



Introducing a new resource & conversation from OHLA...

Serving guests and taking care of their needs is at the heart of hospitality. Part of that dedication involves recognizing and understanding the unique challenges faced by patrons with different types of disabilities. Providing information and guidance when it comes to travelers with disabilities has always been a priority for OHLA. All hotel & lodging properties know that running afoul of regulations like the Americans with Disabilities Act can mean disruption, expense and negative publicity for hotels.

But there are other reasons we should look deeper into this segment of our market. Individuals with disabilities travel, and they spend. As we open our properties and make them even more accessible and attractive to these individuals, we are creating business opportunities. Even more than that, we also know that those working so hard to deliver great service to guests want individuals with disabilities to feel welcome, comfortable, appreciated and valued.

This communication launches a new effort from OHLA with the help of our new partner, Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D. She is an expert on issues related to travelers with disabilities, and we hope will be a resource for OHLA members well into the future. Through these regularly-scheduled communications, Rosemarie will help us learn more about these guests and how we can serve them even better. Rosemarie will also be invited to OHLA meetings and events for additional learning opportunities in the coming year.

OHLA will also share resources such as our helpful Guide to Service and Support Animals in Hotel & Lodging Environments (see below), legal information, and the latest developments. We hope you will engage on this journey with us. If you would like to suggest or request specific topics, drop us a note to info@ohla.org.

Unlocking Business Potential: The Basics and Importance of Accessibility and Service to Travelers with Disabilities

By: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.

Why should a lodging facility enhance accessibility and services to people with disabilities? What are the business and legal considerations?



The Population of People with Disabilities

The 2023 Centers for Disease Control Data shows that 27% of the U.S. adult population, 61 million, has a disability. The disabilities are 12.1% mobility, 12.8% cognitive, 6.1% hearing, and 4.8% vision.

The prevalence of disabilities tends to increase with age. Older adults are more likely to report disabilities. For example, among adults aged 65 and older, the percentage with disabilities is higher than among younger age groups. The aging population and a growing awareness of disability-related travel needs have increased the demand for accessible accommodations. This trend will continue as more individuals seek inclusive and hassle-free travel experiences.

The Profile of Travelers with Disabilities

The [Open Doors Organization](#) conducted research in 2020 on 1,100 adults with disabilities.

The results show in the past two years:

- 27 million travelers with disabilities
- 81 million trips in the past two years
- \$58.7 billion/year spent on their travel
- 59% stayed in an accommodation
- \$100 per night spent in a hotel

[MMGY Global](#) released a 2022 research report, **Portrait of Travelers with Disabilities™: Mobility and Accessibility**. It is based on a survey sample of 2,789 respondents, of which:

- 2,375 have a disability and use a mobility aid
- 1,761 have traveled in the past 12 months
- 414 respondents identified as caregivers or companions of someone with a mobility impairment



Data were collected in June 2022. All respondents were U.S. residents and a minimum of 18 years of age. The survey found lodging and transportation accessibility are cited as the two most significant barriers to travel for those with mobility issues. Nearly all respondents (96%) say they have faced an accommodation problem while traveling.

The findings show travelers with mobility disabilities go on leisure trips nearly the same frequency as those without mobility issues. Travelers with mobility issues:

- spend \$58.2 billion per year on travel
- have taken an average of 3.4 trips in the past 12 months
- have spent an average of \$3,546 on leisure travel during that time frame

Three of the top lodging problems were:

- More than half (54%) have been given a room at check-in that did not match the room they booked.
- 81% have dealt with inaccessible showers or tubs.
- 52% have encountered beds that were too high for them to access.

Understanding Accessibility and Its Impact

Accessibility refers to the design of spaces, products, and services that cater to the needs of individuals with disabilities.



In the context of lodging businesses, accessibility encompasses physical, sensory, and communication accommodations. This includes accessible entrances, guest rooms, swimming pools, restaurants, bars, ramps, elevators, Braille signage, and trained staff who can assist guests with disabilities.

Lodging businesses must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The U.S. Department of Justice enforces this law. Non-compliance can lead to costly lawsuits and tarnish a brand's reputation.

Demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity enhances a business's reputation. Travelers with disabilities are more likely to choose accommodations that prioritize accessibility, leading to positive word-of-mouth and repeat business. By ensuring accessibility, lodging businesses open their doors to a broader customer base. By acknowledging the importance of this market segment and investing in accessibility, lodging businesses can not only meet legal requirements but also unlock significant growth opportunities and enhance their overall brand image.

As accessibility becomes a more significant consideration for travelers, businesses that invest in accessibility gain a competitive edge. Differentiating your lodging business in this way can attract a loyal customer base, repeat bookings, and positive online reviews.

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About the Columnist

Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized accessibility specialist, speaker, author, and president of Rossetti Enterprises LLC. She speaks to and consults with hotels and lodging venues to ensure the environments are accessible and that services are provided to accommodate people with disabilities.



Having been paralyzed from the waist down with a spinal cord injury, she speaks from her wheelchair, sharing her experiences. She presents to audiences throughout the U.S. and beyond as a recognized expert on accessible and universal design.

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Service and Assistance Animals in Hotel & Lodging Environments
A Business Guide to Rights, Responsibilities, and Best Practices

Prepared for members of the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association
2022

Find answers to your questions about service animals

OHLA has a special members-only publication to help you understand the requirements and parameters for service and support animals under federal and state law in Ohio. Professional hotel & lodging operators want to provide the best service and experience to all guests, including those with special needs. At the same time, laws and expectations regarding the rights to access for service animals present hoteliers with questions and quandaries they may not have faced in the past.

Request your copy of OHLA's *Guide to Service and Support Animals in Hotel & Lodging Environments* today. There is no charge for members of OHLA.