

# Adjustable Accessibility:

Specifying Adjustable Kitchen and Bathroom Fittings under the Australian Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Design Standard



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## INTRODUCTION

Accessible design is a growing movement across all facets of the architecture, design and construction industries. At its core, this ethos is based around the inalienable human right to an adequate standard of living, as expressed in Article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:<sup>1</sup>

*“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”*

By designing accessible spaces, fittings and products, architects, specifiers and manufacturers have the chance to propagate this right through their work.

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted more than 70 years ago, the truth is that for many years, parts of it remained a normative ideal for many, and Australia’s codification and regulation of the principles of accessibility has come along in leaps and bounds over the last 35 years. Section 25 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) made it illegal for a person to refuse another person access to a premises based on a disability,<sup>2</sup> and with the ratification of the Disability (Access to Premises) Standards in 2010, the principles of accessible design were signed into law for all new Class 1b-10 buildings.<sup>3</sup>

However, the story is slightly different for class 1a buildings (single dwellings). As private residences, they cannot be regulated in the same way as public / common access spaces. The Australian Government’s Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Design Standard is a comprehensive framework to designing for people with permanent and significant disability,<sup>4</sup> pertaining to class 1a buildings.

This whitepaper will take a detailed look at the SDA Design Standard. It will focus particularly on its relevance to bathroom and kitchen applications and will offer suggestions to product features that specifiers should seek when designing for these applications.





## BACKGROUND TO THE SDA DESIGN STANDARD

The Australian Government's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides funding and support for a range of services to the roughly 500,000 people in Australia who have a significant or permanent disability.<sup>5</sup> Among those supports are assistance with costs related to the supply of specialist housing solutions for those in need. Under the NDIS, the SDA Design Standard applies to all new build accommodation and aims to create spaces that enhance self-determination and allow occupants to lead safe, vibrant and independent lives.<sup>6</sup> The SDA Design Standard works in tandem with the National Construction Code (NCC), to the extent that in most cases the SDA requirements are additional to the NCC's provisions. In cases where the SDA guidelines and the NCC conflict, the NCC takes precedence.

The Standard breaks down the different levels of accommodation support required into four Design Categories as follows:<sup>7</sup>

- Improved Liveability: Provides greater useability through a reasonable level of enhanced accessibility provisions.
- Fully Accessible: Incorporates a high level of physical access provision for those with significant physical impairments.
- Robust: Incorporates a reasonable level of physical access provision with a focus on resilient materials and reduced occupant or community risk.
- High Physical Support: Provides significant physical access provisions for those who require very high levels of physical support.

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## SPECIFYING ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT KITCHEN AND BATHROOM FITTINGS UNDER THE SDA DESIGN STANDARD

The kitchen and bathroom areas are the most important areas of any residence when it comes to satisfying our fundamental human needs - sustenance and hygiene. The ability to independently manage one's own hygiene needs is central to human dignity and minimising embarrassment,<sup>8</sup> and the ability to satisfy one's own hunger or thirst is essential to independent living. When designing accessible residences, all kitchen and bathroom fittings must all be compatible with the *AS1428 Design for Access and Mobility* suite,<sup>9</sup> and specifiers should be sure to discuss this with suppliers prior to specification. Similarly, the SDA guideline references AS1428.1 to ensure that floorplans and physical layouts of kitchens and bathrooms provide adequate clear space and maximum usability for people in wheelchairs and with varying mobility requirements. Adjustable height fittings in kitchens and bathrooms are an ideal way of providing maximum usability for a variety of users and potential disabilities while ensuring efficient use of space.

The SDA Guidelines recommend height adjustable wash basins as best practice in all bathroom spaces - they are an ideal feature in accessible bathrooms as they allow maximum usability for people with varying levels of mobility or disability. For example, people in wheelchairs may have very different basin height requirements than their carers or others within the dwelling. Similarly, people with different wheelchair models will have different needs in that regard. As per the best practice recommendations in the guidelines, adjustable basins should have range of motion between 700mm and 950mm from Finished Floor Level.<sup>10</sup> There are a number of features that specifiers should look for when selecting a height adjustable basin.

When it comes to interacting with height adjustable bathroom fittings, intuitively placed and easy to use controls suited to a wide spectrum of mobility levels, are a very worthy feature. High-strength, lightweight materials provide the best performance for these applications. Materials like aluminium are ideal because of their strength-to-weight ratio and low-corrosive properties (anodised aluminium). ABS polymer is ideal for trims and caps as it is also low

corrosion, high-strength and incredibly durable. Specifiers should also consider maximum load capacities for wash basins. People with disabilities may need to lean against the basin, or to use it for assistance to rise from a seated position. Thus, the bracket should ideally be able to support roughly 135 kg - to easily account for about 75% of the weight of a full grown adult, plus the additional weight of the basin itself.

The SDA guidelines mandate that all kitchens must provide at least one height adjustable benchtop. Adjustable benchtops must have at least 300mm range of motion, between 720mm and 1020mm from finished floor level.<sup>11</sup> The guidelines also state that kitchens must have at least one accessible benchtop, meaning one that is of minimum 900mm width and 440mm depth and compliant with AS1428.1, however this benchtop does not necessarily have to be height adjustable, opening up more options for designers and specifiers within the space.

When specifying height adjustable kitchen fixtures, specifiers must first consider whether the benchtop will be freestanding or wall-mounted. Wall-mounted height adjustable systems will generally be preferable in keeping with common kitchen layouts with bench space along the wall line. However, freestanding models may be a better choice in situations where the walls are not strong enough to support a height adjustable system), or where the benchtop is used to double as a dining table or must be otherwise moveable. Again, low-weight, high-strength material construction is optimal. Anodised aluminium and AB polymers make for strong, easy to clean, corrosion and bacteria resistant surfaces. Electrically operated benchtops are easily moved up & down vertically via a fascia-mounted colour-coded switch, located underneath the front leading edge of the benchtop. However, in certain applications, manually adjustable systems are a cost-effective option that still provide excellent usability. These are most commonly in the form of a crank handle which can be operated with minimal force, making them suitable for users who have a greater level of mobility.



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## PRESSALIT

Pressalit is a Danish manufacturer of accessible bathroom and height-adjustable kitchen solutions. All Pressalit products carry a minimum 3 year guarantee. Pressalit have over 30 years experience in the Australian market and can advise designers and specifiers on the best possible outcomes based on specific design briefs or budgets

Accessibility and improving quality of life for people with disabilities is at the centre of the company's culture, and to that end the focus is always on design innovation and

product quality. Pressalit offers products to cover the full scope of accessible bathroom fixtures including folding support arms, wheelchair accessible wash basins, shower seats, handrails, and a wide selection of height-adjustable kitchen systems dedicated for use with bench tops and wall cupboards.

Pressalit fixtures are fully compliant with all relevant standards and guidelines, making them ideal for specification in homes under the Specialist Disability Accommodation Design Standard.



## REFERENCES

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- <sup>8</sup> Singh, D. "Going to the Toilet When You Want." Human Rights Watch. Published 2014. Accessed 22 May 2020.
- <sup>9</sup> Disability Access Consultants. "Australian Standards - AS1428 Suite". Accessed 22 May 2020. <https://www.disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/australian-standards-as1428-suite/>
- <sup>10</sup> Above n4
- <sup>11</sup> Above n4.

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