COTA NEW SOUTH WALES

Liveable Communities:

Some Basic Principles for Age-Friendly Environments

Footpaths

The design and size of footpaths is one of the key elements for encouraging people to get out and about.

To encourage people to walk socially and for exercising together, paths should be wide enough to take two mobility devices side by side, such as baby strollers, scooters and wheelchairs.

Mobility devices also need seamless footpaths and paths of travel with no lips, trips or steps. However, streets need well defined edges with no roll-top kerbs as these are easier for people to negotiate and to board buses and cars.

One of the main issues of designing footpaths is the trend towards 'shared paths' for both pedestrians and cyclists.

Some older people, particularly those with early dementia, find fast moving people and cyclist disorientating and they fear for their safety as their reflexes are not as good as they used to be. In short they fear being run down.

Pedestrians are also wheelchair and scooter users, as well as people pushing prams, not just people walking.

Basic items

Provide footpaths as soon as possible in new developments

Provide footpaths on both sides of the street

Provide footpaths to transport stops and stations with concrete aprons across nature strips and under seating

Footpaths should be wide enough for two mobility devices to pass

Provide a seamless transition between footpaths and street crossings and into buildings

Minimise conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles

Additional features

Use travelators rather than escalators as these are difficult for some people to negotiate

Locate lifts so that they are easily accessed, well signed and visible to the street

Avoid

Anything that will lift pavers and cause trip hazards later

Gravel

Walking on grass or denuded ground

Breaks in the path of travel caused by missing paving or architectural barriers

Placement of street works that break the path of travel without sufficient attention to accessibility for people with mobility difficulties

Seating

Street and open space seating encourages people who have poor mobility to continue getting out and about

If people experience pain in walking or become breathless and know there is a seat, fear of getting stranded, embarrassed or falling is minimised

Seats must be well placed and not in the line of pedestrian traffic and if outdoors, offer some shelter from the elements, particularly summer sun

Street seating also encourages social inclusion. In some neighbourhoods strategically placed seating encourages older people to gather informally.

People who have difficulty rising from seats require arm rests upon which they can push themselves to a standing position

Seats placed on grass or surrounded by grass or gravel are not easily accessed particularly for people with mobility devices

Basic items

Seats should be placed at regular intervals in street settings and shopping strips. Seats at bus stops can serve as both transport and pedestrian seating, in which case ensure sufficient supply

Seats should be placed on level concreted ground with a concreted wheelchair and pram access space alongside.

Seats to be set back from the main pedestrian path of travel but with a continuous footpath

Seats must have arm rests and back rests

Seats should be protected from the elements but at the same time be visible from all directions for passive surveillance

Avoid

Setting seats too high, too low or on sloping ground
Upholstered public seating without arm rests and/or low to the ground
Seating that will not accommodate larger bodied people

Wayfinding and Signage

Wayfinding design is the process of organising spatial and environmental information to help the user find their way

Although signage is a common solution to wayfinding, sources of confusion can be caused by factors such as the way items are named and labelled and the design of the building itself

Consequently, signage is a part of wayfinding but not the total solution for users being able to find their way through the environment

Some people have difficulty locating themselves in space and get easily disorientated in unfamiliar environments, and others lose their spatial wayfinding capability with the onset of dementia

The positioning of key landmarks together with signage that is clear and easy to interpret should be considered in developments

When designing signage and wayfinding for people who require Braille, refer to Vision Australia for guidance

Basic items

Street signage should have large lettering, colour contrast, plain fonts and non-reflective surfaces

Street and business signs should be easily read by both pedestrians and drivers
Signage should be well placed so that it is visible from all directions

Signage should be continuously placed if leading from a distance, for example leading to toilets, lifts, separate accessible entries, or landmarks

Transport stops to be well signed

Include orientation features such as landmarks and architectural cues

Avoid

Heritage style fonts and colours unless essential. Include alternative signage nearby.

Placing wayfinding signs where there is a lot of visual 'noise', that is, alongside many other signs and hoardings

Just labelling doors, such as toilet doors, without including signage indicating where the door is located

Toilets

Being able to find and use a public toilet is a necessity for everyone when they are out and about.

Some people need a toilet more frequently or urgently

If toilets are not easily located or poorly maintained it can impact on a person's confidence to spend time away from their home base.

If a person has poor levels of continence they may only go to places where they know a toilet is nearby, easily accessed and minimal chances of needing to queue

Equal space given to toilet for men and women is not effective if men have to wait also while women queue. Consideration should be given to more cubicles for women

The size of cubicles need to consider larger people, ability to get in and out with a small child, bags, or luggage, and the placement of sanitary items within the cubicle

Ability to open and close the door and use latches should also be considered. Outward opening doors create greater accessibility, for the' ambulant toilet' in particular, but there should be a handle to pull the door closed on the inside of the door.

At least one accessible toilet should allow for a carer of the opposite sex to attend and assist. Accessible toilets within gender specific toilets prevent this.

Basic items

Public toilets outdoors and indoors are sufficient in number, clean, well maintained and accessible

Provide at least one unisex toilet to allow carers to enter and assist (companion toilet)

Ensure clear and visible signage to public toilets

Allow sufficient space for a person to enter a cubicle with bags or small children
Consider the difference in overall allocation of space required by men and women to reduce queuing times by women

Ensure an accessible path of travel to all toilets

Avoid

Locking accessible toilets

Gravel or uneven paths to outdoor toilets from the main path of travel

Lighting

Lighting is often considered in relation to safety after dark, but lighting covers more aspects than safety

Light levels are also important in daylight hours, particularly for people who are blind or have low vision

Subdued or low light levels can make reading and wayfinding difficult in both day and night conditions

Pools' of light interspersed with darker spaces, both day and night, are problematic for people who are blind or have low vision, and for people who have difficulties with visual perception.

Basic items

Lighting should be even and without glare and designed and placed to minimise pools or strips of light

Lighting should be designed and placed to minimise pools or strips of light across surfaces

Maintain lighting and replace faulty lights when needed to avoid light pools and dark patches

Provide good lighting after dark in public spaces

Provide good lighting after dark at bus stops

Avoid

Glare from reflective surfaces - also consider the suitability of the surface

Placing trees and shrubs where they will grow under a light source