

Welcoming Physical Environment

Provide clear and welcoming signage

Appropriate signage can help visitors move through your space and processes with ease. This is especially reassuring for people with limited literacy who may feel particularly anxious or intimidated when locating and entering a building.

Below are some ways to make your signs more welcoming and helpful:

- x Signs should be simple, clear and visible.
- fi Use a large font and bold colours.
- fi Clearly display the name of your service or program and hours of operation. Provide emergency contact numbers, to extend the feeling of welcome beyond your operating hours.
- fi Consider displaying a welcome sign at the entrance to your program.
- fi It may be useful to colour-code signs, particularly if your service is in a building with other services
- x Coloured lines or symbols on the wall or the floor can help people navigate.
- fi Signs should be available in a number of languages and Braille where appropriate.

People should be directed all the way through the building. These areas may need signs:

- Entrance and exit
- Waiting room
- Interview rooms
- Examination rooms
- Meeting rooms
- Nursing station
- Staff area
- Washrooms
- Telephones
- Refreshment area

Wear name badges that encourage contact

For example, badges may read, Ask me-I can help. You could also consider displaying photographs of team members labelled with their names in the waiting room.

Provide process signs for next steps

Process signs help people understand what is required or what is likely to happen next.

For example:

- Please let reception staff know that you have arrived
- Please take a seat and wait for your name to be called
- If you have waited for longer than 20 minutes, please let staff know at the reception desk
- Please take a ticket and wait to be called
- Visiting hours are between 1:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. every day
- Doctors' rounds are between 10:00 a.m. and noon every morning

Create a bright, cheerful, clean space

- Allow natural light in where possible.
- Keep the space as clean as possible: stains on walls and carpets do not make for a good first impression.
- Hang pictures, photographs and artwork on the walls. To reflect cultural diversity, encourage staff and clients to bring in photographs or art for display.
- Consider having some music playing.

Make access easy and inviting

If possible, provide free parking close to the building. If this is not possible, provide clear information about where to park or alternative ways to travel in to the service. Lack of transport can be a significant factor in non-attendance:

- Ensure parking lots and the exterior of the building are clean
- Ensure there is disabled access. Look at this from different perspectives, including wheelchair access, visual impairment, and hearing impairment
- Ensure that the front entrance is accessible to all and all doors are easy to open
- Ensure that there is an accessible route throughout the facility with clear floor space and minimal clutter

Provide a variety of patient information

- If possible, assign one team member to learn about and designing simple, easy-to-read material. For example: [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)
- Create simple handouts to explain your program or service to the people you serve, and to let them know about the integration of addiction and mental health services.
- Bulletin boards can be very useful if they are well maintained, current, and designed for your visitors. Including information about local activities can create relationships and encourage community involvement.
- ~~Some services may choose to have a PowerPoint or DVD running in the waiting area describing the services and the processes to follow.~~

Suggested activity

Now spend a few moments, either alone or with a colleague, thinking about your own physical environment.

- What could be done to improve the space you have?
- How could you build upon things you are already doing well?
- Put yourself in other people's shoes: think about things that may be trauma triggers for the people you serve.
- Consider these examples of signs that convey welcoming:

Make the space comfortable

- Arrange the furniture in waiting areas and meeting rooms to make it easy to interact.
- Consider having a quiet area in your waiting room for those people who are feeling anxious, agitated or unwell. This area would need to be visible to reception staff.
- Recognize the need for personal space and privacy, particularly when discussing personal information. Try to ensure private areas are available and always knock before entering a room.
- Work towards meeting the needs of families. This can include providing facilities for children, toy boxes in waiting rooms and interview rooms, and drink machines. Lack of child care can be a significant factor in non-attendance.
- Provide clearly marked public washrooms and ensure they are clean. Try to provide a changing table for care of infants.
- Try to have books and magazines available that appeal to a wide range of people. If you can, provide access to tea, coffee and water.
- Invite people to contribute ideas by providing a suggestion box.