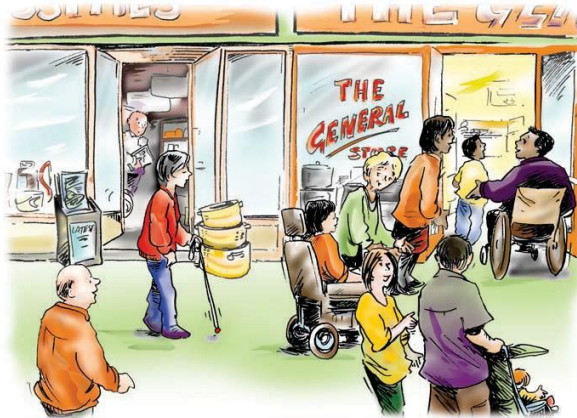




Are you missing out on Busine\$\$?



How to attract more customers by
improving access and inclusion

A guide for small business

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About this resource

In Australia, 4.4 million people, or 18 per cent of the population, have a disability, and more than half of people aged 55 years and over have difficulties with mobility, sight, and hearing.

This Missed Business Guide is an initiative of Sector Connect Incorporated and aims to help you, the small business owner, understand how to improve access and inclusion. Small changes in your business can lead to significant economic, commercial, and social benefits for your business and the lives of people with disability.

This resource provides information that can help your business become more accessible and inclusive. It includes information about the benefits of improving access, your legal responsibilities, and lots of tips on how to improve access and inclusion at your business. It also contains a checklist to help you identify where you are currently at in relation to access and inclusion and to identify practical steps to increase access. Lastly, you will also find information and links to who you can contact for support.

You could be missing out on potential customers

In Australia, 4.4 million people, or 18 per cent 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, neurodivergence, 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.

More than half of people aged 55 years and over have mobility, sight and hearing difficulties. While they may not consider themselves to have a disability, easier access would be a great benefit.

As a small business, quality service is one of the most important things you can offer. This guide aims to help you, small business owners, managers, and employees, to 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.

Which customers are we talking about?

Providing easy 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.

Easy 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.

Can you afford to miss out on all this business?



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, 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

Improving access will also assist your business in meeting 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. It could affect 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

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. In addition, highly contrasting colours distinguish an entrance from the general environment and 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 each entrance and which are accessible.

- ✓ 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. So here are some ideas on how to make it easy for customers to get into 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' at the end of this guide).

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 disabilities.

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. Have staff read information out to customers or provide written menus or other product information in large print versions (e.g. 18-point Arial). Look at the possibility of using 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 <https://clearasound.com.au/>

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, ensure 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 aids.
- ✓ **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.



Local business feature: Teas and Greens Café, Wilton



“Teas and Greens is dedicated to being inclusive and accepting of all customers and know this is good for business”

William Trousas,
Marketing Manager



Should you be providing accessible toilets?

- ✓ Where toilets are provided for the public (e.g. in cafes or 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, ensure 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 pages 25-26).

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 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 Deaf sign 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 customers time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people with an intellectual disability with information. Instead, 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 ensure 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 services

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 alternative ways of providing the same service. Here are some examples:

- ✓ Consider operating a telephone, online ordering, or local delivery scheme.
- ✓ Having a call bell at the entrance and having staff put together an order and bring the goods to the front door or the nearest easy collection point.
- ✓ Offering a home visiting service for a customer with a disability.
- ✓ Providing a service in an alternative, accessible location either by appointment or on a regular basis.

Alternatives such as these increase customer patronage by improving accessibility.

An important note on language

If you are making an effort to make your business more accessible, it is also important to make sure your staff and the signage you use are 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 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.



Local business feature: Blooms the chemist, Camden

"This resource is a great business tool for all businesses"

Rachael Bryant, Manager



Provision of seating can make a huge difference if your customers may need to wait.

Looking for good staff?

Now that you have considered how you can attract more customers by improving 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. Research shows an inclusive and diverse workplace culture increases motivation and engagement.

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 pages 25-26 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; if they do, free support is available to employers. Often it may be as simple as a piece of equipment, information provided differently, 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. However, you most certainly have many customers with disability. Did you know that employees with disability are not obligated to disclose their disability to an employer unless they require adjustments or health and safety concerns exist?



Ready to take the next step?

Access and inclusion checklist

Does your business:	Yes	No
Promote inclusive communities		
Welcoming attitude toward all customers, regardless of difference in ability, culture, language, religion, gender, or sexuality		
Think differently about customer service		
Staff who treat customers of all abilities with respect		
Staff who are willing to assist		
Staff who communicate clearly		
Staff who are trained in emergency evacuation procedures to assist all customers, including those with disability		
Welcoming staff, trained in disability awareness		
Alternatives to visible and audible information		
Information available in alternative formats, e.g. large print		
Accessible website or social media e.g. Facebook with information about services		
Celebrate diversity		
Celebrations/events/activities to mark important times such as International Day of People with Disability, various awareness days/weeks		

Does your business:	Yes	No
Make sure it is easy and safe to use		
Clear path of travel into premises		
Accessible parking close to premises		
Accessible public transport close to premises		
Wide self-opening or easy to open doors		
Colour contrast door frames		
Step free access		
Handrails and contrasting edges on any steps		
Clear internal and external signage		
Clear and wide internal walkways		
Accessible height service or reception counters		
Information/brochure displays at accessible height		
Good internal and external lighting		
Good internal and external lighting		
Low pile carpet or slip resistant flooring		
Ramp or lift access to all levels		
Seating available if customers need to wait		
Access to a clearly marked accessible toilet		
Colour contrast between walls, floors and fittings		
Consider the benefits of employing people with disability		
Accessible and equitable recruitment processes		
Staff with disability		
Staff who are carers of people with disability		
Flexible working conditions		
Provision of reasonable adjustments for staff with disability		
A clear policy around workplace diversity		

Does your business:	Yes	No
Speak up against prejudice and discrimination		
Zero tolerance toward bullying		
Zero tolerance toward inappropriate language use around disability		
Staff who speak up against prejudice from other staff or customers		
Try to be the best you can be		
Clear processes for feedback and complaints		
A proactive approach to overcome access issues		
A Disability Action Plan, outlining steps to improve accessibility and inclusiveness		
Access to disability awareness training for staff		

Further contacts

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 and design ideas on improving physical access, it is recommended to contact an Access Consultant:

- ✓ Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc
 - www.access.asn.au

For information on legal issues and responsibilities, Premises Standards, Disability Action Plans and making reasonable adjustments:

- ✓ Australian Human Rights Commission
 - <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights>
- ✓ IncludeAbility
 - <https://includeability.gov.au/resources-employers>

For free expert advice about all matters relating to the employment of people with disability, including the Employment Assistance Fund:

- ✓ JobAccess
Phone: 1800 464 800 www.jobaccess.gov.au

To engage a local Workforce Australia Provider or Disability Employment Service provider to help you find good staff:

- ✓ www.jobsearch.gov.au/provider or by calling JobAccess

For ideas on improving online accessibility:

- ✓ <https://mediaaccess.org.au/research-policy/guides/disabilitycare-service-providers-accessibility-guide>

For more information about Sector Connect Incorporated and our work as the peak organisation representing and providing regional leadership to community services in South West Sydney:

- ✓ www.sectorconnect.org.au

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