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| Whole of Victorian Government  Universal Design Policy |
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# Introduction

## Key messages

The current State Disability Plan, **Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022-2026** (SDP) outlines the importance of universal design principles.

Utilising universal design principles will ensure facilities, built environments, products and services can be used by people of all abilities, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptations. This means everything can be used by as many people as possible from the beginning and changes do not need to be made later.

There are more than one million people with a disability living in Victoria. Types of disability are wide-ranging and can affect people’s community participation in different ways.

Some disabilities are present from birth. Other people acquire or develop a disability during their lifetime from an accident, condition, illness or injury. For some people, support needs can increase over time. Others can experience fluctuating or episodic disability.

Government has a responsibility to ensure public policy addresses the needs of people with disability to ensure they can participate in all parts of life.

The key to this is applying a social model of disability. A social model of disability recognises that people’s experience of restriction on their participation is more crucial than the nature of their disability.

Infrastructure must cater for the diverse needs of a changing population. In the last four years, the Government has committed to Victoria’s largest infrastructure program, significantly raising investment including on new transport, health, education and social housing.

## What is universal design?

Universal design is a design philosophy that ensures that products, buildings, environments, programs, services 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.

Universal design distinguishes itself from accessible design by focusing on user-centred design from the earliest stages of a project.

## Why a universal design policy?

The current SDP is Victoria’s tool for implementing **Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031***.* A key priority of the SDP is to coordinate a whole-of-government policy incorporating universal design principles into areas such as infrastructure and public transport. The universal design principles include equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort and size and space for approach and use.

Applying a universal design approach from the outset can often save project costs by reducing the dependence on complex mechanical features, such as lifts. It also eliminates the need to retrospectively fit accessibility requirements should standards or community expectations change.

This approach is not to be confused with statutory obligations and requirements for design. For example, the Victorian Government has responsibilities under the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)** (Charter) and **the Disability Act 2006 (Vic)**. The Charter protects a range of human rights, respecting the rule of law, human dignity, equality and freedom. The federal **Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)** (DDA) makes disability discrimination unlawful and promotes equal rights for people with disability. The DDA is supplemented by a series of legally binding standards and guidelines for infrastructure. While the DDA promotes equal access for people with disability, the DDA’s associated infrastructure guidelines only mandate minimal accessibility compliance. It is important to recognise that compliance with minimum accessibility requirements does not ensure equitable outcomes for all people.

# Overview of the Universal Design Policy

The purpose of Victoria’s universal design policy is to support Victorian Government departments, agencies and delivery partners to incorporate universal design principles consistently across infrastructure projects. This policy provides guidance on how Victorian Government funded infrastructure can be designed and delivered to advance universal design principles and goals. This includes small to medium sized infrastructure projects that are funded through grants programs or any other funding mechanism.

The policy takes an outcomes or principled approach to universal design, rather than a compliance or mandated approach. To avoid confusion, the policy is separate to statutory requirements and is additional to regulatory design requirements, other policies and building codes.

The policy is not intended to be a comprehensive or codified list of universal design elements to be incorporated in projects. It should be used as a guide to how the principles of universal design could be applied to government construction projects. This way, infrastructure can support more equitable access and more equitable outcomes, regardless of peoples’ abilities.

Universal design is not one size fits all. Different projects will provide different opportunities to incorporate universal design elements. Uplifting industry skills in thinking about and applying universal design to all projects is part of the policy’s objective.

## Who is this Policy for?

This policy is designed for government agencies and delivery partners with responsibility for planning, designing and constructing Victorian Government infrastructure.

The policy provides an overview of the objectives of universal design and what universal design may look like in practice. This will allow prospective bidders and agencies to incorporate universal design elements more effectively in future projects.

It is the responsibility of delivery agencies to provide guidance to construction and delivery partners about how this policy will be incorporated into their existing construction processes and documentation.

# Victoria's Universal Design policy

Departments and building agencies will have flexibility to apply universal design. This may be through design standards or requirements for procurement and functional briefs.

## Incorporating universal design principles in procurement or functional briefs

Incorporating universal design principles in procurement or functional briefs is suitable for projects where a competitive tender process is undertaken which incorporates design.

Using the competitive tension of the expressions of interest and requests for proposals will support innovation in the private sector, potentially supporting improved outcomes for broader design and construction in the community.

For projects where the department prepares design briefs, the inclusion of universal design principles as a key requirement will support early consideration of universal design in the design process. This requirement can also be included in projects where design is not included in the tender process.

## Incorporating universal design principles into design standards

Incorporating universal design principles into design standards helps provide specific guidance and expectations for building designers and deliverers. This is best suited for building types where universal design principles can be simply translated into tangible design elements for consistent use across projects and where competitive tendering is not utilised.

While design standards enable better control of outcomes, the flexibility of this policy recognises that design standards across Government is not practical due to the broad types of infrastructure Government delivers.

## Co-design and user engagement

Co-design and meaningful user engagement are some of the most important aspects to getting universal design right in practice. Elevating the voice of people with disability throughout the project lifecycle leads to shared decision making which translates to more effective services and better outcomes for people.

The extent to which co-design is incorporated into a universal design project should be scaled according to the project’s size and complexity. While direct engagement with people with diverse abilities is encouraged on all projects, larger projects could consider incorporating the views of people with disability, and co-design principles, at all stages of a project.

# The universal design principles

All new Victorian Government infrastructure projects should demonstrate how their design and construction will align with the universal design principles. Projects should be assessed on their alignment with the universal principles in procurement processes or against building design standards.

Table 1 at Attachment A set outs the seven universal design principles and outlines examples of good and poor design outcomes for each principle.

## Applying universal design across the lifecycle of a project

While universal design should be applied across the design, development and delivery of a project, it is most effective when embedded in processes and applied early in the conceptualisation of a project. When planning a project, delivery agencies should consider previous lessons learnt about universal design and accessibility.

Table 2 at Attachment A sets out how universal design can be applied at each phase of a project lifecycle and what co-design and user engagement may look like in practice.

# Attachment A

## Table 1: Universal Design Principles and Design Outcome examples

| Universal Design Principle | Practical Explanation | Design outcome examples | Poor design outcome example |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Equitable use  The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. | * Provide the same means of use for all people: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not. * Avoid segregating or stigmatising anyone. * Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all people. * Make the design appealing to all people. | * Customer service counters, benches, sinks and other installations have appropriate low heights and leg clearance underneath. * Lifts or ramps must be used as an alternative to stairs. Such lifts should have wide door openings, adequate circulation space, audio announcements and controls incorporating raised tactile and Braille elements. * There must also be easy to read signage throughout the building, incorporating international symbols of access or deafness, alongside raised tactile and Braille elements, which can easily be read by a person when standing or seated. * Accessible toilets are on all floors of the building. | * Counters, benches, sinks, toilets and other installations are only accessible on one floor of the building, as opposed to all floors. * Unnecessary stairs are used in different parts of the building, for example, at some entry points, with one accessible lift for wheelchairs users, which perpetuates differences between wheelchair and non-wheelchair users. * Additionally, lifts are not viewed as a central component of the building and are hidden away. * Ramps are also hidden. * The building is overwhelming for individuals with visual and sensory issues. For example, halogen lighting is used throughout the building, clear signage limited to the ground floor, and there are no soft acoustics to reduce echo noise. * No quiet rooms or zones have been included throughout the building. |
| 2. Flexibility in use  The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. | * Provide choice in methods of use. * Accommodate right or left-handed access and use. * Facilitate people’s accuracy and precision. * Provide adaptability to people's pace. | * Controls on doors, appliances, equipment, fire alarms and extinguishers, lighting, power outlets and other installations must be able to be reached by a person when standing or seated and used with a closed fist or open palm. * Adjustable work benches should also be used throughout the building. * Remote controls are provided to operate all equipment and appliances that may be difficult to reach. * Large print instructions should be provided alongside equipment, and automated and/or cordless appliances should be used. | * Controls on appliances, doors and other installations do not accommodate a wide range of abilities and are not accessible to all. * Only a select number of work benches are adjustable. * Remote controls are not provided to facilitate the use of equipment which is difficult to reach. * No large print instructions are provided for specific equipment and automated and/or cordless appliances are not consistently used throughout the building. |
| 3. Simple and intuitive use  Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the person's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. | * Eliminate unnecessary complexity. * Be consistent with people’s expectations and intuition. * Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills. * Arrange information consistent with its importance. * Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion. | * A continuous accessible path of travel must be provided from any car park, public transport and taxi rank area into and throughout the building. * Tactile ground surface indicators must be provided prior to kerb ramps (where required), steps, ramps, moving walks, escalators, lifts or as a warning of any overhead hazard. * Overhanging obstacles should not be introduced. * Wayfinding is facilitated by signs with large print information, tactile information and other cues to help people orientate themselves. | * There is not a continuous accessible path from transport spaces into the building. * Tactile ground surface indicators are used inconsistently throughout the building, and overhead hazards and obstacles exist in various spaces. * There is no clear or accessible signage to help people orientate themselves or move throughout the building, nor is tactile information provided to assist people who are blind or have low vision. |
| 4. Perceptible information  The design communicates necessary information effectively to the person, regardless of ambient conditions or the person’s sensory abilities. | * Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information. * Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings. * Maximise "legibility" of essential information. * Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e. make it easy to give instructions or directions). * Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations. | * There must be emergency communication systems with both auditory and visual cues, and various size fire extinguishers for ease of use by all people. * Signage must also be height visible to wheelchair users, room acoustics must be designed to assist hearing-impaired individuals and adjustable lighting must exist to assist vision-impaired individuals. | * The emergency communication system does not provide visual cues and a variety of fire extinguisher sizes are not provided to ensure accessibility. * Signage is only at height level of non-wheelchair users, room acoustics and a hearing loop system is not provided, while lighting is fixed and cannot be adjusted to consider the needs of vision impaired individuals. |
| 5. Tolerance for error  The design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. | * Arrange elements to minimise hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded. * Provide warnings of hazards and errors. * Provide fail safe features. * Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance. | * Ensure that the floor is at equal level where possible to eliminate tripping hazards. * An emergency management plan installed at a height that can be read by a person when standing or seated, and incorporates information, (including international symbols of access or deafness where relevant), regarding continuous accessible paths of travel to nominated emergency assembly areas for all people. | * Tripping hazards are prevalent across the building. * An emergency management plan cannot be read by those who are seated, nor does it incorporate information in Braille, and does not detail accessible paths of travel to the nominated emergency assembly areas. |
| 6. Low physical effort  The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue. | * Allow people to maintain a neutral body position. * Use reasonable operating forces. * Minimise repetitive actions. * Minimise sustained physical effort. | * Automated doors which provide easy access to spaces should be consistently used in buildings, alongside the construction of wide corridors free from any side or overhead obstructions. * If stairs and steps are unavoidable, steps and stairs must incorporate firm, level slip resistant surfaces, edge nosings, opaque risers and handrails on both sides to ensure efficient and comfortable access. | * Unautomated doors cannot be reached by a person when seated, nor opened with a closed fist or open palm. * The entry buttons to open the door also do not incorporate raised tactile and Braille elements. * Stairs and steps are prevalent throughout the building and do not incorporate firm, slip resistant surfaces or handrails. |
| 7. Size and space for approach and use  Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the person’s body size, posture, or mobility. | * Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing person. * Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing person. * Accommodate variations in hand and grip size. * Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance. | * Appropriate space in lifts, toilets, showers, ramps and walkways suitable for wheelchair and mobility scooter users. * Charging spaces are also provided for users of mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs. * Floor surfaces must be comfortable for individuals with differing sensory abilities. | * Lifts, ramps and walkways are not wide enough and sufficient space is not provided in toilets and showers. * Floor surfaces do not consider the needs of individuals with sensory issues. * No space is available for users of mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs to charge their equipment. |

## Table 2: Applying universal design across the project lifecycle

| Phase | Activities | Applying Universal Design | Co-Design |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Proposal | Service plan  Strategic business case | * Define the overall population and describe their characteristics * Outline potential universal design features as part of options for capital development * Identify topographical constraints, including site access (if applicable) | Consult with people that use the infrastructure about service needs, preferences and potential universal design features |
| Planning and evaluation | Project Initiation  Planning Brief  Master Plan  Feasibility Study | * Project requirements and master plan embed universal design features (e.g. pathways, entrances, way-finding, access to buildings) * Feasibility study confirms population and considers the most appropriate methodology for engagement * Consider any atypical universal design features within indicative costs and timeframes | Feasibility study  External assessment of universal design features in design plan |
| Business case | Full business case | * Business case demonstrates responses to key principles/requirements of universal design (included as part of an updated business case template) * The business case should demonstrate:   + Technical accessibility for all people that use the infrastructure   + Equity in use for all people   + Adaptability or configurability   + Capability to interface with assistive technology, if relevant | Co-design elements and input from people from previous stages represented in business case |
| Development | Schematic design  Design development | * Testing as part of design development to identify people’s needs | Testing |
| Tender | Tender, evaluation and award | * Tenders required to demonstrate universal design experience as part of their proposal, including a commitment to deliver solutions that are accessible to all * Assessment and weightings for universal design as part of tender evaluation process | Co-design incorporated in tender evaluation (panels / reference groups / external consultation) |
| Implementation | Construction  Commissioning | * Contractual obligations to uphold an approach to universal design and continue testing, where applicable * Introduce a process to mitigate the risk of forgoing universal design features where there are competing priorities (e.g. topographical constraints, costs, delivery timeframe) | N/A |
| Operation | Asset management  Post occupancy evaluation | * Evaluation, including testing post-operation, to monitor unintended design consequences and options for future improvement | Incorporating lived experience in evaluation  Testing post-operation  Incorporation of lived experience in ongoing monitoring and future improvements |

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