



# **Accessibility of Offices of WA Members of Parliament 2019**

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# Abstract

According to former Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Alastair McEwin, governments have a moral and legal obligation to provide their services free of discrimination. However, despite numerous protections, people with disabilities continue to face issues of access and inclusion when trying to have their voice heard by government. For this reason, *People With Disabilities (WA) Inc.* (PWdWA) has recently conducted a project which sought to address the following question: how accessible (or inaccessible) are the offices of WA Members of Parliament (MPs)? In order to do so, the Project Officer: created an accessibility checklist, and delivered training to volunteers on how to use the checklist, matched volunteers to their local MP office, coordinated the logistics of the reviews, and reviewed and analysed the final results. Ultimately, in light of ongoing concerns surrounding a lack of basic disability access, this project has determined that the offices of WA MPs are currently only accessible to people with disabilities to a *limited* extent.

Whilst these results have varied greatly between offices, the overall trends of this project support claims that the offices of WA MPs remain relatively inaccessible to people with disabilities. However, given the disparity between those offices which were established prior to 2011 (which are not mandated to provide disability access) and those offices which have since been established, as well as the complexity and variability of 'disability' itself, this report cannot conclusively determine that all offices of WA MPs are inaccessible to all people with disabilities, particularly given the small sample size of participants used. For this reason, the Project Officer suggests that (using this project as a rationale) PWdWA fund a full-scale, evidence-based study to investigate the accessibility of all offices of WA MPs, whilst incorporating a range of suggestions designed to improve the efficiency, accountability and effectiveness of future projects.

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# Introduction

## 1. Rationale

Accessibility is a common barrier for people with disabilities which can seriously prevent a person from accessing communities and services. For example, it is important for people with disabilities to have their voice heard by government, particularly about legislation and policies which impact upon access and inclusion. In order to do so, people with disabilities, like all members of the community, need access to decision-makers, such as Members of Parliament (MPs). However, under current Western Australian (WA) laws, offices of MPs which were established prior to 2011 are *not* mandated to provide disability access. Consequently, members of the disability community continue to experience issues of access and inclusion when trying to have their voice heard by government.

## 2. Aims

People With Disabilities (WA) Inc. (PWdWA) has recently conducted a project which sought to address the following question:

***“How accessible (or inaccessible) are the offices of WA Members of Parliament?”***

In order to do so, this paper will:

- First, introduce key concepts and related laws in order to explain issues of access and inclusion which people with disabilities commonly face in WA;
- Second, outline the method of inquiry used throughout the investigation;
- Third, discuss the results of the investigation and draw conclusions surrounding the overall accessibility of offices of WA MPs; and
- Fourth, make recommendations surrounding key areas of improvement.

Ultimately, given that all governments have an obligation to provide their services free of discrimination, this paper will find that the inaccessibility of offices of WA MPs not only breaches anti-discrimination laws, but perpetuates issues of access and inclusion for the disability community; and thus, should be rectified as a matter of urgency.

# Background

## a) What is a disability?

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (2015)*, almost one in five Australians report living with a disability, which equates to 18.3 per cent, or 4.3 million people.<sup>1</sup> In WA alone, over 363 000 people have a disability, which equates to over 14.6% of the population.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, a disability refers to: any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the *Disability Services Act 1993 (WA)* defines ‘disability’ as meaning a condition which:

- Is attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment (or a combination of those impairments);
- Is permanent (or likely to be permanent);
- May or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature; and
- Results in substantially reduced capacity of the person for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility and a need for continuing support services.<sup>4</sup>

### i. Types of Disability

The main categories of disability are physical, sensory, neurological, cognitive, intellectual and psychiatric. However, these categories are far from definitive, as many people with disability identify as having multiple disabilities which cannot be described by a single category.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*, cat. no. 4430.0, viewed 6 June 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4430.0Main%20Features202015?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4430.0&issue=2015&num=&view=>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> As aligned with World Health Organisation’s *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health 2001*.

<sup>4</sup> *Disability Services Act 1993 (WA)*, part 1, s. 3.

## Main Categories:

- Physical: affecting a person's mobility and/or ability to use their upper or lower body, usually related to disorders of the musculoskeletal, circulatory, respiratory and nervous systems
- Sensory: affecting a person's hearing or vision
- Neurological: affecting a person's ability to control their movements, usually as a result of acquired disability, such as multiple sclerosis or traumatic brain injury
- Cognitive: affecting a person's thought processes, personality and memory, usually as a result of acquired disability, such as multiple sclerosis or traumatic brain injury
- Intellectual: affecting a person's judgement, ability to learn and communicate, usually as a result of interaction between developmentally attributable cognitive impairment, attitudinal and environmental barriers
- Psychiatric: affecting a person's emotions, thought processes and behaviour, such as anxiety disorders, phobias or depression <sup>5</sup>

## **b) Issues of Access and Inclusion**

Accessibility is a common barrier for people with disabilities, which can negatively impact upon a person's ability and opportunities to participate in the community or join the workforce; both of which are important for social inclusion and economic independence. In particular, it is important for people with disabilities to have their voices heard by government, especially about legislation and policies which impact upon access and inclusion. However, in order to do so, people with disabilities need access to decision-makers, such as MPs.

### **i. Legal Protections**

The rights of people with disabilities to receive equal access to communities and services are protected within the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* and *Disability*

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Western Australia, Disability Services Commission, *Access Resource Kit: Creating Accessible Communities*, published June 1996, updated February 2011.

*Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth); both of which make it unlawful for public places and services (including government offices) to be inaccessible to people with disabilities, unless the cost of alterations imposes “unjustifiable hardship.” In order to achieve these goals, the *Disability Services Act 1993* (WA) requires public authorities to develop and implement a ‘Disability Access and Inclusion Plan’ (DAIP) that outlines the ways in which the Department will ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to its facilities and services. For example, the WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet’s 2016-2021 DAIP (which is responsible for the accessibility of offices of WA MPs) has committed to ensuring equal access to communities and services for people with disabilities in WA.<sup>6</sup>

## ii. Designing for Access

In order to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to services and public facilities (such as the offices of WA MPs) there are a number of important design considerations, related to three major areas of disability: physical, sensory and those disabilities which affect communication and thought processes.<sup>7</sup>

### People with Physical Disabilities:

For those who have a physical disability and use a mobility device (such as a wheelchair), there are a number of important design considerations:

- Avoidance of abrupt vertical changes of level (kerbs, steps, ruts, gutters) to ensure a continuous accessible path of travel;
- Avoidance of excessive slope across the direction of travel on a footpath which makes control of a mobility device difficult;
- Provision of adequate forward reach and clearance under basins, tables and benches to allow access for a person using a mobility device;
- Provision of adequate space into doorways and within rooms to allow for mobility device dimensions and turning circles; and

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<sup>6</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Disability Inclusion and Access Plan 2016-2021*.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Western Australia, Disability Services Commission, *Access Resource Kit: Creating Accessible Communities*, published June 1996, updated February 2011.



- Avoidance of surface finishes which hamper wheelchair mobility (e.g. grass, gravel, deep-pile carpet) and surfaces that do not provide sufficient traction (e.g. polished surfaces).

For those who experience difficulty walking due to medical conditions such as stroke, lower limb amputation, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease or arthritis, there are a number of important design considerations:

- Attention to step and handrail design to ensure adequate support, confidence and ease when negotiating steps;
- Provision of cover from weather as slowness of movement can result in greater time spent along walkways and getting into buildings;
- Provision of seating in waiting areas, at counters and along lengthy walkways to reduce fatigue;
- Awareness that ramps may prove difficult for some ambulant people, so steps and lifts provide useful alternatives;
- Identifying access hazards associated with doors, including the need to manipulate a handle while using a walking aid and difficulty moving quickly through swinging doors;
- Providing surface finishes that are slip-resistant, evenly laid and free of hazards to minimise risk of injury; and
- Minimising street clutter caused by signs and billboards and placing it away from the main pedestrian flow.

For those who have problems associated with manipulation and holding due to arthritis, nerve injuries and upper limb amputation, there are a number of important design considerations:

- Operation of fittings such as door handles, switches, lift buttons and taps (generally levers are preferable to knobs); and
- Operation of switches or buttons (large switches or buttons that can be used by the palm of the hand are preferable to those switches or buttons that need finger operation).

### People with Sensory Disabilities:

For those who may have partial or complete loss of sight, there are a number of important design considerations:

- Providing ways to identify changes in direction, changes in level, hazards and obstacles (such as projecting signs and windows);
- Considering the size, colour, luminance contrast, location, illumination and type of signs used;
- Provision of clear, even illumination in and around buildings so they are not dangerous or confusing;
- Planning so that a person who is unable to see will know whether a lift has arrived at the floor or whether it is going up or down; and
- Being aware that escalators are difficult to use and that well-designed stairs or ramps are a useful alternative.

For those who are deaf or who have a hearing impairment, there are a number of important design considerations:

- Providing information that is both written and spoken in public buildings (such as voice announcements and visual display boards);
- Providing an audio loop system or other appropriate hearing augmentation systems to assist people who use hearing aids in public places; and
- Providing interpreters to assist people who are deaf to understand verbal presentations or achieve access to public facilities and services.

### People with Disabilities Affecting Communication and Thought Processes:

For those with a wide variety of disabilities (including intellectual, cognitive and psychiatric disabilities) who may have significant difficulty when it comes to asking for or understanding information, there are a number of important design considerations:

- Need for clear signage;
- Clear pathways through a building;
- Provision of information with clear instructions;

- Service provision through personal assistance; and
- Well-planned, uncluttered environments.

### iii. Problems with the Current Framework

Although current laws and government regulations certainly intend to provide equal access to services and public facilities, numerous offices of WA MPs remain inaccessible to the disability community. For practical reasons, the WA Department of Cabinet and Premier only considers disability access to be mandatory for all new offices of WA MPs. This means that all offices which were established prior to 2011 are *not* required to be disability accessible, provided that the cost of alterations imposes “unjustifiable hardship.” Rather, it is generally understood that MPs should meet constituents in alternative locations or visit them directly as required.

However, by providing access to offices of WA MPs to some members of the community and not to others, the government ultimately violates its legal and moral obligation to provide services free of discrimination, as per the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (WA) and *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth). Similarly, the WA Department of Cabinet and Premier fails to achieve its commitments to provide equal access to all of its facilities and services. Consequently, the inaccessibility of offices of WA MPs not only remains a significant barrier for people with disabilities to have their voice heard by government; but ultimately perpetuates ongoing issues of access and inclusion for the disability community.

# Methods

In order to address these ongoing issues of access and inclusion, PWdWA recently conducted a project which aims to investigate the accessibility (or inaccessibility) of offices of WA MPs for people with disabilities. Importantly, the Project Officer was tasked to ensure that the project: is informed by the ideas, personal experiences and feedback of people with disabilities; provides adequate training and assistance to support people with disabilities to complete accessibility reviews themselves; and advocates for the rights and empowers people with disabilities in order to combat ongoing issues of access and inclusion.

## a) Participants

With these aims in mind, the Project Officer selected fifteen participants to take part in the project, after explaining its goals and seeking expressions of interest via email, phone calls and PWdWA general meetings. The fifteen participants all live within the WA metro area and identify as having a disability, as was previously defined. However, each participant varies widely in terms of age, ability, background and location; thus allowing for a broad range of ideas, personal experiences and feedback from people with disabilities in WA to be reflected within the project.

## b) Materials

In order to investigate the accessibility of offices of WA MPs, the Project Officer developed an 'accessibility checklist' to assist volunteers to identify barriers that are currently preventing or making it difficult for people with disabilities to access communities and services (*see Appendix 1*). The accessibility checklist consists of forty-one 'yes' or 'no' questions and space for personal comments (where necessary) relating to the following five areas: transport and parking; external access; internal access; internal stairs, ramps and lifts; and toilets. As a result, the accessibility checklist is both simple to use and flexible in application, not only allowing it to be effectively utilised by a diverse range of volunteers during this project; but also creating

the potential for it to be used to investigate the accessibility of other government services and facilities (with minor alterations).

### **c) Procedure**

Once the participants and materials were established, the Project Officer prepared training material and delivered a workshop which explained to volunteers how best to use the accessibility checklist. In terms of training material, the Project Officer finalised the accessibility checklist, prepared an explanatory power-point and organised copies of important documents for each volunteer. Using these materials, the Project Officer held a small, interactive workshop in which they: encouraged volunteers to share personal experiences surrounding issues of access and inclusion; presented a power-point on how to use the accessibility checklist; and received suggestions from volunteers to improve the final copy of the checklist. At the end of the workshop, the Project Officer also received feedback on the quality and content of the presentation and facility used in order to improve the services of PWdWA into the future.

Following the completion of training, the Project Officer (either in person, or by email) matched all volunteers to their local MP office and supplied each person with a copy of the accessibility review, explanatory information and a paid reply envelope, if requested. Subsequently, all volunteers were given one month to visit their local MP office, complete the accessibility review and return a copy to PWdWA, either by email or post. However, this date was later extended by a number of weeks in order to allow all volunteers adequate time to complete the reviews.

Although not all volunteers returned the reviews within the allocated time frame, the Project Officer then collated, analysed and reviewed the data of those received, in order to identify broader issues of access and inclusion in WA. These results were then used to address the broader aims of the project: to determine the level of accessibility of offices of WA MPs for people with disabilities (as reflected in the following sections).

# Results

These results have been obtained directly from the responses of ten participants following the completion of an accessibility checklist (*see Appendix 1*) at their local MP office. Since each question has been phrased positively, the greater the number of boxes ticked (from participant one to ten), the greater the level of access which is provided at those offices which were assessed.

## 1. Transport and Parking

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Public transport is available	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Transport set down area available for buses, taxis and private vehicles	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Set down area is protected from weather										✓
4. Accessible parking bay available		✓					✓		✓	✓
5. Parking bays of adequate size	✓	✓			✓		✓			✓
6. Parking bays on level, even surface	✓	✓			✓		✓			✓
7. Parking bays located close to entrance <u>or</u> adequate seating provided	✓	✓				✓				✓
8. Parking ticket machine is easily accessible				✓						

9. Ticket machine instructions are clear and easy to read				✓						
10. Ticket machine could be operated by someone using a mobility device				✓						
11. Ticket machine can be operated with one hand				✓	✓					
12. Staffed ticket payment booth is available and easily accessible										

## 2. External Access

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Pathway does not cross any vehicle traffic areas		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
14. Pathway is wide enough for a person using a mobility device to use	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15. No steps on direct route to office	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
16. Sufficient signage to locate important areas (or not required)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
17. Signage is easy to read in terms of	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓

size, colour, font, contrast and height										
18. Information is also provided in Braille	✓									

### 3. Internal Access

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. Door to main entrance is self-opening										
20. Door is light enough to open easily		✓	✓			✓	✓			
21. Door could be opened with one hand		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
22. Doorway is wide enough for a person using a mobility device to enter	✓		✓	✓			✓			✓
23. Door has an adequate visual indicator (if fully glazed)	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
24. No threshold at the entrance (i.e. step, mat)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
25. Front counter has wheelchair accessible area (lower height and leg clearance)				✓	✓					✓



26. Adequate seating is provided in reception	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
27. Internal floor is of a slip-resistant surface (e.g. carpet)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
28. Reception is well-lit, non-glare and lighting is even	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
29. Adequate circulation space is provided in reception and walkways	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
30. Hearing loop is provided										
31. Staff are available to assist in providing information	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
32. Sufficient signage to locate important areas (or not required)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓
33. Signage is easy to read in terms of size, colour, font, contrast and height	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓
34. Information is also provided in Braille							✓			
35. Audible alarms are provided	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36. Visual alarms are provided										

#### 4. Internal Stairs, Ramps & Lifts

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>37. <u>Stairs</u></b>	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A
a) Steps have a slip-resistant surface	✓						✓			
b) Step risers are enclosed with no overhang										
c) Steps have even, contrasting strips of colour on the nosing										
d) Steps have tactile ground surface indicators at the top and bottom							✓			
e) Continuous hand rails are provided on both sides of the stairs							✓			
f) Handrails extend past the stairs and curve under at the end							✓			
<b>38. <u>Ramps</u></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
a) Ramp is wide enough for a person using a mobility device to use										
b) Ramp has a slip-resistant surface										
c) Ramp has tactile ground surface indicators at top and bottom										
d) Continuous hand rails are provided on both sides of the ramp										
<b>39. <u>Lifts</u></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A

a) Accessible lift available										
b) Each floor is clearly signed (visual and tactile)										
c) Lift is large enough for a person using a mobility device to use							✓			
d) Continuous handrails are installed in the lift										
e) Control buttons low enough for a person using a mobility device to use							✓			
f) Control buttons are easily identified and illuminated							✓			
g) Control buttons are raised tactile and Braille							✓			
h) Audio information is provided (when lift reaches new level)							✓			

## 5. Toilets

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
40. <u>Toilets</u>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
a) Designated accessible toilet										
b) Toilet is unisex	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	
c) Toilet is wide enough for a person using a mobility device to use	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			

d) Door could be opened by someone using a mobility device	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
e) Door could be opened and locked with one hand	✓			✓		✓	✓			
f) Adequate hand rails are installed	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	
g) A person using a mobility device could access the:	✓			✓		✓				
i. Toilet										
ii. Toilet paper	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	
iii. Flushing control	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
iv. Basin	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
v. Mirror						✓	✓		✓	
vi. Soap dispenser						✓			✓	
vii. Hand dryer						✓			✓	
viii. Baby change table						✓	✓			
ix. Sanitary facility						✓	✓			
41. Staff can reliably direct to nearby public toilets	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓

**End of Results**

# Discussion

## a) Key Findings

In light of these results, it is important to review the individual levels of accessibility associated with each of the five areas assessed by the participants: transport and parking; external access; internal access; internal stairs, ramps and lifts; and toilets.

### i. Transport and Parking

In terms of transport and parking, a majority of participants noted that public transport options to their local MP office were both accessible and relatively convenient, in terms of both location and timing. However, only two participants found that their local MP office had accessible parking bays or ticket machine facilities available for people with physical or sensory impairments. Thus, this lack of available transport and parking options is undoubtedly a cause for concern surrounding the accessibility of offices of WA MPs for people with disabilities.

### ii. External Access

In terms of external access, a majority of participants found that the external pathways to their local MP office were relatively accessible. This area appeared to be one of the most accessible for all participants, as a majority noted that the pathway: did not cross any vehicle traffic areas; was wide enough for someone using a mobility device to use; had no steps on the direct route to the office; and had sufficient, visible signage to all important locations. However, only one participant noted that this signage was also available in Braille, thus demonstrating a potential obstacle to access for people with visual impairments.

### iii. Internal Access

In terms of internal access, a majority of participants were pleased to find that their local MP office had suitable flooring, seating and signage, as well as adequate circulation space inside for a person using a mobility device to access its facilities.

Although results varied slightly, a majority of participants noted their concern that neither the main door nor the reception counter were designed to be easily accessible for someone using a mobility device. Most importantly, the participants noted a number of key concerns of access for people with visual or hearing impairments, such as the lack of an available hearing loop, visual alarm (in case of emergency) or information provided in Braille.

#### **iv. Internal Stairs, Ramps and Lifts**

In terms of internal stairs, ramps and lifts, almost all participants found that their local MP office was only located on one floor; and thus, this section largely did not apply. However, one participant noted the existence of both internal stairs and a lift; both of which appeared to be fairly accessible for people with disabilities.

#### **v. Toilets**

In terms of toilets, whilst almost all participants found that their local MP office had the option of making an accessible toilet available to its visitors, a majority either offered the service only to those who had an appointment with the Minister, or otherwise used the space inappropriately (such as a storeroom). As a result, many participants were unable to access toilet facilities altogether.

### **b) Summary of Trends**

Taken together, the results obtained from this project have demonstrated that the offices of WA MPs are currently only accessible to people with disabilities to a *limited* extent. Whilst there is certainly some variance between offices, those areas which generally demonstrated the highest level of accessibility were: public transport options, external pathways to the offices and general internal mobility. However, despite these inclusions, a number of offices still raised key concerns surrounding (although not limited to): a lack of accessible parking bays, inaccessible main entrances and reception counters, a lack of resources for people who have a visual or hearing impairment, and a general misuse of accessible toilet facilities. Thus, the ongoing lack

of accessibility of offices of WA MPs (reflected by the results of the project) undoubtedly remains a key issue of access and inclusion for the disability community.

To an extent, this lack of accessibility can be attributed to the inability of WA laws to *mandate* disability access to all services and facilities, including to those which were established prior to 2011. Understandably, a number of offices of WA MPs are currently located within buildings which were established prior to 2011 and are not required to provide disability access. However, by not moving MPs to offices that *can* provide disability access, the Department of Cabinet and Premier (responsible for the establishment and maintenance of offices of WA MPs) has seriously prevented people with disabilities from being able to have their voice heard by government, as demonstrated by the results of this project.

### **c) Issues**

However, whilst the results of this project have certainly supported the conclusion that offices of WA MPs remain of limited accessibility for people with disabilities, this statement is by no means conclusive. Given the extremely small sample size of participants involved (with only ten reviews returned), it is almost impossible to draw the conclusion that all offices of WA MPs remain inaccessible to all people with disabilities. Not only would the level of accessibility vary greatly depending on when the office was established (pre/post 2011), but the individual and varying nature of 'disability' itself means that one cannot make a generalised statement surrounding the overall accessibility of offices of WA MPs for all people with disability.

With these limitations in mind, it is important to consider the potential value of these results, not as a stand-alone study, but as a small-scale reflection of issues of access and inclusion which continue to face the disability community in WA. Using this project as a rationale, people with disabilities would undoubtedly benefit from a future investment into a full-scale, evidence-based study to investigate the accessibility of *all* offices of WA MPs, in order to have a significant and lasting impact on issues of access and inclusion into the future.

# Conclusion

Overall, this project has demonstrated that the offices of WA MPs are only accessible to people with disabilities to a *limited* extent. Whilst results varied greatly between offices, a majority of participants reported high levels of accessibility in terms of: public transport, external pathways and general internal mobility. However, at the same time, some participants raised serious concerns surrounding a lack of basic disability access, including: accessible parking bays, main entrances, information in accessible formats and accessible toilet facilities. In some cases, participants noted that they were unable to access their local MP office altogether. Thus, these results have reflected not only great variation, but a clear disparity between the accessibility of those offices established prior to 2011 (which are not mandated to provide disability access) and those offices which have since been established.

However, by continuing to provide access to offices of WA MPs to some members of the community and not to others, the government ultimately violates its legal and moral obligation to provide services free of discrimination, as per the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* and *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*. Similarly, the WA Department of Cabinet and Premier fails to achieve its commitments to provide equal access to all of its facilities and services. Consequently, the inaccessibility of offices of WA MPs not only remains a significant barrier for people with disabilities to have their voice heard by government; but ultimately perpetuates ongoing issues of access and inclusion for the disability community.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that (due to the extremely small sample size of participants) this report cannot make a conclusive statement surrounding the accessibility of all offices of WA MPs for all people with disabilities. Rather, it will conclude that, despite some successes, numerous members of the disability community in WA are still unable to access their local MP office. Therefore, people with disabilities would undoubtedly benefit from the following recommendations for action and suggestions for future research, in order to investigate (on a far larger scale) the accessibility of *all* offices of WA MPs and finally improve upon issues of access and inclusion for the disability community in WA.



# Recommendations

In light of the obvious limitations of this project, the Project Officer:

1. Strongly recommends that PWdWA fund a full-scale, evidence-based study to investigate the accessibility of all offices of WA MPs (at both a state and federal level) using this project as a rationale;
2. Stresses the need to expand the sample size of participants in order to improve the validity of future projects;
3. Highlights the need to investigate when each office was established (pre/post 2011) in order to take into account the differences in regulatory requirements;
4. Suggests that volunteers conduct any future accessibility reviews over the phone, in order to improve efficiency and avoid practical issues experienced due to a lack of disability access;
5. Encourages the future Project Officer/s to conduct their own accessibility reviews to ensure accuracy and accountability of accessibility reviews, as well as to gain insight into the experiences of the disability community;
6. Recommends that the 'accessibility checklist' is reviewed and improved (with input from the disability community) by utilising a system of positive phrasing;
7. Suggests that the future Project Officer/s advocates for the establishment and subsequent submission of results to an online database (similar to 'Access WA') to provide current, reliable information to people with disabilities surrounding the accessibility of services and public facilities;
8. Supports the participant suggestion that PWdWA design and develop bumper stickers which could be presented to those MP offices which achieve a high level of disability access, in order to highlight their efforts to the disability community;
9. Advocates for the extension of this project to assess the accessibility of other services and public facilities, such as: public transport, leisure centres, libraries, parks and recreational areas (as suggested by participants);
10. Underscores the need for the future Project Officer/s to continue to involve the participants, utilise their personal experiences and implement their suggestions to the best of their ability.

# Appendix 1

## Accessibility Checklist

### Review of Offices of WA Members of Parliament (MPs)

**Volunteer Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **MP Office:** \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist will assess the accessibility (or inaccessibility) of WA offices of MPs for people with disabilities. Please select 'yes' or 'no' and add comments where appropriate.

#### Transport and Parking

	Yes	No
1. Is there public transport available to the office?		
2. Is there a set down area for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Buses</li><li>• Taxis</li><li>• Private vehicles</li></ul>		
3. Does the set-down area have protection from the weather?		
4. Is there an accessible parking bay? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How many? _____</li></ul>		
5. Are the bays large enough for a person using a mobility device to comfortably enter/exit a vehicle?		
6. Are the bays on level ground, with a firm surface and free of loose material?		
7. Are the bays located as close to the entrance as possible?		

<i>If not:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is seating provided between the carpark and entrance?</li> </ul>		
8. If parking payment is required, is the ticket machine easily accessible?		
9. Are the ticket machine instructions clear and easy to read?		
10. Could the ticket machine be operated by someone using a mobility device?		
11. Could the ticket machine be operated with one hand?		
12. Is a staffed ticket payment booth available?		
<i>If yes:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it clearly visible and easy to access?</li> </ul>		

### Personal Comments

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### External Access

13. Does the pathway cross any vehicle traffic areas (e.g. parking lot, internal roads)?		
14. Is the pathway wide enough a person using a mobility device to comfortably use?		
15. Are there any steps on the direct access route to the office?		
<i>If yes:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do they have a slip-resistant surface?</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the step risers enclosed with no overhang?</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do the steps have even, contrasting strips of colour on the nosing?</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there tactile ground surface indicators at the top and bottom of the stairs?</li> </ul>		



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are continuous handrails provided on both sides?</li> </ul>		
16. Is there sufficient signage to locate the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carpark</li> <li>• Set down area</li> <li>• Building entrance</li> <li>• Change of direction</li> </ul>		
17. Is the signage easy to read in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size</li> <li>• Colour</li> <li>• Font</li> <li>• Contrast</li> <li>• Height</li> </ul>		
18. Is this information also provided in Braille?		

**Personal Comments:**

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**Internal Access**

19. The style of the door/s to the main entrance is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hinged</li> <li>• Sliding</li> <li>• Revolving</li> <li>• Automatic self-opening (preferred)</li> </ul>		

20. Is the door light enough to open easily?		
21. Could the door be opened with one hand?		
22. Could a person using a mobility device comfortably enter through the doorway?		
23. If the door is fully-glazed/glass, is there a visual indicator (such as a contrasting strip of colour) at an appropriate height?		
24. Is there a threshold at the entrance (e.g. step or mat)?		
25. Does the front counter have a wheelchair accessible area with a lower height and leg clearance?		
26. Is there adequate seating provided in the reception area?		
27. Is the internal floor surface slip-resistant?		
28. Is the reception area well-lit, non-glare and is the lighting even?		
29. Is there adequate circulation space for a person using a mobility device (in reception and walkways)?		
30. Is there a hearing loop provided in the reception/meeting area?		
31. Are staff available to assist with providing information?		
32. Is there sufficient signage to locate the:		
• Reception desk		
• Toilets		
• Change of direction		
• Stairs/lift/ramp		
• Exit signs		
33. Is the signage easy to read in terms of:		
• Size		
• Colour		
• Font		
• Contrast		

• Height		
34. Is this information also provided in Braille?		
35. Are audible alarms provided in the building?		
36. Are visual alarms provided in the building?		

**Personal Comments:**

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**Internal Stairs, Ramps & Lifts**

37. Is there stair access between floors?		
<i>If yes:</i>		
• Do they have a slip-resistant surface?		
• Are the step risers enclosed with no overhang?		
• Do they have even, contrasting strips of colour on the nosing?		
• Are there tactile ground surface indicators at the top and bottom of the stairs?		
• Are continuous handrails provided on both sides?		
• Do the handrails extend <u>past</u> the stairs and curve under at the end?		
38. Are there any internal ramps?		
<i>If yes:</i>		
• Is it wide enough for someone with a mobility device to comfortably use?		
• Does it have a slip-resistant surface?		
• Are the tactile ground indicators at the top and bottom of the ramp?		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the ramp have hand rails on both sides?</li> </ul>		
<p>39. Is there a designated accessible lift available?</p> <p><i>If yes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is each floor clearly signed (both visual and tactile) at the entrance?</li> <li>Is the lift large enough for a person using a mobility device to enter and manoeuvre around easily?</li> <li>Are there handrails installed?</li> <li>Are the control buttons at an appropriate height to be used by someone in a mobility device?</li> <li>Are the control buttons easily identified and illuminated?</li> <li>Are the control buttons raised tactile and Braille?</li> <li>Is there audio information provided (when the lift reaches a level)?</li> </ul>		

**Personal Comments:**

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**Toilets**

<p>40. Is there a designated accessible toilet in the building?</p> <p><i>If yes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the toilet locked or used inappropriately (e.g. as a storeroom)?</li> <li>Is the accessible toilet unisex?</li> <li>Is the toilet wide enough for a person using a mobility device to enter and manoeuvre around easily?</li> <li>Could the door be easily opened by a person using a mobility device?</li> </ul>		
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can the door be opened and locked using one hand?</li> <li>• Are there grab rails installed?</li> <li>• Could a person using a mobility device easily access the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Toilet</li> <li>○ Toilet paper</li> <li>○ Flushing control</li> <li>○ Basin</li> <li>○ Mirror</li> <li>○ Soap dispenser</li> <li>○ Hand Dryer</li> <li>○ Baby change table</li> <li>○ Sanitary facility</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
41. Are there public toilets nearby which staff can reliably direct you to?		

**Personal Comments:**

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**End of Review**