

Universal Design: Everyone, Everywhere

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What is Universal Design within an Australian context from the perspective of an Access Consultant ?

Universal Design is a term that was first used in the United States by Ron Mace in 1985, although aspects of UD were quite prevalent in Europe long before.

Universal Design is often defined as; “the design of all products and environments to be usable by people of all ages and abilities to the greatest extent possible.”
(N. D’souza)

The 7 principles of Universal Design

- 1. Equitable Use**
- 2. Flexibility in Use**
- 3. Simple and Intuitive Use**
- 4. Perceptible Information**
- 5. Tolerance for Error**
- 6. Low Physical Effort**
- 7. Size and Space for Approach and Use**



Like many countries around the world the goal of enabling a built environment that is accessible to everyone and everywhere has been a slow tedious process of evolution.

The evolution of Universal Design is no different.

While UD has many supporters there are no technical standards, regulations or laws that enshrine UD when it comes to the accessibility of buildings, products or services.

How should an Access Consultant apply Universal Design within their daily practice ?



Q1. Are we on the right track with UD or is the 50 year history of enabling accessible environments outdated ?

Q2. Is the Universal Design concept a pure single practice or are there multiple methodologies ?

Q3. Is there place for two systems;

- **Accessible public spaces**
- **Universally Designed private residential development**



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Long before UD was coined
by Ron Mace in 1985
Australian advocates under
the auspice of ACROD and
Standards Australia
developed the first “access
standard” in 1968

AS CA 52 Part 1 – Design for
Access by Handicapped Persons
– Part 1-Public Buildings and
Facilities.

AS CA52.1—1968
UDC 721.052 : 362.4
S I E 8a4

Australian Standard CA52, Part I—1968

DESIGN FOR ACCESS BY
HANDICAPPED PERSONS

**Part I—PUBLIC BUILDINGS
AND FACILITIES**



STANDARDS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
Incorporated by Royal Charter



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AS CA 52 Part 1 [1968] – Design for Access by Handicapped Persons – Part 1-Public Buildings and Facilities.

24 pages of information which covered some basic requirements for wheelchair circulation spaces, stairway design, audio-visual signals and a....

Preface that articulated;

“Its basis is that the design of buildings for public use must take into account all members of the community.”

In 1977 CA 52 evolved to AS 1428 with an expanded scope that has undergone revisions in 1988, 1993, 2001 and 2009.



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During 1980's there were many incremental baby steps progressing the debate forwards to accessible public buildings with some notable milestones being;

- 1981 IYDP (International Year of the Disabled Person)
- 1983 NSW Govt introduces Section 53 into Ordinance 70, which specified accessibility requirements in public buildings. This was the forerunner to Part D3 of the BCA.
- 1988 update of AS1428.1.
- Access consultancy infancy
- ACROD key stakeholder representative on the Oz scene



1990's pace of change accelerates with some notable milestones being;

- 1990 – A national Building Code of Australia established and references AS1428.1.
- **1992 Disability Discrimination Act.**
- 1992 – AS1428 suite expanded with Parts 2, 3 and 4.
- 1993 Sydney awarded the 2000 Olympic & Paralympic Games & Access Consultants become integral to the games
- 1995 – Adaptable Housing Standard is published and NSW Local Govt's include proportional requirements for adaptable housing in multi-unit residential – often 10%.
- 1997 BCA 96 removes the one step threshold allowance at the entry to public buildings in a first step to harmonise with the DDA.
- 1998 NSW Seniors Housing policy revamped and revised again in 2000, 2004 and 2007. {2007 version is now an accessible AS1428.1.}
- Mid 1990's – UD enters the vocabulary of Access Consultants but the DDA is the main game.



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- 2003 – 2011 – Development of DDA Premises Standard, update to AS1428.1 (2009) and BCA 2011 aligned. BCA embraces Class 2 residential flat buildings requiring common area accessibility.
- Australian Network for Universal Housing Design forms.

- Throughout the 2000's – UD is a side issue to Access Consultants as the aim of accessible public buildings is the No. 1 Goal.
- Local Government and Access Consultants get on with Adaptable Housing rollout and in NSW, Seniors Housing.
- **AS 4299 Adaptability principles are misunderstood, missed and abused.**



- Australian Network for Universal Housing Design forms and two streams of UD emerge;

- **UD in a housing context.**
- ANUHD prosecute the argument that while 10% of dwellings being adaptable maybe useful that 100% of dwellings should provide universal design.
- 2009 the National Dialogue takes places which is primarily a drive to bring together industry, government and ageing and disability rights advocates to establish UD in the mass housing market nationally.

- **UD in public buildings gives way to Access for All and consistency with the DDA.**
- NSW Seniors Housing Policy 2007 adopts AS1428.1 and AS4299 to deliver accessible & adaptable design features.
- Access Consultants generally excluded from the National Dialogue and the revision of AS4299 put on hold.



- 2010 onwards.....
- AS4299 has minimal take-up outside NSW and the Standard is misunderstood by planners, architects and builders.
- UD advocates argue against the notion of accessibility and adaptable housing in favour of liveability.
- Accessible design features maligned as being ugly, inappropriate and unsuitable for residential living.
- 2011 Livable Housing Australia establishes Livable Housing Guidelines which is a abbreviated version of AS4299 with a reduced scope that is aimed at the mass housing market.

- 2010-2012 Access Consultants look at LHA as a branding and marketing campaign, which is seeking to sell the very modest LH guidelines to the mass market.
- Local Government and Access Consultants continue using AS4299 with Adaptable Housing rollout and in NSW, Seniors Housing.
- No gold stars for poor design even if it is accessible.
- Every LGA from Newcastle to Wollongong (except 2) specify Adaptable Housing in multi-unit residential and several now specifying Accessible AS1428.1 apartments (Hornsby, Gosford, etc)



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- The parallels between the 1970's and 2011 are obvious as the cycle of starting with minimalist access (*dare I use that word, "Access"*) requirements commencing with the development of Livable Housing Guidelines – Silver, Gold, Platinum.
- Livable Housing – e.g. Silver level has no step at the front door.
- Livable Housing – e.g. Gold level requires a 10m sq bedroom (AS4299 requires 12m+).

What is Universal Design within an Australian context from the perspective of an Access Consultant ?

While the concept of UD is widely supported by Access Consultants it is clear that UD is now firmly embedded in the residential housing market commencing with “social housing” and hopefully rolling into the mass housing market of detached and semi-detached dwellings as LHA develop Partnerships with the mass production builders.



Q1. Are we on the right track with UD or is the 50 year history of enabling accessible environments outdated ?

Answer – Enabling accessible environments is still the right course and UD can play a part in that aim.

Q2. Is the Universal Design concept a pure single practice or are there multiple methodologies ?

Answer – Clearly policy makers are embracing the UD principles and developing Guidelines, mostly voluntary, to suit particular objectives.

Q3. Is there place for two systems;

- Accessible public spaces
- Universally Designed private residential development

Answer – YES the two systems can co-exist, albeit the confusion over the coming years will prevail until LH Guidelines merge with Adaptable Housing to include PLATINUM PLUS, DIAMOND levels and beyond.





While Universal Design provisions of Livable Housing do not currently deliver accessible environments Access Consultant shall provide advice as the LH Guidelines permit.

- **The Future** - Over time ***we (the advocate within each Access Consultant)*** hope to see revised LH Guidelines and clever innovation in design and construction that delivers real benefits to people with disabilities, their families and friends.
- AS4299 revised and reinvigorated to provide a comprehensive AS1428.8 standard (or Handbook) for accessible residential development with multiple parts for people with various impairments.