

A guide for business

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

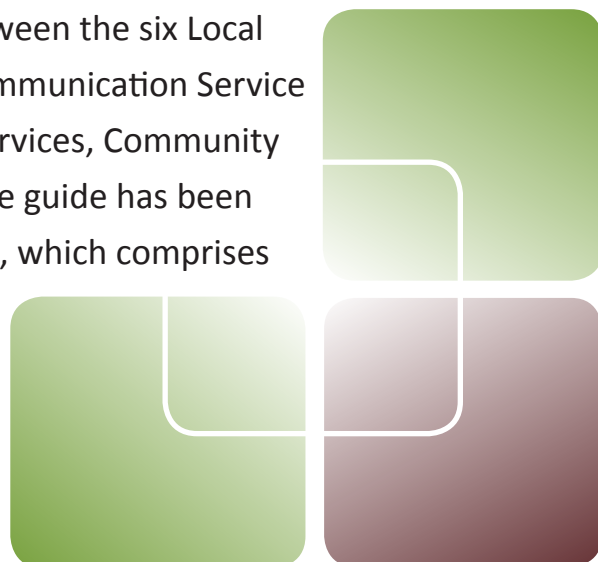
Good Access is Good Business





Acknowledgements

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You could be missing out on customers!

In Australia, 4 million people or almost 20 per cent of the population, have one or more disabilities (ABS, 2009). This increases to 35% when you include people with temporary disabilities resulting from injury or illness. Together with their friends and families, the number of people affected by disability is bigger still and all could be your customers.

In Gippsland, 32,500 people have a disability. If each individual is accompanied by a friend or family member this means that everyday, around 65,000 local people choose to shop, do business or visit tourist destinations based on how easy they are to access and the quality of service provided.

Over half of Gippsland's population is aged 55 or older and this figure will increase into the future. Some older people may experience difficulties with mobility, sight and hearing but may not consider that they have a disability. Easier access to business and services helps everyone, including you, by increasing your customer base.

People with disability and older people contribute to the richness of our diverse community. The more you can reflect the diversity of your customer base and community in your business, the more successful you will be.

Your Council is committed to ensuring that every person in our community is able to enjoy the many social, cultural and business benefits of living in Gippsland. One way it does this is to help businesses like yours establish and thrive in the Gippsland area.

As you would be aware, quality service is one of the most important things your business can offer. This guide aims to help you, as a business owner or operator, to understand how to improve access to your goods and services for a large part of the community you may be missing out on - customers with disability.



Which customers are we talking about?

Providing good access to your business will benefit:

- people who have low vision
- people with learning or intellectual disabilities
- people who are deaf or hard of hearing
- people with physical disability who may use a mobility aid such as a wheelchair, mobility scooter or walking frame
- people with long-term illnesses
- people with a mental health condition
- people with temporary illness or injury, and
- people who are older.

Good access also benefits:

- parents or carers of young children - particularly those with prams
- delivery people
- shoppers with heavy bags
- every customer - especially when it's busy
- employees with disability



Can you afford to miss out on all this business?



Darren and Daphne walking along a Leongatha street that complies with the Footpath Trading Code



“When the footpath is free from obstacles, Daphne and I can enjoy the walk”.

“I live in town and I like to walk down the street to do my banking and shopping, and to meet friends for coffee. When the footpath is free from obstacles, Daphne and I can enjoy the walk, and the independence and health benefits, just as others do”.

Darren, Leongatha.



Good access makes good business sense

As potential customers, everyone will make choices about your business based on how easy it is to use. For example, if a person uses a wheelchair for mobility and there's a step at your front entrance, they, their friends and family, will probably go to another business which has a flat entrance or a ramp. Alternatively, if your business has easy access but the customer finds your staff unhelpful or unfriendly, they may not come back.

If you make an effort to provide easy access into your business and your shopping areas are uncluttered, people will appreciate the ease of shopping in your business. If you and your staff are courteous and friendly, all people, including people with disability are more likely to become regular customers.

People with disability have a range of valuable skills and abilities which could be useful in your business. Employing people with disability is a proactive way to meet the current and changing needs of your customer base. Providing good access will enable you to access this growing skill base. For advice and assistance about employing people with disability, information about wage subsidies and workplace training and modifications, see **“Where to get more information”** at the end of this guide.

Remember: What you do to improve accessibility doesn't have to be expensive. Providing easier entry and educating staff will go a long way to making your business more attractive to many people, including people with disability.

“It's a win”

“It's a win for the individual, my business and the community”, says business owner, Lucy, about Emily's employment at her cafe.

Emily and Cathy,
Gatha Foodstore, Leongatha



Meeting your legal responsibilities

As a business owner or operator, improving access to your business will also assist you to meet your legal responsibilities.

In Australia, the law says that customers with disabilities should be able to access your goods or services just like any other customer. If a customer with disability cannot access your building, your goods or services, they could make a complaint of discrimination under either State anti-discrimination laws, or the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Under law, both the business operator and building owner may be liable for providing access. A complaint can be lodged by any person against the operator, owner or both.

Making your business more accessible is likely to make it safer for both customers and staff alike. The provision of good access may also have a positive effect on your public liability and workplace safety responsibilities.

For more information on your legal obligations see **“Where to get more information”** at the end of this guide.



“Steve is a valued employee - he’s coming up to 10 years service next year. His pride in his work is a positive reflection on Steve as an employee and us as employer”.

Daniel, Steve’s Manager,
Woolworths, Leongatha.

Steve and his work colleagues, Woolworths Leongatha



Four ways to improve access for your customers

1. Make it easy for people to find you

To attract more customers, try following these simple steps to make your business easier to find and get to:

Advertise your advantages

- If your business is accessible, let people know. For example, if you have wheelchair access include this in your promotions and advertisements.
- Put up clear external signs to help people with low vision or communication difficulties identify what type of business you operate.

Make the entrance easy to see

- Ensure the entrance to your business contrasts well with the surroundings. This will make it stand out for people with low vision. Highly contrasting colours assist in distinguishing an entrance from the general environment and make it easier to tell the difference between the immediate door surrounds and doorway itself.
- If there is more than one entrance to your business ensure you provide clear directions to each entrance, including the wheelchair accessible entrance (if separate).
- Be aware of reflective glass in your shop front. People with low vision may find this confusing. Installing a solid contrasting strip on the glass so people don't walk into it is a great solution, making it easier to tell the difference between the window display and the doorway.



Four ways to improve access for your customers

Avoid obstructions

- Advertising boards, displays or furniture placed outside on the footpath or near the entry can discourage people from entering your shop or may form a trip hazard.
- If you are permitted to have advertising boards, display goods or furniture outside your business, make sure there is a clear accessible pathway along the shop front. Check with the Local Laws Department of your local Council for more information on Council regulations for Footpath Trading.

Your local Council seeks to provide a safe, attractive and accessible streetscape and welcomes your ideas about how best this can be achieved. Consider the surroundings of your business; you may need to speak with your local Council about these matters.

Car Parks	Look for opportunities to improve accessible car parking facilities in your local area.
Pathways	Ensure the path from parking bays to your entrance is accessible for a person using a wheelchair (wider and more even) and less slippery for someone older or a person using a walking aid.
Lighting	Check lighting to ensure car parks and pathways are well lit to improve safety and accessibility.
Hazards	Make sure overhanging trees or signage do not cause a hazard to your customers.



Four ways to improve access for your customers

2. Make it easy for people to get in

Ideally all customers should be able to enter your shop independently. However, the main entrance may have a step, or other potential access challenges. Here are some ideas on how to make it easy for customers to get into your business.

While many of these ideas are easy to put into practice, some require technical advice to ensure they are undertaken correctly, comply with Australian Standards and local Council regulations - see **“Where to get more information”** at the end of this guide.

Level access

- Ideally remove steps and provide a level entry.
- If you can't provide a level entry, build a ramp (maximum gradient 1:14)
- If this is not possible for technical or financial reasons, consider moving the main entrance to a more accessible location.

Better doors and doorways

- Reposition the entrance door handles to an accessible height (900-1000mm above floor level).
- Make the door easier to open by making it automatic or lighter.
- Make the doorway wide enough (minimum 850mm clearance) to allow a person with a walking frame or someone who uses a wheelchair to pass through with ease.



Four ways to improve access for your customers

Better doors and doorways

- If the door is made of reflective glass, attach solid contrasting strips (75mm wide, positioned between 900 - 1000 mm above floor level) so people do not walk into it.
- Make sure any doormats are secure and only use them if they can be made flush with the surrounding floor.
- Install handrail(s) which comply with Australian Standards on ramps and stairs, where appropriate.

Clear sight lines

- If possible make sure there are clear sight lines between the entry and the counter so that staff are aware if a customer needs assistance to enter the premises or purchase goods.



Wide unobstructed level entry doorways invite everybody in.

“This means my family and friends can shop with me”

Laura - Larsen's Jewellers
Bairnsdale



Four ways to improve access for your customers

3. Make it easy for people to get around

Once inside your shop or premises all customers should be able to find their way to all sales areas, browse and inspect goods, bring them to the counter for payment or receive services.

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

For people who are blind or have low vision

Signs	Make sure signs and product pricing labels are clear and use high contrast colours such as dark print on a light background. Ensure overhanging signs do not cause a hazard.
Information	<p>Make menus in cafes or product information easier to read by using clear and appropriate size font, such as Arial or Helvetica in minimum 12 point.</p> <p>Have large print versions (minimum 18 size font) on hand, or have staff read information out to customers. Look at the possibility of providing information such as menus in Braille</p>
Lighting	Improve lighting, especially around service counters.
Layout	Avoid dangerously placed fittings and fixtures to ensure customers can move around freely. Make sure your aisles provide a clear path of travel and displays do not create hazards.
EFTPOS	Make sure the electronic payment system and EFTPOS machines have features for people with low vision.



Four ways to improve access for your customers

For people who are Deaf or hard of hearing

- Noise** Find ways to reduce the amount of background noise and if music is playing, keep it at a low volume.
- Hearing Loop** Look into installing a “hearing loop” or other system to assist people using hearing aids at counters, especially if there is a screen from the public at the counter.

For people with limited mobility

- Aisles** Make sure shopping aisles are wide enough, at least 1.2 metres wide
- Counters** Ensure at least part of your customer service area is at a height that is suitable for people using wheelchairs (830mm - 870mm from floor level). Make sure that at least one of your checkout aisles is wide enough, has a lower checkout counter and is always open.
- Reach** Try to place goods, particularly the most popular ones, within reach of someone using a wheelchair. If this is not always possible, make sure staff offer assistance.
- Chairs** If your customers need to wait, make a chair available for someone who may be older, frail, use a walking aid or have poor balance. Chairs should be stable and have back and arm rests.
- EFTPOS** Ensure that electronic payment systems and EFTPOS machines are on a long enough cord (or cordless) to pass over to someone using a wheelchair.
- Surfaces** Make sure the floor surface is free from trip hazards and is non-slip.



Four ways to improve access for your customers

Should you be providing accessible toilets?

Where toilets are provided for the public, an accessible toilet should be provided where possible. Under building laws a unisex accessible toilet counts as a male and female toilet. If you do not have an accessible toilet make sure all staff know the location of the nearest accessible toilet so they can direct customers. If you decide to make your toilet accessible you should get technical advice on how to do so - see **“Where to get more information”** at the end of this guide.

“I have my favourite shops that I regularly visit in the local area; they have courteous and helpful staff, are easy to get into and present their goods neatly and conveniently, making my choices a breeze.

I don't hesitate to recommend these stores to my friends, family and local tourists”



Salli accessing Pelican View,
San Remo Fisherman's Cooperative, Victoria



Four ways to improve access for your customers

4. Make the most of customer service

When talking about “improving access” it’s easy to think only in terms of installing ramps, toilets and other fixtures, but one of the most simple and cheapest solutions is to change the way you think about customer service. It’s not difficult to educate your staff on how to communicate effectively with all your customers and how to give practical assistance when it’s needed.

Respect

Treat customers with disabilities as you should all customers, with respect.

Focus on the person

Treat each customer with disability as an individual 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 accompanying the person.

Offer assistance

Always ask the customer first if they want help - don’t assume they need assistance, and accept the answer if the answer is no. If you have a conversation that will last more than a few moments with a customer using a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.

Ask questions

Ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided.

“We treat all our customers the same”.

“We get to know each other and enjoy each others company”.

Belinda, Maffra Bakery



Communication

People might have communication difficulties such as:

- no speech
- a very quiet voice
- unclear speech
- limited English
- very fast or very slow speech

There are many ways to communicate:

- write messages
- point to real objects
- draw a picture
- text message on a mobile phone
- point to pictures on a communication board
- use voice output communication devices



“I believe people with disability, like all of my customers, have the right to enter my store through the front door, choose their goods and make purchases independently.”

John, Owner, Cleanskin Kitchenware, Cowes, Phillip Island

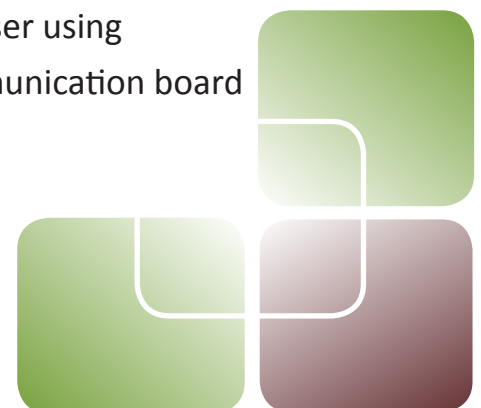
Damian being served by Cleanskin Kitchenware employee, Lara

For people who have communication difficulties

- Be clear - Address the customer directly, listen carefully, speak clearly and check for understanding. Always use clear language without being patronising.
- Allow time - Allow your customer time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people with an intellectual disability with information. Reassure your customer you are there to help if they forget the information.
- Ask yes / no questions to clarify communication.
- Give the customer the option to show you what they want to communicate.
- Some people prefer to communicate using Auslan, Australian Sign Language.
- Remember: the best communication tip is to be patient.
- Your shop could have a communication board. A communication board is a card with pictures and words on it. Customers can point to the pictures to communicate a message; they do not have to use speech.
- If you would like to know more OR develop a communication board for your business, contact the Regional Communication Service - see **“Where to get more information”** at the end of this guide.



Bus user using
Communication board



For people who are Deaf or hard of hearing

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 you clearly.

Sound

Use your normal tone of voice and volume. Reduce background noise and repeat yourself if asked to.

Interpreters

If your customer has a sign language interpreter, 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 customers.

Leisa & Brooke using Auslan,
Sale Library



For people who are blind or have low vision

- Use names** Always identify yourself by name. If appropriate, ask the customer for their name so you can address them directly and so that they know you are talking to them and not to someone else.
- Offer assistance** If a customer asks for assistance to move around your shop, offer your arm so they can hold your arm just above your elbow.
- Guide dogs** Never pat or distract a guide dog or offer it food while it is in harness: it's a working animal under the control of its owner.

The best way of attracting business and fulfilling your legal responsibilities is to make your business as accessible as possible. Where it's not possible to provide full access in the short term, you might consider other ways of providing the same service.

Find other ways to provide service:

Here are some examples:

- A butcher's shop may operate a telephone, mail order or local delivery service.
- A florist might operate an internet service, have staff put together an order and bring the goods to the front door or the nearest easy collection point.
- A hairdresser may offer a home visiting service for customers.
- An estate agent might consider providing their service in an accessible location, either by appointment or on a regular basis.

These approaches will not provide full equality for people with disabilities, but will assist in improving access to your business and reducing the basis for a complaint being made.



What's the best language to use?

If you are making the effort to create a business that is more accessible, it's also important to ensure your staff and the signage you use is part of that effort.

Use signage that identifies:

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

and always refer to:

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



Where to get more information

For more information on planning issues, building law and local access requirements, contact the Planning Officer, Building Surveyor or Rural Access Worker at your local Council.

Baw Baw Shire Council

Address: PO Box 304, Civic Place
Warragul, Victoria 3820
Tel: (03) 5624 2411
Fax: (03) 5622 3654
Email: bawbaw@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au
Website: www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au

Bass Coast Shire Council

Address: PO Box 118, 76 McBride Avenue
Wonthaggi, Victoria 3995
Tel: 1300BCOAST (226 278)
Fax: (03) 5671 2222
Email: basscoast@basscoast.vic.gov.au
Website: www.basscoast.vic.gov.au

East Gippsland Shire Council

Address: PO Box 1618, 273 Main Street
Bairnsdale, Victoria 3875
Tel: (03) 5153 9500
Fax: (03) 5153 9576
Email: feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au
Website: www.egipps.vic.gov.au

Latrobe City Council

Address: PO Box 264, 141 Commercial Road
Morwell, Victoria 3840
Tel: 1300 367 700
Fax: (03) 5128 5672
Email: latrobe@latrobe.vic.gov.au
Website: www.latrobe.vic.gov.au

Wellington Shire Council

Address: PO Box 506, 70 Foster Street
Sale, Victoria 3850
Tel: 1300 366 244
Fax: (03) 5142 3499
Email: enquiries@wellington.vic.gov.au
Website: www.wellington.vic.gov.au

South Gippsland Shire Council

Address: Private Bag 4, 9 Smith St
Leongatha, Victoria 3953
Tel: (03) 5662 9200
Fax: (03) 5662 3754
Email: council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au
Website: www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Where to get more information

For more information on **communication**

Regional Communications Service (SCOPE) servicing all of Gippsland

Address: 12 George Street, Warragul, Victoria 3820

For more information on **Deafness or hard of hearing**

Deaf Access Gippsland

Address: PO Box 9314, Sale, Victoria 3853

Tel Voice / TTY: (03) 5143 1537

SMS: 0408 637 880

Fax: (03) 5143 1814

Email: gippsland@vicdeaf.com.au

For more information on **design ideas** and contacting an **Access Consultant**

Association of Consultants in Access Australia Inc

Tel: (03) 5221 2820

Web: www.access.asn.au

For more information on **employing** people with disability

Job Access - An Australian Government Initiative

Help and workplace solutions for the employment of people with disability

Tel: 1800 464 800

Web: www.jobaccess.gov.au

For more information on **legal issues** and **responsibilities**

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Address: Level 3, 240 Lygon St, Carlton, Victoria, 3053

Tel: 1300 292 153

Web: www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Australian Human Rights Commission

(or your State or Territory anti-discrimination agency)

Tel: 1300 369 711

Web: www.humanrights.gov.au

“I always go back to businesses where people treat me well. If I find a cafe or shop where I feel welcome and I get good service, I will be a long term customer. I have recently joined a local gym where they have really gone out of their way to make sure I have a good experience there, I now go there three times a week” Ross, Moe

