

# Universal Design Guidance for Accessible and Inclusive Housing



Universal Design Network  
Newfoundland & Labrador

ST. JOHN'S





This resource, developed in partnership between the Universal Design Network of Newfoundland and Labrador and the City of St. John's, highlights the benefits of Universal Design in residential homes. Whether building, renovating, or designing, Universal Design offers practical solutions that enhance safety, independence, and long-term sustainability for everyone.

[udnnl.ca](http://udnnl.ca)



## What is Universal Design?

- Universal Design (UD) is about designing for everyone – including age, gender, stature, ethnicity, culture, first language, and learning preference.
- At its core, UD is flexible, adaptable, safe and efficient.
- UD is a person-centred approach that supports equity and inclusion.

Source: [universaldesignnl.ca](https://universaldesignnl.ca)

Source: [Universal Design Guide by CMHC](#)

## Why Universal Design?

- UD creates products, processes, and environments that are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible.

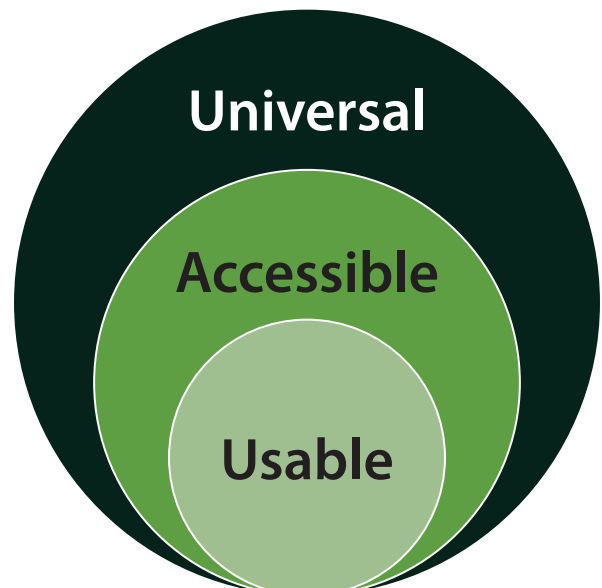


## Universal Design?

- The difference between the terms is based on the needs and/or requirements of the user.
- **Usable** designs are products that are easy and efficient to use based on a specific set of users with a specific set of tasks in a particular environment.
- **Accessible** designs are designs that consider the needs of people with varying physical, sensory, communication, or cognitive disabilities so that products, services, and spaces can be independently used.
- **Universal** designs are environments, processes, and products that are designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible – including age, ability, gender, stature, ethnicity, culture, first language, and learning preference.

Source: [What is the difference between accessible, usable, and universal design? DO-IT](#)

Source: [Canada's Standard on Accessible Dwellings \(CSA B652:23\) for Inclusive Home Design - CMHC-SCHL](#)





## What Is the Purpose of Our Home?

- Our homes offer us essential places for:
  - o nourishment (kitchen/dining),
  - o cleansing/personal hygiene (bathroom/laundry) and,
  - o rejuvenation (bedroom/living room).
- UD homes are designed to offer this to everyone.

Source: [CSA/ASC B652:23, Accessible dwellings](#)  
Section 4.3.4

## What Are the Benefits of Homes That Use Universal Design?

- They work for individuals through all stages of life.
- They require fewer modifications, making them more affordable in the long run.
- They are safer and easier for people with varying degrees of mobility or ability, including people who use mobility aids either temporarily or long-term.
- They make it easier for people of all ages and abilities to visit.
- They have a wider range of buyers/tenants.

Source: [Universal design | BRANZ](#)

## What are the Costs of Using Universal Design in a Home?

- UD homes can save money as it anticipates short-term circumstances (e.g., new baby, injury, care for relative) and long-term circumstances (e.g., age and mobility).
- UD helps avoid costly future renovations and allows people to stay in their homes longer whether due to changing family needs, changing mobility needs, or aging.
- According to a 2011 Branz Study out of New Zealand, it was estimated that the change to the total cost of a single-story home was 0.5% to add UD features. Modifications later can cost 10 times as much.

Source: [What is universal design? CMHC-SCHL](#)

Source: [Study Report SR263 \(2011\) Lifetime Housing – the Value Case](#)



## Homes That Use Universal Design?

- **Level, Zero-Step Entry:** A level or gently sloping entryway without steps or stairs ensures that people using wheelchairs, strollers, or those with balance and mobility concerns can easily access the home.
- **Wide Doorways and Hallways:** Wider doors (typically 36 inches or more) and hallways.
- **Level, Zero-Step Transitions:** Level or gently sloping entryways and smooth transitions from inside to out and room to room.
- **Lever-style Door Handles and Faucets:** Lever handles on doors, windows, and faucet.
- **Non-slip Flooring:** Level, hard-surfaced floors with minimal transitions throughout (e.g., slip-resistant tiles, low-pile carpet, vinyl).
- **Drawers and Easy-to-Use Handles:** Drawers in kitchens and bathrooms with D-shaped handles.
- **Enhanced Lighting:** Increase, adjustable lighting in entry areas and task lighting in areas such as kitchens.
- **Safer Bathrooms:** Reinforced wall structures with well-placed grab bars.

Source: [Universal design | BRANZ](#)



## Where Can I Get More Information on Universal Design?

- There are many aspects of UD. It is easy to add UD principles whether renovating a home or building a new home. Some resources include:
  - o [Universal Design Network Newfoundland and Labrador](#) provides information on UD as a home building checklist, and resources for making bathrooms, kitchens, and entrances accessible.
  - o [Universal Design NL](#) provides guides, tips and details including an [online interactive home](#).
  - o [CSA Group](#) is a global organization dedicated to safety, social good and sustainability. [The CSA/ASC B652, Accessible Dwellings Standard](#) provides accessible home design guidance and includes area allowances, operating controls, floor surfaces, headroom, lighting, and specifications by room.
  - o The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHA-SCHL) provides a comprehensive Universal Design Guide ([CMHC Universal Design: A Guide for designers, builders and developers of multi-unit residential buildings](#)).
  - o The Rick Hanson Foundation provides a great perspective on “Busting Myths” about UD. [From Where I Sit: Busting Five Myths of Universal Design | Rick Hansen Foundation](#).



**Universal Design Network**  
Newfoundland & Labrador

**ST. JOHN'S**

