

# Workplace Accessibility Guide

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# Foreword

*At Permobil, we're engineering a future free from mobility limitations. It's a bold vision – driven by relentless focus, inclusive innovation, and a commitment to listening to and challenging mindsets. Through cutting-edge technology and cross-industry collaboration, we're redefining what's possible.*

Since our pioneering roots in 1967, one principle has guided us: User First. Always. This isn't a mere philosophy; it's the DNA of every product and service we forge and the ecosystem we transform. And nowhere is this more critical than our own workplace – the epicenter of where our lives at Permobil intersect, ideas ignite and our collective purpose propels humanity forward.

For some, the workplace works well. For others, it creates barriers and exclusion. That must change. Accessibility matters, but it's just the starting line. Real progress happens when we pair it with true inclusion: designing spaces that don't just accommodate, but empower.

Consider something as simple as the corridor: If a wheelchair user can't move side-by-side with their peers, only behind or ahead, that's not equality. It's a signal that the space wasn't designed with our purpose in mind.

*“When accessibility and inclusion meet, workplaces evolve into thriving hubs that boost wellbeing, spark collaboration, and empower every individual to contribute at peak capacity. That's when teams thrive. That's how societies advance.”*

This guide is our catalyst for change, distilled from the learnings and wisdom of our worldwide network – from Sundsvall’s innovators to Nashville’s trailblazers to Sydney’s visionaries. It’s designed to ignite bold thinking, dismantle outdated norms and provide the questions that drive progress.

There’s no single blueprint for inclusion. But armed with curiosity, the courage to be open, and profound empathy, we can architect workplaces – and a world – that elevates everyone.

*The future isn’t waiting. Let’s build it.*



Chuck Witkowski  
President & CEO Permobil





## Parking and entrance

The parking area is often the first point of contact for visitors and employees, making it crucial to their overall experience. It should be functional, inclusive, and welcoming, ensuring accessibility and easy navigation for everyone to the entrance.

### **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

#### **Parking space design**

Accessible parking areas should be clearly marked and located close to entrances and exits. These spaces should be wide enough to accommodate wheelchair users and equipped with appropriate signage. If possible, extend the parking space so that wheelchair users can safely reach the trunk without being too close to passing cars.

#### **Weather protection**

Adding a roof to the accessible parking areas protects both vehicles and drivers from weather conditions like rain, snow, and sun. This important feature ensures that wheelchair users can move from their car to the workplace without getting wet or having to sit on a wet cushion all day.





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### **Signage and wayfinding**

High-contrast signage with large, easy-to-read text should be used to guide users through the parking area. Including braille and audio options can further enhance accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. Also, ensure the reception phone number is visible at the parking area for visitor assistance.

### **Lighting**

Adequate lighting is crucial for visibility and safety.

### **Pathways**

Clear, wide pathways ensures easy navigation for all users. Extending the roof from the disabled parking to the entrance protects wheelchair users from being exposed to wet or snowy weather.

## **High level implementation**

Investing in ground heating cables can prevent ice and snow accumulating in the parking, making it easier for wheelchair users to move around. This also reduces the risk of slipping for those who may need to stand or take a few steps to lift their wheelchair into the car trunk.

# Reception area

When entering a workplace, the reception area is often the first point of personal contact. To foster an inclusive environment, it is essential that the reception area is welcoming and accessible to all visitors.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Entrance**

Ensure a large entrance with an automatic door opener and no inclines or thresholds to ensure a smooth transfer into the building. If switches are used for powered doors, foot operated switches are a simple addition to offer accessible alternatives.

### **Reception desk**

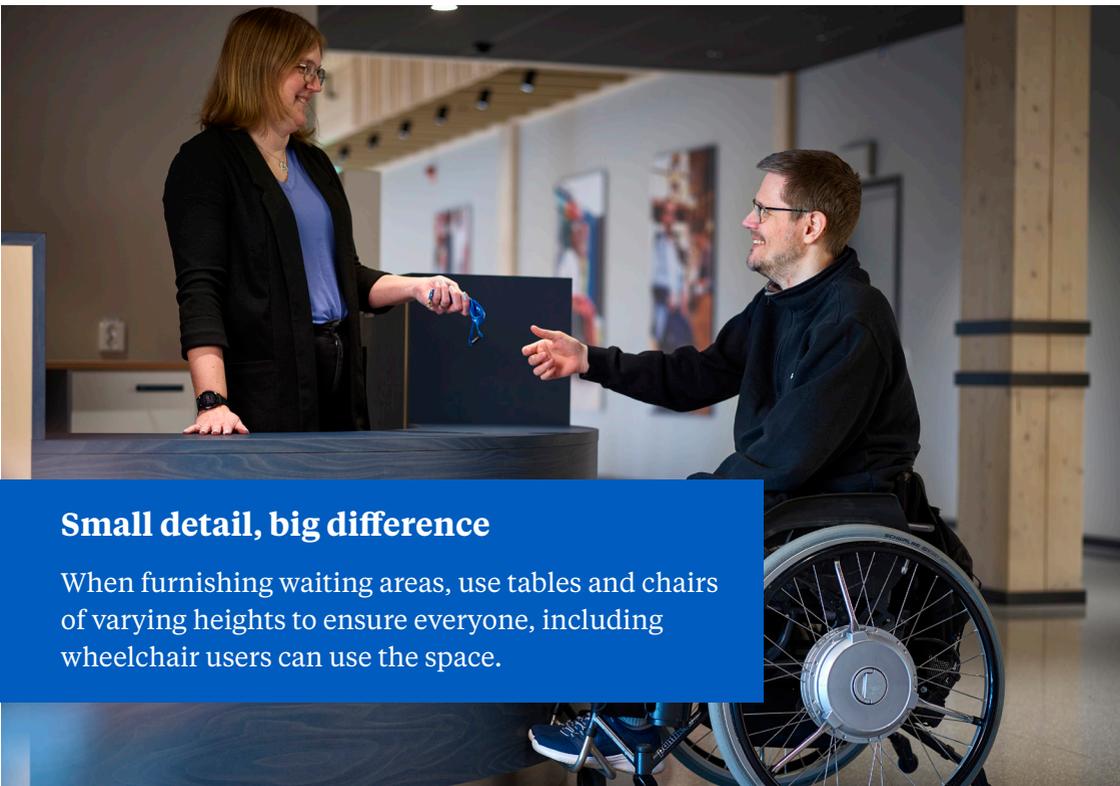
Designing the reception desk with two different levels – one higher and one lower – is recommended to accommodate both seated and standing positions.

### **Contrasting colors**

For visibility purposes, the different levels of the reception desk should be designed in contrasting colors. This ensures that individuals with visual impairments can easily perceive height differences.

### **Crutch holder**

Providing a designated place for crutches in the reception area enhances accessibility by offering a convenient storage solution. It also improves safety by preventing crutches from being left on the floor, which can be a tripping hazard.



## Small detail, big difference

When furnishing waiting areas, use tables and chairs of varying heights to ensure everyone, including wheelchair users can use the space.

*“We have to make sure all parts of our working environment is accessible: Physical, Attitudes, Structures and Communication. It’s not a ‘good thing to do’. It’s the right thing to do.”*



# Gem Turner

Content Creator at Gemturner.com

For me, I thrive on being part of something bigger with a purpose. Accessibility helps everyone, and having disabled people be part of society on every level is not only good, but it's necessary to create inclusive structures and environments.

## **Accessibility at work**

I've experienced a mix of accessibility in workplaces. While many employers aim to be accessible, they often lack the know-how. I've faced negative experiences, such as being reminded of my "cost" and dealing with patronizing attitudes. However, I've also had supportive colleagues and employers who ensure I can perform my best.

## **How to start creating accessible workplaces**

Employ disabled people making decisions high up as well as having disabled colleagues across the organization. Also, remember that accessible working looks different to everyone. Some will want to work from home most of the time. Some may thrive on being around people. There's no one answer for all disabled colleagues. We have to make sure all parts of our working environment is accessible: Physical, Attitudes, Structures and Communication. It's not a 'good thing to do.' It's the right thing to do.

# Staircases and handrails

Well-designed staircases and handrails are essential for easy navigation between building levels, reducing the risk of accidents, and improving the movement flow.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Handrails**

Ensure continuous handrails without gaps to provide better and safer support when moving up or down the staircase. Ideally, the handrail should extend beyond the staircase to support users when entering and exiting the stairway safely.

### **Level indicators**

Add tactile markers on stairs/handrails to indicate the floor level. Additionally, use a contrasting color or another type of marking on the first and last steps to clearly indicate their positions for users entering and exiting the staircase.

### **Contrasting colors**

To enhance the visibility of the handrail, ensure there is a contrasting color between the handrail and the supporting wall.

### **Positioning of stairs in relation to the elevator**

Position the staircase as close as possible to the elevator. This helps keep people together and fosters a more inclusive environment for all employees by preventing them from taking separate paths.



# Elevators

Elevators enable people with disabilities to navigate a building independently. However, certain considerations are necessary to ensure the experience is fully accessible and inclusive.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Elevator call button**

Place the elevator call button at a level suitable for wheelchair users.

### **Automatic door openers**

Add automatic door openers to enable independent entrance and exit.

### **Accessible buttons**

The buttons and controls inside the elevator should be placed at a height accessible to wheelchair users. Add tactile signs to make it easy to identify and use the correct button.

### **Voice attendant**

Equip the elevator with a voice attendant that announces the current floor, direction of movement, and when the door is opening.

### **Mirror**

If it is not possible to have a double-sided elevator, add a mirror inside the elevator and another on the opposite wall outside. This helps users reverse out safely by allowing them to see what is behind them.



## High level implementation

If you have the opportunity to install a new elevator, consider:

### Double-sided

Choose an elevator with two openings, also known as a double-sided elevator, so users can drive straight through when exiting. This eliminates the need to reverse out of the elevator, reducing stress and providing a more pleasant and safer ride.

### Fire cell

Install an elevator that functions as its own fire cell. This ensures the elevator can be used during emergencies, allowing wheelchair users to evacuate themselves instead of waiting for a rescue team.

# Conference rooms and office spaces

Accessible conference rooms and office spaces ensure that all employees can participate fully.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Adjustable office furniture**

When furnishing conference rooms, chairs with wheels can be easily moved and allow wheelchair users to select their own seat. Additionally, provide office desks with adjustable heights.

### **Maneuvering**

Ensure ample maneuvering space for wheelchair users to rotate and move around the room comfortably.

### **Whiteboards**

Position whiteboards at a height accessible to both standing and seated individuals.

### **Power sockets**

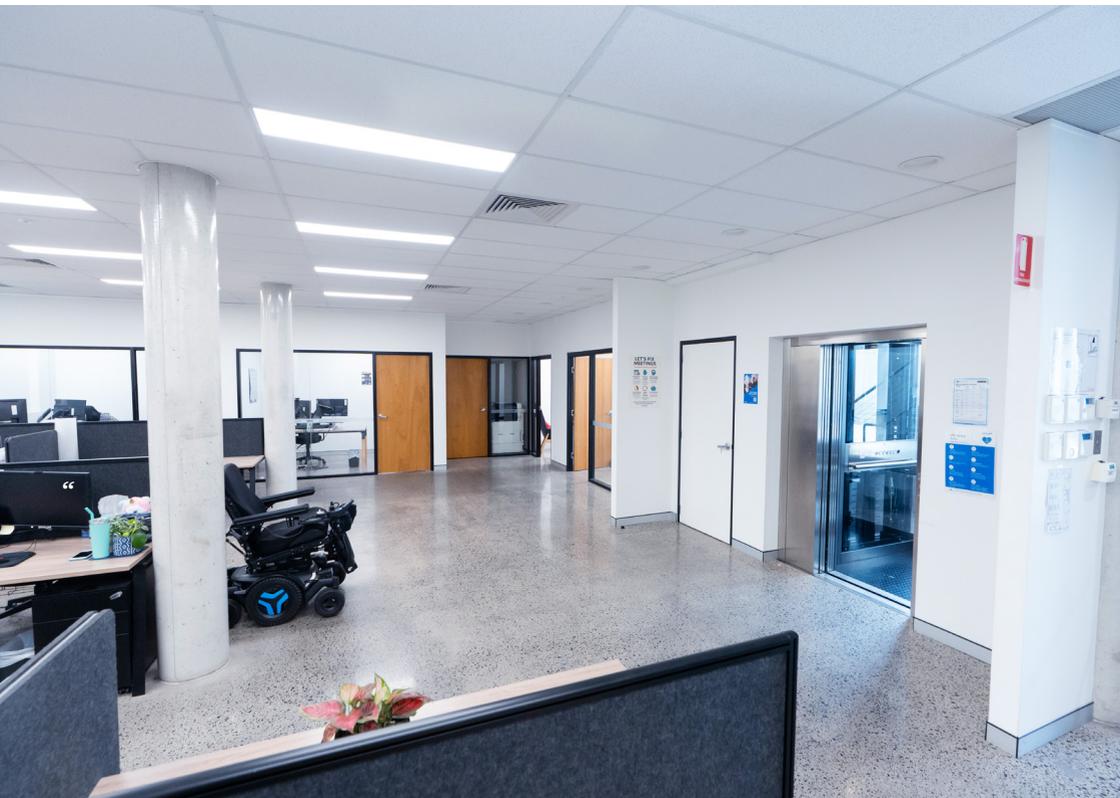
Ensure power sockets are positioned at a height that allows seated individuals to easily plug in.

### **Good acoustics**

It is important to have good acoustics in the rooms to prevent sound leakage and reduce echoes, which can be particularly distracting for individuals with hearing impairments.

### **Calm and warm colors**

Selecting calm and warm colors can have a positive impact on individuals experiencing brain fatigue. These colors can create a tranquil environment that enhances focus and productivity.





*“Accessibility allows me to participate fully, independently, and professionally.”*

# Rim Alexandra Halfya

Founder & COO at Combify

Accessibility shouldn't be built on the assumption that someone will always be there to help. The real hindrance isn't the physical disability, but a built environment that doesn't work for everyone.

## **Understanding the value of accessibility at work**

Workplace accessibility matters to me because it creates equal conditions from the start. When a workplace is accessible, I can focus on my work, not on logistics, workarounds, or how to get from one place to another. It's about being able to arrive at meetings at the same time as colleagues or my clients and not having to leave early or take separate routes just to move between spaces. Accessibility allows me to participate fully, independently, and professionally.

## **Personal experiences**

Accessibility has improved over my career, but gaps remain. Too often it feels like a checkbox exercise rather than thoughtful design. A lower table does not guarantee usability, and a bigger restroom is not accessible if essentials are out of reach. In coworking spaces, phone booths with high chairs and tight layouts exclude me from everyday work situations. People are usually willing to help, which I appreciate, but accessibility should not rely on others. Independence matters.

Social spaces like terraces can also be challenging; needing help to join colleagues outside feels infantilizing, even with good intentions. Safety is another overlooked aspect. Something as simple as an unstable toilet seat can pose real risks. Accessibility is not just about access; it is about feeling safe and independent.

*“Progress begins when we understand perspectives beyond our own.”*



# Ryleigh Newman

University Student, Scientist, and Community Leader

I've learned that progress starts with truly listening to different perspectives. When every voice is included, teams uncover needs they might otherwise overlook. Accessibility creates the conditions for real innovation by empowering everyone to contribute.

## **Perspective across workplace accessibility**

My experiences have shown me that accessibility isn't limited to one environment. In the workplace, it shapes how we move, communicate, and contribute. I've been in meeting spaces where fixed seating and narrow layouts made it difficult to participate. Sometimes I couldn't even fit my wheelchair into the room. In those moments, it was harder to contribute fully. Yet those same moments have also shown me what's possible when people listen. When my feedback leads to real change, such as adjusting room layouts or installing automatic doors, it improves access for everyone. That kind of listening creates more intentional collaboration and leads to stronger, more thoughtful solutions.

## **Accessibility as the foundation for collaboration**

Progress begins when we understand perspectives beyond our own. In an accessible workplace, every voice matters, and each person brings unique insights shaped by their experiences and roles. Recognizing these differences not only uncovers overlooked needs but also leads to solutions that work for everyone. When people feel heard and included, collaboration becomes intentional, creativity flourishes, and outcomes improve. This strengthens both the employee experience and the organization as a whole.

# Refreshment areas

The refreshment area is a natural hub for conversation and exchanging ideas. It also offers a quick break during the workday to recharge and refresh.

## Recommendations for enhanced accessibility

### Coffee and tea machine

All refreshment areas with coffee, tea and water machines should have counters or benches at different heights. This ensures wheelchair users can easily reach the machines and enjoy refreshments independently.

### Empty space

Ensure there is empty space underneath the lower-height counter or bench to allow wheelchair users to approach straight towards the object. This is preferable to accessing the counter from the side, which requires twisting awkwardly while reaching for a hot drink.

### Drawers

Install drawers instead of cabinets, as drawers are easier for everyone to use. They can be pulled out fully, allowing individuals to see and reach items without having to bend down or reach into the back of a cabinet.

### Ground level

Avoid wall cabinets and items placed high up. Ensure everything is reachable from ground level.



*“Workplace accessibility is ultimately not a cost, but a benefit to everyone involved.”*



# Erik Svensson

Senior Development Engineer at Permobil

Living with a spinal cord injury can be challenging. Having a truly accessible workplace makes everyday life smoother, reducing stress and increasing happiness and inspiration at work. Workplace accessibility is ultimately not a cost, but a benefit to everyone involved.

## **Personal workplace experiences**

At my previous job, which was in very old industrial premises, the building had no regular elevators. I had to use a freight lift and navigate basement corridors to move between different levels. This was not only frustrating but also made me feel isolated from my colleagues.

## **Erik's tips for accessible workplaces**

1. The building's layout is crucial for ensuring user-friendliness and accessibility. Therefore, it's important to consider accessibility from the early stages of construction to avoid it becoming a challenging afterthought.
2. Visits to other highly accessible buildings can inspire and help you solve potential challenges that you are facing regarding workplace accessibility.
3. I think there is great value in inviting wheelchair users to your facility for them to share what workplace accessibility means to them.

# Corridors

Ensure corridors are wide enough to provide ample space for individuals using wheelchairs or other mobility aids to navigate comfortably without feeling restricted.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Side-by-side travel**

It is important to ensure that corridors are wide enough for a wheelchair user to move alongside someone else. This allows for easier communication and interaction.

### **Lighting**

Ensure good lighting in corridors to enhance visibility. Additionally, make sure to install adjustable lighting, as it allows individuals to customize brightness and contrast to their needs.

### **Contrasting colors**

When designing a space with light-colored walls and flooring, it's important to use darker colors for door frames, doors, and baseboards. This contrast helps visually impaired individuals distinguish between different surfaces more easily.

### **Highlight potential obstacles**

Using color contrast to highlight obstacles like beams, columns, or protruding structures makes them more visible, reducing the risk of accidents.

## Safety perspective

Wide corridors are also crucial from a safety perspective. In emergency situations, they facilitate quicker and safer evacuations for all occupants.



# Restrooms

Restrooms need to be adjusted to accommodate power wheelchair users. A standard restroom for wheelchair users often lacks sufficient space and equipment, making it challenging for users to maneuver and transfer from the chair to the toilet.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Automatic door opener**

Install an automatic door opener, enabling independent opening and closing.

### **Adjustable equipment**

Equipment such as a toilet seat and sink with the ability to raise and lower can be extremely helpful.

### **Lift**

Install a personal lift, either mounted on the walls or ceiling, or opt for a portable lift. Note that a portable lift will require more space.

### **Showering bed**

Place a showering bed in the restroom and ensure a shower handle can be mounted above it. This setup allows caregivers to use both hands while the water continues to flow, keeping the user warm.

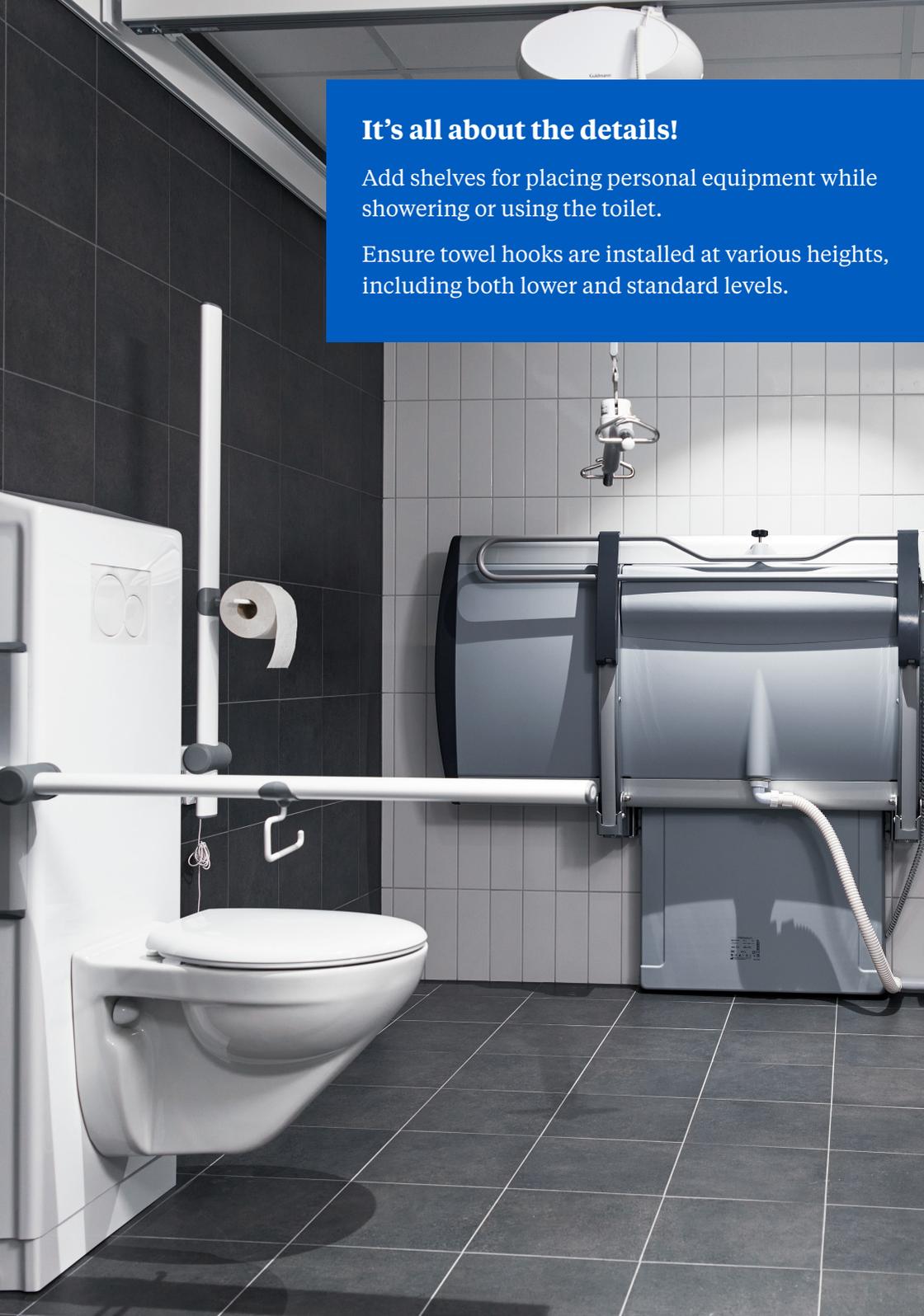
### **Mirror height**

Ensure mirrors are placed at a height suitable for individuals who are seated.

## It's all about the details!

Add shelves for placing personal equipment while showering or using the toilet.

Ensure towel hooks are installed at various heights, including both lower and standard levels.





*“Aim for progress,  
not perfection.”*

# Ross Hovey

## Workplace Inclusion Specialist

Workplace accessibility goes beyond individual needs – it’s essential for everyone. By incorporating inclusive design, workplaces can adapt to today’s demands as well as future changes. Elements such as wider doorways or automatic doors benefit not only wheelchair users but also pregnant employees and individuals with temporary injuries.

### **Personal workplace experiences**

At the start of my career, the building where I worked didn’t have an accessible restroom, so I needed to travel about half a mile (a kilometer) to use one at a nearby university. People frequently mention accessible toilets because finding a usable restroom is still a significant challenge for wheelchair users. Having access to a toilet is a fundamental human right.

As recently as a decade ago, numerous workplaces required employees with mobility disabilities to access the premises via back entrances, frequently routing them through loading docks and past refuse areas, which presented concerns regarding safety and dignity.

Today, progress is visible, evacuation procedures, for example, have improved significantly. However, there is still work to do.

### **Accessibility matters for everyone**

Accessibility isn’t about fixing something for one person as it benefits everyone. Anyone can become disabled at any time, so inclusive design prepares workplaces for the future. It adds value through diversity, strengthens brand reputation, and makes business sense.

Remember: you’ll never achieve perfection for everyone, but striving for inclusion matters. Aim for progress, not perfection.

# Kitchen area

The kitchen area is an everyday social space where colleagues gather. All employees should be able to use this space independently and comfortably.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Empty space**

Ensure there is empty space underneath the counter. This allows wheelchair users to approach directly and reach comfortably, rather than accessing the counter from the side, which requires lifting items and involves shoulder and upper body rotation.

### **Drawers**

Use drawers instead of cabinets in the kitchen. Drawers are easier for everyone to access, as they can be pulled out fully, allowing individuals to see and reach items like plates and glasses without bending down or reaching into the back of a cabinet.

### **Maneuvering**

Ensure there is ample maneuvering space between counters to avoid a crowded feeling and provide sufficient turning radius space.

### **The small things**

Place hand towels, napkins, soap, salt and pepper etc. at a height and distance that can be easily reached by everyone.



# Cafeteria

The cafeteria offers a break from desks or meeting rooms, perfect for lunch and informal meetings, fostering relaxation and collaboration.

## **Recommendations for enhanced accessibility**

### **Maneuvering**

Ensure there is ample space between furniture to allow easy movement and provide a sufficient turning radius for wheelchair users.

### **Seating arrangement**

Create both larger and smaller seating areas to allow people to sit together or alone.

### **Easy to remove chairs**

Ensure that chairs can be easily removed and repositioned. This flexibility allows individuals in wheelchairs to choose their preferred seating area, rather than being limited to the end of a table where no chair is positioned

### **Screened off area**

If possible, create areas that can be screened off to provide privacy for individuals who may feel uncomfortable eating in public. This can be achieved in various ways, such as using fabrics, screens or plants.





*“Accessibility isn’t just about physical access  
- it’s about inclusion.”*

# Louise Vidlund

Digital Creator

When a company demonstrates that it truly includes everyone, regardless of their life situation, it sends a powerful message. Employees with disabilities should feel comfortable and confident working there.

## **Accessibility at work**

I haven't worked in a traditional office for an extended period, as I've mainly worked from home running my own business. However, during visits to various companies for meetings, I've noticed significant improvements in workplace accessibility in recent years.

That said, there are still challenges. For example, I've seen situations where a trash bin was placed in front of elevator buttons, making it difficult to reach them when using wheeled mobility aids. Mobility aids like wheelchairs or scooters require extra space to maneuver, so small obstacles create big problems.

Another common issue is height differences in furniture.

Workplaces should provide tables at varying heights to accommodate different needs. Many organizations still need to adopt an inclusive mindset, and design spaces that work for everyone. Accessibility isn't just about physical access - it's about inclusion.

## **Quick wins for making workplaces more accessible**

Minimize large differences in floor levels wherever possible. If level changes are unavoidable, ensure there are accessible routes (such as ramps or lifts) so that people using wheeled mobility aids can reach the same areas as everyone else without taking long detours. Accessibility should mean equal access, not extra effort. becomes intentional, creativity flourishes, and outcomes improve –strengthening both the employee experience and the organization as a whole. It is not just about access; it is about feeling safe and independent.

*“We must keep advocating and raising awareness in society to ensure inclusive spaces for all.”*



# Martin Larsen

Marketing Content Specialist at Permobil

Workplace accessibility directly impacts my independence and reduces the need for assistance from others. My current workplace is thoughtfully designed with accessibility in mind, which makes a significant difference. The importance of accessibility features can differ based on individual needs. For me, accessibility is crucial in areas such as the entrance, hallways, office spaces, restrooms, and the cafeteria

## **Personal experiences of accessibility in the workplace**

At my previous job, I had to call a colleague to access the building via a freight lift. I also couldn't use the restroom, so I had to rely on a urine bottle or make the 40-minute commute home each way. In contrast, my current workplace is fully accommodating, with challenges solved collaboratively by my employer and the municipality.

## **How to start creating accessible workplaces**

Ongoing discussions about ableism and accessibility are crucial. Accessibility should indeed be a priority for everyone, in all areas of life, not just in workplaces. We must keep advocating and raising awareness in society to ensure inclusive spaces for all.

# House of Disability Organisations

The House of Disability Organisations in Denmark is designed as an office building for disability organisations. It ensures all 300 employees and visitors can move freely and work equally. With inclusive design, it serves as a beacon for accessibility and innovation, promoting an inclusive labor market where physical barriers do not prevent participation.

## **Perforated panels in the atrium**

The atrium's perforated plywood panels with sound-absorbing material create excellent acoustics, benefiting those with visual, cognitive, and hearing impairments. The perforations also improve visual access for people of all heights. This affordable solution complements the building's design.

## **Elevator buttons**

Each elevator has two control panels: one at hand height and another at foot level. The lower panel can be operated with a foot or wheelchair wheel. Elevator stops automatically at each floor, eliminating the need to press buttons inside of the elevator – ideal for users with limited arm mobility. This feature adds only 12 seconds to a trip to the top floor, making it practical and inclusive.

## **Floor indicators**

The handrail features guide knobs to assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired in navigating each floor. These tactile knobs provide cues indicating the current floor and signal when passing office wings. This simple, affordable solution enhances accessibility within the building.



# Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the development of this Workplace Accessibility Guide. Your dedication, expertise, and insights have been invaluable.

## **Special thanks to:**

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”House of Disability Organisations” for being at the forefront and paving the way for a more inclusive society.

Magnus Berglund at ”Accessibility Business”, your expertise and dedication to creating accessible workplaces is admirable.



The tips and ideas presented in this guide are based on Permobil's experiences and are intended to provide reflection and inspiration. However, it is essential to comply with the specific accessibility regulations applicable in your country, in addition to considering these suggestions.

For any questions or inquiries, please contact [accessibility@permobil.com](mailto:accessibility@permobil.com)

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