

Making it easier for customers to engage with your business

How to make your business accessible



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About this guide

Delivering a quality service to your customers is sound business practice. You want all potential customers to be able to access and purchase your goods or services, whether they are just passing through town or are locals with a regular need for a business like yours.

Improving the accessibility of your business is not just about physical access; it covers the entire customer experience and is not necessarily a high cost exercise.

You may not be able to improve everything, but making even small changes will be good for your customers and, through their satisfaction, repeat sales and good reviews, good for your business too.

This guide offers practical tips and suggestions for small business owners, landlords or tenants. It will help you make your business more accessible and attractive to everyone, including people with disability and older people.



Tasmania has the highest rate of disability among all states and territories at 26%, higher than the national average of 18%.



We also have the oldest population in Australia, with nearly 20% of the population aged 65 years and over.



The benefits of an accessible business

For your customers

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

In that sense, all of your customers will benefit from the efforts you make to improve accessibility.

For some people the level of accessibility of your business is crucial to their decision to engage with your business at all.

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, scooter, walking frame or crutches
- » people who have an assistance animal such as a guide dog
- » people who have difficulty speaking or understanding information
- » people with neurological conditions such as dementia
- » people with psychosocial or mental health conditions
- » family members, friends and colleagues accompanying a person with disability
- » older customers
- » parents of 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

If you make it as easy as possible for customers and others to access and experience your goods or services, your business could benefit in a number of ways.

» **An increase in returning customers and positive word of mouth recommendations**

People with disability and older Tasmanians, along with their families and friends, choose places to shop and socialise that are accessible and inclusive.

» **A decrease in your public liability and workplace health and safety risk exposure**

The actions you take to make your premises more accessible will usually also lead to your business becoming a safer place for all of your customers and staff.

» **Assistance to meet your legal responsibilities**

All businesses in Tasmania are covered by Tasmanian and Australian Government laws relating to discrimination, including access for people with disability to goods and services.



What being an accessible business means

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

- » identify your business as one that supports them as they consider purchasing goods or services
- » be sure that your business is complying with legal requirements regarding 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 purchase goods or services if your premises are not fully accessible
- » be assured of receiving good, respectful, inclusive customer service from well-informed and trained staff.

These elements are explored in more detail, with tips and suggestions on how you can improve the accessibility of your business.

Promoting your business as supportive of people's accessibility requirements

Use your website and advertising and promotional material to let people know how your business supports all customers to purchase the goods or services you offer.

People with disability or older people might be interested to learn that you have a step-free entrance, or a staff member who knows and uses sign language, or an easy-to-use online ordering system.

You could also put up clear signage to indicate particular accessibility features available at your premises.

Some examples of accessibility signage are opposite.



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 and leasing or buying a building, or thinking of altering or expanding your existing building, be mindful of your legal responsibilities around access for your customers.

Building laws and regulations and Australian Government 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
- » you make structural changes inside your building
- » you build an extension to your existing business
- » you upgrade or build new facilities in your premises such as toilets. All new buildings must have an accessible toilet at each bank of toilets.

Before you lease, buy or alter your building, seek advice from an expert about your legal responsibilities.

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

For advice on the effect of accessibility requirements on leasing, buying or altering a building, contact your local council's building or planning section, a building surveyor or an access consultant through the Association of Consultants in Access Australia at www.access.asn.au or phone 03 5221 2820.

**For more information on your legal responsibilities,
visit www.equalopportunity.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 with its surrounds
- » have high visibility safety markings on glass doors and full-length windows.

In older buildings, this may be difficult to achieve as there may be steps or other barriers for customers.





However, there are still ways you can 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.
- » Make sure the door is wide enough for a person accompanied by an assistance animal, or someone using a walking frame or wheelchair, to easily pass through.
- » Use automatic or lightweight doors and replace door knobs with 'D' style handles located at about waist height that are easy to grasp and turn.
- » Put high-visibility safety markings across doors that have reflective glass or other glazing so that customers do not walk into them.
- » If there are steps or stairs at the entrance, install handrails and a high-contrast strip on the nose of each step.
- » If you have a doormat at the entrance, make sure it is secure and flush with the surrounding floor.

If you cannot provide good access at your entrance, put your service counter where staff can see customers at the door.

You could also provide a doorbell with signage so that a customer 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 and contrasting colours at the entrance to your premises to make it easier for people who have a vision impairment to locate the entry point.

Be careful not to get carried away though, too much colour and text, or too many patterns on external windows or walls can make it difficult for potential customers to work out what your business does.

Get rid of clutter on the surrounding footpath

Many people who use a wheelchair or have a vision impairment use the side of the footpath closest to buildings as a guide for their movement. Some councils even have rules to ensure a clear path along building lines.

If you use advertising boards or display items or furniture outside your premises, keep them away from the building line on the footpath. Also check that overhanging tree branches or signage do not create a hazard for a person who has a vision impairment.

A clear path for people who use a wheelchair or other mobility aid, people who have a vision impairment, and people who are supported by an assistance animal will make it safer and easier for them to find their way into your business.



Providing accessibility features and ease of movement inside your premises

Accessibility features

In many buildings such as restaurants, cinemas and shopping centres, accessible toilets must be available to customers.

If you are upgrading your premises to include an accessible toilet or other accessibility feature such as ramps, handrails or service counters, seek technical advice first so that you meet the required standards.

Advertising features as accessible when they are not will cause frustration and potentially embarrassing situations for customers and for your business.

If you do not have an accessible toilet within your premises, find out where the closest one is so you can advise customers if required.

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 at www.access.asn.au or phone 03 5221 2820.

Moving around

There are many things you can do to make browsing and moving around easier for your customers, particularly people with disability and older people.

- » Provide signage that uses a large and clear font, is well lit and has high contrast with surrounds.
- » Install handrails to support customers using ramps, steps or stairs.
- » Organise your displays and fixtures so they are not obstacles for customers.
- » Ensure that any aisles or gaps between displays or furniture are wide enough for wheelchair and scooter users, as well as people who have an assistance animal.
- » Make chairs available if customers have to wait, or if your customer floor area is large and customers want to sit or rest.



Signage

You can make your signage easier to read by considering the colour combinations you choose.

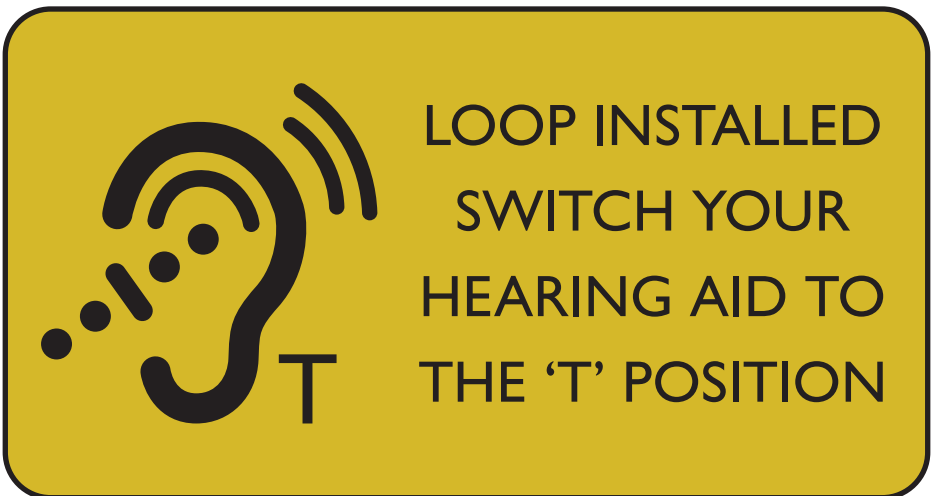
Combinations with a high contrast – such as black on white, yellow on black, and red on yellow – are easier to read than other colour combinations.



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

There are many ways you can make the customer experience easier, safer and more comfortable for the people who visit 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 provide assistance if necessary.
- » Find ways to reduce background noise if possible. Too much noise or loud music may cause discomfort for some people who have a hearing impairment or neurological condition such as autism.
- » Help your customers find what they are looking for by providing ceiling mounted or similar high visibility signs.
- » Use a large and clear font on information materials such as menus and price lists and consider producing copies in braille.
- » Lower at least part of your customer service counter so that a person who is using a wheelchair or a person of short stature can comfortably interact with staff and conduct their business (dining table or standard desk height is good).
- » Improve lighting around all service counters.
- » Use electronic payment systems – such as EFTPOS machines – that are wireless or on cords long enough to be easily handed to a customer who is using a wheelchair or who is of short stature.



Offering alternative ways for customers to purchase goods or services

It may not be possible for you to make your business fully accessible. If that is the case, consider other ways you might be able to deliver goods or services, and advertise and promote any alternatives you can offer.

You could, for example, offer home visits for hairdressing or other personal services, or organise an alternative accessible site for a meeting with a client with disability. You can also make the most of online opportunities to deliver a complete customer experience to people with disability and older people who want to purchase your goods or services.

This could include anything from providing advice via an online meeting platform to offering an online ordering and delivery service.

There is plenty of support available to help you make your website and online shopping system accessible for people who have a vision impairment, people who find it difficult to use a mouse, or anyone not confident online.

You may already have a website designer who can assist you to improve your online presence. You can also use the Digital Ready for Business program that provides knowledge and resources to help Tasmanian businesses to operate effectively in the digital economy.

Visit www.digitalready.tas.gov.au for more information.



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

- » using plain fonts that are easy to read; avoiding fonts that are decorative or stylised
- » producing text that is easy to read by having enough colour and tone contrast between foreground text and background colour
- » 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 and videos
- » being aware of the capability of screen-readers used by people who have a vision impairment; often these screen-readers do not read PDFs well, so it is important to provide information in Word and/or HTML format as well
- » requiring a user to reply to an email sent to their email address rather than requiring them to manipulate images on the screen or identify and 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.

Online accessibility

To learn more about online accessibility, access the Doctor Digital's Check up – Accessibility Factsheet at www.digitalready.tas.gov.au/resources/doctor-digital-check-accessibility

To conduct a quick assessment of your website's current level of accessibility and information on how it could be improved, access The Digital Ready Check up Tool at <https://checkup.digitalready.tas.gov.au/>

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 Digital Ready coaches via the Digital Ready program website at www.digitalready.tas.gov.au/resources/doctor-digital-check-accessibility or phone 1800 955 660.

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. Putting these ideas into practice consistently will not only benefit your customers, your business will likely be rewarded with an increase in word of mouth recommendations and customer loyalty.

- » Talk directly with the person with disability, not other people who may be with them (such as a sign language interpreter or friend).
- » 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 questions and try not to rush them. If a customer has an intellectual or learning disability, do not overload them with information, and check that they understand what you are telling them.
- » If you are having a long conversation with a person who uses a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.
- » When communicating with a person who has a hearing impairment:
 - make sure you face the person when you speak
 - 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 to help you communicate, if necessary.
- » 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 or other assistance animal.



A word on terminology

People often get anxious about how to use language appropriately when talking 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.
- » A customer with disability who wants your goods or services is not 'special' or 'inspirational'.
- » 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'.

Further information

For general information on starting a new business visit Business Tasmania at www.business.tas.gov.au/starting or phone 1800 440 026.

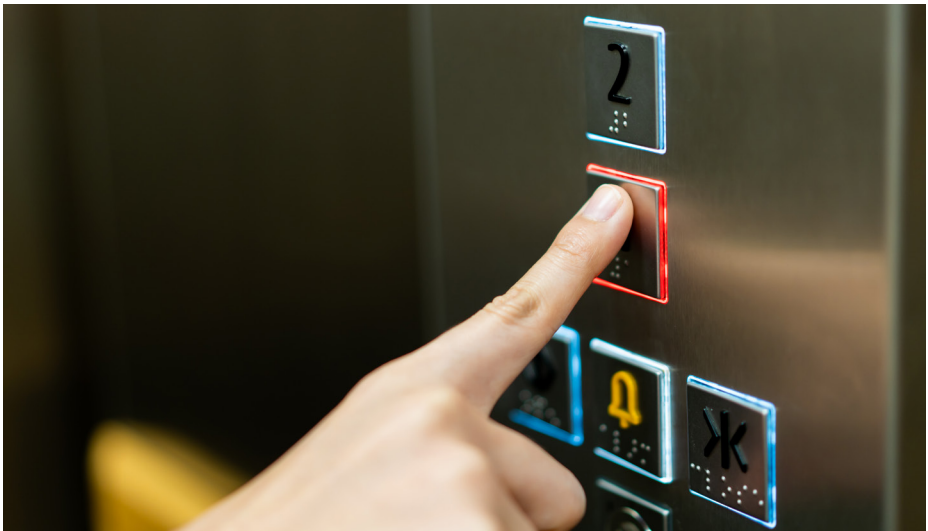
You can obtain information and advice about all aspects of running a business, including business compliance, by contacting a business adviser through Enterprise Centres Tasmania at www.enterprisecentres.tas.gov.au or phone 1800 440 026.

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

Acknowledgements

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