

When Air Becomes a Barrier: Rethinking Accessibility for People Living with MCS



Accessibility is often understood in terms of visible features — ramps, elevators, and physical design.

But not all barriers are visible.

For individuals living with multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), accessibility often depends on something less visible—the quality of the air, both within and beyond built environments.

Did You Know?

- Exposure to everyday chemicals can limit access to workplaces, healthcare, and public spaces
- Indoor air quality is a **shared exposure** — what one person uses affects others
- Addressing emissions can significantly lower overall exposure levels
- Accessibility includes environmental conditions, not only physical design

When Air Limits Access

Fragranced products, cleaning chemicals, and other sources of indoor emissions can make environments difficult — or impossible — for some individuals to tolerate.

In these cases, the barrier is not the building itself, but the conditions within it.

This can affect access to essential services, including healthcare, employment, education, and housing.

A Shared Responsibility

Indoor air is not experienced individually — it is shared.

The choices made in a space, from product use to maintenance practices, contribute to the overall environment. When multiple sources of exposure are present, their effects can accumulate.

Recognizing this shared responsibility is an important step toward creating more inclusive environments.

Practical Steps Toward Accessible Air

Creating more accessible environments does not require complex solutions. Effective steps include:

- Choosing fragrance-free and lowest-emission products
- Using only ecological strategies and least-toxic solutions for all uses
- Supporting indoor air quality policies
- Considering air quality in building operations

These measures can improve accessibility for those living with MCS, while also supporting healthier environments for everyone.



Looking Ahead

As awareness grows, so does the opportunity to rethink accessibility.

For many people living with MCS, the ability to participate in everyday life depends on environments that are safe to enter.

Creating accessible air is not only a matter of comfort — it is a necessary step toward inclusion.