

What makes a toilet wheelchair-friendly?

Features of an accessible loo

A guide by **ABLE** 
AMSTERDAM

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Accessible toilets are an absolute necessity for many people living with a disability. A crucial part of inclusive spaces, their design features allow wheelchair users and individuals with a range of (physical) disabilities to use the toilet as independently and safely as possible.

Below you'll find a range of considerations when designing a wheelchair-friendly loo:

An accessible doorway

Doorways of accessible toilets should be **wider than normal** (min. 80 cm / 32 inches) so that wheelchair users can easily roll in and out. There should be **no threshold** obstructing the entrance. The door should be **lightweight** so that it opens with minimal force (believe me, it's hard to juggle a mobility aid with a heavy door).

To easily close the door behind you, there should be a **horizontal grab bar** along the inside of the door. In addition, **the door should always open outwards**. This means the door can still be opened easily in an emergency situation if someone has fallen on the toilet floor.

Grab rails

Grab rails are a basic feature of any accessible toilet. They provide crucial **support, stability and balance** for anyone transferring onto the toilet. Without them, I'd have to hold onto the toilet seat (yuck!) which is as unhygienic as it is unsafe.



Adjustable grab rails inside Hotel Sofitel Legend The Grand, Amsterdam

A raised toilet seat

For people with reduced mobility like myself, higher toilet seats make it easier to stand up and sit down. By raising the seat of an accessible toilet, transfers to/from a wheelchair are also safer as the seat height is more equal between the two.

Low mirrors and sinks

Mirrors and sinks in accessible toilets should be placed at a lower height. This makes them useable for anyone seated in a wheelchair.

The soap, paper towels, hand dryer, hooks, and toilet paper must all be within reach when seated

All amenities in an accessible toilet must be within reach for wheelchair users. This means placing or hanging things at a lower height than in standard toilets.



A low mirror and sink at the OBA Public Library
(Oosterdokskade)

Any **paper towels or hand dryers should also be placed close to the sink**. This way mobility aid users won't have to touch their wheelchair, rollator, or crutches with wet hands as they go to dry them off.



The soap, paper towels and toilet paper are all within reach at
the Hyatt Regency Amsterdam

Easy-to-use tap and bin designs

The tap in an accessible toilet should be an easy-to-use design that doesn't require much force. Especially as some disabilities involve difficulty gripping things, the tap should be useable with a closed fist. For this reason, a lever design (see photo above) is much better than a tap with a twistable knob.

Similarly, bins should be easily operated without much force and with a closed fist (see photo above). Foot-pedal bins are a big no no, as anyone with limited or no leg function would find them impossible to use. It's also important that bins are large enough for multiple users to discreetly dispose of (adult) diapers, stoma bags, or other waste items.



Easy-to-use taps and bins at the OBA Public Library
(Oosterdokskade)

Space

An accessible toilet has to be spacious enough to turn and manoeuvre in a wheelchair. At minimum, this should involve a clear and unobstructed wheelchair turning circle of 1.5 metres in diameter.

Ideally there should be space on both sides of the toilet (min. 90 cm) so that wheelchair users can transfer onto the toilet seat from either side. The sink should also have adequate space underneath to roll right up to it in a wheelchair.

Remember that the extra space in an accessible toilet is **a necessity, not a luxury. It** shouldn't be used as a storage cupboard, filing cabinet, laundry room, or anything else.



A spacious accessible toilet inside the Hotel Okura in Amsterdam

An emergency alarm cord

Every accessible toilet needs an emergency alarm cord. This ensures that anyone who falls or needs assistance can signal for help.

Emergency alarm cords should be hung **approx. 40 cm from the ground around the full parameter of the toilet.** The button to turn off the alarm should also be inside the toilet, so an alerted staff member always has to enter the toilet (and check on anyone inside) before turning it off.



A bright red emergency cord at the Van der Valk Hotel Amsterdam-Amstel

Signposting

If you've got an accessible toilet, flaunt it! Signposting with a wheelchair icon is especially important so anyone in need of an accessible toilet **knows it exists and knows where to find it.**



Stylish signposting at Persijn in the QO Amsterdam

Changing Places Facilities

Finally, the best accessible toilets also have Changing Places Facilities. These are specialised toilet facilities for people with more complex needs who are unable to use a standard toilet. It includes a tracking hoist system, an adult sized changing bed, and other features that allow individuals to use the toilet with comfort and dignity. For more details, please see the official Changing Places website.

Disclaimer

I am not a professional with regards to the specifications for accessible toilets. However, based on personal experience as a wheelchair user, I consider the criteria above important. The information in this document should serve as a guide in combination with expert advice.

Questions? Email hello@ableamsterdam.com

Head to [**www.ableamsterdam.com**](http://www.ableamsterdam.com) for more accessibility tips.