

# REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE FOR PERSONS WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

Equal employment opportunities begin with the removal of physical, social, and attitudinal barriers in the workplace. Reasonable accommodations for persons with mobility impairments enable employees to work productively and with dignity, while also creating inclusive organisational cultures that benefit all.

Mobility needs vary from person to person. Some persons may use wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, callipers, prosthetics, or service/guide dogs, while others may require personal assistance. Each person's experience of mobility is unique, and accommodations should be tailored accordingly.

Reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to the work environment or the way a job is performed that enables a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to perform their duties and enjoy all human rights and freedoms. This is a legal requirement under the Employment Equity Act unless the reasonable accommodation would impose an undue hardship (a disproportionate or unjustifiable burden) on the employer. Reasonable accommodation can include physical adjustments to the workplace, assistive technologies, changes to work schedules, job restructuring, or modifications to printed materials.

## What is the purpose of reasonable accommodation?

To eliminate discrimination and ensure that persons with disabilities can participate fully in the workplace.

To enable individuals with disabilities to perform their essential job functions.

To provide equal employment opportunities for all.

## 1. LANGUAGE

Respectful language in the workplace shapes how mobility and impairments are perceived.

- It is appropriate to say, "uses a wheelchair" or "wheelchair user".
- **Avoid terms** such as "*wheelchair bound*" or "*confined to a wheelchair*", as a wheelchair is not a limitation but a tool that provides freedom and mobility.
- **Offering Assistance:** Always ask before assisting someone with a mobility impairment. People have different preferences, some may feel uncomfortable if you help without asking, while others may feel excluded if they have to request help every time. A simple offer such as, 'Would you like a hand?' ensures the person feels included, supported, and not like a burden.

## 2. PHYSICAL ACCESS AT WORK

Work environments should be designed to allow employees safe and independent movement.

- **New Buildings & Renovations:** When constructing or renovating offices, employers should consult qualified accessibility specialists—such as universal design auditors or occupational therapists—to ensure compliance with building regulations and universal design principles.
- **Entrances & Exits:** Step-free access, ramps with handrails, automatic doors, and wide entryways.
- **Accessible Routes:** Clear, obstacle-free corridors with sufficient turning space for wheelchairs.
- **Elevators & Lifts:** Essential in multi-level buildings, with accessible controls and visual/auditory indicators.
- **Restrooms:** High toilets, Wheelchair-accessible stalls, grab bars, and lowered basins and mirrors.
- **Parking:** Reserved accessible parking bays located close to ramps and building entrances. There should be an adequate number of reserved accessible parking bays located close to building entrances.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Clear evacuation routes, visual and auditory alarms, and assistance plans.

## 3. WORKPLACE SETUP AND TOOLS

Workspaces should be flexible and adaptable to different mobility needs.

- **Adjustable Workstations:** Desks, tables, or counters that can be raised or lowered.
- **Accessible Technology:** Voice-activated systems, adapted keyboards, or switches for limited hand use.
- **Flexible Furniture Layout:** Adequate space to allow manoeuvrability for wheelchairs, crutches, callipers or walkers.
- **Personal Assistance:** Personal assistance is a critical component in enabling full participation and independence. It can include comfort needs or practical tasks such as turning pages, driving, or providing support during outdoor activities or workplace functions. This support often extends to meaningful assistance at events such as conferences, office functions, or even stadium outings, or situations where relying on colleagues for intensive physical help may feel uncomfortable. Having an assistant can make participation easier, smoother, and less intrusive for both the employee and their co-workers.
- **Service/Guide Dogs:** Permission and suitable facilities for service or guide dogs to accompany persons with disabilities in the workplace.

## 4. JOB MODIFICATIONS

Work tasks and schedules can be adapted to reduce barriers to employment.

- **Flexible Scheduling:** Allowing time for medical appointments or mobility-related delays.
- **Task Redistribution:** Adjusting duties that involve heavy lifting, prolonged standing, or extensive travel.



- **Remote or Hybrid Work:** Provide the option (if possible) where physical presence is not essential.
- Persons with physical impairments may experience higher levels of physical fatigue, as daily tasks often require significantly more energy and effort. Using assistive devices such as wheelchairs or the weight of callipers can make physical mobility strenuous.

## 5. TRANSPORTATION SUPPORT

Mobility also depends on accessible and inclusive transport arrangements.

- **Accessible Shuttle Services:** Employer-provided or contracted transport that accommodates mobility devices.
- **Work travel:** Accessible seating. Accommodations, and necessary assistance during work-related travel.

## 6. ORGANISATIONAL ATTITUDES AND POLICY SUPPORT

A culture of inclusion is just as important as physical changes.

- **Awareness & Sensitisation:** Training programmes on inclusive practices and disability etiquette for staff and management.
- **Non-Discrimination:** Enforceable policies guaranteeing fair treatment and equal opportunity.
- **Employee Voice:** Involve employees with mobility impairments in workplace planning and accessibility initiatives.

Reasonable workplace accommodations are not just legal requirements; they are investments in human potential. By creating accessible environments, employers empower persons with mobility impairments to contribute fully, fostering a culture of equality, independence, and productivity. At NCPD, we encourage employers to see accessibility as part of organisational growth: when the workplace is designed for everyone, everyone benefits. Personal assistance, thoughtful design, and respect for lived experience ensure that inclusion goes beyond compliance and becomes a culture.

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