



# New access requirements

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**W**hen a new dental practice is built, statutory bodies require compliance with regulations for new building work to enable access for people with disabilities, ranging from wheelchair users, to visually impaired, to deaf, aged and the handicapped. Guidelines come from three areas:

- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA);
- Australian Standard AS 1428.1 (2009) Design For Access And Mobility. Part 1: General Requirements For Access - New Building Work; and
- Development Control Plans in some Local Councils.

The primary guideline is AS 1428 and was updated in 2009, with the previous issue being from 2001. Compliance with this standard is referenced under the Building Code of Australia which is the overarching compliance code for any new construction work. The 2009 update will become a legal requirement under BCA in 2011.

The standard is used by designers, architects, and regulators to ensure a facility is designed to a minimum standard for compliance.

Some practitioners think they will be exempt if they do not treat any disabled patients, however, this is not the case. All practices need to address the code, or argue for exemption/non-compliance if *“alterations required to make them accessible would impose unjustifiable hardship on the person providing the accessibility.”* (Section 23 DDA).

I will briefly outline following some of the primary areas and changes in the recent standard AS1428.1 (2009) that affect new dental practices.

## Entry ramps

The maximum gradient of a ramp exceeding 1900mm (previously 1520mm) in length shall be 1 in 14 which is the steepest comfortable gradient for a person in a wheelchair to navigate. This means for every 100mm change in level, there is 1.4metres of ramp required.

## Doorways and clearances

All doorways now require a clear opening unobstructed door width of 850mm minimum (previously 800mm). Circulation space clearances are affected by width of door and direction of approach and width of corridor. The clearance required inside a hinged door on the latch side to a surgery room is now 530mm, increased from 460mm previously for door width of 850mm. The clearance on the inside of an inward opening hinged door has

increased from 1350mm to 1450mm. These clearance requirements substantially affect the location of clinical joinery and the dental chair in the surgery.

## Corridor

Corridors and continuous accessible paths of travel have varying width requirements generally from 1000mm to 1220mm minimums. The required widths must be unobstructed and care should be taken to make sure that skirtings, architraves, door handles, hand rails, fire hose reels, shelves, signage, etc. do not intrude in the minimum width. The unobstructed height required is 1980mm.

## Toilets

A disabled WC is required for healthcare practices. The area of the WC has significantly increased from 1600mm x 2000mm to a revised minimum of 1900mm x 2300mm. Specific provisions also address WC pan clearances and the toilet seat (there is the requirement now for the seat to have minimum luminance contrast of 30% with the floor). Other provisions address flushing controls, backrest, seat angles, grab rails, circulation clearances, etc.

## Basins and taps

The update now requires a washbasin to be located within the toilet cubicle. There has been a marginal increase in circulation space around the basin. The standard now addresses semi-recessed and floor mounted basins, as well as the previous wall mounted option. The new standard requires a shelf (120mm x 400mm minimum) to be provided adjacent to the washbasin (if no vanity). Other guidelines relate to knee toe clearances, basin heights and widths, etc. Tap guidelines are basically the same except for a new provision that lever handles must not be less than 50mm from an adjacent surface.

Please note that I have only addressed some salient areas of the standard which are pertinent to dental fit-outs. By no means should this be treated as an exhaustive list. For a comprehensive understanding, the complete standard should be referenced.

Other standards address vision impairment, car parking and hearing impairment. The standards can be purchased online from <http://www.saiglobal.com/shop>

## About the author

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