



VisitAble

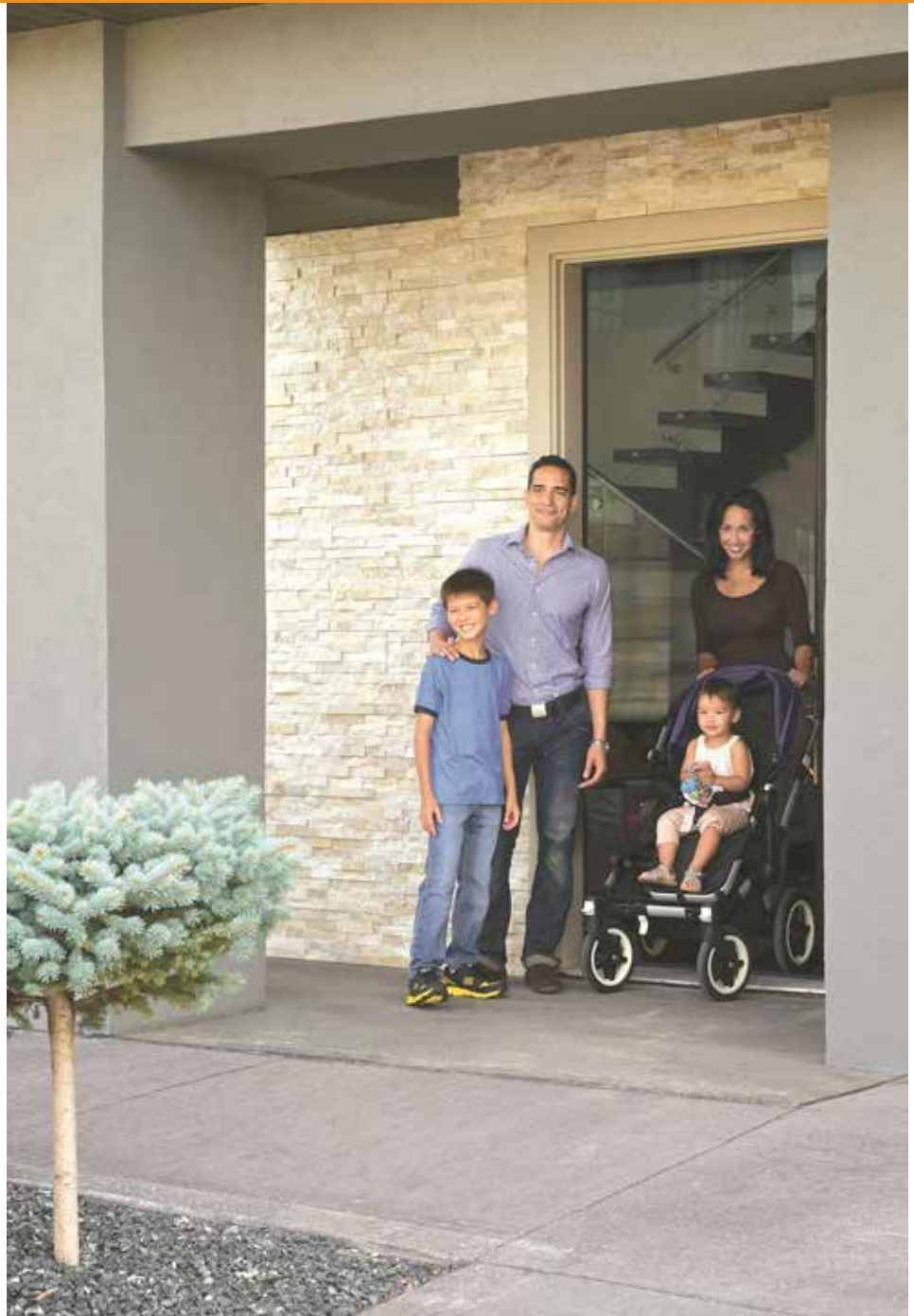
Housing Canada

VisitAble Housing

is the concept of building homes with basic accessibility on the main level for visitors of all ages and mobility.

It's as easy as 1, 2, 3

- 1 No Step Entrance
- 2 Clear Passageways
- 3 Accessible Bathroom



VisitAbleHousingCanada.com

For Home Buyers • Building Professionals • Policy Makers

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The house the Davises built

Style on a budget



Photo: Kevin and Cathy Davis relax in their new home (bottom photo)

Functional style was top-of-mind for Cathy and Kevin Davis when they were looking for a new home after a sudden injury. The Winnipeg couple in their early 40s were looking for a bungalow, and ended up buying a VisitAble home in the Bridgwater subdivision in 2013. “We thought, when we move, let’s get a bungalow where the bathroom and laundry are all on one floor,” says Kevin Davis, an audio engineer. “The sales agent pointed out it was a VisitAble lot. It was the first time we’d heard of VisitAble homes, but we thought it would work for us.”

Their former home was a century-old house on three floors, with a bathroom on the second level and the laundry room in the basement. Right before their house hunt, Cathy Davis, a federal civil servant, experienced an Achilles rupture during a dance class that required her to use crutches, which made it tough to get around the old house for five months. “We thought this could happen again, and we didn’t want to be in a similar situation again,” says Kevin

Davis. The couple plans to stay in their new house as they age.

Inside the thoughtfully designed bungalow, a no-step front entrance leads to the main floor, which features wide hallways, a high-ceilinged great room that transitions from dining to living space, and a kitchen with quartz countertops and a generously sized island for preparing meals or entertaining. “We built it, and we had a hand in choosing all aspects of it. Everything works and everything is really convenient,” says Kevin Davis. The master bedroom’s



ensuite bathroom includes a five-foot fibreglass shower with a towel bar that can be swapped for a grab bar later on, as well as a large main floor guest bathroom. To supplement the main floor's two bedrooms, the basement includes another two bedrooms.

Crafted by Discovery Homes, the 1286-square-foot house also met the couple's budget. "We splashed out on the lighting and added money to the budget to go beyond the basics. We figured that lighting and plumbing fixtures are like the jewelry of a house," says Davis. Now, when the couple's friends visit, they don't notice the lack of a front step: some go back outside to take a second look when told the house is VisitAble. "It's easy to imagine the house having handrails everywhere and looking like a hospital. But it doesn't look like that at all. It helps for people to really see the house," says Davis.

The couple's parents, who are in their late 70s, are relieved to avoid climbing stairs when they visit

The home's no-step front entrance is appreciated by the couple's parents, who are in their late 70s and are relieved to avoid climbing stairs when they visit. Plus, the Davises have noticed it's easier to move large bulky items in and out of the house, or to carry around a laundry basket without banging into the hallway. "We bought a freezer, and the two of us could carry it in," says Kevin Davis, with great satisfaction. Sometimes, a homeowner appreciates the benefits of a new house only after moving in.

Bridgwater by the numbers

2006: Bridgwater Project, developed by the Government of Manitoba, launched in Winnipeg. The new subdivisions, including townhouses and single-family homes, focus on VisitAbility

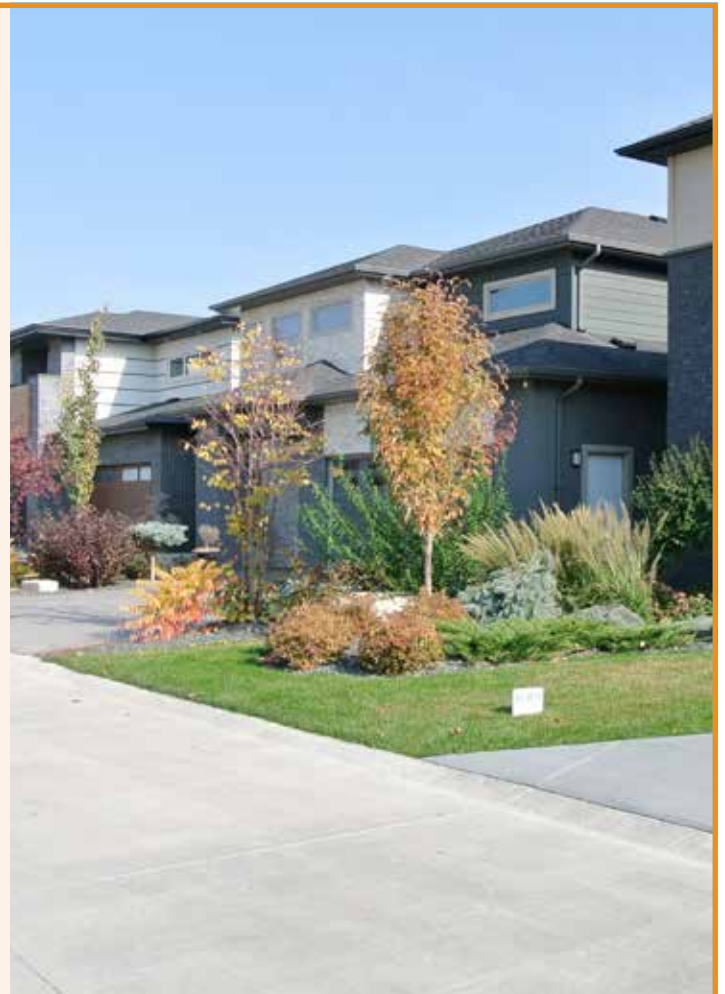
The project includes **4** neighbourhoods: Bridgwater Forest, Bridgwater Lakes, Bridgwater Trails and Bridgwater Centre

Over **50 per cent** of homes planned for Bridgwater will be VisitAble

Over **500** VisitAble houses have been built and are occupied

A projected **1,000** VisitAble houses will be built

Bridgwater Project will be completed in **2021**



Dream home with ocean view

The Roscoe-Lynch residence



Photo: Sidewalks lead to a well-used accessible side door

When Elizabeth Roscoe, 65, and Michael Lynch, 70, imagined their dream home, they knew they wanted a house that would be truly welcoming to family and friends. Roscoe, a retired judge, and her husband, a retired lawyer, envisioned a wide-open rural acreage with a view of the ocean, and they found the perfect 10-acre lot in the historic Malagash region of Nova Scotia. The resulting house, a 6000-square-foot raised bungalow, takes advantage of a natural slope that runs downward toward Tatamagouche Bay, and consists of a main floor with three bedrooms and a finished basement. “We have two sons who are married, with one grandson and two more on the way. We designed the house so the children and grandchildren can stay over,” says Roscoe. Built as a retirement home, the residence was designed to be VisitAble for guests, and to allow the couple to stay in their home as they age.

Completed in 2010, the house itself was five years in the making. Planning began well before the couple’s retirement. Roscoe and Lynch hired an architect who already owned a cottage in the area,

and emphasized the importance of having an ocean view from the house’s major rooms. “We met with him on the land and talked about where to position the house,” says Roscoe. They also discussed the wider door size and hallway size at this stage. After finalizing the floor plan, they worked with an interior designer who sketched built-in cabinetry and adjusted features such as the sightlines from the dining room table. A geothermal heat expert designed the heat pump for the in-floor heating on both floors. Finally, they chose a builder, and decided on low-maintenance building materials, including a metal roof, concrete-composite siding and Trex decking, since the couple didn’t want to spend their retirement years with a paintbrush in hand.

The house takes advantage of a natural slope that runs downward toward Tatamagouche Bay



In addition to the formal front door, built at the top of three steps, a sidewalk runs past flowerbeds to a much-used side door with a ramp for wheelchair access, ensuring the house is VisitAble. The light-filled main floor uses large windows to showcase the natural scenery, while inviting visitors to relax in the living room in front of a fireplace. In addition to the master bedroom suite, two guest bedrooms accommodate more guests.

Wheelchair-friendly

Since a good friend uses a wheelchair, the Roscoe-Lynches designed the house to be wheelchair-accessible, and took his advice to make the house work for him. They added features such as a roll-under sink and transfer seat in the guest bathroom. When their friend and his wife visit, a three-inch portable ramp allows access to the back deck. "We have a nice dinner, and then we sit out on the deck

and watch the stars. It's also good for bird watching," says Roscoe. On the pool deck level, their friend likes to swim in the 40- by 18-foot salt-water pool (it's heated by six solar panels on the roof of the pool house), or enjoy a soak in the hot tub. The pool and hot tub can be accessed via the sidewalk that leads from the side door.

The accessible side door is convenient when a grandchild arrives in a stroller, and also came in handy when the couple hosted a large lunch for Malagash residents; some guests arrived with walkers. "When we move anything heavy in, a new barbecue for example, it comes in that way. We can roll it in using a dolly," says Roscoe. Planning for the future includes extra-large closets on both floors that can be converted to an elevator later if necessary: for now, the family has determined that the main-floor closet can hold up to 60 coats, and they test the limits with large Christmas gatherings. Fun additions to the basement include an exercise room and a music room with Lynch's guitars and karaoke equipment. For its welcoming design, the house received an honourable mention in the Awards of Excellence in VisitAble Housing, organized by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS).

"We'd like to stay here as long as we can, even if we become dependent on walkers or canes," says Roscoe. After all, that view isn't going anywhere.



Photos (left to right): Lynch and Roscoe; sunset view from the back deck; guest bathroom with roll-under sink

Making the sale

What it's like to sell a VisitAble home



Photo: Real estate agents can educate clients about the elevated lots in the Bridgwater subdivision

"I would say more than half of my clients don't even realize it's VisitAble. They don't even notice they're not walking up front steps," says Phil Amero, a real estate agent in Winnipeg, who has sold about a dozen new VisitAble houses built by Artista Homes in the Bridgwater neighbourhood. "About a quarter of my clients are Baby Boomers who are maybe downsizing, thinking ahead, and they like it."

The surprising feature that homebuyers love best about the VisitAble homes, which include bungalows and two-storey houses? The garage, which doesn't have a step up to the door leading into the house, creating more useable storage space. "Anybody can appreciate the garage aspect—it's nice, you don't have the bulkiness taking up space in the garage. Two cars can really be parked in the garage."

Amero tends to sell houses in the mid-priced-range where buyers like the wider hallways: "In the higher price range, people like the grander feeling of a

wider hallway." Some clients have concerns about having a larger bathroom on the main floor, but it does offer convenience for guests who need extra space. One practical concern of homebuyers is that the house looks lower to the ground, creating worries the house may be susceptible to flooding, so Amero educates buyers about how the building lot is elevated to minimize drainage issues. "You're seeing a sleeker, lower profile. It looks more modern."

Amero normally expects the VisitAble houses to sell for a price comparable to a regular home, and says the VisitAble houses sell a little more quickly. "If it's properly marketed, the pros would outweigh the cons. Honestly, it's not different than anything else I've moved." From a sales perspective, a VisitAble home may be attractive to a broader age demographic, from young families with kids in strollers to buyers over 50 with sore knees.

The art of the possible

High-end materials add glamour to renovations

Design trends often start at the top, with aspirational home renovations that incorporate extraordinary materials. For the homeowner with a certain budget, almost anything is possible. Renovator Denis Villeneuve has been bringing dreams to life for clients in the Ottawa region for over 30 years. His company, Studio S Interiors, specializes in kitchen and bathroom renovations on a mid- to high-end budget. “Now, there’s more interest in people staying in their home as long as possible,” says Villeneuve.

Renovating a house or condominium for a well-heeled client who plans to live at home as they age starts with thinking about their future needs. “We are now working with a couple in their 80s, they want to keep their independence as long as they can,” says Villeneuve. In their former ensuite bathroom, the tub was too big, and the shower was too small. “Their new renovated bathroom adds a five-foot soaker tub that we sank two inches into the floor. We installed a larger walk-in shower with a built-in heated seat for those cool morning showers. The shower has a low sill, and a wide shower door for easier access.”

Luxury bathroom renovations

Bathroom renovations can be designed to suit a homeowner who uses a walker or a wheelchair, and incorporate high-end materials for an opulent look. Showers can come with fold-down seats made of Brazilian hardwood, bamboo with chrome, or a brushed nickel or oil-rubbed bronze finish. Matching bars look like towel bars but double as grab bars, offering a luxurious aesthetic that would suit a high-end hotel or spa. Villeneuve likes to add double his-and-her sinks, prized by younger couples, to increase the home’s resale value in the future.

For Villeneuve, the practices followed during renovations for clients who want to age in place spill over to other renovations. “Whenever I do a

bathroom, I try to add backing to the perimeter and shower walls behind the drywall. It adds a solid structure so that a grab bar and seat can be added in the future,” he says.

Villeneuve and his wife bought a bungalow 20 years ago that was VisitAble in a neighbourhood they loved. They appreciate the wide hallways and open spaces, no steps, and a large back deck with a ramp. “We updated the interior recently, and we are living in our future home,” says Villeneuve. Now in their late 50s and early 60s, the couple plans to stay in that house as long as they can.

Studio S Interiors shows that stylish bathrooms can incorporate accessible, practical designs and look upscale at the same time.



Photo: Studio S renovates with a barrier-free mind

Affordable luxury

Building VisitAble bungalows



Photo: Celebration Homes built 50 VisitAble bungalows in Edmonton

Customizing a house to its owner's needs and desires is something Randy Ettinger has learned to value. Since Ettinger first started building homes in the Edmonton area in 1995, his company, Celebration Homes, has worked in the mid- to high-end market. One of Ettinger's specialties is crafting new homes for families in which one member has a disability. "For example, if someone has an accident, the family might decide to sell the old house and build a new one adapted to their needs, rather than try to renovate the old home," says Ettinger. Customizable details can include, for example, an elevator in a two-storey home, a ceiling track system that allows a person to move from room to room, or kitchen cabinets where the upper cabinets fold down.

In 2010, the company started work on Touchmark at Wedgewood. A gated community, Touchmark includes bungalows and apartments on a 24-acre campus that offers a full continuum of care from independent living to long-term care. "It might be the largest cluster of VisitAble homes in the Alberta area," Ettinger says. The idea is that residents, often 80-somethings, will stay in their homes for as long as they want, then move to a higher level of care

as needed within the Touchmark community, remaining near their friends.

Celebration has built 50 bungalows at Touchmark, all of them VisitAble, with wide hallways, big doors and no-step front entrances. "The bungalows are in the mid- to high-end, and the buyers are typically successful retired people," says Ettinger. Bathrooms are all customized to the needs of homebuyers, so some suit homeowners who use walkers or wheelchairs. The bathrooms can include the buyer's choice of bathtubs or roll-in showers with seats, while all include emergency pull-cords that can summon help in case of a fall. Typical building materials might include granite countertops, no-slip ceramic tile floors and tiled showers. "Double vanities for his-and-her sinks are popular with customers," says Ettinger.

Bathrooms include bathtubs or roll-in showers with seats, as well as emergency pull cords

Detailed custom homes

As a builder, Ettinger had a short learning curve on building VisitAble houses. He learned how to prepare a building lot for a house with no front steps—the grading is different, to allow rainwater to drain away from the house. Ettinger notes that it's much cheaper to build with an eye to future accessibility than to try to renovate later. "It's easy as pie to sink the floor down for a roll-in shower on a new build. For us, it's an extra \$500 to add a roll-in shower instead of a regular shower," he says. "Bathroom designs can cost more, depending on what you want. Walk-in tubs are expensive because of the manufacturers' costs. In comparison, building with wider doors and hallways is cheap."

It's much cheaper to build with an eye to future accessibility than to try to renovate later

With close to 20 years of experience, Ettinger has built perhaps a thousand homes. "Most of ours have been highly detailed custom homes, and at the higher end," he says. He's very proud of the skilled tradespeople with whom he works. His work on accessible homes has made some practices standard, too. "Building detailed homes affords us the expertise to build for accessibility sensitive people very easily, but a lot of the thinking on VisitAble homes has flooded over to our regular homes," Ettinger says. "I like to use wide hallways and doors in our new designs now, too."



Photo: Bedroom in a Touchmark bungalow offers space to manoeuvre

Costs associated with three basic VisitAble features for new construction

In general, it's cheaper to plan for accessible features at the building stage than to try to renovate later.

1. No-step entrance

Costs: Vary widely. With planning, less than \$250

Dependent on:

- Whether the no-step entrance is achieved with a ramp or by lot grading
- Topography of the lot
- Building methods and materials
- Design of features such as drainage pipes, earthwork and depth of utilities

2. Wider doors and halls

Costs: \$0-\$25. Approximately \$5 per door

Dependent on:

- The type of house and materials used
- Number of doors
- No significant cost to increase the width of the hallway

3. Main floor VisitAble bathroom

Costs: \$0-500

Dependent on:

- Whether other accessibility features are added, such as grab bars
- On average, VisitAble bathrooms don't cost extra in new home builds

Low-rise living

Vickers Avenue units are social by design



Low-rise buildings are common when Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) constructs new social housing. A typical project on Vickers Avenue in St. John's, N.L., consists of two bungalows that each have two units, built in 2010. "They fit in nicely with the existing community," says Colleen O'Keefe, a director of engineering for NLHC.

Each unit has two bedrooms and one bathroom. In each bungalow, one unit is VisitAble, while one is fully accessible. One reason why the two units were made VisitAble is because they could be upgraded to accessible housing in the future, if needed. "The VisitAble units could be adapted later to universal design in a cost-effective way," says engineering technician Ashley Murphy.

The houses are constructed with durable, affordable building materials such as non-slip tile flooring in bathrooms. In the VisitAble units, the bathrooms include floor drains and bathtubs with reinforced walls, so grab bars could be added later. "We try and distinguish between VisitAble, accessible and fully universal housing," says O'Keefe. One idea behind the choice of rugged building materials, such as the commercial-grade flooring used throughout each unit, is that the flooring and corner protection boards can take a lot of wear and tear from, say, energetic children playing, or a walker bumping into a wall.

The units include smart design features such as lowered windows, lowered thermostats, raised outlets, lever handles on doors and plumbing fixtures, D-pull handles on cabinets, and a special mechanism to open and close windows. One attractive feature of each unit is the backyard and

exterior landscaping, which includes a patio and a lowered handle on the gate, so that it's easy for guests to come over for backyard barbecues.

Since there are no ramps at the front doors, the Vickers Avenue houses look like all other houses in the neighbourhood. One resident in an accessible unit, a 43-year-old woman who has lived there for six years, uses a wheelchair. "I love the fact that this is a single home, as opposed to an apartment building, which gives me privacy," she says. "The no-step entrance is great for bringing home groceries." The layout and design of the home enables her to be independent.

The Vickers Avenue homes are located in the Cashin Avenue neighbourhood, which is unusually flat for the region, so the lots didn't require special preparation. The houses are part of an existing, close-knit neighbourhood, with sidewalks that lead to a local community centre. One of Canada's oldest social housing sites, the neighbourhood brings together new design and established community in a fitting historical context.



Photo: Wide hallways give a spacious feeling to two bungalows on Vickers Avenue (top photo) VisitAble units

An advocate for VisitAble housing



Photo: Matt and Mary Pappert

Mary Pappert is an outspoken 85-year-old who advocates for VisitAble housing in her Kitchener, Ont. region. “When people think of VisitAble housing, they don’t think about themselves, and they don’t think about what challenges life might give them. I tell them about my experience with my husband,” she says. Pappert is a member of the VisitAble housing task force in her region, and an activist for tenants’ rights with the organization RENT (Renters Educating and Networking Together). Today, Pappert testifies before municipal and regional councils in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, trying to explain to politicians and planners what VisitAble housing means in real life for families.

When her family was young, Pappert lived in a typical house, with steps everywhere and a too-small bathroom. As she and her husband Matt Pappert aged, they downsized, moving into an apartment building that was not VisitAble. That’s when her husband had a triple bypass surgery and suffered a stroke. He lived five years longer, using a wheelchair, walker and cane.

It was difficult for Pappert to care for her husband in the non-VisitAble apartment. For example, returning to their apartment after a trip to the grocery store was needlessly tedious. There were steps to the indoor parking garage, meaning it wasn’t wheelchair accessible, so Mary Pappert had to drop Matt off at the front door lobby, drive into the underground garage, and then return to the lobby to meet her husband before heading up to their apartment.

Returning to their apartment after a trip to the grocery store was needlessly tedious

But even more difficult was planning a visit to see their children and grandchildren. The Papperts had two daughters who lived nearby in homes that weren’t VisitAble. Both houses had steps at the front of the house—sometimes, relatives would lift Matt up the front steps, so he could join the family inside. “It was very embarrassing for him to be lifted in. It goes against a man’s dignity and his self-respect,” says Pappert. Once inside either house, the bathroom became a problem: one daughter didn’t have a bathroom on the main floor, while the other had a bathroom that was too small. Since there was no accessible bathroom for Matt to use, the couple could only stay for an hour. “We just didn’t get to visit sometimes. It was just too much. Christmas was the most difficult time of year. Sometimes the family would all try to squeeze into our apartment.” That meant missing some of the fun of wedding anniversaries, holidays like Easter and Thanksgiving, and grandkids’ birthday parties.

Pappert thinks homebuyers should look for houses with basic VisitAble features, considering that they could break a leg or experience a physically limiting event at any point in life. “I love watching the TV shows where someone is buying a house. They’re gushing over the granite countertops and a grand staircase, and I think, do you ever wonder how you will get yourself, or a family member, up those stairs one day?”

Community spirit

Working for VisitAble housing in every community

VisitAble housing is a priority everywhere in Canada, including First Nations communities. And the campaign to promote VisitAble housing for First Nations communities is led by the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS). The B.C.-based not-for-profit took charge of organizing the First Nation VisitAbility Task Force from 2013 to 2016, working in partnership with two local First Nations, Beecher Bay (Sc'ianew) and Esquimalt, both located on Vancouver Island. "Although BCANDS is the lead organization in the First Nation Task Force, our collective role was to promote the benefits of VisitAble housing to First Nations communities," says Neil Belanger, the executive director of BCANDS. Part of the task force's strategy was to illustrate the benefits of VisitAble housing to First Nations communities, and suggest that VisitAble housing should be considered at both the design stage, when constructing new housing, and also when planning upgrades and renovations to existing community buildings.

Nationally, the rate of disabilities experienced by Canada's indigenous population is twice that of the overall population. Unfortunately, funding necessary

to ensure full accessibility of communities and housing is not always available within First Nations communities. As with other communities, at the planning stage, developers may not always think ahead to the future and consider how community members' accessibility needs might change as time goes on and members get older. "Accessibility within some, although not all, First Nations communities can be limited," notes Belanger. In cases when accessibility requirements aren't part of a home's design from the start, if a member loses mobility later in life, the house has to be modified quickly. If the community is not fully accessible, some residents might be excluded from events and amenities, often leading to isolation and frustration.

The rate of disabilities experienced by Canada's indigenous population is twice that of the overall population



left to right: Members of BC First Nations VisitAbility Task Force included Janice Rose, Esquimalt Nation Administrator; Ali Davis, BCANDS Disability Case Manager; Adrienne Carlson, BCANDS practicum student; Renee Ahmadi, UNBC Masters student; construction contractor with Esquimalt Nation

The First Nation VisitAbility Task Force also considers how well VisitAble housing fits within the overall community context. Some First Nations communities might not have sidewalks or paved roads, or have buildings, such as a band office, with a second floor but no elevator. “VisitAble housing is a great initiative, but it has to be paired with an accessible community to really see the benefits,” Belanger says.

Successes

Three years of work by the task force saw a number of successes, including a resolution passed by the B.C. First Nations Summit, and a national resolution passed by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in July 2015. Both resolutions commit to support for and promotion of VisitAble housing within First Nations communities across Canada. This support has led to the establishment of an AFN VisitAble Housing committee of which AFN, BCANDS and the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) are members. Importantly, these resolutions indicate that support for VisitAble housing is not only coming from political leaders but from the communities as well. “It’s vital to have community awareness and support. Without these crucial elements, there will be no buy-in from communities,” says Belanger.

Awareness of VisitAble housing is growing across Canada

Another of the task force’s accomplishments was the creation of a VisitAble housing policy that First Nations could use as a template and adopt as their own. The Beecher Bay First Nation, a member of the First Nation VisitAble Housing Task Force, updated its existing housing policies to include a VisitAble housing component. Other interested First Nations can now modify and adopt the policy to meet their communities’ needs.

Overall, a greater awareness of VisitAble housing is growing across Canada. One example Belanger points to is Seabird Island, a First Nations community located on the mainland of B.C. Seabird Island has a strong awareness of disability, says Belanger, including their membership’s disability related needs. This awareness means the Seabird Island Nation continually attempts to ensure that an inclusive, VisitAble and accessible community is enjoyed by all its members.



Policy influencers

VisitAble housing policy is influenced by many people across Canada, from academic researchers to city planners

It takes a community to raise a building. Across Canada, many individuals contribute to VisitAbility standards.

Christelle Montreuil is one of them. Montreuil is doing a PhD in universal design and accessibility at Laval University in Quebec City. “Here in Quebec, there’s not a lot of focus on VisitAbility in single-family homes. In commercial buildings, there’s a little more accessibility,” she says.

Montreuil’s current work is interdisciplinary, informed by the faculties of medicine and architecture, and her dissertation, which she expects to complete in 2018, is about VisitAble housing for the elderly. “With my PhD, I want to be a professor or a researcher, or start my own consulting business,” says Montreuil. Her background includes a technical degree in industrial design, a bachelor’s degree in environmental design, and a master of science degree in architecture.

In Richmond, B.C., volunteer **Tom Parker** has served on the city’s Advisory Design Panel since 2006, reviewing the designs of architects and builders, primarily for larger projects such as high-rise apartments or multi-unit townhouses. Parker is a retiree who brings a wealth of professional experience to the advisory committee. From 1992 to 2003, he worked for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. There, he was the researcher responsible for a project that resulted in the concept of FlexHousing, designing homes to adapt to residents as they age and their needs change.

In the lower mainland of B.C., a significant concern is affordable housing. As a result, there’s more of a focus on ensuring townhouses, condominiums, and apartments are VisitAble, as these are more likely to be affordable for seniors and persons with disabilities than single-family homes, which tend to cost in the range of \$1 million. “I’d rather see the affordable

housing be accessible,” says Parker. For example, Richmond has a policy that stipulates developers who ensure one in 15 townhouses are VisitAble and adaptable are given the inducement of a small density increase.

Parker has seen a greater acceptance for guidelines on accessible design over the past five years. “I think the city planners are a little more aware of the benefits now, and a little more stringent with the project proponents,” he says.

In Prince George, B.C., **Hillary Morgan** is the city’s staffer assigned to accessible housing. Her background includes a bachelor’s degree in geography and a master’s degree in urban planning. From 2009 to 2011, the City of Prince George set up a VisitAble housing project that, among other measures, requires that when undeveloped city land is sold to a builder, 15 per cent of new homes must be VisitAble. Morgan started her position as a planner after that project concluded, but she can see the lasting effects. For example, she recently spoke at a Canadian Home Builders Association event, where the panel included a real estate agent, a builder and an accessibility advocate. The panel highlighted the fact that VisitAbility is easy to achieve and benefits everyone. “The builder focused on how many of the VisitAble features are easy to incorporate into the construction process, while the realtor pointed out that VisitAble features, such as larger bathrooms and bedrooms on the main floor, can also make housing more marketable,” says Morgan.

The city also has a new incentive program for multi-family dwellings, such as apartment buildings, that requires 50 per cent of new units meet adaptability standards. “The VisitAble housing project really informed the adaptability standards,” Morgan notes. Much of the research had already been done.

Accessibility Continuum Chart

Accessible housing functions on a continuum, with VisitAble housing taking the simplest form. Here are a few design features to consider in planning your home.

VisitAble housing: allows social visits by people using a mobility device

Enhanced VisitAbility: opens up more areas of the home for visitors with disabilities

Adaptable housing: can be easily modified to suit residents with disabilities

Accessible housing: meets the needs of a resident with disabilities

Universal design: accessible to all, including older adults, people with disabilities, children

Minimum Features

	VisitAble Design	Enhanced Visitability	Adaptable Housing	Accessible Housing	Universal Design
No-step entrance with accessible path to entrance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minimum doorway width of 915 mm (36 inches) with lever handles on all doors and minimum hallway width of 1,100 mm (43 inches)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accessible half bathroom with: reinforced walls and support features, lever faucets, manoeuvring space to access the sink and toilet, room for transfer space around the toilet	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Overnight space		✓	✓	✓	✓
Non-slip floor washrooms		✓	✓	✓	✓
Audio visual alarms		✓	✓	✓	✓
Kitchen allows wheelchair manoeuvring in front of all appliances		✓	✓	✓	✓
Lever faucets in kitchen		✓	✓	✓	✓
Rocker or touch-sensitive switches and controls		✓	✓	✓	✓
Raised electrical receptacles		✓	✓	✓	✓
Lower controls: light switches, thermostats, intercom, door bells, alarms pads		✓	✓	✓	✓
Adjustable heights of closet rods		✓	✓	✓	✓
Adequate lighting at entrance area		✓	✓	✓	✓
Adequate latch space for proper approach		✓	✓	✓	✓
At least one accessible bedroom			✓	✓	✓
Direct access from house into garage			✓	✓	✓
Large parking space can be converted to garage			✓	✓	✓
Stacked closet convertible to elevator shaft			✓	✓	✓
Manoeuvring space throughout home including laundry, kitchen, bedrooms			✓	✓	✓
Curbless shower with door replaceable by curtain			✓	✓	✓
Seats in showers and next to tub			✓	✓	✓
All areas of dwelling unit are accessible through use of elevator or stair lift			✓	✓	✓
Adjustable counter heights			✓	✓	✓
Off-set controls for bathtub and shower			✓	✓	✓
Adjustable closet			✓	✓	✓
Strobe lights on smoke detectors				✓	✓
Audible signals				✓	✓
Lower countertop segments				✓	✓
Seats next to bathroom fixtures				✓	✓
Off-centre bathtub controls				✓	✓
Usability balanced with aesthetics					✓
Meets needs of a range of persons without adaptation or specialized design					✓
Increased safety, convenience, and comfort for all					✓

Editor's note



Photo: Allen Mankewich

In 2013, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) launched its latest initiative on VisitAbility, called Collaborative Knowledge Building and Action for VisitAble Housing in Canadian Cities (a.k.a., the VisitAbility Project). The work was funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability Component. This initiative wrapped up in March 2016, but CCDS remains committed to promoting VisitAbility.

This digital magazine is the final product of our project, and highlights some of the great aspects of VisitAble Housing. These stories highlight lessons for homebuyers, building industry professionals and policymakers across Canada.

The concept of VisitAbility has been discussed in the United States since the 1980s. But there is still more work to be done to make it a reality.

The objective of our project was to promote VisitAbility by highlighting promising policies and best practices, and encouraging the development of strategies to promote VisitAbility. Our work showcased positive aspects of VisitAbility, including active living, social inclusion and sustainability.

The project team completed major tasks, including new research on VisitAbility, a case study on the Bridgwater neighbourhood in Winnipeg, the Awards of Excellence in VisitAble housing, and the development of promotional materials.

The project team couldn't have accomplished all of this without the tremendous support of our six task forces. Here are some highlights of their work:

- The British Columbia First Nations task force was highly successful, championing a resolution at the 2015 Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly to support the B.C. First Nations VisitAbility activities to improve housing accessibility.
- The Richmond task force focused on public education, leading several public engagements.
- The Edmonton task force worked to get VisitAbility on the radar of municipal policy makers, as well as students.
- The Winnipeg task force created modern VisitAbility standards, did community outreach, and worked with students to teach them about VisitAbility.
- The Kitchener-Waterloo task force focused on educating professionals in the housing industry, policy makers and political leaders.
- The Ottawa task force worked with municipalities in the region, forming a partnership with the City of Ottawa's Affordable Housing Unit to ensure VisitAbility in future projects, and getting VisitAbility included in the City of Ottawa's 2015 Accessibility Design Standards.

Throughout the project, we have seen changes within each community where we worked. VisitAbility is catching on as an inclusive concept as we move forward in creating more inclusive communities. What could be a stronger statement on inclusion than the ability to invite anyone into your home?

Allen Mankewich

Communications Coordinator
Canadian Centre for Disability Studies

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We would also like to thank our supporting organizations, who helped disseminate information about our project.

A full list of supporting organizations is available on the following link: <http://visitablehousingcanada.com/supporting-organizations/>

For more information and examples of VisitAble housing across Canada, consult the website at www.visitablehousingcanada.com

