

## VisitAble Housing Standards

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this document is to establish basic accessibility requirements for the design and construction of newly built dwellings, by providing reasonable criteria for VisitAbility. The primary goal is to make one level of the home (the VisitAble floor) usable by all individuals, regardless of age or ability. VisitAbility is defined as: one step-free entrance, wider doors and hallways, and at least a two-piece washroom on this same level. This document is not intended to suggest the need for full universal design or full accessibility but simply the requirements that pertain to VisitAbility (as defined by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation). It is also not intended to contradict any section of the building code, or zoning requirements, in Ottawa, Ontario. Please consult an architect in your jurisdiction to ensure compliance to provincial or territorial codes, as well as municipal zoning requirements.

### **1. Step-Free Entrance:**

Every newly built dwelling shall be provided with at least one step-free entrance, approachable from a parking area or public way. This step-free entrance should have a slope no greater than 1 in 12 (a slope of 1 in 20 is preferred, when site conditions are favorable). This entrance can be accessed from a sidewalk, a driveway, a garage floor, or other useable route; it may be located at any entrance to the home. If the step-free entrance is located in the garage, a door bell button should be located outside the overhead garage door. In a case where a lot is so steep that it can't be graded to a maximum slope of 1 in 12, the driveway may have to exceed a 1 in 12 slope. In this case, and upon approval of a variance by the permit office, the builder may construct a maximum 1 in 12 slope leading from the driveway to the step-free entrance.

### **2. Doors and Hallways:**

All exterior and interior doors shall not be less than 915mm or 36 inches in width and 2032mm or 80 inches in height. The minimum width of a hallway should not be less than 1100mm or 43 ¼ inches and shall not have any steps or changes in level on the VisitAble floor. In no way shall the width of the hallway be less than required by the building code if 1100mm or 43 ¼ inches is not possible.

### **3. Washroom/Powder Room on the VisitAble floor:**

There shall be at least one washroom/powder room, containing at least 1 water closet (toilet) and one lavatory (sink), on the VisitAble floor served by the step-free entrance.

*EXCEPTION: If a step-free entrance is located at a level other than the level closest to grade, such as the lower level of a split level home, and a washroom or powder room that complies with these requirements is located on the same level as the step-free entrance, then a first floor washroom/powder room shall not be required.*

All washrooms, bathrooms and powder rooms shall meet all applicable building code requirements. It is not essential, although it is helpful, to have a minimum turning radius (1500mm x 1500mm or 59 1/16 inches x 59 1/16 inches) inside a residential washroom, bathroom or powder room on the VisitAble level. In a small washroom, bathroom or powder room, the individual using a mobility device can roll in forward and roll out backward. A

minimum 915mm or 36 inch clear path should be provided to all fixtures and the room must be designed in a manner that will allow the user to be able to shut the door when using the room. The bathroom, washroom or powder room door may be hinged to swing out to provide more room, if the hallway design provides the proper clearances. A pocket door might be another option if there are no design limitations in selecting this type of door (e.g. ample distance from a second floor stairwell).

## **Other Features to consider**

### **A. Electrical Wall Switches:**

In all newly built dwellings, all wall switches controlling light fixtures and fans shall be located at a height not to exceed 1200mm or 47 ¼" above the finished floor. Height shall be determined by measuring from the finished floor to the center of the switch. One height consideration is 1100mm or 43 ¼ inches.

*EXCEPTION: This requirement does not apply where the use of special equipment dictates otherwise as required by the manufacturer.*

### **B. Electrical Wall Receptacles/Outlets:**

In all newly built dwellings, all wall receptacles shall be located at a height not less than 458mm or 18 inches above the finished floor. Height shall be determined by measuring from the finished floor to the center of the receptacle.

*EXCEPTION: This requirement does not apply where the use of special equipment dictates otherwise as required by the manufacturer.*

### **C. Wall Reinforcement:**

Bathroom walls shall be provided with wood blocking installed flush within wall framing to support grab bars if needed, or desired, in the future. The wood blocking shall be located from 628mm to 1200mm or 24 ¾ to 47 ¼ inches above the finished floor. The wood blocking shall be located in all walls adjacent to a toilet, shower stall or bathtub. All bathrooms, washrooms and powder rooms shall meet all applicable requirements. Another option for wall reinforcement would be to install 19mm or ¾" plywood sheeting (floor to ceiling) in the above mentioned areas to avoid limitations on grab bar placement, if needed or desired.