

# Visitability

## A Pathway Home



**Visitability is a national movement to build homes with three accessible design features:**

1. One zero step entrance on an accessible path of travel from the street, sidewalk or driveway
2. Doorways that provide 32 inches clear space throughout the home's main floor and hallways that provide 36 inches of clear width
3. Basic access to a half or (preferably) full bath on the main floor

### What does a Visitable home offer?

Having a Visitable home means that a friend or family member with a physical disability, or who has difficulty walking or using stairs, can easily visit you in your house. It means that you will be able to remain living in your own home as you age with less chance of needing costly renovations. It also means that visitors using the restroom can close the door, even if they use a wheelchair, walker or other mobility device.



### Are most homes at least partially accessible to people with mobility needs?

No. Most homes have steps and interior layouts that prevent people who use mobility devices or who have difficulty walking from visiting the home.

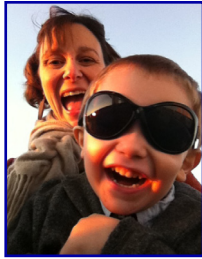


In Montana, less than 20% of homes have a zero-step entry. Of those, many do not have a bathroom usable by someone in a wheelchair or hallways that would let someone move along that floor.

This lack of access means many people are unable to visit the homes of others in their community or even find housing.



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We need a home that is visitable by all our friends and family!

Jenny Montgomery

Shouldn't we just have a few Visitable homes for the people with the most severe mobility needs?

No. Visiting other people's homes is just as important to people with disabilities as it is to others.

It is impossible to predict which formerly nondisabled person will need access in their own home, whether through an injury, disease or aging-related decline in mobility. Sixty percent of all new houses are projected to have a resident with a long-term, severe mobility limitation over the lifetime of the house itself.

Furthermore, if only a tiny amount of homes are Visitable, it becomes nearly impossible for people with mobility needs to find a home when they are ready to rent or purchase one.

Do Visitable homes have curb appeal?

Yes. Visitability requires features to be built into the home from the start, which leads to a natural looking structure. In fact, in places that require Visitable homes, buyers who don't need the features tend not to even notice them but enjoy the convenience they offer none the less.

Just as planned zero-step entries for local businesses are unnoticeable, so too are they for homes.

Is Visitability affordable?

In new construction, it costs a negligible amount to make a home Visitable:

- \$0 - \$25 for a home on a concrete slab
- \$0 - \$600 for a home built with a basement

Renovating a home to be Visitable, on the other hand, can be prohibitively expensive and sometimes physically impossible depending on home's design.



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## Is it possible to make most new homes Visitable?

Yes. It's already been done in several areas of the country:

- 21,000+ homes in Pima County, Arizona
- 7,000+ homes in San Antonio, TX
- 3,700+ homes in Bolingbrook, IL

It is also a requirement for all new homes built in the United Kingdom.

All apartment buildings in the U.S. are already required to be Visitable. The Fair Housing Act requires all of the internal features & basic access requirements of Visitability in all apartment buildings and multi-level condominiums with elevators in addition to several other access features.

## Who benefits from making homes Visitable?

Everyone. Adding these basic access features doesn't stop people without mobility needs from using or enjoying the home. In fact, adding Visitability features helps anyone who:

- is moving furniture
- is transporting strollers, bicycles, etc.
- needs to access the home during emergencies, such as firemen or paramedics
- temporarily loses their mobility through injury, such as those acquired from sports or high-risk jobs

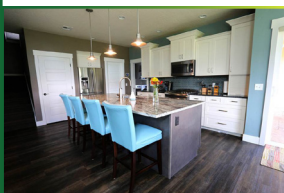


Also, a home with basic access is available to a wider market considering the aging population in the U.S.



## Why is Visitability becoming so popular?

Incorporating Visitable features in newly constructed homes saves money. Because building in Visitable features is less expensive when done during initial construction, homeowners aren't faced with needing to spend thousands of dollars renovating when future mobility needs change. When people are most likely to need access features in their own home, such as after a traumatic event that causes a decline in mobility, they are not often in a financial position to be able to spend thousands of dollars on renovations.



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Families living in Visitable homes are also able to welcome family and friends who have limited mobility without the need to devise makeshift access features that could potentially be dangerous and cause injuries.

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## Who benefits most from VISIBLE home design?

Veterans and older adults are two groups of people who tend to need Visible homes more frequently than the general population in order to remain independent.

Veterans:

- Nearly half of Wounded Warrior veterans surveyed said physical health interfered with normal social activities
- Half have severe back, neck, or shoulder problems
- One out of three have knee injuries or problems
- One out of four need some form of attendant care

Older Adults (Age 65 or older) in Missoula County:

- 2,500 report having difficulty walking
- 1,000 have difficulty with self-care
- 1,500 have difficulty living independently
- More than 7,000 live alone



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Visitability is important to me because I want to stay in my home as long as possible!

Barbara Blanchard

## What are the costs to the community due to lack of Visible housing?

Lack of home access is one of the leading reasons people have to move to nursing homes or assisted living facilities.

However, those who have to move to these facilities must often exhaust their savings on care. They also cannot transfer their assets to others without disqualifying themselves from state support.

The cost of care in Missoula is:

- \$125/day for an assisted living facility
- \$247/day for a nursing home

Taxpayers end up shouldering many of these costs, which are enormous compared to the \$0-\$600 total of building a Visible home.

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Where are some websites I can visit to learn more about Visitability or other information contained in this packet?

Concrete Change Website <http://concretechange.org/>

University of Montana Rural Institute Fact Sheet on Visit-ability  
[http://mtdh.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/?page\\_id=976](http://mtdh.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/?page_id=976)

AARP, Increasing Home Access: Designing for Visitability  
[http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008\\_14\\_access.pdf](http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_14_access.pdf)

AARP, Aging in Place: A State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices  
<http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/ib190.pdf>

Journal of the American Planning Association, Aging and Disability: Implications for the Housing Industry and Housing Policy in the United States  
[www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01944360802197132](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01944360802197132)

For Many Injured Veterans, A Lifetime of Consequences  
[www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/08/for-many-injured-veterans-a-lifetime-of-consequences/](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/08/for-many-injured-veterans-a-lifetime-of-consequences/)

Genworth - Compare Cost of Care Across the United States  
[www.genworth.com/corporate/about-genworth/industry-expertise/cost-of-care.html](http://www.genworth.com/corporate/about-genworth/industry-expertise/cost-of-care.html)

National Association of Home Builders: Funding for Home Modifications & Programs  
[www.nahb.org/generic.aspx?genericContentID=89799](http://www.nahb.org/generic.aspx?genericContentID=89799)

Centers for Disease Control - Falls Among Older Adults: An Overview  
[www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html](http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html)

Missoula Measures - Older Adults  
[www.co.missoula.mt.us/measures/Social/OlderAdults.htm](http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/measures/Social/OlderAdults.htm)

Home and Community Based Services aka the "Medicaid Waiver" Program  
[www.dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/moreinformation/brochures/MedicaidWaiver.pdf](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/moreinformation/brochures/MedicaidWaiver.pdf)

U.S. Census American Community Survey Estimates 2008-2012, Older Adults in Missoula County: Individuals Age 65 and older with Physical or Mental Limitations

2013 Wounded Warrior Project Survey  
[www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/505955/2013-alumni-survey-results.pdf](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/505955/2013-alumni-survey-results.pdf)

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### Visitability Standards

All new single-family homes, duplexes and triplexes constructed with all of the following visitability features shall be fast-tracked through plan review and permitting:

- (a) Zero-step entrance: Provide at least one zero-step entrance to the main floor. The zero-step entrance shall be accessed via a visitable route.
- (b) Doors/Opening: All doors and openings on the main floor shall have a minimum net clear width of 32 inches.
- (c) Bathroom/Half Bath: Provide a bathroom or half bath on the main floor with unobstructed clear floor space of 30 x 48 inches (unencroached by a swinging door).
- (d) Bathroom/Half Bath Walls: All walls in the required bathroom/half bath shall have reinforcing/backing in the walls to allow for future installation of grab bars.
- (e) Wall Electrical Outlets: Wall electrical outlets on the main floor shall be mounted at least 15 inches above the finished floor.
- (f) Light Switches, Thermostats and Controls: Light switches, thermostats and other control devices on the main floor shall be no higher than 48 inches above the finished floor.

Concurrent with submittal of the standard Residential Site Plan Check List, applicants seeking fast-track plan review and permitting shall be required to complete, sign and submit a Visitability Check List requesting fast-tracking and verifying that each of the above standards is met in the submitted plans.

The Building Official or designee shall conduct preliminary review for substantial conformance with the visitability standards and authorize fast-tracking, whereupon those plans and any required resubmittals shall move to the front of the queue for plan review. Permits shall be ready for issue immediately upon completion of plan review.

Upon project completion, a Visitability Certificate shall be issued concurrent with the Certificate of Occupancy that affirms that the project meets the city's visitability standards.