

## **Definition of universal accessibility**

The concept of universal accessibility is primarily related to building or site design, whereby all visitors, or “users,” have equal access throughout public buildings or other public areas.

In concrete terms, universal accessibility allows for unfettered physical access to public buildings or sites; allows all visitors to find their way around independently; allows for freedom of movement; ensures that services are accessible by all visitors or users; and ensures that all visitors or users experience the same treatment and benefit from opportunities offered in equal measure...at the same time, in the same way.

Universal accessibility is achieved through the appropriate design and development of buildings, public spaces and urban infrastructure, creating an environment in which the needs of all members of the population are met, including members with functional limitations. For example, buildings can be constructed with gradual slopes leading to their entranceways, usable by all, rather than have an access ramp for some and stairs for others. Also, sidewalks can be designed so that benches, garbage cans and parking meters do not constitute obstacles for any individual.

It is likewise possible, given the collective will, to expand the notion of universal accessibility to include other areas besides the design and development of public buildings and other public areas. When applied to programmes and services, universal accessibility entails: establishing and implementing programmes, services and protocols that respond to the needs of all clientele for whom the programmes and services are intended, including fair criteria for determining eligibility, as well as determining fair parameters for how the actual benefits and services become available to the population at large.

In regards to the sectors of communication and information, universal accessibility means: establishing communication-information strategies and methods that take into account, and indeed reach, their global clientele, including those with functional limitations.

In short, universal accessibility concerns all aspects related to city life, and targets the entire population. All citizens can benefit from the principle.

Universal accessibility, whether in the area of barrier-free design, enlightened programmes and services, or the proper dissemination of information, is fast becoming the norm around the world -- and there can be no looking back.

Adopted by the Committee overseeing the follow-up to the  
Montreal Summit on Universal Accessibility

Committee members:

**City of Montreal**  
**Comité régional des associations pour la déficience**  
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**Regroupement des organismes de promotion du Montréal**  
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