

POSITION STATEMENT

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Introductory statement of the purpose of the paper

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) acknowledges and supports the principles of universal design as a prerequisite for participation and inclusion in society. Universal design is a strategic approach to planning and design for human diversity, social inclusion and equality, defined as *“the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design”*ⁱ.

Statement of the position being taken

The WFOT encourages all member organizations to promote universal design as a means of reducing discriminating barriers in society, and to be a resource for partners seeking expertise in universal design. The WFOT will strive to incorporate universal design in all WFOT products and published material.

WFOT advocates universal design as the principle that underlies the constructed environment, products, transportation, technology as well as services and attitudes.

Statement of the significance of the position to society

The worldwide growing interest in universal design is based on several factors:

- Its benefit to the population as a whole
- increased life expectancy
- a growing younger population living with functional limitations
- the importance of human rights and equality of opportunities
- the relation between disability, health and the environment.
- a growing number of countries have anti-discriminatory legislation that supports and/or demands universal design.

Statement of the significance of position or issue to occupational therapy

Occupational therapists have the knowledge and skills to be experts in universal design for the following reasons:

- Occupational therapists are experts in the interaction between the person, occupational performance and the social, cultural and physical environment to optimize inclusion and participation.
- Occupational therapists promote occupational justice
- Occupational therapists collaborate with partner agencies to reduce the barriers to participation and inclusion.

ⁱThe principles of universal design *Version 2.0 - 4/1/97*. Bettye Rose Connell, Mike Jones, Ron Mace, Jim Mueller, Abir Mullick, Elaine Ostroff, Jon Sanford, Ed Steinfeld, Molly Story, and Gregg Vanderheiden. Major funding provided by: The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. *Copyright 1997 NC State University, The Center for Universal Design*