



Summary:

Findings and recommendations

for building standard

NZS 4121

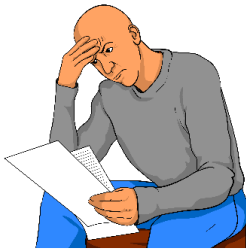


Published: July 2026

Before you read this document



This is a long document.



It can be hard for some people to read a document this long.

Some things you can do to make it easier are:



- read it a few pages at a time
- set aside some quiet time to look at it
- have someone read it with you to support you to understand it.



What is in this document

Page number:



What this Easy Read is about.....3



What is the NZS 4121?9



Accessibility standards around
the world10



Stakeholder workshops.....17



Options for change.....23

What this Easy Read is about

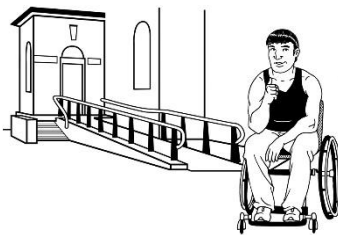


This Easy Read is about rules for buildings.



It looks at rules for new buildings that make sure disabled people can use buildings in a way that is:

- easy
- fair.



This Easy Read document was made by **Standards New Zealand** for the **Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha**.





Standards New Zealand is part of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

Standards New Zealand:

- manages **standards** in New Zealand
- develops / makes standards for places that:
 - build things
 - sell things
 - make things
 - provide services.



A **standard** is a set of rules that people have to follow when they are:

- doing something like building a public building / space
- managing something like a public building / space.



The **Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha** works to make change for disabled people so their lives are better.



The Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha makes things better for disabled people by working with:

- the Government
- the community
- businesses.





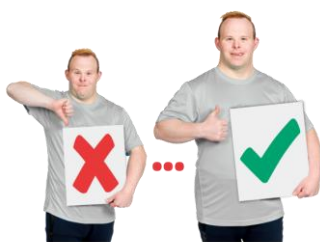
In this Easy Read we call the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha **Whaikaha** for short.



Where it says **our / we / us** in this document it means **Standards New Zealand**.

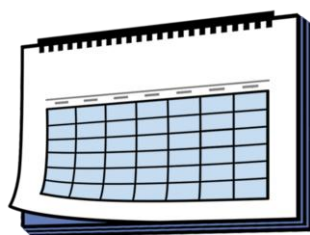


We are **reviewing** the standard **NZS 4121:2001 – Design for Access and Mobility: Buildings and Associated Facilities**.



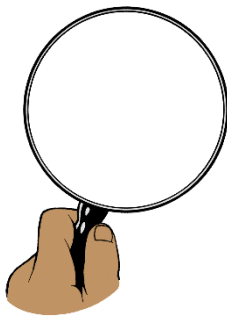
Here **review** means checking something to see what things need to be changed to:

- make it better
- or
- bring it up to date.

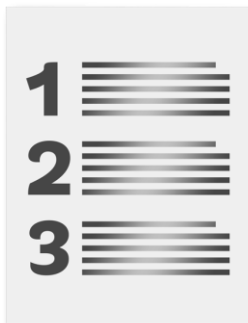




We call the **NZS 4121:2001 – Design for Access and Mobility: Buildings and Associated Facilities** the **NZS 4121** for short in this document.

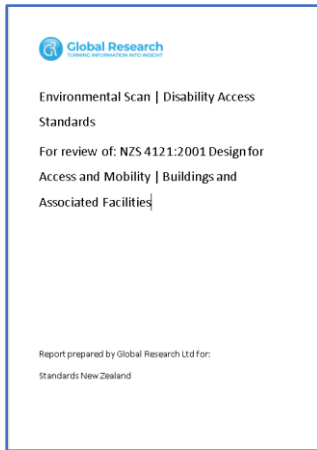


This Easy Read is a **summary** of the report we did about what we think needs to happen with the NZS 4121.



Here a **summary**:

- is shorter than the full document
- tells you the main ideas.



Go to our website to:

- read the full report
- find out more information about the full review of the NZS 4121.



Our **website** is:

www.whaikaha.govt.nz/4121



This website is **not** in Easy Read.

What is the NZS 4121?



The NZS 4121 is a building standard that says what rules need to be followed to make sure public buildings / spaces are **accessible** for disabled people.



Here **accessible** means buildings that everyone can use including disabled people.



The NZS 4121 is used by people like:

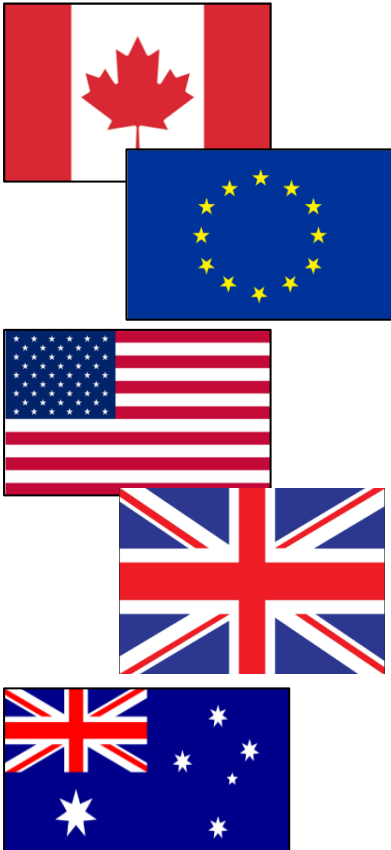
- designers of public buildings / spaces
- builders
- managers of public buildings / spaces.



Accessibility standards around the world



We wanted to find out what other places have in their accessibility standards.

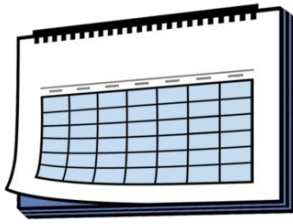


We looked at accessibility standards from:

- Canada
- the European Union
- the United States
- the United Kingdom
- Australia.



We looked at how our accessibility standards are different to the standards from these places.



We found that even though the NZS 4121 has been used for a long time it:



- is out of date / not written for now
- does not cover:



- as much as accessibility standards in other countries
- what Aotearoa New Zealand needs now.



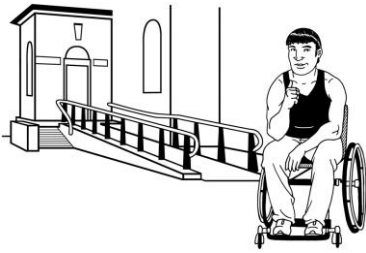
We found standards around the world:



- have gotten a lot better
- understood that there are a lot of different kinds of disabilities



- used **universal design principles**.

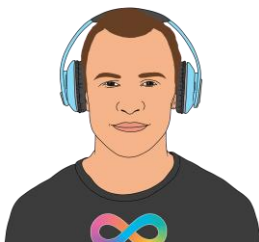


Universal design principles are guidelines for ways things can be made for everyone to use.



Standards around the world also have more information about:

- emergency evacuation / getting out in an emergency
- air quality / how good the air is
- **sensory accessibility**
- **cultural considerations.**



Sensory accessibility means making things easier to use for people who have **sensory processing differences**.



Sensory processing differences

are when people have a hard time with things like:

- sounds
- bright lights
- how some things feel when you touch them.



Here **cultural considerations**

means understanding how the culture of the people using something can affect:

- what they need
- how something should be built.



Culture is a way of:

- thinking that a group shares
- doing things as a group.

There are many different cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Some examples of the different cultures are:

- Māori culture
- Pasifika culture
- Deaf culture.



Standards around the world also have more information about:

- use of **smart technology** in buildings
- **barriers.**



Smart technology means technology that works together through the internet like:

- lightbulbs that can be turned on by your phone
- fridges that can give you cooking ideas based on what you like
- digital assistants like Alexa.



Here **barriers** are things that make it hard to use something.



We found the best accessibility standards are in:

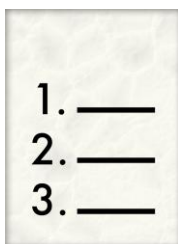
- Canada
- the European Union.



The accessibility standards in Canada have a lot of important details.



The European Union standards cover the most kinds of accessibility.



The NZS 4121:

- does not have much detail
- uses old ways of thinking
- does not cover some important things about accessibility.



Stakeholder workshops



Here a **stakeholder** is someone who has an interest in what is happening because it affects them.



We ran stakeholder workshops for people to tell us what they think:

- the problems with NZS 4121 are

and

- how we might be able to fix those problems.



Over 50 people attended the workshops.

People who attended the workshops were:

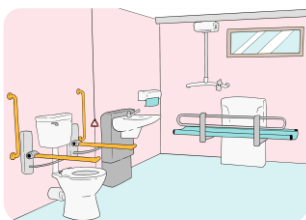
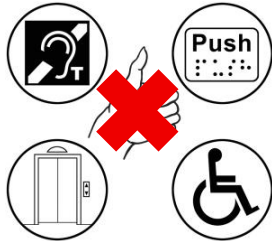
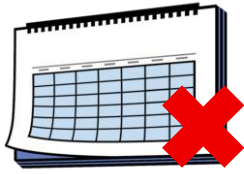


- from the disability sector / groups who work with the disabled community
- from academia / people who work in higher education like universities
- building practitioners / people who work in building things like houses.

They told us that NZS 4121 is:



- used a lot
- thought well of because it:
 - is easy to understand
 - says exactly what people need to do.



They also told us NZS 4121:

- is out of date / not good for how New Zealand is now
- does not cover the things that are normal for accessibility now
- does not cover the changes in technology that have happened since NZS 4121 was written.

The workshops found 89 problems that need looking at when a review of NZS 4121 is done.

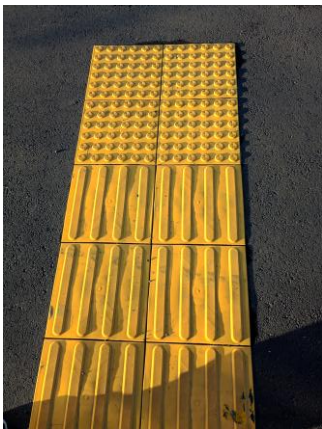
The problems found are to do with things like:

- how wide doors need to be
- how much space is needed
- bathroom design.



Other problems are to do with things like:

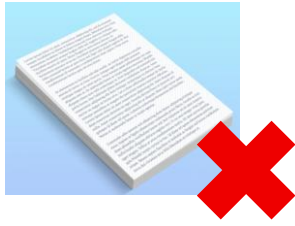
- lifts
- accessibility parking spaces
- emergency exits
- **tactile ground surface indicators.**



Tactile ground surface indicators

are things on the ground that can be felt so people who have low vision / are blind can find their way around.

An example of tactile ground surface indicators are the yellow bumps at pedestrian crossings.



The workshops also found other issues to do with accessibility that are not part of the standard like:



- what people have to do for accessibility because the law / rules of Aotearoa New Zealand say so



- enforcement / making sure people do what they have to under the law



- needing 1 place to tell everyone else what they need to do to meet accessibility standards



- parts of NZS 4121 being different to the Building Code / law for building in Aotearoa New Zealand
- teaching everyone who works in building about accessibility.



The workshops told us that some things were more important than others like:

- making sure NZS 4121 uses universal design principles
- matching what is written in NZS 4121 with what is written in the Building Code
- making sure that any review in the future is done:
 - using very good research
 - using the ideas that are thought to be the best around the world
 - by working with the disability sector.

Options for change



We have come up with some options for changing NZS 4121 by using everything we found out.

Option 1



Change NZS 4121 by using how it is written at the moment as the starting document.



These changes would use the best standards from:

- Aotearoa New Zealand
- around the world.



Option 2



Replace NZS 4121 with a newer standard from somewhere else in the world.

Option 3

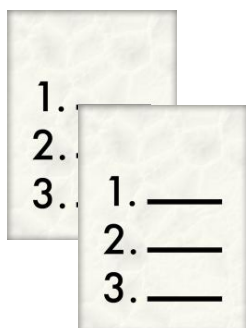


Make an Australia / New Zealand standard by joining together:

- the Australian Standard AS 1428

and

- NZS 4121.



Option 4



Use the world / international standard ISO 21542 in Aotearoa New Zealand.



We think the best option is Option 1 because it:

- is more likely to give us a better access standard
- uses good practices from around the world
- understands what Aotearoa New Zealand needs that other places might not need
- will make the standard more likely to match the Building Code.

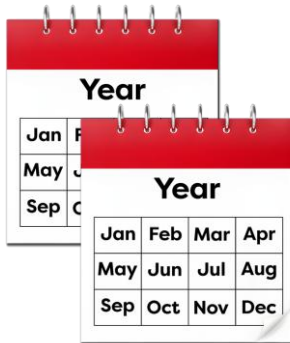
Option 1 will need more:



- resources / money than the other options
- time to make than the other options.



Option 1 will be likely to create a standard that is better for Aotearoa New Zealand.



It will also last a lot longer than the other options before it needs changing again.



This information has been written by Standards New Zealand for the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha.



It has been translated into Easy Read by the Make it Easy Kia Māmā Mai service of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



The ideas in this document are not the ideas of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



All images used in this Easy Read document are subject to copyright rules and cannot be used without permission.



Make it Easy uses images from:



- Photosymbols
- Change Images
- Huriana Kopeke-Te Aho
- SGC Image Works
- T Wood
- Studio Rebeko
- Inga Kramer.