Section Five – Access and inclusion

This section covers:
1. Access and inclusion
2. Planning to overcome barriers to access and inclusion
3. Designing access for people of all ages and abilities
4. Access to information
5. Access to services and events
6. Access to buildings and facilities
7. Resources

This section includes resources for specific access issues such as parking, information, events, toilets, pathways, consultation and complaint processes

The accompanying resource for this section is a PowerPoint, which could be used as part of a workshop / presentation.

1. Access and inclusion

Being involved in the community is important to all of us and this involvement can take many forms. It can include visiting friends, doing the shopping, going to the movies, playing sport and working.

Most people take for granted the ability to go about daily lives in the community without experiencing any barriers.

To get about in the community people with disabilities require public and private transport that is suited to their needs and buildings, streets, open spaces and services that are accessible and welcoming.

For people with disabilities to have the same opportunities as other people to participate in community life it is important that the services and facilities provided to the community address the access requirements of people with disabilities. Improving access and inclusion is also of great benefit to everyone in the community including families with prams, seniors and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

A person’s ability to access information, services and facilities is affected by a number of factors, including the degree of disability, type of disability, the physical environment and staff attitude and understanding.

Access and inclusion means different things to different people. Processes and outcomes for access and inclusion cannot be prescriptive, and must take into account the diverse needs of individuals and the nature, strengths, priorities and resources of a community.
The common elements of access and inclusion are the removal or reduction of barriers (physical and attitudinal) to participation in the activities and functions of a community. Doing this ensures that information, services, buildings and facilities are accessible and welcoming to people with various disabilities.

2. Planning to overcome barriers to access and inclusion

The main type of disability in Western Australia is physical disability, which affects nearly three quarters of people with disabilities.

Planning to provide good access for people with disabilities will also provide benefits to other members of the community who may be disadvantaged in terms of access. Examples include:

- parents with prams, and seniors who find it difficult to negotiate steps or steep gradients;
- people who have a temporary disability through accident or illness;
- tourists and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who may find it difficult to read signs or understand information; and
- small children who have difficulty climbing steps or understanding information.

People with disabilities face barriers to everyday activities such as hearing what is said, seeing small print, climbing stairs and understanding signage. The impact these barriers have on the life of the person concerned can be major, particularly if the individual has multiple disabilities.

It is important to note that many environmental barriers can be avoided with informed planning.

Creating a community which is accessible and inclusive will minimise the effect of disability.

3. Designing access for people of all ages and abilities

The following section highlights some specific design implications for access. There are many different types of disabilities, however the priorities for service planners and providers is best understood when considering the three major areas of disability:

- physical - people who use wheelchairs, people who have difficulty walking and people who have difficulty with finger or hand control;
- sensory - vision, hearing; and
- disabilities that affect communication and thought processes.

People who use wheelchairs

Although the number of people who use wheelchairs is small compared with other physical disability groups, the implications for designers are, in many ways, the greatest. If the needs of a person who uses a wheelchair are
considered by designers of facilities used by the general public, then the vast majority of people (including people with prams, goods or shopping trolleys) will also benefit.

Design considerations for people who use wheelchairs include:

- avoiding of abrupt vertical changes of level (eg kerbs, steps, ruts, gutters) to ensure a continuous accessible path of travel;
- avoiding of excessive slope (camber) across the direction of travel on a footpath, which makes control of the wheelchair difficult;
- providing of adequate forward reach at basins, counters and tables;
- providing of available clearance under basins, tables and benches to allow access for the person using the wheelchair as well as their wheelchair footrests and front wheels;
- providing of adequate doorway width;
- providing of space within rooms to allow for wheelchair dimensions and turning circles; and
- avoiding of surface finishes which hamper wheelchair mobility (eg gravel, grass or deep-pile carpet) and surfaces that do not provide sufficient traction (eg polished surfaces).

People who experience difficulty walking

People who experience difficulty walking may have disabilities that arise from conditions including stroke, lower limb amputation, cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s disease and arthritis.

This description includes those people who:

- use a mobility aid (crutches, walking stick, frame);
- wear a leg brace or have an artificial limb;
- have limited physical stamina;
- have a stiff or painful back, hips, knees or ankles;
- have uncoordinated movements;
- walk slowly; and
- have balance problems.

Design considerations for people who experience difficulties walking include:

- specific attention to steps and handrail design to ensure adequate support and a feeling of confidence and ease when negotiating steps;
- provision of cover from weather, as slowness of movement can result in greater time spent along walkways and getting into buildings;
- provision of seating in waiting areas, at counters and along lengthy walkways to reduce fatigue;
- awareness that a ramp can prove difficult for some people, steps and lifts providing useful alternatives;
- identifying access hazards associated with doors, including the need to manipulate a handle while using a walking aid and difficulty moving quickly through swinging doors;
- providing surface finishes that are slip-resistant, evenly laid and free of hazards to minimise risk of injury; and
- minimising street clutter caused by signs and billboards and placing these away from the main pedestrian flow.
People who have difficulty holding and/or manipulating objects

Problems associated with manipulation and holding may be due to arthritis, neurological conditions (such as Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy), nerve injuries and upper limb (finger, hand or arm) amputation.

Design considerations for people who have difficulty holding and/or manipulating objects include the operation of fittings such as door handles, switches, buttons and taps.

People with sensory disabilities may have partial or complete loss of sight or hearing.

Design considerations for people who may have partial or complete loss of sight include:

- providing ways they can identify changes in direction, changes in level, hazards and obstacles such as projecting signs and windows;
- attending to the size, colour, colour contrast, location, illumination and type of signs;
- providing for clear, even illumination levels in and around buildings so they are not dangerous and confusing;
- planning so that a person who is unable to see will know whether a lift has arrived at the floor or whether it is going up or down; and
- being aware that escalators can be difficult to use and that well-designed stairs or ramps are a useful alternative.

Considerations when designing facilities or services for people who are Deaf or who have a hearing impairment include:

- providing information that is both written and spoken in public buildings (eg visual display boards as well as voice announcements); and
- providing an audio loop system or other appropriate hearing augmentation systems to assist people who use hearing aids in public places such as auditoriums and conference facilities.

People with disabilities affecting communication and thought processes

People with a wide variety of disabilities, including intellectual, cognitive and psychiatric disabilities, may have significant difficulty when it comes to asking for and understanding information.

Design and service provision considerations when planning for people who have intellectual, cognitive or psychiatric disabilities include:

- clear signage;
- clear pathways through a building;
- provision of information with clear instructions;
- service provision through personal assistance; and
- well-planned, uncluttered environments.

This section on Designing for Access and Inclusion has been taken from Designing for Access - Beyond Minimum Requirements, a paper presented by Helen McAuley of ACROD National at an Australian Standards seminar on access.
4. Access to information
Giving and receiving information is a critical aspect of our daily lives. People with disabilities frequently report frustration at the difficulties they experience in gaining access to all types of public information.

Communication difficulties are frequently associated with many disabilities, including:
- hearing loss or deafness;
- low vision or blindness; and
- disabilities that affect an individual’s ability to learn or think, such as an intellectual or cognitive disability or psychiatric illness.

Public authorities produce a variety of written material eg flyers, invitations and information brochures. Many communication difficulties can be overcome by providing written material in simple, clearly written English and in a print size that is easy to read.

For people who have low vision or are blind, it is also important to have information freely available on request in alternative formats such as audio cassette or CD, large print, computer disk and Braille. Providing information by email or having it available in an accessible format on the authority’s website will also make it more accessible for many people with a vision impairment.

There is a variety of communication techniques that can be used to assist people who have a hearing impairment or who are Deaf. Individuals need to have a range of options available so they can use the communication method that best meets their specific needs. “Better Hearing” signs on public counters are valuable for informing visitors that staff know how to speak to someone who experiences difficulty hearing. The provision of audio loops, for people with hearing impairments, at public meetings will enable people who use hearing aids to participate. For people who are Deaf, Auslan sign language interpreters should be arranged if requested.

People with disabilities often experience access difficulties due to inadequate signage. Clear, well-lit directional signs also benefit the whole community. Inside buildings, signs which indicate where services or amenities are found are often absent or difficult to identify due to bad lighting, obscure placement or unclear lettering on directory boards. Clear symbols and directions assist people to find their way.

For people with physical disabilities unclear signs may increase the effort required to reach their destination. People with an intellectual disability require signs which have clear symbols and words, and people with a vision impairment are assisted greatly by signs with good contrast of colours and texture.

Ways public authorities have improved access to their information include:
- developing accessible information policies;
- providing training for all staff who develop public information;
- designing websites to meet the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines;
- making all public documents available on the website in accessible formats;
• promoting the availability of information available in alternative format to the community; and
• using audio loops.

5. Access to services and events
People with disabilities frequently report difficulty in gaining access to a range of mainstream services provided by public authorities. Barriers faced can be physical, attitudinal and procedural. It is important that the services provided by public authorities, including contracted services, appropriately meet the needs of the public. This includes people with disabilities, their families and carers.

Staff awareness of barriers in the delivery of services is an important factor in creating accessible services. Disability awareness should be an integral part of staff awareness training programs for all staff, but especially for direct service or advisory staff.

Adapting services may involve developing a particular response to the identified needs of someone with a disability or a group of people with a disability. It could include creating options for what is provided and/or how it is provided and should not separate the person with a disability from use of the authority’s mainstream services.

Ways that services and events have been successfully adapted by public authorities to enhance access and inclusion for people with disabilities include:
• assistance with garbage collection;
• use of AUSLAN interpreters or the National Relay Service when interviewing clients if necessary;
• develop links between the DAIP and other plans and strategies; and
• ensuring that events are held in an accessible venue.

6. Access to buildings and facilities
The provision of appropriate access not only benefits people with disabilities but also seniors, frail aged, people with temporary disabilities and parents with young children in prams. If access requirements are considered early in the planning stage of any new development, they can frequently be incorporated for very little or no additional cost.

The vicinity around a facility needs to facilitate access. People with disabilities often experience difficulties due to the location of facilities, buildings or services.

Signs that indicate where services or amenities are to be found are often absent or difficult to identify due to bad lighting, obscure placement or unclear lettering on directory boards. Clear symbols and directions can assist people to find their way. The increasing community recognition of the importance of providing access to public buildings and facilities is reflected in a variety of legislation, standards and codes that relate to the provision of access.

To achieve access in the built environment public authorities should ensure that:
• the provision of appropriate access for people with disabilities is an integral part of any services provided, funded or contracted out; and
• the design and construction of all public buildings and facilities funded by Government comply with the BCA and the requirements of the DDA as detailed in the Access to Premises Standards (refer to the Australian Human Rights Commission [www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights)).

It is essential that the design brief for buildings and facilities specifically addresses access provision requirements.

It is recommended that access consultants are engaged as part of the design team throughout the planning and construction phases of major projects to ensure that access is appropriately addressed. Information about access consultants can be obtained from the Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc (please refer to [www.access.asn.au](http://www.access.asn.au)).

Ways that public authorities have improved access to their buildings and facilities for people with disabilities include:

• internal modifications (lowering counters, accessible lift controls);
• adequate number of accessible parking bays;
• space into doorways and within rooms to allow for wheelchair dimensions and turning circles;
• signage with clear lettering and good colour contrast;
• colour contrast strip on steps; and
• access audits.

7. Resources
Commission resources:

Access Resource Kit (ARK)
Contains information about the six access outcomes, including access to services, that Western Australian State Government agencies and local governments must address in their Disability Access and Inclusion Plan.

Builders and Developers – stages for planning access
To assist in achieving access and to meet legislative requirements, it is recommended that builders and developers plan access issues during all stages of the design and construction of a development or major redevelopment. Builders and Developers - Stages for Planning Access identifies the different stages during the planning, development and construction phases where access needs to be incorporated.

Creating Accessible Events
Creating Accessible events assists event organisers and function coordinators to design, plan and conduct events that are accessible for people with disabilities. Consideration of aspects such as the venue, continuous accessible path to the venue, invitations, and hearing augmentation are important.

Improved parking for People with Disabilities
A guide for parking providers to ensure appropriate accessible parking is available for people with disabilities.
State Government access guidelines for information services and facilities
A guide to assist State Government, Local Government, business and community groups to create Western Australia as an accessible and inclusive community (refer to in Premier's Circular 2003/08)

All of the above resources are available at www.disabilitywa.gov.au

Disability access consultants
Disability access consultants can assist in assessing and resolving physical and environmental access issues. For further information or to contact an access consultants refer to www.access.asn.au