

Summary:

Environmental scan for the review of building standard NZS 4121



Published: November 2025

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.....4



What is the NZS 4121?12



Countries we looked at in the
environmental scan.....16



Good things about the NZS 412121



How the NZS 4121 can be
improved23

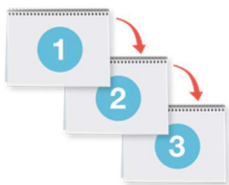


Recommendations28



Topics not in the NZS 412131

List of topics35



What next?39

What this Easy Read is about



This Easy Read is about rules for buildings.



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

- easy
- fair.



This Easy Read document was made by:

- the **Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha**

and

- **Standards New Zealand.**



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.



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:

- people should follow when they are:
 - doing something like building a public building / space
 - managing something like a public building / space
- that follow the **law**.

Standards:

- guide people how to do something in the right way
- keep people safe when the standards have been followed.

A **law** is a rule made by the Government that everyone must follow.



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:

- Whaikaha
- and
- Standards New Zealand.



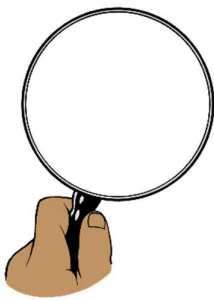
We are **reviewing** the standard **NZS 4121:2001 – Design for Access and Mobility: Buildings and Associated Facilities**.



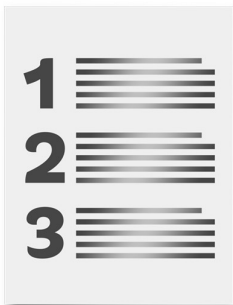
Here **review** means checking something to see what things need to be changed to make it better.



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 **environmental scan** we did that will support our full review of the NZS 4121.



Here a **summary**:

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



Here an **environmental scan** means we:

- looked to see what parts of the NZS 4121:
 - are working well that should be kept
 - need to be changed if they are not working well
 - can be made better
- looked at other countries to see:
 - what they are doing about their accessible building standards
 - if their accessible building standards are working well.



Go to our website to:

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



Our **website** is:

www.whaikaha.govt.nz/4121



This 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:

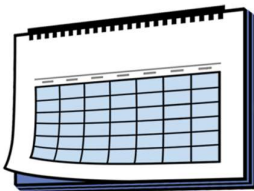
- designers of public buildings / spaces
- builders
- managers of public buildings / spaces.





The NZS 4121 says what things need to be done to make sure buildings are accessible like:

- how wide a doorway needs to be for wheelchairs / walking frames to get through easily
- if a ramp is needed for someone who may have trouble walking
- having ways to control things like:
 - light
 - noise.

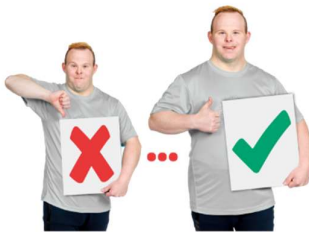


This standard is now over 20 years old.



It is time to review the NZS 4121 to make:

- sure it meets the needs of disabled people
- sure it is easy for people to:
 - understand the rules
 - follow the rules
- it better.



We did the environmental scan to support us to review the NZS 4121.



The environmental scan checked if the NZS 4121 is:

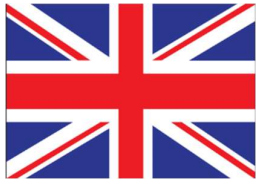
- working to make sure new accessible buildings / spaces are working for disabled people
- keeping up with technology
- keeping up with what disabled people need in an accessible building / space
- following **international good practice**.



International good practice means how other countries are doing something in:

- a good way
- the way that works for most people.

Countries we looked at in the environmental scan



The environmental scan **compared** the NZS 4121 to the standards for building accessibility in:

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



Compare means looking at information from different places to find out if things are:

- different
- the same.



Comparing the NZS 4121 to similar standards in other countries supports us to understand:



- what things are being done well here
- what things are being done well in other countries
- if New Zealand is following international good practice.



We looked at 5 **criteria** for the:

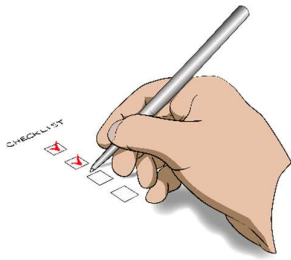


- NZS 4121
- standard of each country.



Criteria means the reasons for how something is:

- decided
- made.

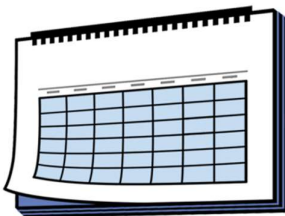


Having criteria makes it easier to compare the NZS 4121 to the standards of other countries.

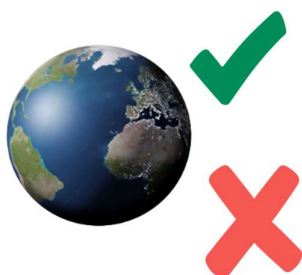


Criteria support us to find out about each standard like:

- how easy it is to follow
- the **scope**
- how much information it has about each **topic**
- how old it is.



Here **scope** means what information is to be used when looking at something.



Here a **topic** is each area that is covered in an accessible building standard in:

- New Zealand
- the other countries we looked at.

Some of the topics in the building standards of other countries:

- are in the NZS 4121
- are not in the NZS 4121.

There is a list of most of the topics covered in the environmental scan on **page 35**.



The 2 places we found to have the best standards are:

- Canada
- the European Union.



These 2 places have all their information about accessibility in 1 standard.



This makes it easier for people to follow what the standard says to do.



We thought the Canadian standard was the best.

Good things about the NZS 4121



There are some good things about the NZS 4121.



The NZS 4121 is:

- set out clearly
- easy to follow.



The NZS 4121 covers things like:

- the design of an accessible public building / space
- access to a public building / space
- shelters in car parks.





The NZS 4121 covers where things should be placed like:

- toilets
- showers.

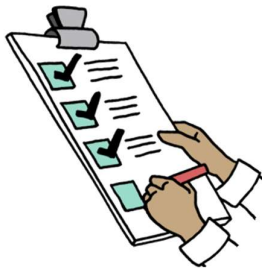
How the NZS 4121 can be improved



Improved means to make something work better.



There are some things that we know need to be improved in the NZS 4121.



The NZS 4121 needs to have more detail / information in each topic.



This supports people to follow the rules set out in the standard.



There also needs to be a better way to make sure people:

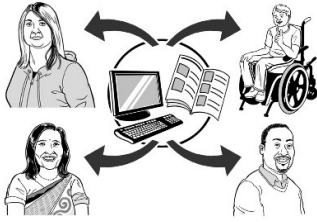
- understand what accessibility is
- know what accessibility means for disabled people
- understand how disabled people feel when a building / space is not accessible.



The NZS 4121 mainly has information on accessibility for people who:

- use wheelchairs
- use things like walking frames
- find it hard to move around.





There should be more guidance about how to make public buildings / spaces work for disabled people with different disabilities.



There also needs to be more information about things that support disabled people in an **emergency** like:

- emergency alerts
- how to get out of a building / place in an emergency.



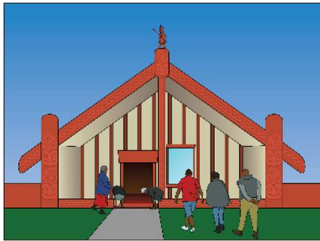
An **emergency** is when something happens that puts someone in danger.



There should also be more guidance about **acoustics** in the NZS 4121.



Here **acoustics** is about how sound is controlled in a building / place.



The NZS 4121 needs more information about how buildings that are important to a **culture** can be accessible like **marae**.



Culture is a way of:

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



There are many different cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand.



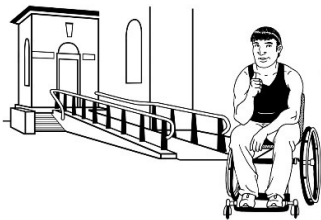
Marae are places where people can come together for things like:

- hui / meetings
- celebrations
- learning
- being part of Māori culture.



Some of the wording in the NZS 4121 needs to change to:

- be more inclusive
- show a better understanding of why places should be accessible.



Recommendations



Here **recommendations** are things that can be done to make something better.



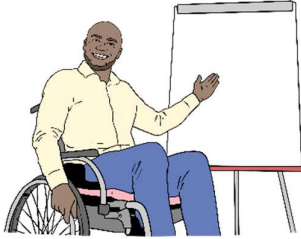
Big changes are needed to improve the NZS 4121.



Comparing the NZS 4121 to international standards has supported us to understand:

- what changes are needed
- what other topics should be added
- how to support people to understand why disabled people need accessible public buildings / spaces.





Our recommendations to improve the NZS 4121 will be things like:

- use inclusive language / wording
- include more topics like:
 - ways to get out in an emergency
 - sensory environments such as controlling noise
 - cultural buildings / places
 - access for people with different types of disabilities



- use the good examples in the standards from:
 - Canada
 - the European Union.



We think if New Zealand decides to use a **model** from another country it should choose the Canadian model.



Here a **model** is an example of something that is good to follow.



The Canadian accessible building standard:

- has a lot of detail

and

- is easy to follow.



Topics that are not in the standards of other countries should be kept in the NZS 4121.

Topics not in the NZS 4121



There are topics in the standards of other countries that would be useful in the NZS 4121.

Canada



The Canadian standard is the only one to think about how to take away **barriers** for disabled people with a:



- **functional disability**
- **cognitive disability.**



A **barrier** is something that stops a disabled person from doing something.



For example a person may not be able to get information they need in a way they can understand.



Functional disability means things like:

- being blind / having low vision
- being Deaf / hard of hearing
- finding it hard to move
- finding it hard to take care of yourself every day.





A **cognitive disability** is when someone can find it hard to:

- think
- learn new things
- remember things.



Canada also has extra information about:

- acoustics / sound
- how good the air should be to breathe in a building / space
- **security access** for disabled people.





Security access means the ways to get into a building / place by using something like:

- a swipe card at the door
- a passcode at the door.

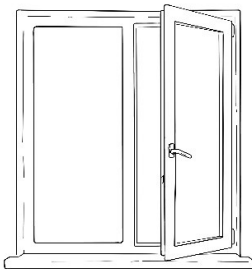
Security access supports people to be safe when they are inside a building.



The European Union

The European Union has good information about:

- acoustics
- air quality
- security access for disabled people.



List of topics



Here is a list of the different topics that we:

- looked at during the environmental scan
- may think about having in the NZS 4121.



The topics in the standards were things like:



- the language / words used in the standard
- the way the standard is set out
- access to buildings / spaces.





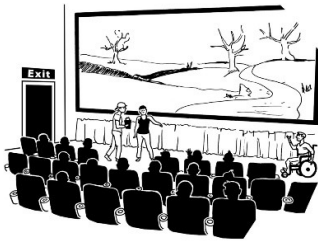
Other topics in the standards were:

- accessible routes / paths including:
 - signs
 - information about what to do in an emergency
- carparks
- footpaths
- ramps
- escalators / moving walkways
- landings
- entrances
- hallways / corridors
- doorways / doors.



Other topics in the standards were:

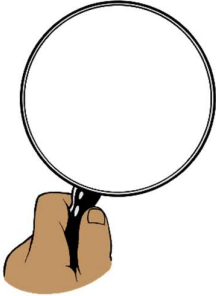
- stairs
- elevators / lifts
- toilets
- showers
- public facilities like:
 - dressing rooms
 - support for people with assistance animals
 - seating
 - rubbish bins
 - ATMs
 - vending machines.



Other topics in the standards were:

- places where people get together to do things like sport centres
- entertainment places like cinemas
- accessible outdoor public areas like:
 - parks
 - kerbs
 - kerb ramps
 - street furniture like benches
 - pedestrian crossings
- for accommodation like:
 - hotels
 - motels.

What next?



This environmental scan is the first part of our review of the NZS 4121.



The next step will be **consulting** with **key stakeholders** to find out what topics should be in the review.



Here **consulting** is where we find out what people think about:

- the NZS 4121 now
- how it can be made better.





Here **key stakeholders** are the main people we will consult with like those who:

- know a lot about accessible public buildings / spaces
- have an interest in the NZS 4121 like designers of accessible public buildings / spaces
- will be affected by the NZS 4121 like some:
 - disabled people
 - whānau / family of disabled people
 - supporters of disabled people.

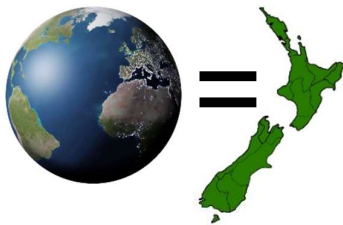




When we have finished consulting we will decide what areas to look at for the NZS 4121 review.



We will make recommendations about:



- changing the NZS 4121 so it works for people in the future
- making sure the NZS 4121 is following international good practice
- what works for different cultures here in Aotearoa New Zealand
- making sure the NZS 4121 works for all disabled people.





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

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.

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