access and inclusion checklist

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**Does your Business:**

**Yes    No**

## Think differently about customer service

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ✓ Welcoming staff, trained in disability awareness  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Staff who treat customers of all abilities with respect   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Staff who are willing to assist   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Staff who communicate clearly   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Alternatives to visible and audible information   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Accessible website with information about services  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Information available in alternative formats, eg large print  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Clear processes for feedback and complaints   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Staff who are trained in emergency evacuation<br>procedures to assist all customers, including those<br>with disability | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Make sure it is easy and safe to use

- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ✓ Accessible parking close to premises          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Accessible public transport close to premises | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Wide self-opening or easy to open doors       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Colour contrast door frames                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Clear path of travel into premises            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	Yes	No
✓ Step free access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Handrails and contrasting edges on any steps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Clear internal and external signage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Clear and wide internal walkways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Accessible height service or reception counters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Information/brochure displays at accessible height	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Good internal and external lighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Low pile carpet or slip resistant flooring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Ramp or lift access to all levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Seating available if customers need to wait	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Access to a clearly marked accessible toilet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Colour contrast between walls, floors and fittings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Consider the benefits of employing people with disability

✓ Staff with disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Staff who are carers of people with disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Flexible working conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Provision of reasonable adjustments for staff with disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Accessible and equitable recruitment processes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ A clear policy around workplace diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
<b>Speak up against prejudice and discrimination</b>		
✓ Zero tolerance toward bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Zero tolerance toward inappropriate language use around disability, eg spastic, cripple, retard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Staff trained in disability awareness and inclusive, person-first language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Staff who speak up against prejudice from other staff or customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# You could be missing out on potential customers

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## Which customers are we talking about?

Providing good access to your business will benefit:

- ✓ people who are blind or partially sighted
- ✓ people with learning or intellectual disabilities
- ✓ people who are Deaf or hearing-impaired
- ✓ people with a physical disability who may or may not use a wheelchair or walking frame
- ✓ people with long-term illnesses
- ✓ people with mental health or psychological difficulties, and
- ✓ people with an acquired brain injury.

Good access also benefits:

- ✓ parents or carers of young children – particularly those with strollers or prams
- ✓ older people
- ✓ delivery people
- ✓ shoppers with heavy bags
- ✓ every customer – particularly when it's busy.



# Good access makes good business sense

All potential customers make choices about your business based on how easy it is to use.

If a person uses a wheelchair and there is a step at your front entrance, they, and the people who accompany them, will probably go to another business in your area which has a flat entrance or a ramp. If they find your staff unhelpful they probably won't come back to your business.

But if you make an effort to provide aisles that aren't cluttered with boxes that could be fallen over, then people will appreciate the ease of shopping at your business. If you train your staff to be respectful – not patronising – then people with a disability are more likely to become regular customers.



## Access attracts customers:

What you do to improve accessibility doesn't have to be extravagantly expensive – a combination of providing easier entry and improving staff training will go a long way to making your business more attractive to many people including people with a disability. Improving access isn't just about making physical changes.

# Meeting your legal responsibilities

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Improving access will also assist your business to meet your legal responsibilities.

In Australia, the law says that customers with disabilities should be able to access your goods or services just like any other customer. If a customer with a disability cannot get into your building or cannot access your goods or services they could make a complaint of discrimination under either State or Territory anti-discrimination laws, or the Federal Disability Discrimination Act (1992). You need to make adjustments unless they would cause your business 'unjustifiable hardship'.

Making your business more accessible is also likely to make it safer for both customers and staff and could have an effect on your public liability and work health and safety responsibilities.

Remember that improving access is not just about physical access. There is a lot you can do to improve access and inclusion even if it is not possible for you to make your business completely physically accessible. The following sections have lots of ideas.

For more information on your legal obligations see 'Further contacts' at the end of this guide.



# Four ways to improve access for *all* your customers

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## 1. Make it easy for people to find you

To attract customers who have a disability you can take some simple steps to make your business easier to find and get to.

### Advertise your advantages

- ✓ If your business is accessible, let people know. For example, if you have wheelchair access include this in your promotions and advertisements.
- ✓ Put up clear external signs to help people with vision impairments or learning difficulties identify what your shop is.

### Make the entrance easy to see

- ✓ Paint the entrance to your business in a colour that contrasts well with the surroundings. This will make it stand out for people with vision impairment. Highly contrasting colours not only distinguish an entrance from the general environment but also make it easier to tell the difference between the immediate door surrounds and the doorway itself.
- ✓ If there are multiple entrances, make sure there are clear directions to where each entrance is.

- ✓ Be aware of reflective glass in your shop front. People with a vision impairment often find this presents them with a confusing picture of reflections, light and shadows. One good solution is to put safety markings on the glass so people don't walk into it. This makes it easier to tell the difference between the window display and the doorway.

## Avoid obstructions

- ✓ Advertising boards, displays or furniture on the footpath and in the shop entrance create a hazard for people who use wheelchairs, older people and people with vision impairment.
- ✓ If you are permitted to have advertising boards, display items or furniture outside your business, make sure there is a clear pathway leading to the entrance.

### Think about your surroundings

It also pays to look at the surroundings of your business\*.

**Carparks** Think about making at least one customer car space wider for a person with a disability to use.

**Pathways** Make sure the path from the carpark to your entrance is accessible for a person using a wheelchair (e.g. wider and more even) and less slippery for someone older or using walking aids.

**Lighting** Would better lighting make carparks and pathways safer?

**Hazards** Make sure overhanging trees or signage do not cause a hazard to a person who is blind or vision impaired

\*You may need to talk to your local Council about these matters.

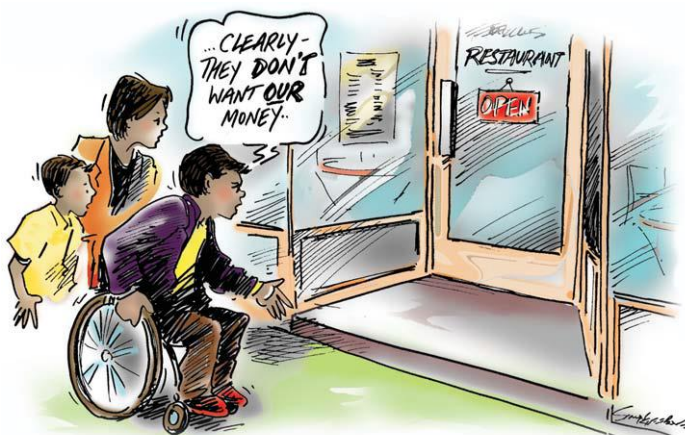
## 2. Make it easy for people to get in

In new buildings all customers, including people using wheelchairs, must be able to enter the shop independently. But in many older buildings the main entrance may have one or several steps, or be difficult in other ways. Here are some ideas on how to make it easy for customers to get in to your business.

While many of these ideas are easy to put into practice, some may require technical advice to ensure they are done correctly (see 'Further contacts' on page 23).

### Level access

- ✓ Ideally, get rid of steps and provide a level entry.
- ✓ If you can't provide a level entry, build a ramp.
- ✓ If these are not possible for technical or financial reasons, consider moving the main entrance to another more accessible position.



## Better doors and doorways

- ✓ Reposition the entrance door handles to an easier height.
- ✓ Make the door easier to open by making it automatic or lighter.
- ✓ Make the doorway wide enough to allow a person with a walking frame or someone who uses a wheelchair to pass through with ease.
- ✓ If the door has a lot of reflective glass, attach safety markings so people do not walk into it.
- ✓ Make sure any doormats are secure and only use them if they can be made flush with the surrounding floor.
- ✓ Put in a handrail.

## Clear sight lines

- ✓ If possible make sure there are clear sight lines between the entry and the counter so that staff are aware when a customer needs assistance to enter the premises or purchase goods.



### 3. Make it easy for people to get around

Once inside your premises customers with disabilities should be able to find their way to all sales areas, browse and inspect goods, bring them to the cash desk or receive services in the same way as people without disability.

The following tips are designed to assist you to better understand and meet the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.

#### For people who are blind or have vision impairment

- ✓ **Signs.** Make sure signs and product pricing labels are clear and use high contrast colours. Ensure overhanging signs do not cause a hazard.
- ✓ **Information.** Make board menus in cafes or product information displays easier to read. Provide written menus or other product information in large print versions (e.g. 18 point Arial) or have staff read information out to customers. Look at the possibility of using modern technology to assist.
- ✓ **Lighting.** Think about improving lighting, especially around service counters.
- ✓ **Layout.** Avoid having dangerously placed fittings and fixtures that can make independent movement difficult for customers who are blind. Make sure your aisles provide a clear path of travel and do not have displays sticking out into them.
- ✓ **EFTPOS.** Make sure the electronic payment system and EFTPOS machines have the features that mean people who are blind can use them.

## For people who may have difficulty hearing

- ✓ **Noise.** Find ways to reduce the amount of background noise and to easily turn down the music when necessary.
- ✓ **Hearing loop.** Look into installing a ‘hearing loop’ or other system to assist people using hearing aids at counters, especially if there is a screen from the public at the counter. See [www.printacall.com.au/hearingloops](http://www.printacall.com.au/hearingloops).

## For people with mobility impairments

- ✓ **Aisles.** Make sure shopping aisles are wide enough (preferably 1.2 metres).
- ✓ **Counters.** Ensure at least part of your customer service area is at a height that is suitable for people using wheelchairs (750–800mm from floor level). Make sure that at least one of your checkout aisles is wide enough, has a lower checkout counter (750–800mm) and is always open.
- ✓ **Reach.** Try to place goods, particularly the most popular ones, within reach of someone using a wheelchair. If this is not always possible, make sure staff are trained to offer assistance.
- ✓ **Chairs.** If your customers need to wait, make a chair available for someone who may be older and frail, use crutches or have poor balance. Make sure there is enough space between chairs for wheelchairs and mobility aides.
- ✓ **EFTPOS.** Ensure that electronic payment systems and EFTPOS machines are on a long enough cord to pass over to someone using a wheelchair.
- ✓ **Surfaces.** Make sure the floor surface is free from trip hazards and is non-slip.





## **❗ Should you be providing accessible toilets?**

- ✓ Where toilets are provided for the public (e.g. in cafes or in other situations where customers may be on the premises for a period of time) an accessible toilet should be provided where possible. Under building laws a unisex accessible toilet counts as a male and a female toilet.
- ✓ If you do not have an accessible toilet make sure all staff know the location of the nearest accessible toilet and, if necessary, get approval for your customers to use it.
- ✓ If you decide to make your toilet accessible you should get technical advice on how to do so (you can find useful contacts on page 23).

## 4. Make the most of customer service

When talking about ‘improving access’ it’s easy to think only in terms of installing ramps, toilets and other fixtures. But one of the simplest and cheapest solutions is to change the way you think about customer service for people with disabilities.

It’s not difficult to train your staff on how to communicate effectively with all your customers and how to give practical assistance when it’s needed.

### Respect

You and your staff should treat customers with disabilities as you do all customers – with respect:

- ✓ **Focus on the person.** Treat each customer with a disability as an individual customer with their own likes and dislikes. Always focus on the person, not their disability. Always address the customer directly, not the other people who may be with them (such as a carer or Auslan interpreter).
- ✓ **Give assistance.** Always ask the customer first if they want help; do not assume they need assistance. Always accept the answer if the customer declines your help. If you have a conversation that will last more than a few moments with a customer using a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.
- ✓ **Ask questions.** Ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided particularly where there are barriers to equal access.

## Communication

For people who may have a learning difficulty, an intellectual disability or brain injury:

- ✓ **Be clear.** Address the customer directly, listen carefully, speak clearly and check for understanding. Always use clear language without being patronising.
- ✓ **Allow time.** Allow your customer time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people with an intellectual disability with information. Reassure your customer you are there to help if they forget the information.

For people who have a hearing impairment or are Deaf:

- ✓ **Lip reading.** Always face the customer so they can read your lips. Try to make sure there are no bright lights behind you that may limit their ability to see your lips.
- ✓ **Sound.** Use your normal tone of voice and volume. If possible, move out of the way of background noise.
- ✓ **Interpreters.** If your customer is there with a sign language interpreter always address your comments directly to your customer rather than to the interpreter.
- ✓ **Pen and paper.** Have a pen and paper on hand to help you communicate with your customer.

For people who have a vision impairment or are blind:

- ✓ **Use names.** Always identify yourself by name. If appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and so that they know you are talking to them and not to someone else.

- ✓ **Give assistance.** If a customer asks for assistance to go somewhere ask which side you should be on and offer your arm so they can hold just above your elbow.
- ✓ **Guide dogs.** Never pat or distract a guide dog or offer it food while it is in harness, it is a working animal under the control of its owner.

## Finding alternative ways to provide service

The best way of attracting business and fulfilling your legal responsibilities is to make your business as accessible as possible. Where it is not possible to provide full access in the short term, you might also consider alternate ways of providing the same service. Here are some examples:

- ✓ A butchers shop might consider operating a telephone, mail order or local delivery scheme.
- ✓ A florist might have a call bell at the entrance and have staff put together an order and bring the goods to the front door or the nearest easy collection point.
- ✓ A hairdresser might consider offering a home visiting service for a customer with a disability.
- ✓ An estate agent might consider providing their service in an alternative, accessible location either by appointment or on a regular basis.

Alternatives such as these will not provide full equality for people with disabilities, but they will assist in reducing the chances of a complaint, and may increase customer patronage by improving access.

# An important note on language

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If you are making the effort to make your business more accessible it is also important to make sure your staff and the signage you use is part of that effort. Using appropriate language in relation to people with disability is a very important sign of respect.

Use signage that identifies:

- ✓ 'Accessible Toilet' not 'Disabled Toilet'
- ✓ 'Accessible Parking' not 'Disabled Parking'
- ✓ 'Accessible Entry' not 'Disabled Entry'.

And always refer to:

- ✓ a *person with a disability* rather than a disabled person
- ✓ a person who *uses* a wheelchair rather than someone *confined* to one
- ✓ a person who *is* blind rather than a person who *suffers* blindness.



# Looking for good staff?

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Now that you have considered how you can attract more customers by improving the access to your business, you may wish to consider another opportunity: engaging people with disabilities in work.

There are many reasons why a person with disability may be the best fit for your business. Your main priority is to have the right person for the job, and sometimes that person will also happen to have a disability. It is great to know that research shows employees with disability are:

- ✓ **Reliable.** Take fewer days off and stay in their jobs longer than others.
- ✓ **Productive.** Motivated and perform equally as well as other employees in the right job. Many are highly educated and skilled.
- ✓ **Affordable.** Have less workplace accidents and recruitment, insurance cover and compensation costs are lower. There is financial support available to assist with any necessary adjustments.
- ✓ **Good for business.** Build good relationships with customers, demonstrate your business' commitment to inclusion, and create a positive workplace culture.

## Support is available for employers

Financial and practical support is available to help you develop a diverse workplace and positively promote your business. Supports and incentives available at no cost to employers include:

- ✓ **Recruitment support, training and ongoing workplace support:** Available through Disability Employment Services.
- ✓ **Employment Assistance Fund:** Assists with the costs of workplace adjustments and equipment.
- ✓ **Wage subsidies:** Helps cover the costs of paying wages in the first few months of employment. For apprentices with disability, wage support is available for the whole duration of the apprenticeship.
- ✓ **Supported wage system:** An opportunity to employ a person with higher level of disability and pay a fair wage that is matched with their productivity.
- ✓ **Insurance coverage for work experience:** Available from schools, tertiary education providers and some service providers to provide work experience opportunities for people with disability.

See 'Further contacts' on page 25 for more information about who to contact to access this support.



## ❗ Disability employment is covered by law

- ✓ Under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* employers have to give people with disability the same chance of employment as anyone else.
- ✓ They also have to provide reasonable adjustments for staff with disability if required. Many people with disability won't need any adjustments at all, and if they do, there is free support available to employers. Often it may be as simple as a piece of equipment, information provided in a different way, a bit of extra training, or flexible working hours.
- ✓ You probably already provide support and flexibility to your staff without thinking of it as making adjustments – what employees with disability may need is often not much different.
- ✓ You may already have a person with disability working in your business and not realise it. You most certainly have many customers with disability.





# Further contacts

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For information on planning issues, building approvals and local access requirements:

- ✓ Contact the Planning Officer, Building Surveyor or Ageing and Disability Officer at your local Council.

For information on design ideas and contacting an Access Consultant:

- ✓ Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc
  - Phone: 03 5221 2820
  - [www.access.asn.au](http://www.access.asn.au)

For information on legal issues and responsibilities:

- ✓ Australian Human Rights Commission
  - Phone: 02 9284 9600
  - [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)

For free expert advice about all matters relating to employment of people with disability:

- ✓ JobAccess
  - Phone: 1800 464 800
  - [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au)

To engage a local Disability Employment Service provider to help you find good staff:

- ✓ [www.jobsearch.gov.au/provider](http://www.jobsearch.gov.au/provider) or by calling JobAccess

For ideas on improving online accessibility:

- ✓ [www.mediaaccess.org.au/disabilitycare-service-providers-accessibility-guide](http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/disabilitycare-service-providers-accessibility-guide)

For more information about the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program:

- ✓ In South Western and Western Sydney
  - Phone: (02) 9678 7378
  - Email: [ndco@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:ndco@westernsydney.edu.au)
  - [www.westernsydney.edu.au/ndco](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ndco)
- ✓ In other regions
  - Find your local NDCO at [www.education.gov.au/ndcoprogramme](http://www.education.gov.au/ndcoprogramme)
- ✓ Check out these other relevant NDCO resources:
  - Education to Employment: [www.westernsydney.edu.au/ndco/employment](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ndco/employment)
  - Disclosure: It's a personal decision: [www.westernsydney.edu.au/ndco/disclosure](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ndco/disclosure)



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