



Universal Design Position Statement

Purpose

The purpose of this position statement is to encourage the adoption of universal design in all future projects, policies, services, and communications. It is designed as a model document for others to use and adapt in different contexts.

Background

Universal design is an approach to policy and practice that aims for social and economic inclusion.

Universal design emerged from the disability rights movement in the 1960s. The early years focused on 'barrier-free movement' and physical access. More recently universal design has evolved to incorporate all marginalised groups and address sensory, cognitive, social and cultural aspects of everyday life.

The practice of universal design has also evolved from a top-down designer approach to an inclusive design approach, embracing processes such as co-design, human-centred design, and user-centred design.

Definition of universal design

There are several ways of explaining universal design. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities definition is, "the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design". This definition focuses on the product or outcome.

The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access defines universal design as "a process that enables and empowers a diverse population by improving human performance, health and wellness, and social participation." This definition focuses the design process.

Thinking of universal design as a design process rather than a design outcome or product allows the involvement of users in the design process. It can be described as 'taking a universal design approach' to projects, policies, services, and communications.

Universal design is a philosophy

Universal design is a design thinking process that promotes human rights and embraces the concept of inclusion for all. A universal design approach considers the diverse needs and abilities of people throughout the design process. Universal design is non-stigmatising, efficient and sustainable.

As an iterative process, universal design aims for the best possible process and outcomes available at the time. It builds on the learning of past designs to meet the needs of people today and into the future and reduces the need for expensive changes.

Other names for universal design

Universal design is cited in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is recognised internationally. Other terms with the same goal of inclusion are ‘inclusive design’, ‘design-for-all’, ‘human-centred design’, and ‘user-centred design’.

What universal design is not

Universal design is not the same thing as accessibility. It is not a standard or list of technical specifications. Neither is it special design for a minority, or a one-size fits all design. It is not a new design trend. ‘Universal accessibility’ is not a version of universal design.

Scope

Universal design can be applied to all projects, policies, services, and communications. Universal design guides the conception, design, construction, and evaluation of projects. It is best applied at the beginning of any project when users can be involved in the process.

Strategic alignment

(Insert local, state/territory or federal policies in which universal design, inclusion and diversity are cited.)

Regulatory alignment

(Insert relevant legal requirements, Acts and standards that require, access, inclusion, and diversity to be addressed.)

International context

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion
- UN Convention on the Rights of Children
- UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- UN Principles for Older Persons

Appendices

Additional resources

(For example, 7 Principles of Universal Design, 8 Goals of Universal Design and other guides and sources of information. See below.)

The Seven Principles of Universal Design:

1. **Equitable Use:** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
2. **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. **Simple and Intuitive Use:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

4. **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
5. **Tolerance for Error:** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
6. **Low Physical Effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
7. **Size and Space for Approach and Use:** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

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The 8 Goals of Universal Design:

1. **Body Fit:** accommodating a wide range of body sizes and abilities
2. **Comfort:** keeping demands within desirable limits of body function and perception
3. **Awareness:** ensuring that critical information for use is easily perceived
4. **Understanding:** making methods of operation and use intuitive, clear and unambiguous
5. **Wellness:** contributing to health promotion, avoidance of disease and protection from hazards
6. **Social Integration:** treating all groups with dignity and respect
7. **Personalization:** incorporating opportunities for choice and the expression of individual preferences
8. **Cultural appropriateness:** respecting and reinforcing cultural values and the social and environmental context of any design project.

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The Universal Design for Learning Guidelines:

1. Provide multiple means of **Engagement** – recruiting interest, sustaining effort and persistence, and self-regulation
2. Provide multiple means of **Representation** – perception, language and symbols, comprehension
3. Provide multiple means of **Action and Expression** – physical action, expression and communication, executive functions

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Ten things to know about Universal Design:

1. Universal Design strives to improve the original design concept by making it more inclusive.
2. Universally Designed products can have a high aesthetic value.
3. Universal Design is much more than just a new design trend.

4. Universal Design does not aim to replace the design of products targeted at specific markets.
5. Universal Design is not a synonym for compliance with accessible design standards.
6. Universal Design benefits more people than older people and people with disabilities.
7. Universal Design can be undertaken by any designer, not just the specialists.
8. Universal Design should be integrated throughout the design process.
9. Universal Design is not just about 'one size fits all'.
10. A Universally Designed product is the goal: Universal Design is the process.

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