



A house is by definition “a building for human habitation,” and yet the design and construction is often based upon techniques which better suit the manufacturers and builders than opposed to the homeowner, or the people who live there. And when the inhabitants have special needs – such as reduced mobility due to age or a physical impairment, the problems are magnified.

Accessible housing: The team approach

The solution for individuals with physical or other limitations lies in homes that are accessible...homes that apply proven barrier free design principles and the concept of universal design, allowing access to all individuals, regardless of age or level of physical mobility.

Accessible housing incorporates features that meet the special needs of the individual, while maintaining a universal design. Simply stated, the home is adapted to meet the

present and future needs of the individual and their family.

Concepts of accessibility

There are three terms that are often associated with accessible homes.

Accessible design: This refers to the design of specialized products, buildings and exterior spaces to mandatory specifications, which meet the needs of the residents. Examples include wheelchair ramps and bathrooms specially designed for people who have difficulty manoeuvring safely in a standard bathroom.

Adaptive design: This involves designing certain products and features that can be readily adapted to the needs of particular users. Removable base cabinets beneath sinks to provide wheelchair access are examples of adaptive design.

Universal design: This concept refers to designing all products, buildings and exterior spaces to be used by all people. Typical features include lever handles on doors and rocker-panel light switches that anyone can use easily.

A key element to an independent lifestyle for elderly individuals or those with a physical limitation is their ability to live comfortably and safely in their homes. To ensure this is possible, modifications may be needed to meet the physical needs of the occupant.

Whether these modifications can be

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achieved through renovation of the existing home or whether it is better to custom build a new home remains a crucial question. Many variables must be considered when assessing the most “appropriate” housing solution.

Professionals skilled in the area of accessibility, design and construction are generally consulted to conduct an accessibility assessment of the existing residence and to identify the adaptive modifications that should be considered (along with estimated costs for the work).

This will form the basis of the decision on whether to renovate the existing home or, alternatively, to further explore new housing options.

Many variables factor into the extent of the adaptive modifications. These include: the individuals’ level of function, family dynamics, the style and layout of the existing residence, lot size, number of levels, budget and many more.

Assembling the right team

It is important to remember that accessibility is more than just architecture and construction. It also involves the collaborative effort of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals. This team can include construction/accessibility consultants, architects/designers, kinesiologists and occupational therapists.

These professionals should be experienced with the construction and management of accessibility projects. Each discipline is reliant on the other, in order to ensure that the proposed modifications, match the functional requirements of the client and their family.

Kinesiologist/Occupational Therapist

- Determines the individuals’ functional capabilities and limitations.
- Recommends and supplies the appropriate assistive devices to the homeowner.
- Assists the construction consultant with determining the primary areas of focus,

identifying the accessibility barriers within the home environment.

- Ensures that the homeowner has the understanding and ability to use the recommended assistive devices and adjust to their newly renovated home environment.

Construction/Accessibility Consultant

- Conducts a thorough in-home assessment of the existing residence.
- If requested, will complete a comprehensive “Accessibility Analysis Report” outlining the existing residence, the long-term housing requirements, and a detailed cost summary to complete the recommended modifications.
- Manages the construction of the project and acts as a liaison between the homeowner, architect and all concerned parties.

Architect/Designer

- Works in unison with the Kinesiologist/Occupational Therapist, the Construction Consultant and the homeowner to design a customized home.
- Completes the drawings of the existing and proposed residence, highlighting the recommended modifications.
- Provides final drawings complete with floor plans, building elevations, and cross sections, required for the necessary building permits.

Builders or architects would not be expected, nor are they qualified, to determine an individual’s functional capabilities and limitations. Similarly, Kinesiologists and Occupational Therapists are not expected or qualified to complete a thorough in-home accessibility assessment, which requires expert knowledge of the construction industry (e.g. feasibility and/or cost estimates of renovations). Only through a collaborative effort, involving all of the above noted disciplines, can a comprehensive and thorough housing assessment be completed. ■

Professionals skilled in the area of accessibility, design and construction conduct an accessibility assessment of the residence.

AREAS AFFECTING MOBILITY			
EXTERIOR		INTERIOR	
Drives and Walkways	Entry Doors	Kitchens	Secondary Exit
Garages and Carports	Gateways	Bathrooms	Electrical and Mechanical Fixtures
Exterior Lighting	Exterior Stairs	Corridors	Doorways
Ramps and Decks	Entry Doors	Bedrooms	Closets
Exterior Stairs	Gateways	Laundry	Security Systems
		Means of Changing Levels	