



For more information about the K-W VisitAble Housing initiative:



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# Understanding Accessibility Features to Meet Housing Needs

A Guide for Real Estate Professionals & Home Seekers

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Developed by:

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region  
Kitchener-Waterloo VisitAble Housing Task Force  
*In partnership with the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies*





## A Spectrum of Accessibility Design

**VisitAble Housing** enables someone who has mobility limitations to easily visit and access the main level of the home. This is a basic standard for housing accessibility.

**Adaptable Housing** is VisitAble and has additional features so the home can be adapted economically, at a later date, to accommodate mobility needs and changes. This may also be called FlexHousing™.

**Accessible Housing** is VisitAble and includes a range of additional features to make the home, inside and out, accessible and functional for most mobility or sensory challenges.

*This guide reflects current knowledge adapted from a number of sources in Canada and the US. See last page for Reference list.*

## How to Use this Guide

This guide is divided into two sections to make it easier to focus on the level of accessibility of interest to you.

Section 1 includes VisitAble Housing design features. Use this checklist to assess a home for this basic level of accessibility.

Section 2 provides additional features to assess if a home meets higher levels of accessibility along the design spectrum.



### Overall Assessment:

Total VisitAble Features: \_\_\_\_ /3

Total Adaptable Features: \_\_\_\_ /11

Total Accessible Features: \_\_\_\_ /86

### References

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2014). *Accessible Housing by Design — House Designs and Floor Plans*. Retrieved from: [http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/acho/acho\\_001.cfm](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/acho/acho_001.cfm)

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2014). *Flexhousing Checklist: Homes that adapt to life's changes*. Retrieved from <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/61943.pdf?fr=1421086550208>

Canadian VisitAble Housing Project: Ottawa, Winnipeg, Alberta, British Columbia, Kitchener-Waterloo Task Forces. *Unpublished notes*, January 13, 2015.

Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation. (2006). *VisitAble Housing: Community Building Through VISIBLE & Adaptable Housing. A Background Report with Draft Policies, Implementation Strategies and Communication Tools*. Retrieved from <http://visiblehousingcanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Visible-Housing-Visible-housing-Community-building-2006.pdf>

Winnipeg VisitAble Housing Task Force, *VisitAble Housing Spreadsheet*, January 13, 2015.

## Exterior Features

### Adaptable

- Large parking space can be converted to garage

### Accessible

- All approaches are level or slope gently
- Parking areas have lighting positioned to illuminate ground conditions and vehicle doors on both sides. Motion activated lighting is preferred.
- Letter box is on an accessible path of travel and has a 1,500 mm (60 in.) diameter turning space in front of it
- Width of parking area is at least 2,800 mm (9 ft.); preferred 3,350 mm (11 ft.)
- Garden has easy access to house; bevelled, no-step, no-trip, threshold
- Garden has non-slip paths and decks
- Level walkways with little or no slope to garden
- Planters at various and accessible heights
- Ample clear space for patio furniture and traffic (garden)

Total: \_\_\_\_/one Adaptable Exterior Features

Total: \_\_\_\_/nine Accessible Exterior Features.

Notes:

## SECTION 1

## VisitAble Housing Features

- At least one no-step entrance, exterior threshold doesn't exceed 13 mm (1/2 in.) in height
- Main living level has minimum doorway width of 36" (915mm) and minimum hallway width of 43 1/4" (1100mm)
- Main living level has an accessible half bathroom with min. 1500mm turning radius

Total: \_\_\_\_/three of the VisitAble Housing Features.

*To be VisitAble, a home must have all three of these features.*

Notes:



No Step Entry

*VisitAbility defines a minimum level of accessible housing so these features are required starting points for the next section of this guide*



## SECTION 2

# Adaptable & Accessible Features

Adaptable and Accessible housing options MUST possess all basic VisitAble Housing features in addition to further features that allow for greater access inside and out.

While there are no exact requirements for an Adaptable or Accessible home, the more accessible features a home has, the more it can be expected to be a space that supports someone to live with independence and dignity.

*Material for this section has been adapted from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2014). Flexhousing Checklist: Homes that adapt to life's changes.*



## Electrical Outlets and Controls

### Accessible

- Extra electrical outlets
- Light switches at 1,050 mm (42 in.) from floor level
- Electrical outlets at 450 mm (18 in.) from floor level
- Control panels, thermostat controls at 1,200 mm (48 in.) from floor level
- Telephone and cable jacks at 450 mm (18 in.) from floor, close to electrical outlet
- Electrical controls and switches are at 1,050 mm (42 in.)
- Three-way switches located at the top and bottom of stairwells

Total: \_\_\_\_/seven Accessible Electrical Outlet and Control Features.

## Home Automation

### Accessible

- Full wiring for current or future automation
- Audio visual alarms installed (for visual and hearing impaired) e.g. smoke detectors

Total: \_\_\_\_/two Accessible Home Automation Features.

Notes:

## Storage Space

### Accessible

- Shelving and hanger rods with adjustable heights to suit those who would be using the space
- 200-lux light in general storage
- Switch located on outside of storage area at 1,050 mm (42 in.) from the floor
- Electrical outlet in general storage located at 450 mm (18 in.) from the floor

Total: \_\_\_\_/four Accessible Storage Space Features.

## Balcony

### Accessible

- Bevelled, no-step, no-trip, exterior threshold no higher than 13 mm (1/2 in.)
- Exterior sliding doors are 1,800 mm (72 in.) wide to ensure a minimum opening of 810 mm (32 in.) opening Minimum balcony clear width of 1,500 mm (60 in.)
- Balcony enclosure should not unduly restrict view from seated position
- Adequate lighting switches inside located at a maximum of 1,050 mm (42 in.) from the floor
- Exterior electrical outlet located at 450 mm (18 in.) from the floor

Total: \_\_\_\_/five Accessible Balcony Features.

## Entrances

### Accessible

- Barrier-free path of travel to all entrances
- Bevelled no-step, no-trip, exterior thresholds don't exceed 13 mm (1/2 in.) in height
- Entrances are covered, have level landing of 1,500 mm<sup>2</sup> (5 sq. ft.), and adequate lighting
- Porches provide sufficient width and depth to open door and accommodate a child's stroller or an adult's wheelchair or walker
- Door locks and lever handles are easily operated without the use of tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist
- Window or peepholes on exterior doors have height considerations for both children and adults
- Good lighting both inside and outside the entrance
- On the pull side of the door there should be 600 mm (24 in.) clearance along the wall at the handle edge of the door
- On the push side of the door there should be 300 mm (12 in.) clearance along the wall at the handle edge of the door
- Doorbells and intercom controls are no more than 1220mm above threshold

Total: \_\_\_\_/ten Accessible Features at \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_ entrances

### Notes:

## General Interior Features

### Adaptable

- Main living level contains kitchen, living room, washroom (convertible to three-piece bathroom) and has space usable as a bedroom
- Some rooms are designed to permit easy change of use
- Easily moveable or removable partition walls
- Cabinets and counters permit easy height adjustment
- Stairs are straight run and at least 1,000 mm (40 in.) wide, preferred 1,200 mm (48 in.) wide with reinforced walls (straight run to allow for future installation of a platform lift)
- Vertically aligned closets and appropriate framing to allow future installation of a vertical lift

### Accessible

- Open floor plan
- All areas of dwelling unit are accessible through use of residential elevator or stair lift
- Doors have easily operated opening and locking hardware
- Corridor minimum width should be 1,500 mm (60 in.)
- Easy-to-grasp continuous stair handrails
- Level floor with uniform surface texture
- Windows have sills no higher than 750 mm (30 in.) and are easily operated without the use of tight grasping, pinching or twisting of wrist
- All cabinetry and pocket doors have "D" pulls with a minimum finger space.

## Bedrooms

### Adaptable

- Adjustable heights of closet rods

### Accessible

- Minimum 1,500 mm (60 in.) on two sides of a double bed
- Switches and outlets for light control located within easy reach from the bed
- Closet rods usable from seated or standing position —1,200 mm (48 in.)
- Telephone jack near bed

Total: \_\_\_\_/one Adaptable Bedroom Feature in \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_ bedrooms  
Total: \_\_\_\_/four Accessible Bedroom Features in \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_ bedrooms.

Notes:

## Bathrooms

### Adaptable

- Wall reinforcement to allow for future installation of grab bars surrounding the walls of the toilet, bath, and shower

### Accessible

- Non-slip flooring
- Outward opening door or pocket door
- Free space in front of bathtub along its entire length
- Wheel-in shower with no threshold
- Easy-to-use (e.g. lever type), pressure-balanced, temperature-regulating faucets
- Modular vanity that permits height changes
- Rounded corners on counters provide safety
- Adjustable-height shower head
- Knee clearance under basin when sitting
- Seats in showers and next to tub
- Offset controls for bathtub and shower
- Offset and insulated drain and hot water pipes below the sink
- Mirror usable when standing or sitting
- Good-quality non-glare lighting
- Toilet height between 430 mm & 480 mm high (17 in. & 19 in.)

Total: \_\_\_\_/one Adaptable Bathroom Feature  
Total \_\_\_\_/fifteen Accessible Bathroom Features

- Bevelled interior thresholds with max. height of 13 mm (1/2 in.)
- Blocking in the wall at top and bottom of stairs to allow for future installation of security gates
- Exterior sliding doors 1,800 mm (72 in.) wide provide clear minimum opening of 810 mm (32 in.)

Total: \_\_\_\_/six Adaptable General Interior Features.  
Total: \_\_\_\_/eleven Accessible General Interior Features.

### Notes

## Windows

### Accessible

- Easily operated windows
- Opening mechanisms are easy to grasp and operate
- Locking mechanisms are accessible and easy to operate
- Sills not higher than 750 mm (30 in.) above floor level
- Window-opening mechanism at 1,050 mm (42 in.) from floor level and at a minimum of 300 mm (12 in.) from wall corner

Total: \_\_\_\_/five Accessible Window Features.

### Notes:

## Kitchen

### Adaptable

- Plumbing installed to allow easy change of counter height

### Accessible

- Non-slip flooring
- Task lighting over sink, stove and work surfaces
- Some electrical switches and outlets at front of counters
- Easy-to-use (e.g. lever type), pressure-balanced, temperature-regulating faucets
- Counters and sink in modules that can be adjusted separately in height; or work surfaces at various heights
- Rounded corners on counters provide safety
- Pull-out work boards, one close to a side-opening, wall-mounted oven that can sustain the heat and weight of a heavy roasting pan
- Optional roll-out cabinet to provide additional storage and workspace
- Accessible shelves in upper cabinets (for example, through adjustable height cabinets or pull-down shelving)
- Use colour contrast in cabinets and counters for people with poor vision
- Tactile and colour-contrasted controls that are within easy reach
- Kitchen to allow wheelchair manoeuvring in front of all appliances
- A knock out cabinet below the vanity/kitchen sink
- Offset and insulated drain and hot water pipes below the sink

- In a parallel kitchen, plan a minimum width of 1,200 mm (48 in.), In a u-shaped kitchen, 1,500 mm (60 in.)
- Create or plan for open space under sink and cooktop to permit use while seated—680 mm high by 750 mm wide by 250 mm deep (27.2 in. X 30 in. X 10 in.)

Total: \_\_\_\_/one Adaptable Kitchen Features.

Total: \_\_\_\_/sixteen Accessible Kitchen Features.

Notes:

## Laundry Facilities

### Adaptable

- Plumbing and electrical provisions for relocating laundry facilities to main floor

### Accessible

- Laundry facilities on main or upper floor
- Appropriate task lighting
- Front-loading washer and dryer
- Controls easy to reach and operate
- Clear floor space of 750 mm (30 in.) by 1,200 mm (48 in.) in front of each laundry appliance

Total: \_\_\_\_/one Adaptable Laundry Facility Feature

Total \_\_\_\_/five Accessible Laundry Facility Features.

Notes: