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INTRODUCTION

This report is a functional access assessment rather than an access audit. The following comments apply:

- The report makes reference to the Building Code of Australia (BCA) but the assessment is not of either a new building nor new building works
- Reference is made to Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements with awareness that application has to be within the guidelines of “reasonable and practicable”
- Judgements of reasonable and practicable are made with reference to Commonwealth Government OHS Legislation and the requirements for the application of risk and hazard mitigation processes.
- The “users” being considered potentially include the staff working within Parliament House; the Members of the Houses of Parliament; their staff; contractors providing services to all users such as catering and cleaning, café, bank, florist, travel agent, Post Office and members of the public including those who come to visit publicly accessible areas of the building; those who attend other areas of the building as guests of Senators, Members or staff; and those attending private functions
- The definition and understanding of ‘reasonable and practicable’ access to a disabled individual is likely to vary with the level of autonomy and control each person has within their use of the building; their ability to manage disability requirements, and their expectations of access and services
- The functional expectation underlying the assessment is that both disabled individuals who perform most activities independently, (able to arrive at, enter and use the House facilities by themselves), and those persons who require the assistance of a carer (assisting them to undertake some activities) are considered
- The report is not intended to provide an audit of building related regulations or legislation but aims to provide practical advice regarding improving access to the Parliament House-user interface for all those users with disabilities. It is noted that section D3.4 of the Deemed to Satisfy Provisions of the BCA for access for people with disabilities do not require access to more than 30% of the public space in restaurants, function rooms or the like; or any area if access would be inappropriate because of the particular purpose for which the area is used
- Fundamental to the risk assessment of desirable levels of access level is consideration and understanding of the need for both a high level of security required in a public building of such importance, and the inherent and fundamentally challenging demands balancing the demands related to maintaining building design integrity
- Additionally this risk assessment recognises the consideration of the need to also balance the public’s need for access to their Parliament House while protecting and supporting those who carry out work activities within the building



SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

A Functional Access Audit of Parliament House was undertaken involving on-site assessment, measurement and liaison with Parliamentary Services management.

In general, there is evidence of high level intention and planning to accommodate persons with disabilities within the Parliament house complex, but some anomalies and inconsistencies exist between different areas. There are some issues which are related to the inherent aesthetic design features of the building, which has been designed as an impressive National Capital building, rather than for accessibility.

There are four themes which have emerged and require addressing in degrees of urgency:

1) Safety issues - urgent and important.

Given the many different levels within the complex, one of the most urgent issues is ensuring that barrier heights are adequate. The balustrade on the outer edge of Queens Terrace poses a public safety hazard due to the low height (860mm) of the barrier where the viewing step is located. Also, on Viewing area to the Great Hall, level 1, there is a danger of serious injury to a wheelchair occupant due to the lack of a barrier at ground level. Other urgent items are the replacement of towel rails in the disabled toilets with weight-bearing grab-rails, and the provision of emergency call buttons in the disabled toilets in the car park area.

In general, the second most immediate items which should be addressed are the fall hazards, such as non-fixed mats, small lips or ledges, which have the capacity to cause significant injury to all members of the public, and should therefore be eliminated as far as reasonably practicable. In some cases however, this may be difficult, given the importance of the design aesthetic.

A third safety item is the re-timing of automatic doors to allow safe egress and ingress by visitors with mobility issues.

2) Ergonomic Issues

These include design features such as very heavy doors, which are difficult to open for frail or mobility-impaired visitors, and thick carpet which is difficult for wheelchairs and people with wheeled mobility frames, children's strollers etc. There should be provision of seating for frail or mobility challenged visitors.



3) Accessibility issues

Issues here include access to telephones, heights of switches and mail boxes, signage for visually-challenged visitors, as well as car-park access. These issues vary considerably within the complex, and it is suggested that kerb accessibility, doors operation etc are standardised to be easily used by wheelchair users and other visitors with mobility issues.

4) Routine maintenance

A regular, planned program should be implemented to ensure that handrails are not loose, mats are safely located etc.