



Summary

The Australian Institute of Architects (The Institute) believes that ensuring a high level of accessibility within the built environment for people of all abilities must be a matter of priority for governments and the community as whole.

Most Australians will experience a form of disability at some stage of their lives as a part of the normal human life cycle. Physical and non-physical barriers within the built environment can have a substantial impact on freedom of movement and therefore freedom of choice. Policies designed to ensure universal access within the built environment are essential, particularly in light of Australia's ageing population.

Governments must continue to work toward ensuring universal access for all citizens. Legislated uniform standards for accessible public and private housing are necessary and universal housing provisions should be included in planning schemes. Architects should, in co-operation with the broader community, work toward the elimination of barriers to equitable access with the built environment.



Background

A period of disability, whether permanent or temporary, is a normal part of the human life cycle for a majority of Australians. There are physical and non-physical barriers within the built environment which can limit freedom of movement and choice for a significant number of people, especially people with disabilities, people with limited mobility and older people. Universal access, which accommodates the needs of all people regardless of age and ability, benefits the whole community and is, therefore, a community responsibility. The Institute recognises that the architectural profession has a significant role in determining the level of accessibility in the built environment, including heritage buildings, public and private housing, and outdoor built environments. We affirm the responsibility of the architectural profession to contribute to the provision of universal access throughout the built environment as a basic human right.

Existing rights of access to public facilities and buildings are governed by the combined effect of the prohibition on discrimination contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA92) together with the provisions of the applicable State or Territory Equal Opportunity legislation and the technical requirements contained in the Building Code of Australia (BCA).

In recognition that the BCA does not completely capture the intent of the DDA, a review of this regulatory framework has been underway since 2000, led by the Australian Building Codes Board. A Draft Disability Standards on Access to Premises was submitted in 2005 to the Federal Attorney General and the Federal Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources for their endorsement.



What Governments need to do

The need to ensure access for people of all abilities including Australia's rapidly growing ageing population necessitates the adoption of legislated uniform standards for accessible public and private housing which take into account the occupants' needs that may change across their life span. Currently, the demand for visitable, adaptable or accessible housing far exceeds supply.

The Institute supports the efforts already being made by Federal, State and Local Government bodies and the community to eliminate barriers to accessibility in the built environment, in accordance with the human rights declarations to which Australia is a signatory.

The Institute supports the adoption of a Disability Standards on Access to Premises that incorporates the 90th percentile of wheelchair sizes and users in accordance with the intent of the DDA92.

The Institute encourages the inclusion of housing accessibility provisions in planning schemes.



What Institute members need to do

Be aware that the design and form of the built environment can be a cause of disablement.

- Recognise that within the Australian society a spectrum of differing abilities exists and to raise awareness amongst members, clients and building professionals of prejudices that have resulted in barriers to universal access.
- Develop the skills necessary to meet their professional obligations in regard to accessible built environments through appropriate education and professional development training.
- Be aware that the Institute has an expanding list of specific advisory notes on Universal Access, for example on the topic of the DDA, professional offices, heritage buildings, transport buildings, design for hearing impairment, and signage formats.
- In co-operation with the broader community, purposefully work towards the elimination of barriers to equitable access within the built environment.
- Participate in Institute access-related activities, such as the National Access Work Group and its Access Sub-Committees at State and Territory Chapter levels.
- Recognise the unique and sensitive nature of implementing accessibility modifications while protecting the integrity and significance of heritage properties. Work in collaboration with those with the skill and understanding of the issues required to evaluate and implement the appropriate access solution within a conservation context.



Further Information and Links

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>

Australian Building Codes Board, Access for People with Disabilities
<http://www.abcb.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications>

Queensland Office of the Public Advocate, Housing Design for All
http://jp.justice.qld.gov.au/guardian/pa/discussion/ip3_0305.pdf

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Advisory Notes
on Access to Premises
http://www.hreoc.gov.au/.../premises_advisory.html

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Accessible and
adaptable housing
http://www.humanrights.gov.au/.../access_to_premises.html

New South Wales Premier's Council for Active Living, Designing
Places for Active Living
http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/planning_design_guidelines/

Institute Submissions on access to public premises and accessible
housing
<http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=4104>

Building Commission of Victoria, Welcome – Design Ideas for
Accessible Homes

Available for purchase via:

<http://www.buildingcommission.com.au/...-access-to-housing.asp>



ACT Planning and Land Authority, Interim Guidelines for Access and Mobility

<http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/.../current/pdf/2003-363.pdf>

Improving Access to Heritage Buildings by Eric Martin, available free of charge on the Australian Heritage Council website

<http://www.ahc.gov.au/publications/generalpubs/access/index.html>

Deafness Forum of Australia, Policy statements on communication access in a variety of facilities

<http://www.deafnessforum.org.au/position%20statements.htm>