



## Hotel Guest Room Accessibility: Common Problems and Practical Solutions

By: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.

During a recent interview with Robin Jones, Director of the Great Lakes ADA Center, I discussed some of the most frequent problems people with disabilities encounter when staying in hotels.

As a frequent traveler and accessibility consultant, I am often hired to evaluate the accessibility of hotels across the United States. Combining my first-hand experiences with insights from Jones, this article highlights recurring accessibility barriers—and the solutions hotel managers can take to create safer, more welcoming environments for all guests.



### Bed Height

One of the most common concerns for guests with disabilities is bed height. Many hotel beds are **too high**, especially for wheelchair and scooter users, and persons of short stature. For instance, the seat cushion of my manual wheelchair is 20 inches from the floor. Yet I often encounter hotel beds ranging from 26 to 30 inches high, which makes transferring extremely difficult. With my spinal cord injury and paralysis below the waist, I cannot stand to aid my transfer.

The **International Code Council (ICC) A117.1 Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities code** requires that at least one bed in a mobility accessible hotel room be **between 17 and 23 inches high**, measured from the floor to the top of the uncompressed mattress. [This standard](#) is critical for ensuring safe transfers.

Solutions for hotel managers to ensure ICC compliance include:

- Use an adjustable bed frame to provide for the mandated 17 to 23 inch finished bed height.
- Ensure 7 inches of clearance underneath the bed to accommodate portable lifts. These lifts slide under the bed and allow a person to be lifted and transferred with minimal physical effort. The lift uses a sling and a mechanical lifting mechanism.
- Avoid solid-sided or platform bed frames that prevent portable lift access.
- Procure reduced height mattresses when necessary.
- Train staff to measure bed heights in all mobility accessible rooms and make adjustments as needed.

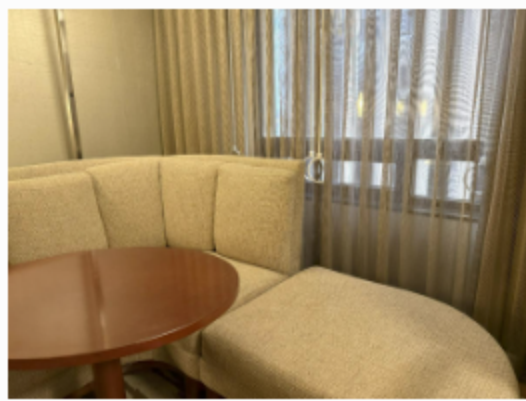
It's important to note that removing the bed frame is not a viable solution—beds must be safe, functional, comfortable, and accessible.

### Circular Turning Space

The ICC updated its accessibility requirements, increasing the circular turning space in new construction from 60 inches to 67 inches in diameter. This ensures that wheelchair users have enough room to turn safely, with knee and toe space under obstructions allowed as part of the clearance.

In existing buildings, the minimum required turning diameter remains 60 inches. Solutions for hotel managers include:

- Reviewing mobility accessible rooms for adequate circular turning space.
- Rearranging or removing furniture that blocks maneuverability.



### Furniture Placement

Even when a room technically meets accessibility standards, poorly placed furniture can create significant barriers. I have stayed in accessible rooms where:

- A bed blocked the doorway, making it impossible to enter the room.
- A couch was in front of a floor lamp in a corner, blocking access to the lamp.
- An armchair made it impossible to reach the thermostat or the window treatment controls.

These situations not only limit independence but also create safety hazards. Solutions for hotel managers include:

- Conducting regular room audits with accessibility in mind.
- Ensuring controls, lamps, and window treatments are within easy reach.
- Training staff to check the room layout after housekeeping or furniture updates.

### Conclusion

Hotel accessibility is not just about compliance; it's about dignity, safety, and independence for all guests.

To better understand how design and furniture placement affect mobility, I recommend that hotel staff spend time in a wheelchair navigating a mobility accessible room. This first-hand perspective can be eye-opening and help uncover barriers that may otherwise go unnoticed. By addressing bed height, turning space, and furniture placement, hotels can create environments where every guest feels welcome, respected, and safe.

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### About the Columnist

Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized accessibility consultant, speaker, author, and CEO of Rossetti Enterprises LLC. She speaks to and consults with hotels and lodging venues to ensure their environments and services are fully accessible.

Paralyzed from the waist down after a spinal cord injury, she speaks from her wheelchair, *combining personal experience with professional expertise to advocate for accessible and universal design across the U.S. and beyond.*

Phone: (614) 471-6100  
[Rosemarie@RosemarieSpeaks.com](mailto:Rosemarie@RosemarieSpeaks.com)  
[www.RosemarieSpeaks.com](http://www.RosemarieSpeaks.com)

