



Practical Recommendations for Domestic and Family Violence Services



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As information gets updated, new versions of this document will be available on both websites

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Practical Recommendations for Domestic and Family Violence Services

Each service is different, and will therefore require different changes in order to address its barriers to access.

Complete an audit to ascertain which changes need to happen immediately. Consultation is vitally important. Ensure that women with disability are involved in this auditing process, as their lived experience of disability may enable them to notice barriers that you might not have even considered. Reach out to NSW peak body, People with Disability Australia, for information or assistance concerning consultation.

Consultation with women with disability will help ensure that your service is addressing the most salient issues first. A realistic timeframe for implementing the following recommendations is 6 months to 3 years. Ultimately, your service should make these changes towards inclusivity as soon as it can.

Often, changes to increase accessibility are relatively minor. The recommendations in stage one are quite straightforward, and require little planning or financial input. Stage two recommendations require more planning and resources. However, if at this stage a complete solution or change to one of these recommendations is unavailable, it is important that you make realistic plans towards how to address this issue in the future. This can help make incremental progress towards this goal. For instance, if a permanent ramp is not immediately available or realistically able to be installed, a portable or temporary ramp could be installed to address accessibility in the interim. Finally, the recommendations in stage three are larger undertakings, often involving significant changes to infrastructure, or requiring substantial financial resources.

Develop your Disability Action Plan (DAP) with consultation with people with disability, and with ownership at all levels of your organisation. For instance, assigning responsibility to staff members for each of the following categories of accessibility recommendations will help foster ownership, accountability and commitment to these changes. Progress under the DAP should be regularly reviewed, and monitored as part of your organisation's Strategic Plan.

While the other changes can be implemented over a period of 6 months to 3 years, the following safety changes should be prioritised by your service.

Important Safety Changes

- Install fire alarms that can be converted into flashing lights or vibrations, ensuring there are audible and visual alarms as a minimum standard.
- Ensure that your emergency evacuation plan is available in a range of formats, such as braille, Easy English, large print and audio recording. If required, seek external assistance for feedback on how to make your emergency evacuation plan safer for people with various impairments.

Information Accessibility

Stage One

- Ensure that any information provided by or about your service meets a minimum level of accessibility, for instance in braille, large print, Easy English and other alternative formats.
- Ensure that information uses short sentences, clear headings, simple information, succinct definitions, a legible large print size and pictures and diagrams where necessary. Highlight important information by putting it in bold font. Italics should be avoided.
- Information provided in inductions to refuges or services must be broken down into smaller segments, or incorporate Easy English information, to accommodate women with intellectual disability.
- Information should be printed on non-reflective paper that contrasts with a dark font colour.
- Ensure that you are dispersing information in safe and accessible locations. For instance, in disability services, disability advocacy organisations, doctor's offices, supermarkets, schools, community centres, accessible toilets and so on. Notice boards and pamphlet dispensers need to be at appropriate heights.
- Ensure that electronic information is provided in Microsoft Word or html, as these formats are most accessible.
- If you have a telephone designated for client use, these should be located at an appropriate height, with large numbers, volume control and TTY capability.
- Attach a mobile number to your service to facilitate easier contact and communication, and establish alternate methods of crisis contact, such as via email or SMS. In particular, women who are Deaf, deaf¹ or have hearing impairments may prefer to communicate via email or SMS, due to concerns about confidentiality using relay services.
- Ensure that televisions have closed-captioning text and that staff are able to use this function, as well as any other assisted listening devices.
- Ensure that all your events are held in accessible venues. Plan events that are inclusive and are able to be attended by women with a range of impairments.

¹ "Deaf", "deaf" and "hearing impaired" people refer to three distinct groups of people.

"Deaf" (with a capital D) people identify with a distinct cultural and linguistic population who often speak Auslan as their first language, whilst "deaf" and "hearing impaired" people may not identify in this way, and may have different needs.

Information Accessibility

Stage Two

- Ensure your website, and other informational materials, divide information up into manageable chunks to increase the likelihood of retention and understanding.
- Consult the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards outlined by W3C to ensure your website is accessible. If need be, employ someone to change your website to abide by these guidelines.
- Informative material and brochures should represent women with disability, using photos of women with disability where possible.
- Consider chatting with a radio program about your service, or create a YouTube video targeted at women with disability, concerning your service and domestic and family violence.
- When planning events, ensure full accessibility by offering hearing loops, Auslan interpreters, live captioning and web streaming.

Stage Three

- Provide information about the accessibility of your service in presentations, publications, on your website and brochures.
- Create an introductory DVD to show women upon arrival at your service.
- Consider creating a DVD to show in workshops or disability services, to help inform women about domestic and family violence and how your service can help.

Signage and Lighting

Stage One

- Ensure that accessible areas, such as parking bays and toilets, have the appropriate signage. Use the international symbol of access (white wheelchair on a blue background) to identify these areas. If there are no accessible parking bays, contact your local council.
- Ensure that signs are well lit and placed in appropriate positions.
- Signs should be made of non-reflective material. Ensure that they are an appropriate size and colour, with the font contrasting with the background.
- Signs should have clear lettering and symbols on them.
- Lighting should be installed in a way that minimises glare and shadows. Fluorescent tube lighting is best for this.

Stage Two

- Existing signs using large print should be produced with raised tactile lettering, or in braille.
- Ensure that light switches, power point outlets and elevator buttons are at an appropriate height.
- Switches and buttons should be large enough to be pressed by the whole hand.
- Raised tactile lettering or braille should be used on elevator buttons, and elevators should have an audio system installed where possible.

Physical Accessibility

Stage One

- Ensure that the closest, safest and most accessible form of public transport to your service is detailed in informational materials and on your website.
- Ensure there is a wide, clear path leading to your service.
- Accessible parking bays should be as close to the main entrance as possible and clearly marked as such.
- Remove rugs from hallways and rooms, or at the very least ensure they cannot become a tripping hazard.
- Ensure that pathways and hallways are always clear, and that any obstacles (such as poles) can be easily located by using a cane.
- Ensure that stairs have slip-resistant and colour contrast strips on them to increase visibility and prevent falls.
- Ensure handrails are a different colour from the wall upon which they are located.
- Use light colours on walls and ceilings so that furniture can stand out.
- All cupboards and wardrobes should have white or light interiors, increasing contrast and making it easier to find things.
- Get rid of any glossy paint that may be creating glare.
- Where appropriate, divide larger spaces into smaller areas to give women with visual impairment landmarks from which to navigate. Furniture can be used to do this, as can floor coverings of different textures.
- Furniture should not obstruct pathways or doorways or the turning circle of a wheelchair. Ensure that all areas have enough room for wheelchairs to turn around.
- Ensure that furniture locations make sense and are kept consistent.

Stage Two

- Floors should be matte, hard and non-slip.
- Ensure that there are Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSI) prior to stairs or any other changes in level such as ramps.

Physical Accessibility

Stage Two

- Where required, install handrails. Ensure that they provide enough support to allow people to feel confident moving about, both inside and outside.
- To increase wheelchair access, carpet should be low level pile and polished surfaces should be avoided, as should loose surfaces such as gravel.
- Replace doors that are too heavy. Doors should be able to be opened using one hand.
- Replace doorknobs with door handles, with 'D' shaped handles preferred. Door handles should be made of non-reflective material and should be a contrasting colour to the door.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms should also be configured for accessibility. Ensure that:

- Toilet paper is easy to reach and replenish.
- Taps are consistent throughout the service: hot on the left, cold on the right.
- The locking mechanism on accessible toilets is easy to use, preferably with one hand.
- The flushing mechanism is easy to use, preferably with one hand.
- The shower head is hand held.
- Shower seats are made available to those who require them.
- Soaps, hand driers and towels are at appropriate heights
- There is sufficient lighting and ventilation.
- Handrails are provided to assist stability and balance.
- Non-slip tiles or non-slip bath mats are used.
- Accessible showers do not have a recess or step into them. They should be easily opened or not have a door at all.
- Sinks are an appropriate height to allow a wheelchair to fit underneath them.

Stage Three

- Consult Liveable Housing Australia, which outlines the best approach to accessibility. Ensure that all aspects of physical access abides by these requirements. If required, address the aspects of your service that do not meet these standards.
- Keep in mind that women with disability need to be accommodated for, yet physically accessible accommodation should not be located in an isolated area of the service.

Kitchens

Kitchens should be configured for accessibility. Ensure that:

- Appliances and utensils are kept at an accessible level.
- There is sufficient bench space at heights appropriate for people standing or sitting (including benches with openings beneath for wheelchairs).
- There is sufficient general and task lighting above kitchen benches.
- Stainless steel and other reflective surfaces are avoided.
- Stove tops are at accessible heights, and have controls at the front, to prevent women having to lean over the hotplates.
- Hotplates are a contrasting colour to the stove tops.
- Ovens are wall ovens, of contrasting colour to the rest of the kitchen benches.

Attitudinal Accessibility

Stage One

- Ensure that your staff and volunteers have received disability awareness training at the bare minimum.
- Arrange further training and skill-building exercises for staff, to be held at least annually, to increase their confidence in engaging with women with disability. Write these into the work plans of staff members.
- Encourage best practice by treating women with respect, genuinely valuing their voices and opinions. Establish relationships with disability services and disability advocacy organisations, and continue to work in collaboration with these organisations to improve your service and its engagement with women with disability.
- Ensure that staff are aware of how their language can impact people with disability, and advise that they read [PWDA's Guide to Reporting Disability](#).
- Add questions designed to measure the attitudes and accessibility of your service into your Client Satisfaction Survey, and arrange to include these in your annual report to stakeholders.
- Include staff in the creation of the service's DAP, and ensure that they know their responsibilities in working towards access and inclusion for women with disability.
- Make plans to ensure the service keeps up to date with any changes in disability assistive technology. Perhaps assign responsibility for this to a staff member, tasking them to keep abreast of any developments in assistive equipment or accessibility technologies, and notify the governance body of any relevant developments.

Stage Two

- Survey staff about their disability awareness and their level of skill or training to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and support to engage with a range of women. If necessary, organise further training and support for staff.

Stage Three

- Continually ensure that staff and volunteers are all trained on how to use TTY, hearing loops, closed-captioning, interpretive devices, communication boards and other assistive communication devices.

Procedural Accessibility

Stage One

- Perform an initial review of policies and practices that need to be addressed. Seek to improve complaints mechanisms, recruitment and selection processes and foster an inclusive culture among staff.
- Ensure that your risk assessment tools and intake processes include the variety of settings and situations in which a person with disability may encounter domestic and family violence.
- Ensure that your policies, including safety protocols, are not discriminatory. Excluding women with disability, including psychosocial disability, from seeking refuge on the basis of their disability is discrimination.
- Ensure that policies are inclusive of various types of domestic and family violence, understanding that carers and support staff can be perpetrators of such violence.
- Ensure that all women are asked about their accessibility needs upon arriving at your service. Where necessary, provide extra assistance to women who require help filling out forms or providing information to your service.
- Policies and procedures should ensure that all clients and staff using your service are informed about how their actions influence women with disability. This could involve outlining the importance of putting things back in their place, ensuring women with disability are made aware of any changes in layout, minimising clutter and avoiding excessive noise, among other things.

Stage Two

- Ensure policies clearly outline your service's minimum requirements for accessibility. Aim to consistently meet and exceed these standards.
- Ensure that recruitment policies and practices do not discriminate against women with disability. Foster a supportive work environment that emphasises equal employment and inclusivity.

Procedural Accessibility

Stage Three

- Establish a support group or network for women with disability who have experienced domestic and family violence.
- Develop a new DAP in line with each new Strategic Plan, to ensure that if any new issues or strategies arise they are included within the plan.
- Respond appropriately to feedback and complaints and include them in your DAP.
- Continue to address policies and practices to make them more inclusive, and to allow more flexibility when engaging with women with disability.
- Ensure that formal policies are established and upheld, so that accommodations can be made more consistently, and that disability and access requirements are unable to be overlooked or ignored within the service.

References

We would like to acknowledge Carolyn Frohmader for all her previous work in this area which has substantially informed our work here. See also Frohmader, C. 2007. 'More than just a ramp: a guide for women's refuges to develop disability discrimination act action plans', Women With Disabilities Australia, http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/More_Than_Just_A_Ramp.pdf.

A lot of the following resources have been drawn from the Stop the Violence Resource Compendium on domestic and family violence, available at <http://www.stvp.org.au/RC-Domestic-and-Family-Violence.html>.

The Stop the Violence Resource Compendium also provides more general resources concerning violence against women with disability. It is available at <http://www.stvp.org.au/Resource-Compendium.html>.

The following resources informed the recommendations provided in this document:

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