

Physical Barriers Guide

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living

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How to Use this Guide

Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) were started in the late 1970s, to establish a non-residential center to support people with disabilities, live their independent lives. It took a while for this grassroots effort, known as the Independent Living Movement, to find its way into all 50 states and the US Commonwealth; but we are here, and we are a strong service!

Illinois was one of the first adaptors of the Independent Living Movement, in the early 1980's. Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) is one of the original five (5) CIL's in Illinois.

Fast forward 35-plus years and today, NICIL, as well as 21 other CIL's, continue to work hard every day to develop programming and services that support our consumers, in the five (5) county-NICIL territory which includes: Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, and Whiteside Counties. Our time is dedicated to serving all people with disabilities to live their independent lives, as they see fit. It is an honor and a privilege to serve!

Our services are tailored to each individual with whom we work. There are some common barriers which keep individuals from living independently. These barriers (or topics) are referred to in the industry as issue areas. There are nine (9) issue areas:

- Assistive Technology
- Attitudinal Barriers
- Communication
- Education
- Employment
- Healthcare Services
- Housing
- Physical Barriers
- Transportation

All NICIL staff are trained to be subject matter experts in these issue areas. Our team has developed issue-area guides to be available to our consumers, which are user friendly. These guides are designed to provide a basic understanding of the issue area, as well as to give information for self-direction. However, we want to be part of the process of independent living, so please, contact our team for one-on-one (individual) services.

Please use this guide to give you a helping hand in understanding the Physical Barriers issue area and use the resources provided as a starting point. When you are ready, know that we are here to support your independent living path.

Check out our website, www.nicil.org for access to all of our issue area guides. Contact the office at 815-625-7860 or via email at frontdesk@nicil.org to request for a copy to be emailed to you. Enjoy!

Introduction

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) supports people with disabilities to live their independent lives as they chose. Part of being independent is being able to move about; go to doctor appointments, go shopping, go to school, and go visit family or friends. Unfortunately, sometimes there are barriers to this independence, especially if you have a physical disability or limitation.

When it comes to physical barriers, specifically in places of public access, there are laws to ensure equal access. These laws were established in 1990 under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The state of Illinois adheres to the ADA, but also has their own set of codes entitled the Illinois Accessibility Code (IAC). Some of these codes, both ADA and IAC, can be difficult to understand, fortunately, the NICIL team has had extensive education and training on these codes. Let us assist you with your questions and/or concerns about physical accessibility!

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Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law, which was signed into effect on July 26, 1990 by then president, George H. W. Bush. This law prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, as well as all public and private places that are open to the general public. The ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications. The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that encompass the laws, specifications, and rights of persons with disabilities. These five (5) titles are as follows:

- Title I Employment
- Title II State and Local Government
- Title III Public Accommodations
- Title IV Telecommunications
- Title V Miscellaneous Provisions

Within these five (5) titles are the codes and specifications that must be followed to ensure equal access to most areas of public access. The ADA was revised in 2016 to update some of the codes and to make the language easier to understand.

Illinois Accessibility Code

Similar to the ADA, Illinois has its own codes as related to accessibility called the Illinois Accessibility Code (IAC). The purpose of the IAC, as stated within the IAC document is, *“This Code is intended to ensure that the built environment, including all spaces and elements of all applicable buildings and facilities in the State of Illinois is so designed, constructed, and/or altered to assure the safety and welfare of all members of society and to be readily accessible to, and usable by, environmentally limited persons”*. All applicable buildings and spaces must comply with the ADA and the Illinois Environmental Barriers Act. The IAC was revised in 2018 to match more closely with the ADA and to update some of the language to be more easily interpreted.

Physical Barriers

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Physical barriers “are the structural obstacles in natural or manmade environments that prevent or block mobility (moving around in the environment) or access” for people with disabilities. Physical barriers pose a unique barricade to a person with disabilities, whether it be the inability to eat a restaurant due to their being multiple stairs to the main entry, or the inability to obtain and/or maintain employment due to their disability. NICIL works diligently to remain current on all rules and laws pertaining to accessibility as it relates to physical barriers.

How NICIL Can Assist You

NICIL strives to assist our consumers to identify and remove these barriers. Some of the ways that we can assist are as follows:

- Advocacy – when a barrier is identified, NICIL will assist consumer in communication with the person or entity to try to resolve or remove the barrier
 - Please note that NICIL is not legal representation, when advocacy requires this level of service, NICIL will refer consumers to potentially available free legal services
- Site Surveys
 - NICIL strives to work with all area businesses to help make them accessible to all residents. For a fee, NICIL offers accessibility site surveys to area businesses looking to ensure unrestricted access to their business or service
 - For individuals, NICIL offers our thorough expertise to assist in the interpretation of individual accessibility concerns and identification of steps, if necessary, in the rectification of any accessibility issues

There are a number of factors that dictate the requirements of accessibility in which a business or area of public access must meet. Some of these influential factors include, type of business, historical registry placement, type of funding received, whether or not any major renovations have taken place. These factors can make it even more difficult to determine if a business is in violation of the laws. Let us help make this determination!

Definitions

There are often times that people use language (slang or abbreviations) that may not make any sense to those not familiar with a specific topic. In this section we want to take the time to identify some common terms that you may hear in regards to this issue area.

Physical Barriers – According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Physical barriers “are the structural obstacles in natural or manmade environments that prevent or block mobility (moving around in the environment) or access” for people with disabilities.

Advocacy – the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.

Accessible - Describes a site, building, facility, or portion thereof that complies with guidelines set by ADA, ICA, or any other law.

Accessible Route - A continuous unobstructed path connecting all accessible elements and spaces of a building or facility. Interior accessible routes may include corridors, floors, ramps, elevators, lifts, and clear floor space at fixtures. Exterior accessible routes may include parking access aisles, curb ramps, crosswalks at vehicular ways, walks, ramps, and lifts.

Tips and Suggestions

There are many tips and suggestions that the NICIL team can share through our years of experience here, years of experience in other positions, and as subject matter expertise. We have seen it all, heard it all, and could write a book!

Here are our best tips and suggestions!

- Observe the barrier and identify any additional access points, such as a second entrance, to ensure there is not an alternate accessible access
- Look for signs indicating accessible access
- Don't be afraid to ask for assistance if you need it
- Contact NICIL for more information

Resources

Collection Spotlight from the National Rehabilitation Information Center, M.P Garcia, at <https://naricspotlight.wordpress.com/2018/06/29/what-are-physical-barriers/>

Merriam-webster.com

Conclusion

The rules, laws, and codes related to the removal of physical barriers and accessibility can be intimidating and difficult to interpret. We hope that this guide gives you a basic understanding of what physical barriers are. The goal of NICIL and the NICIL team is for Northwestern Illinois to be accessible to all persons residing or visiting Northwestern Illinois.

The NICIL team is ready to help you with choosing your independent life in any way we can. Our services for one on one sessions are free. Our onsite accessibility assessment of businesses does have a fee, please call us and we would be happy to share our pricing schedule with you. Call us for your appointment, we will be waiting!

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