

Dental Practice Accessibility Considerations for Older Persons

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In Australia, approximately 4.2 million people, or 19 percent of the population, have a disability¹. Together with friends and families, the number of people affected by a disability is larger still. People with disabilities, friends and families make choices about premises based on how easy they are to use.

Australia has an ageing population, between 1996 and 2016 the proportion of people aged 65 years and over increased from 12.0% to 15.3% and the proportion of people aged 85 years and over almost doubled from 1.1% of the total population in 1996 to 2.0% in 2016.² Levels of disability increase with age, and many older people have difficulties with mobility sight and hearing. In accordance with an ageing population people will require provisions to ensure equitable access to goods and services - so maximising accessibility of premises makes good business sense for all service providers.

Provision of access for a person using a wheelchair or mobility aid is often considered to be an indication of an effective method for ensuring access. However, there are far more considerations to be taken into account that are not necessarily satisfied by just providing access for a person using a wheelchair.

Older people may also experience the effects of disability through impairment to:

- Sight
- Hearing
- Motor ability
- Dexterity
- Balance
- Mental functioning etc.

Older People may not consider themselves to have a disability, but examples of a range of access challenges that progressive practices should consider for older people and people with a disability include:

- Users of wheelchairs or mobility devices and additionally their carer companions face difficulties such as abrupt changes in levels (e.g. steps and steep slopes/gradients) and require increased circulation area, particularly at doorways and changes in direction.
- People who walk with difficulty and experience have stiff hips, balance problems or uncoordinated movements, require attention in the design of stairs, handrails, selection of seating in waiting areas, slip resistant floor finishes and ramp gradients.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia 2012* (catalogue 4430.0).

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2016* (3101.0).

- People with sensory disabilities, which affect either their hearing or vision, require clear, easy, succinct signage and tactile indicators. This requires attention to a variety of factors including sound levels, background noise, and announcement amplification at customer service points, colour, luminance contrast, size and levels of illumination.
- People with cognitive impairment may have difficulty finding their way in new environments. Therefore clear layout and directional signage with graphics are important.

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