



MAKING SPACE FOR EVERYONE

Accessible, Inclusive, and
Safe Communities

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Introduction: The Accessible Community

An accessible community works to support the independence, comfort, self-esteem, and security of everyone, including people with disabilities.

In the past, accessibility efforts focused only on physical access requirements for a subset of disabilities. The diversity of the needs of people with disabilities were not considered. In recent years in British Columbia, however, efforts have been made to extend the traditional definition an accessible community and to increase the application of inclusive principles.

For people with disabilities to participate as full members of the community, and before we can truly call any community accessible, universal access requirements must be met. Everyone has the fundamental right of access to their communities. For thousands of Canadians, this right is not being met.

This booklet focuses on issues of concern to people with mobility, sensory, and cognitive impairments. Contained within are a set of minimum guidelines and best practices for design, policy, and education. We encourage all communities to meet and exceed standards described within. Contact SPARC BC for more information.

Components of an Accessible Community

An accessible community is an inclusive community: a community that ensures accessible design specifications are met, invites input from all citizens on issues of policy and governance, provides accessible and affordable housing and public transit, mandates sufficient designated accessible parking, includes everyone in public events and celebrations, and makes an ongoing commitment to reviewing and improving accessibility. To accomplish these goals, an inclusive community provides and supports:

- **Participation:** An accessible community includes those directly concerned with accessibility to be involved with improvements to general community plans and facility plans.
- **Defines accessibility broadly:** An accessible community takes the perspective that accessibility is more than physical design: it is complete social inclusion that makes a community a better place for everyone.
- **Allocates resources:** A community demonstrates its dedication to accessibility by committing resources to expanding access to facilities, events, and services; by applying universal design principles; and by taking the time to understand the issues of accessibility.

Accessibility Includes:

- Physical Access
- Access to Services
- Social Inclusion
- Equality and Respect
- Equity in Opportunities

About SPARC BC

For More Information

Visit our web site at:
www.sparc.bc.ca

The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization whose members and Board of Directors are drawn from across the province. Since 1966, SPARC BC has worked with communities in building a just and healthy society for all.

SPARC BC's vision includes the following fundamental values:

- **Equity:** The recognition that some individuals or groups require more or less than others in order to flourish, and that some individuals are capable of contributing more than others to address social deficiencies and promote fair distribution of services and resources.
- **Social Inclusion:** The recognition that both the right and the opportunity to participate in all aspects of human life enables individuals and communities to celebrate their diversity, and recognize their responsibilities.
- **Security:** The recognition that individuals and communities flourish when they have confidence in their communities as safe, supportive, and stable environments.

- **Adaptability:** The recognition that sustainability requires resilience for both individuals and communities, and the ability to respond creatively to change.

SPARC BC's Work

SPARC BC conducts public education on priority issues identified by our Board of Directors and volunteer committees. Currently, SPARC BC focuses its efforts on the key social issues of income security, accessibility, and community development.

SPARC BC continually undertakes a variety of accessibility-related research, community support, and public education projects. Our projects include:

- **Access Awareness Day** is the first Saturday in June
- Community Accessibility Contacts Initiative
- Community Dialogues on Accessibility
- Employment and Disabilities
- Living with Disabilities on Income Assistance

SPARC BC's Mission

"The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all."

Designing for Accessibility

Although full accessibility includes more than physical access, accessible design is fundamental to an inclusive community. The goals of accessible design go beyond access to facilities; they are:

- **Freedom of movement:** To go where you want when you want is a central liberty of our society, one that most community members take for granted. Accessible buildings and public spaces and readily available, accessible transportation are the foundation of access.
- **Sense of inclusion:** To support the independence, comfort, and self-esteem of citizens with disabilities, communities must make an effort to include everyone at all levels of decision making and in all public happenings.
- **Equal participation:** Communities should strive to include, as equals, people with disabilities in all activities and at all levels of society, including employment.
- **Equity in opportunities:** As full citizens, people with disabilities must have equal access to opportunities so that they may lead healthy, happy lives. This includes equal opportunities in

employment, education, health care, support, politics, planning, development, and recreation.

A Diversity of Disabilities

An accessible community accommodates all types of disabilities. Planners need to consider the needs of people with specific types of disabilities, as well as those with multiple disabilities. The majority of disabilities that communities need to accommodate fall into several categories:

- **Mobility impairments:** People whose disability affects their mobility may use wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, or canes. Others have hidden mobility impairments that impede their ability to move quickly, climb stairs, or walk more than a short distance.
- **Visual impairments:** People with visual impairments are either blind or have limited vision and require special design considerations.
- **Hearing impairments:** Citizens with hearing impairments require visual cues and specialized communications equipment.
- **Cognitive impairments:** These are invisible impairments like learning or developmental disabilities and impediments created by mental health issues that need to be considered in accessibility policies.

Universal Design

The principles of universal design aim to make products and environments usable to all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The application of universal design benefits all members of a community.

Meeting the Needs of People with Mobility Impairments



Many design features can improve accessibility. Ramps that make it easier for people with mobility impairments to get into buildings, doorways wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters, doors that are easily opened, curb cuts to access ways and buildings, and handrails for steadying and lifting are all design features that improve access.

But since each person with a disability has access concerns specific to his or her situation, it makes sense to discuss any plans, changes, or modifications with the individuals the changes are meant to accommodate. They can provide the best advice.

Considerations

Individuals with mobility impairments require distinct accessible design features:

- **Space, pathways, and corridors:** Ramps, curb cuts, automatic doors, smooth thresholds, wheelchair-reserved areas indoors; provide and enforce designated accessible parking.
- **Room to manoeuvre:** Provide extra-wide parking spaces, doors, corridors, and elevators;

large bathroom stalls.

- **The right tools for the job:** Accessible computers and software; low sinks, faucets, counters, door handles, levers, elevator controls; automatic or light, free-swinging doors; proper hand rails; accessible washrooms.
- **A respectful environment:** Be courteous and respectful, consider staff diversity and accessibility training.

Safe Ramps

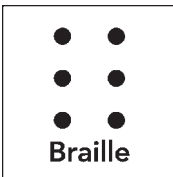
Ramps that do not meet strict building code design guidelines can be as hazardous and inaccessible as a set of steep stairs. People with a wide variety of disabilities use ramps.

- A ramp is any slope greater than 1:20
- Slopes greater than 1:20 should not be more than 9 m long
- Ensure that the ramp is at least 1.5 m wide
- Use hard, non-slip surfaces
- Put landings at the top, bottom, and where the ramp changes grade
- Equip ramps with handrails on both sides
- Have an 8 cm curb at the sides of the ramp

B.C. Building Code

The minimum standards for the design of accessible housing units and commercial or public buildings is controlled by the **BC Building Code** and local bylaws.

Meeting the Needs of People with Visual Impairments



People who have visual impairments often navigate their own environments with little trouble. The goal of an accessible community is to make it possible for everyone to participate safely, comfortably, independently, and with dignity in all aspects of community life.

The needs of individuals with no vision and those with limited vision differ. Design features like signs or aural clues which can be understood by people who are blind or visually impaired.

Considerations

Accommodate individuals with visual impairments by implementing a variety of consistent physical, aural, and visual features:

- **Space, pathways, and corridors:** Simple, open floor plans; corridors free of obstructions; bright, non-glare lighting; bright colour coding for design features and similar-use areas.
- **Accessible communications:** Braille controls and written alternatives; well-lit signs with large, clear lettering; informational listening

devices; accessible computer software.

- **Safety and emergency considerations:** Staff training for emergency procedures.
- **Respectful environment:** Ask individuals if they require assistance, do not interfere with an individual's or his or her guide dog's routine.

Reducing Hazards

One of the principal accessibility concerns of people with visual impairments is the safe navigation of foreign spaces. Accessibility efforts to accommodate visually impaired users need centre around reducing hazards. Such efforts should include:

- Visual, aural, and tactile cues that identify safety features or warn of hazards or obstructions;
- Consistent colour-coding for safety features;
- Consistent visual and auditory alarms;
- Cane detectable warnings of any hazards;
- Corridors free of obstructions
- Large, plain type-face and/or braille information signs and directions for facility use;
- Lighting and surfaces designed to reduce glare;
- Provide information online about spaces and potential hazards.

Web Accessibility

The World Wide Web Consortium (www.w3c.org) manages the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), a set of design standards that maximize the accessibility of information on the Web. For more information, visit: www.w3c.org/WAI

Meeting the Needs of People with Hearing Impairments

Technology exists that can extend the communication possibilities of people with hearing impairments. This technology must be made widely available. Safety is also a prominent accessibility consideration for people with hearing impairments.

Considerations

Individuals with hearing impairments require special design and communications accommodations.

- **Signage:** Clear, readable signs; visual feedback for interactive equipment.
- **Communications:** Telephones with amplification; TTD stations; live captioning; live sign language translations at public events.
- **Safety measures:** Visual alarm signals; procedures for alerting deaf persons; visual equivalent to emergency instructions; staff training.

Specific Accommodations

Making facilities fully accessible for people with hearing impairments mostly involves maximizing visual communications and implementing proper safety

standards. Some accommodations for specific places and items are:

- **Public telephones:**

- Accessible telephones clearly identified
- At least one telephone in any public space has amplification control
- TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) is available

- **Meeting rooms:**

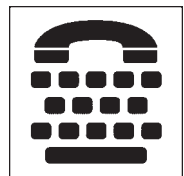
- Non-glare, non-reflecting, and non-blinking lighting
- Meeting room is equipped with a FM system
- Live captioning and sign language translation available

- **Guest rooms:**

- Telephones with amplification available
- Pre-arranged system for alerting deaf persons for a wake up or in case of emergency

- **Public transit / elevators:**

- Consistent visual signals



Meeting the Needs of People with Cognitive Impairments

Many individuals have invisible impairments, like learning or developmental disabilities. Meeting the needs of this group of people requires careful and respectful consideration.

Accommodating people with cognitive impairments often requires fewer physical design considerations than required for people with physical impairments. Unfortunately, many places are less accessible to and inclusive of people with cognitive disabilities than those with other types of disabilities.

Considerations

When increasing accessibility for people with cognitive impairments, consider the following:

- **Promote understanding:** Use plain language in all communications, provide time for orientation, encourage questions and engagement. Use multisensory approach in any public presentation and provide opportunities for individuals with these needs to do the same. Don't rely on printed information only; use visual and other methods to communicate ideas.

- **Respectful environment:** Understand the needs of people with cognitive disabilities and be open to different ways of understanding and absorbing information.

Being Inclusive

Many groups and individuals have questions about how to engage individuals with cognitive impairments. Here are some tips on how to include people with disabilities:*

- Ask the individuals you wish to include. They can tell you what works for them.
- Find a resource person who knows about disabilities and ask them for information and for help developing your skills.
- Choose activities that do not limit participation. Brainstorm on how to adapt existing activities to be more inclusive.
- Find out if someone with experience in working with people with disabilities can volunteer to help with your activities.
- Have confidence that supporting participants with disabilities can work and that the process itself helps everyone learn and grow.

* Adapted from *12 Inclusive Activities: A Guide for Youth Group Leaders* (2004) from the BC Association for Community Living.

Designated Accessible Parking

Where accessible public transport is not yet available, and for individuals for whom public transport is not workable, accessible parking is a necessity, as many people with disabilities cannot just “park anywhere.” Unfortunately, accessible parking is either insufficient or unenforced in much of the province. The alternative for many people with a mobility impairment is to simply go home.

Parking areas have often been designed with able-bodied drivers in mind. People using wheelchairs, walkers, and other mobility aids, can find it impossible to get in and out of the narrow spaces common in most parking lots. Some people with disabilities need side room to manoeuvre themselves and their gear in and out of vehicles; others need to be close to the entrance of the building.

Municipalities can enact parking bylaws concerning designated accessible parking for people with disabilities. SPARC BC believes that sufficient spaces for both on- and off-street parking should be designated and enforced for appropriate use.

What a Municipal Bylaw Should Contain

Municipal bylaws designating parking for people with disabilities should:

- Require owners or occupiers of land to provide parking spaces for people with disabilities, wherever the public is invited.
- Specify what portion of parking spaces will be designated for people with disabilities (10% is recommended).
- Authorize the ticketing and removal of unlawfully parked vehicles.
- Designate SPARC BC as the agency to issue and cancel parking permits on behalf of the municipality.

Designing Designated Accessible Parking

If designated parking is to work, here are the specifications that need to be met:

- Locate spaces within 15 m of an accessible entrance;
- Provide 1.25 m of transfer space in addition to the required parking stall width;
- Mount an enforceable designated accessible sign parking on the post at height of 1.54 m;

Enforceable Signage



It is illegal under the **Motor Vehicle Act** to park without displaying a valid permit in a space marked by a designated accessible parking sign (as depicted above).

- Slope walkways in parking area a maximum of 1:20 (any slope greater is considered a ramp) and make walkways at least 1.54 m wide;
- Leave a 1 m level passageway at the end of each speed bump;
- Ideally, have an 8 cm curb at walkway edge;
- Locate curb cuts so that they will not be blocked by vehicles;
- Make sure ramps/curb cuts make it possible for people in wheelchairs to get from parking area to walkway;
- Make sure the designated accessible parking area can accommodate the height of specialized vehicles;
- Designated parking spots need to be marked by signs that meet provincial standards and are therefore enforceable.

What You Can Do

Working for an inclusive and more accessible community benefits everyone, not just its citizens with disabilities.

We can all help make our communities more accessible to and inclusive of all members of our communities. We can begin by acknowledging that people with mobility, sensory, and cognitive impairments have access needs, and that they are the ultimate authority on how those needs can be met.

By working together to improve accessibility, we can make British Columbia a safer, happier, and more inclusive place to live. For everyone.

Recommendations

Every community in B.C. can improve its accessibility. SPARC BC encourages communities to:

- Recognize that the ultimate experts on accessibility issues are those people with lived experiences of disabilities.
- Ensure that bus stops, curb cuts, and other access areas are free of vehicles and obstructions so that all community members can come and

go freely.

- Create and support municipal advisory committees that include members of the community.
- Use the accessibility lens when designing buildings and building communities.
- Renovate existing facilities to upgrade accessibility.
- Support organizations that advocate on behalf of people with disabilities.
- When designing private and commercial buildings, create space that can be adapted to meet a variety of personal circumstances and accommodate people's needs as they age.
- Encourage the government and public transit organizations to expand their accessible services.
- Conduct local public education on the importance of accessibility.
- Celebrate **Access Awareness Day** every year on the first Saturday in June!



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