Australian Government

Department of Finance

Final Report on Action 10

Audit of existing Australian Government owned and rented premises for their current levels of accessibility.

Implementing Action 10 of the
APS Disability Employment Strategy 2020-2025

Acknowledgement of Country and Traditional Owners

The Department of Finance acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land in which we live and work. We extend that acknowledgement to their continuing connection to country, waters and community. We pay our respects to all elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Use of the Coat of Arms
The terms under which the Coat of Arms can be used are detailed on the 'It's an Honour' website.

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1. Executive Summary

Preface

An accessible workplace assists in creating an inclusive workplace culture that enables people with disability to thrive in their careers, this includes being able to readily access the office to interact and build connections. When the physical environment of a workplace is not accessible, the experience of working in the Australian Public Service (APS) can be diminished and this affects the ability to attract and retain staff with disability.

An effective APS needs a diverse workforce that is reflective of the community it serves. People with disability provide a positive contribution through bringing lived experience and alternative perspectives which in turn can foster innovation. Providing dignified access to the physical environment of APS office accommodation is a key contributor to being seen as an employer of choice and the attraction and retention of staff with disability.

Employers must provide 'dignified access' to workplaces under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992(DDA)*[1] *and the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010(the Building Standards)*.[2] Providing dignified access means designing office spaces to incorporate features that support people with disability to interact with and navigate the office independently.[3]

This report responds to Action 10 of the *APS Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25*[4] (the Strategy), which aims to increase employment of people with disability across the APS to 7%. Action 10 provided a platform to identify current levels of accessibility and recurring barriers in APS tenancies and inform possible property solutions. This report identifies common barriers to accessibility across Commonwealth entities (entities) and opportunities to improve accessibility.

This information will be used to inform:

- the development of appropriate policy responses; and

- advice to entities.

This report is targeted at officials in entities with responsibility for office accommodation, diversity and inclusion outcomes. The report makes recommendations for the Department of Finance (Finance), in its stewardship role of the Commonwealth Property Management Framework, to provide frameworks, policies, guidance and tools for entities to assist them in identifying and addressing barriers to dignified accessibility.

The report consolidates information from Dignified Access Reviews (DARs) undertaken by dignified access providers, in a sample of APS tenancies. A DAR is a building review, assessing internal and external areas of an office for dignified accessibility. The DARs contain recommendations to improve accessibility in offices.

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1   Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (legislation.gov.au).
2   Premises Standards | Department of Industry, Science and Resources.
3   Australian Network on Disability, to be renamed to Australian Disability Network from 15 January 2024.
4   Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25 | Australian Public Service Commission (apsc.gov.au).

Approach

Finance aligned the scope of Action 10 with the strategy's intention of providing an accessible and inclusive workplace culture.

Action 10: Audit of existing Australian Government owned and rented premises for their current levels of accessibility

Agencies should involve employees with disability and experts on organisational planning, digital and IT policy, change management, and job design to improve accessibility.

The Australian Public Service Commission will consult with the Department of Finance on the conduct of an audit of existing Australian Government owned and rented premises and a review of current leasing arrangements to ensure entity compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and other relevant standards.

Finance worked with the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) to determine the scope of Action 10. It was agreed that auditing a sample of tenancies across the APS would provide sufficient data to identify common accessibility barriers. The sample used to inform this report included tenancies that were both owned and leased, covered properties managed by large and small entities and properties in different locations across Australia.

Compliance with the DDA and other requirements, such as the Building Standards is a point in time compliance requirement occurring at the time of build that cannot be applied retrospectively to older buildings. To mitigate this, Finance amended paragraph 21.2 (h) and (i) of the Commonwealth National Lease (CNL) – User Guide which relates to clause 11.1.2 of the CNL to make explicit the existing obligation entities have to comply with the DDA[5.] In responding to Action 10, Finance is cognisant that the language in discussions surrounding disability has broadened, shifting away from the medical model towards the social model of disability. In line with this shift Finance has aligned Action 10 with the definition of disability under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The UNCRPD at Article 1 states:

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.[6]

Finance's analysis of the DARs indicated that support for neurodivergent people warrants further consideration.

This report focuses on dignified access as a means of creating inclusive workplaces. The term dignified accessibility used throughout this report moves beyond the regulatory parameters and considers the needs of the whole person.

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5   Commonwealth National Lease | Department of Finance.
6   Article 1 – Purpose | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Commonwealth property portfolio consists of 1,373 leased and 60 owned properties.[7] This report draws on findings from 34 DARs across 26 entities in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria (**Attachment A – List of Participating entities**). Thirty-two of the DARs were undertaken within major cities with one tenancy location being classed as inner regional Australia and one as outer regional Australia.[8]

Finance worked in partnership with participating entities who engaged accessibility consultants to undertake their DAR and then shared the findings with Finance which informed analysis of whole-of-government trends. All data collected, analysed and published in this report has been de-identified. Finance has been advised by entities that the process of undertaking a DAR increased awareness of barriers and entities have subsequently taken action to improve accessibility.

This report highlights accessibility barriers faced by current staff, potential new staff and visitors and makes recommendations to address these. A summary of these impacts is provided below.

Current Staff

Staff are more likely to attend the office and experience the benefits of social interaction, including increased job satisfaction and work output when access to all areas of the office is made easy – through arrival, navigation, and departure.

Social interaction allows staff to bond with teams and the agency, increasing the chance of staff retention.

Potential New Staff

Dignified access removes a significant hurdle people with disability face when accessing employment in the APS.

Potential employees may choose to not apply for APS vacancies when APS offices are inaccessible; for example, a candidate may not proceed with a job application if they are unable to easily access the building for interview.

How a potential new employee experiences an APS office is likely to be shared with family and friends. Negative experiences are far more likely to be conveyed and impact the APS's reputation and discourage others with disability in applying for APS vacancies.

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7   Correct as at 6 February, 2024.

8   The measures of remoteness are based on population estimates obtained from the Census of Population and Housing, produced every 5 years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Remoteness Areas | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au). Remoteness measures are calculated using Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) scores, which are based on the distance of geographic locations from the nearest population centre in various size ranges.

Visitors

The APS works with stakeholders to develop and deliver on government policy agendas and priorities.

Many of these stakeholders will visit our buildings to work and engage with us.

As with new staff, visitor experiences of APS offices are likely to be shared with family and friends, with negative visitor experiences impacting on the reputation of the APS.

Modelling shows that 1 in 6 people in Australia are living with disability.[9] People with disability want their skills and suitability for a role to be the primary consideration for employment. Unfortunately, people with disability report that they still face a range of barriers looking for and staying in work. Employers have a role to actively build their disability confidence and create inclusive workplaces.[10] By addressing these barriers the APS can access a broader pool of talent, have a workforce that is more reflective of the community it serves and increase innovation.

Office tenancies are regulated by legislation and building codes which prescribe a minimum level of accessibility. In practice this means a building may meet building code standards and legal requirements but may not provide dignified access to the building's facilities. For this reason, the approach to Action 10 has focused on dignified access rather than compliance.

The report has been structured to take the reader through the experience of working in a typical office occupied by the APS. The areas of focus have been structured to demonstrate a standard working day, from arrival to departure. Some aspects of the daily routine that do not involve property have been included within the chapters for consideration in the context of the Strategy.

Every chapter contains:

- **an overview** to provide the reader with an understanding of what the chapter encompasses.

- **an analysis of findings** covering the recommended actions that received the highest number of findings within the category, Finance also calls out some lower rated actions for review.

- **recommendations** that link the chapters actions to broader recommendations and where appropriate provide detailed sub-recommendations.

- **suggested actions for entities.** This information is based on the aggregated data results, Finance has also provided 'easy wins' that have been assessed as changes that can be made without significant financial outlay and immediately provide dignified access.

Finance assessed recommended actions from the DARs against a Priority Matrix, which assessed the likelihood of an action occurring against the potential consequence of injury to provide a risk rating. The Priority Matrix informed the focus of the report through the categorisation of recommended actions. The summary of DAR actions by category is at **Attachment B** and the Priority Matrix is located at **Attachment C**.

9   People with disability in Australia, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au).
10 Employ My Ability (dss.gov.au).

Outcomes

In reviewing the DARs, the following 5 categories were identified as having 200 or more recommended actions:

- Work Areas

- Wayfinding

- Meeting Rooms

- Kitchens

- Shared Areas.

Figure 1 below provides a summary of the number of recommended actions for each category. Each category is addressed in a separate chapter of this report and includes an assessment of recommended actions by theme.

Figure 1 - Recommended actions by category
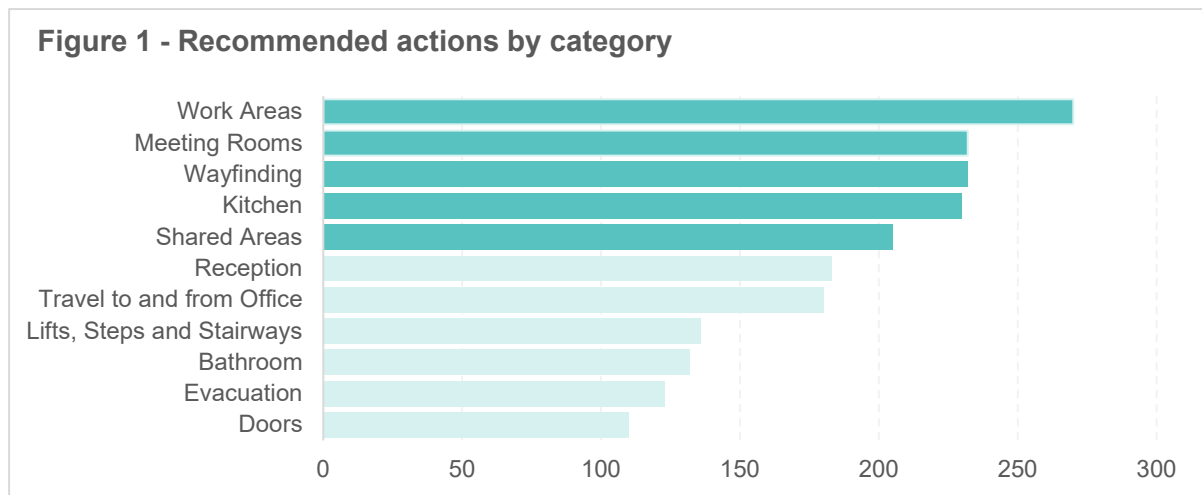
Overall, there were 17 themes identified from the DARs, with the most prevalent theme being fit out.

Figure 2 provides a summary of the number of recommended actions by theme. The themes with the highest number of recommended actions are addressed in this report.

Figure 2- Recommended action by theme
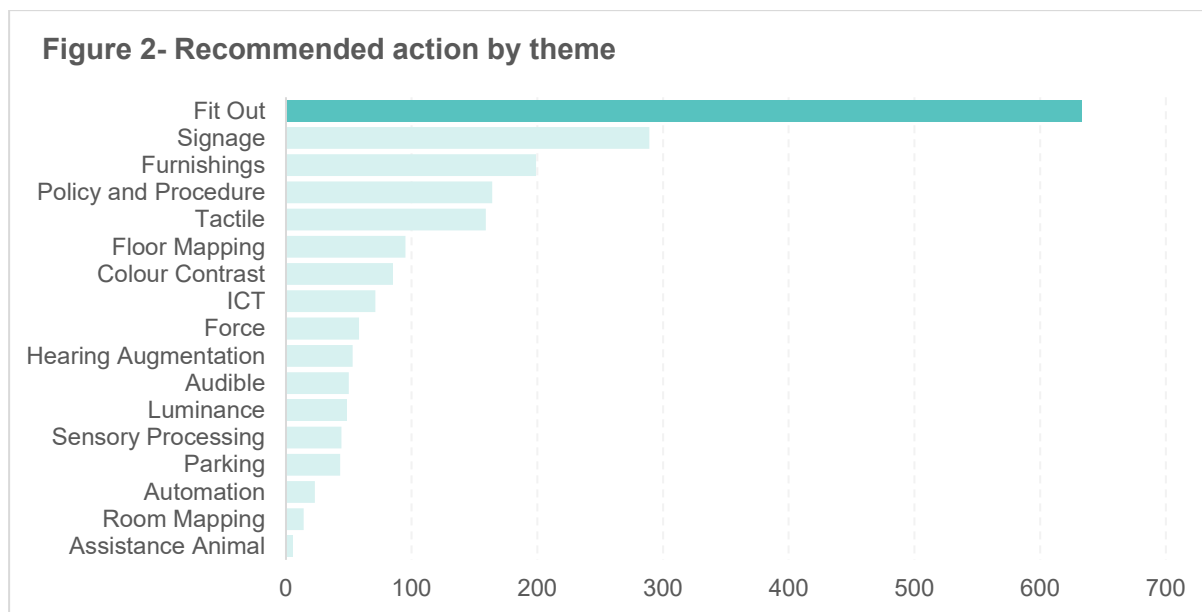
Building Awareness

The need to build an awareness of the barriers to dignified accessibility within the APS is a common theme identified across the chapters. The recommendations will support entities to recognise and remove barriers to accessibility through the provision of frameworks, tools and resources. These resources will support consideration of accessibility needs during planning phases, but also encourage regular review and adjustment.

Cultural change

Discussions with entities highlighted the importance of cultural change. Cultural change can be improved by developing people's knowledge of dignified access and explaining the role everyone plays in supporting inclusion. Entities should consider delivering targeted training to build awareness of the importance of inclusive workplaces which include dignified access, to drive the behavioural change required to support improvements to the physical environment that will provide dignified accessibility and ensure that these changes are maintained. By fostering an awareness of barriers in the workplace, the workplace can become disability confident and competent.

Recognising barriers

Finance acknowledges that for property changes to be effective in improving dignified accessibility there needs to be a broader cultural awareness of the need for change across the APS. The Principles and Recommendations identified in the following chapters play a role in creating awareness of the changes required for the Strategy to be successful.

The insights provided throughout this report, aggregated at the whole-of-government level, provide a sound basis for the development of whole-of-government policies and interventions to improve physical accessibility, aligning with the focus and intention of the Strategy.

Principles supporting accessible workplaces

The principles below are intended to provide high level guidance to entities on how to successfully reduce property barriers and support an accessible and inclusive workplace.
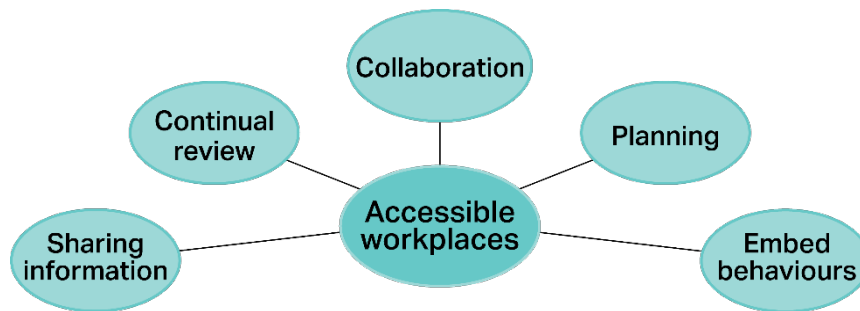
Collaboration

Effective collaboration between Property, Information Communications and Technology (ICT) and Human Resource (HR) teams as well as staff networks will help to ensure the most suitable accessibility solution is implemented and maintained. It is important that all three areas work together to ensure workforce, property and technology are considered when designing and fitting out the office.

Planning

Property planning is the process by which an entity considers the property needs of its workforce including the types of spaces and technology the workforce requires to determine its future accommodation needs. Consideration of accessibility and inclusion during this process is vital for catering for a diverse workforce.

Embed behaviours

Embedding behaviours involves educating staff on the importance of accessibility and identifying ways to embed those behaviours which support accessibility in the workplace. This can include improving knowledge about disability (including individual needs and preferences) and supporting the development of streamlined processes to address accessibility issues.

Sharing information

Accessibility is improved by sharing information:

- across government on accessibility barriers, challenges and solutions to improve knowledge and capability across the APS.

- on building accessibility features to improve staff and visitor experience. For example, through appropriate signage and publishing accessibility information.

Continual review

Our understanding of the barriers to accessibility is continually improving as new information becomes available. Technology is also constantly changing and new solutions for reducing accessibility barriers are being developed. It is important that entities are undertaking continual reviews of offices to ensure that they are accessible and that new ideas and technologies are being investigated to reduce barriers to accessibility.

2. Recommendations

The analysis of 2,033 recommended actions raised across the 34 DARs has informed the recommendations of this report. The recommendations provide opportunities to strengthen existing frameworks and provide entities with tools and resources to encourage dignified access.

While the DARs focused primarily on the physical barriers to accessibility, a cultural change is required to build awareness and change behaviours. As cultural change is outside of the scope of Action 10 Finance has refrained from making a recommendation on this noting this is covered in the context of the Strategy. Finance notes that entities who address key cultural behaviours will provide a more cohesive and consistent approach to property change.

The chapters in this report include suggested actions for entities to improve accessibility within their organisations. A consolidated list of these suggested actions for entities is at **Attachment D.**

Recommendation 1

The Department of Finance to review existing property frameworks, policies and resources with a view of improving the awareness of accessibility barriers across the APS and embedding accessibility considerations into property planning processes.

Providing safe, equitable and accessible office accommodation is important to meeting the goals of the strategy as well as improving APS staff experience. Finance as the owner of Resource Management Guide 500 – Commonwealth Property Management Framework, will review existing frameworks and resources and develop accessibility guidance to help inform property decisions.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Finance to develop tools and resources to assist entities identify accessibility barriers within their tenancies.

Some entities may not have the resources to engage a qualified consultant in the current environment to undertake DARs. Finance will develop resources to assist entities to identify accessibility barriers in their tenancies. This could include:

- **a self-assessment checklist** which would provide guidance on a wide range of dignified accessibility considerations relating to office design.

- **a building accessibility guide** which would facilitate entities providing information to both staff and visitors on the location of accessible entrances, accessible parking, accessible facilities within the building and where to access support.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Finance in collaboration with relevant agencies to review property barriers impacting neurodivergent staff.

Sensory processing differences that impact neurodivergent staff are not widely covered in the recommended actions to improve accessibility. Finance will undertake a review to identify property barriers that are experienced by neurodivergent staff and develop resources to assist entities in recognising and addressing these barriers. This review will build on the work of forward-leaning entities across the APS, leveraging existing experiences and expertise, where possible.

Recommendation 3

3.   Travel to and from the office – accessing the premises

Overview

Arriving at the office can be considered one of the most stressful times of the day and is exacerbated when barriers are encountered that prevent staff and visitors from being able to come into the office in a dignified manner. This can lead to a negative impact on the emotional and physical wellbeing of the person involved. It can also impact an individual's view of the department or agency, the culture and whether the department or agency is a good place to work.

A crucial step in ensuring dignified access is afforded to all is to support the ability to arrive and depart the office safely. Addressing the recommendations will support the fostering of an inclusive and accessible work environment for all people. This chapter identifies barriers in travelling to and from the office and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:
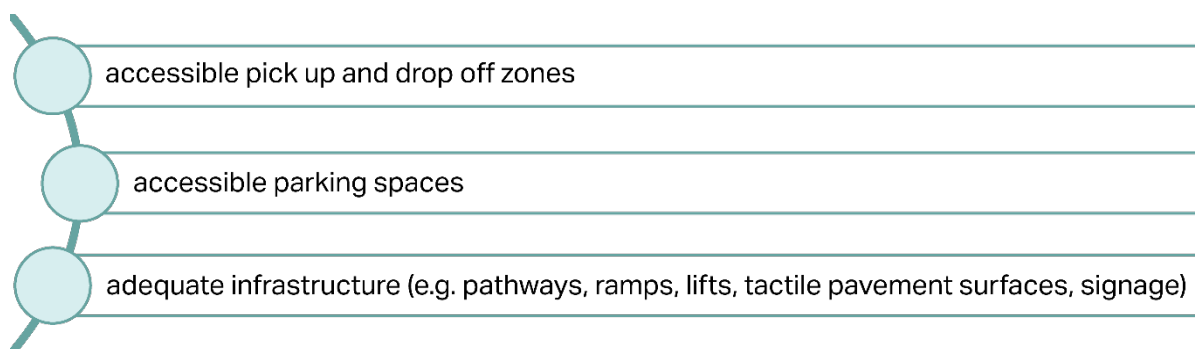
accessible pick up and drop off zones

accessible parking spaces

adequate infrastructure (e.g. pathways, ramps, lifts, tactile pavement surfaces, signage)

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1 and Recommendation 2.** Specific recommendations to this chapter are included below.

Recommendation 2.1

The Department of Finance to develop a template for a building accessibility guide. This template will assist entities to create a guide that provides visitors and new starters with information on key accessibility facilities, features and assistance available in a specified APS building. This could include:

• information on accessible entrances, location of accessible parking, accessible facilities within the building and where to access support, if required.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs identified 180 actions to improve dignified accessibility in the travel to and from the office category. The most common barriers relate to signage and parking. In contrast, furnishings and assistance animal considerations were the least common issue identified in this category.

Figure 3 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs by theme.

Figure 3 - Travel to and from the Office - # Issues by theme
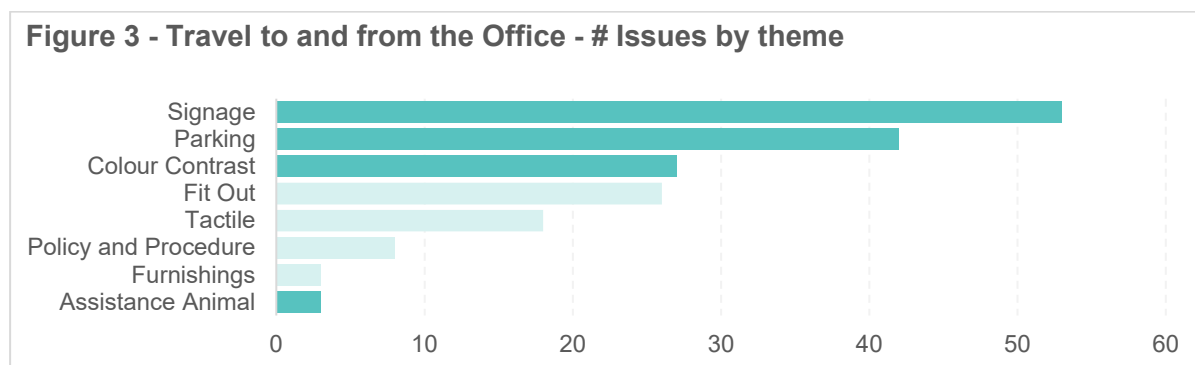
Signage

> **29.4%** of recommended actions in the travel to and from the office category relate to signage.

Signage can create a welcoming and inclusive environment by communicating pathways for travel, safety and access information. Without clear signage, people can struggle to navigate and access office premises safely, which compromises an entity's reputation with current and prospective future employees and can lead to confusion and frustration for visitors.

Installing signage that includes tactile markers and conveys clearly visible, relevant information such as parking, building entry points (including accessible entry points), and how to contact security or reception personnel goes a long way to improving accessibility.

Focus areas:

- **use of appropriate signage** – some signage in APS tenancies is outdated and uses terminology or visuals that are no longer appropriate or fit for purpose

- **improving the visibility of existing signage** – several recommended actions covered font size being too small, signage being at inappropriate heights or visibility of signage being impaired due to reflective surfaces

- **signage around the building** – several DARs included recommended actions that entities work with local governments and councils to ensure appropriate signage around the building including suitable markings for pedestrian paths and crossings

- **reviewing policy for relevance and accessibility** – considerations including issuing staff and visitor notifications on workplace barriers, for example broken doors, lifts under repair or large-scale cleaning.

Parking

> **23.3%** of recommended actions in the travel to and from the office category relate to parking.

The provision of accessible parking provides people with disability equitable access to the building. Provision of accessible parking provides independence in travel and is crucial to attracting staff with disability.

Entity reports highlighted several elements in the design of accessible parking spaces that require improvement, noting parking facilities are not always the direct responsibility of entities.[11]

Focus areas:

- **locating accessible parking in close proximity** to the office, lifts, entrances and pathways of travel

- **appropriately marking accessible car spots** with the international accessibility logo

- ensuring accessible car spaces meet requirements in terms of number and size – consistent with state and territory requirements

- **reviewing policy for relevance and accessibility considerations** – including providing a booking system for accessible car parking spaces.

Colour Contrast

> **15.0%** of recommended actions in the travel to and from the office category relate to colour contrast.

Poor colour contrast is a barrier for people who have limited vision, difficulties with depth perception and for those who are not concentrating on their path of travel. Steps, changes in gradient, glazing on windows and doors, potted plants and immovable objects on a pathway of travel are all potential impact and trip hazards. Providing a solid non-transparent contrasting strip on all glazing allows people to easily identify that there is a barrier in their path and to correct navigation to avoid impact. Providing a coloured contrasting strip on potential trip hazards is imperative for assisting people to assess the distance to objects and navigate around them.

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11 Note: parking facilities are not always the direct responsibility of entities. Landlords, local councils and governments all have a role to play in providing accessible parking spaces.

Assistance Animals

1.7%, or **3** recommended actions in **one** DAR relate to assistance animals in the travel to and from the office category.

The use of assistance animals is becoming more common. Assistance animals perform specific daily tasks to support their owner's independence. Assistance animals may provide support by being a seeing guide to assist people with vision impairment, a hearing alert for those with hearing impairments, or a medical alert trained to detect an imminent medical emergency such as seizure or blood sugar change. Assistance animals have full public access rights and are required to accompany their handler.[12] We note the use of emotional support animals do not have the same rights or training requirements under legislation.

Focus areas:

- **provision of animal toileting areas** that allow for safe and clean access (including consideration of facilities within the building or in the very immediate vicinity to the office)

- **reviewing timing of security gates** with consideration given to service animals

- **provision of signage** that reaffirms the right of access for assistance animals.

Other Findings

The remaining 4 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

Travel to the office can be stressful when you don't know what to expect. While appropriate signage, tactile markings and colour contrasts can assist staff and visitors to find their way once they arrive; providing information on what facilities, features and assistance are available ahead of arrival can take the stress out of the experience. Entities should consider:

- creating a building accessibility guide for their tenancies. This will be supported by Finance creating a template to support entities.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the travel to and from the office category:

- ensure that the accessible entrance remains unlocked during business hours.
- relocate items on pathways that cause physical barriers.
- slow the speed and timing of revolving entrance doors and security gates.
- identify processes that will inform employees about lift outages and malfunctioning turnstiles.
- introduce a system to provide for booking of accessible car parking spaces.
- give consideration to policy regarding meeting staff and visitors while large scale cleaning or refurbishment of offices is underway.

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12 *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992.*

4. Reception

Overview

The reception area often serves as the first point of contact for staff and visitors. It sets the tone for the remainder of the building and can leave staff and visitors with either a positive or a negative view of the building and the department or agency occupying it.

When barriers are experienced during this first point of contact it reflects poorly on the entity and can create a negative impression of the culture and environment. A barrier free experience at reception plays a crucial role in fostering an inclusive and accessible work environment for all staff, particularly those with disability. Ensuring a seamless, safe, and welcoming experience for employees and visitors is essential for promoting overall satisfaction and engagement.

Forethought into design of a reception desk that includes different heights and cut away areas to allow people using wheelchairs to effectively use the space, ensuring that fixtures and furniture are supportive and inclusive are vital to ensure dignified access. This chapter identifies barriers faced within the building reception area and recommends actions that will improve the physical environment, focussing on:
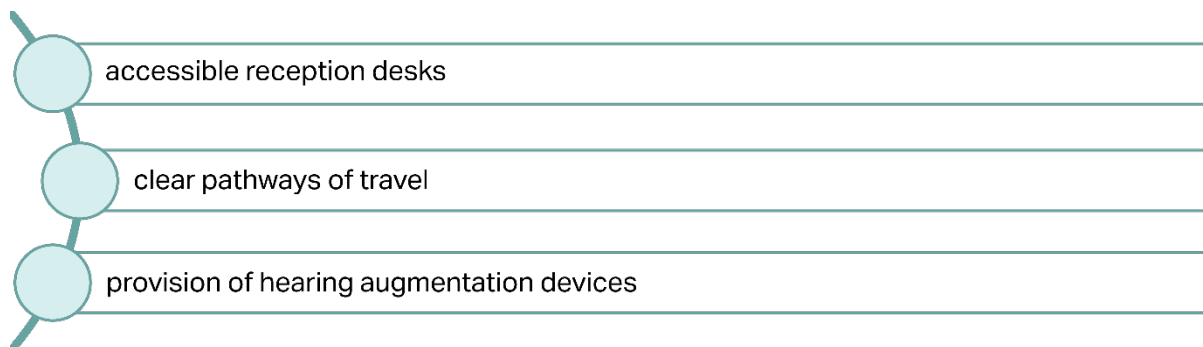
- accessible reception desks
- clear pathways of travel
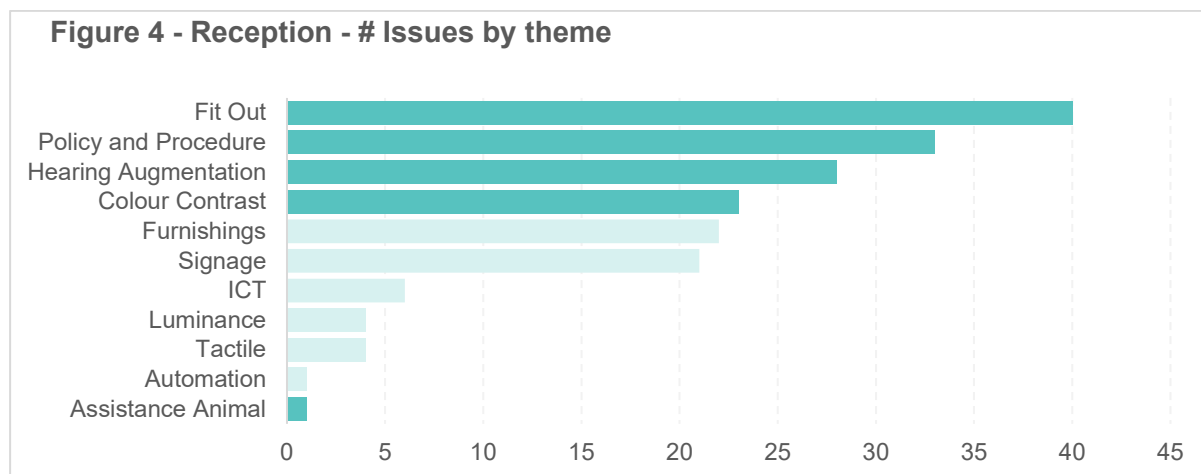- provision of hearing augmentation devices

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1** and **Recommendation 2**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs identified 183 actions to improve dignified accessibility for the reception area. The most common barriers are fit out, colour contrast and hearing augmentation themes.

Figure 4 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 4 - Reception - # Issues by theme

Theme	Value
Fit Out	40
Policy and Procedure	33
Hearing Augmentation	28
Colour Contrast	23
Furnishings	22
Signage	21
ICT	6
Luminance	4
Tactile	4
Automation	1
Assistance Animal	1

Fit Out

21.9% of recommended actions in the reception category relate to fit out.

Fit out refers to preparing the interior of a building which includes the installation of the interiors, fittings and finishes of a building. In the context of the reception category, fit out encompasses elements of the base build, desks and seating options, the fixed placement of items including phones, sign-in terminals and security gates.

Everyone benefits from a thoughtful and inclusive fit out design, particularly one that considers access and incorporates views from a wide range of perspectives. Poorly designed and executed fit out restricts dignified access impacting people with disability. Increasing awareness of the barriers to dignified access can help to inform future design, which will result in an inclusive environment that supports staff to positively contribute to organisational needs.

Focus areas:

- **designing reception desks** to improve universal access, including ensuring technology is accessible
- **providing a range of seating** options to suit different needs
- reducing physical barriers and marking obstructions
- **providing better support** to people with disability.

Policy and Procedure

18.0% of recommended actions in the reception category relate to policy and procedure.

Policies and procedures set the direction for entities in areas of significance and empower people by providing information and guidance as well as display commitment to a topic by the organisation. Entities need to focus attention on cultural change to improve dignified accessibility, employee understanding, and help increase staff retention. Policies and procedures should be reviewed to ensure that they encourage and support a change towards dignified inclusion.

Focus areas:

- training staff and security personnel (including contractors) in the:

  – use of hearing loops to support users,

  – etiquette and protocols for welcoming people with disabilities,

  – provision of assistance with sign in procedures, and

  – interaction procedures for assistance animals.

- provision of guided accessibility tours to assist with memory mapping.

Hearing Augmentation

15.3% of recommended actions in the reception category relate to hearing augmentation.

Hearing augmentation in the context of this report references the transmission of audio information to a listener's hearing aid, enabling those with a hearing impairment to access quality audio.[13] Hearing augmentation is crucial as it allows people with a hearing impairment to hear information conveyed in different environments, such as boardrooms and meeting rooms.

Purchasing and installing hearing augmentation technology, including portable hearing loops is imperative to assist people in accessing dignified communication.

Colour Contrast

12.6% of recommended actions in the reception category relate to colour contrast.

Providing adequate contrast decreases the risk of people tripping or falling and generally provides better outcomes for people with neurological, sensory processing and sight impairments.

Focus areas:

- **providing colour contrasting** nosings that identify tiered sections of flooring, gradient changes and platform edges

- **reviewing the colour palette** of the fit out and furnishings to provide better contrast of colours

- **providing colour contrasting strips** and signage to the base of structural columns, fixtures and furniture.

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13 Building Solutions - Hearing Loop Australia.

Assistance Animal

0.5%, or **one** recommended action (in **one** DAR) in the reception category relates to assistance animals.

Focus areas:

- **training staff and security** on etiquette and user interaction protocols when in contact with an assistance animal.

Other Findings

The remaining 6 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

As the reception is generally the first point of contact, providing a barrier free entry creates a welcoming office by recognising and accommodating the diverse needs of people. Entities should consider creating clear internal processes and guidance for staff on how to accommodate staff and visitors with disability or mobility issues. This includes providing key contacts for organising assistance for visitors.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the reception category:

- removing items that obstruct access and reduce circulation space on pathways.

- reviewing lighting and adjust as required.

- reviewing the timing of the security gates and engage all accessiblity features.

5. Lifts, steps and stairways

Overview

Lifts, steps and stairways are a valuable component of workplace accessibility. They facilitate movement by linking floors within buildings and play a significant role in allowing navigation around a workplace. They also play a vital role in allowing people to safely navigate out of the building in an emergency.

Equitable opportunities for movement between floors in office buildings is crucial for inclusiveness. If people are unable to move freely between floors in a dignified and inclusive manner, there is a significant risk that they will feel excluded and look for other employment opportunities that better cater for their requirements.

Lifts, steps and stairways that are not accessible create an inability to move through a building and can also compromise a person's safety. Lifts, when accessible, provide a safe, fast and seamless way of traversing floors. Lifts increase independence by allowing people to feel comfortable and safe in navigating around the office.

Steps and stairways are known for recording higher instances of injuries due to tripping and falling. They are often the only safe way to exit a building during an emergency, and it is a requirement that stairways are accessible. Providing a safe and seamless way to traverse the office increases independence and personal satisfaction, while decreasing the chance of personal injury and broader reputational damage to entities.

This chapter identifies barriers in travelling between office floors and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:

- providing information on tactile/braille markers
- providing railings and handrails
- ensuring audible indicators are in place

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1** and **Recommendation 2**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs identified 136 actions to improve dignified accessibility in relation to lifts, steps and stairways. The most common barriers were tactile markers, fit out and audible announcements. In contrast, hearing augmentation was the least common issue identified for this category.

Figure 5 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs by theme.

Figure 5 - Lifts, Steps and Stairways - # Issues by theme
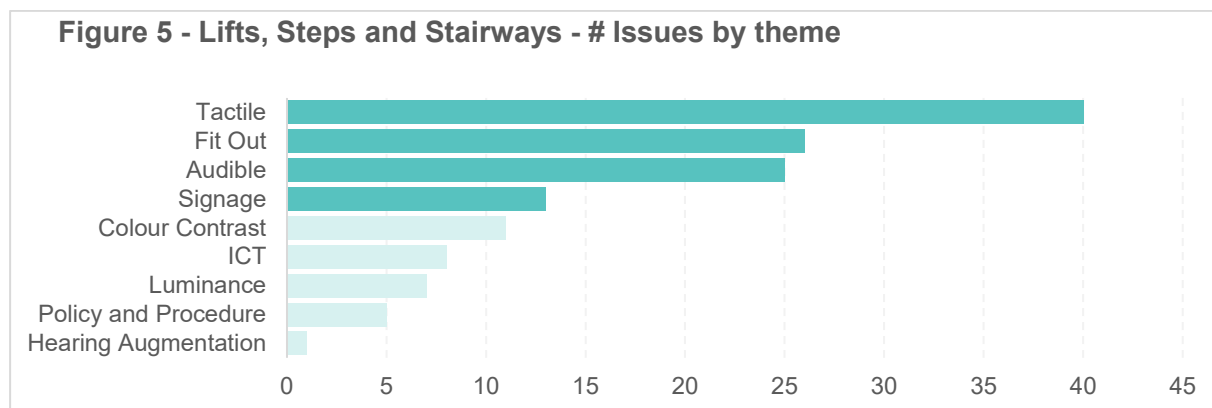
Tactile

29.4% of recommended actions in the lifts, steps and stairways category relate to the tactile theme.

Tactile or braille markers enable dignified access by ensuring that people who are vision impaired or blind can independently use lifts and stairways. Without tactile or braille markers people can struggle to independently navigate around offices as there is no way to check location of floor levels or identify lift buttons without the assistance of someone with full vision.

Tactile markers are crucial in an office environment to ensure safety. They allow staff to know that they have approached a stairway or stairs and how to navigate to an exit. During an emergency, tactile markers can assist all staff to navigate to safety, particularly where vision may be obstructed due to smoke or fumes.

Focus areas:

- providing tactile buttons and braille markers on:

  – floor destination and emergency phone buttons within lifts

  – any written information including emergency contact details

  – stairway handrails to indicate floor level and direction of travel

- **identifying changes to elevation** on floor surfaces or hazards through:

  – non-slip stair nosings incorporating colour contrast

  – tactile ground surface indicators

- **providing closed risers** on stairs; open riser staircases or floating staircases can cause disorientation and lack the tactile feedback mechanism provided in closed staircases.

Fit Out

19.1% of recommended actions in the lifts, steps and stairways category relate to fit out.

Fit out in this category is limited to handrails, lift car panels and installation.

Buildings where fit out design includes dignified accessibility features provide an environment that is more physically safe. Handrails provide support for people with balance or mobility issues and can provide a physical outline of the boundaries within areas. Handrails can also be used as a navigation tool for people with vision impairments; or in case of fire where smoke may impair vision, handrails can be a guide to safety for all staff and visitors.

Lifts are widely used by staff and visitors to navigate the office building. Lifts are especially useful for people who have mobility issues as they allow for easy access to all floors. Inclusivity and safety are necessary for providing a dignified and accessible environment. Lifts that are inclusive and support easy travel reflect an understanding of accessibility.

Focus areas:

- **ensuring handrails extend** beyond the first and last step of a stairwell and are provided on both sides of the stairwell to allow for foot traffic to flow in both directions as well as providing users a way to safely egress

- **ensuring lifts provide hand railings** on all internal sides of the car supporting people while travelling

- **improving accessibility of lift keypads** ensuring proximity to lift cars and height accessible placement.

Audible

18.4% of recommended actions in the lifts, steps and stairways category relate to audible notifications.

Audible notifications are imperative for safety and navigation reasons. An audible announcement helps people prepare for entry and exit of the lift as it provides audible guidance on when doors can be expected to open and close. Audible notification provides further independence in navigation, allowing people to identify their floor and navigate the building.

Focus areas:

- providing audible notifications announcing:

    – opening and closing lift doors

    – announcing floor numbers.

Signage

9.6% of recommended actions in the lifts, steps and stairways category relate to signage.

Signage creates a pathway for communication. When done properly it conveys valuable information and messaging in a way that is accessible to most staff and visitors.

Poor signage can impact safety, particularly in lifts. People who are deaf or hearing impaired are unable to independently gain information from audible intercoms or telephones located within the lifts in case of an emergency or malfunction. This puts them at far greater risk in an emergency, if they are travelling alone, as there is no way for them to communicate with people outside of the lift. Signage that provides alternative means of communication, in case of an emergency, can easily rectify this issue. Accessible signage is crucial where it provides important safety information, such as, lift capacity.

Signage is also important for navigation. Lift areas and stairwells often include information on where particular facilities or amenities are located on a floor. It is important to make these accessible through consideration of lighting choices, positioning and tactile markers.

Focus areas:

- **SMS alternatives** – emergency intercoms and telephones in lift cars are not accessible for people who are deaf. Signage with tactile indicators and provision of an SMS communication alternative is needed

- **visual information display** – signage orientating people to the space, that is provided in contrasting colour with a matte laminate finish and includes tactile indicators allows for independence in travel.

Other Findings

The remaining 5 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

Entities should consider:

- working with landlords to enable accessibility features to ensure audio announcements are made within the lifts

- adherence to guidelines to ensure correct placement, usage and visibility of tactile ground surface indicators on steps.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the lifts, steps and stairways category:

- ensuring that all lighting is working and fit for purpose.

- marking floor numbers on lift buttons and on the ends of handrails on steps and stairways with braille or tactile markers.
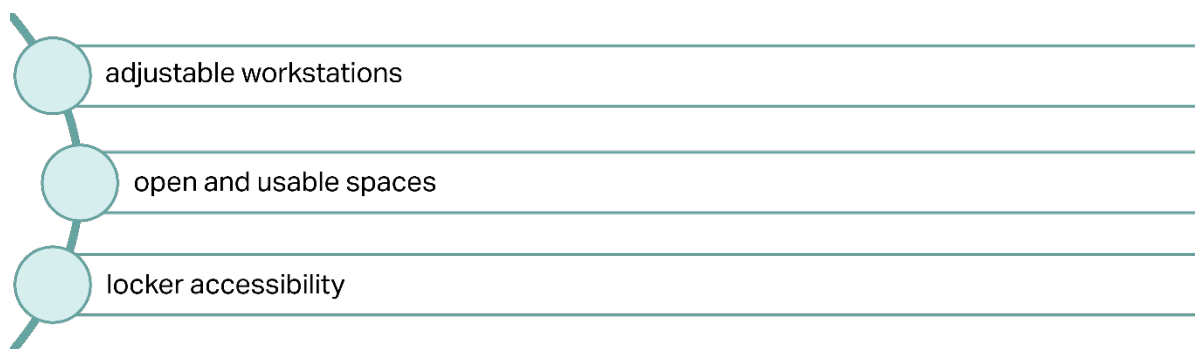
6. Work areas

Overview

Work areas are a central feature of the office environment and support staff to perform their work. In most instances, this will be a person's base to return to between meetings or from interacting with other spaces in the building. Every entity received recommendations to improve workstations from an accessibility standpoint.

Designing and configuring work areas to accommodate all people including those with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities is essential to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace. Spaces should be designed to support staff to undertake their work rather than serve as a barrier to participation.

This chapter identifies barriers in work areas and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:

- adjustable workstations
- open and usable spaces
- locker accessibility

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1**, **Recommendation 2** and **Recommendation 3**.

Analysis of findings

The work areas category recorded the highest number of actions across all 11 categories. An analysis of the DARs identified 270 actions to improve dignified accessibility in work areas. The most common barriers to accessibility related to fit out and furnishings; whereas assistance animals and colour contrast were the least common issues identified in this category.

Figure 6 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 6 - Work areas - # Issues by theme
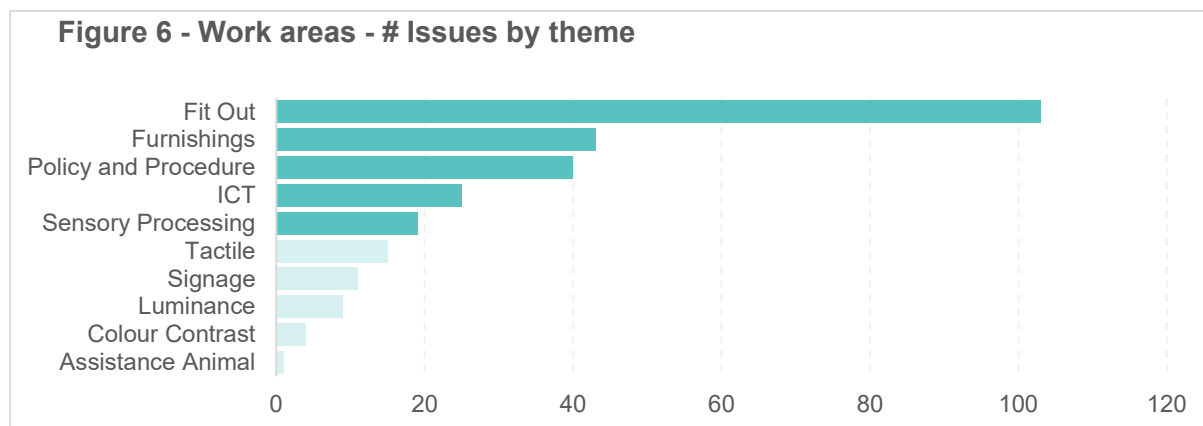
Fit Out

38.1% of recommended actions in the work areas category relate to fit out.

In the work areas category fit out includes: desk, chair, storage, cabinet and locker selection and placement as well as blinds, lighting, electrical and IT cabling placement. Fit out does not cover ICT, this is covered separately below.

A well laid out and considered office interior provides a seamless transition for employees to safely participate in work activities. Providing adjustable chairs and desks with under table clearance allows employees to position their workstation in a way that provides support and comfort, to allow for prolonged periods of focused working.

Accessible lockers and storage cabinets which support work, quick set down and departure, are also important in supporting staff to participate and work independently. Locating storage at appropriate heights can also decrease instances of a workplace injury, which is a risk for all staff.

Focus areas:

- **providing adjustable furniture** – sit/stand desks with full under table clearance, chairs with back support and arm rests as required, allows for universal access

- **redesigning storage facilities** – to suit a variety of diverse needs. Considerations include:

  – locating storage at varying heights

  – providing alternative locking mechanisms as barrel locks can be inaccessible for people who have issues with dexterity and fine motor skill

  – installing handles on lockers in the D or U shape and in a contrasting colour to the locker

  – installing handles on all cupboards and drawers that are not push open

- **reducing physical barriers** – installing fixed items at a more accessible height and reach.

Furnishings

15.9% of recommended actions in the work areas category relate to furnishings.

Furnishings in the context of the work areas category relates to stationary, supplies and placement of furniture. Placement of furnishings plays a role in assisting with memory mapping and navigation. If objects are incorrectly placed they can create a fall or trip hazard.

Focus areas:

- **repositioning common use items** including stationery, supplies and bins, to accessible heights and locations, using the same placement layout consistently across rooms and floors

- **reviewing furniture placement** to provide more open and usable collaboration areas and increase circulation space.

Policy and Procedure

14.8% of recommended actions in the work areas category relate to policy and procedure.

To support the provision of accessible work areas it is important that policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure these remain relevant and support adjustments, where required.

Focus areas:

- reviewing policy for relevance and accessibility considerations – including locker allocations and reasonable adjustments

- **providing information and instruction** – to ensure staff are aware how to operate compactus, safes and secure cabinets to reduce the risk of injury.

Information, Communication and Technology

9.3% of recommended actions in the work areas category relate to ICT.

While ICT is often considered separately to property, the interaction between the two is an important consideration for property professionals in creating an accessible work environment. For example, monitor arms that work in tandem with adjustable workstations to create a comfortable work environment allows for prolonged periods of focused work.

Similarly, items such as printers and shredders should be placed at accessible heights and locations so that all staff can access these items as well as their screens, where applicable.

Focus areas:

- **accessible features embedded** in technology including the provision of adjustable screens on printers and shredders

- **provision of wireless accessories** to facilitate comfortable work positions.

Sensory Processing

7.0% of recommended actions in the work areas category relate to sensory processing.

Recommended actions for sensory processing only appear in a small number of DARs. This suggests that sensory processing is a developing theme and that these accessibility barriers are not as well understood as those related to physical accessibility.

While only a small number of recommended actions across DARs related to sensory processing, Finance has received feedback from entities that this is an area of focus. This coincides with more targeted recruitment of neurodivergent staff by some entities. The importance of understanding sensory processing barriers is reflected in **Recommendation 3**, which recommends that Finance undertake more work in this space to understand how the APS can better accommodate neurodivergent staff needs.

Focus areas:

- **reducing sensory disturbances**, where staff experience distractions from open plan environments.

Other Findings

The 5 remaining themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B – Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

Entities should consider the immediate benefits obtained by implementing the easy wins below.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider adopting to improve dignified accessibility in the work areas category:

- removing excess and unused furniture within work areas.

- applying tactile stickers to lockers, phones and desk controls.

- addressing noise concerns with policies, procedures and behavioural prompts.

- seeking staff input on a preferred height for personal lockers.

- ensuring advertised job descriptions contain all requirements for the job, including manual and sensory tasks, with a clear pathway to support reasonable adjustments as required across the employment lifecycle.

- reviewing and updating policies and processes for implementing reasonable adjustments.
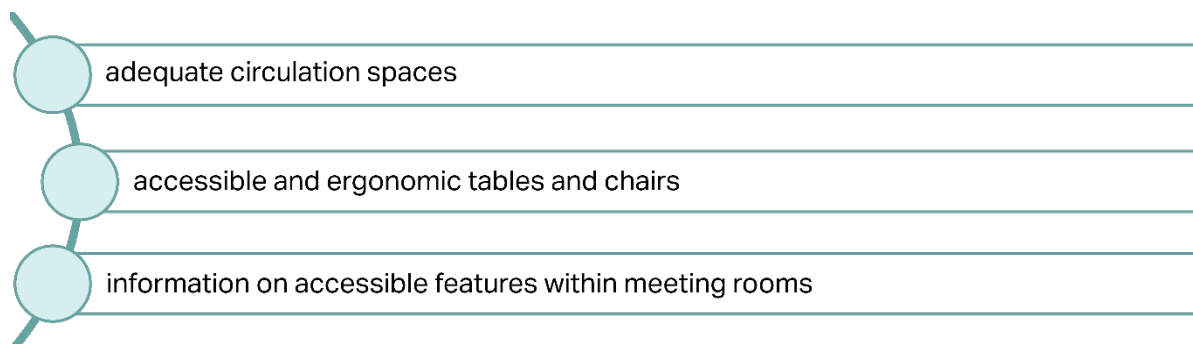
7. Meeting rooms

Overview

Meeting rooms and collaborative areas are crucial in fostering collaboration and communication within an office environment. Ensuring that these spaces are accessible to people with disability is vital to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace for everyone.

Accessible meeting rooms enable individuals with varying abilities to participate in workplace activities and interactions comfortably and independently.

Meeting rooms allow for collaboration, including bringing together hybrid teams. They often facilitate collaboration with visitors and recruitment activities, including interviews and written tasks. In these instances, meeting rooms can set the tone for the entire building and either positively or negatively impact a person's view of the agency and its approach to inclusivity. When people are unable to gain dignified access to meeting rooms and collaborative spaces or cannot access equipment in these spaces it creates barriers to participation.

From a recruitment perspective, if someone is invited to attend a face-to-face interview, and is unable to do so easily and safely, due to overcrowding of furniture, poor design, or an inability to meet accessibility needs, this may cause a significant increase in stress and anxiety before the interview has begun. This may disadvantage the candidate during interview and may even impact recruitment outcomes.

This chapter identifies barriers faced in accessing meeting rooms and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:

- adequate circulation spaces

- accessible and ergonomic tables and chairs

- information on accessible features within meeting rooms

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1** and **Recommendation 2**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs identified 232 actions to improve dignified accessibility in the meeting rooms category. The most common accessibility barriers relate to fit out and signage. In contrast, audible announcements are the least common issue identified in this category. Meeting rooms recorded the third highest number of recommended actions across all categories.

Figure 7 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 7 - Meeting Rooms - # Issues by theme
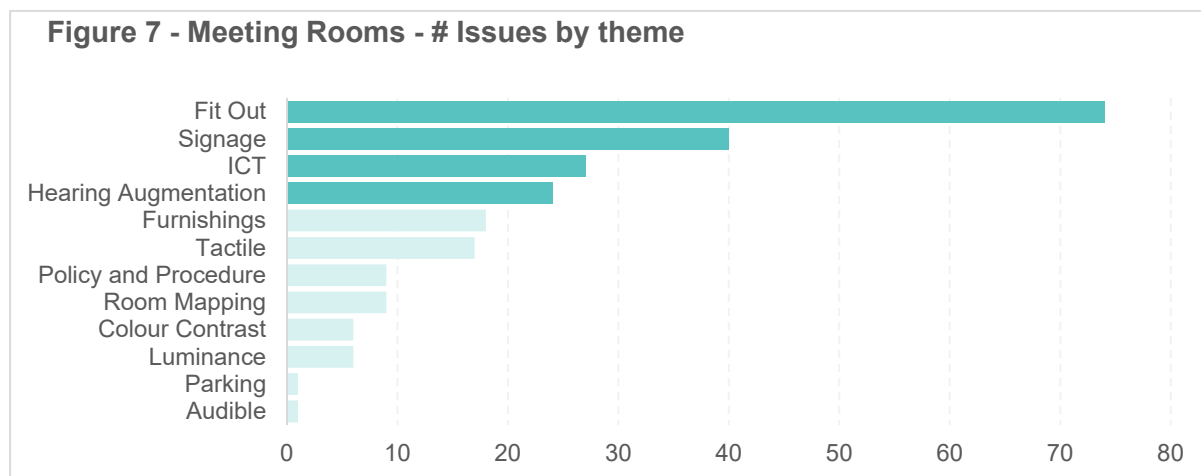
Fit Out

31.9% of the recommended actions in the meeting rooms category relate to fit out.

Within the context of meeting rooms, the fit out theme covers tables and seating options as well as the fixed placement of items (for example lighting and temperature controls) and excludes ICT which is addressed separately in the ICT theme below.

Meeting rooms are frequently overcrowded with furniture. Over furnishing reduces inclusion through reducing circulation space, it also creates a trip hazard for people who are unable to navigate around large tables and excess seating.

Focus areas:

- **redesigning meeting rooms** to provide adequate circulation space to ensure wheelchair users and those with mobility devices have enough space to adequately navigate around the room, including:

  – reducing the amount of furniture in meeting rooms

  – reducing the size of the meeting room table

- **providing meeting room** tables that are either height adjustable or low enough to be accessible to a person in a wheelchair

- providing a range of seating options including chairs with arm rests

- **relocating fixed furniture to accessible heights** including whiteboards, screens, access/booking and air conditioning panels, and light switches

- **asking about accessibility requirements** as routine, prior to every meeting and event to ensure that an appropriate room, equipment, and other facilities can be provided for use.

Signage

> **17.2%** of the recommended actions in the meeting rooms category relate to signage.

Signage in meeting rooms helps to inform staff of accessibility features and how to operate equipment. Signage can also inform behaviours through providing information on how to interact with the facilities and any housekeeping or etiquette rules, that can help to maintain an accessible environment.

Focus areas:

- **providing signage** that is unlaminated or matte finished with instructions on how to book rooms and use features including hearing loop technology, video conferencing and organise teleconferencing.

Information, Communication and Technology

> **11.6%** of the recommended actions in the meeting rooms category relate to ICT.

Focus areas:

- ensuring that all screens have closed caption capabilities and the feature is enabled

- **providing options for audio visual systems** and booking panels that are touch operated, potentially utilising screen reading technology.

Hearing Augmentation

> **10.3%** of the recommended actions in the meeting rooms category relate to hearing augmentation.

Hearing augmentation allows for people who are deaf or hearing impaired to communicate and participate in meetings. Without this technology, staff may be unable to understand and contribute to discussion, which can result in anxiety as well as feelings of isolation and exclusion.

Focus areas:

- purchasing portable hearing loops

- providing staff training on usage

- ensuring charging protocols are in place

- **ensuring devices are stored** in an easily accessible location.

Other Findings

The remaining 8 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

Entities should consider:

- cultural change – building awareness about why change is required, and how they help include colleagues and visitors is crucial to ensuring behavioural changes

- creating processes to standardise meeting room fit out

- assessing what meeting rooms staff require, including single person, small group or larger collaboration spaces and designing these spaces to accommodate staff requirements.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the meeting room category:

- removing excess, bulky or unused furniture and furnishings.

- using boardroom fit out as a visual guide to the required amount of circulation space for meeting rooms, utilise compact table and chair furniture or decrease the capacity for room bookings.

- utilising closed caption technology as standard practice.

- creating a list which identifies features and barriers to the rooms allowing staff to make decisions on which room would best suit their requirements – room mapping.

- ensuring colour contrasting tape is over cabling that needs to run across pathways of travel.

- asking about accessibility requirements prior to every meeting and event.

8. Shared areas

Overview

Shared areas support a range of tasks undertaken in an office environment. Shared areas provide respite from the work area: they benefit mental and physical health and wellbeing. Shared areas provide recognition and support to aspects of people's lives outside of the work area.

Shared areas include: first aid rooms, corridors, parents' rooms, prayer rooms, utility areas, gyms; and mail rooms. Chapters 9 and 10 cover bathrooms and kitchens respectively. Some of the areas above are a requirement for office fit out such as first aid and utility areas, others such as prayer rooms, parent rooms and gyms support employees in managing their work life balance. The rooms that support personal choice improve morale and provide support for employees looking to maintain a work-life balance.

This chapter identifies barriers encountered by people within a variety of shared areas and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:

- equitable access to shared areas
- safety equipment is accessible
- items at accessible access heights

Recommendations
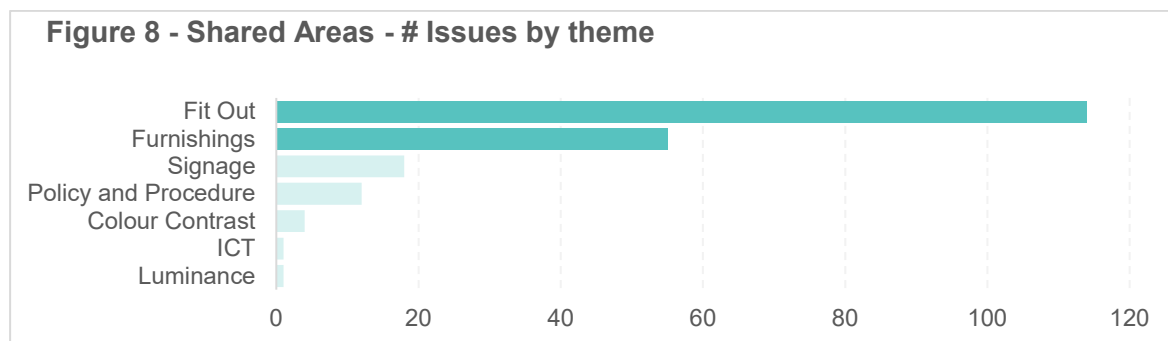
Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1** and **Recommendation 2**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs, identified 205 actions to improve dignified accessibility in the shared areas category. The most common barriers to accessibility identified related to fit out and furnishings. In contrast, ICT concerns were the least common issue identified in this category.

Figure 8 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 8 - Shared Areas - # Issues by theme

Theme	Value
Fit Out	~114
Furnishings	~55
Signage	~18
Policy and Procedure	~11
Colour Contrast	~4
ICT	~1
Luminance	~1

(horizontal axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120)

Fit Out

55.6% of the recommended actions in the shared areas category relate to fit out.

In the context of the shared areas category fit out encompasses elements of the base build, tables, beds, cupboards, seating options, placement of fixed items including phones, alarms, temperature and lighting controls.

An inclusive fit out design, particularly one that considers access and views from a diverse range of perspectives has wide ranging benefits. Within shared areas, the fit-out signals how inclusive the entity is, it is a physical demonstration of the thought and consideration given to employee and visitor safety and participation. People who have disability are most affected if a fit out is poorly executed as it restricts dignified access.

Focus areas:

- provision of accessible fixed items

    - adding handles to cupboards or install push opener

    - providing needle storage/sharps containers in first aid rooms

    - fixing emergency/duress alarms, light switches, access swipe panels, temperature controls, automated external defibrillators and emergency phones at accessible height

- **installation of accessible furniture** – benches, tables and sinks with cut out sections, adjustable first aid beds and seating options

- **reviewing storage cupboards** – rearranging contents and stationery, consider from the perspective of a short statured person or someone in a wheelchair.

Furnishings

26.8% of the recommended actions in the shared areas category relate to furnishings.

Furnishings can make the office feel warm and welcoming when properly placed, they can aid in daily life providing safety, assisting with navigation cues and increasing employee participation.

- **Decrease the amount of clutter** unblock pathways of travel and increase circulation space.

Other Findings

The 5 remaining themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

The shared areas category covers a number of spaces in the office that support staff. This includes spaces that encourage social interaction, support staff in religious practices and support working parents. Providing equitable and dignified access to these areas ensures that people feel that their needs are supported. Entities should consider:

- standardising fit out and placement of furnishings across floor levels

- improving the awareness about dignified accessibility (via cultural change) – for example returning items after use to their correct location

- supporting the physical needs of people when accessing rooms to ensure that dignified accessibility is a priority:

  – providing a first aid bed at the appropriate height (so that climbing is not required)

  – removing clutter from mail and utility rooms to support unhindered access.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the shared areas category:

- relocating commonly used stationery to a height and position that is easily accessible.

- setting up all rooms with the same purpose for example first aid or utility rooms, in the same way for every floor.

- removing excess furniture from areas that are not specifically designed for storage.
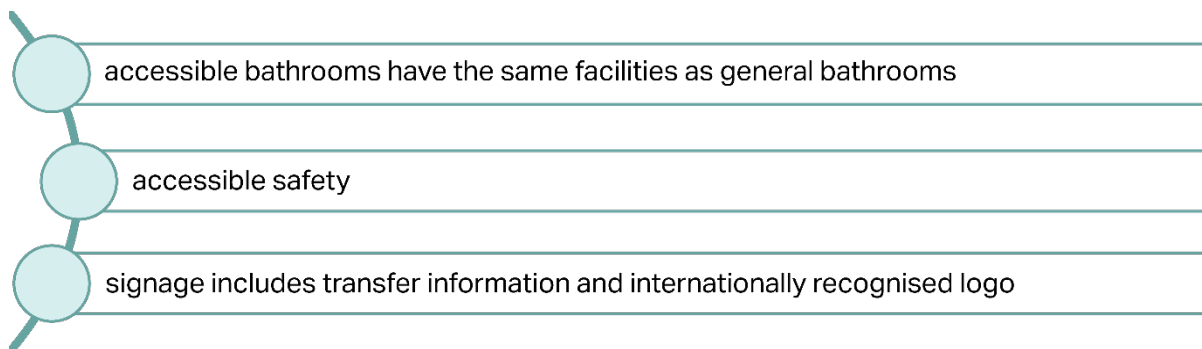
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9. Bathrooms

Overview

Being able to access a bathroom is a basic right and the provision of bathrooms is essential to the office environment. Ensuring people have equitable access to bathroom facilities when required promotes health and safety and supports dignified access.

Providing an accessible bathroom space for people with disability is mandated in legislation. Ensuring that the bathrooms are designed to provide dignified accessibility and are properly maintained is necessary to ensure a safe and comfortable experience for all.

This chapter identifies barriers in bathrooms and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:
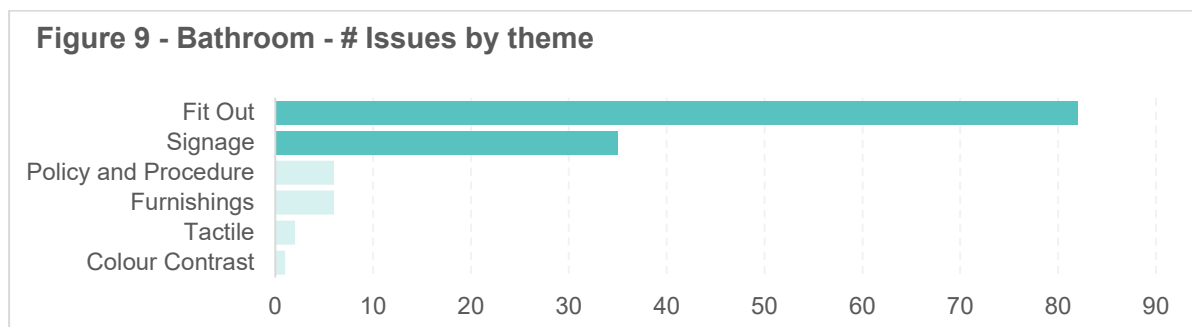
accessible bathrooms have the same facilities as general bathrooms

accessible safety

signage includes transfer information and internationally recognised logo

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1** and **Recommendation 2**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs, identified 132 actions to improve dignified accessibility for bathroom facilities The most common barrier relates to fit out. Colour contrast and tactile themes were the least common identified in this category.

Figure 9 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 9 - Bathroom - # Issues by theme

Theme	Count
Fit Out	82
Signage	35
Policy and Procedure	6
Furnishings	6
Tactile	2
Colour Contrast	1

Fit Out

62.1% of the recommended actions in the bathrooms category relate to fit out.

Fit out in bathrooms covers the design and build of the internal space. Bathrooms, like all aspects of a build, are covered by legislative requirements that are of vital importance to people with disability. Within the bathroom category the base build, vanities, shelving, accessible toilets, fixed placement of storage, alarms and access panels are all considered part of the fit out.

Ensuring a correct fit out for bathrooms is not only inclusive but also provides an element of safety in access for people who have disability.

Focus areas:

- **legislative compliance requirements** – specifically related to the number of available bathrooms, the location and the dimensions

- **equitable provision of amenities** – to ensure that accessible bathrooms provide the same facilities as those found in the general bathrooms, storage and shelving near basins, coat hooks installed at accessible heights, remove requirements for swipe card access

- **provision of safety equipment** – back rests on accessible toilets, accessible height duress buttons, visual evacuation alarms, containers for needles and sharps

- **providing information and instruction** – to ensure staff cleaners return waste and sanitary bins to accessible locations, and shower heads to an accessible height.

Signage

26.5% of the recommended actions in the bathrooms category relate to signage.

Signage creates a safe environment by allowing transparency in navigation and communication, which is vital for bathrooms. Signage can also be used as a reminder for staff to support an accessible environment. For example, a reminder to return shower heads to an accessible position.

Focus areas:

- **inclusion of information and graphics** – communicate right or left-handed transfer and display the internationally recognised logo as shown in the graphic below

- display signage at accessible heights

Other Findings

The 4 remaining themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

Entities should consider:

- supporting dignified access through ensuring:

  – accessible bathrooms are not used as overflow storage for furniture

  – swipe cards or security personnel are not required to unlock doors to provide access to bathrooms.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the bathrooms category:

- lowering coat hooks to be more accessible.

- removing swipe or key lock requirements to access bathrooms.

- removing any excess furniture or furnishings that block access to amenities.

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10. Kitchens

Overview

Staff use kitchens as a change of environment and break from work. It is where people prepare and consume food and drink. The kitchen also facilitates informal meetings, social catch ups and gatherings. Providing a kitchen that is accessible, ensures people feel included and considered within the office environment.

Kitchens typically contain electrical appliances, such as sandwich presses, microwaves and kettles, furniture such as benches, tables, seats, storage facilities such as cupboards, sinks and other amenities.

Providing equitable access to kitchens allows everyone the same opportunities to partake in social events and other activities that kitchens can provide. When barriers are experienced, people are more likely to feel excluded, and this could decrease morale and limit individuals' options for food preparation. Staff and visitors are likely to voice negative feedback about barriers they are facing when it affects their ability to relax and enjoy their meals.

This chapter identifies barriers that prohibit dignified accessibility in kitchens in the office and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:
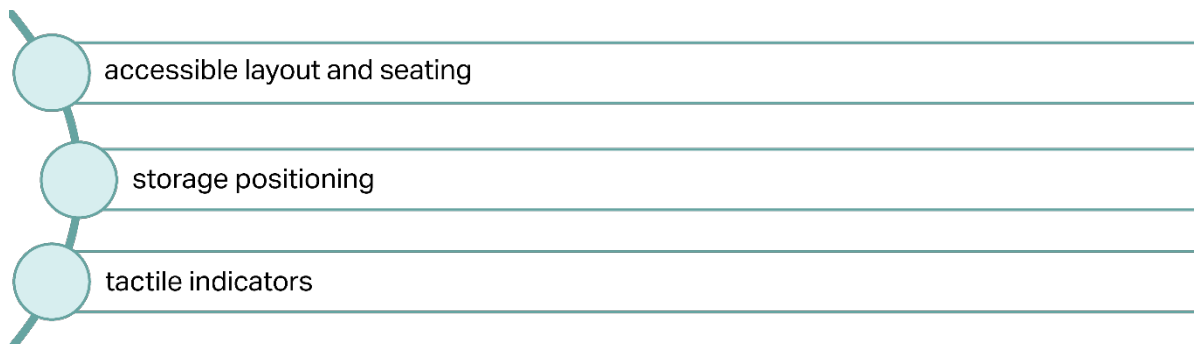
accessible layout and seating

storage positioning

tactile indicators

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1**, **Recommendation 2** and **Recommendation 3**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs identified 230 actions to improve dignified accessibility with the most common barriers to accessibility in the kitchens category relating to fit outs and furnishings. Colour contrast, sensory processing, and ICT were the least common issues identified in this category.

Figure 10 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 10 - Kitchens - # Issues by theme
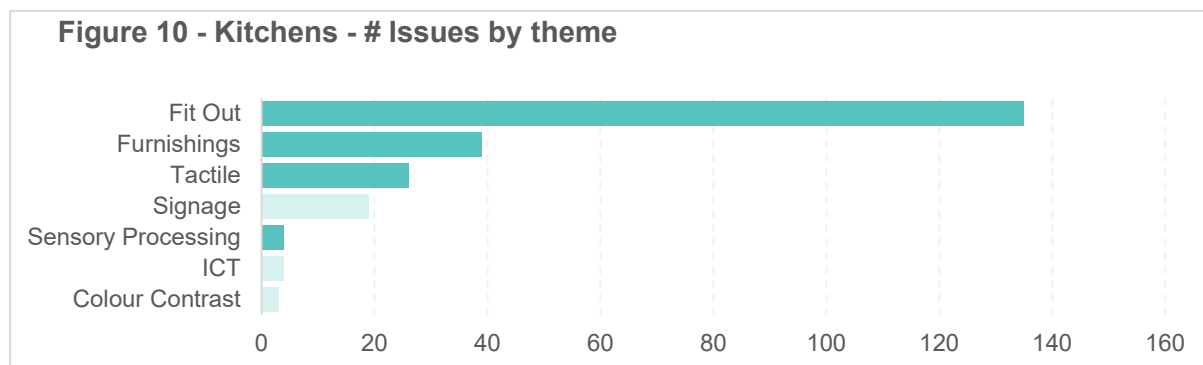
Fit Out

58.7% of recommended actions in the kitchens category relate to fit out.

Within the kitchen category, fit out covers the base build, cupboards, seating, tables, benches, fixed items on walls and appliances.

People who have disabilities are already at a disadvantage compared with able-bodied people when accessing buildings that are not inclusive in their fit out. A poorly designed and implemented fit out in kitchens may cause further stress as people are required to work through alternative plans for hydration, sustenance breaks and meal preparation and may be excluded from social gatherings. Increasing staff awareness will help ensure that kitchens can be an inclusive and accessible environment for all.

Focus areas:

- **providing a range of accessible furniture options** including tables and benches of differing heights and chairs with differing supports

- reducing the physical barriers to:

  – cupboards and drawers by providing accessible handles, consider removing cupboard doors to allow for open shelving

  – sinks by providing cut-out areas underneath.

  – paper towel dispensers, first aid kits and equipment, lighting and temperature controls all need to be within accessible heights and reach

- **relocating appliances to improve access** – consideration given to height and reach.

Furnishings

17% of recommended actions in the kitchens category relate to furnishings.

Furnishings can be used as navigation cues, assist in memory mapping and be used to create a welcoming environment. Providing furnishings that are accessible is critical for equitable participation and demonstrate commitment to health and wellbeing.

Focus areas:

- Repositioning:

  – excess furniture that blocks access to or creates obstacles in moving around the room

  – crockery, cutlery and glassware to lower level cupboards and drawers, ensure consistency across floors

- Providing accessible storage and equipment:

  – bins that do not require hand or foot operation

  – consider ease of being able to open or access tea and coffee.

Tactile

11.3% of recommended actions in the kitchens category relate to the tactile theme.

Tactile or braille markers provide independence by allowing people with poor vision to access the same information as people with full sight. Within kitchens there are numerous appliances and items that would benefit from the application of tactile markers. The actions address the addition of tactile indicators to bins, dishwashers, microwaves and all other kitchen appliances to allow people with low vision to operate independently.

Sensory Processing

1.7% of recommended actions in the kitchens category relate to sensory processing.

Only 4 of the 34 DARs provided recommended actions to improve dignified accessibility for sensory processing. The focus areas include reviewing kitchen appliances, fans and lighting with consideration given to the reduction of both sound and light to reduce sensory stimulants.

Finance has noted these and will continue to research actions consistent with **Recommendation 3**.

Other Findings

The 3 remaining themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

While a number of recommendations within this category require a substantial financial investment to address them, the following easy wins can be quickly implemented to create a more equitable environment.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the kitchens category:

- placing commonly used items such as plates, glasses, mugs and cutlery in lower, more accessible locations.

- setting out all kitchens/kitchenettes in the same way labelling cupboards to inform of contents.

- adding tactile buttons/stickers to all appliances.

- adding handles to drawers and cupboards.

- providing first aid and contact officer details at accessible heights and close to kitchen appliances.

- repositioning appliances to be closer to users – reducing the required reach.

- enabling closed captioning on all screens (such as televisions).

11. Doors

Overview

Doors play a significant role in workplace accessibility. Given the number of doors within office buildings, their features should be considered to ensure barrier-free entry to all areas in the workplace.

People with mobility impairments, limited dexterity and those who use mobility aids are the most impacted when a door is not fully accessible. Being unable to get through a door denies independence and participation. If potential employment candidates are unable to independently access the building or an interview room due to barriers from doors, they may not favourably consider ongoing employment.

This chapter identifies barriers doors create in the office and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:
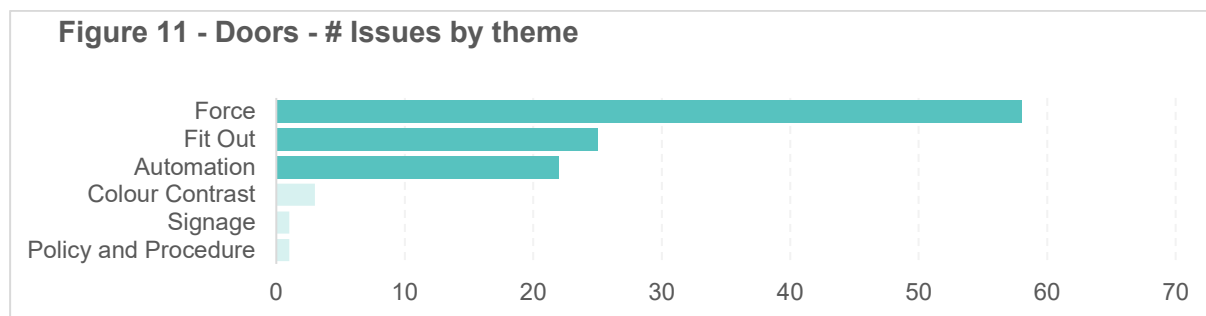
- force required to use doors
- accessible hardware
- automation

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 1** and **Recommendation 2**.

Analysis of findings

Doors had the lowest rated category throughout the DARs with 110 identified recommended actions to improve dignified accessibility. The actions are aggregated within entity DARs and, as such, are not an exact reflection of the scope of the issue. The most common barriers to accessibility relate to force, fit out and automation with the least common issue being signage.

Figure 11 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 11 - Doors - # Issues by theme

Theme	Count
Force	~58
Fit Out	~25
Automation	~22
Colour Contrast	~3
Signage	~1
Policy and Procedure	~1

Force

52.7% of the recommended actions in the doors category relate to force.

Doors that require too much force to open are a barrier to inclusion, participation and can be a safety risk. When people are unable to easily navigate to their required location due to the force needed to open a door, they may look for alternate routes, which may delay participation. Alternatively, in situations where there is no alternate path of travel a person is completely dependent on the assistance of others and they may face exclusion from engagements.

In an emergency there may only be one pathway for evacuation. In this instance, it is of paramount importance that all individuals can seamlessly navigate their way to safety.

Every DAR received recommended entities review the force required to open all doors. Automatic openers should be considered for doors which are too heavy for staff to comfortably open.

Fit Out

22.7% of the recommended actions in the doors category relate to fit out.

Fit out of doors includes the dimensions, fittings and automation controls. The ability of employees and visitors to feel included and participate is dependent on the ability to access rooms. When people are unable to enter or exit an area, their ability to participate and be included is compromised and so is their safety. People with disability may face greater challenges in being able to safely enter or exit offices, work areas, meeting rooms and other building facilities.

Focus areas:

- **ensuring door locks and handles** are correctly installed and replaced if broken

- **relocating automatic controls** to be at an accessible height

- **widening door openings** to reflect current requirements and consider installation of sliding doors.

Automation

20.0% of the recommended actions in the doors category relate to automation.

While automated doors can in some situations, require a significant financial outlay, they are considered best practice in office buildings. Automation removes the risk of push/pull injuries from doors that are heavy and where too much force is required. Automated doors have manual override release buttons should an emergency arise, and they facilitate equitable participation and access to rooms.

Focus areas:

- **the automation of doors** – ensuring they are labelled accordingly and reviewing the timing settings on these doors.

Other Findings

The remaining 3 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

While a number of recommendations within this category require a substantial financial investment to address them, the following easy wins can be quickly implemented to create a more equitable environment.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the doors category:

- replacing broken door handles as part of office maintenance.

- reviewing the force required to open and close all office doors.

- considering removing automatic door closers.

- ensuring that automatic doors already in use are correctly labelled and timing settings are reviewed.
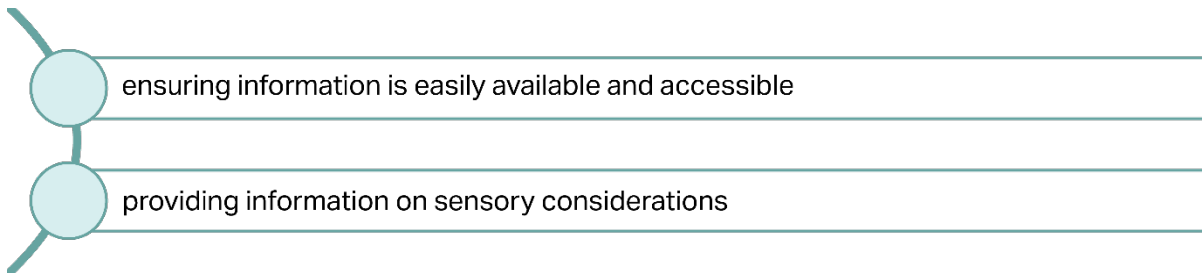
12. Wayfinding

Overview

Wayfinding is a system of communication cues delivered to an individual using senses, including visual, audible and tactile elements, to navigate to a particular location. When people have diminished sensory abilities, navigation becomes harder and people become reliant on their remaining sensory capabilities.

Addressing wayfinding challenges is essential to ensure that all people, including those with diverse sensory abilities, can effectively locate destinations within the office.

The inclusion of wayfinding as a standalone chapter underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to communication and navigation within the office. A more inclusive office environment can be created by identifying and addressing the barriers to effective wayfinding. This action supports the needs of all people, regardless of their sensory abilities.

This chapter identifies barriers in wayfinding through the office and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on mapping access features and barriers, including:

ensuring information is easily available and accessible

providing information on sensory considerations

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 2** and **Recommendation 3**.

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs identified 232 actions to improve dignified accessibility in the wayfinding category. The most common barriers to accessibility related to floor mapping and signage, with the least common barrier being colour contrast.

Figure 12 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 12 - Wayfinding - # Issues by theme
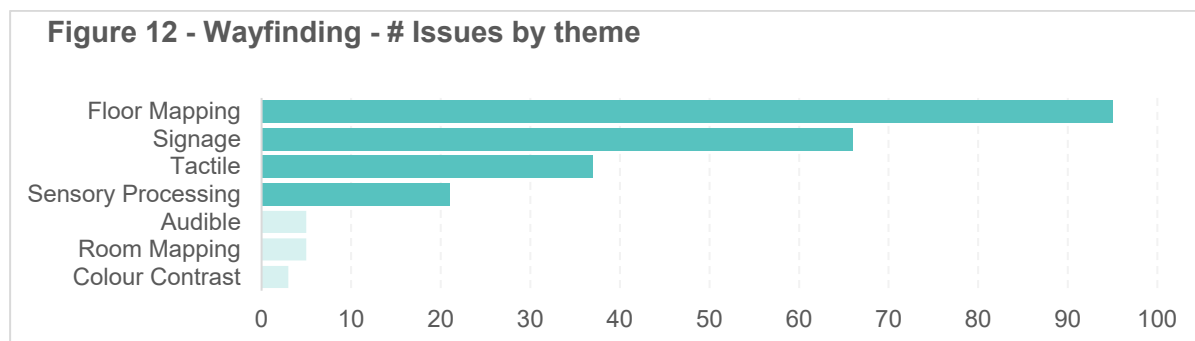
Floor Mapping

40.9% of recommended actions in the wayfinding category relate to floor mapping.

Floor mapping is the visual mapping of a floor of a building. As part of the DARs, floor mapping focuses on physical obstacles that may be encountered. The recommended actions draw awareness to accessibility supporting technologies and assistive features, such as hearing loop locations and the identification of ramps and stairs. Identification of accessibility features and barriers affords dignity to people by allowing them to plan their independent travel around the office.

All staff benefit from floor mapping as it provides a level of information that may be known by long-term employees but unknown to new and potential employees and visitors. Floor mapping provides psychological reassurance and physical safety as people can assess location and navigate around a floor with ease.

Focus areas:

- **creating an accessible floor map** to provide a comprehensive overview of accessibility features and barriers that is displayed in accessible locations and at accessible heights

- **ensuring floor mapping is available online** with consideration given to providing the maps on intranets and potentially the entrance level on public facing webpages to assist visitors and new staff

- considering the installation of beacon navigation technology

- providing building accessibility guides to staff, interviewees and visitors.

Sensory Processing

9.1% of recommended actions in the wayfinding category relate to sensory processing.

Sensory processing refers to the way people recognise and process information using their 5 senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. An example of sensory processing within an office would be the identification of a kitchen by using the smell of food and elevated noise levels. Sensory processing is crucial for people who have sensory processing disorders as elevated noise or brightly lit areas may be overwhelming. Identifying sensory processing touch points afford dignified access through providing necessary information to both staff and visitors.

Sensory processing was noted in the DARs of 16 entities to include sensory considerations into wayfinding mapping.

Signage

28.4% of recommended actions in the wayfinding category related to signage.

Signage communicates essential information to staff and visitors that assists them safely travel around the office. Poor signage, particularly in wayfinding, impacts safety and independence.

Focus areas:

- **installation of directional arrows** allowing people to easily identify pathways of travel

- **installation of visual information at accessible heights** including floor numbers located on the opposite walls to the lifts and stairs, with consideration to be given to font, glare and colour contrast.

Tactile

15.9% of recommended actions in the wayfinding category relate to tactile markers.

As with sensory processing, the provision of tactile markers on the floor maps was largely absent. Incorporating braille markers on floor maps supports people who have a vision impairment as it allows access to the same information as those who do not have a visual impairment. Tactile markers support independence in travel and safety as those with vision impairments are able to access the same information as those without visual impairments.

Other Findings

The remaining 3 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

While a number of recommendations within this category require a substantial financial investment to address them, the following easy win can be quickly implemented to create a more equitable environment.

Easy Win

Below is a simple solution that entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the wayfinding category:

- entities to create maps detailing accessibility features that are displayed at accessible heights and made available on intranets and entity webpages.
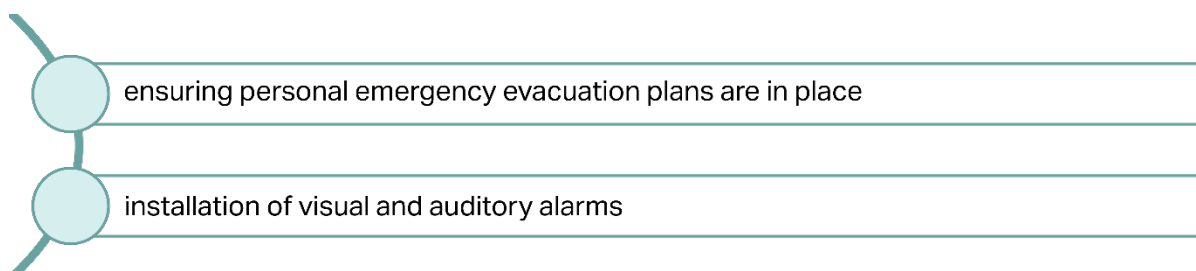
13. Evacuation

Overview

Identifying and resolving barriers to evacuation procedures is crucial to ensure the safety of everyone in the event of an emergency.

Emergency situations are generally unpredictable so processes must be developed and understood by all staff to reduce the risk of injury or death. A clear evacuation plan allows for an element of control and certainty over an unpredictable situation.

To effectively plan evacuations, entities should identify all potential emergencies and implement response options to mitigate risks. Plans need to be regularly reviewed and revised to ensure preparedness, including the development of personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEP) where required. A PEEP is a personal emergency evacuation plan that caters to an individual's abilities and allows people to be more prepared for action. A PEEP may also be required for staff with a temporary condition (such as a broken leg). Evacuation can be further supported through installation of visual and auditory alarms, such as flashing lights and auditory indicators.

This chapter identifies barriers in evacuation procedures and recommends actions to improve the physical environment, focusing on:

ensuring personal emergency evacuation plans are in place

installation of visual and auditory alarms

Recommendations

Findings from this chapter link to **Recommendation 2.**

Analysis of findings

An analysis of the DARs, identified 123 actions to improve dignified accessibility in the evacuation category. The most common barriers to accessibility are related to policy and procedure, luminance and audible themes. The least common issue in this category was fit out.

Figure 13 shows the frequency of recommended actions across participating entity DARs, by theme.

Figure 13 - Evacuation - # Issues by theme
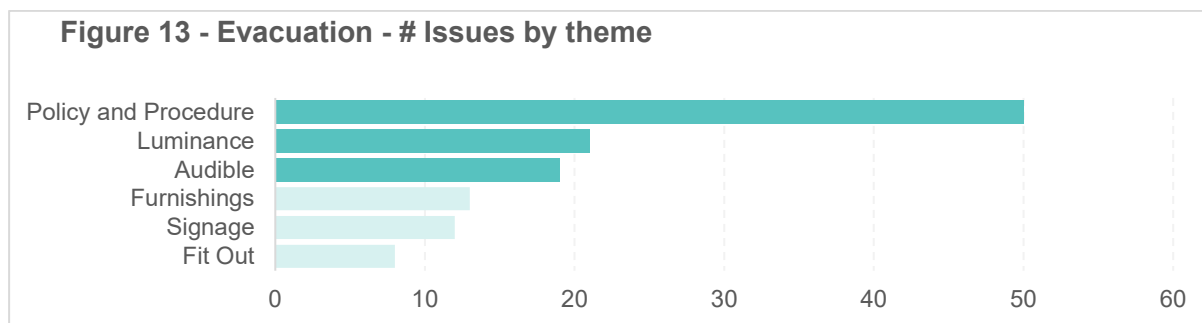
Policy and Procedure

40.7% of recommended actions in the evacuation category relate to policy and procedures.

Evacuations, outside of practice drills which support individuals to understand the actions to follow in the event of an emergency, are generally unpredictable. Evacuations can be stressful but are a necessary requirement to preserve life in an emergency. Forward planning ensures policies and procedures are in place assisting staff to evacuate safely. Forward planning is essential to protect life and reduce the risk of injury.

Focus areas:

- **ensuring PEEPs** are implemented and maintained for staff who need them, including implementing policy to ensure that PEEPs are in place for all staff from induction and regularly reviewed to ensure accuracy

- **factoring in the impact of hybrid working on evacuation procedures**, specifically in relation to where buddies are allocated to support people in evacuation, but may be out of the office, and covering any gaps in wardens

- **ensuring emergency drills occur regularly**, in addition to the testing of alarm systems.

Luminance and Audible

17.1% of luminance and **15.4%** of audible recommended actions to improve dignified accessibility were identified in the evacuation category. The luminance and audible categories are combined as they are closely related in emergencies.

Visual and audio alarms are imperative for safety and navigation. Audio alarms indicate to those with vision impairments that an emergency is unfolding by providing key information, such as when to evacuate. Similarly, should an area become smoke or haze filled, visual alarms may not be visible and so audio alarms will be relied upon by both staff and visitors. Likewise, people with impaired hearing can be at risk if they are in an isolated area and there is no visual alarm to signal an emergency is taking place.

Focus areas:

- educating staff of where there are gaps in emergency alarms and addressing them

- **installation of visual alarms** with consideration given to installation in noisy locations, in accessible bathrooms and near evacuation signs

- **utilising visual alarms** in combination with existing audio alarms for all emergency situations, not just during lock-downs

- **installing auxiliary alarm systems** for team members who are deaf and ensure auditory alarms are in working order.

Other Findings

The remaining 3 themes were noted in some DARs but not to the extent that whole-of-government themes were evident. A summary of the findings for this category is found at **Attachment B - Summary of DAR actions**.

Suggested actions for entities

Entities should consider:

- the behavioural and cultural aspects that can impact placement of furniture and furnishings to ensure the safety of all individuals. For example, if staff are placing furniture in the pathway to fire exits, an education program may be required to change this behaviour.

- implementing PEEPs on induction and reviewing regularly will help to keep people safe in an emergency situation.

Easy Wins

Below are some simple solutions entities should consider to improve dignified accessibility in the evacuation category:

- reviewing evacuation pathways and procedures, including reminding staff of the importance of keeping doors clear of obstacles and ensuring that PEEPs remain current.

- providing guidance to staff on how to assist visitors with accessibility concerns during an emergency.

- understanding where there are gaps in audible and visual alarms.

- conducting regular emergency drills including practice of evacuation procedures for staff with disabilities.

Appendix 1 - Consultation

Internal to Finance

- Human Resources

- Facilities

- SES Disability Champions

Internal to government

Australian Public Service

- Australian Public Service Commission

- Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

- Attorney-General's Department

- Australian Human Rights Commission - Disability Discrimination Commissioner

- Department of Social Services

- Department of Defence

Commonwealth Networks and Working Groups

- Whole of Australian Government Property Group

- Australian Public Service Property Working Group

- Commonwealth Disability Champions Network

External to government

State and Territory Governments

- Western Australia and Victoria Government Property Group

- Victorian Public Service Commission

- New South Wales Property and Development Team

- New South Wales Disability Inclusion and Social Policy Team

Private Enterprise

- Australian Network on Disability[14]

- Design for Dignity

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14 Organisation was renamed to the Australian Disability Network 15 January 2024.