September 2024

Rick Hansen Foundation

The Office Guide to Meaningful Access

Practical Solutions for Accessibility

Report design by **R&G Strategic Communications**.

Rick Hansen Foundation

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Practical Solutions for Accessibility

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Welcome

Welcome to **The Office Guide to Meaningful Access**, your resource for creating welcoming workplaces for all tenants, clients, employees, and guests.

Who is this Guide for?

This Guide provides a starting point for understanding how environments can create barriers to accessing and engaging in our places and spaces. Whether you are choosing a new office space, or looking to enhance your current workplace, this Guide will provide practical solutions to improve the experience of meaningful access.

While we recognize that commercial properties and occupant needs and preferences may vary, this Guide is designed to be widely applicable. The strategies presented in each section draw directly from global evidence and validated workplace best practices, so you can be assured that the approaches outlined represent the latest in research and trends to support accessible and productive work environments.

Using this Guide

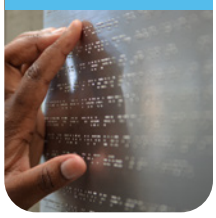
This Guide is intended to be useful at every stage of the commercial real estate journey—from office selection to build-outs and upgrades of existing spaces. It is divided into three parts:

Part 1 16

Examines the common elements in the built environment that impact the experience of meaningful access in any building, including features found in and around your tenanted space.

Part 2 42

Considers the most common functional areas within a tenanted workspace and practical insights into making these areas more accessible, flexible and adaptive to anyone.



Part 3 56

Focuses on the basics—small, crucial details that can make any space more accessible. It highlights simple, low-cost improvements that can be made quickly and easily.

We understand that not all aspects may be within the control of tenants or building owners—and that's okay. Improving the accessibility of our built environments is a step-by-step process, and each small improvement can collectively make a significant impact over time.

It's a journey where every step, every detail, and every decision has the potential to remove a barrier and create a positive experience for our most valuable asset—our people.

Understanding Meaningful Access

What is Disability?

In North America, 1 in 4 people identify as having a disability.

There are many different definitions of disability. Disability refers to any impairment or functional limitation, including physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory. These limitations may be permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature.

Did You Know?

There are many kinds of disabilities, and they are often categorized in different ways. Common categories used to describe the experience of disability include:

- **Seeing (vision)**
- **Hearing**
- **Mobility**
- **Flexibility**
- **Dexterity**
- **Pain**
- **Learning**
- **Developmental**
- **Mental Health**
- **Memory**

An Office of Barriers

Imagine working in an office that feels like it wasn't designed for you.

Desks and chairs don't fit your body, and the lighting triggers migraines. In the staff kitchen, appliances are out of reach. The reception area suffers from poor lighting and acoustics, making it hard to communicate. Some parts of the office are so dimly lit that you have to walk slowly to avoid tripping over obstacles. Although there are many washrooms, the only one accessible to you is on a different floor, necessitating a cumbersome elevator ride.

These barriers are not created by any individual person, their ability or their disability. They are created by the physical features of the environment itself. These limitations restrict the ability of staff, tenants, guests—really, anyone at all—to participate in that environment.

For users with disabilities, these experiences are a fact of life and common to many experiences in every kind of facility or space.

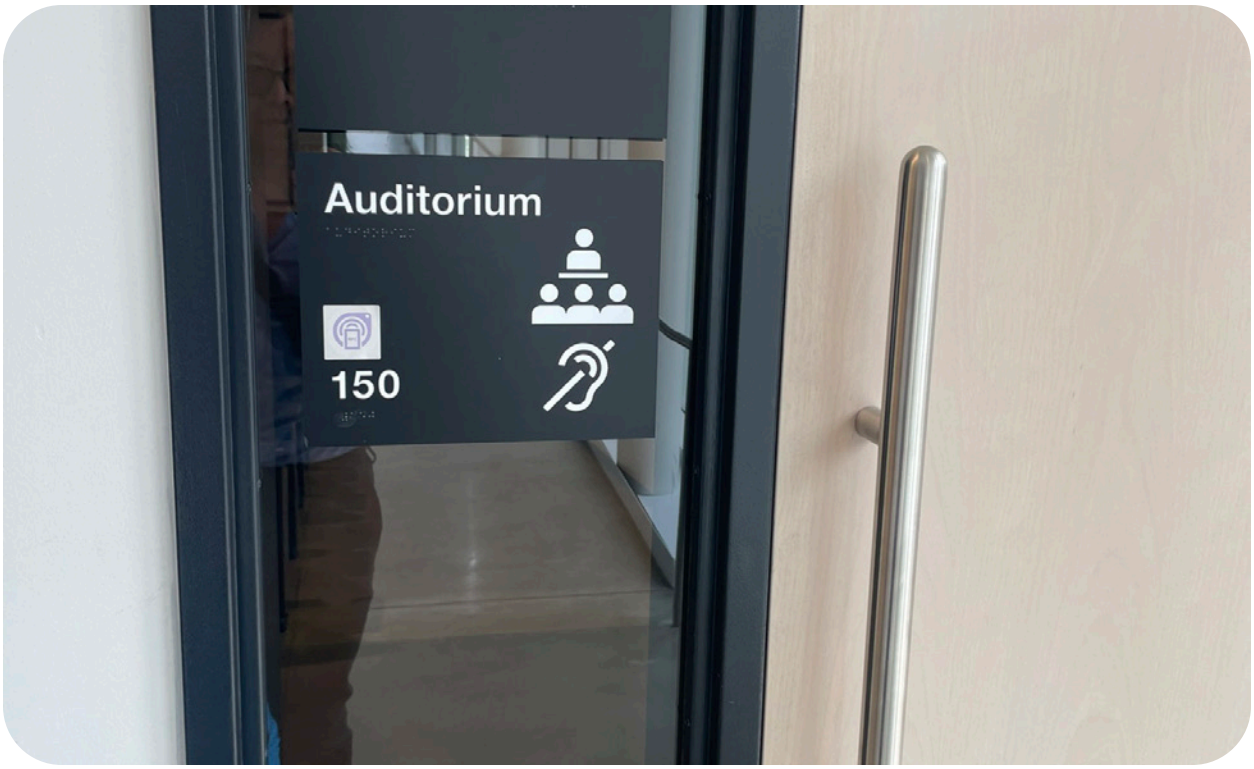
Beyond Building Codes

Isn't Building Code Enough?

Building codes set the minimum technical requirement for construction, including renovation, building demolition and changes of use for existing buildings. They include accessibility requirements for some elements of the building, but focus mostly on requirements related to people with mobility disabilities.

Accessibility specifications in building codes are like base ingredients in a recipe. These ingredients are necessary to create the desired dish, but they must be mixed with other ingredients in a particular order and guided by the chef's vision and knowledge to produce a true culinary experience.

All buildings must meet the requirements of building codes, but the experience we have in any of these spaces can vary widely. For example, the fact that all restaurants must meet minimum food preparation and health and safety regulations to operate does not mean that all restaurants offer nutritious or delicious food that we'd like to eat.


Auditorium
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IN CASE OF FIRE DO NOT USE
ELEVATORS USE STAIRS.
EMERGENCY
CONTACT
INFORMATION
YOU ARE HERE

What is Meaningful Access?

Meaningful access describes the ability for any user to participate fully and independently in any built environment. When we experience meaningful access, we are experiencing the environment for its intended purpose. In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Meaningful access takes a holistic and people-centric approach to accessibility.

To evaluate meaningful access, we need to consider the entire experience of moving through a space. This involves understanding how features might be experienced by someone with limited mobility, low vision, no or little hearing, or neurodiverse ways of processing sensory information.

With this goal in mind, we can more effectively examine our workplaces to identify ways in which our places and spaces fall short. By acknowledging these limitations, we can start to devise solutions that make our workplaces more inclusive and accessible for everyone.

It is easy to jump too quickly to detailed technical specifications for the features we think are most important. But similar to the recipe example we used previously, this approach can cause us to miss the big picture or goal.

Fortunately, anyone can improve any environment to make it more welcoming for users with disabilities, regardless of space, budget, capacity or experience!

Introducing the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ Program

The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) provides a holistic, practical and people-focused framework to measure meaningful access, create a roadmap for improvement, and celebrate an organization's commitment to making their spaces accessible for all.

At RHFAC, we:

- Measure the experience of meaningful access to a workspace based on the holistic user experience of people with varying disabilities affecting mobility, vision, hearing, and diverse neurological experiences
- Provide a roadmap to improve accessibility through an interactive rating survey that uses common methodology and language to support analysis, reporting and decision-making
- Publicly recognize an organization's commitment to accessibility through formal certification as 'RHF Accessibility Certified' or 'RHF Accessibility Certified Gold'

For more information about RHFAC, visit **RickHansen.com/RHFAC.**

Sharing Resources with Your Property Manager

While many property managers consider accessibility to be important and may have completed projects to improve accessibility for tenants and guests, they might lack the expertise to evaluate the total experience of meaningful access.

That's OK! Ask them about their experiences and their interest in collaborating—and share a copy of the Office Guide to Meaningful Access with them!

Collaborating with Your Property Manager

The experience of meaningful access in any given space is shaped by someone's experience of the ***entire*** space—including the common spaces and surrounding areas that may be outside of your control as a tenant.

For this reason, it is critical to find a property manager who shares your values, is willing to collaborate, and communicates clearly and effectively! Fortunately, many property managers today understand the importance of accessibility and are excited to work with tenants to ensure their spaces meet the needs of diverse guests.

Tips for Identifying Buildings That Prioritize Meaningful Access

1. **Has the building you are moving into, considering, or currently occupying been rated and certified under RHFAC?**
   A list of RHFAC-certified sites is publicly available on the **RHFAC Registry**. If the building is not listed there, that does not mean that the building was not rated and certified. Some sites choose not to list their ratings publicly. Ask your property manager if the building is certified!

2. **Does the property manager's website include information about the accessibility features of the building?**
   Published information about specific accessibility-related building features demonstrates a property manager's commitment to accessibility. Providing clear and easy-to-access information is beneficial to site users before they visit.

3. **Does the property manager provide accessibility training to employees?**
   There are several training options to help commercial real estate professionals improve their accessibility knowledge and skill and support tenants more effectively. Visit **RickHansen.com/Courses** to discover options.

4. **Has the property manager completed or are they planning to complete renovations or upgrades to common amenities to improve accessibility?**
   Recent or planned upgrades to entrances, common areas, washrooms, reception areas and directional signage that improve meaningful access show a commitment to accessibility.

Make sure to ask questions and find a collaborative property manager who has demonstrated a commitment to meaningful access through action.

Part 1

Common Building Elements

Part 1 highlights how meaningful access is shaped by elements common to all buildings in your space and shared public areas. The overall accessibility of the building is as important as the accessibility of your office space, and it supports and influences the experience of meaningful access.

Vehicular Access

People may get to your tenanted space in many ways, such as driving their own vehicle, taking a taxi or public transit, walking or cycling.

Vehicular access refers to the main access points that serve individuals arriving at a site by either motor vehicle or transit, including parking, passenger drop-off and pick-up zones, and transit stops.

Why It Matters

Accessible parking, passenger pick-up and drop-off zones and nearby transit stops make locations more usable, safe and accessible for people of all abilities. In some cases, it makes all the difference in whether people can participate in work and play, such as in sporting and cultural events, or enjoy shopping, restaurants and other activities. Providing flexibility and choice to meet the different needs of occupants and guests is at the heart of excellence in inclusive customer service.

Quick Wins!

Your organization's website can be a great way to provide useful accessibility information about your site and help guests and staff plan their trip before getting to the site. Some examples include but are not limited to the following:

- Location of the accessible parking spaces.
- Location of the closest transit stop, especially if the site is served by transit.
- Location of any passenger drop-off or loading zones.
- Directions to the accessible building entrance from transit stop(s).
- Availability of accessible electric vehicle charging stations, if available.

Key Features

Sites that provide **additional accessible parking spaces** beyond the minimum required by code or the local jurisdiction are better prepared to meet the needs of the site users.

Work with your property manager if additional accessible parking spaces are required based on your employee and customer needs.

Directional and identification signs help users easily identify the location of accessible parking spaces and passenger drop-off and pick-up zones when they are not obvious.

A **wide marked access aisle** adjacent to accessible parking spaces, connected to a pedestrian route, provides space for people with disabilities to safely exit or enter their vehicles.

Clearly marked pedestrian pathways help delineate them from vehicular routes in a parking lot, thereby protecting people who may otherwise be difficult to see, especially people using wheelchairs and families with children.

If your site is served by transit, it is important to assess if an **accessible, continuous, and safe path of travel from the transit stop to the building entrance** is available.

For complex sites, you can provide directions and information on accessible routes to the building entrance(s) on your website to support guests planning to visit you.

Why It Matters

Meaningful access begins with the ability for any user to access any space, travelling independently from Point A to Point B. For example, an elevator is of no use for someone using a mobility device if it is located at the top of a staircase.

Where there are changes in level, circulation routes should be easy to understand and navigate with a choice of a ramp, stairs, or other elevating devices. Some people with limited mobility may find it easier to climb a few steps rather than walking along a long ramp, while people using wheelchairs, other wheeled mobility devices, and those pushing strollers or carrying luggage most often prefer a ramp.

Elevators are usually the most effective means to ensure that any user can access any floor of a building. They enable all users to travel together, without segregating users with disabilities.

Exterior and Interior Circulation

Paths of travel include all pedestrian routes, ramps, stairs and elevating devices used by people to travel through the exterior of the site, interior of the building and inside your tenanted space.

Exterior and Interior Circulation

Paths of Travel, Corridors, and Hallways

Paths of travel should be easy to navigate, safe for all users, free of obstacles, well-illuminated, easy to find, and well-integrated with any stairs, ramps or other elevating devices along the route.

Important!

Objects, installed overhead or projecting into paths of travel, can be dangerous as they may not be visible to people with vision disabilities. People may bump their head where there is a reduced headroom along a path of travel, including under staircases or escalators, if they are not easily identified. Ensure paths of travel are kept clear and provide a cane detectable feature or barrier to prevent people from walking into hazard.

Quick Wins!

- Directional signage along paths of travel helps people navigate through the site and building more efficiently, particularly for those with limited stamina.
- Providing seating along long paths of travel also allows people who are unable to travel long distances to pause and rest.
- When selecting floor surfaces and materials during build-out or retrofit of a space, it is important to ensure they do not have busy patterns, as those can be distracting and confusing for some people. Busy patterns can create optical illusions and affect depth perception.

Key Features

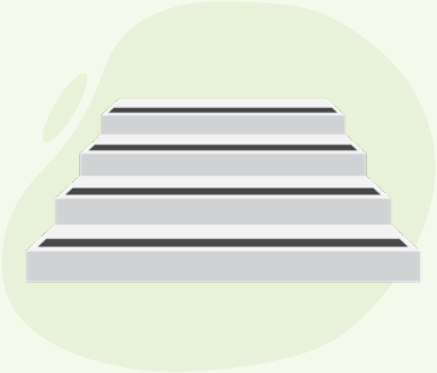
The **width and surface of the path of travel** is important to ensure people using wheeled mobility devices can navigate and get to the building.

Wider paths of travel allow people to travel two-way using wheeled mobility devices but also provide space for them to turn around if needed.

Straight, predictable and continuous paths of travel are easier to navigate. Curb ramps are essential to ensure smooth transitions between levels where there is a change in elevation.

Paths of travel that are long and/or steep are tiring and difficult to navigate. **Rest areas with seating along the path of travel** offer a chance for people to stop and catch their breath. For example, commercial buildings with retail concourses or interior paths of travel to adjacent buildings should consider seating options in these areas.

A clear space adjacent to a bench or seat provides space for people using mobility spaces to also stop and rest.



Important!

Stairs with open risers can become tripping hazards and a source of visual confusion. People who wear leg braces or prosthetic devices need a solid riser to guide their foot up the riser and over the nosing to the next step; those who use canes or crutches place them against the riser of the next step to maintain balance.

Exterior and Interior Circulation

Stairs

Stairs are inherently hazardous. They need to be well-dimensioned to provide a stable footing and to ensure the safety and comfort of all users.

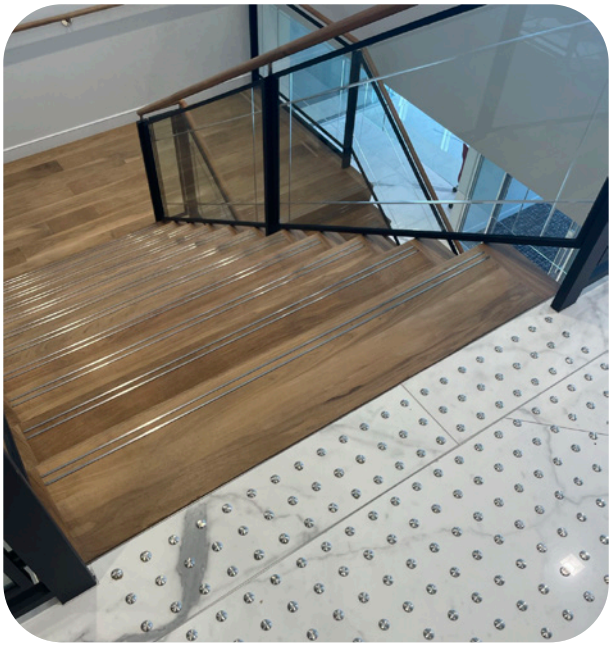
Key Features

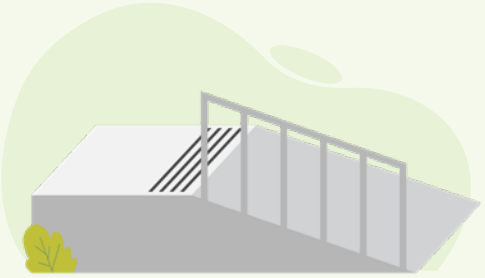
Consistent tread depth and riser height are critical to prevent tripping and falls. People may misjudge the height of each step if the riser height varies, causing potential injury.

Having **nosings with high tonal contrast** at the edges of steps helps define and increase the visibility of each step.

Tactile attention indicators at the top of stairs alert people who are blind or have low vision that they are approaching a change in level.

Handrails on both sides of the stairs are not only used as support but also as a navigation feature for people with vision disabilities. They should be easy to grasp, and colour contrasted with the surrounding surfaces.





Quick Wins!

Colour contrasted and slip-resistant strips, extending the full width of the ramp, at the landing before each run notify people that they are approaching a slope.

Exterior and Interior Circulation

Ramps

Ramps are used as a means to overcome changes in elevation. Depending on the elevation, an elevator, escalator, or passenger lift may be more appropriate.

Key Features

Walking or wheeling up steep ramps can be exhausting! Ramps with a **gradual slope** make it easier for people to go up and down and transition between levels.

Level landings large enough for a mobility device are essential along a long ramp to allow people using mobility devices to pause before continuing their journey up or down the next ramp.

Handrails on both sides of a ramp are not only used as support but also as a navigation feature for people with vision disabilities. They should be easy to grasp, and colour contrasted with the surrounding surfaces.


REPRESENTING IOWANS
APPROPRIATIONS
WORK DAYS
MOBILE OFFICE
LISTENING, SERVING, AND STRENGTHENING

Exterior and Interior Circulation

Elevators

Elevators are common building elements that help people travel vertically to other floors or level of a building or site. Most people prefer to use elevators to travel between floors in a multi-storey building as it requires less effort, especially when going up or down multiple floors.

In some spaces, an elevator may not be feasible. A vertical platform lift or a limited use/limited application elevator may be used. They are not preferred as they often cannot be operated independently.

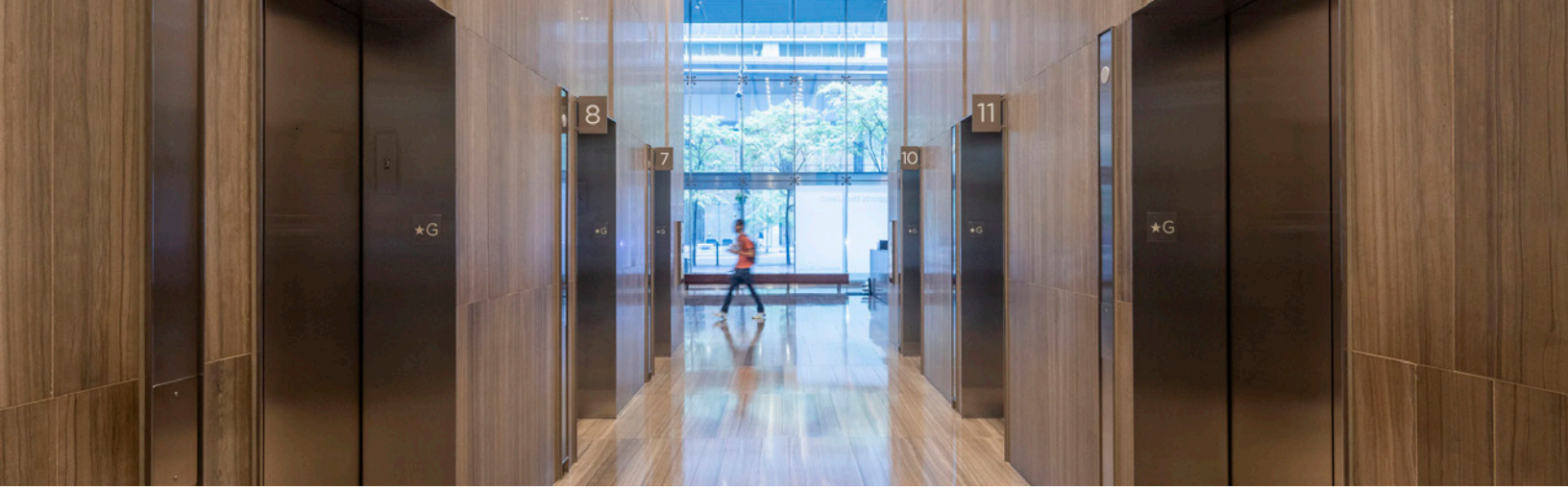
Important!

With evolving technology, such as destination dispatch elevators used in high-density buildings, it is important to keep a few things in mind:

- Touchscreen controls are not usable for some people as they may not be able to see or have the manual dexterity to operate them. Alternative means to operate controls that are tactile (e.g., keypads) or audio-activated (e.g., voice-activated) should be available.
- Instructions must be clear and given in various formats as not everyone will be able to see or hear them. When instructions are given for people to go to a specific elevator, people must be able to receive the information, identify the location of the elevator, and get to it in time.

Quick Wins!

- Elevators can be hard to find if they are not installed in predictable and logical areas. Providing directional signage at key locations helps users find them more easily.
- For smaller elevators that do not have sufficient space for a mobility device to turn around, installing a mirror inside the elevator cab allows people using mobility devices to see what is behind them before reversing out.



Key Features

The **size of the elevator cab and the opening width of elevator doors** determine if the elevator can accommodate a range of mobility devices. They should be large enough for a mobility device to turn around inside the elevator cab.

People with disabilities may require additional time to navigate to an elevator. The **length of time it takes for elevator doors to remain fully open** is important to ensure people can enter safely.

Automatic non-contact door reopening devices prevent doors from closing on a person.

Elevators should stop so the **elevator floor is flush with the finished floor level of each landing** for smooth transition and to avoid tripping hazards.

Elevators work best when anyone, regardless of user's ability or knowledge, can use them independently. This can be supported using cab controls that are **easy to operate, include tactile characters (numbers or symbols)** that can be read by touch, and are accessible from a seated position.

Because some users may not be able to see or hear floor notifications or communicate through some emergency communication systems, elevators that offer **both audible and visual notifications and emergency communication systems** are more easily used by anyone.

Exterior and Interior Circulation

Doors and Doorways

Doors come in every shape, size, type, mode of operation, and configuration. The right door for a given space will depend on the nature of your space, how often they are used, available space, and security needs.

The easiest way to access a space is through automatic or power-operated doors. These types of doors are typically used at an entrance or in high-traffic areas. When possible, sliding doors are best because they remove a potential hazard created by a door's swing path, though these may not be possible for your space.

Important!

Automatic doors that swing open into a path of travel can be dangerous for some users, such as people who are blind or partially sighted. Providing door guards and using tactile surfaces to mark a door's swing path can alert people with vision disabilities to swinging doors.

Quick Wins!

- Applying high-contrasting paint to door frames can make doors easier to identify, even if door and wall surfaces are similar in colour and texture.
- Replacing knob-style door hardware with lever handles makes doors easier to open and close for everyone.

Key Features

When there is not sufficient contrast between doors and adjacent surfaces, doors can disappear as they blend with the wall. Colour-contrasting **doors or door frames** make doors easier to find.

Wide doors accommodate people using wheelchairs or electric scooters or for people with strollers, companions or service dogs.

Door handles that can be used with a closed fist and do not require tight pinching, grasping and twisting of the wrist, are easier to operate by people with limited manual dexterity.

Any interior or exterior door can be made more accessible using **power-operated doors**. Make sure that controls are mounted at the right height and location for someone to activate and enter without turning or rotating.

Level and clear space on both sides of the door (pull and push side) allows people using mobility devices to maneuver in front, open and close the door.

Building Entrances

The accessibility of building entrances is essential to ensure everyone can safely enter and exit a building conveniently, independently, and with minimal effort. Entrances should be welcoming, easy to find, and connected to an accessible path of travel.

Why It Matters

If building entrances are not accessible, then it will be impossible for someone to enter a building, let alone have a positive experience inside. Building entrances that are connected to an accessible path of travel on both sides (outside and inside the building), have level landings, and provide automatic or power-operated doors signal to users that accessibility is a priority.

Did You Know?

Power door openers come in a variety of shapes and sizes and can be used with both exterior and interior doors. Elongated door openers let people open doors at various heights and can be easier for someone with limited mobility or flexibility to use.

Quick Wins!

- If the building entrance is hard to identify, collaborate with your property manager to add features that provide cues to suggest the entrance location.
- Using signage with large text that contrasts with the background can make any entrance easier to find. This includes larger permanent signs above entranceways as well as more cost-effective and temporary solutions such as sandwich boards (but make sure these do not impede on an accessible path of travel!)
- Installing colour-contrasting strips on glazed doors helps increase visibility and prevent people with vision disabilities from walking into the glazing.
- Providing seating and shelter near the entrance offers a place to wait or rest while protected from the elements.

Key Features

Entrances that are **clearly identifiable** through architectural features, signage and other physical and visual cues help users find them the first time.

Exterior building entrance doors are typically heavy and are harder to open. Doors that are **automatic, operable using a power-assist door opener** or otherwise easy to open ensure that everyone can enter and move through a space freely.

A beveled, ramped or rounded threshold at an entrance door ensures doors are accessible for people using wheeled mobility devices.

Where door security systems, such as intercoms, are used, it is important that they are mounted at an **accessible location and height** and provide **visual and audible feedback** to users.

Important!

- The main entrance of the building should be accessible to everyone. People with disabilities should not be required to enter through an alternative entrance.
- If access to buildings is controlled and building entrances include security and entry systems, it is critical to ensure that people with varying disabilities can use and access the system. For example, someone who is deaf may not be able to communicate with security to be granted access to a building if the system is audio only.

Lobbies and Concierge, Security or Reception Desks

When entering a building or space, lobbies set the tone for the experience of meaningful access inside as it is where decisions are made. Lobby concierge, security or reception desks are often the first point of human interaction when visiting a building. Many lobbies are large to accommodate large flows of traffic, but large, open spaces can be more difficult for some people to move through if they are not familiar with the space and limited signage is provided.

Did You Know?

Moving from outside to inside can come with dramatic changes in light. It can take some site users a long time to adjust their eyes to these changes enough to move safely through the lobby.

Important!

The section underneath the lobby reception desk should always be kept clear and never used as a storage area for boxes and equipment to ensure people using mobility devices can roll under the desk.

Quick Wins!

- If the location of reception desks, waiting areas or washrooms is not obvious from the building entrance, collaborate with your property manager to install extra directional signage with large text that contrasts with the background, including tactile characters.
- Providing **audio accessibility and communications enhancement technologies** such as hearing loops, mic/speaker systems and other technologies can facilitate smoother exchanges between staff and guests at reception desks.

Key Features

Concierge and reception desks should be **visible from the main building entrance** and contrast visually with the surroundings so they stand out.

A **variety of seating types** in lobbies such as ones that are wider, include back support and/or armrests, offer choice to people.

The concierge/reception desk needs to be at **universally accessible or adjustable height** for people to use them in both seated and standing positions.

Having **space underneath the reception desk on both sides** allows someone using a mobility device to approach and use the desk from a front approach which allows for easier transaction and communication.

Audio accessibility and communication enhancement technologies help people who are Deaf or hard of hearing to communicate with staff at reception desks. This is especially important where barriers, such as plexiglass screening, are used as it becomes harder to hear the other person.

Why It Matters

Everyone has the right to privacy, dignity, safety, security and comfort. For this reason, accessible sanitary facilities must ensure that a person's rights are respected while accommodating the diverse needs of many users.

Washrooms are not glamorous, but they are one of the single biggest factors influencing someone's experience of meaningful access. Discovering that a washroom isn't going to work for you when you most need it is a terrible feeling.

Washrooms

Many buildings have two kinds of washrooms: multiple occupancy washrooms with several stalls (usually gendered) or universal washrooms, which are enclosed individual washrooms that typically include a single toilet and sink.

In most cases, washrooms are shared amenities located in the building stack and overseen by the property manager, but this section applies to any washrooms in your tenanted space as well.

Did You Know?

Many buildings do their best to make washrooms more accessible, but there are many common mistakes. Fortunately, all the examples described below can be improved quickly, at minimal cost, in collaboration with your property manager!

- Accessible stall doors that open inward make it difficult to get into the stall.
- Grab bars that are not installed at the proper locations and height.
- Toilet paper dispensers mounted too far from the toilet.
- Accessories are mounted too high or in a location that may be hard to reach.

Key Features

Whatever washroom configuration a building has, it's important to have **at least one accessible toilet stall** in each multi-stall washroom or provide a **universal washroom** nearby.

People who use mobility aids or guide dogs benefit from **plenty of floor space** inside the washroom and around the toilet to maneuver, turn or transfer.

To use a toilet, someone using a wheelchair will need space next to the toilet and will rely on **grab bars mounted adjacent to the toilet** to help them move from a seated position to the toilet.

Sinks and counters with **knee space underneath** help someone using a wheelchair to use faucets and accessories at a comfortable reach.

Accessories that are mounted at **a lower height within reach of the sink** help someone dry their hands without needing to touch wheelchair controls.

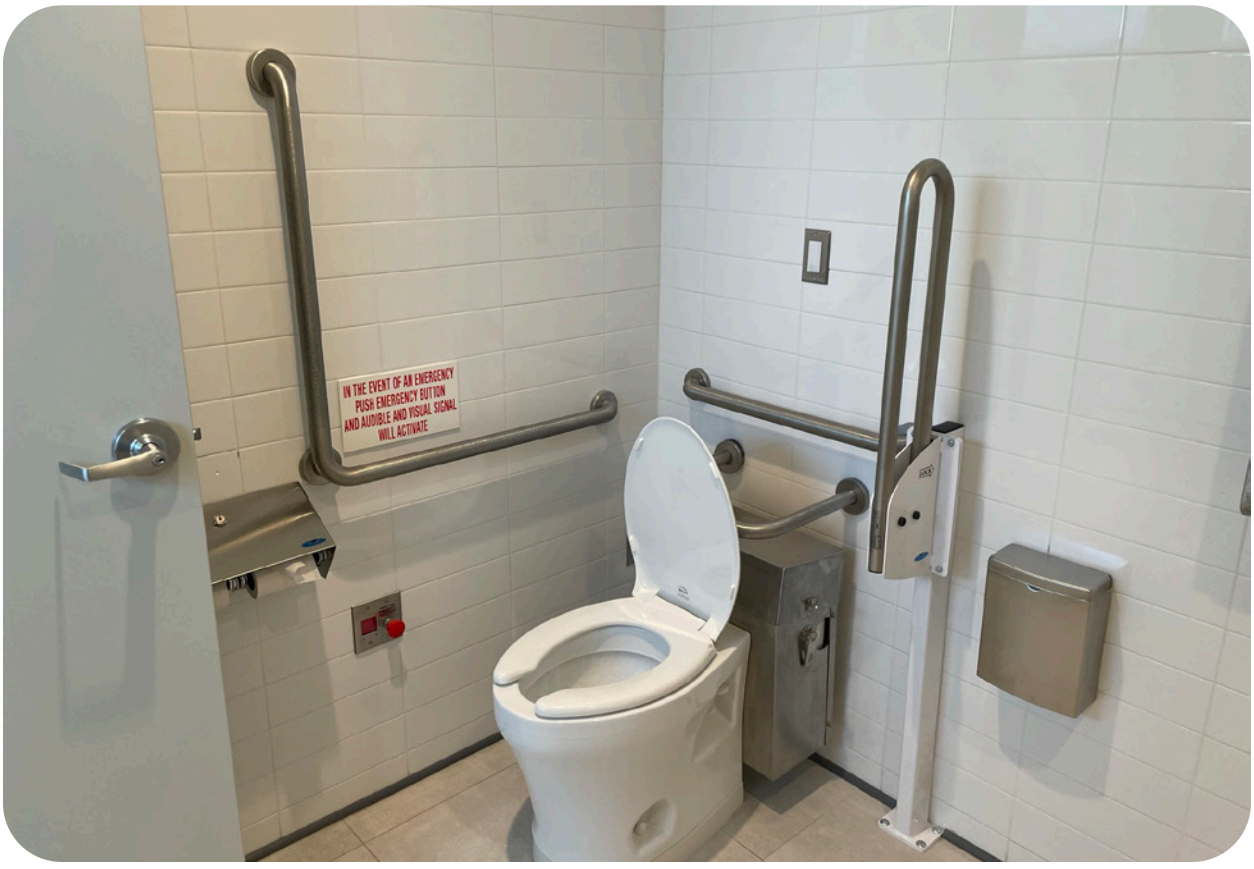
No-touch features, such as motion-controlled power-operated doors, automated toilets, faucets, hand dryers and towel dispensers help people with limited mobility or dexterity to use all the features of a washroom.

Transferring to and from toilets can create many hazards in washrooms. Providing **emergency call buttons** that are reachable from a supine position helps people who have fallen call for help.

Important!

- While no-touch accessories are generally recommended, people who are neurodiverse may have adverse responses to loud accessories such as automatic toilets and hand dryers. Providing alternatives such as a manual flush toilet or a basket of paper towels next to the sink are two examples of easy ways to provide choice and flexibility.
- For washroom features, the details matter. The placement, mounting height, stability of toilets and sinks, the correct use of grab bars, adequate space for transfer from a mobility device, the use of no-touch accessories and accessible locking mechanisms and emergency alarms—all of these and more are critical to the experience of meaningful access.
- If you are designing a washroom for your space, we recommend working with an accessibility professional.


Koala Kare Center
DIAPER
DISPOSAL


IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY
PUSH EMERGENCY BUTTON
AND AUDIBLE AND VISUAL SIGNAL
WILL ACTIVATE

Building and Emergency Systems

Building systems control a building's lighting, ventilation and emergency features. Because they perform in the "background" of a building's daily life, they're easy to miss. However, the performance of these systems influences the experience of meaningful access anywhere in a building during both ordinary and life-and-death situations.

Why It Matters

The only thing more important than the ability to enter and interact with a building is the ability to get out in an emergency. In ordinary day-to-day operations, building systems that control lighting, temperature and ventilation help make us comfortable and should operate quietly.

Did You Know?

Red exit signs are difficult to see in smoke-filled rooms. Green exit signs provide better visibility in emergency situations.

Important!

- It is critical to ensure people with disabilities are included as part of your emergency evacuation plan and that this information is clear and made available to everyone.
- The ability to adjust lighting, temperature and other features of building systems provides a more comfortable environment for people, especially at workstations.

Key Features

Most buildings rely on audible alarm signals to alert people to an emergency, but these are not helpful to someone who is hard of hearing or Deaf. **Visual fire alarms** use both visual and audible alerts. Ideally, visual alarms should be provided throughout a building, especially anywhere where someone is likely to be alone.

Most elevators are automatically sent to the ground floor and disabled when an emergency alarm is activated. This makes it difficult for users with mobility devices to exit. **Clearly marked areas of refuge** provide a safe place for people with disabilities to wait. Audio and visual emergency communication systems in these areas make it easy for people to communicate with first responders.

Evacuation chairs make it possible to bring someone with no or limited mobility down a stairwell in an emergency. However, these devices can be dangerous if people are not trained on how to use them.

In the case of an emergency, such as fire and smoke, everyone's visibility is reduced. **Emergency exit signs and building evacuation instructions** can help people clearly identify locations of accessible exit routes and areas of refuge.

Evacuation instructions benefit **from large type, colour contrast, and raised** characters and Braille so they can be more legible.

Part 2

Making Your Workplace Flexible and Adaptable

Part 2 examines the types of spaces that are most common in office environments and provides practical tips to ensure that every space meets the needs of both staff and guests. Whether you're completing an office build-out or looking to enhance an existing space, this section will provide you with all you need to know.

Design Layout 44

Is the layout of your tenanted space designed to enable meaningful access?

Workstations and Meeting Rooms 46

Do working and meeting areas provide flexibility and adaptability to meet the needs of all employees?

Kitchens and Lunchrooms 48

Are staff kitchens and lunchrooms accessible to everyone?

Support Spaces, Storage and Other Amenities 50

Don’t forget about the ancillary spaces, such as copy rooms and storage areas that are a necessary part of every office!

Quiet Rooms: Spaces for Sensory Relief and Respite 52

Does your space provide opportunities for peace, quiet or privacy?

Design Layout

The arrangement of functional areas in your tenanted space and the path of travel that connects them together is one of the most important considerations for accessible office design. This includes providing an accessible path of travel that flows naturally between functional areas and ensuring that these areas have enough space for all users.

Why It Matters

Arranging the functional areas of your tenanted space logically and providing an accessible path of travel to move traffic between areas makes it easier for anyone to use your space. It will also reduce the likelihood that barriers will arise in the future.

For example, if the layout is not designed thoughtfully, there's a greater chance that you will have less room for an accessible path of travel, increasing the potential for obstacles and more traffic.

Quick Wins!

- Using **different floor surfaces and textures** to distinguish circulation routes from other functional spaces can help move people through spaces effectively, especially in **open-concept environments.**
- Choosing hard floor surfaces or low-pile carpets with **no loud or bright colours**.
- Provide **seating** that offers different heights, arm rest configurations and textures to provide choice. Underestimating seating requirements during the build-out will lead to too much furniture later, making the space crowded.

Key Features

When setting furniture and equipment, ensure **sufficient clear width and turning spaces** are provided for people using mobility devices.

If your tenanted space includes **multiple floors** and you install stairs to make it easier to travel between levels, make sure you think about how to make the experience of using the elevators as convenient as possible, too. The “Interior and Exterior Circulation” section in **Part 1** of this Guide offers some guidance.

For spaces where people congregate, the provision of **a variety of seating types and clear space for mobility devices** ensures everyone can use the space.

If you have **washrooms** within your tenanted space, pay special attention to their location and accessibility requirements. If you are designing a space from scratch, it is always helpful to have accessible washrooms located near reception or waiting areas.

Workstations and Meeting Rooms

Why It Matters

Working spaces, whether intended to support work independently or in groups, need to be accessible to anyone and adaptable to the diverse needs and preferences of employees.

Work areas and meeting rooms include anywhere people work or meet. These include dedicated workstations and desks, small meeting rooms and larger conference rooms, lounges, hotel stations or ‘privacy pods’ used for confidential phone calls and conversations.

Quick Wins!

- Make sure paths of travel to and from working areas are kept **clear of obstacles** such as boxes, garbage receptacles and overflow storage.
- Designating certain areas of your tenanted space as **“Quiet Areas”** provides an area of respite for people who benefit from periodic sensory relief. These areas should be marked with signage.
- In meeting rooms, **tables with rounded corners** ensure that people don’t catch clothing, accessories or devices on sharp edges.

Key Features

Workstations and meeting rooms are the spaces where flexibility and adaptability are most important. The more flexible and customizable a workstation is, the more useful it is for anyone. **Height-adjustable chairs and desks** make workspaces ergonomically comfortable for everybody.

Many people respond to stimuli such as light, hot/cold and noise differently. The ability to adjust the environment for your needs is important when employees spend many working hours at workstations. Consider providing **adjustable built environment controls** such as temperature controls, window coverings and task lighting.

Noise pollution between functional spaces can make it difficult to do independent work and can make communication in meeting spaces noisy and more difficult, especially for people who have some degree of hearing loss or who identify as neurodiverse. Evaluate how your functional areas create and contain noise!

Many offices have meeting rooms with glazed surfaces. These spaces create a pleasing open-concept effect, but in some cases, they do not contain noise effectively. Sound is also more likely to reflect off these surfaces, creating reverberations and reflections that can make listening more difficult.

If your meeting rooms deploy technology for virtual/remote meetings, assess the **functionality and usability of audio/visual technology** for someone who has a vision or hearing disability.

Offices and meeting rooms are prone to be cluttered with tables, chairs, boxes and equipment, **reducing the space available for users to move around**.

Kitchens and Lunchrooms

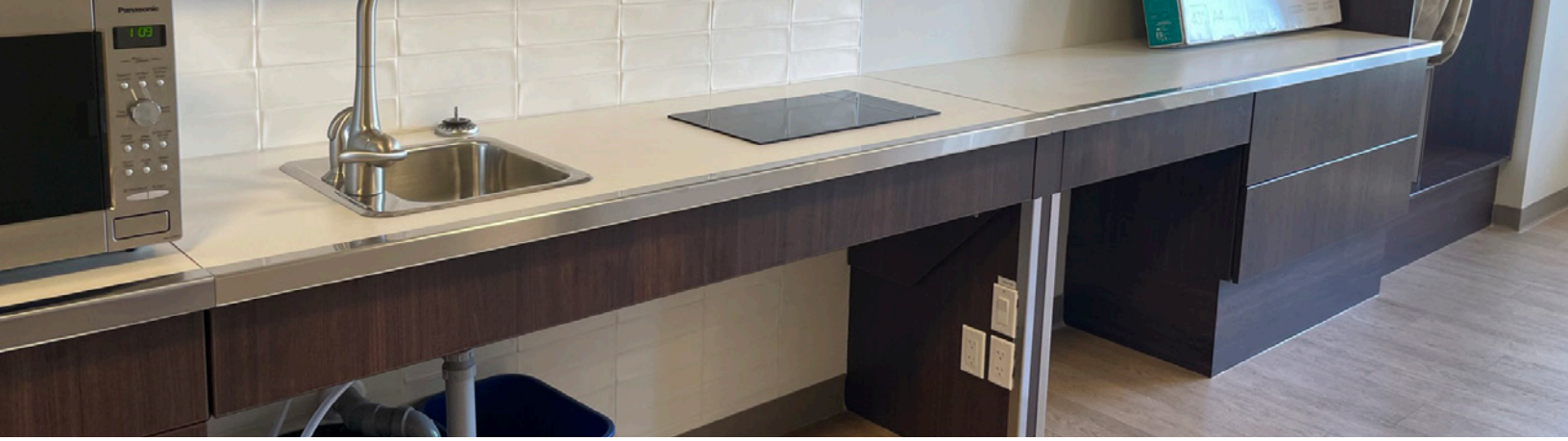
Kitchens and lunchrooms are places where people gather to prepare and eat food and socialize with colleagues. The guidance in this section focuses on smaller kitchens and lunchrooms within tenanted spaces, but its principles can be equally applied to larger, shared cafeterias and eating areas overseen by a property manager.

Why It Matters

Spaces where people gather to prepare and eat food and socialize appear in nearly every office environment in many different settings and configurations. They are also one of the functional areas that present the greatest number of barriers to someone with a disability.

Quick Wins!

- Placing frequently used appliances such as microwaves, kettles and coffee machines on a lower counter height. If these are located somewhere other than kitchen counters, provide a space beside them to put a hot item.
- Using lower kitchen cabinets that are reachable from a seated position to store plates, utensils and any pantry items ensure access for everyone.



Key Features

Spaces intended for food preparation are best located on an **accessible route** and adjacent to any dining or seating areas. For people with mobility devices, clear space to maneuver within the kitchen and to be able to pull up to appliances and counters is especially important.

Kitchen sinks should be at an accessible height with clear space underneath so that someone using a wheeled mobility device can approach the sink and easily reach the tap and faucets.

No-touch accessories such as motion-activated faucets, soap dispensers and towel dispensers are also helpful and should be mounted at a height and distance that can be reached by anyone.

Traditional counter heights will be too high for someone of short stature or who is using the counter from a seated position. **At least a lowered section of the counter** should be provided for someone in a seated position. Make sure that the lower counter height includes knee clearance and is kept free of clutter so that it can be used properly.

Pull-down or reachable cupboards or storage areas, as well as work surfaces adjacent to or under appliances, help ensure ease of use for everyone.

Some people are sensitive to a variety of natural and artificial scents. Exposure to these scents can cause physical or cognitive symptoms. For this reason, it's important that **scents from food preparation areas are contained** in kitchens and lunchrooms.

Support Spaces, Storage and Other Amenities

This section applies to any secondary or ancillary space that is found in an office environment. This typically includes areas such as photocopying, printing rooms or stations, storage rooms and cabinets, staff lockers, mail rooms and more.

Why It Matters

The experience of meaningful access applies to everyone. Because they are most often used only by employees, support and storage spaces are easy to miss when evaluating a space for meaningful access. Staff with disabilities should also be able to use and access those spaces.

Quick Wins!

- People are always moving things in and out of storage rooms, so everyone benefits from storage areas with power-operated doors.
- If your office's primary storage rooms are located somewhere that is inaccessible or far from your primary functional areas and workspaces, provide a smaller storage cabinet or space that includes some of the same essentials close to the functional area where they are expected to be used.

Key Features

In general, **locating support spaces near primary functional areas** will make it easier for anyone to access and use them. Where this is not possible, consider how to provide more accessible short-term storage options closer to primary workspaces.

Some office environments may have storage rooms in areas that do not have an accessible path of travel (for example, a storage room located in a basement that can only be reached by stairs). In such environments, it's helpful to provide frequently accessed supplies in the main tenanted space area.

Operable controls and paper feeders for printers or photocopiers should be reachable from a seated position as not everyone will be able to reach them on a regular-height counter.

Many office environments today do not have assigned or dedicated workstations. These spaces often provide locker storage for employees to store personal belongings and office supplies. Offering **lockers in different sizes, configurations, and shelf heights** provides choice and flexibility.

Why It Matters

We all know what it feels like to be overwhelmed and to need a moment to collect ourselves with dignity and privacy. For people who sometimes experience greater sensory, cognitive or emotional dysregulation in response to their environment, such as people with autism, these effects can be especially pronounced.

Most built environments provide few or no quiet spaces. For that reason, we recommend identifying areas of your space that will serve these important purposes.

Quiet Rooms: Spaces for Sensory Relief and Respite

This section applies to any area of a tenanted space or commercial building and site intended to promote well-being and emotional and cognitive regulation. This includes dedicated sensory/relief rooms (or other spaces that are used for this purpose), designated quiet areas and other examples of features and amenities promoting peace, comfort and well-being.

In some cases, spaces will use an existing space to provide this environment (e.g., an office or meeting room), but these spaces may not be readily available to meet the immediate needs of someone experiencing anxiety, distress or sensory overload.

For that reason, we recommend identifying areas of your space that will serve these important purposes! Where only one dedicated quiet and restorative space or room is provided, it should be designed as a flexible environment with a variety of design options that are customizable to the individual's sensory needs.

Key Features

A **dedicated respite or sensory room** is a permanent and identifiable room used to provide an environment for users seeking relief from overwhelming stimuli, reduce anxiety or regulate emotions and well-being. It may be an area used exclusively for this purpose or a room that serves other functions (such as a meditation/prayer room or first-aid room.

Providing access to **spaces that are calming** can reduce stress and help users with diverse neurological experiences to regain emotional equilibrium. These include many different types of spaces and features, such as designated "quiet" zones, meditation gardens and green/water features.

Dedicated respite areas are often tucked away in lesser-used spaces. This can make them difficult to access when you need them most. Instead, consider how you can integrate respite areas along the **primary accessible path of travel**.

Respite areas must block out **unwanted ambient or background noise**. In general, soft surfaces, such as carpeting, curtains, ceiling tiles and upholstery, will absorb sound and provide a more comforting environment.

Some people who process sensory stimuli differently benefit from **tools, toys and other resources** specifically designed to help them regulate their sensory experiences and improve emotional well-being.

Some examples of helpful tools to provide in respite rooms, reception areas, and other areas susceptible to sensory disruption include noise-cancelling headphones, weighted blankets, rocking chairs, tactile textures, surfaces and toys, sound/noise machines, fidget spinners, books, and interactive displays.

Quick Wins!

There are many ways to improve the experience of meaningful access for people who process sensory information differently:

- For large spaces, use visual and tactile “landmarks” to make it easy for people to orient themselves.
- Provide alternatives to automated and loud accessories in washrooms.
- Identify and replace any noise-producing, strobing or flickering lights.
- Consider if sounds are contained within their functional areas.
- Look at the experience of temperature throughout your space—is it consistent and comfortable?
- Are there any noticeable scents that are unrelated to your space’s primary use?

Important!

Additionally, some buildings provide tenants with access to a range of facilities and amenities, such as fitness rooms, conference rooms, cafeterias, change rooms, laundry facilities, bike rooms, outdoor patios and gardens and many more.

Understanding the accessibility of these facilities and amenities is important to evaluate the experience of meaningful access for your staff and guests. After all, meaningful access doesn't truly exist if barriers prevent someone from using any spaces within a building that should be accessible to everyone.

Part 3

Easy Ways to Enhance Your Space

Part 3 looks at the small improvements that ensure and enhance the experience of meaningful access in any environment with minimal cost.

The Fundamentals

When looking at your space, the following provides some core considerations to keep in mind as you design, build or enhance your tenanted space to ensure meaningful access.

Key Features

Layout

Straight lines make layouts more predictable and, therefore, more navigable. Clustering amenities in a central or consistent location makes them easier to find.

Colour Contrast

People with low vision often cannot see low contrasts. The greater the distance between the colours on the light spectrum, the better!

Illumination and Lighting

Lighting is fundamental to wayfinding, safety and aiding communication, whether it be signing, lip-reading, visual or text-based communication.

Sightlines

Adequate sightlines ensure people with hearing disabilities can interact with and gain vital information about their environment.

Acoustics

Acoustics are important for those who are hard of hearing, and for hearing aid users. They are also important for people with vision disabilities who rely on audible cues.

Height and Location

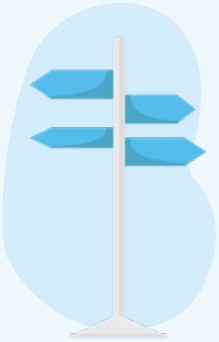
The mounting height and location of accessories, operating mechanisms, or controls, such as light switches and safety controls, should be easy to reach from a seated position. Clear floor space needs to be provided to allow people using mobility devices to position themselves in front of accessories and controls.

Obstacles

Avoid objects that project into space and signage. Obstacles should be eliminated from paths of travel and any areas where appropriate clearance is needed.

Glare

Glare or gloss can cause confusion and/or disorientation by washing out colours and reducing contrast.



Why It Matters

Successful wayfinding strategies help everyone move through spaces safely and easily, including people with a wide range of sensory abilities, intellectual abilities, literacy levels, languages and physical statures.

Wayfinding and Signage

Wayfinding describes how people navigate the built environment to get from one place to another. Effective wayfinding uses many senses and cues, including signage, to communicate information that is helpful to navigating a space.

There are two primary categories of wayfinding strategies—spaces that use wayfinding effectively usually employ both kinds:


IN CASE OF FIRE DO NOT USE ELEVATORS USE STAIRS.
EVACUATION PLAN - FLOOR 18
EMERGENCY
CONTACT
INFORMATION
destination
19
15 16 17
10 11 12 14
6 7 8 9
1M 3 5
P4 P3 P2 1
ANAHEIM DUCKS
SPECTRUM ability

Quick Wins!

Architectural wayfinding strategies are not necessarily complex, expensive or permanent! Sometimes, the effective use of colour and a bucket of paint is enough to help people identify and remember different parts of a space.

3.2 Wayfinding and Signage

Architectural Wayfinding

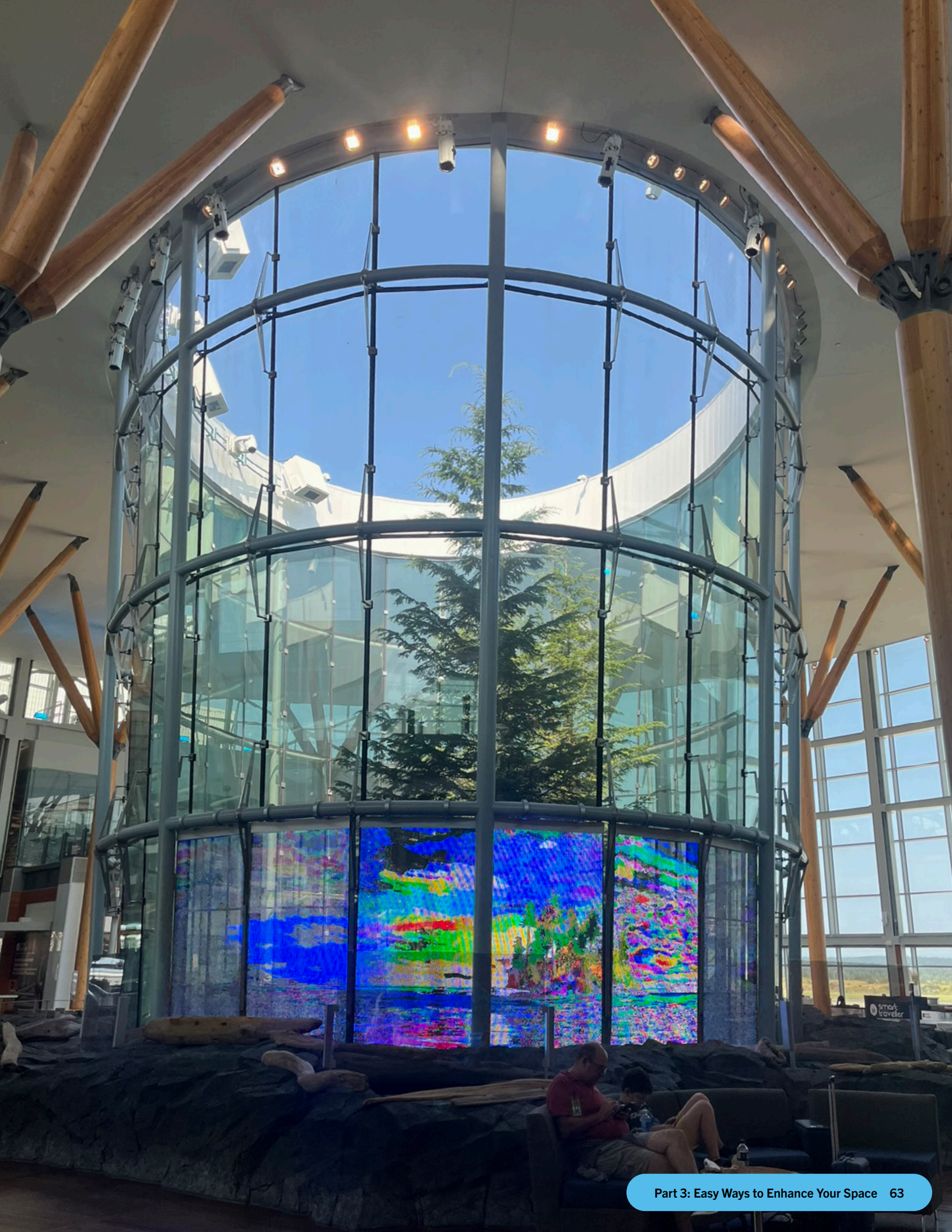
Architectural wayfinding uses interior design features, such as distinctive floor and wall treatments, colour and sound, to delineate and distinguish between spaces. For example, placing a carpeted area adjacent to the linoleum can signal that these are two different spaces.

Key Features

Providing **defined paths, edges and hallways** through features such as walls, screens or columns, especially in open-concept areas.

The predictability of a given space, is a useful tool for someone who is blind or partially sighted. Providing **recurring features in the same place** in each functional area of your space will make your space more memorable and predictable.

Some people have cognitive or spatial disabilities that can make some space disorienting. Using **distinctive features or landmarks** to aid in spatial memory and recall, such as special lighting fixtures, artwork, distinctive wall and floor treatments, colour and biophilic features that can help people identify a particular area or location.



Did You Know?

The best place for room identification signage is on the wall next to the latch side of the door. This helps someone who is blind or partially sighted to identify the room safely out of the door's swing path. Providing signage on the hinge-side wall—or on the door itself—is dangerous if the door opens while someone is attempting to read the room sign.

3.2 Wayfinding and Signage

Informational Wayfinding and Signage

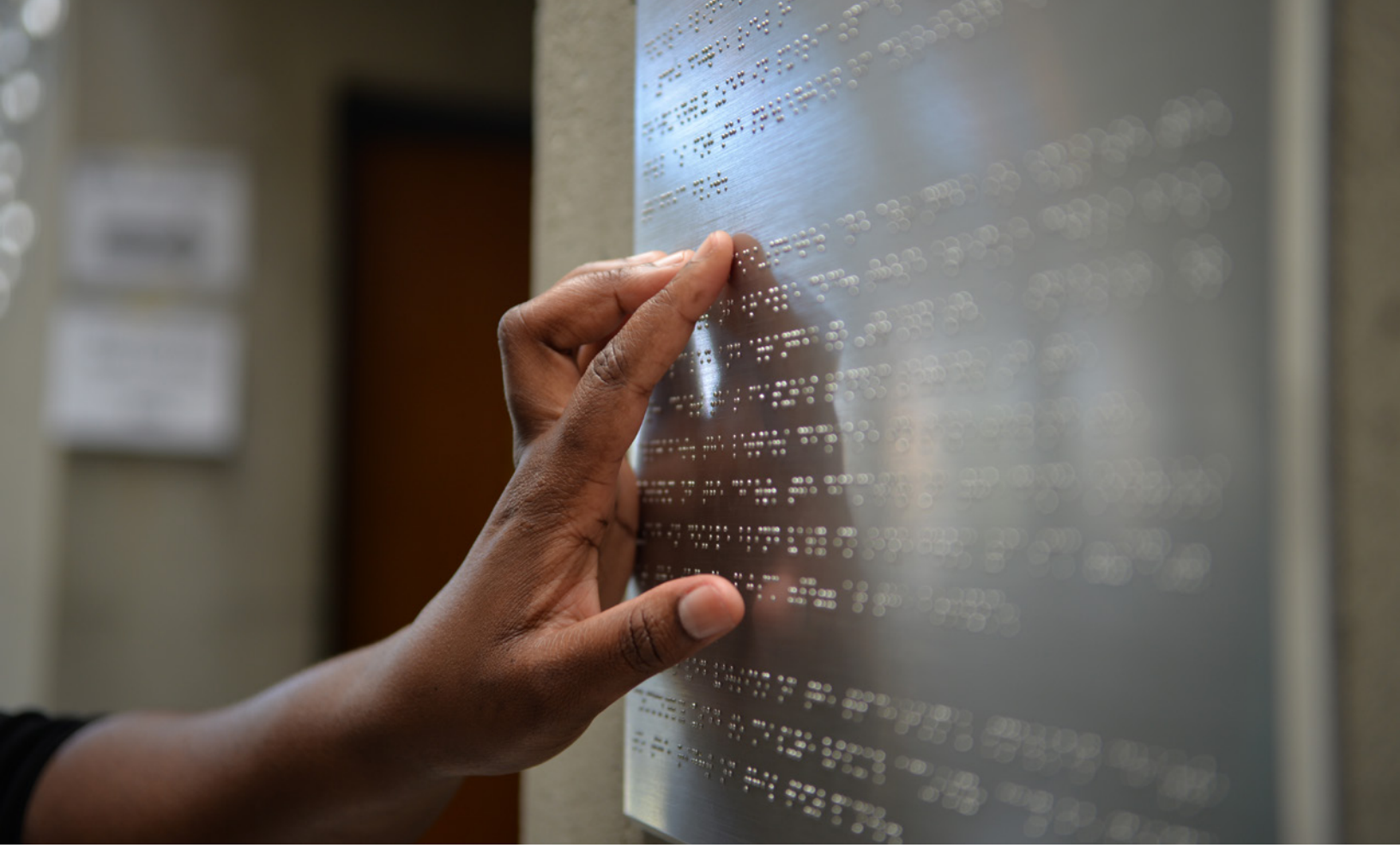
Information wayfinding delivers information through visual, tactile and audible media, such as visual and tactile signs, audible information from public address systems and apps that people can access from mobile devices.

Quick Wins!

Use more than words: Signs incorporating the use of colours, patterns and symbols along with text are helpful for people with learning disabilities or for those who are unfamiliar with the language.

Mount signage at accessible heights and locations: Signs need to be mounted so that people using wheelchairs as well as people with low vision can see them easily. Consistent placement of all signs throughout a building is a significant help for all guests, including persons new to a building or those with a vision disability.

Use blade signage: Blade signage is a wayfinding marker that is mounted perpendicular to a wall. These signs effectively point out an amenity such as a washroom or elevator. They are helpful because they are more likely to be visible from a distance.



Key Features

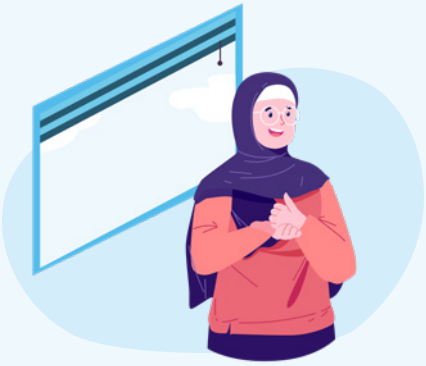
Most signage benefits from greater size, contrast and legibility! Make sure that lettering, numerals and symbols on all signage are **large enough to be clearly visible from a distance** or by someone with reduced vision, with a **high degree of contrast against backgrounds**.

For people who are blind or partially sighted, the location and style of room identification signage is very important. **Room identification signage** should provide a room name and/or number with large, sans-serif fonts, with high contrast against the sign's background, with tactile lettering (such as raised letters and Braille).

The use of digital screens to display room information is becoming more common in many office buildings. Where they are used, it's important to provide information in **alternative formats such as audio or tactile information**.

Illumination

Illumination includes all interior and exterior light sources in your space, including lighting for entrances, hallways, workstations, amenities and stairwells. Make sure to consider all sources of natural and artificial light, including windows, skylights, glazed doors, glazed walls and light fixtures.



Why It Matters

While proper lighting helps everyone, it is particularly important for people with low vision or for anyone who has difficulty making out surroundings when they are too bright or too dark. Good lighting also aids visual communication, such as lip-reading and ASL, or people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Did You Know?

Automatic, timed or sensor lights in washrooms can sometimes leave people in the dark! For this reason, manual light switches are recommended for these areas!

Did You Know?

For accessibility purposes, illumination is about much more than overall light levels. In fact, lighting that is too bright creates barriers for some people with low vision, who may be sensitive to light. Well-illuminated spaces provide sufficient light throughout, with lighting distributed evenly and consistently and minimal glare, pooling or shadows.

Quick Wins!

Evaluating your space's illumination levels during both night and day conditions will help pinpoint where interior lighting is insufficient or problematic areas where daylight isn't being effectively controlled.

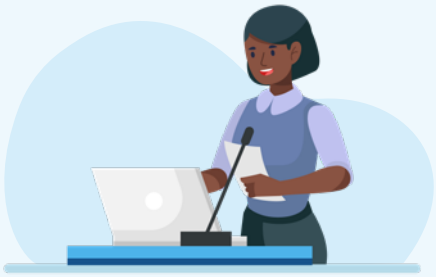
Key Features

Make sure **flooring, walkways, ramps and stairwells surfaces** are fully and evenly illuminated, especially in areas where changes in level are present.

Position lighting so that it **minimizes glare, reflection or shadows**. Glare can cause confusion or disorientation and shadows reduce visibility or create false impressions. All of these create potential trip-and-fall hazards.

Watch out for **abrupt changes** in lighting levels between outdoor and indoor spaces. People should easily transition between outdoor and indoor areas, with no sudden contrast in light levels.

Illumination is an especially important part of **emergency egress**. Photoluminescence (glow-in-the-dark) treatments on fixtures (e.g., obstacles, features, stairs) help wayfinding in the event of a power outage or in smoke filled rooms and stairs.



Why It Matters

Nearly any built environment can improve the experience of meaningful access through the effective deployment of various technologies. Technology is always evolving, and new forms become available in the market each day. They should be considered carefully from the lens of people with varying types of disabilities so that they do not become potential barriers.

Technology

This section applies to the use of a variety of technologies to enrich features of built environments and address gaps and barriers to meaningful access.

What's most important is to understand the basic ways that technologies can enhance the experience of meaningful access and then apply the foundational categories below to your space by asking important questions when evaluating them:

1. Does your space already use technology to make the space more accessible?
2. If so, where and how? Are these technologies helpful across your entire space or limited to just a few areas?
3. Some various technologies are listed on the listed on the following page. Which of these categories have you already considered, and which are new to you?
4. Are the technologies that your space offers working together to create a more seamless experience?
5. Does technology support multiple types of disabilities with both audible and visual features?

Key Features

Environmental Controls: Enables individuals to independently customize the environmental conditions of the built environment to their needs or preferences.

Includes: Adjustable thermostats, light switches, dimmers and sensors, power-operated doors, automated/digitally controlled shades and window treatments and more.

Communication: Improves one-to-one or group communication, in-person or online, usually where communication or transactional activities take place.

Includes: Induction loops, portable hearing systems, accessible conferencing software and hardware, video relay services, closed captioning and descriptive video and more.

Navigation and Emergencies: Tools to help people move through a site or, in the event of an emergency, to exit quickly and safely.

Includes: Navigational beacons, digital maps, mobile applications, mass communication systems and more.

Mind-Friendly: Toys and resources that help individuals regulate sensory overload, supply aids for routines and social interactions, and offer tools for self-regulation.

Includes: Interactive floor or wall panels, sensory lighting, musical water beds, bubble tubes, tactile books, fidget spinners and more.

Why It Matters

Exposure to nature is a fundamental human need offering many health benefits. Access to daylight and natural garden or water features promote stress relief and connect individuals to nature, providing areas to recharge.

These features also help people regulate their senses and emotional responses to stimuli. Besides supporting improved physical and mental health and well-being for everyone, these features play a special role in helping individuals living with autism, dementia, learning disabilities and other neurological experiences.

Natural Features

Natural features include access to outdoor environments such as parks, gardens, paths and trails and indoor features such as green walls and water fountains.

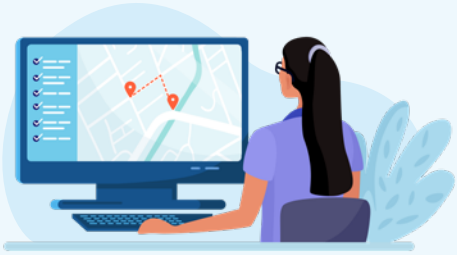
Key Features

Access to **daylight and natural views** improves mood, reduces stress, enhances focus, and creates a more pleasant and sensory-friendly environment.

Biophilic features, such as **green walls, sensory gardens and water fountains,** foster a connection with nature and have a calming and grounding effect.

Did You Know?

In some cases, access to daylight can create design challenges or accessibility barriers, such as light pooling and glare.



Why It Matters

People with disabilities spend a lot of time planning. When you are not sure that you will be able to enter or use a space, it's important to know in advance if a building is likely to meet your needs. Finding accurate information about a space's accessibility features is very helpful and can bring peace of mind.

Access to Information

Providing access to information about the building online is an easy and simple way to help people have a better understanding of what to expect before they arrive.

Key Features

The experience of meaningful access can change day to day. **Up-to-date information about access impacted by events, renovations or maintenance** (such as scheduled elevator closures that restrict access to functional spaces) can be the difference between a successful and frustrating visit.

Sometimes a person with a disability may have a question that's not available online. **Providing contact information** for a staff member who is knowledgeable about the site's accessibility features is a way to offer great service quickly.

Many spaces provide maps and instructions on how to find and get to the space. Including information about the number and location of **accessible parking spaces, passenger loading zones, and transit stops** makes travelling to the space much easier.

Providing detailed information online about the location and features of **accessible washroom facilities** and universal washrooms, as well as other amenities such as sensory rooms, family change rooms, and nursing stations helps people with disabilities know what to expect from your space.

Providing details on the availability of communication technologies, such items as audio accessibility and communication enhancement technologies available in reception/service areas, WIFI availability, and accessible self-service kiosks, informs guests of their availability so they can request them.

What's Next

1 Collect your insights

Making effective decisions to advance meaningful access begins with a strategic and comprehensive approach to evaluating your space. Our intuitions about our space's successes, opportunities and priorities can lead us astray, but the evidence will not. What feedback do we receive most often from guests about accessibility? What do we think we're doing well, and where can we improve?

2 Rate and certify your space with the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) program

a. **Understand your space by identifying current barriers.**
Uncover areas of success and improvement for your site by hiring an RHFAC Professional to rate the experience of meaningful access in your space. This will help you understand how your workspace performs for people with disabilities today and provide practical, useful suggestions to help you prioritize improvements as you embark on your accessibility journey.

b. **Measure progress!**
The pursuit of meaningful access is a continuous journey. This Guide offers multiple strategies that can be implemented to get you started to establish your vision for meaningful access. RHFAC will assist you with measuring progress and making changes in response to the needs of those you serve.

c. **Showcase your space.**
In addition to validating the successful experience of meaningful access for your space, RHFAC offers unique opportunities to promote your commitment to accessibility and showcase your workspace with those you serve.

3 Train staff to be champions of meaningful access

Meaningful access requires a culture shift. Consider additional accessibility education and training opportunities for you, your design team, or operating staff. After all, the experience of meaningful access is shaped not only by the physical features of your space but also by your team's understanding, confidence and skills to support people with disabilities in your space.

The Rick Hansen Foundation offers a variety of training courses and seminars on access and inclusion, including RHFAC Professional Training. For more details about the training, visit **RickHansen.com/Courses** to find out which ones will suit your needs and those of your organization.

4 Bring RHFAC Professionals to help

New build-outs and major renovations are excellent opportunities to make site improvements and enhance meaningful access. In most cases, these goals can be achieved with no or minimal extra costs. If this sounds like you, we recommend requesting the services of designated RHFAC Professionals experienced in construction and renovations, who can provide invaluable advice to support you and your project.

For more information about rating a site, download the **RHF Guide to Accessibility Certification.**

Notes

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