



VisitAble Housing

Introduction to VisitAbility

Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

September 2014

Concept of VisitAble (Visit + Able) Housing

- Visit + Able
- Three basic accessibility features that provide easy access on the main level for everyone.
 1. No step entrance
 2. Wider doorways and clear passage on the main floor
 3. A main floor bathroom (or powder room) that can be accessed by visitors who use mobility devices



1. No step entrance (at the front, back or side of the house)



2. Wider doorways and clear passage on the main floor



3. A main floor bathroom (or powder room) that can be accessed by visitors who use mobility devices



VisitAble Housing in North America

- First introduced in North America in 1986.
- Eleanor Smith and a group of advocates for people with physical disabilities.
- The vision of the VisitAbility movement was to create an inclusive community where people with mobility challenges can visit their families, friends, and neighbours without barriers.

International Trends in VisitAble Housing

- USA, Australia, UK and other European countries - Much progress made in advancing VisitAble housing
- Canada - Lagging behind those countries in terms of legislation, public education, and incentives

Issues and Gaps

- Architectural barriers for visiting relatives or friends who use mobility devices
- Unprepared housing industry to meet needs of the growing aging population
- A lack of housing stock with basic accessibility features in Canada
- Changing housing needs of residents over the lifetime of a house
- Hostile home structures to those with mobility difficulties
- Few VisitAbility regulations and policies in Canada

Reasons for VisitAble Housing

People with Mobility Difficulties and Aging Population

- One in six Canadians (14.3%) having a disability
- One third of all Canadians aged 65 years or over with mobility problems
- Older adults aged 65 years and over accounting for 14.1% of the Canadian population
- Older adults more than one-fifth of the population by 2026 and one-quarter of the population by 2056



Reasons for VisitAble Housing (cont.)

Aging in Place

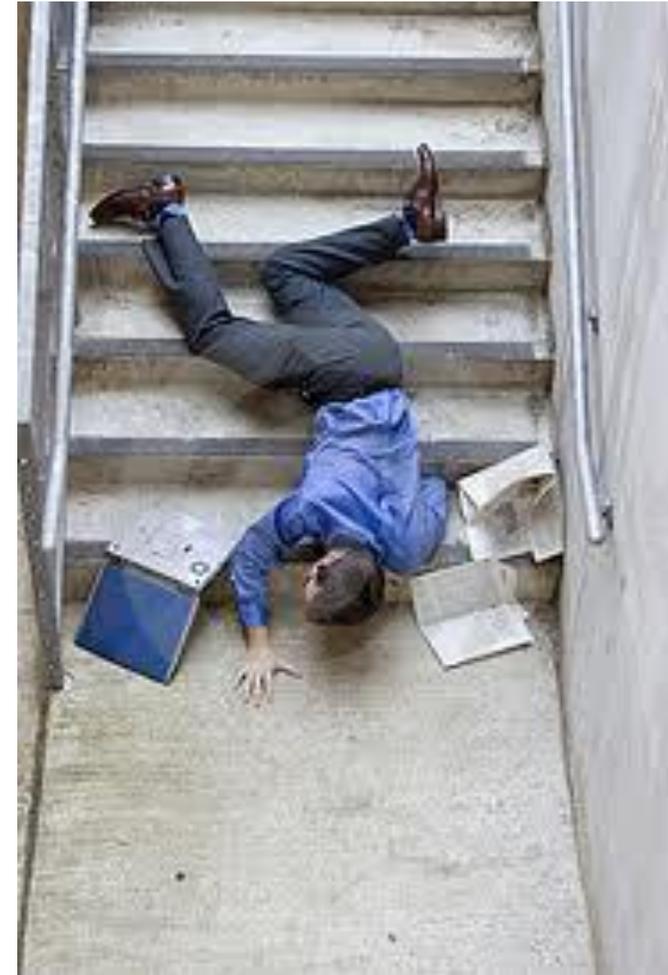
- People can remain in their own home as they get older, instead of moving to specific institutional residential care facilities.
- The vast majority of adults aged 55 or older (89%) like to age in place.
- Seniors less likely to move to an institution or care home with their homes equipped with some accessibility features.
- A sense of independence and control, proximity to family, familiarity, safety and security, and being near friends.



Reasons for VisitAble Housing (cont.)

Falls and Injuries

- Over 50% of falls that older adults suffer occur in their own home.
- Staircases are one of the common areas within the home where falls occur.
- Stairs are the leading cause of serious falls among community-living elderly, accounting for about one-third of all fatal falls.
- A large portion of Canadian older adults are hospitalized after a fall on stairs or steps in their homes.



Marketability and Advantages

- Easy access to the house
- People with mobility difficulties, those with young children in strollers, those carrying large and heavy shopping items, furniture, or equipment
- Aging in place
- Community participation and social integration
- Reduced costs for home renovations at a time of mobility changes

Aging in Place
*Mom & Dad Want to Stay Home...
Now What?*

Marketability and Advantages (cont.)

- Reduced need for more costly personal care services
- Reduced risks of fall or injuries
- Prevention of premature institutionalization of older adults
- Invisible accessibility features and increased safety
- Aesthetic appeal



Positive Impacts on the Society As a Whole

- Fewer injuries to older people and young children
- Reduced use of acute care hospitals and rehabilitation facilities
- Safer work environments for both paid and unpaid care-givers
- Less demand for home modifications, assistive equipment and paid assistance for people with mobility difficulties
- Less demand on institutional care arrangements for older people and people with a disability



Costs of VisitAble Housing

- When VisitAbility features are planned for at the outset, additional costs are minimal.
- Most of additional costs is related to creating the no step entrance, rather than interior design.
- Retrofits of a conventional home to make it a VisitAble home costs significantly more than building a VisitAble home.



Additional Costs Associated VisitAble Housing

Additional costs related to VisitAble homes vary.

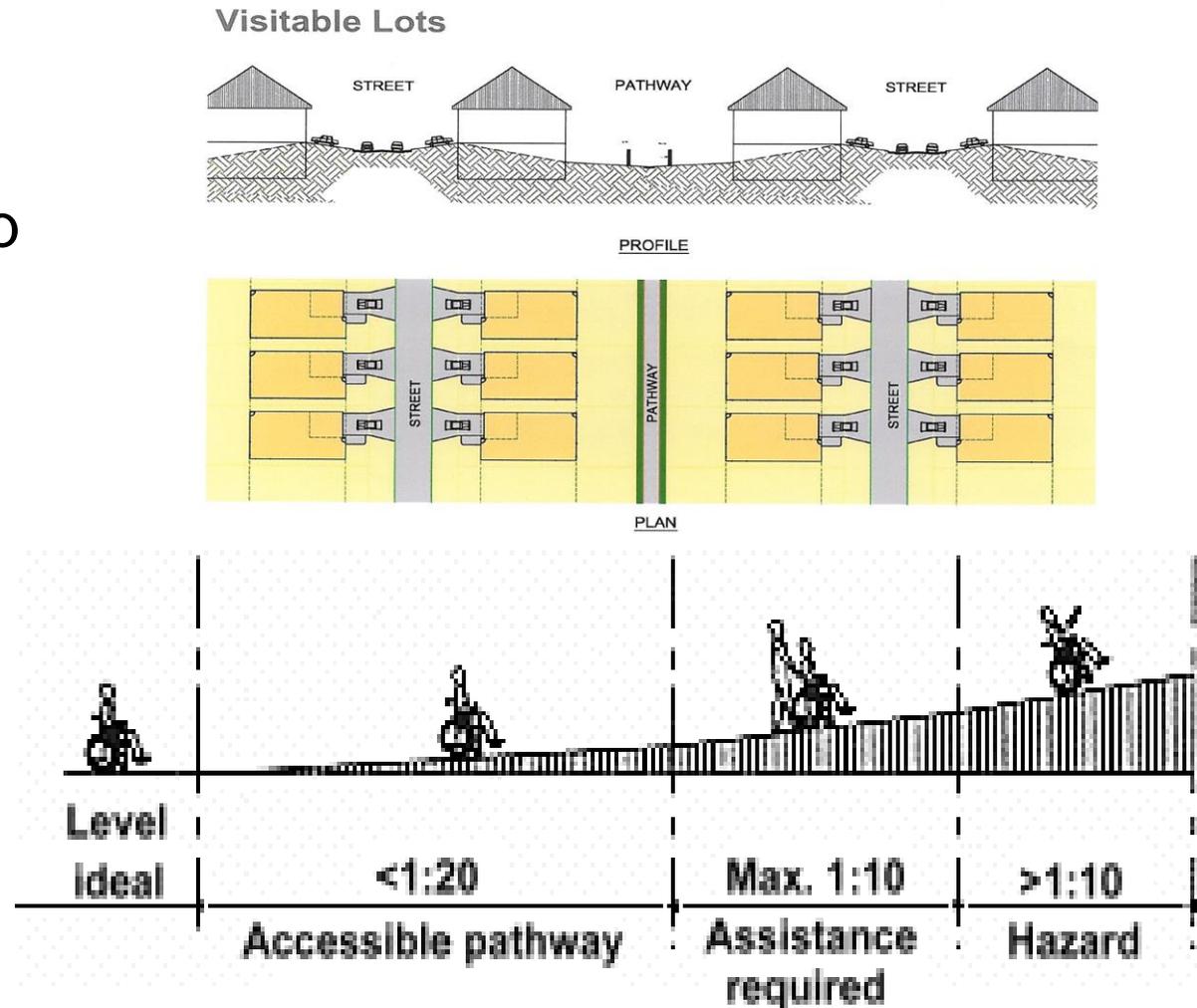
- 67 VisitAble homes in Atlanta - Roughly \$25
- Concrete Change - As little as \$200
- Buffalo and Rochester, NY - Less than \$1,000
- Naperville, Illinois - \$500 - \$5,000
- Bolingbrook, USA - \$2900 in average (1.5% of the total cost)
- Bridgwater neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba - \$0 - \$10,000

Factors That Affect Costs

- Topography – land development for no-step entrance
- Land and Utility services (e.g., sewer lines, pathways, lighting)
- Basement (e.g., window wells, depth of basement, foundation walls)
- Reduced living spaces (e.g. compensating reduced living spaces due to wider hallways and bathroom on the main level by increasing square footage of the house)

Construction and Technical Challenges

- Lot drainage plan and sewer lines
- Elevation of slope for no-step entrance
- Livable basement - window wells, depth of basement, foundation walls, etc.



Policy Development for VisitAble Housing

- Mandatory vs. voluntary
- Requirement to publicly funded housing vs. private housing
- Incentives for builders (e.g., fast tracked permit process, tax credits, subsidies, certificates)
- Incentives for housing consumers (e.g., tax credits, subsidies)
- Full vs. partial adoption of VisitAble housing
- Application to only new homes vs. to new homes and major renovations
- Application to select types of dwellings (e.g., single family homes, multi-family dwellings, condos, age-restricted housing (55+), social housing)

Policies in VisitAble Housing in Canada

2014 Building By-Law, Vancouver, British Columbia

- For all newly built homes, including condos and apartments
- Wider doors, stairs and hallways.
- Three-piece bathrooms on the main floor that allow room for independent use by a person in a wheelchair.

Accessibility Design Standards and VisitAble Housing Guidelines, Winnipeg, Manitoba

- Winnipeg's 2010 Accessibility Design Standards defines VisitAble housing.
- The Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation provided VisitAble Housing Guidelines that builders must follow when they build VisitAble homes in Bridgwater neighbourhoods.

Policies in VisitAble Housing in Canada

2003 Zoning By-Law, Saanich, British Columbia

- Mandatory guidelines for most newly-constructed apartment or congregate housing uses with elevators.
 - Three VisitAbility features required.
 - Other accessibility features required: reinforcement of bathroom walls for future installation of grab bars, and accessible door handles, switches, and outlets.
- Voluntary guidelines for single family and townhouse dwellings.

Recommendations to Promote VisitAble Housing

- Develop policies that promote VisitAble housing (e.g., National Building Code, provincial building codes, standards, ordinances, guidelines)
- Provide subsidies and support for VisitAble housing
- Include VisitAble housing in housing development projects
- Develop information materials on VisitAble housing for public awareness
- Launch an awareness campaign on VisitAble housing (e.g. seminars, website, pamphlets, design contest, show homes)
- Foster partnerships among stakeholders to promote VisitAbility

Recommendations to Promote VisitAble Housing

- Encourage educational institutions for housing professionals to include the concept of VisitAble housing in their curriculum
- Study costs associated with building VisitAble homes
- Study the feasibility of developing and maintaining a housing registry and/or labelling program to identify VisitAble homes
- Develop guidelines on VisitAble housing for housing professionals
- Develop VisitAble home designs
- Develop a renovation action plan for public housing units for VisitAbility
- Encourage mortgage and insurance providers to offer discounts to those who build, purchase, or renovate VisitAble/adaptable homes.

VisitAbility Project

- Canadians are working together to promote VisitAble housing in Canada.
- 3 year national initiative (May 2013 – March 2016).
- **Goal:** To promote VisitAble housing in Canada.
- **Funder:** The VisitAbility Project is supported by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program — Disability Component.
- **Lead organization:** The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS)
- **Six VisitAbility Task Forces across Canada:**
Three First Nations in Vancouver Island, BC; Richmond, BC; Edmonton, AB; Winnipeg, MB; Ottawa, ON; Kitchener and Waterloo, ON

For More Information

Please visit:

<http://VisitAbleHousingCanada.com>

or

Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

56 The Promenade

Winnipeg, MB R3B 3H9

(204) 287-8411

Fax: (204) 284-5343

TTY: (204) 475-6223

Email: VisitAbility@disabilitystudies.ca