

# Ensuring your business is accessible

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# About this guide

Delivering a quality service to your customers is sound business practice. This guide will help you maximise customer accessibility to your goods or services, whether they are tourists or locals with a regular need for a business like yours.

Making your business accessible goes beyond physical entry. It includes the whole customer experience and does not need to be a high-cost exercise.

You may not be able to make everything accessible. But even making minor changes can benefit your customers. Happy customers often buy again and share good reviews. This helps your business grow.

This guide offers practical solutions for small business owners, landlords, and tenants. It will make your business easier for customers to access and more appealing to everyone, including those with disabilities and older people.





Tasmania has the highest rate of disability among all Australian states and territories, well above the national average.

Tasmania also has the oldest population in Australia, with a higher proportion of people aged 65 and over than any other state or territory.



# The benefits of an accessible business

## For your customers

Customers prefer engaging with a business that is easy to enter and use; where owners and staff offer excellent, attentive and inclusive service.

For some, how accessible your business is matters a lot when deciding to connect with you.

People who might benefit from improved access to your goods or services include:

- people who have impaired vision or hearing
- people who have difficulty moving around and use a wheelchair and/or mobility aids
- people who have assistance animals or a guide dog
- people who have difficulty speaking or understanding information
- people who are neurodivergent (conditions that affect the function of the brain)
- people with psychosocial or mental health conditions
- support person accompanying a person with disability or an older person
- older customers
- caregivers to young children, particularly those using strollers or prams
- people carrying heavy bags or using shopping trolleys
- people delivering or collecting goods and other items.

## For your business

Making your business more accessible to customers and others could benefit your business in several ways including.

- Increase in returning customers through positive experience. People with disabilities, older people, families, and friends enjoy shopping and socialising at businesses that are accessible and inclusive.
- Reduction in your public liability and workplace safety risks. Making your business more accessible will also make it safer for all customers and staff.
- Meet your legal responsibilities. Businesses must follow anti-discrimination laws set by the Tasmanian and Australian Governments, including access for people with disability to goods and services.



# What being an accessible business means

Being an accessible business means that all your potential customers can:

- be confident that your business meets their needs when buying goods or services
- be sure that your business is complying with legal requirements about your premises
- make their way into your premises
- move around inside your premises and locate important features
- find and pay for the goods or services they want to purchase
- use alternative ways to buy goods or services, if your premises are not fully accessible
- expect respectful and inclusive customer service, from knowledgeable and well-trained staff.

We will explore these in more detail throughout the guide with tips and suggestions on how you can improve the accessibility of your business.

## Promoting your business as supportive of people's accessibility requirements

Promote your business on your website and in promotional materials to let people know you are inclusive of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities and older people want to know if you have:

- a step-free entrance
- a staff member who uses sign language
- an easy online ordering system
- quiet time.

Having clear signage shows the accessibility features of your business.

See the next page for some examples of accessibility signage.



Access for individuals who are blind or have low vision



Wheelchair accessibility



Sign language interpretation



Braille



Closed captioning



Open captioning



Telephone typewriter



Information



Assistive listening system



Large print



Volume control telephone



Access for elderly individuals

## Complying with legal requirements

If you are setting up a new business, leasing or buying a building, or thinking about alterations, consider your legal obligations around access for customers.

Building laws, regulations and Australian Government anti-discrimination laws may affect you if you:

- change the use of a building - for example, if you convert a house to a suite of offices, or a warehouse into a gallery
- make structural changes inside your building
- build an extension to your existing business
- upgrade or build new facilities - all new buildings must have an accessible toilet in each bank of toilets.

It is important to seek advice from an expert about your legal responsibilities before choosing a building to lease, buy, or alter.

For more information and expert help, along with examples of issues raised in complaints, visit [www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/access-all-improving-accessibility-consumers-disability](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/access-all-improving-accessibility-consumers-disability)

For advice on how accessibility requirements impact leasing, buying or altering a building, contact your local council's building or planning office, or an access consultant through the Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc at [www.access.asn.au](http://www.access.asn.au)

For more information on your legal responsibilities, visit [www.antidiscrimination.tas.gov.au](http://www.antidiscrimination.tas.gov.au) or phone 1300 305 062.

## Providing an accessible entrance to your premises

In all new buildings the law requires the main entrance to:

- be level with no step
- have a wide door with high colour contrast to its surroundings
- have high-visibility safety markings on glass doors and full-length windows.

In older buildings providing an accessible entrance may be difficult to achieve as there may be barriers for customers.

But there are still effective ways you can improve access to your premises. These are listed on the next page.





Here are some things you can do to improve access to your premises.

- If it is not possible to provide level access with no steps, consider relocating the entrance or providing a permanent or temporary ramp. If you do offer a temporary ramp, advertise this and let people know how they can request and use it. If there is a different entryway for wheelchairs and mobility aid, ensure clear signage including direction arrows to show its location.
- Make sure the door is wide enough for a person accompanied by an assistance animal or someone using a wheelchair or mobility aid to easily pass through.
- Use automatic or lightweight doors and replace doorknobs with 'D' style lever handles positioned at waist height that are easy to grasp and turn. Make sure push/pull and swing door signs are easy to see. They should have arrows that show which way the door opens.
- Have high-visibility safety markings across windows and doors to prevent customers from walking into them.
- If there are stairs at the entrance, add handrails and a high-visibility strip on the edge of each step.
- If you have a doormat at the entrance, make sure it is secure and flush with the surrounding floor.

If you can't make sure your business is easy to access, position your service counter where staff can see customers at the door.

You could also install a doorbell with signage so that customers can let your staff know they require some assistance.



## **Making it easy for customers to find and use the entrance**

### **Add a splash of colour**

Use bold, contrasting colours at the entrance. This helps people with vision impairments find the entry point easily. Be careful not to go overboard.

Too much colour, text, and signage can confuse potential customers and people with disabilities.

It may be difficult to see what your business offers if there are too many patterns on the windows or walls.

### **Get rid of clutter on the surrounding footpath**

People who use wheelchairs, mobility aids, or have vision impairments or neurodivergence often use the side of the footpath closest to the buildings as a guide.

Some councils even have rules to ensure a clear path along building lines.

Keep advertising boards, display items and furniture outside your premises away from the building line on the footpath.

Check that tree branches or signage do not create a hazard for a person who has a vision impairment.

Having a clear path will make it safer and easier for people to make their way into your business.

# Providing accessibility features and ease of movement inside your premises

## Accessibility features

Many buildings, like restaurants, cinemas, and shopping centres, have accessible toilets for customers. If you are upgrading your premises to include an accessible toilet or other features, get technical advice first.

This way you'll meet the required standards for ramps, handrails and service counters.

Claiming your business's advertising features are accessible when they aren't, can frustrate customers. It may also lead to embarrassing situations for both them and your business.

If you don't have an accessible toilet on your premises, check where the nearest one is. This way, you can help customers if needed.

For technical information on features such as ramps, handrails, toilets and signage, talk to your local council or building surveyor.

You can also contact the Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc at [www.access.asn.au](http://www.access.asn.au)

## Moving around

There are several ways to help your customers browse and move around easily. These include.

- Installing suitable handrails to support customers using ramps, steps or stairs.
- Arrange displays and fixtures so they are not obstacles for customers:
  - » make sure aisles or gaps between displays or furniture are at least 1.2m wide
  - » turning areas should be 1.5m wide - allow space for wheelchairs, mobility aids, and people with assistance animals or support persons.

- Have seating available if people with disabilities and older customers need to stand waiting for more than a few minutes. This can be a temporary seat if there is not enough space for permanent seating.
- Providing signage that uses a large, clear font and communication symbol. Ensure good lighting and high contrast with surroundings

## Signage

To make sure your signage is easy to read, it's important the colours and images you use are clear and stand out.

Combinations with a high contrast, such as black on white or yellow on black are easier to read than many other colour combinations. Avoid using colour schemes that are representative of important information.

For example, black on yellow is used for caution signs, and white on red for danger signs. Using these colours can confuse people who are neurodivergent or have low literacy.

When designing signs, include clear images and Braille. This helps describe the location of products and services.

If you are unsure TPGI has a free contrast checker to check your colour palette [www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker](http://www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker)



## Assisting customers to easily find and purchase goods or services in your premises

There are many ways you can improve the customer experience. It's important to make it easier, safer, and more comfortable for everyone who visits your business.

- Try to place popular goods within reach of wheelchair users and people of short stature. If this is not possible, have staff available to assist if necessary.
- Find ways to reduce background noises and scents where possible. Too much noise, loud music, and scents may cause discomfort for some people. Having quiet time can be very beneficial to hearing-impaired and neurodivergent customers. Quiet time means turning down or switching off the lights. Point of sales should be silent, and music should stop. Also, reduce the number of strongly scented items.
- Make sure loud items aren't put where customers are having conversations.
- Help customers find what they need with ceiling-mounted or high-visibility signs. Consider adding a communication image to help neurodivergent and low literacy customers.
- For printed materials, like menus, price lists and brochures, use Arial font in size 12 or greater. Avoid the use of italics and write in plain English. Consider printing in braille and easy-read versions.
- Avoid using standing desks. A desk or counter should be appropriate to the task. The expected time for a customer interaction, the type of conversation, and the need for a shared screen will decide the desk and seating style. For guidance, please refer to 'Customer interaction counters, tables and worktops', Australian Network on Disability [www.australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/DFD/dfd-06-14-customer-interaction-counters-tables-and-worktops.html](http://www.australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/DFD/dfd-06-14-customer-interaction-counters-tables-and-worktops.html)
- Improve lighting for visibility around all service counters.
- Do not distract, pat, or talk to assistance animals or guide dogs. For the safety of assistance animals and guide dogs, it is best not to allow pet animals into your business.



- Use electronic payment systems, like EFTPOS machines, that are wireless or have long cords. This way, they can be easily handed to customers in wheelchairs or those of shorter stature. Check that your EFTPOS system is visual impaired compliant.

## Offering alternative ways for customers to purchase goods or services

It may not be possible for you to make your business fully accessible. If you can't, think about other ways to deliver goods or services. Also, promote any alternatives you can offer.

This could include offering home visits for services like hairdressing. Or setting up an accessible location for meetings with clients who have disabilities.

You can take advantage of online opportunities to offer a complete customer experience. This is especially important for people with disabilities and older customers who want to buy your goods or services.

This could include providing advice via an online meeting platform or an online ordering and delivery service.

Seek support to set up your website and online shopping system so it's accessible for people who are visually impaired or not confident online.



## Online accessibility

Some of the ways you can improve the accessibility of your business online include.

- Using Arial font size 12 and avoid fonts that are decorative or stylised. Ensure there is a good contrast between background and foreground colours.
- Ensuring information is written in plain English and where possible an easy read version is available.
- Ensuring online forms include labels that clearly describe the content required for all fields.
- Having a title element on each webpage to describe the content of that page.
- Providing captions to all audio, videos and alternative text for images.
- Avoiding elements that flash or blink.



- Providing information in Word or HTML as screen-readers for people with vision impairments often struggle with PDFs.
- Asking a user to reply to an email for verification rather than having them manipulate images on a screen or retype letters and numbers as used in CAPTCHA or similar systems.
- Enabling all content on your website to be navigated by keys on the keyboard, rather than requiring the use of a mouse.

To learn more about online accessibility, including the importance of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and how they impact your online presence, take a look at [www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22)

For specific advice on how to ensure your online operations are accessible, or to set up online trading platforms or payment gateways, book a session with one of the mentors from the Digital Solutions team. Visit [www.digitalsolutionstas.com.au](http://www.digitalsolutionstas.com.au)

# Training and supporting staff to provide respectful and inclusive customer service

Operating an accessible business involves more than making it easy for people to enter and move around your premises. You also need to look at whether you and your staff are providing access-supportive customer service.

Here are some ideas to improve customer service for people with disability and older people. Consistently applying these ideas will help your customers. This, in turn, may boost word-of-mouth recommendations and increase customer loyalty for your business.

- Talk directly with the person with disability, not the support person who may be with them (such as a sign language interpreter, friend, support worker).
- Ask the person first if they want assistance and, if they say yes, ask how you can best assist them. Do not assume they need assistance or that you know what they require.
- Give your customers time to ask and answer questions and try not to rush them. If a customer is neurodivergent or elderly, do not overload them with information. If there are multiple steps, provide one step at a time. Wait for each step to be completed before giving the next one.
- A person with disability may be nonverbal or only verbal in certain circumstances. This doesn't mean they don't understand you. Instead, they struggle to express their needs. Try rephrasing your question to yes or no responses. Another way is to have communication cards specific to your business. For example, a café may have communication cards with various menu items. These cards help people with disabilities share their orders.
- A green lanyard with sunflowers on it denotes a person with a hidden disability. This person may require extra assistance, more time and a place to rest.

- When a neurodivergent person is overwhelmed:
  - » remain calm and patient, don't grab or touch
  - » ask if they would like the lights to be turned down or the music turned off
  - » if possible, offer a quiet place to sit
  - » keep questions simple to yes or no responses.
- If you are having a long conversation with a person who uses a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.
- Never lean on or move a wheelchair or mobility aid.
- When communicating with a person who has a hearing impairment:
  - » make sure you face the person when you speak and don't cover your mouth or face
  - » speak normally and clearly, don't shout or speak very slowly
  - » make sure there is no strong light behind you that will make it difficult for the person to lip read
  - » move out of areas with lots of background noise
  - » have a pen and paper or device to help you communicate, if needed
  - » try rephrasing a question or answer if not understood
  - » don't assume that all people who are hearing impaired use Auslan
  - » hearing devices work better at different distances. If customers move backward don't follow and if they move closer don't move away.
- When communicating with a person who has a vision impairment:
  - » identify yourself by name to them
  - » if appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and so they know you are talking to them
  - » if the person asks for assistance to go somewhere, ask which side they would prefer that you stand and offer your arm so they can hold onto it just above the elbow
  - » do not pat, talk to, or otherwise distract a guide dog.

## A word on terminology

People often get anxious about how to interact with a person with disability.

There are different views and preferences, but here are a few ideas.

- Focus on the customer and not their disability.
- Avoid using comparative statements like ‘everyone is a little autistic’, ‘everyone is neurodivergent’, or ‘everybody has pain’.
- Examples of appropriate terminology include:
  - » ‘accessible’ toilet or entrance, not ‘disabled’ toilet or entrance
  - » a person who is blind, not someone who ‘suffers’ blindness
  - » a person who uses a wheelchair, not someone ‘confined’ to a wheelchair or ‘wheelchair-bound’.



# Acronyms

CAPTCHA	Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart
EFTPOS	Electronic Funds Transfer at Point Of Sale
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
PDF	Portable Document Format

## Further information

You can obtain information and advice about all aspects of starting and running a business, including compliance, through Business Tasmania.

The Business Tasmania team is available to provide support between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

Phone: 1800 440 026

Email: [ask@business.tas.gov.au](mailto:ask@business.tas.gov.au)

Website: [www.business.tas.gov.au](http://www.business.tas.gov.au)

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