

## Google Offering New Tools To Help Those With Disabilities

by Shaun Heasley | May 28, 2020



Google is adding new accessibility features to its array of offerings. (Thinkstock)

Google is introducing new technology to simplify smartphones for those with cognitive disabilities and it's beefing up its map program to make it easier to know if destinations are accessible.

The company said this month that it is releasing an app called "Action Blocks" for Android devices that's designed to make routine smartphone tasks — like calling mom or turning the lights off — less cumbersome.

With the app, users can create a one-touch button that displays on their home screen to complete actions that typically require multiple steps.

"For people with cognitive disabilities or age-related cognitive conditions, it can be difficult to learn and remember each of these steps," wrote Ajit Narayanan with Google's central accessibility team and Sharlene Yuan of Android Accessibility in a [posting](#) about

the app. “Create an Action Block for any action that the Google Assistant can perform, like making calls, sending texts, playing videos and controlling devices in your home.”

Separately, Google said that it is also launching a feature in Google Maps called “Accessible Places.” When enabled, users see a wheelchair icon prominently displayed to denote if a location has an accessible entrance.

In addition to details about entrances, the maps program offers information about whether a place has accessible seating, restrooms or parking. Google Maps will also indicate if it has confirmed that a business or other destination does not have an accessible entrance, the company said.

“With this feature ‘rollout,’ it’s easier to find and contribute wheelchair accessibility information to Google Maps. That benefits everyone, from those of us using wheelchairs and parents pushing strollers to older adults with tired legs and people hauling heavy items,” wrote Sasha Blair-Goldensohn, a software engineer with Google Maps, in a [posting](#) about the development. “And in this time of COVID-19, it’s especially important to know before you go so that you won’t be stranded outside that pharmacy, grocery or restaurant.”

At present, Google said it has accessibility information for more than 15 million places around the world, a figure that has doubled since 2017.

The new offerings come as Google is also bringing improvements to Live Transcribe, an app that provides real-time transcription for conversations, and Sound Amplifier, which clarifies the sounds around you.