



IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Around 1 in 5 Australians have a disability and more than half of people aged 55 years and over have difficulties with mobility, sight, and hearing. Applying simple strategies to improve customer service for people with disability can help ensure everyone can access information, services and supports.

BELOW ARE SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES TO USE WHEN SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITY

FOCUS ON THE PERSON

Focus on the person and not their disability. Speak directly to the customer enquiring and not the person who may be accompanying them (carer or interpreter). If it is not necessary to discuss the person's disability, then don't. If it is relevant to their service, they will bring it up. Remember that many disabilities are not visible.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Always face the customer when you are speaking with them, use clear and concise language and check for understanding. Avoid covering your mouth or turning your back when speaking to ensure that customers who lip read have good visibility of your lips.

Use your normal tone of voice and volume. If possible, move away from loud background noise.

Never pretend to understand what a person is saying. If you don't understand them, ask the person to repeat or rephrase it or offer them a pen and paper. Don't attempt to speak for or finish a person's sentence.

BE RESPECTFUL

Treat people with disability with the same respect as you would anyone else. Don't speak down to people with disability or use patronising language. Many people with disability find it offensive when they are referred to as courageous or inspirational for living with their disability and going about their daily tasks.

ALLOW TIME

Be patient and acknowledge that some customers may require extra support or time. Give the opportunity for the customer to ask questions and reassure them that you are there to help.

GUIDE AND ASSISTANCE DOGS

Assistance animals are not pets, but rather are highly trained disability support services that enable a person with disability to safely participate in personal and public life activities.

A person using a harnessed Guide Dog or Assistance Dog in NSW is allowed entry into all public places, transport, and food service businesses. It is an offence to deny or charge a fee for the entry of a Guide or Assistance Dog.

Don't pat, feed, or otherwise distract the Guide or Assistance Dog when it is working.



EASIER ACCESS

Consider how someone using a wheelchair or mobility aid can move easily around the customer area and keep walkways and open spaces as clear as possible. Portable ramps can be purchased if an entryway isn't wheelchair accessible. A clear view of the entrance area can make it easier for customer service staff to identify if someone needs assistance.

Perspex and glass shields at counter fronts can make it difficult for a person with a vision impairment to see where to exchange documents or make payments. A simple line of coloured tape at the end of the shield can make a huge difference.

Printed and digital information can be made more accessible by using plain English and using high contrast colour schemes e.g., dark text against a light background. It is helpful to avoid using high gloss paper and bold and italicised text. Important documents should also be available in Easy Read and Braille wherever possible. Printed material can also be made available in large font versions.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

HERE ARE SOME RESOURCES THAT WILL SUPPORT YOU WHEN WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY.

<https://www.and.org.au/pages/tips-for-welcoming-customers-with-disability.html>

<https://www.and.org.au/pages/etiquette.html>

<https://www.and.org.au/pages/inclusive-language.html>

<https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/language-guide/>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This guide has been produced with information sourced from
NSW Business Chamber (2017) Missed Business: How to attract more customers through better access.

Australian Disability Network website <https://www.and.org.au/articles.php/12/9-tips-for-assisting-customers-with-disability> [accessed 08/02/21]

NSW Guide Dogs website <https://nsw.guidedogs.com.au/resources/community-resources/guide-dog-access-and-etiquette/> [accessed 08/02/21]