

Don't turn a blind eye

Guide
Dogs
NSW/ACT



Footpath Obstructions

Footpath Dining / Goods / Signage

A recent survey conducted by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT found that 88% of people with impaired vision had encountered problems with footpath obstructions. They reported overhanging branches, footpath dining, rubbish bins, signs and uneven paths among the common hazards that affected their ability to safely, confidently and independently get out and about in their local community.

A person using a cane may not detect all hazards.

A person using a Guide Dog may be taken off the path to avoid the hazard.

A person with low vision may not see the hazard.

When a person with impaired vision encounters a footpath obstruction, they must:

- recover from the unexpected shock
- find their way around the hazard, which can force them into another hazardous situation
- relocate their path
- re-establish their direction
- continue on their journey with trepidation until their next encounter with a hazard
- In order to help reduce the incidence of this happening, a few simple actions can make a big difference.

The issue

Footpath obstructions related to commercial activity were reported by many clients in a recent survey by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. These included:

- Footpath dining reported by 60% of respondents
- Goods displayed on footpath reported by 53% of respondents
- Signage on footpaths reported by 14% of respondents

A clear path along the building line is an important element that provides a consistent guiding line for people to follow. People who are blind or vision impaired usually prefer to travel along the clear path next to the building line as this provides many clues for directionality and entry location. Building alignment is often used by people with impaired vision to align



to cross the road safely. When the area along the building line is obstructed, maintaining independence and confidence can be extremely difficult as the person loses their direction and encounters hazards.

Having tables and chairs, sandwich boards and goods on display adjacent to doorways makes it very difficult for all people to locate the entrances to shops. For people who are blind or vision impaired that are unable to use visual clues to locate the entrance, this situation is even more complicated.

Solution

The pedestrian area of the footpath is located adjacent to the building line and is kept clear of dining, goods and signage.

A better option is to locate these items on the kerbside. In the case of chairs and tables, these should be located behind barriers to prevent patrons, tables and chairs spilling out of the defined dining area.

Sections 23 and 122 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) cover public footpaths and access. For more information see the Australian Human Rights website, humanrights.com.au.

What can Councils do?

Develop and enforce an appropriate footpath dining policy.

Access Checklist

- ✓ Footpath is located next to the building line
- ✓ Accessible area of footpath is 1.8 metres wide
- ✓ Footpath is free from trip hazards
- ✓ Footpath is as even as possible
- ✓ Footpath has all weather slip resistance
- ✓ All footpath dining areas, street furniture, signage, and goods on display are placed off the building line
- ✓ All street crossing points and approaches from the building line are clear
- ✓ All bus stops and approaches from the building line are clear
- ✓ All footpath dining areas have suitable barriers enclosing the whole area
- ✓ Footpath dining barriers have:
 - Suitable luminance contrast
 - Suitable height
 - Sturdiness
 - Have no trip hazards for footings
- ✓ Footpath dining barrier openings align with the premises opening



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