

NZS 4121:2001

Environmental Scan and Scoping Exercise Executive Summary

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This report outlines main findings and recommendations from the environmental scan on disability standards, and subsequent scoping workshops with key stakeholders held in late 2025. The scoping workshops identified issues, gaps and opportunities relating to New Zealand Standard 4121:2001 **Design for access and mobility—Buildings and associated facilities** (NZS 4121:2001). This is a 25-year-old standard that covers accessibility requirements for buildings and associated facilities in New Zealand.

The environmental scan was undertaken by Global Research Ltd, commissioned by Standards New Zealand to inform the review of NZS 4121:2001. The scan compared NZS 4121:2001 with leading overseas accessibility standards from Canada, the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The scan revealed that while NZS 4121:2001 has long served as New Zealand's foundational accessibility standard, it is now outdated and narrower in scope than its overseas counterparts and current sector needs. Key findings highlight that global standards have advanced significantly, adopting broader definitions of disability, embedding

universal design principles, and providing more detailed coverage of areas such as:

- emergency evacuation
- sensory accessibility
- cultural considerations
- air quality
- use of smart technologies in buildings
- functional and cognitive barriers.

The environmental scan found the Canadian Standards Association/Accessibility Standards Canada (CSA/ASC B651:23) and European Union European Norm (EU EN 17210:2021) standards to be the most comprehensive overall. The Canadian standard offers strong technical detail, and the EU standard provides the widest topical coverage. In contrast, NZS 4121:2001 was identified as lacking detail, relying on outdated concepts, and omitting entire topic areas now considered essential to contemporary accessibility practice.

Stakeholder scoping workshops followed shortly after the environmental scan was finalised. Over 50 participants representing the disability sector, academia and building practitioners were asked to outline key issues with NZS 4121:2001 and how they think these issues could be addressed. Workshop participants emphasised that NZS 4121:2001, while widely used and valued for its clear

layout and measurable requirements, is outdated and misaligned with contemporary accessibility expectations and technological developments. The workshops identified 89 technical, regulatory and other issues requiring consideration in a future revision of NZS 4121:2001. This includes issues with:

- door widths
- circulation spaces
- tactile ground surface indicators (TGSI)
- bathroom design
- lift usability
- the lack of emergency egress provisions
- accessible parking parameters.

The workshops also highlighted broader system issues that fall outside the scope of the standard, such as:

- enforcement
- legislative requirements
- inconsistencies between NZS 4121:2001 and the Building Code
- the need for centralised guidance
- sector-wide education and competency.

The workshops collectively underscored the importance of:

- aligning NZS 4121 with modern principles of universal design
- strengthening alignment with the Building Code
- ensuring that any future revision is informed by robust research, international good practice and meaningful engagement with the disability sector.

Based on feedback from the scoping workshops, findings of the Environmental Scan by Global Research Ltd and consultations with MBIE Building System Performance (MBIE BSP), Standards New Zealand identified and evaluated the following options to align NZS 4121:2001 with the international good practice in disability access:

- **Option 1** Revise NZS 4121:2001 using the present standard as the foundation—utilising the best of a range of national and international standards content and material where appropriate.
- **Option 2** Replace NZS 4121:2001 with a modern overseas standard.
- **Option 3** Join the Australian Standard AS 1428.1:2021 with New Zealand, making it a joint AS/NZS standard.
- **Option 4** Adopt the international standard ISO 21542:2021 in New Zealand.

Standards New Zealand recommends option 1 above as it is more likely to deliver a modern disability access standard, incorporating good practices from international and other overseas standards, as well as catering to New Zealand unique needs where these exist. Additionally, the resulting standard is more likely to be fully aligned with the New Zealand building regulatory system.

While this option will require more resource and time, it is expected to produce a standard that is better suited to New Zealand's building users, industry, the regulator, and better meets accessibility needs. It is also more likely to be future proofed. The best parts of various standards would look to be utilised, taking the best internationally and incorporating it in New Zealand.

To find out more information please click on the following link:

www.whaikaha.govt.nz/4121

End of Environmental Scan and Scoping Exercise Executive Summary