

State-Based Disability & Health Program

The University of Montana Rural Institute

Visitability Testimonies Increase Affordable, Accessible Housing in Montana

Public Health Issue

In Montana, one in four adults has a mobility limitation, and many require special equipment for mobility. However, fewer than 20% of Montana homes are “visitabile,” or custom-built to accommodate a homeowner’s specific physical needs. Finding accessible housing is a major challenge for people with disabilities who want to live independently in the community. A lack of accessibility in a home can lead to greater possibility of falls, decreased independence, and isolation.

Program Overview

In 2008, the Montana Disability and Health Program (MTDH) and the Montana Independent Living (IL) Housing Task Force began a statewide educational campaign to advocate visitability in home design. To date, MTDH Accessibility Ambassadors have educated approximately 8,300 consumers, builders, architects, policy makers, and other housing stakeholders about the importance of visitability in home design.

Making a Difference

MTDH’s visitability campaign supported the following policy changes in Montana:

- **Visitability is now the minimum accessibility requirement for all housing funded through Montana’s Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) program.**
- **As of 2011, all ground floor units built with LIHTC funds are required to have step-less entries.**
- **As of 2012, all units built with LIHTC funds are required to have at minimum a half bathroom with a turning radius of 30” x 48” on the accessible floor.**
- **Additionally, the proposed 2012 Montana HOME Investment Partnerships Program rules require rather than encourage enhanced accessibility features for HOME-assisted units.**

“In 2005, I purchased my first home. As a young man in my late 20s, I did not have an issue that my home was a tri-level. In 2007, I became disabled. Because of this disability, I have been in a wheelchair and forearm crutches. I have fallen multiple times trying to navigate the stairs in my home. This led to stitches, CT scans, ER visits, and glass in my eyes. I do not have the funds to fix my home, and I owe the bank too much to be able to sell it and move.”

~ Montana Resident

Shaping Tomorrow

MTDH continues to collect Visitability Testimonials to educate housing stakeholders about visitability throughout Montana.

Contact Information

Meg Traci, Ph.D., Project Director
Montana Disability and Health Program
The University of Montana Rural Institute
52 Corbin Hall, Missoula, MT 59812-7056
406.243.4956
matraci@ruralinstitute.umt.edu
<http://mtdh.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/>

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