



MISSED BUSINESS

ACCESS DOUGLAS

Attracting more customers to your business
by providing better access

A GUIDE FOR SMALL BUSINESS
PROUDLY PRODUCED BY DOUGLAS SHIRE COUNCIL

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YOU COULD BE MISSING OUT ON POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS

Douglas Shire Council is strongly committed to ensuring that everyone in our community is able to enjoy the many social, cultural and business benefits of living and visiting here. One way Council seeks to meet this commitment is by assisting small businesses to establish and thrive in the region.

As a small business, quality service is one of the most important things you can offer. This guide aims to help you, the small business owner, understand the importance of improving access to your goods and services. Greater accessibility for people who have a disability to your business could assist a large part of our communities in accessing what you have to offer.

In Australia almost one in five people are living with a disability (4.2 million people or 18.5% of Australians*), around one third of Australian households have living there a person with a disability (36% or 3.1 million households*). One in two of those households have a carer (2.7 million Australians or 17% of all households*), of which just under half had a primary carer (770,000 people or 7.6% of all households*).

The Douglas regional economy is greatly dependent on the tourism industry. Did you know people with a disability spend \$8 billion a year on Australian tourism accounting for 11 per cent of total tourism expenditure.** 88 per cent of people with a disability take a holiday each year which accounts for some 8.2 million overnight trips.**

In Australia almost one in five people are living with a disability

Making small changes to improve access to your business can benefit other groups including seniors, parents with prams, people with temporary injuries and customers with heavy bags.

Locals and visitors to the region who may be living with a disability, together with their friends, families and carers may be a sector of the market which for you could be a potential customer.

Which customers are we talking about?

- people who are blind or partially sighted
- people with learning and intellectual disabilities
- people who are deaf or hearing-impaired
- people with a physical disability who may use a wheelchair or walking frame or have arthritis
- people with long-term illnesses
- people with mental health or psychological difficulties, and
- people with acquired brain injury



Good access to your service or business also benefits:

- parents or carers of young children – particularly those with strollers or prams
- older people
- delivery people
- shoppers with heavy bags
- every customer – particularly when it is busy

* 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) conducted throughout Australia from 5 August 2012 to 2 March 2013.

**National Visitor Survey (2003) as analysed by Darcy and Dwyer (2008)

GOOD ACCESS MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

For every potential customer, each of these people will make choices about your business based on how easy it is to use.

If a person uses a wheelchair and there is a step at your front entrance, they, and probably the people who accompany them, will probably go to another business in your area which has a flat entrance or a ramp. If they find your staff unhelpful they probably won't come back to your business.

However, if you make an effort to provide corridors that aren't cluttered with things that may be easily bumped or fall over, then people will appreciate the ease of shopping at your business. If you train your staff to be respectful – not patronising – then people with a disability are more likely to become regular customers.

Remember

What you do to improve accessibility doesn't have to be extravagantly expensive – a combination of providing easier entry and improving staff training will go a long way to making your business more attractive to many people including people with a disability.

Meeting your legal responsibilities

Improving access will also assist your business to meet your legal responsibilities.

In Australia, the law says that customers with disabilities should be able to access your goods and services just like any other customers. If a customer

with a disability cannot get into your building or cannot access your goods and services they could make a complaint of discrimination under either State or Federal (Disability Discrimination Act) law. Making your business more accessible is also likely to make it safer for both customers and staff and could have an effect on your public liability and workplace safety responsibilities.

For more information on your legal obligations see 'Further contacts' at the end of this guide.



FOUR WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

1. Make it easy for people to find you.

To attract customers who have a disability you can take some simple steps to make your business easier to find and get to.

Advertise your advantages

- If your business is accessible, let people know using appropriate language and terminology. For example, if you have wheelchair access include this in your promotions and advertisements. It could be as simple as including the internationally recognised wheelchair logo.
- Put up clear external signs to help people with vision impairments or learning difficulties identify what your shop is.
- If you have a website let people know the details and advantages of your accessibility.

Make the entrance easy to see

- Paint the entrance to your business in a colour that contrasts well with the surroundings. This will make it stand out for people with vision impairment. Highly contrasting colours not only distinguish the entrance from the general environment but also make it easier to tell the difference between the immediate door surrounds and the doorway itself.
- If there are multiple entrances, make sure there are clear directions to where each entrance is located.
- Be aware of reflective glass in your shop front. People with vision impairment often find

this presents them with a confusing picture of reflections, light and shadows. One good solution is to put safety markings on the glass so people don't walk into it. This makes it easier to tell the difference between the window display and the doorway.

Avoid obstructions

- Ideally, remove dangerous obstacles such as advertising boards, displays or furniture from the entrance so that people who use wheelchairs, older people, or people with vision impairment don't have to risk falling over them
- If you are permitted to have advertising boards, display items or furniture outside your business make sure there is a clear pathway leading to the entrance.

TIPS - Think about your surroundings

It also pays to look at the surroundings of your business. On some of these matters you may need to talk to Council:

- **Car parks;** Think about making at least one customer car space wider for a person with a disability to use.
- **Pathways;** Make sure the path from the car park to your entrance is accessible for a person using a wheelchair (e.g. wider and more even) and less slippery for someone older or using walking aids.
- **Lighting;** Would better lighting make car parks and pathways safer?
- **Hazards;** Make sure overhanging trees or signs do not cause a hazard to a person who is blind or vision impaired.

FOUR WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

2. Make it easy for people to get in

In new buildings all customers, including people using wheelchairs, must be able to enter the shop independently. But in many older buildings the main entrance may have several steps, or be difficult in other ways. Here are some ideas to make it easier for customers to get into your business.

While many of these ideas are easy to put into practice, some will require technical advice to ensure they are done correctly (see 'Further contacts' at the end of this guide).

Level Access

- Ideally, get rid of steps and provide a level entry.
- If you can't provide a level entry, build a ramp or have a portable ramp available.
- If these are not possible for technical or financial reasons, consider moving the main entrance to another more accessible position if possible.

Better doors and doorways

- Reposition the entrance door handles to an easier height.
- Make the door easier to open by making it automatic or lighter.
- Make the doorways wider to make it easier for someone with a walking frame or someone who uses a wheelchair to pass through with ease.
- If the doorway has a lot of reflective glass, attach safety markings so people do not walk into it.
- Make sure any doormats are secure and only

use them if they can be made flush with the surrounding floor.

- Put in a hand rail.

Clear sight lines

- If possible make sure there is a clear sight line between the entry and the counter so staff are aware when a customer needs assistance to enter the premises to purchase goods.



3. Make it easy for people to get around

Ideally, once inside your shop or premises customers with disabilities should be able to find their way to all sales areas, browse and inspect goods, bring them to the cash desk or receive services in the same way as people without a disability

The following tips are designed to assist you to better understand and meet the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.

FOUR WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

For people who are blind or have vision impairments

- **Signs:**
Make sure signs and product pricing labels are clear and use high contrast colours. Ensure overhanging signs do not cause hazards.
- **Information:**
Make board menus in cafes or product information displays easier to read. Provide written menus or other product information in larger print versions (e.g. 18 point Arial) or have staff read information to the customers. Look at the possibility of providing information in Braille.
- **Lighting:**
Think about improving lighting, especially around service counters.
- **Layout:**
Avoid having dangerously placed fittings and fixtures that can make independent movement difficult for customers who are blind. Make sure your aisles provide a clear path of travel and do not have displays sticking out from them.
- **EFTPOS:**
Make sure the electronic payment system and EFTPOS machines have the features that allow people who are blind to use them.

For people who may have difficulty hearing

- **Noise:**
Find ways to reduce the amount of background noise and to easily turn down the music when necessary.



- **Hearing loop:**
Look into installing a 'hearing loop' or other system to assist people using hearing aids at counters, especially if there is a screen from the public at the counter.

For people with mobility impairments

- **Aisles:**
Make sure shopping aisles are wide enough (preferably 1.2 metres).
- **Counters:**
Ensure at least part of your counter service area is at a height that is suitable for people using wheelchairs (750 – 800mm from floor level). Make sure that at least one of your checkout aisles is wide enough, has lower checkout counter (750 – 800mm) and is always open.

FOUR WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

- **Reach:**
Try to place goods, particularly the most popular ones, within reach of someone using a wheelchair. If this is not always possible, make sure staff are trained to offer assistance.
- **Chairs:**
If customers need to wait, make a chair available for someone who may be older and frail, use crutches or have poor balance.
- **Surfaces:**
Make sure the floor surface is free from trip hazards and is non-slip.
- **EFTPOS:**
Ensure that the electronic payment system and EFTPOS machines are on a long enough cord or cordless to pass over to someone using a wheelchair.

Should you be providing accessible toilets?

- Where toilets are provided for the public (e.g. in cafes or in other situations where customers may be on the premises for a period of time) an accessible toilet should be provided where possible. Under building laws a unisex accessible toilet counts for a male and female toilet.
- If you do not have an accessible toilet make sure all staff know the location of the nearest accessible toilet and, if necessary, get approval for your customers to use it.
- If you decide to make your toilet accessible you should get technical advice to do so.



FOUR WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

4. Make the most of customer service

When talking about 'improving access' it's easy to think only in terms of installing ramps, toilets and other fixtures. But one of the simplest and cheapest solutions is to change the way you think about customer service for people with disabilities. It is not difficult to train your staff on how to communicate effectively with all your customers and how to give practical assistance when it's needed.

Respect

You and your staff should treat customers with disabilities as you do all customers, with respect.

Focus on the Person:

Treat each customer with a disability as an individual customer with their own likes and dislikes. Always focus on the person not their disability. Always address the customer directly, not the other people who may be with them (such as a sign language interpreter).

Giving assistance:

Always ask the customer first if they would like some help; do not assume that they need assistance. Always accept the answer if the customer declines your help. If you have a conversation that lasts longer than a few moments with a customer using a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.

Asking Questions:

And remember: ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided

particularly where there are barriers to equal access.

Communication

For people who may have a learning difficulty or, an intellectual disability or brain injury.

Being clear:

Address the customer directly, listen carefully, speak clearly and checking for understanding. Always use language without being patronising.

Allowing Time:

Allow your customer time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people with an intellectual disability with information. Reassure the customer that you are there to help if they forget the information



FOUR WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

For people who have a hearing impairment or are deaf.

Lip reading:

Always face the customer so they can read your lips. Try to make sure there are no bright lights behind you that may limit their ability to see your lips.

Sound:

Use your normal tone of voice and volume. If possible, move out of the way of background noise.

Interpreters:

If your customer is there with a sign language interpreter always address your comment directly to the customer rather than the interpreter.

Pen and Paper:

Have a pen and paper on hand to help communicate with your customer.

For people who have vision impairment or are blind.

Using names:

Always identify yourself by name. If appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and so that they know you are talking to them and not someone else.

Giving assistance:

If a customer asks for assistance to go somewhere ask which side you should be on and offer your arm so they can hold just above your elbow.

Guide dogs:

Never pat or distract a guide dog or offer it food while it is in a harness, it is a working animal under the control of its owner.



FINDING ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO PROVIDE SERVICE

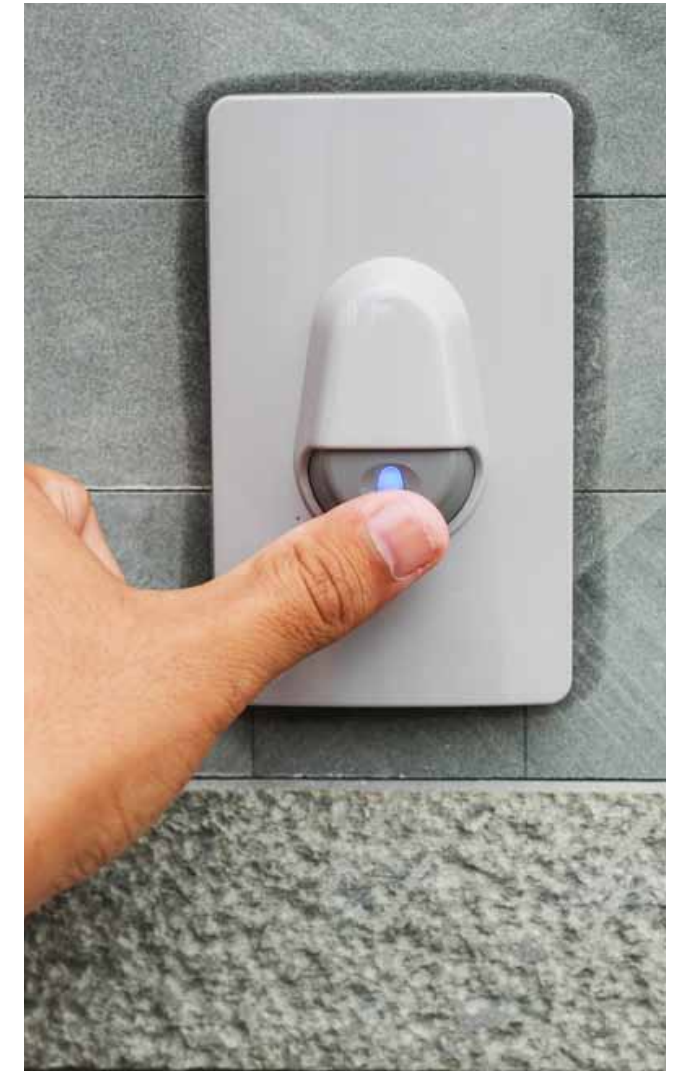
The best way of attracting business and fulfilling your legal responsibilities is to make your business as accessible as possible.

Where it is not possible to provide full access in the short term, you might also consider alternative ways of providing the same service.

Here are some examples:

- A butchers shop might consider operating a telephone, e/mail order or local delivery scheme.
- A florist might have a call bell at the entrance and have staff put together an order and bring the goods to the front door or the nearest easy collection point.
- A hairdresser might consider offering a home visiting service for a customer with a disability or is elderly.
- An estate agent might consider providing their service in an alternative accessible location either by appointment or on a regular basis.

Alternatives such as these will not provide full equality for people with disabilities, but they will assist in reducing the chances of complaint.



WHAT'S THE BEST LANGUAGE TO USE?

If you are making the effort to make your business more accessible it is also important to make sure your staff and the signage you use is part of that effort.

Use signage that identifies:

- Accessible Toilet – not Disabled Toilet
- Accessible Parking not Disabled Parking
- Accessible Entry not Disabled Entry

And always refer to:

- A person with a disability rather than a disabled person
- A person who uses a wheelchair rather than a person confined to one
- A person who is blind rather than a person who suffers blindness.



FURTHER CONTACTS:

For more information on planning issues, building approvals and Douglas Shire Council access requirements:

Douglas Shire Council

Phone: (07) 4099 9444

Web: www.douglas.qld.gov.au

Speak to:

A Planning Officer or a Community and Economic Development Officer for assistance

For more information on design issues, developing alternative access methods or to contact an Access Consultant:

Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc

Ph: (02) 5221 2820

Web: www.access.asn.au

For more information on legal issues and responsibilities:

Human Rights and equal Opportunity Commission

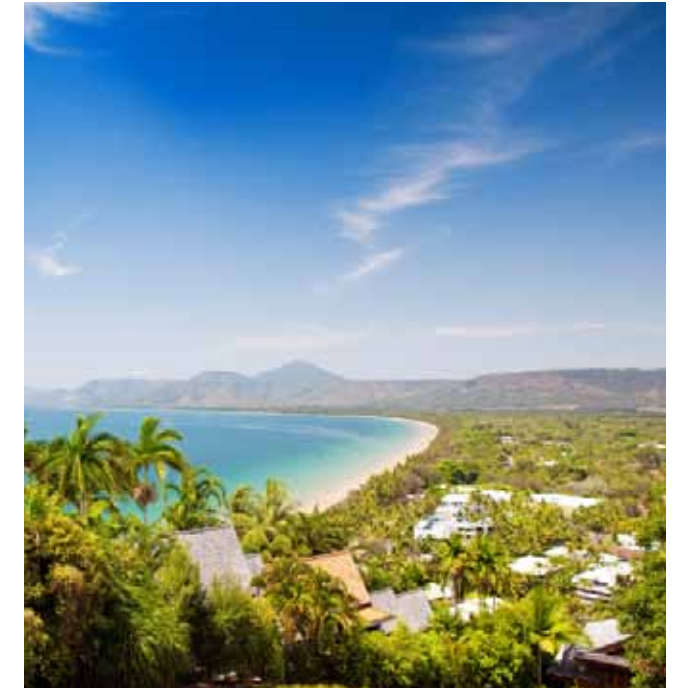
Phone: (02) 9284 9600

Web: www.hreoc.gov.au

Queensland Anti Discrimination Commission

Phone: 1300 130 670 or TTY 1300 130 680

Web: www.adcq.qld.gov.au



THANK YOU...

....for taking the time to read this guide. Council appreciates your interest in making the Douglas region an accessible community for all its residents and visitors. Council encourages you to use the suggestions made in this guide and by doing so create an inviting environment for your customers.



Acknowledgements

Gail Cockburn and Selina Maffey

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