

# Architectural Barriers Act

## FAQ Series

### **Q: What is the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968?**

A: The ABA is a federal law that requires facilities designed, built, or altered with federal funds or leased by a federal agency to be fully accessible to and usable by the public.

### **Q: What are examples of covered facilities under the ABA?**

A: Federal government facilities, such as post offices, Social Security offices, federal courthouses, prisons, and national parks are covered under the ABA. Public housing built or altered with federal grants or loans, public transit systems, schools, hospitals and universities receiving federal grants for facilities also are covered under the ABA.

### **Q: Does the ABA apply to facilities that receive any kind of federal grant or loan?**

A: No. ABA coverage is limited to federal grants or loans that are used specifically for facility design, construction, or alteration where the federal agency that awards the grant or loan has the authority to establish facility standards.

### **Q: Are some facilities excluded from the ABA?**

A: Yes. Military facilities and spaces that are designed exclusively for “able-bodied military personnel” and facilities used by the Department of Defense in emergencies and natural disasters are exempt from the ABA.

### **Q: Does the ABA apply to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?**

A: Yes, the ABA applies to VA. VA medical facilities are covered under the ABA’s requirements for federally funded and constructed buildings to be accessible.

### **Q: What are examples of physical barriers that might violate the ABA?**

A: Building and space features preventing access for people with disabilities are physical barriers that violate the ABA. For example, stairs without ramp or elevator access, narrow

doorways, high counters, inaccessible restrooms/parking, hard-to-grasp doorknobs, and poor lighting/contrast.

**Q: How is the ABA different from the Rehabilitation Act?**

A: The Rehabilitation Act is a broader civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in any program and activity receiving federal funds, while the ABA is a law mandating accessibility in federally owned or federally funded buildings. The ABA also sets accessibility standards for physical structures.

**Q: How is the ABA different from the ADA**

A: The ADA does not apply to federal agencies. Instead, it applies to programs, services, goods, and activities offered by state and local governments or places of public accommodation, meaning private businesses open to the general public.

**Q: What are ABA accessibility standards?**

A: They are requirements for federal buildings and facilities built or altered with federal funds to be accessible. They indicate where access is required and provide detailed specifications for the covered features and spaces. They cover physical spaces, ensuring accessible routes, operable parts, and clear floor space.

**Q: Do the accessibility standards cover building policies?**

A: No. The ABA standards apply to elements that are fixed or built in.

**Q: Do the accessibility standards cover furniture?**

A: No. Movable elements and furnishings are not generally addressed in the ABA standards.

**Q: Do the accessibility standards cover vehicles?**

A: No. The ABA standards do not cover transportation vehicles.

**Q: Does the ABA apply to older buildings?**

A: If an existing facility complied with earlier standards at the time it was built, generally it does not need to be updated to the latest standards. However, additions and alterations must comply with the current ABA standards.

**Q: What if the building has accessibility features, but they are not properly maintained?**

A: Features and equipment required to be accessible must be maintained, except in cases of isolated or temporary interruptions in service due to maintenance or repairs.

**Q: What do I do if my rights are violated?**

A: If you believe you have encountered or are aware of an accessibility barrier at a building or facility covered by the ABA, it is important to file a complaint. When filing, always keep a copy of the complaint and any relevant documents for your own records.

**How to File Complaints Under the Architectural Barriers Act**

- Fill out the [Online ABA Complaint Form](#);
- E-mail: [enforce@access-board.gov](mailto:enforce@access-board.gov);
- Fax: 202-272-0081; or
- Mail the complaint to:

U.S. Access Board  
1331 F Street, NW  
Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20004