



Disability Access Guide for the Mount Alexander Shire

Mount Alexander Shire
Disability Advocacy Group



INTRODUCING MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE DISABILITY ADVOCACY GROUP (MASDAG)

The Mount Alexander Shire Disability Advocacy Group (MASDAG) are an independent advocate proudly auspiced by Castlemaine Community House.

Our work is informed by the social model of disability which explains that disability stems from communities, services and spaces that are not accessible or inclusive. It is society that places limits on people, not the person and their disability.

Our aim is to promote systemic change that supports equitable social participation for the wide range of disabilities experienced by residents in Mount Alexander Shire.

By systemic change, we mean:

- Promoting disability awareness and community education
- To collaborate with Mount Alexander Shire Council on policy, planning and information
- Taking action on known safety trouble spots for all pedestrians (including those with low vision, or using sticks, walking frames, prams, wheelchair, scooters or crutches)
- Making ourselves available to groups and organisations to provide feedback on project designs to ensure adequate and safe disability access
- Following up with VicRoads, VicTrack and VicRail where disability access and safety issues are raised
- Providing disability access information and guidelines for event organisers.

We understand the importance of social inclusion for everyone, including people with disabilities, their families and carers.

MASDAG meets on the fourth Monday 2pm at Castlemaine Community House, 30 Templeton St, Castlemaine

Should you wish to be involved or raise issues of concern, you can contact MASDAG at Castlemaine Community House on 5472 4842.

PO Box 762, Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia 3450
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Website: www.cch.org.au/masdag



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About this guide:

For a variety of reasons people living with a disability can suffer poor or reduced access to the goods and services in our shire, including limitations around the built environment and accessible transport, and people living with a disability are also subject to negative attitudes and prejudice.

The aim for providers of goods and services in the Shire, including business owners and operators, service providers, organisers of cultural and social events, and tourism operators to assist in improving accessibility for people with disability in our Shire. This guide includes a checklist to help you improve accessibility to your business or organisation.

Many people living with a disability face significant challenges and barriers in their daily lives. This may be in gaining education and employment, accessing government services, daily shopping and chores, cultural, social and political events and actions and simply accessing the built environment, such as footpaths, buildings and public transport.



Dig at Newstead
*Winner of Mount Alexander Shire
Business Disability Access Award (2015)*



These people could be your customers:





Disability in Mount Alexander Shire:

Approximately 20% of the population, or almost 4 million Australians, have been identified as having some form of disability (source: Australian Bureau of Statistics). In addition, the portion of the Australian population is increasing as our population ages.

The Mount Alexander Shire Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2023-2027 identifies that in Australia 1 in 6 people have a disability, 1 in 2 people over the age of 65 has a disability, 1 in 4 disabilities are invisible, mental or behavioural, and 5 in 10 people with disability are employed compared with 8 in 10 people without disability.

When we say ‘disability’ we are talking about people who:

- Are blind or have trouble seeing.
- Are deaf or have trouble hearing.
- Have trouble moving around and may use a wheelchair, electric scooter, walking frame, crutches, etc.
- Have trouble reaching and holding things.
- Have trouble speaking.
- Have trouble understanding.
- Need to rest often due to illness or injury.
- Have sensory differences and may find loud, busy, cluttered or scented spaces overwhelming





Providing Good Access also helps:

- Older people
- Parents or carers with young children, prams or strollers
- People who are short statured
- People with heavy bags or shopping jeeps
- Delivery people
- Staff wellbeing and safety
- People with injuries/everyone

Good customer service and ease of access in physical premises improves the experiences for all consumers of goods and services. When a business gets it right for people with disability, it gets it right for everyone. For example, changes such as having clear signage or providing a quiet space will be appreciated by everyone

(‘Dementia –friendly business guide’ Alzheimer’s Society).

Australian anti-discrimination law says that customers with disabilities should be able to access your goods and services just like any other customer. If a customer with a disability cannot do this, they can make a complaint of discrimination under the Victorian Anti-Discrimination Act or Federal Disability Discrimination Act.

For more information:

- Human Rights Commission (phone: 1300 369 711 or hreoc.gov.au)
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (phone: 1300 292 153 or humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)



Workers from Inclusive Town Project, Maldon



Where to next?

Universal Access Sticker -

If your business has good access, then let people know through your advertising and promotions.



Accessible Communications Symbol -

If your business has accessible communications options, you can promote this with the Accessible Communication Symbol.





Accessible Recharge Points -

Local businesses and venues can provide a power point specifically for people to recharge the battery on their electric wheelchair or scooter, if needed.

Recharge stickers are displayed at the entrance and next to the allocated Recharge power point to identify its using being for people to recharge their electric wheelchair or scooters.



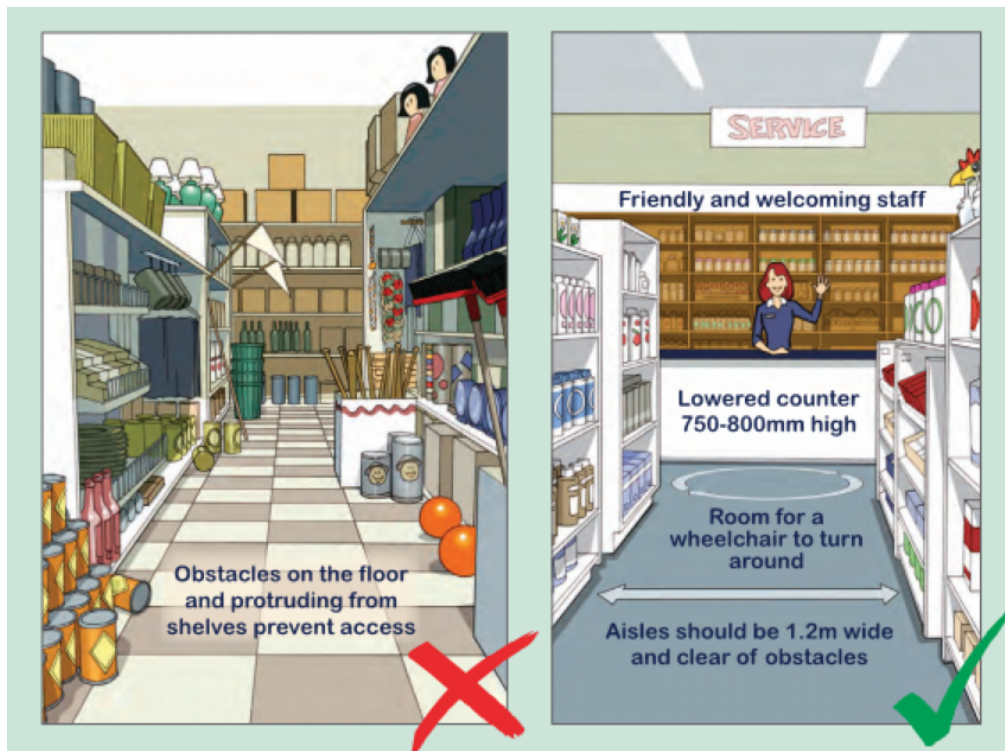
There are currently two (2) Recharge Points provided in the Castlemaine Library (accessible entry via Mechanics Lane), one (1) in the Market Building (at 44 Mostyn Street), and, one (1) at the Castlemaine Railway Station waiting room.



What is Good Access?

Good Access involves:

- Seeking feedback from people with a disability about your services.
- People being able to locate and find out about your business, service or event.
- Easily enter, move around and have access to all the facilities, amenities and services provided.
- People being able to readily find and pay for goods and services.
- Get assistance, if required.
- Feel welcome.



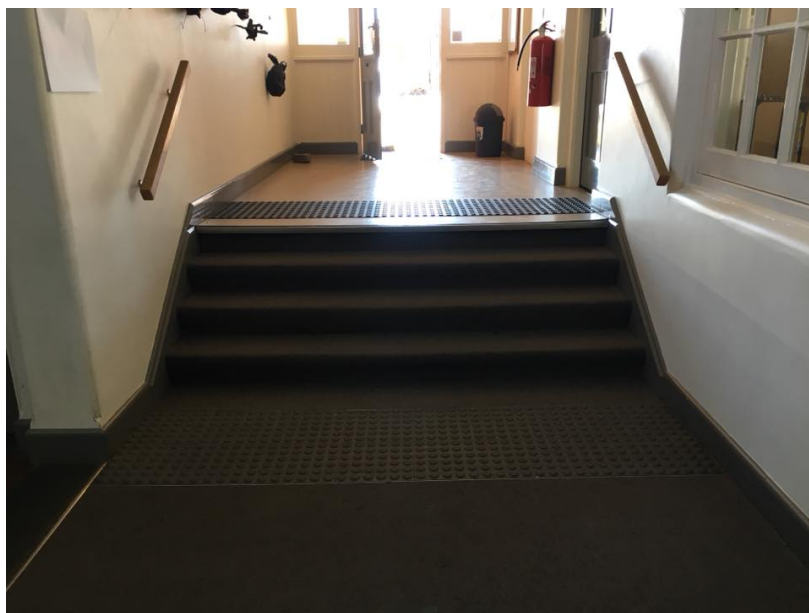
(Moreland City Council 'Good Access is Good Business')



Barriers to Good Access may include:

- `Barriers to the physical environment such as steps, narrow or crowded spaces.
- Barriers to information such as text that is difficult to read, information that is hard to understand or publications only available in limited formats. For example, brochures may use a small font. Some people with a hearing impairment may not be able to follow film clips unless they have captions.
- Barriers to communication such as a limited range of options for people to contact your business or lack of awareness about how to communicate with some customers. For example, relying exclusively on a phone number or a website to promote your business.
- Barriers as a result of negative or discriminatory attitudes, for example, making assumptions about people's abilities'
- Overwhelming sensory experiences including flashing or fluorescent lights, noises, scents

(Accessible Tourism – It's your business – Accessibility resource kit)





Achieving Good Access

Disability Access:

Introduction of new technology and changing government regulations have impacted upon the traditional design and function of shops.

Every shop is required to provide universal access that is equal access for all people, including those people who use wheelchairs, prams or other types of assisted walking mechanisms. The regulation is introduced through the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Customer Service:

Providing good access involves welcoming all visitor and customers, including people with disabilities and being flexible in the provision of customer service.

‘The key to resolving any accessibility issues is respectful and effective communication with consumers with disability, and the provision of practical assistance in response to their requests. Training your staff on how to communicate with people with disability is an important step in ensuring you are providing an accessible service’.

(Australian Human Rights Commission ‘Access for all: Improving accessibility for consumers with disability’)





How you can show respect and improve customer service:

- 'Speak directly to the person with the disability, not to their interpreter support worker.
- Ask how your customer would like goods or services to be provided, if required.
- Speak clearly, listen carefully and check for understanding
- Give your customer time to respond to your questions or offers of service.
- Provide a pen and paper for an alternative method of communication.
- If your customer is Deaf (or has a hearing impairment), face them so they can lip read. Speak normally, do not shout.
- If your customer is blind (or has a vision impairment), identify yourself and ask for their name so they know you are talking to them.
- If your customer asks for assistance to move somewhere, offer your arm so they can hold it just above your elbow.
- Never pat or distract a guide dog when it is working. It is illegal to deny entry to a guide dog.
- Understand that sometimes a customer or client may not want to speak or interact, keep interactions simple and brief if they are trying to avoid interacting.

(Ref. Moreland City Council 'Good Access is Good Business')



Achieving Good Access

Building access:

Good accessibility involves everyone being able to get to and into the front door of buildings, being able to readily move around all parts of the premises, having amenities such as toilets and change areas being wheelchair accessible, ensuring that customer service counters, products for sale and point of sale services being accessible.



Portable ramps are available for hire from the Market Building in Mostyn Street, Castlemaine



Good Access involves - inside:

- Wheelchair access to all areas (i.e. if there are stairs to any areas, then alternative ramp or lift access is provided)
- Clear doorways with no trip hazards
- Handrails if there is a ramp or stairs
- Clear sight line from entrance to service counter
- Seat provided for people to rest
- Good lighting in all areas
- Aisles at least 1.2m wide, with no protruding or overhanging obstacles
- Passages are clear, dry and slip resistant
- Signs and menu boards are well positioned.
- Information is in large, clear writing with good contrast.
- Lowered counters, 750 – 800mm high.
- Shops with checkout aisles have at least one aisle 1.2m wide.
- EFTPOS is user friendly and has long cord (or cordless).
- Hearing loop for service counters.
- Background noise kept to a minimum.
- Music kept low, and easily turned off if required.
- No fluorescent or flashing lights.
- Accessible toilet provided, or directions to the nearest accessible toilet (toilet map at www.toiletmap.gov.au)



(Ref. Moreland City Council 'Good Access is Good Business')



Good Access involves - outside:

- Doorways to be a minimum of 850mm wide and clear of obstacles.
- Accessible parking for people with disabilities on site or close-by.
- Accessible pathways from car parking to the site and all facilities.
- Accessible parking for scooter users.
- Signage is clear, well positioned and well lit.
- Signage has large font and good contrast.
- Footpath is clean and clear of obstacles.
- Pedestrian zone is 1.5 – 1.8m wide.
- Entrances are wide and can be easily seen.
- Glass windows and doors have safety markings.
- Doors are easy to open: automatic or light weight & have low set D-shaped or lever handles.
- Provide level or ramped entrance instead of stairs.
Note: ramps must meet Australian Standards



(Ref. Moreland City Council 'Good Access is Good Business')



Achieving Good Access

Information access:

Barriers to information and communication include text that is too small and difficult to read, information that is hard to understand or available in limited format only. Barriers may be created if there are limited options for people to contact you, or a lack of awareness about how to communicate with some customers (e.g. relying solely on a phone number or website to provide information about your business or event).



Mount Alexander Shire staff participate in disability awareness training.



Good Information Access involves:

- In hard copy, large format text and plain fonts that are easy to read, and simple, clear and concise language (e.g. 'Easy English').
- Provide information in multiple formats. This may include in print and online, QR code, orally by staff (including for people who are Deaf or have hearing impairment via the Telephone Typewriter (TTY) National Relay Service).
- Be flexible in your customer service. Understand that different people may have different communication needs.
- Ensure online information is accessible by ensuring website design is accessible per the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Web Guidelines) developed by the Work Wide Web Consortium (refer also to Human Rights Commission Advisory Note on accessibility of web resources 'Word Wide Web Access: Disability discrimination Act Advisory notes version 4.0, 2014)
- In communicating with people, who may have conditions such as dementia, offer understanding and reassurance, be patient (allow the person to take their time)
- Be mindful of background distractions (such as noise, movement), breakdown information / actions into manageable chunks
- Consider the person's feelings and emotions, if people appear to be experiencing difficulty or distress ask direct, rather than open-ended questions (such as 'is there someone you would like me to call' instead of 'what would you like me to do').
- (Alzheimer's Society (UK), How to help people with dementia – a guide for customer-facing staff)
- In communication with people who may have conditions such as dementia, offer understanding
- Allow the person to take their time
- Be mindful of background distractions such as noise or movement
- Breakdown information / actions into manageable chunks
- Consider the person's feelings and emotions
- If people appear to be experiencing difficulty or distress, ask a direct question such as "is there someone you would like me to call?" instead of "what would you like me to do?"



Customer Access Plan -

Start by grouping access actions you need to take, into the following areas:

- Action you can take now for little or no cost
- Action you can take in the medium term that doesn't require renovation or building works
- Action you will need to take during a refurbishment or redevelopment of your building to provide access for all

Under the Building Code of Australia, you are required to provide access for people with disabilities when undertaking renovations or building works.

If you don't own your building, you can also start to talk to the building owner about the legal requirements of providing access for all, as they are also responsible under the Disability Discrimination Act.





Short term actions:

Medium term actions:

Long term actions:



Contact MASDAG:

PO Box 762, Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia

3450 Email: masdag@cch.org.au

Website: www.cch.org.au/masdag



Members of MASDAG Lorraine Le Plastrier and Cathy Wheel with Lisa Chesters MP & Maree Edwards MP at Castlemaine Fitness Centre at the opening of the hydraulic chairlift funded by the Victorian Government Pick My Project Grant



References & resources:

Alzheimer's Society (UK), '*How to help people with dementia – a guide for customer-facing staff*,' (<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/publications-factsheets/dementia-guide-customer-facing-staff>) (2015)

Alzheimer's Society (UK), '*Dementia –friendly business guide*' (<http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiafriendlycommunities>) (May 2017)

Australian Human Rights Commission '*Access for all: Improving accessibility for consumers with disability*' (<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/access-all-improving-accessibility-consumers-disability>)

Australian Human Rights Commission Advisory Note on accessibility of web resources '*World Wide Web Access: Disability discrimination Act Advisory notes ver 4.0*' (2014)

Mount Alexander Shire Council '*Accessible Events Guide*' (August 2012)

Moreland City Council '*Good Access is Good Business*' (December 2012)
<http://disabilityawareness.com.au> – National Disability Co-ordination Officer Program & Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (disability awareness training)

Tourism Victoria '*Accessible Tourism – It's your business – Accessibility resource kit*'



Acknowledgements:

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