Universal Design

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design is a design philosophy that ensures that products, buildings, environments and experiences are innately accessible to as many people as possible, regardless of their age, level of ability, cultural background, or any other differentiating factors that contribute to the diversity of our communities.

Universal Design can be applied to all fields of design, including but not limited to product design, interactive design, architecture and urban planning.

How is this different to accessible design?

'Access' and 'accessibility' is largely concerned with fulfilling a set of measurable requirements (technical notes and specifications) as prescribed in legislative requirements such as the Building Code of Australia and other relevant standards. This often results in 'accessible' features being incorporated as afterthoughts, and commonly relies on specialised features to fulfil legislative requirements such as lifts and ramps. Mechanical features such as lifts can break down, and a dependence on these can render an entire building inaccessible to sections of the community.

Universal Design separates itself from accessible design by focusing on user-centred design from the earliest stages of a project, rather than just at the end stage. This results in the seamless integration of inclusive features that are in many cases invisible and does not stigmatise or separate users, and ensures that the experience of a building is shared by as many people as possible.

How much will Universal Design add to the costs of my project?

In most cases Universal Design will not add any additional costs to a project. In fact, applying Universal Design principles can often save costs, particularly in the long run, by lessening the dependence on mechanical features that require maintenance such as lifts, or retrofitting features to comply with legislation.

In addition, Universal Design can often increase revenue and financial viability at a facility by catering for a broader cross-section of the community, thereby increasing patronage.

What are the seven Universal Design principles?

The seven Universal Design principles are detailed over the page.

Who can I contact for further information?

For further information on Universal Design, please contact your regional sport and recreation representative.

Principle	Definition	Guideline
1. Equitable Use	The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.	1a. Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not. 1b. Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users. 1c. Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users. 1d. Make the design appealing to all users.
2. Flexibility in Use	The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.	2a. Provide choice in methods of use. 2b. Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use. 2c. Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision. 2d. Provide adaptability to the user's pace.
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.	3a. Eliminate unnecessary complexity. 3b. Be consistent with user expectations and intuition. 3c. Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills. 3d. Arrange information consistent with its importance. 3e. Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.
4. Perceptible Information	The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.	4a. Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information. 4b. Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings. 4c. Maximize "legibility" of essential information. 4d. Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e. make it easy to give instructions or directions). 4e. Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.
5. Tolerance for Error	The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.	5a. Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded. 5b. Provide warnings of hazards and errors. 5c. Provide fail safe features. 5d. Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.
6. Low Physical Effort	The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.	6a. Allow user to maintain a neutral body position. 6b. Use reasonable operating forces. 6c. Minimize repetitive actions. 6d. Minimize sustained physical effort.
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.	7a. Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user. 7b. Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user. 7c. Accommodate variations in hand and grip size. 7d. Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.