

Missed Bu\$iness?



**How to attract more
customers by providing
better access to your business**



Knox City Council

Council & Community: A Partnership in Progress



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Missed Bu\$iness?

Knox Disability Advisory Committee has great pleasure in presenting Missed Business, a joint initiative of Knox City Council and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Knox City Council is committed to ensuring access and inclusion for all residents, including people with a disability, who live in or visit Knox.

Access issues affect everyone, especially people using prams, older residents and people with a disability.

This guide will assist small businesses by improving access for people with a disability, business potential will also increase.

Missed Bu\$iness?

The City of Knox is home to a \$3.5 billion dollar economy consisting of around 9,000 businesses with a labour force in excess of 84,000 persons. Our industry capabilities reflect this diversity from the humblest of handcrafts to world leading technologies in jet airline component supplies and new generation industries in micro and nano technology.

Knox City Council is strongly committed to ensuring that everyone in our community can enjoy the many social, cultural and business benefits of living in Knox. One way Council meets this commitment is by assisting small businesses to establish and thrive in the area. Please register with Business Direct – **www.knoxbusinessdirect.com.au**

Quality service is one of the most important things any small business can offer.

Improving access to your goods and services may help connect you with a large part of the Knox community that you may be missing in your marketing – customers who have a disability or other access requirements.

This guide aims to help you to reach those potential customers.

Contents

You could be missing potential customers	2
Which customers are we talking about?	3
Good access makes good business sense	4
Meeting your legal responsibilities	5
Footpath Trading Policy	6
Four ways to improve access for all your customers	8
1. Make it easy for people to find you	8
2. Make it easy for people to get in	11
3. Make it easy for people to move around	14
4. Make the most of customer service	18
Access checklist	23
Where to get more information	Back Page

You could be missing out on potential customers

In Knox, approximately 29,000 people, or **19 percent** of residents are identified as having a disability.* Together with their friends and families, the number of people affected by a disability is even larger, and every one of them is a potential customer.

More than half of people aged 55 years and over have difficulties with mobility, sight and hearing. With an ageing population this is a particularly important consideration. While older people may not consider themselves as having a disability, easier access would be a great benefit to them.

*National Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers by ABS (2003) combined with population estimates & projections for Victorian Local Government Area.



Which customers are we talking about?

Providing good access to your business will benefit:

- people who are blind or partially sighted
- people with learning or 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
- people with an acquired brain injury

Good access also benefits:

- parents or carers of young children, especially those with strollers or prams
- older people
- delivery people
- shoppers with heavy bags
- every customer, especially when it's busy.

**Can you afford to
miss all this business?**

Good access makes good business sense

As potential customers, each of these people will make choices about your business based on how easy it is to access.

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

If you make an effort to provide clear corridors, then people will appreciate the ease of shopping at your business.

If your staff are trained to be respectful – not patronising – then people with a disability will more likely become regular customers.



Meeting your legal responsibilities

Improving access will also assist businesses to meet their legal responsibilities.

In Australia, the law stipulates that customers with disabilities should be able to access your goods or services like any other customer. If a customer with a disability cannot access your building or cannot access your goods or services, they can make a complaint of discrimination under either State (Victorian-Equal Opportunity Act) or Federal (Disability Discrimination Act) laws.

By making your business more accessible, it is also likely to make it safer for both customers and staff. It could have an effect on public liability and workplace safety responsibilities.

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

Remember...

What you do to improve accessibility doesn't have to be expensive – a combination of 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.

Street trading guidelines

Knox City Council has adopted Street Trading guidelines as part of Council's commitment to ensuring a safe and accessible environment for all people within our community. The regulations will also ensure Council is complying with the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act.

The guidelines require you to maintain a clear footpath directly in front of your business. You are not able to place your café furniture, goods or signage adjacent to your shop front – instead these items can only be placed closer to the roadway, away from your building (as per diagram). A continuous path must be maintained at all times in line with Australian Standards.

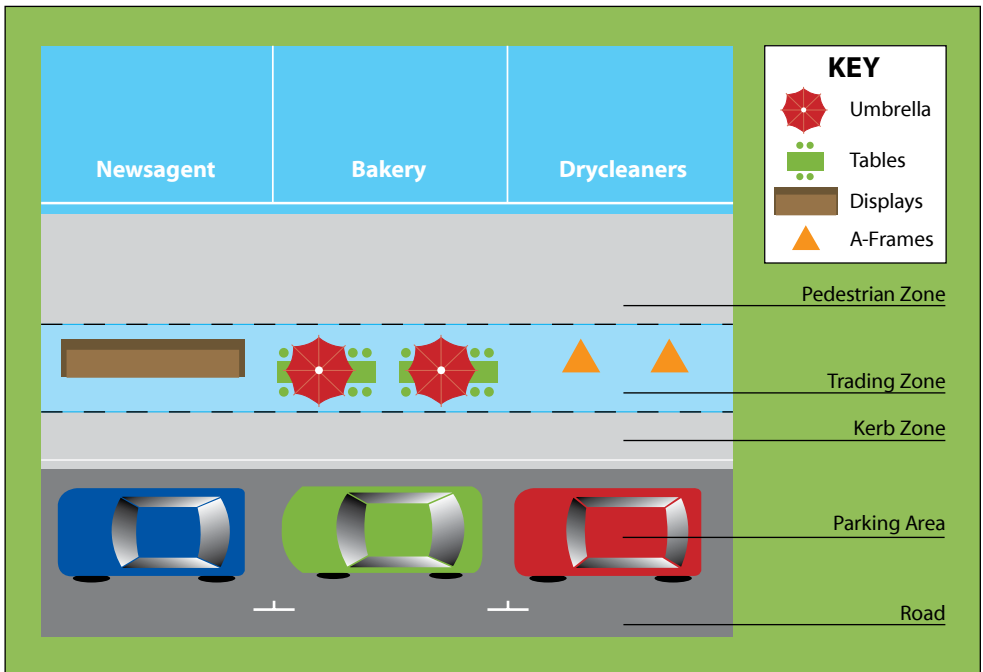
Why is a clear footpath important?

A clear footpath is important for vision impaired people who often use the front of buildings as a guide to their passage of travel through shopping precincts and will ensure there are no unexpected obstacles hindering their path. In addition, the clear path ensures that people using wheelchairs or people with other mobility aids will have no trouble in using the footpath or gaining entry to your store.

While the changes will make gaining access to your business easier for people with a disability, they will also bring the added benefit of making it easier for others, such as parents with prams or shoppers with buggies, to gain entry to your store.

If you use the footpath outside your business for goods, signage or table and chairs, **a permit is required**. Contact Council's Local Laws to discuss what is required under the Local Law Guidelines for your area. A Local Laws Officer can visit you to provide support and assistance in helping you meet the requirements.

If you would like more information, please contact Local Laws Department on 9298 8000 or visit www.knox.vic.gov.au



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 there are some simple steps to make your business easier to locate.

Advertise your advantages

- Let people know your business is accessible. For example, include wheelchair access in your promotions and advertisements.
- Display clear external signs to help people with vision impairments or learning difficulties identify your shop.

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 a vision impairment. Highly contrasting colours not only distinguish an 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 each entrance.

- Be aware of reflective glass in your shop front. For people with a vision impairment this often presents a confusing picture of reflections, light and shadows. A good solution is to place safety markings on the glass so people don't walk into it. It is also easier to distinguish between the window display and the doorway.

Avoid obstructions

- Remove dangerous obstacles from the entrance eg. advertising boards, displays or furniture, so people who use wheelchairs, older people, or people with a vision impairment are not at risk of falling over them.
- If you are permitted to have advertising boards, display items or furniture outside your business, make sure there is a clear accessible pathway along the building line.



Tip

Think about your surroundings

It also pays to look at your business surroundings. You will probably need to talk to Council about these matters.

Carparks

Think about making at least one wider customer car space for people with a disability to use.

Pathways

Make sure the path from the carpark 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 carparks and pathways safer?

Hazards

Make sure overhanging trees or signage do not create a hazard to a person who is blind or vision impaired.

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 one or several steps, or present access barriers in other ways. Here are some ideas on how to make it easy for customers to enter 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

- Remove steps and provide a level entry.
- If you can't provide a level entry, ramps are an alternative.
- If these are not possible, consider moving the main entrance to another more accessible position.



'There is no doubt that improved access has helped my business. A lot of customers comment on the ramp, not just people with disabilities also parents with prams & people in general.'

Business Owner



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.
- Doorways should be wide enough to allow a person with a walking frame or someone who uses a wheelchair to pass through with ease.
- If the door 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 level with the surrounding floor
- Install handrails.

Clear sight lines

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

3 Make it easy for people to move around

Customers with disabilities should be able to find their way to all sales areas. They should be able to 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 can assist you to understand and meet the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.

For people who may have difficulty hearing

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

Hearing loop: Consider installing a 'hearing loop' or other systems to assist people using hearing aids at counters, especially if there is a counter screen from the public.



For people who are blind or have vision impairments

Signs: Make sure signs and product pricing labels are clear. Use high contrast colours. Ensure overhanging signs do not cause a hazard.

Information: Make board menus in cafes or product information displays easy to read. Provide written menus or other product information in large print versions (eg 18 point Arial) or have staff read information to customers. Consider the possibility of providing information such as menus in Braille.

Lighting: Consider improving lighting, especially around service counters.

Layout: Avoid dangerously placed fittings and fixtures that can make independent movement difficult for vision impaired customers. Make sure aisles provide a clear path of travel and do not have protruding displays.

EFTPOS: Electronic payment system and EFTPOS machines should have the features that enable vision impaired people to use them.



"I go to businesses that are easily accessible both at the entrance and within the store. These are places I go back to and recommend to friends". KNOX RESIDENT

For people with mobility impairments

Aisles: Make sure shopping aisles are wide enough (preferably 1.2 metres).

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

Reach: Try to place goods, especially the most popular items, within reach of someone using a wheelchair. If this is not always possible, make sure staff are trained to offer assistance.

Chairs: If your customers need to wait, make a chair available for older or frail people, those using crutches or who have poor balance.

Surfaces: Make sure the floor surface is non-slip and free from trip hazards.

EFTPOS: Ensure that electronic payment systems and EFTPOS machines are on a long enough cord 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 other situations where customers may be on the premises for a period of time) an accessible toilet should be provided where possible. Under Planning Laws a unisex accessible toilet counts as a male and a 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 obtain technical advice on how to do so.

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.

Training staff on effective communication and how to give practical assistance to customers when needed, is not difficult.

Respect

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 other people who may be with them (such as a Deaf sign interpreter).

Giving assistance: Always ask the customer first if they want help; never assume they need assistance and accept the answer if the customer declines help. If you have a conversation lasting more than a few moments with a customer using a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.

Asking questions: Remember – ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided, especially where there are barriers to equal access.

Communication

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

Being clear: Address the customer directly, listen carefully, speak clearly and check for understanding. Always use clear 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 information. Reassure your customer you are there to help if they forget the information.

For people who are hearing impaired or 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 away from background noise.

Interpreters: If your customer has a sign language interpreter, always address your comments directly to your customer rather than to the interpreter.

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

For people who have a speech impairment:

Sound: Talk in a quiet environment if possible.

Allowing time: Be patient, don't be afraid to ask the person to repeat themselves. Ask the person to say the request using different words if you can't understand.

Aids: Ask a person to give you a clue to the subject or spell a word – they may have a communication board or alternatively use a pad and pen. If a person is using an electronic communication aid stand in front of them, refrain from reading over their shoulder.

For people who have a 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 they know you are talking to them and not to 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 harness. It is a working animal under the control of its owner. In accordance with Victorian State Laws a person accompanied by a Guide Dog is permitted to enter any public space, including restaurants and food stores.



For further information and supplies of Guide Dogs Welcome window stickers, please contact Guide Dogs Victoria on 03 9854 4444 or at www.guidedogs.asn.au.

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

Here are some examples:

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

Alternatives such as these will improve equality for people with disabilities and assist in reducing the chances of a complaint.

A checklist is provided (pg 23), as a guide to help improve the accessibility of your retail outlet. This can also be used as a guide for planning improvements or selecting a new premises.

What's the best language to use?

If you are making the effort to improve accessibility to your business, it is also important to make sure your staff and business signage are 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 someone confined to one.
- a person who is blind rather than a person who suffers blindness.



Access checklist for retail outlets

General Access Issues To Consider

Does your retail outlet have:	YES	NO
Accessible parking close by	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessible public transport close by	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear internal & external signage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A clear external building line at front of premises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A clear path of travel from outdoor to indoor areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wide clear internal walkways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Step free access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wide self opening or easy to open doors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Color contrast door frames	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low height service counters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low pile carpet or slip resistant flooring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ramp or lift access to all levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessible website with information about services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet shopping service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Direct access to an accessible toilet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternatives to visible & audible information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welcoming staff, trained in access awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Further contacts:

For more information on planning issues, building approvals, Knox City Council's access requirements and ways to support access for all contact:

Knox City Council

Phone: 9298 8000

Web: www.knox.vic.gov.au

Business Directory: www.knoxbusinessdirect.com.au

Speak to:

- City Development – Planning/Building Staff
- Community Action – MetroAccess Officer

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

- Access Audits Australia

Phone: 9431 3472

Web: www.accessauditsaustralia.com.au

- Association Of Consultants in Access – Australia

Phone: Victoria - (03) 5221 2820

Web: www.access.asn.au

- Standards Australia

Phone: 1300 654 646

Web: www.standards.com

For more information on legal issues and responsibilities:

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

Phone: 1300 369 711 (toll free)

Web: www.hreoc.gov.au

- Equal Opportunity Commission – Victoria

Phone: 1800 134 142

Web: www.eoc.vic.gov.au

If you would like this publication in braille, audio or community languages please contact Knox City Council, Community Services, Phone 9298 8524, TTY 9298 8521 or email: knoxcc@knox.vic.gov.au.