

Mentoring Program Checklist Series

Surfaces and Signage

Understanding more about your workplace environment and the needs of your employees with a vision impairment.

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During the Mentoring Sessions one of the areas discussed was workplace surfaces and signage. This information checklist and related questions are designed to build awareness about an important part of the induction process and compliments the rest of the checklists in reducing barriers to the employment of and advancement opportunities for employees with a vision impairment.

Building knowledge in this area and working with people with vision impairment in workplace situations is important for individuals, teams and workplaces and may have Workplace Health and Safety implications.

Most workplace premises are not owned by specific organisations so there is a need for strong relationships, leadership and action with building owners and relevant maintenance teams to ensure accessibility for all is a priority. Newer buildings should be covered by strengthened building codes that include accessibility requirements. However, in older buildings there needs to be work done to advocate for change to ensure accessibility is part of the renovations or alternate approaches to accessibility are taken. Interestingly, in many cases, accessibility changes undertaken for people

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with disabilities benefit the broader population.

Why is it important to meet requirements?

Strengthening understandings related to Surface and Signage is important for all employees and meets Disability Discrimination Act requirements. The Disability Discrimination Act - Access to Premises Standard applies to new buildings and to any substantial renovations to older buildings. It is the key National Disability Discrimination document on building and environment access issues. The following websites of the Australian Human Rights Commission and Standards Australia contains useful information on building and environment access requirements:

- <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/disability-standards>
- <https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/page/PremisesStandardsGuidelineV2.pdf>
- <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights>

We encourage all leaders to have a comprehensive look at the workplace. To assist in doing this we suggest reflecting on the following questions and thought starters.

Surfaces

- What type of building does your organisation currently occupy in terms of approximate age?
- What floor does your organisation or company unit/team currently occupy?
- Are there tactile indicators at the top and bottom of stairs?
- Does the handrail provide support for the full set of stairs or is there a gap one step from the bottom?
- Are there contrasting colours on stairs for vision impaired employees?
- Has there been creative use of materials regarding floor, wall and ceiling surfaces for colour contrast and acoustics? Have employees with lived experience been involved in testing these new spaces?
- Have you ever received requests for changes in floor, wall and ceiling surfaces from people with different disabilities and have requests been adopted?
- Have relevant policies been formalised and implemented?
- Do employees with a variety of vision impairments have ongoing involvement in policy development and implementation processes?

Signage

- Signage needs to cater for all people with disability. At times there is a need to think laterally to ensure all needs are met. Does your organisation take care in catering for a range of requirements and provide additional supports if needed?
- What accessible signage is displayed throughout your office and building?

- Are contrasting colours used? Information about contrasting colours provided by Vision Australia

<https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/digital-access/resources/colour-contrast-determinator>

- What other mediums are used for signage? Have you ever had requests for signage in a specific medium?
- Are signs at a convenient height for vision impaired employees?
- If Braille signs are used, how are they created and are they checked for accuracy?
- Does your organisation have formal policies relating to adoption and implementation of signage and are vision impaired employees involved in this process?

Lifts

We encourage organisation to take a closer look and determine if there could be challenges with lifts.

Examples of challenges include:

- Lifts or banks of lifts with no announcements, people have to guess which floor the lift has stopped on or have had to get out at each floor to find a human to find out what floor. Sadly, receptionists on each level no longer exist.
- There are foyer areas where people with a vision impairment, employers and visitors, need to guess which lift will arrive next and hope they are in the right position to enter safely.
- Lifts that go to restrictive floor configurations. Buildings where all lifts don't go to all floors with one bank of lifts going to levels 1 to 10 and another to levels 10 to 20.
- Requirement for a swipe card to a specific floor. If a person with a vision impairment is a visitor or new without a swipe card and the doors close too quickly, they can get stuck in the lift.
- Worn out braille buttons. There is an ongoing requirement to check all and specifically the emergency button. Also ensure emergency button is in place that is easily accessible however not in place that could be pushed by mistake.

Additional questions to consider:

- Are there surface or milestone building features that provide correct directions to and from lifts for visitors plus new and existing staff?
- Do the lifts in your building meet relevant Australian Standards and relevant provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act Standard for Access to Premises?

Independence

A majority of vision impaired employees are very independent and with orientation tailored to their requirements do not require a great deal of assistance. In trying to be as helpful as possible sometimes people might go into too much detail. This could happen in personal areas like staff toilets. Ask the person who is being shown around how much detail they need. Some people will appreciate knowing the bathroom lay out in detail however others might be okay with less information and work out the rest for themselves. Asking what people need is always the best approach.

Some vision impaired people will use modern technology to maximise their independence. For example:

- Many people are now quite familiar with the type of technologies used in QR codes with their mobile phones and this type of signage will become more prominent throughout buildings into the future.
- **AIRA** - <https://aira.io/> Aira is a visual interpreting service. Live, on-demand access to visual information.
- **Be My Eyes** - <https://www.bemyeyes.com/> Be My Eyes is a free app that connects blind and low-vision people with sighted volunteers and company representatives for visual assistance through a live video call.
- **Vision Australia** provides links to helpful apps through the following link: <https://www.visionaustralia.org/information/adaptive-technology/technology-beginner-guides/top-10-apps-for-blind-and-low-vision-users>

PLUS:

- **Guide Dogs NSW/ACT** offer Orientation and Mobility training and support for people with a vision impairment who have guide dogs plus people who use canes and other technology: <https://nsw.guidedogs.com.au/services/orientation-mobility/>