

A GUIDE TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS FOR HERITAGE PLACES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Purpose

These guidelines provide owners, managers and developers of heritage places with useful information to assist in providing universal access to heritage places. The guide sets out the statutory framework, conservation principles and process for determining the access requirements of a heritage place as well as providing examples of the successful adaption of heritage places to provide universal access.

These guidelines demonstrate how universal access can be aligned with the conservation and adaptive reuse of heritage places. While each situation presents its own unique opportunities and limitations, the use of innovative thinking can overcome these barriers and facilitate equal access to heritage places for all users.

For further information, there are more detailed guides to overcoming the practical problems associated with providing universal access, some of which are included in the resources section of these guidelines.

Overview

It can be challenging to meet universal access requirements at heritage places. Nevertheless, fair, dignified and independent access for everyone should be available at all places. By following the principles of universal design, which aims to create environments that meet the needs of the greatest number of people regardless of age and ability, benefits for the wider community can be achieved.



ABOVE: Armadale District Hall, WA

Ramp installed at main entrance, sympathetic with the symmetrical façade of the building with steps leading up to the main entrance. Non-intrusive addition.

Each heritage place is unique and the level of access which can be achieved is dependent on the characteristics of the place. The goal is to create maximum accessibility with minimal impact on heritage fabric.

Legislation

Buildings in Western Australia are subject to the requirements of the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA), which requires that people with disabilities are given equal opportunity to access premises without discrimination. The DDA is complemented

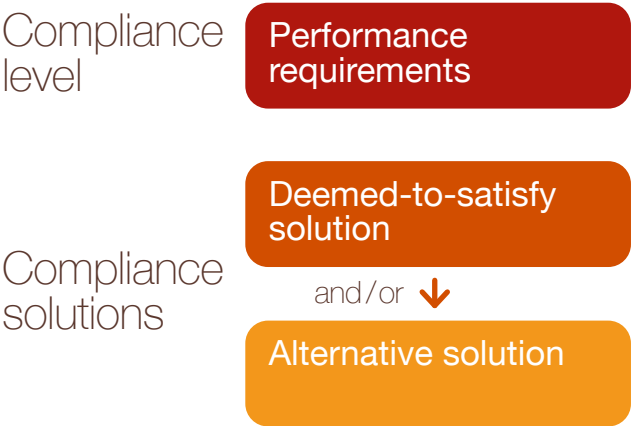
by state legislation including the *Disability Services Act 1993* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of impairment.

The *Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standard 2010* (Premises Standards) is legislation under the DDA, which came into effect in May 2011. The Premises Standards provide clarity to industry regarding compliance with the DDA and establish performance requirements. The *National Construction Code* (NCC) contains these requirements and is applied in Western Australia through the *Building Act 2011*, which adopts the Building Code of Australia (BCA) now incorporated into Volumes 1 and 2 of the NCC.

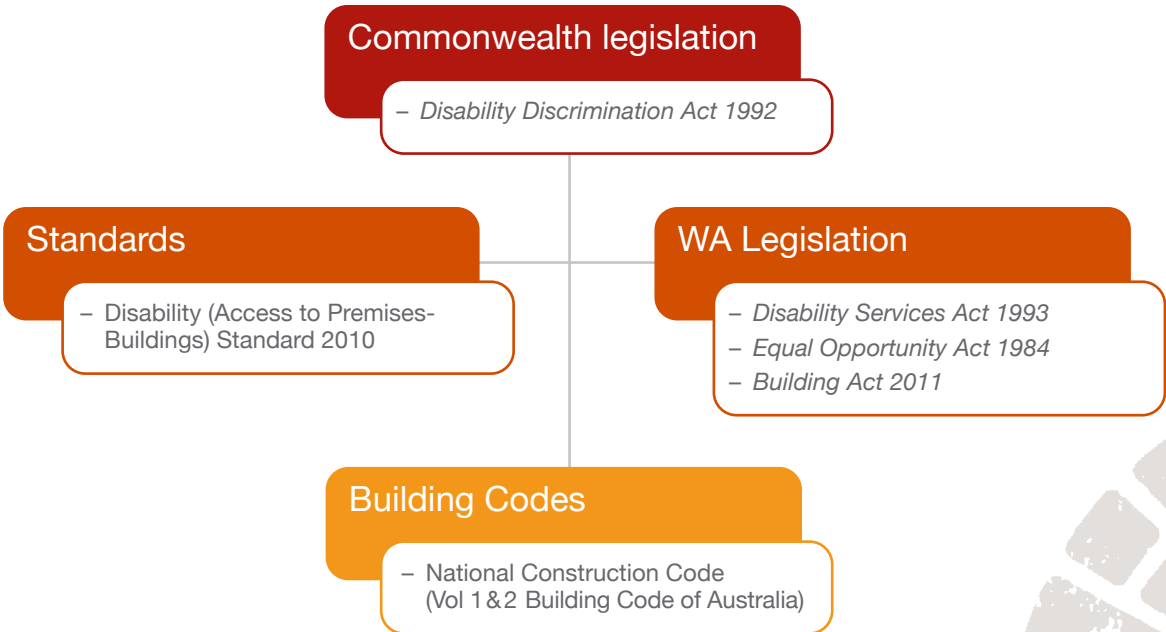
The NCC is not applied retrospectively to heritage places, any new work or change of use is required to comply with the Code. Adaptive reuse and the upgrading of heritage places should be seen as an opportunity to facilitate access not previously available.

Under the NCC, compliance with the performance requirements can be met by either a Deemed-to-Satisfy solution or an alternative solution. Alternative solutions must satisfy the performance requirements and be approved by a building surveyor.

NCC



Cultural heritage in Western Australia is protected under the *Heritage Act 2018* and includes the provision for State and local level statutory listings. However, there is usually an acceptable way to adapt and update a heritage place while respecting its heritage significance. If you have identified that your property is heritage listed, we recommend contacting your local government as specific guidelines and approvals may apply regarding works to heritage places. For further information, see the DPLH guidelines in the resources section.



Guiding Principles

Universal Design

Legislation provides guidance for the minimum requirements for disabled access. By following the principles of universal design, the minimum standards can not only be exceeded but best practice and access for all can be achieved.

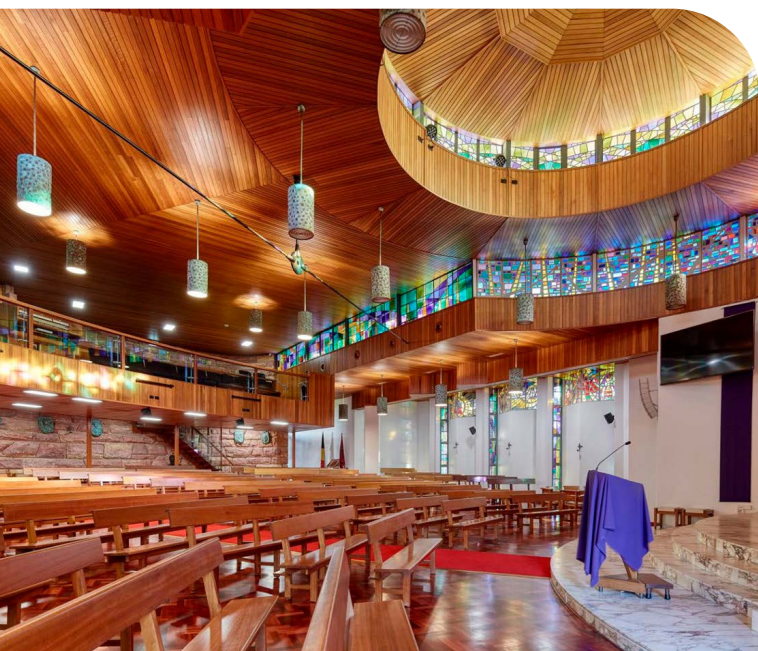
The application of universal design principles creates an environment which is utilised, understood and accessible to the widest range of users. Universal design principles promote inclusion and can be applied to new buildings and in the adaption of existing buildings including heritage places and relates to the management and maintenance of places as well as the provision of information and services.

The principles include:

- Equitable use
- Flexibility in use
- Simple and intuitive use
- Perceptible information

BELOW: Aquinas College Chapel, WA

Hearing loop installed beneath flooring enabling auditory function for the hearing impaired with minimal impact on existing fabric.



ABOVE: Kellerberrin Post Office, WA

Removable ramp installed over entry step. Minimal, reversible impact on significant tiling.

- Tolerance for error
- Low physical effort
- Size and space for approach and use
- Able to be used by everyone

To practically apply these principles and create universal access, heritage places should aim to include the following provisions where possible:

- Accessible common entrance
- Accessible parking, if parking is available on site
- Accessible sanitary facilities
- Accessibility on all levels
- Interpretive information in a variety of formats
- Legible signage
- Tactile indicators
- Appropriate lighting and luminescence contrast
- Hearing augmentation

Without intervention, heritage places are not always compatible with universal access requirements. Through creative thinking, a balance can be reached and if necessary provided through alternative solutions.

Heritage Conservation

Western Australia's heritage places are an integral part of our cultural identity which contribute to our sense of place and represent changes in society over time. The cultural significance of heritage places is embodied in their design, fabric, features and use as well as their association with people and events. The sustainability of heritage places is dependent on their continued use and ongoing connection with communities which is often achieved through adaptive reuse. However, it is important that any changes to heritage places strive to respect and conserve the significant elements. These elements are outlined in the Statement of Significance and describe the cultural heritage value of the place, encompassing aesthetic, historic, scientific and social values.

The **Burra Charter** is the internationally-recognised guiding document for best practice conservation of heritage places. Produced by ICOMOS Australia, the Burra Charter includes guiding principles which specify that adaption should involve minimal change to significant fabric, and changes which reduce cultural significance should be reversible. This approach should guide any works to facilitate universal access at heritage places.

Conservation Management Plans (CMP) are practical guides in the management of heritage places, which provide policies to manage future change. For further information, see the DPLH guidelines in the resources section.

Process

Step 1

review

Significance



Access
evaluation



Consultation

Step 2

planning

Accessibility solutions



Step 3

implementation

Access plan

The recommended process for identifying access barriers and developing strategies that enable universal access while balancing heritage conservation includes:

Step 1 - Review

Significance

- Determine the cultural heritage significance of the place, identifying significant elements and features as well as areas of conservation sensitivity.
- Draw on existing documentation (CMP, Statement of Significance) where available.
- If the place is listed at a local or state level visit our heritage places and listings database **inHerit** for more details.
- For major projects and State Registered places, engagement of a heritage professional is required. For help finding a consultant, visit our heritage trades and professionals directory **inContact**.
- If you are unsure of any aspects regarding State Registered places, contact the **Heritage Development Team** at DPLH.

Access Evaluation

- Undertake an access evaluation, to determine existing barriers to access, any outdated services and the level of accessibility required at the place. Engage a heritage professional, specialising in universal access if necessary.
- Identify required compliance under NCC.
- Consider access areas including the entrances, paths, parking, toilets, level changes (stairs and lifts), interpretation and communication, signage and lighting.
- If changes are required, consider whether they are reasonable, is physical alteration required to improve access, will this alteration impact significance fabric or features?

BELOW: The State Buildings, WA

Platform lift installed for basement access.
Discrete addition with minimal impact to frontage.



ABOVE: Supreme Court (1903), WA

Lift installed into existing light well. Pre-cast concrete lift inserted into the space, utilising existing windows at basement, ground and first floor as lift openings to reduce impact on original fabric.

Consultation

- Undertake user consultation based on the size of the heritage place and scale of the proposed works.
- Consider contacting an access consultant who can advise on the appropriate user groups and level of consultation required.

Step 2 - Planning

Accessibility Solutions

- Develop a range of solutions which provide the greatest level of access with the minimum amount of modification to significant heritage fabric.
- Consider compliance with NCC, necessary building permits and statutory approvals for heritage and planning.

Conservation Checklist:

- Are new elements clearly distinguishable from original fabric?
- Are new features sympathetically designed and consistent with the size and scale of the place?
- Are changes reversible?

Options should be fully explored and the impact of each assessed before a final option is selected.

Step 3 - Implementation

Access Plan

- Establish a site-specific list of actions needed to enable access to the place, these should include alternative solutions as well as any physical alterations.
- Develop a **Heritage Impact Statement (HIS)** determining how the proposed works will affect the heritage significance of the place. For major projects consider engaging a heritage professional, for help finding a consultant, visit our heritage trades and professionals directory **inContact**.



ABOVE: Nedlands Park Masonic Hall, WA

Installation of external lift in the adjacent laneway, providing access to the first floor. The new feature is contemporarily designed, consistent with the size, scale and colour scheme of the existing building.

- Should access not be possible without severe negative impact on the cultural heritage significance of a place, mitigation measures should be proposed to reduce the impact of access barriers.
- Apply for the relevant permits and or approvals, providing as much information as possible. Early consultation with the **Development Team** is recommended for larger projects
- Provide training for staff and volunteers regarding universal access and the needs of people with disabilities.
- Prioritise implementation of the Access Plan if necessary, according to need and available resources.
- Develop a schedule for review of the Access Plan, including a maintenance schedule of any new access features. Allocate responsibility for review process.

Resources

For further information, refer to the following documents:

Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage Guidelines

Guide to Developing Heritage Places

Heritage Impact Statement Guide

An Information Guide to Conservation Management Plans

Universal Access in Heritage Buildings

Improving access to heritage buildings:
A practical guide to meeting the needs of people with disabilities, 1999 - Eric Martin

Access to heritage places guidelines: NSW 2018 – Eric Martin & Associates Architects

Access to heritage places: VIC 2018 – Eric Martin & Associates Architects

Access for all to heritage places, 2008 - Heritage Council of Victoria

International guides

Easy Access to Historic Buildings, 2015 – Historic England

Providing for Physical Access to Heritage Places, 2011 - New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga

Legislative compliance

A guide to the building approvals process in Western Australia, 2015 – Building Commission

Guideline on the application of the Premises Standards, v.2 2013 – Australian Human Rights Commission

Conservation Guidelines for Building Surveyors, 2002 - Australian ICOMOS

Upgrading Existing Buildings Handbook 2020 – Australian Building Codes Board

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