



Workplace Accessibility Guide

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Foreword

When Dr. Per Uddén founded Permobil in 1967, he wasn't just starting a company – he was igniting a movement. His vision of independence and inclusion for all has fueled everything we've done for over half a century; from what we manufacture to how we create the best conditions for those who use our products and services.

The workplace is where things happen. Knowledge is shared, experiences are made, and ideas are created. It is more than just a place to work. It is where every individual should feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. This vision guided us in building our new facility in Sundsvall, Sweden. Drawing from our experiences, partner feedback, and inspiration from other buildings, we proudly unveiled our accessible workplace in the fall of 2024.

However, accessible buildings are not necessarily inclusive. Even in modern workplaces that meet all accessibility regulations, all individuals should be able to experience and use the building in the same way.

Requiring a wheelchair user to take a detour to avoid a few steps may offer accessibility but is far from inclusive. This highlights the importance of designing with first-hand experience in mind.

Creating truly accessible environments requires a different mindset - one that you need to immerse yourself with genuine curiosity. This guide aims to inspire and help you adopt this mindset, so you can make these principles your own.

Explore this guide with both your heart and mind engaged. Discuss it with colleagues. Challenge assumptions. Take action. Together, we're not just creating better workplaces – we're building the inclusive society that Dr. Uddén envisioned all those years ago.



Bengt Thorsson, President & CEO Permobil

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Bengt Thorsson'.

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.

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

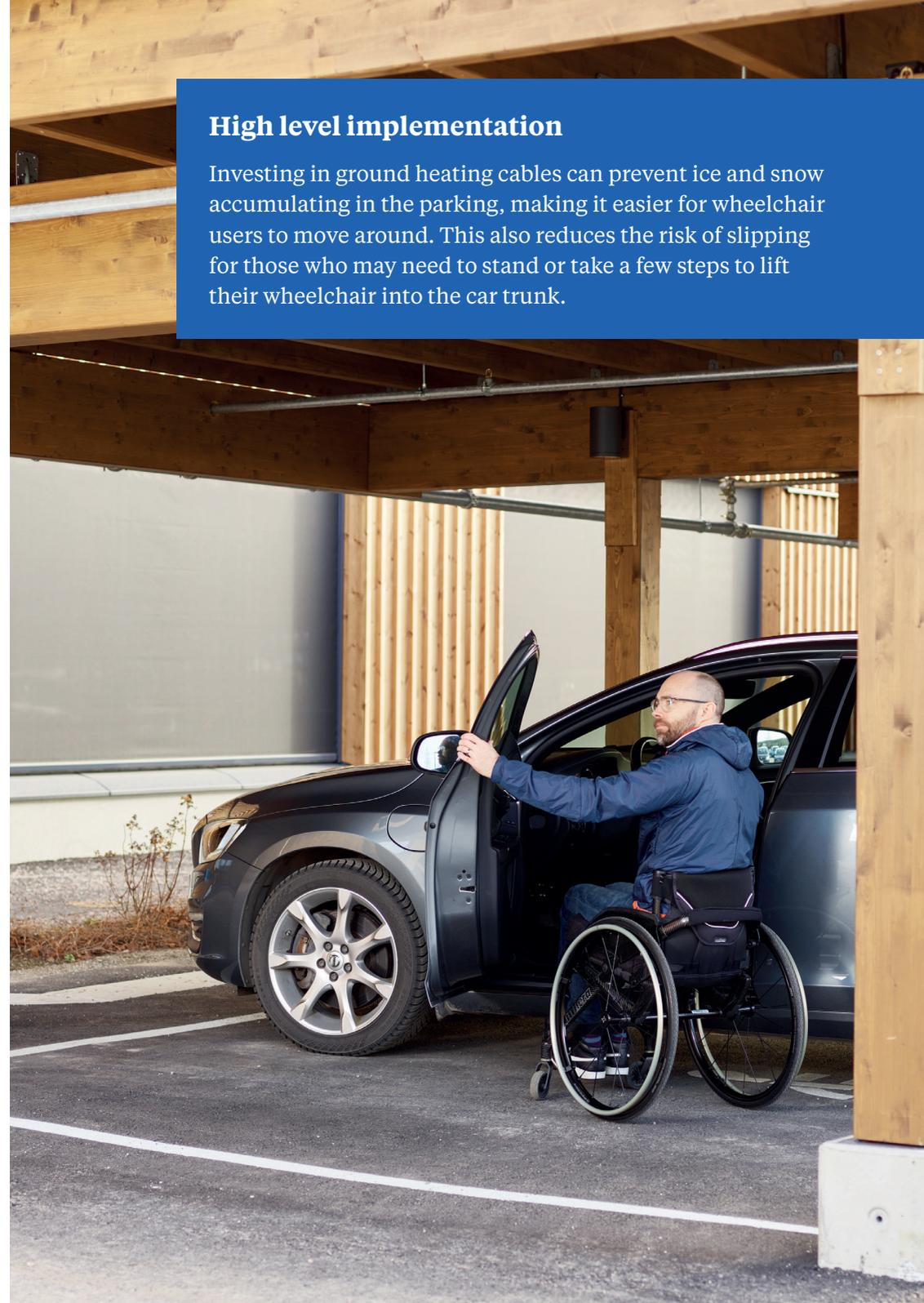
Adequate lighting is crucial for visibility and safety.

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

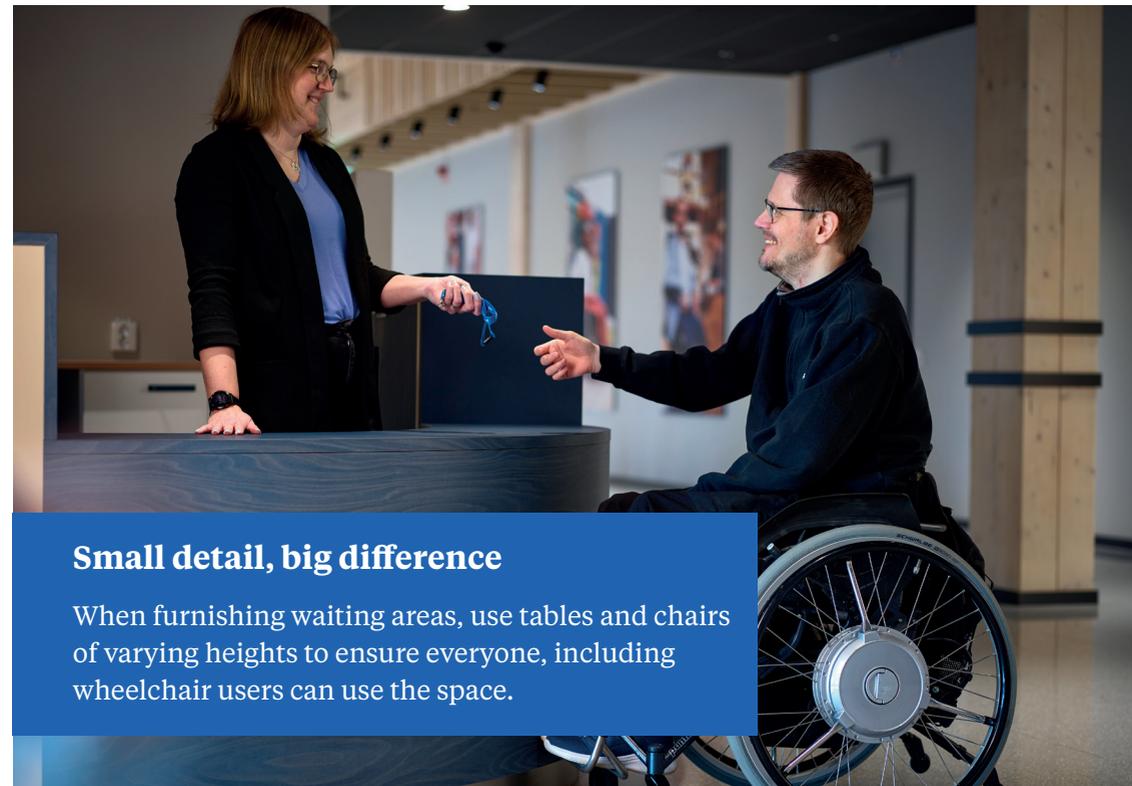
Designing the reception desk with two different levels – one higher and one lower – is recommended to accommodate both seated and standing positions.

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

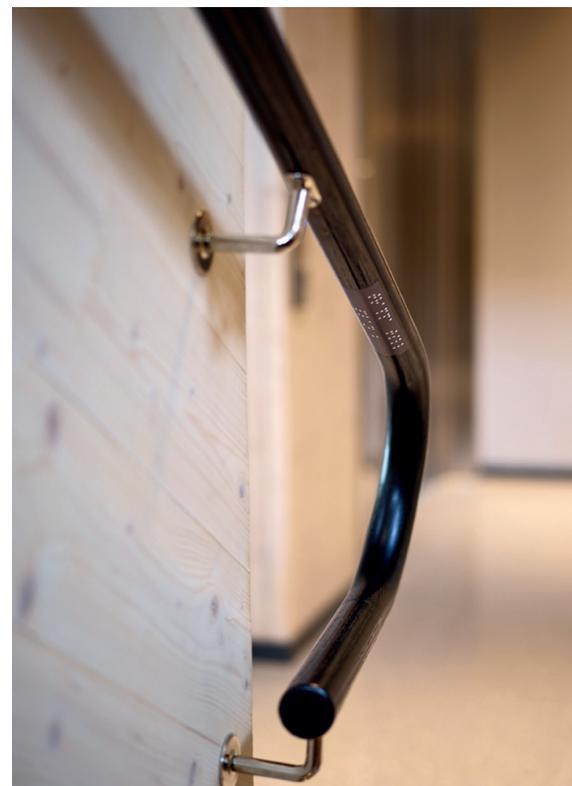
Add tactile markers on stairs/handrails to indicate the floor level. Additionally, use a contrasting color or another type of marking on the first and last steps to clearly indicate their positions for users entering and exiting the staircase.

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

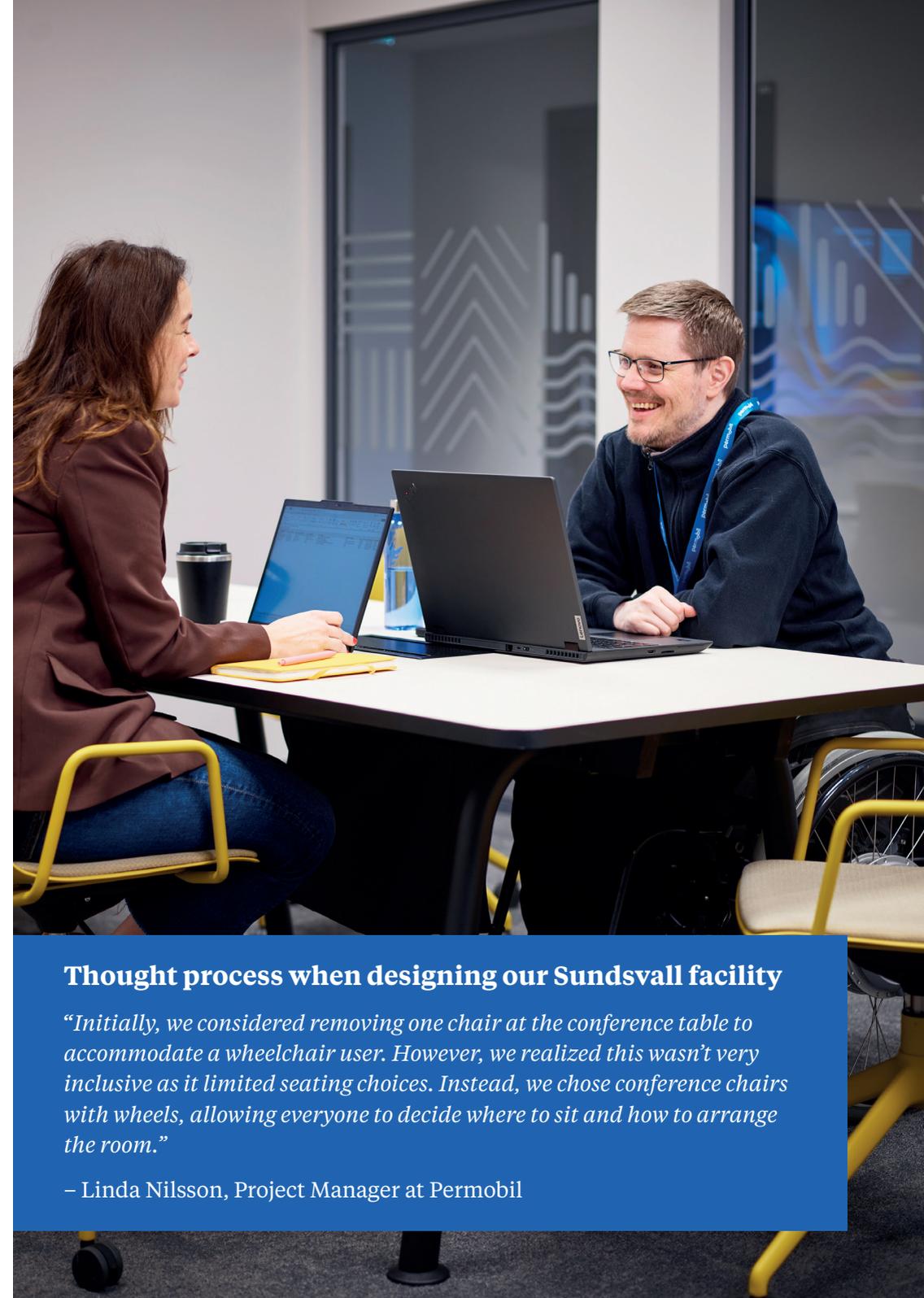
Ensure power sockets are positioned at a height that allows seated individuals to easily plug in.

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.



Thought process when designing our Sundsvall facility

“Initially, we considered removing one chair at the conference table to accommodate a wheelchair user. However, we realized this wasn’t very inclusive as it limited seating choices. Instead, we chose conference chairs with wheels, allowing everyone to decide where to sit and how to arrange the room.”

– Linda Nilsson, Project Manager at Permobil

“That’s just life as a wheelchair user, we learn to adapt to these types of challenges very quickly.”



Doug Garven

Principal Product Manager at Permobil

Workplace accessibility is the first step in allowing someone to perform their job. If there are physical obstacles that are preventing this, in my case stairs, it makes completing your tasks that much more complicated. However, that’s just life as a wheelchair user, we learn to adapt to these types of challenges very quickly.

Accessibility at work

At Permobil Nashville, our ground-level facility is a major plus since it allows me to easily move around the building without being dependent on an elevator to access different floors. I’d rather not spend my life in an elevator! However, we only have three accessible bathrooms in the entire building. Unfortunately, these are often occupied by able-bodied colleagues who have other alternatives, which forces me to wait outside until they are free. Another issue is that the doorway thresholds aren’t optimal, as they don’t have a smooth transition to eliminate the bump. But overall, my current situation at work is quite accessible.

How to start creating accessible workplaces

My best advice is to put on a different pair of glasses and imagine yourself in a wheelchair, navigating from the parking lot to inside the building. Ensure accessibility not just to individual workstations, but throughout the entire facility.

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

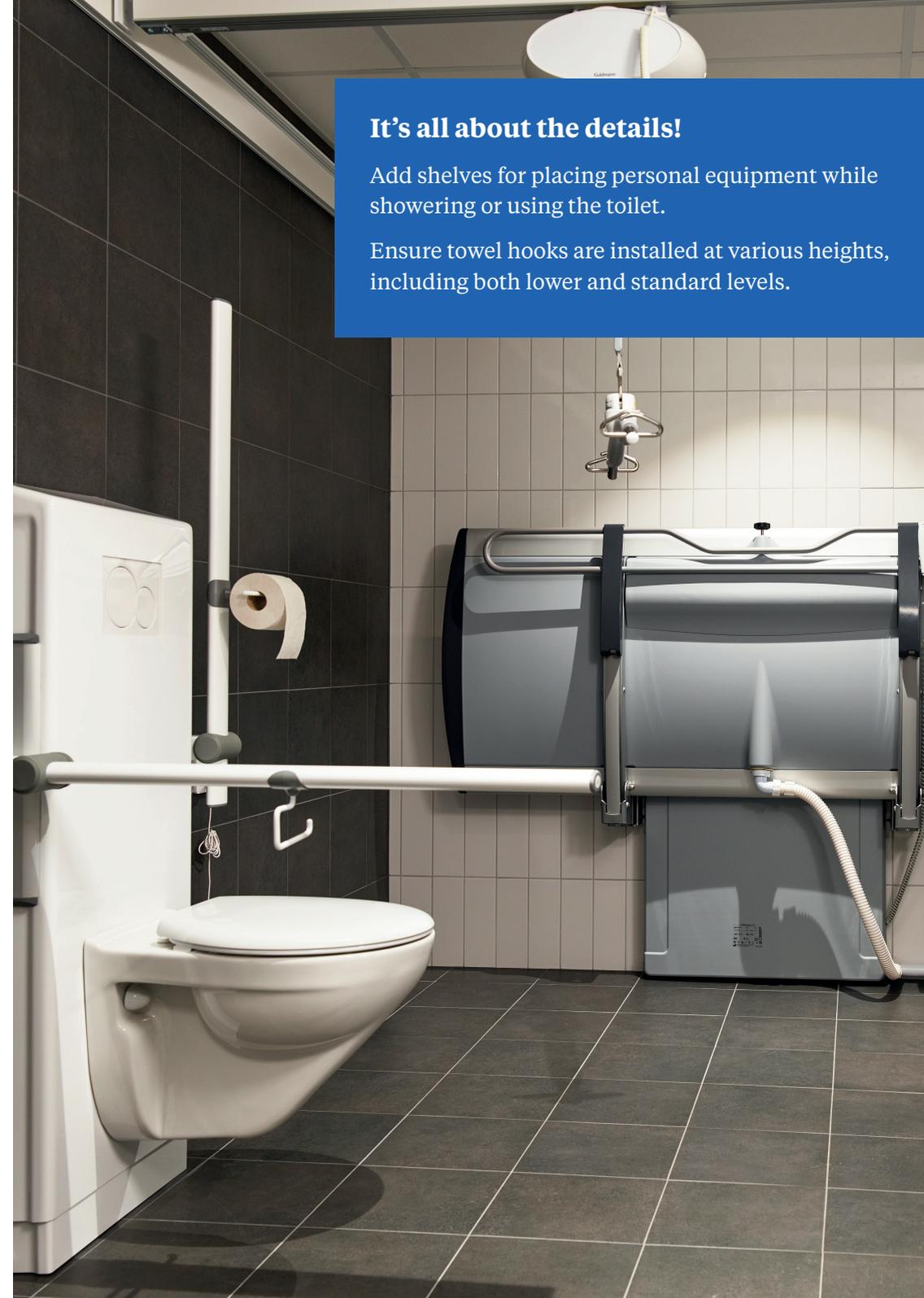
Install a personal lift, either mounted on the walls or ceiling, or opt for a portable lift. Note that a portable lift will require more space.

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.

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.



Karin van Dijk

Board member My Breath My Music Foundation
& Accessibility Expert

It's crucial that you can be independent without relying on others. This greatly impacts the joy of work. You feel more relaxed and can concentrate solely on your duties.

Accessibility at work

During my bank internship, every door required an ID scan to open. When my friend wasn't around, I had to ask my colleagues for help, which felt awkward. It was disheartening not being able to move around independently. In contrast, Permobil's facility in Sundsvall, Sweden, is a great example of thoughtful accessibility. I felt completely independent there. It accommodates all, because no person is the same.

How to start creating accessible workplaces

Project managers and architects must know that true workplace equality means creating an inclusive and unconditionally accessible environment where all employees can work independently and feel valued. This fosters a more equitable workplace.



“Workplace Accessibility means being on equal terms, and that’s very important.”

“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

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