

Part 2

Using the access checklists



making a difference

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Disability access and inclusion plans

Public authorities in Western Australia were required to have Disability Service Plans (DSPs) as part of the Disability Services Act (1993). This Act was amended in 2004 and requires that public authorities develop and implement Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). The requirements of DAIPs build on those of DSPs, towards ensuring that people with disabilities can access services, facilities and information in a way that promotes independence, opportunities and inclusion within the community.

A key aspect of the amended legislation is the listing of six desired outcomes of Disability Access and Inclusion Plans. These are that:

1. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to access the **services** of and any **events** organised by a public authority.
2. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to access the **buildings** and other facilities of a public authority.
3. People with disabilities receive **information** from a public authority in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.
4. People with disabilities receive the same level and **quality of service** from the staff of a public authority as other people receive from the staff of that public authority.
5. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to make **complaints** to a public authority.
6. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any **public consultations** by a public authority.

The access checklists contained in this Kit address each of the six desired outcomes of Disability Access and Inclusion Plans. They were developed through consultation with a wide range of State Government agencies, Local Governments and people with disabilities, and will be useful for:

- obtaining baseline information about the current accessibility of information, services and facilities; and
- measuring improvements in access to information, services and facilities.

By using these access checklists, government service providers can systematically identify barriers which may be preventing people with disabilities from using their services, or making it difficult for them to do so. The checklists will also be useful when identifying the actions required to improve access to these services.

The checklists can be used to identify access to a wide range of services including information services, building approval and planning services, parking services, hospital services and legal services.

Although the checklists can be used separately, it is strongly recommended that they are all used to systematically identify the many common barriers to access. When used together, the checklists provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of the accessibility of a service.

The package includes the following checklists:

- **Access to buildings and facilities**

This checklist is made up of a number of sections that will assist with the evaluation of access to existing buildings and facilities provided by public authorities. The sections consider common access issues such as internal and external access, lifts, entrances, signage, toilets, carparking, public open space, and other specific facilities.

There are mandatory and recommended requirements concerning access provision in new building works. These are contained in the Building Code of Australia and Australian Standards. State Government agencies and Local Governments involved in new building works should refer directly to these documents, as it is important that new building works comply with the current requirements of these documents. For more information refer to Part 4 of this Kit.

- **Access to information**

This checklist is aimed at evaluating the level of access to information provided by public authorities, and considers use of language, alternative formats and other communication strategies.

- **Staff access awareness**

This checklist has two complementary sections. The first is a sample survey that could be issued to any staff member to determine levels of staff awareness with regard to access for people with disabilities. The second is a checklist provided to assist with the compilation of the results of the staff access awareness survey.

- **Public participation**

This checklist will assist in evaluating the extent of access to and opportunity to participate in decision-making or consultation processes, grievance mechanisms and quality assurance processes.

- **Creating accessible events**

This checklist will assist people with disabilities to access public events such as functions, consultation, festivals, education sessions and public meetings.

- **Adapting services**

This checklist will assist users to gauge the extent to which their services are relevant and appropriate and to ensure that policies, procedures and practices do not exclude people with disabilities.

Steps in using the checklists

When completing the checklists for any service it is helpful to consider the following questions:

- To what extent is the service provided to the public?
- Who are the users of the service?
- To what extent are people with disabilities, their families and carers, users or potential users of the service?

Each public authority will decide how often it wishes to assess the accessibility of services. It is recommended, however, that high public usage services are audited on a regular basis. Access assessments can be conducted in conjunction with existing reviews of services and facilities, such as annual inspections.

The major results from the checklists can be incorporated into the planning documents and annual reports that are prepared by public authorities.

The following steps are suggested when assessing services:

Step 1: Nominate co-ordinator

Ideally the access assessment should be co-ordinated by the committee or individual who has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of your Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP).

Step 2: List services

List all in-house and contracted services provided by your organisation. The list of services identified in your DAIP will provide a useful resource when identifying services.

Step 3: Select services

Rank the services identified in Step 2 according to the level of public involvement. Services that are most frequently used by the public or that significantly impact on people with disabilities should be given the highest priority.

Step 4: Identify resources

Identify the staff and financial resources that will be required for administering the checklists. Identify a proposed timeline for the access assessment.

The checklists may be administered by one or more members of staff. Before commencing assessment, it is recommended that all staff administering the checklists are given copies of the sections: People with disabilities; Planning for access; and Using the access checklists.

Step 5: Planning access assessment

In conducting an assessment of access, services may be assessed individually, by groups of services, or by programs.

Step 6: Identify checklists

It is important to identify the components of the service to be assessed so that the relevant checklists are used.

Step 7: Complete the checklists

During this step the person(s) responsible for assessing the accessibility of the nominated service category will need to complete the relevant checklists. It is recommended that the checklists be completed in the following order:

1. buildings and facilities
2. access to information
3. staff access awareness
4. public participation
5. accessible events
6. adapting services

Step 8: Summarise actions

Following completion of each checklist, a summary of identified issues can be prepared using the 'Issues and Actions' sheets provided at the end of each checklist.

As much as possible, rank the issues in order of priority and identify the required actions. Priorities for action should be developed according to the level of use of the services by the public.

Often there can be more than one way of overcoming a particular barrier. It is important to seek appropriate advice on the best and most economical way of removing barriers, especially in the area of physical access.

Step 9: Report to management

Report to management on the results of the assessment of services and the recommended actions.

Step 10: Amend Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP)

Once management has approved the committee's recommendations, the DAIP should be amended to incorporate the barriers, strategies, timelines and person responsible. Remember to seek endorsement of the amended DAIP by corporate executive / Council.

Step 11: Communicate the amended plan

You may wish to inform staff members, interested individuals and organisations that your DAIP has been amended and that copies can be made available on request.

The following example illustrates how a State Government agency or a Local Government would undertake an access assessment of one of its services.

Below is an example of how checklists are used to access a service.

Step 1: Nominate co-ordinator

Identify the officer or group responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP), who may also be responsible for overseeing the assessment of services.

Step 2: List services

Identify all information, services and facilities that are provided to the public, as outlined in your DAIP.

Step 3: Select priority services

Identify all services and facilities that have high public usage. It might be decided that the assessment will be conducted on the following services in a particular financial year:

- payment of fees;
- participation in recreation services; and
- public involvement in meetings.

It may be appropriate to seek approval for the planned assessments from the Chief Executive Officer or Director of the organisation.

Step 4: Identify resources

The officer/s may work with relevant staff members from across the organisation, to undertake different tasks in assessing services. It might be decided that the checklists will be completed prior to budget allocation for the following year. A timetable could be developed to ensure that a final report on recommended changes is available, so that any approved actions can be incorporated into the following year's budget.

Step 5: Plan access assessment

As an example, it has been determined that the first service to be assessed will be the payment of fees.

The following steps are involved in this service to customers:

- sending of fees notice through the post;
- payment of fees through the post or in person;
- questions about fees are handled either over the phone or in person;
- complaints about fees assessment are usually made either by phone or in person (usually at front reception counter); and
- receipt for payment of fees is provided through the post.

Step 6: Identify relevant checklists

In this example, the following checklists are identified as relevant to assessing this service:

Buildings and facilities checklist

Given that the Administration Building is an important component in the delivery of this service, the following sections on general access are identified as relevant to assessing this service:

- accessible carparking and ticket machines;
- external access, including ramps and railings;
- entrances, including signage;
- internal access, including counter tops. Access to EFTPOS machines; and
- toilets.

In this instance the results of this checklist can also be used for assessing the accessibility of other services such as monthly meetings, consultation sessions and functions. (The section on lifts will need to be completed if meetings are on the first floor.)

Information checklist

As information on fees is provided in person, by telephone and in writing, this checklist may be used to assess the degree to which:

- written information is clear and easy to understand and read;
- the important information on fee notices is in large bold print;
- people are advised that fee notices can be made available in alternative formats upon request; and
- the Better Hearing Counter Card is displayed and used at the front counter.

Staff access awareness checklist

Staff involved in providing this service directly to the public and those staff involved in the production of information for this service are identified and provided with a staff survey to assess their understanding of the access needs of people with disabilities. Staff are also able to raise issues which they have identified as being possible areas of improvement.

Public participation checklist

This checklist is used to assess the complaints process for this service. (As access to the building is covered by the 'Access to building and facilities checklist', only the accessibility of the information provided on complaints will need to be assessed.)

Adapting existing services checklist

This checklist is used to identify whether policies, procedures and practices for this service are appropriate and currently available.

Step 7: Complete checklists

Relevant checklists are now completed.

Step 8: Summarise actions

Using the 'Issues and Actions' sheets provided at the end of each checklist, access barriers and actions are identified and prioritised.

Step 9: Report to management

A report to management may be prepared once all the assessments are completed. The report may contain recommendations on priorities, options for how problems can best be addressed, timelines and indicative costs.

Step 10: Amend the plan

Once the report has been approved, the DAIP should be amended to incorporate new strategies, timelines and persons responsible.

The amended plan should be submitted to Management, for approval, then lodged with the Disability Services Commission.

Step 11: Communicate amended plan

Staff might be informed via the staff newsletter or circular about the amended plan.

The community might be advised that your DAIP has been amended to better meet the needs of people with disabilities and that copies are available. Options include signage in public areas of Council offices, "call-on-hold messages", articles in community newspapers and information on the organisation's website.

In summary

The access checklists have been designed to address the majority of access needs that people with disabilities have in relation to the services provided by State Government agencies and Local Governments.

In some cases, there may be specific access issues that have not been addressed by the checklist, given the nature of the service provided by a public authority and the particular needs of the people with disabilities who use that service.

Through your customer feedback or quality assurance mechanisms, it will be important to provide opportunities for people with disabilities, their families and carers and organisations to comment on access issues.

Through this process, additional access issues might be identified. Public authorities might wish to develop questions to be added to the checklist to better reflect the needs of their customers with disabilities.

It is recommended that public authorities seek guidance from the Community Access and Information Branch of the Disability Services Commission prior to developing additional questions.