

Introduction

Providing access to buildings and housing for people with disabilities is an important consideration for all building projects to ensure safe and equitable access for all. Building standards determine minimum requirements for accessibility provisions including for adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Ensuring accessibility in a residential adaptive reuse project requires careful planning to meet the needs of all potential residents, including those with disabilities. By considering these factors, you can create a living environment that is inclusive, safe, and functional for everyone.

Accessibility strategies can also consider ease of access for other users such as people with prams, walkers or restricted mobility.

Building Standards

Minimum standards for access for people with disabilities for adaptive reuse of existing buildings in South Australia are defined by the *Ministerial Building Standards* (MBS) and the *National Construction Code* (NCC).

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) requires that all new developments — including those converting existing buildings into housing — be accessible to people with disabilities. This legislation aims to ensure that people with disabilities can access and use buildings, services, and spaces on an equal basis with others.

The *Access to Premises Standard* forms part of the DDA and is intended to ensure that people with disabilities can access, enter, and move through buildings and premises with ease and safety.

Providing access for people with disabilities as part of an adaptive reuse project may be required under these standards where there is a change of use of the building and more than one residence is being proposed.

Upgrades that may be required include:

- Upgrades to the main entrance to comply with standards
- Doorway widths increased to comply with standards
- Installation of an accessibility compliant lift
- Upgrades to public areas such as corridors to meet minimum standards
- Appropriately designed signage and wayfinding
- Providing access to and within residential units (only applies where there are 20 or more units proposed)
- Emergency and safety features
- Accessible car parking spaces.



Checklist & Key Considerations

- Have you sought advice from a Building Certifier and/or DDA consultant?
- Will there be multiple residences thereby triggering accessibility upgrades?
- Does the building's height necessitate any specific accessibility upgrades?
- Is the building or part of the building changing use?
- Does the building's heritage status require expert advice on integrating accessibility upgrade works?



Other Accessibility Considerations

Consideration should also be given to making apartments universally accessible through strategies such as providing level thresholds at doorways, wider door openings, additional circulation space within residential units, and providing structure within bathroom and shower walls to accommodate future installation of grab rails.

Although it may not always be feasible to achieve full compliance in historic or heritage buildings, reasonable adjustments must be made where possible, balancing the need for accessibility with the preservation of the building's significant features.

Getting the right advice

- Seek early advice from a licensed Building Surveyor and/or specialist DDA consultant to assess accessibility requirements
- Engage an Architect/Designer to develop floor plans that meet regulatory requirements and create inclusive, safe and functional living environments
- If your project involves a heritage building, work with heritage consultants to ensure accessibility upgrade works do not compromise the building's aesthetic or historical integrity.

A licensed Building Surveyor can provide preliminary advice regarding accessibility requirements for adaptive reuse projects. A specialist DDA consultant can also provide advice on compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

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