

Accessible Examination Rooms

To raise awareness about disability barriers and to increase accessibility of primary health care to people with disabilities, the Illinois Department of Public Health Disability and Health Program, funded through a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, collaborated with statewide disability advocacy organizations to develop a health care facility exam room and medical equipment accessibility survey. Several statewide health care professional organizations assisted in disseminating the survey. The Illinois Department of Public Health Disability and Health Program reported results of the survey in a prior article. In response to the anonymous, self-report survey, the majority of the 160 respondents indicated a considerable need for accessibility improvements, particularly in regards to the availability of accessible primary medical equipment and other elements within the exam room, as well as staff properly trained in the use of accessible medical equipment.

The article below is the second in a series providing recommendations on how to increase accessibility of exam rooms and medical equipment. It is important to note that in addition to physical accessibility, facilities may need to go a step further and consider policies, practices and procedures that may need to be reasonably modified or created, and to ensure staff are trained and understand how to make available and use the accessible equipment. A provider should take these steps unless they can demonstrate such modification or creation of a new policy will fundamentally alter the nature of the services.

The following information is an excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice document, "Americans with Disabilities Act: Access to Medical Care for Individuals with Mobility Disabilities, Part 3: Accessible Examination Rooms." The full document may be viewed or downloaded at www.ada.gov/medcare_mobility_ta/medcare_ta.htm or copies may be obtained by calling 800-514-0301 (voice) or 800-514-0383 (TTY).

Accessible Examination Rooms

An accessible examination room has features that make it possible for patients with mobility disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs, to receive appropriate medical care. These features allow the patient to enter the examination room, move around in the room, and utilize the accessible equipment provided.

The features that make this possible are:

- an accessible route to and through the room;
- an entry door with adequate clear width, maneuvering clearance, and accessible hardware;
- appropriate models and placement of accessible examination equipment; and
- adequate clear floor space inside the room for side transfers and use of lift equipment.

New and altered examination rooms must meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design. Accessible examination rooms may need additional floor space to accommodate transfers and for certain equipment, such as a floor lift.

The number of examination rooms with accessible equipment needed by the medical care provider depends on the size of the practice, the patient population, and other factors. One such exam room may be sufficient in a small doctor's practice, while more will likely be necessary in a large clinic.

Entry Doors

Under the ADA Standards for Accessible Design, an accessible doorway must have a minimum clear opening width of 32 inches when the door is opened to 90 degrees. Maneuvering clearances on both sides of the door must also comply with the ADA Standards. In addition, the door hardware must not require tight grasping, tight pinching, or twisting of the wrist in order to use it. Keep in mind the hallway outside of the door and the space inside the door should be kept free of boxes, chairs or equipment, so they do not interfere with the maneuvering clearance or accessible route.

Clear Floor and Turning Space Inside Exam Rooms

In order for accessible equipment to be usable by an individual who uses a wheelchair or other mobility device, that individual must be able to approach the exam table and any other elements of the room to which patients have access. The exam table must have sufficient clear floor space next to it so an individual using a wheelchair can approach the side of the table for transfer onto it. The minimum amount of space required is 30 inches by 48 inches. Clear floor space is needed along at least one side of an adjustable height examination table.

Because some individuals can only transfer from the right or left side, providing clear floor space on both sides of the table allows one accessible table to serve both right and left side transfers. Another way to allow transfers to either side of exam tables, particularly when more than one accessible examination room is available, is to provide a reverse furniture layout in another accessible examination room.

The room should also have enough turning space for an individual using a wheelchair to make a 180-degree turn, using a clear space of 60 inches in diameter or 60 inch by 60 inch T-shaped space. Movable chairs and other objects, such as waste baskets, should be moved aside if necessary to provide sufficient clear floor space for maneuvering and turning.

When a portable patient lift or stretcher is to be used, additional clear floor space will be needed to maneuver the lift or stretcher. Ceiling-mounted lifts, on the other hand, do not require additional maneuvering clear floor space because these lifts are mounted overhead.

Features of an Accessible Examination Room

