

Universal Design and Health

Access to Health Care

Many people with disabilities do not seek out or obtain quality health care. Often, health care facilities are not accessible or do not have the equipment needed to serve people with disabilities. Sometimes, staff may not know how to assist a person with a disability, causing frustration for both the patient and the staff member. As a result, some people with disabilities only pursue medical attention for emergency or acute conditions, making primary and preventive health care services low priorities. Universal access or universal design is a concept, that, when applied to environments, ensures that facilities, products, and services are usable by all people.

Recommended Universal Design for Health Care:

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| ✓ Weather protection at entrance doors | ✓ Mammography machines that can be used on a woman in a seated position |
| ✓ Power door operators at interior and exterior entrances | ✓ A portable, amplified communication system |
| ✓ Spaces left open but dispersed in waiting areas | ✓ More than one accessible toilet and dressing room |
| ✓ Chairs that can be set at different heights | ✓ A TTY for use by people who are deaf |
| ✓ Scales with grab bars or one that allows people to be weighed while sitting in a wheelchair | ✓ Staff awareness and training in using the National Telephone Relay System |
| ✓ Motorized, adjustable-height treatment and examining tables and chairs | ✓ Staff receive disability awareness and sensitivity training |

Building Livable Communities

A livable community:

- Provides affordable, appropriate, accessible housing
- Ensures accessible, affordable, reliable, safe transportation
- Adjusts the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility
- Provides work, volunteer, and education opportunities
- Ensures access to key health and support services
- Encourages participation in civic, cultural, social, and recreational activities

Within each of these six areas, a livable community strives to maximize people's independence, assure safety and security, promote inclusiveness, and provide choice. (Creating Livable Communities, NCD 2006)

Federal Legislative Activity

Senator Harkin Reintroduces Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in April of 2007. S. 1050. A bill to amend the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Public Health Service Act to set standards for medical diagnostic equipment and to establish a program for promoting good health, disease prevention, and wellness and for the prevention of secondary conditions for individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes.