

Success Story from the Montana Disability & Health Program

Visitability Testimonies Increase Affordable, Accessible Housing in Montana

Public Health Issue

In Montana, one in four adults have a physical limitation, and many require special equipment for mobility. Finding accessible housing is a major challenge for people with disabilities who want to live independently in the community. A lack of accessibility in housing can lead to greater possibility of falls, decreased independence, and isolation. However, fewer than 20% of Montana homes were visitable. Accessibility laws guiding home building (e.g., Fair Housing Act) have focused on a small proportion of housing. They have prompted relatively little change in home building practices compared to changes in public building practices realized by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additional education and policy work is needed.

Program Overview

“Visitability is a movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes not merely those custom-built for occupants who currently have disabilities — offer a few specific features making the home easier for mobility-impaired people to live in and visit.”

Visitable homes include three features: a step-less entrance, a 32" wide entry door, and a bathroom on the main floor with enough space for a wheelchair to turn around. www.concretechange.org

In 2008, the Montana Disability and Health Program (MTDH) began a statewide education campaign to advocate for visitability in home design. In 2010, they included a Visitability Testimonial survey that asks people to share their experiences with visitable housing. These testimonies are a key component of the statewide campaign and the policy work of the Montana Independent Living Housing Task Force.

Making a Difference

To date, MTDH Accessibility Ambassadors have educated approximately 8,300 consumers, builders, architects, policy makers, and other housing stakeholders on visitable housing.

Visitability testimonies and comments from housing experts led to policy changes in Montana. Montana is the only state requiring visitability with other accessibility features in housing projects funded through its:

- Qualified Allocation Plan

<http://housing.mt.gov/content/About/MF/docs/LIHTCAAllocation/2012qapForPublicComment.pdf>

- HOME Investment Partnerships Program

<http://housing.mt.gov/content/HM/docs/HMHOMEHappenings/HMNLtrVol11Issue05.pdf>

- Community Development Block Grant

<http://housing.mt.gov/content/CP/docs/CPPublicHearingOct272011>

Shaping Tomorrow

MTDH continues to collect testimonies to educate housing stakeholders about visitability throughout Montana (<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/453201/visitability>). For information on opportunities to provide public comment on policy changes in Montana visit <http://housing.mt.gov/>; or check with your state for local housing meetings.



State Disability and Health Grantees
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“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



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