

Taken to Access

Volume 6, Issue 2 * February 2017

ACCESSIBLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT UPDATE

New equipment accessibility standards are now in place! The U.S. Access Board released its long awaited accessibility standards on Medical Diagnostic Equipment (MDE) or what Sutter Health calls “Accessible Medical Equipment” (see [link](#)). The historic final rule appeared in the Federal Register early January —these are the first accessibility standards developed for medical diagnostic equipment.



Some key highlights on the standards

- The standards set forth design criteria for examination tables, chairs, weight scales, radiological equipment, mammography equipment and other medical diagnostic equipment. The standards include requirements for transfer surfaces, equipment height adjustability, support rails, armrests, compatibility with lift devices, and space for mobility devices.
- A significant recommendation is the adjustability and height of the “seat” (transfer surface) of both exam tables & chairs. The standard is a low height range of 17-19 inches with the upper measurement of 25 inches. Because the low seat measurement sparked controversy between disability community, industry and provider committee members, the Board recommended the 17-19 inch range with a 5 year sunset to motivate additional research efforts.
- The standards are organized by the patient’s position, e.g. a supine, lying, or seated position.
- All equipment requiring patient transfers must have transfer supports or handrails that facilitate transfer on and off the equipment.
- Some equipment features required by the standards are not currently available. This means the manufacturers will need to modify their equipment designs. Some notable examples: mammography equipment, bone density, stretchers.
- Scoping or quantity standards, are being left to enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Health & Human Services.
- While the standards state they are not enforceable, the long-held position of the U.S Department of Justice is that equipment cannot be a barrier for people with disabilities. Published research spells out the experience of people with disabilities finding inaccessible equipment as a huge barrier to effective care.

What does this mean to Sutter Health?

Sutter Health has developed its own standards to guide our practitioners. Sutter Health’s Accessible Medical Equipment Standards Committee incorporated the best knowledge of disability access practices into its equipment standards. The result is that Sutter Health’s internal standards (see [link](#)) have many of the elements cited in the federal rule. Moving forward the new federal standards will be a primary reference for the technical equipment requirements. If you have any questions, please contact [Jan Carroll](#), Sutter Health’s ADA Equipment Officer, or [Carol Bradley](#), Sutter Health’s Disability Compliance Officer.

Reminder: Bookmark the PAC Web Portal link for the most updated documents!

PAC Web Portal Links: [internal Sutter Health](#) and [external vendor](#)