

ACCESSIBILITY FACT SHEET

for staff



Improving accessibility for customers with disabilities

Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* it is against the law to discriminate against people based on a personal characteristic (protected attribute under the Act) including disability.

As a staff member, this means you need to provide accessible premises, facilities and services and ensure you do not discriminate.

Accessibility isn't just about ensuring people can physically access your business. It means ensuring your services and facilities, including information, are also accessible. Failing to provide accessible premises and services could mean some customers avoid your business or make a complaint of discrimination. You could also put your business's reputation at risk because of poor customer reviews.

Providing an accessible environment can also benefit other people who are protected from discrimination under the *Equal Opportunity Act* – including older people, parents and carers.

What do I need to do?

While some things, such as physical alterations, are the responsibility of the business owner or the landlord, there are practical steps you can take to improve accessibility and meet your legal obligations. You should also let your manager know about issues that have arisen for your customers.

To make sure you do not discriminate, you must also remember to make changes or improvements (known as reasonable adjustments under the Act) for people with disabilities. You can start by making small inexpensive changes, which could significantly improve accessibility. For example, removing chairs to make space for mobility aids or an assistance dog, writing any specials on a blackboard displayed within easy view or removing excess stock from fitting rooms. You could also consider making larger changes progressively, or as resources in your business allow. Examples of adjustments you can make are provided on the following pages.

You can contact the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission or one of the organisations listed on the Commission's *Come In, We're Accessible* web page for further information about how to improve accessibility – and why not ask your manager for training about discrimination and how to prevent it?

Visit www.accessiblebusiness.com.au for more information and a link to the Commission's business accessibility self-assessment tool.



Come in *we're*
ACCESSIBLE

Improving accessibility in retail & hospitality



Training and consultancy

Our education, training and consultancy services can help you understand your obligations regarding disability discrimination and accessibility.

For more information and to register online visit humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/training or call (03) 9032 3415.

Making reasonable adjustments

As an initial step, you can examine your environment for any barriers to accessibility for your customers using our self-assessment tool.

Further practical steps you can take include:

- **make it easy for people to get in** – remove obstacles from entrances and walkways to allow people with a wheelchair or mobility aid to get in.
- **allow people who have assistance dogs to enter** – it is against the law to deny a person with disability access to your premises because they have an assistance dog, or to treat them unfavourably because they have one. You could help by making more space for a customer who uses an assistance dog by removing a chair at a table.
- **make it easy for people to get around** – clear pathways by ensuring stock is properly packed away or by moving objects such as portable shelves, stands and mannequins around where possible. Put safety markings on the glass so people do not walk into it. Think about how you can improve lighting or reduce background noise
- **provide extra assistance to overcome physical barriers** – assist customers to overcome physical barriers, such as by handing stock from higher shelves to customers using a wheelchair or mobility aid, providing fitting rooms on ground floors and ensuring enough space for wheelchairs or mobility aids or prams, providing chairs in waiting areas or by serving people in front of service counters at the height of people using wheelchairs or mobility aids
- **use resources that are available to you** – If your shop has resources to assist customers with disabilities make sure you know about them and use them. For example, have a pen and paper ready, familiarise yourself with the whereabouts of notes, tablets or interpreters, accessible EFTPOS machines with long cords, accessible parking, portable ramps, lifts or accessible toilets and changing places.

You can download the Commission's fact sheet on [accessible toilets and changing places for more information](#).

Improving communication and customer service

Good customer service is about effective communication that suits each individual. It is just as important to get this right with customers with disabilities as with any other customer. You can improve communication and provide good customer service in the following ways:

- focus on the person and not the disability
- have a positive attitude to customers with specific communication access needs
- talk directly to each customer rather than to others, such as parents, carers or interpreters, who may be with them
- be patient and adapt your approach to suit the individual and try to understand their needs
- provide assistance and ask if the customer needs help at all stages of the customer service experience
- have a pen and notepad or small whiteboard available to write things down or allow customers to write things down
- speak clearly and make sure your mouth is visible and lighting is sufficient for ease of lip reading for people who are deaf or hard of hearing or people with other disabilities. While this may assist some people who are deaf or hard of hearing – you should not assume that people can lip read
- repeat instructions and requests where appropriate to confirm you have understood and that the person understands you
- don't allow yourself to be put off by other customers who may be rude or impatient when you are taking the time to assist a customer with specific communication needs
- don't pretend you understand – check for accuracy by repeating what you have heard
- know how to use the National Relay Service or TTY (teletypewriter) for customers who are deaf or hard of hearing. Visit www.relayservice.com.au for more information. The National Relay Service also offers training and other support to use the service
- using any communication aids and signs you have available and or use hand signs or gestures appropriately.

You can download the Commission's fact sheets on [communicating with customers with disabilities, including mental health disability,¹ for more information](#).

¹ The term 'mental health disability' is used in this fact sheet because it falls within the definition of disability in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The Commission acknowledges that people may not necessarily use or identify with this term and that a range of other terms are used in Australia and internationally. These include: mental illness, psychosocial disability and survivors of psychiatry.

PIN cards

While generally people must now use a PIN number, some people with disabilities and older people are allowed to continue to sign. To avoid discriminating, do not refuse these customers service or embarrass them by insisting on a PIN when they are authorised to sign.

Language and terminology

The type of language you use is also important. You should ensure you do not use unacceptable or outdated language which may cause offence to people with disabilities.

You can find detailed information on appropriate terminology for communicating and interacting with people with disabilities in the Scope guide *Disability Speak*. Visit www.scopevic.org.au for more information. Below are some general principles to guide you:

- words such as 'handicapped' 'spastic' or 'retarded' are outdated and offensive and should never be used
- 'disabled person' puts the condition before the person. Use 'person with disability'
- describe facilities as 'accessible', for example 'accessible parking' and 'accessible toilets' rather than 'disabled toilets' or 'disabled parking'
- generally avoid language which limits or depersonalises the individual such as referring to someone as a 'sufferer' or a 'person confined to a wheelchair' or saying 'despite hearing loss'
- where appropriate, ask individuals about any terms they prefer or which may offend them.



Accessibility is everyone's responsibility. If you find situations arise where you would benefit from electronic (for example, tablets) or non-electronic communication aids (for example, boards or pictures), ask your manager if there is anything the business can do to provide these aids to improve things in future.

For more information visit the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's *Come In, We're Accessible* webpage at www.accessiblebusiness.com.au



Where can I get more advice and information?

To find out more about protected attributes, your legal obligations, other agencies that work with and for people with disability, and how to improve communication accessibility, visit www.accessiblebusiness.com.au

