



Community Engagement Survey Summary Report

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Executive Summary

The California Commission on Disability Access (CCDA) engaged CPS HR Consulting to conduct a community engagement survey of individuals and businesses across California. The survey sought to understand firsthand experiences with accessibility compliance — examining how frequently community members encounter barriers, the impact those barriers have on daily life and commerce, and what resources or system changes would most meaningfully advance access in the state.

A total of 117 individuals completed the survey, representing a diverse cross-section of the disability and business communities. Three-quarters of respondents (76%) identified as members of the disability community, while just over half (54%) identified as members of the business community. Thirty-eight percent identified as part of the disability community only. Sixteen percent identified as part of the business community only, and 8% identified as part of neither. Notably, 38% of respondents held membership in both communities — reflecting an important population of disabled business owners, advocates, and professionals whose voices span both perspectives.

Across both quantitative and open-ended responses, several themes emerged consistently: physical access barriers remain widespread and daily; chemical and fragrance sensitivities represent a significant — and largely unaddressed — accessibility issue; the business community often lacks the resources, language, and confidence to navigate compliance; and community members want more meaningful collaboration and connection with CCDA's outreach and enforcement work.¹

The findings underscore both progress and persistent gaps. While many businesses express willingness to comply, barriers including cost, unclear regulatory guidance, fear of litigation, and limited knowledge about disability needs beyond the most visible conditions continue to impede full and equitable access. The open-ended responses in particular reflect a community that is engaged, frustrated, and ready for deeper partnership with CCDA.

Methodology

Survey Design

The survey was designed to capture perspectives from both the disability and business communities regarding accessibility compliance in California. It included structured questions aligned with CCDA's five high-frequency complaint categories — parking lots, exterior paths of travel, interior paths of travel, access to goods and services, and website content — as well as multiple open-ended questions inviting respondents to share experiences, identify gaps, and suggest improvements. All questions were administered online via a web-based survey platform.

Survey Administration

The survey was distributed through CCDA outreach channels to community members across California. No hard deadline or response quota was imposed; participation was voluntary and self-selected. The instrument included both Likert-scale and open-ended response formats, with demographic screening questions to establish community membership.

Respondent Screening

¹ Note: CCDA is not an enforcement agency; its role is focused on education, outreach, and guidance regarding disability access compliance.

Respondents were asked at the outset whether they considered themselves members of the disability community, the business community, or both. This screening approach ensured that questions tailored to business compliance experience were directed to the appropriate subset of respondents, while all participants could share perspectives on personal access challenges and overall recommendations.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data (frequency counts, means, and standard deviations) were calculated for all structured response items. Open-ended responses were reviewed and organized thematically using a qualitative coding approach, with recurring topics identified and grouped into the major themes reported in the final section of this report. Direct quotes have been paraphrased or aggregated to protect anonymity and maintain focus on patterns across respondents.

Limitations

As a self-selected convenience sample, findings may not be statistically representative of all Californians with disabilities or all California businesses. Respondents who opted into a CCDA-distributed survey may have stronger awareness of — or prior engagement with — accessibility issues than the general public. Open-ended themes reflect the salience of issues to respondents who chose to provide comments rather than the proportional prevalence of those issues in the broader community. Results should be interpreted as directional and informative rather than definitive.

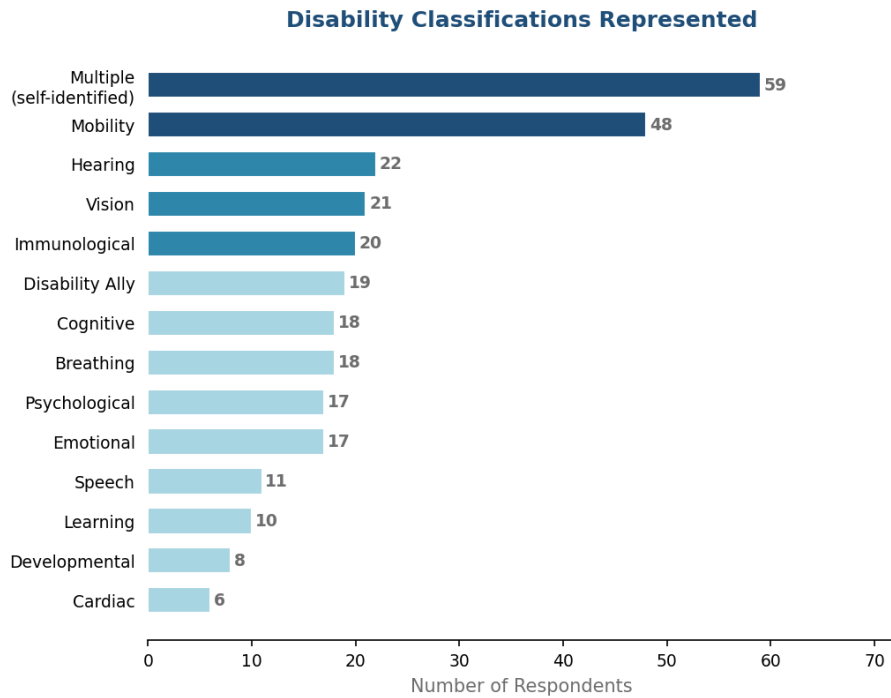
Response Rate & Respondent Demographics

A total of 117 individuals completed the survey. Respondents were distributed across four demographic groupings established by the screening questions:

Community Membership	Count	Percentage
Disability Community Only	45	38%
Business Community Only	19	16%
Both Communities	44	38%
Neither	9	8%
Total	117	100%

Table 1. Community Membership Response Rate

Respondents were further asked to identify the disability classification(s) they associate with themselves. Mobility-related disabilities were the most commonly represented (48 respondents), and 59 respondents self-identified with more than one disability classification — underscoring the complexity and intersectionality of disability experience in the survey population.



Graph 1. Disability Classification Represented

*Multiple was not an option available to be selected. This reflects the number of people who indicated associating more than one disability are with themselves.

Quantitative Findings

Compliance Frequency & Impact — Disability Community

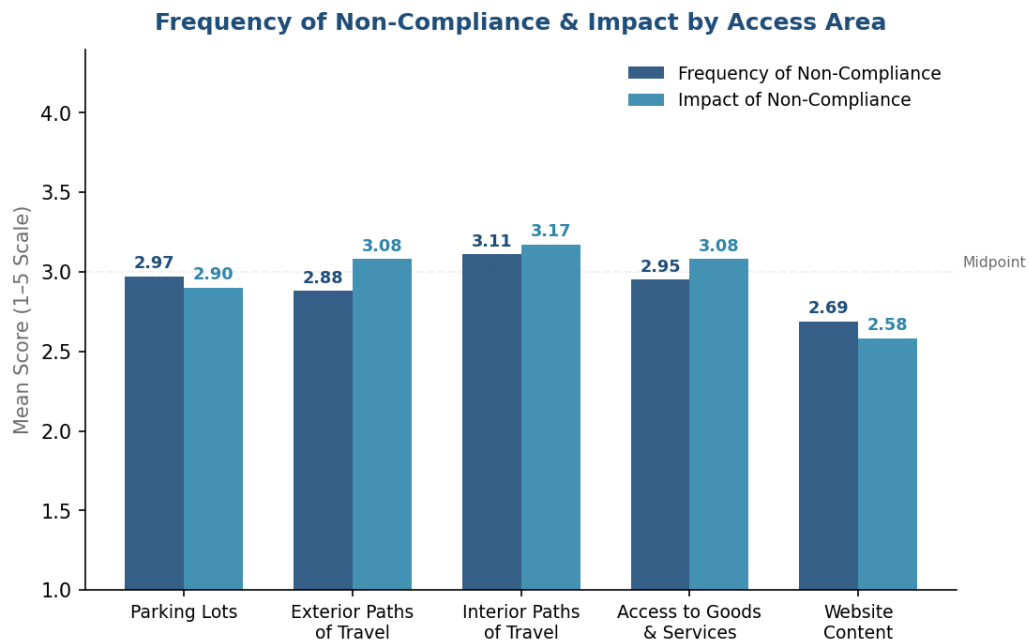
Respondents from the disability community rated how frequently they observe compliance in each of the five high-frequency complaint areas, and the degree of impact non-compliance has on their ability to interact with businesses. Scores were recorded on a 1–5 scale where lower values indicate greater compliance frequency and lower impact from non-compliance, respectively.

Scale for Frequency response options:

1. I have never experienced non-compliance in this area
2. Non-compliance very rarely seen
3. Compliance seen about half of the time
4. Compliance very rarely seen
5. I have never experienced compliance in this area

Importance response options:

1. Next to no impact on ability to interact with the business
2. Only slightly inconvenient to interact with the business
3. Moderately difficult or inconvenient to interact with the business
4. Incredibly difficult to interact with the business
5. Unable to interact with the business



Lower scores indicate greater compliance frequency and lesser impact on ability to interact with a business.

Graph 2. Compliance Frequency & Impact by Access Area

Key takeaways:

- Website content was the most frequently compliant area (2.69) and also had the least impact when non-compliant (2.58).
- Interior paths of travel were the least frequently compliant (3.11) and had the most negative impact score (3.17) among physical access areas.
- All areas clustered near the midpoint (i.e., 3.0), indicating that compliance is inconsistent — roughly "seen about half the time" — across all five categories.

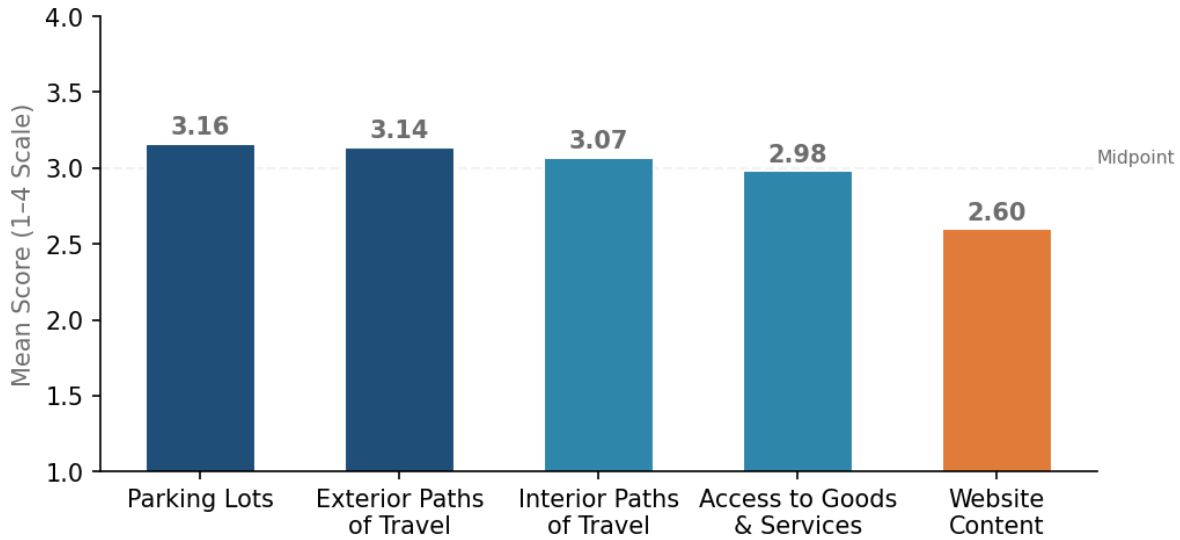
Business Community: Self-Reported Understanding of Compliance Requirements

Business community respondents rated their own understanding of compliance requirements in each of the five areas on a 1–4 scale.

Scale:

- 1 = Do not understand the requirements at all
- 2 = I have more questions than answers
- 3 = Understand almost everything, but still have questions
- 4 = Understand all requirements in full

Business Community: Self-Reported Understanding of Compliance Requirements



Graph 3. Business Community: Self-Reported Understanding of Compliance Requirements

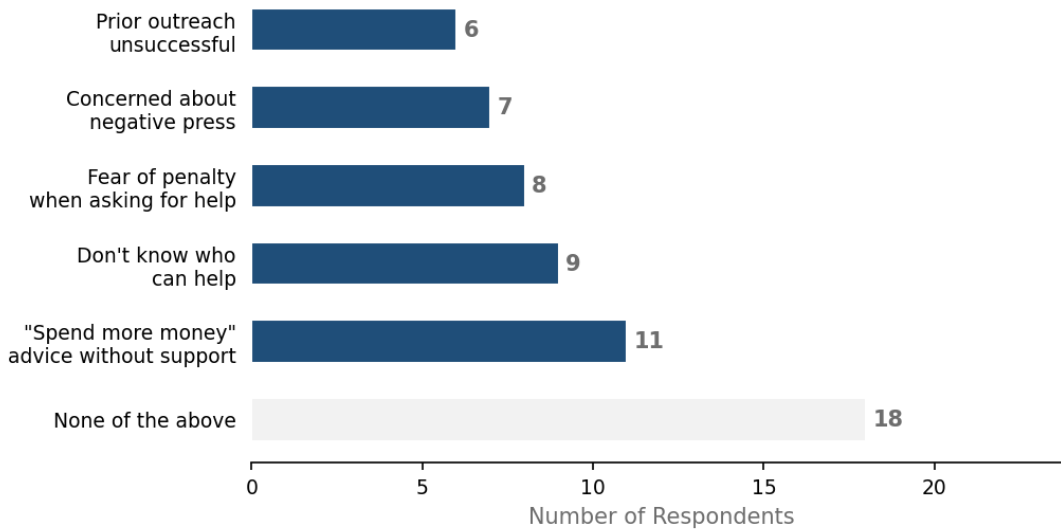
Key takeaway:

Website content requirements were the area of lowest reported understanding among business respondents (2.60). At the same time, disability community respondents rated website content as the most frequently compliant area (3.31) and the area where non-compliance had the least impact on their ability to interact with businesses (3.42). These findings suggest that, while businesses feel less confident about website accessibility requirements, respondents who associate themselves with the disability community perceive this area as comparatively less problematic than other access categories.

Barriers to Compliance — Business Community

Business respondents identified which factors present challenges when trying to meet disability access requirements.

Barriers Businesses Face in Achieving Compliance



Graph 4. Barriers Businesses Face in Achieving Compliance

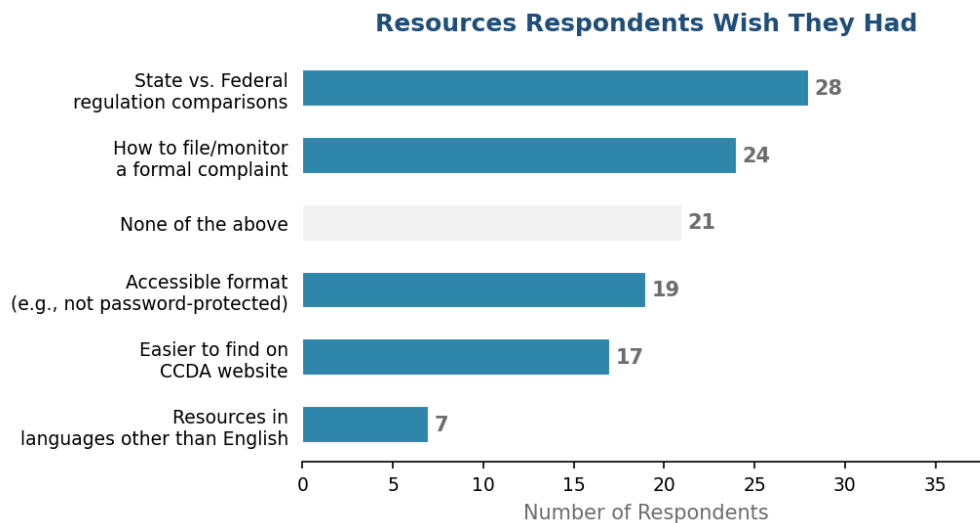
Key takeaway:

The barriers-to-compliance findings suggest that businesses are navigating a combination of practical and informational challenges rather than a single obstacle. Cost and implementation concerns appear to matter, but the data also indicate a

strong need for clearer guidance, training, and easy-to-use resources that help businesses understand requirements and translate them into action.

Nearly a third of business community respondents (18 of 63, or 29%) selected "None of the above" when asked which barriers they face in achieving compliance. The open-ended write-ins associated with this selection reveal several distinct scenarios. Some respondents are already credentialed compliance professionals for whom the listed barriers did not apply. Others operate entirely online and face different compliance considerations than brick-and-mortar businesses. Several noted that operating in leased spaces places facility decisions outside their control entirely. More broadly, two themes stood out as having significant implications for CCDA's work: the effect of litigation fear on business willingness to engage proactively with accessibility, and the absence of practical guidance on compliance issues beyond physical and web access — including the ADA Interactive Process for customers and accommodation of chemical and fragrance sensitivities.

Desired Resources for All Respondents



Graph 5. Resources Respondents Wish They Had

Key takeaway:

- The top requests were information comparing state and federal regulations (28 respondents), guidance on filing and monitoring formal complaints (24 respondents), and information available in accessible formats such as non-password-protected documents (19 respondents). Seventeen respondents noted that existing resources are difficult to find on CCDA's website, and seven requested resources in languages other than English.
- Eighteen percent of respondents (21 of 117) selected "None of the above." Their open-ended write-ins reveal resource such as plain-language compliance information delivered at the point of business licensing, outreach through chambers of commerce and small business development boards, guidance on accommodating chemical and fragrance sensitivities, resources for fatigue-related disabilities including Long Covid and ME/CFS, and practical guidance for businesses and agencies on accommodating communication disorders in medical, legal, and emergency settings.

Qualitative Themes

The themes below were identified through a review of all open-ended survey comments submitted by respondents across the disability and business communities. Responses were examined for recurring ideas, concerns, and suggested improvements, then grouped into broader thematic categories based on patterns that appeared across multiple comments

rather than isolated observations. Together, these themes help illustrate the issues respondents most consistently raised.

Theme 1: Chemical & Fragrance Sensitivity as a Major Access Barrier

A large portion of respondents described fragrances, cleaning chemicals, and airborne toxins as severe and often exclusionary accessibility barriers. Many indicated they cannot enter businesses, healthcare facilities, or even public spaces due to exposure risks.

Theme 2: Persistent Physical Access Barriers (Built Environment)

Respondents frequently described incomplete, outdated, or poorly maintained physical accessibility in both public and private spaces. Responses emphasize that compliance gaps are systemic and ongoing, not isolated. Common issues included insufficient or non-compliant parking (especially van-accessible spaces), Curb cuts and ramps, door accessibility (heavy doors, lack of automation), obstructed paths of travel (Merchandise, carts, boxes blocking aisles), poor interior design, inaccessible tables, POS systems, restrooms, older infrastructure not retrofitted

Theme 3: Inadequate Parking & Transportation Access

Access to transportation and parking—especially for wheelchair users and seniors—was described as a primary barrier to participation in community life. Transportation access is framed not just as convenience, but as a foundational equity issue affecting independence and dignity. Key Concerns include:

- Shortage of van-accessible parking spaces
- Misuse or abuse of disabled parking placards
- Parking designs that prevent ramp deployment
- Long distances from parking to entrance
- Lack of affordable, on-demand accessible transportation

Theme 4: Digital Accessibility & Communication Barriers

Respondents identified ongoing challenges with websites, apps, and communication channels, particularly for vision and cognitive disabilities. Even where compliance is improving, real-world usability still falls short—especially for multi-modal access needs. Common issues:

- Websites not compatible with screen readers
- Poor labeling of buttons, images, and navigation
- Low contrast and readability issues
- Over-reliance on digital-only communication (Lack of phone or in-person alternatives)
- Lack of accessible formats (large print, verbal options)

Theme 5: Lack of Awareness, Education, and Training

Many responses point to limited understanding of ADA requirements among businesses, contractors, and agencies. Businesses are often unclear on what compliance requires. **While wheelchair access is a need limited understanding and addressing of** broader disability needs such as chemical sensitivities, communication disabilities, service animal requirements, and architects/contractors not consistently applying standards were frequently called out.

Theme 6: Enforcement Gaps & Weak Accountability

There is a perception that laws exist but are inconsistently applied, leading to ongoing non-compliance. Respondents repeatedly highlighted a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms including building departments not enforcing accessibility during renovations, no inspections tied to routine updates (e.g., parking lot resurfacing), limited consequences for non-compliance, and lack of formal ADA accommodation processes for customers (vs. employees)

Theme 7: Narrow Definition of Disability in Policy & Practice

Respondents expressed frustration that accessibility efforts are too focused on visible, mobility-related disabilities and have a desire for more inclusive, modern definitions of disability in policy, guidance, and outreach. Areas they feel are excluded or underrepresented include chemical sensitivities, Autism and neurodivergence, communication disorders, fatigue-related conditions (e.g., Long COVID, ME/CFS), and behavioral and mental health disabilities

Theme 8: Service Access & Programmatic Barriers

Respondents felt accessibility challenges extend beyond environments to how systems operate and deliver services. Respondents highlighted barriers to accessing services, programs, and accommodations, particularly in Healthcare, government services, social services (e.g., Medi-Cal, community supports), and emergency response systems. Highlighted no clear process for requesting accommodations. Lack of ADA “interactive process” for consumers, denial or inconsistency in service animal acceptance.

Theme 9: Fear, Cost, and Legal Complexity for Businesses

Businesses reported several barriers to achieving compliance in the open-ended comments including cost of modifications, lack of clear guidance, fear of lawsuits (“predatory litigation” concerns), landlord/property control constraints. As a result, there is a tension between the desire to comply and the fear and uncertainty about how to do so safely and affordably.

Theme 10: Need for Collaboration, Outreach, and Practical Resources

Respondents emphasized the need for better engagement between CCDA, businesses, and the disability community with a strong interest in partnership-based solutions, not just regulation. Requested solutions included:

- Clear, plain-language guidance
- Training and workshops
- Networking between businesses and disabled individuals
- Toolkits, checklists, and funding resources
- Public awareness campaigns

Conclusion

Overall, the survey findings suggest a meaningful opportunity for CCDA to continue strengthening its role as an educator, convener, and bridge between the business community, advocates, and the disability community. The results point to a clear need for practical, plain-language education, broader awareness of diverse disability needs, and stronger connection points between those seeking guidance and the resources best positioned to help. Where concerns fall outside CCDA’s direct purview, the Commission can still play an important role by helping individuals and businesses understand the issue and connect with the appropriate agencies, tools, and support.