



Accessible indoor spaces

This section offers simple, straightforward solutions for improving accessibility in existing buildings and their surrounding areas. Building regulations ensure that facilities are accessible to everyone, regardless of disability, age or gender. The information below will help you navigate these requirements and avoid potential issues. See [AISF part C](#).

Indoor spaces



Corridors, lobbies and walkways

Fixed features like columns, corridors, and lobbies are hard to modify. However, you can help by keeping them free from clutter and clearly marking hazards to improve safety and allow space for wheelchair users to turn and manoeuvre.

Internal doors

Wider doors are helpful for everyone and essential for wheelchair users. Focus on clearance width rather than door size. Existing buildings may have door clearances as low as 750mm, which can be insufficient for wheelchair access, while an 850mm clearance is ideal for most situations.

The exception to this is where sports wheelchairs are used as these have angled wheels which make them wider. See [AISF part C 3.7](#) for details. If you have multiple doors, it can be helpful to have a foam board or cardboard strip cut to the minimum clearance width to check all doorways as you walk-through the building.



What can be done if your doors are too narrow?

- **Evaluate critical routes:** For a few doors, consider their importance and if they are on critical routes. Use alternative routes or doors where possible if internal door clearances are too narrow.
- **Open fire exits:** If internal door clearances are narrow, and there are no other options consider opening external fire exit doors to provide access from outside. These are likely to be wider and often have a double door set. Have umbrellas available for bad weather days when people are using these routes.
- **Booking arrangements:** When taking bookings, consider the group or participant needs when allocating space. If other rooms have wider doors, a priority booking system will enable people needing these to specifically request and reserve spaces.
- **Double door solutions:** Sometimes, both double doors can be opened to provide a wider opening. A double door set can be difficult for anyone using a wheelchair or crutches. If the door set are not fire doors, consider propping or wedging the doors in the open position. Eventually, the venue could replace the double set with one larger door and one smaller door.
- **Hinge adjustments:** Fit existing doors with new hinges to open beyond 90 degrees, which will maximize the clear opening width.

You can find out more about door widths in [AISF part C 3.7.2](#).

Heavy doors are a major challenge for many disabled people. Measure door opening forces with a simple Newton measure. A manual door should have no more than 30 Newtons force to open from the closed position to 30 degrees and 22.5 Newtons beyond that. Many doors, especially those with self-closing devices (required on fire doors and many entrance doors in exposed weather conditions), are too heavy.

See [AISF part C 3.7.5](#) for further information on door closers.

Adjustments may include:

- Many self-closing devices can be adjusted (usually with a simple turn of a screwdriver), so it may be possible to reduce the heaviness of the door in this way.
- Changing a door closer to one with a sliding CAM action can result in a lower opening force.
- Have someone ready and able to open the door when needed.
- Where the door is definitely not a fire door (check with your fire professional), such as a toilet door, the closer could simply be removed.
- Prop or wedge the door open during the event/opening hours (if it is not a fire door). A door closer can be fitted with a 'stand open arm' to a non-fire or security door, so that the door will remain open at a pre-set angle until it is closed manually, this is helpful on outer doors.
- The style of the door handle can also make opening a door more challenging; for example, handles that require a strong grip and hand action, such as doorknobs, should be changed for lever action. See [AISF part C 3.7.6](#).



Lifts

Lifts are essential for many people requiring step-free access to different floor levels but are only likely to be available in larger venues. A lift is a major investment and will be disruptive to install, but it should be considered when opportunities arise. See [AISF part C 3.8](#).

There are some easy improvements that can be made to existing lifts, which include:

- **Handrail:** Add a handrail if there's not already one there.
- **Mirror:** Install a top-half mirror in the rear of the lift car for wheelchair users to see when reversing out. This also helps people with hearing impairments as they can see who enters the lift with them. If a full-height mirror exists, add opaque film to the bottom half to prevent visually impaired people mistaking the mirror for an opening.
- **Wheelchair access:** Your lift car may be too small for some wheelchairs. Providing a small, lightweight wheelchair that fits the lift car may allow some wheelchair users to use the lift whilst their own wheelchair is transported separately to the next level or stored safely.
- **Control panels:** If control panels within a lift car lack any tactile information, add both visual and tactile information using inexpensive self-adhesive embossed vinyl layover signs or Braille tape.



Credit: RNIB

- **Floor covering:** If the lift car floor is black or very dark in colour, cover it with lighter, slip-resistant vinyl, carpet, or a flat dust mat to avoid the appearance of an empty shaft.
- **Communication:** In the event of a lift breakdown or servicing, notify users via clear notices at reception, on social media, and via your website to prevent people making wasted trips. Some facilities find that creating an app user group can help give timely notifications to people of any temporary changes in accessibility like this.

Internal stairs and ramps

Stairs and ramps should have handrails on both sides where possible, continuing around landings. Where avoidable gaps occur on stairways or landings, it may be possible to add a section of rail. Timber poles from any DIY store, like those used for broom handles or curtain poles, have an ideal diameter for gripping. This is especially important where steps are irregular in shape or height, such as tapered steps and small half landings. All steps should be assessed for safe use – contrasting step edges and handrails are key safety features that should be provided. See [AISF part C 3.5](#).

A fillet infill or a threshold ramp can be used where there are level changes over 15mm, which are often found on older entrance thresholds. A threshold ramp is a small ramp designed to bridge the small height difference between the floor and a doorway to enable someone who needs step-free access to enter the building. Larger level changes will require a portable or permanent ramp, with a maximum gradient of 1:12 for safe independent use. Refer to [AISF part C 3.2 and 3.2](#) for more guidance.

Glazing

Sometimes buildings have full height glazed walls or glass doors, making them difficult to identify. All full height glazing that is not protected by furniture, should have manifestation or markings across a minimum of two bands (preferably 3). If there are no markings on the glass use notices or posters to make it stand out. You can advertise your sessions or promote special offers while improving safety and visibility for users. See [AISF part C 7.5](#).



Credit: RNIB

Light, colour and sound



Finishes

The interior finishes of a building can make a big difference to how welcoming a space feels as you enter and can affect the comfort levels of users. For example, spaces with lots of hard surfaces can become quite noisy especially when there are lots of people or activities happening.

- Introducing softer surfaces can help – use materials that will absorb sound such as cushions, blankets or upholstered furniture.
- Having non-reflective, muted colour schemes on large areas such as walls and floors can be helpful in creating a calm and comfortable environment. See [AISF part C 7.2.2](#).
- Floor finishes can create many challenges but using appropriate slip resistance and avoiding strong patterns are the most important. See [AISF part C 7.3](#).

How building features affect the senses is an important consideration which can be improved in a number of ways. For further information, see [AISF part A 2.2.8 and parts C 5.6, 7.2.2, 7.2.3](#), which includes content on neurodiversity and sensory considerations, and separate guidance is available on dementia-friendly activities.

Visual contrast

Many people benefit from visual contrast when moving around. When surface finishes and features have a tonal contrast from one another, they are easier to identify. Improving contrast is very easy. See [AISF part C 7.2.1](#).

Flooring is often mid to dark coloured (rarely white). Most walls, other than feature walls, are likely to be light-coloured, which achieves satisfactory contrast in most buildings without any special effort.

- Doors (and/or their frames) can easily be repainted in a darker shade if they do not contrast with the walls.
- Columns can be painted in a different colour, or tonal bands added at ground and eye level (typically at an average eyeline of 1500mm).
- Tables that blend with floors can have contrasting tablecloths or mats added, and soft seating that blends with carpets can have some cushions added in a contrasting colour to increase visibility.

Ensure strong contrast on smaller features such as signs, door handles, grab rails, and step edges.

Top tip! Take a black and white photograph to easily assess tonal differences and ensure adequate contrast. See [AISF part C 7.2.1](#).

Internal lighting

Lighting is a key consideration in creating a comfortable environment that people can use with ease. People with hearing loss need adequate lighting to lip-read and people with visual impairments rely on good lighting to maximise their ability to see finer detail.

Bright, flickering lighting can be difficult for people who are visually hypersensitive.

[AISF part C 8.4](#).

- **Brightness and colour temperature:** Warmer lighting can be beneficial, but be mindful of spaces with specific brightness requirements, such as activity areas or reading and other near vision activities. Consider the colour temperature of lights (e.g. warm to cool), brightness (measured in lux) and user feedback when replacing lamps and bulbs.
- **Adjustable lighting:** If lights are dimmable, or the colour temperature can be changed, brightness and tone of lighting can be adapted for different activities or user requirements. This can create a very different feel to a space, which can be used for a wide variety of activities. Where it is the intention for visitors to adjust the lighting, clear directions will be needed.
- **Lighting position:** Lamps and overhead lighting should be positioned to provide indirect rather than direct lighting as this is more comfortable. Where the angle of a lamp can be altered, care should be taken to ensure it is not pointing in a direction that will dazzle or cause discomfort.
- **Maintenance:** Regularly clean light fittings, blinds, and windows to ensure maximum light efficiency from your existing fittings.

Noise control

Ensuring good acoustics in areas where communication takes place, such as reception and meeting rooms, is crucial. If a space has excessive echo, consider adding soft materials to improve sound quality. Effective options include adding soft materials such as carpets, soft seating, curtains or fabric screens.

See [AISF part C 7.1](#).

Rest, social, relaxation and refreshment areas



Refreshments

Refreshment areas, like reception waiting areas, should be accessible to everyone:

- **Seating:** Provide a mix of seating styles, including options with and without arm supports. Keep aisles between tables clear. See [AISF part C 5.1 to 5.3](#).
- **Table contrast:** Use tablecloths if tables don't contrast well with their surroundings.
- **Serving counters:** Ideally, counters should be 850mm high for both seated and standing use. Offer table service for items that are difficult or hazardous to carry, like hot drinks. See [AISF part C 5.4](#).
- **Food and drink:** Include finger foods, and use plain crockery that contrasts with tables or table covers. Offer a mix of cups with and without handles and provide straws for use. See [AISF part H 3.8.8](#).
- **Menus:** Display menus in large print and easy-to-read formats. See [AISF parts C 5.4 and H 3.8.8](#).
- **Vending machines:** Ensure accessibility by providing assistance if needed, especially if the coin slot or the dispenser is too high or low. Braille tape can be considered for selection panels, or self-adhesive labels called bump-ons, available in an assortment of colours and textures. Some machines have audio and/or Braille, it may be possible to exchange your vending machine with one of these options. See [AISF 5.5](#).

- **Assistance animals:** Identify designated, enclosed areas for owners to toilet their assistance dog. Areas should be safe, free from glass and other dangers and have appropriate disposal bins and cleaning provisions. Include any areas the dog can access drinking water. See [AISF part B 5.10](#) and the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) offer further guidance.
- For rural routes it is helpful to provide highly visible dog bins. It can be helpful for these to be positioned at key decision points near wayfinding markers or signs and near to any general waste bins where provided.

See [AISF part C 5](#) for details of furniture for social and amenity spaces.



Quiet/restorative and sensory rooms

For individuals experiencing anxiety, sensory overload or mental health conditions, small adaptable spaces for quiet or restorative practices may be beneficial. These rooms should offer privacy and the ability to adjust the environment to suit personal needs, providing a place to pause and reset.

For detailed guidance on creating these spaces, refer to [AISF part H 3.8.6](#).

Multi-faith facilities

There are no established design standards or regulations at the current time, so if you are providing spaces for prayer, it's essential to involve disabled people in the design process, which may include specific wash facilities and the orientation of toilets. You can find guidance on faith rooms and associated facilities for ritual washing in [AISF part D 2.12 and part H 3.8.7](#).

Toilets and changing spaces



Toilet facilities should be available at the start of an activity, trail or experience, and every building should have at least one accessible toilet large enough, and correctly laid out, for disabled people including wheelchair users.

The AISF standards should be followed wherever possible when adding new toilets. Details for the design of new accessible and ambulant accessible toilets are given in [AISF parts D 2.3.6 and 2.3.7](#). Changing Places Toilets for assisted use are detailed in [AISF part D 3.8](#).

Accessible toilets

Accessible toilets are sometimes called wheelchair accessible toilets. This reassures wheelchair users that these facilities are large enough, but designed to accommodate a wide range of disabled people, including people with non-visible impairments.

Knowing where your nearest accessible toilet is and what it can offer is important. For existing facilities that may not meet current standards:

- **Facility information:** Clearly communicate the toilet's features, such as left or right-hand transfer, on websites or in responses to enquiries.
- **Space:** If the room is a little too narrow (under 1.5m), consider repositioning the toilet pan closer to the wall to improve the transfer zone. (e.g. repositioning the pan 400mm from centreline of the pan to the wall rather than 500mm).
- **Length:** If the cubicle is too short (less than 2.2m), removing any entrance lobby may create more space.
- **Under-sized facilities:** If the space is significantly undersized, consider extending or providing an alternative facility, but always keep a facility in use as it will still be beneficial for disabled people who are non-wheelchair users.
- **Toilet position:** The corner toilet layout allows hands to be washed and dried before transferring back into a wheelchair. Ensure that the space between the basin and pan is adequate for this. Use wall-fixed soap dispensers above the basin where it won't spill onto the floor and place a hand towel dispenser near the pan. If the distance between the basin and the toilet pan is too large, provide hand cleansing gel, use self-adhesive pads to provide a dispenser near the pan until this can be addressed.
- **Pan height:** Aim for a higher pan (480mm rim height). If this isn't possible, use a raised seat. Note that the hinges on these raised seats take considerable strain during use and are inclined to move more than a conventional seat. They should therefore be regularly checked.
- **Visual contrast:** Sometimes the toilet facility has poor visual contrast between finishes, for example, white grab rails, white walls and white sanitary ware. Improve contrast by adding coloured bands around walls or using contrasting vinyl on grab rails. The toilet seat can be changed to another colour to highlight the position of the pan; however, darker seats can disguise any soiling, so generally, a light colour is preferred. If the toilet seat has a lid, it must be changed for one without.

- **Grab rails and fittings:** Ensure grab rails and backrests are robust, within reach, and properly fixed. The horizontal rail at the side of the pan is most important, and the drop-down rail, in particular, should be checked to see if it is suitably weight-bearing, so don't be afraid to lean on it heavily to test it.
- **Emergency alarms:** Install emergency pull cord alarms in accessible toilets and showers. If this is not under your control, consider temporary solutions like wireless doorbells or personal alarms. Even in remote locations, such as rural area, remote monitoring arrangements are possible. A call point should sound somewhere permanently manned on or offsite so that someone can raise the alert.
- **Accessibility:** Avoid keeping accessible toilets locked unless absolutely necessary. Keeping an accessible toilet locked (even with a Radar key – a National Key Scheme (NKS) key that opens accessible toilets) is acceptable in only the most exceptional circumstances, such as a regularly abused/ vandalised facility in a remote location. Keep accessible toilets available to all users, including those with non-visible disabilities.





Credit: PCMobility Services Ltd

Ambulant accessible toilets

Ambulant accessible toilets, which are designed for people with physical impairments who are not wheelchair users should also be provided. Provide at least one cubicle with grab rails and a higher pan in standard toilets when possible. Using tap turners could help make twist operated taps usable for people with dexterity impairments.

All-gender toilets

An all-gender, sometimes called unisex, facility is self-contained with a basin and is a welcomed facility for many circumstances where using the male or female toilets is not practical or comfortable. This may include people with young children, someone supporting an adult of the opposite sex, or anyone who identifies as non-binary. Older buildings may only have male and female toilets plus a unisex accessible toilet for disabled people. This means that when someone requires an all-gender toilet, they must use the accessible one. When an opportunity arises, an alternative all-gender facility should be provided to avoid disabled people potentially having to wait longer.

For more information, refer to the detailed guidelines in [AISF part D](#).

Changing Places toilets

A Changing Places toilet is a specialised facility designed for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets. These toilets offer dignity, comfort, and hygiene for people with complex needs. They are much larger than an average wheelchair accessible toilet, with a minimum area of 12 square metres. The space has an overhead hoist and changing bed, toilet and basin, and room for up to two personal assistants. If you have a Changing Places toilet, remember to register it on the Changing Places website so people can find it. See [Changing Places](#) and [AISF part D 3.8](#).



Credit: The Wave Project

Shower and changing facilities

Easy improvements to existing facilities may include adding some chairs where no seating is provided, providing anti-slip matting where flooring is not slip resistant, and installing wall-fixed vertical grab rails in showers.

- A free-standing shower stool may help if a flip-down seat is not available in a shower or changing area.
- Shower heads can be too high for some users. Extending the shower pole can allow it to be lowered to accommodate a handheld shower spray.
- Visual contrast can be improved easily with shower curtains, anti-slip mats, and manifestation or markings applied to clear shower screens.
- Remember that portable/removable toilet seat raisers, freestanding grab rails to go around a toilet, shower stools, shower wheelchairs, and other aids for toilets and washrooms are readily available and allow a space to be adjusted to meet a range of different user needs.

AISF part D 2.1 and 2.2 for details on designing changing and shower facilities and **AISF part D 4** for examples of different configurations for a variety of facility types.

Baby and toddler facilities

Having a sturdy child's step is helpful to give greater independence and help parents who are unable to lift their young child. A smaller inner toilet seat is helpful in making a child feel safe on an adult sized pan, but this can also be provided as a separate seat that is placed on top of the usual seat before use.

See **AISF part D 2.7** for options of how to create a baby changing facility. If there is no space, a baby changing table could be provided in one or more toilets and this should be in reach of a basin for safety reasons. Where a dedicated facility is not possible, a drop-down baby change table could potentially be added within an accessible toilet, if carefully managed, alongside other standard toilet and change units. It is important that disabled people do not experience longer waiting times to access the accessible toilet as a result.

For privacy when breastfeeding, facility managers can improvise to create a quiet corner or room as requested.

Having a highchair available can be helpful to a disabled parent or grandparent who is unable to hold their child still for any length of time or if the facility has little spare space for a pram/pushchair. Harness straps should be provided to ensure the child cannot slip down.



Emergency arrangements



Evacuation

Creating an inclusive experience means considering not just how people engage in an activity, but also how they enter, move around, and exit a building or environment. Emergency evacuation from any space or building is a particularly important consideration for people who may need assistance. This is more likely to be the case in a building of more than one storey, but complex single level buildings and some external spaces may also have some challenges for some people. See [AISF part F](#) for design considerations and [AISF part H 3.5](#) for key management actions.

Making GEEP and PEEP plans

Generic/General Emergency Evacuation Plans (GEEPs) and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) are for anyone requiring assistance or support to evacuate in an emergency. These plans will vary depending upon the environment and user requirements. This could be a short-term need, such as during pregnancy or recovering from an illness or surgery, or for a longer-term impairment or disability. A key part of many plans will be to identify people who are willing to be an evacuation assistant or buddy to support or assist, including from a designated temporary waiting area (refuge) to a place of relative safety (usually outside).

It can be difficult to tailor emergency arrangements around individual needs if people are taking part for short periods or not on a regular basis. However, it is possible to consider likely scenarios, user needs and plan ahead for different types of emergencies, such as fire, flood, chemicals or anti-social behaviour. These types of plans are sometimes referred

to as GEEPs and outline how individuals may be supported or assisted. People with assistive evacuation requirements will find it reassuring to know what the arrangements are from the outset. This information can be shared with participants and visitors either upon request or on arrival. Consider displaying information in reception areas or printed on the back of visitor passes.

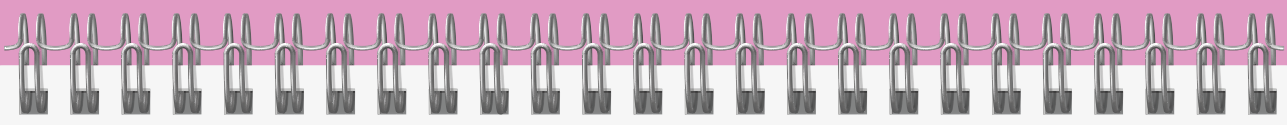
For staff and others who regularly use a venue, developing a bespoke evacuation plan is best. PEEPs are an effective way of planning for anyone who cannot evacuate independently. Assumptions should not be made about what people can and cannot do, it is always best to ask everyone if they have any individual requirements.

You can find information on how to develop these plans in [AISF part F 3.4](#) and [table F 2](#).



First aid

First aid kits and defibrillators should be accessible and easy to locate. Think about where your first aid points are located and whether everyone can access these. Ensure you know and communicate their locations and regularly check they are well stocked. Whilst buildings are likely to have formal first aid facilities or kits in place, some outdoor environments may not. It's worth finding out about the nearest defibrillators and taking basic first aid supplies with you.



Key actions

We have reached the end of this section. Have a look through the list below and

☒ **check the boxes** that apply to your space. Note any areas for improvement.

Light, colour and sound:

- ☐ Have you ensured acoustics and lighting accommodate various sensory needs?
- ☐ Are indoor areas safe for everyone?
Remember to mark hazards such as stairs or glazing to avoid accidents.

Rest, social, relaxation and refreshment areas:

- ☐ Are public areas clear of obstructions and wheelchair accessible?
Remember to provide quiet spaces too.
- ☐ Have you provided a range of food options that cater to various dietary requirements?
Ensure you also include provisions and amenities for assistance animals.

Toilets and changing spaces:

- ☐ Have you provided a variety of toilet and changing options for people using your facilities?
Including accessible and all gender options and facilities for families with young children?

Emergency arrangements:

- ☐ Are emergency procedures clearly displayed in all public areas and do all visitors know of where to find them?
 - ☐ Are your emergency procedures accessible and inclusive for all, including people requiring assistance or support?
- 