Universal Design for Housing

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptation or specialized design. The intent of the universal concept is simply life for everyone by making more housing usable by more people at little or no extra cost. Universal design is an approach to design that incorporates products as well as building features and elements which, to the greatest extent possible, can be used by everyone.

Some of the common features of universal design are:

- Stepless entrances - no steps needed to get into the home.
- Single story - living room, kitchen, bathrooms, and bedrooms are all located on one level.
- Wide doorways and hallways - to allow movement throughout the house doorways are at least 32 - 36 inches; hallways are between 36 - 42 inches.
- Accessible bathroom - bathrooms with adequate maneuvering space, 60 inch diameter turning space in room.
- Kitchens - feature accessible countertops, cabinets, sink and appli-

Principles of Universal Design

The following are the seven principles of Universal Design.

**Principle One: Equitable Use** - The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Guidelines for Principle One:

- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.

**Principle Two: Flexibility in Use** - The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Guidelines for Principle Two:

- Provide choice in methods of use.
- Accommodate right or left-handed access and use.
- Facilitate the user’s accuracy and precision.
- Provide adaptability to the user’s pace.

**Principle Three: 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.

Guidelines for Principle Three:

- Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- Be consistent with user expectation 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.
Designing homes which simply live for everyone by making the house usable by more people at little or no extra cost provides many benefits for everyone. Some of these benefits include:

- **Increased safety** - having features such as no-step walkways, entries and showers, adding grab bars and slip resistant floors can prevent falls.
- **Provides ergonomic design** - having an environment that accommodates commonly used wheeled devices such as luggage, baby strollers, walkers and wheelchairs reduces the stress on one’s body. Lever handles on faucets and doors not only makes it easy to turn handles when carrying items, it reduces stress to hands and wrists.
- **Provides a more work efficient design** - universal design uses efficient products and work environments to reduce the time and personal energy required to perform daily tasks.
- **Provides a more inclusive design** - having a home that incorporates universal design means that people of all ages and abilities are able to use the home. The design accommodates people who are tall, small or use a wheelchair.
- **Allows for individuals to grow old in their homes** - universal design accommodates changes over the lifetime of the individual who lives in the home due to aging, injuries, heart conditions and arthritis.

**Benefits of Universal Housing**

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**Resources**

**AARP.org**
Voice: (888) OUR-AARP
TTY: (877) 434-7598
Website: www.aarp.org/families/home_design/

**The Center for Universal Design**
NC State University
Voice: (919) 515-3082
Website: www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm

**Maryland Department of Disabilities**
Voice / TTY: (410) 767-3660
Voice / TTY: (800) 637-4113
Email: mdod@maryland.gov
Website: www.mdod.maryland.gov

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