

Alberta Doctors' Digest

The W5 on new building codes for physician offices

As of April 1, the province of Alberta has changed its building code to improve the accessibility of doctors' offices for people with physical and auditory disabilities. The changes to *National Building Code-2019 Alberta Edition* make it easier for people with disabilities to enter the doctor's office and exam area, but also make examining a patient - especially a person with a physical disability - more appropriate for both patient and doctor.

What will these changes look like?

Examples of the changes include increased width for entrance doors to accommodate mobility devices such as electric wheelchairs and electric scooters, and assistive listening devices for people with auditory impairments.

Under the new codes, at least one examining room must be large enough to accommodate the turning radius required by a person seated in a wheelchair and allow for transfer to an examining table. Furniture is generally not required by the building code, but the appendix note for this new subsection recommends that a hydraulic plinth be provided in the accessible examining room. Hydraulic plinths are of ergonomic benefit to the physician conducting an examination because they can be adjusted to the optimal height.



Dr. John Latter (L) and Patrick Sweet (R) were instrumental in influencing the new building codes in support of people with physical and auditory disabilities. (Photo credit: Marvin Polis)

Who will these changes impact?

These building code changes will affect physicians who will be constructing new buildings to house their offices and examining rooms. Substantial renovations that affect a building's structure or overall footprint will also be within scope for these new requirements.

When will the changes come into effect?

A transition period is in effect to allow building designers the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the new requirements. The end of the transition period is December 1. Building permit applications after December 1 will need to comply with the updated building code.

Please note that the new codes only impact new construction and significant renovations. The codes are not retroactive. In other words, existing offices and spaces do not have to be renovated on account of the new codes.

Why have these changes come into effect?

Up to this point there has been no direction in the building code to specifically cover the accessibility of physicians' offices. Part of putting Patients First® includes recognizing and understanding each patients' perspective and trying to improve their physical experience so that all patients can be comfortable receiving care.

In this age of inclusiveness, it is hoped that Alberta physicians will see the benefit of this change which allows all patients to see and be examined by a physician despite their personal circumstances.

Where can I find more information?

The details of the new changes are in subsection 3.8.5. of the building code and more information can be found online. The *National Building Code-2019 Alberta Edition* is available for free to download from the [National Research Council Canada products web page](#). Scroll to the product type list and select the second option for the free PDF download.

For questions and further information about accessibility within physician offices, please contact:

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