

Success Stories

from the Montana Disability and Health Program



Visitability Testimonies Increase Affordable, Accessible Housing in Montana

Finding accessible housing is a major challenge for people with disabilities who want to live in the community. Accessibility is defined by federal and state laws such as the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. A lack of accessibility in housing can lead to greater possibility of falls, decreased independence, and isolation.

In 2010, the Montana Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) found that one in four Montana adults had a limitation due to health problems, and/or they required special equipment. However, less than 20% of Montana homes had, as a minimum standard, an accessible entrance (Seekins, Traci, Ravesloot, & Oreskovich, 2010).

The need for accessible housing may become even greater as the population of Montana ages. Typically, a person's chance of having a disability increases with age. In 2010, 15% of Montanans were age 65 and older; by 2030, projections indicate that one in four Montanans will be age 65 and older (U.S. Census Bureau). Visitability is a Healthy People 2020 objective.

In 2008, the Montana Disability and Health Program (MTDH) and the Montana Independent Living (IL) Housing Task Force began promoting visitability in housing. A visitable home is designed to provide hospitality to people with disabilities and includes three features: a step-less entrance, a 32" wide entry door, and a bathroom on the main floor that has enough space for a wheelchair to turn around.

The Montana Independent Living Housing Task Force and the Montana Disability and Health Program (MTDH) have been collecting online testimonies about visitable housing. These testimonies have been used to educate housing stakeholders about visitability throughout Montana. Here is one testimony:

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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In 2010, MTDH in partnership with the Montana IL Housing Task Force developed a Visitability Testimonial survey where people are asked to share their experiences with visitable housing. MTDH uses the collected visitability testimonies as a resource in the Visitability toolkit for its statewide educational campaign. MTDH Accessibility Ambassadors have educated approximately 8,300 consumers, builders, architects, policy makers, and other housing stakeholders about visitability as an alternative for home design.

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/2012gapForPublicComment.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>

MTDH continues to collect Visitability Testimonials online. Please share your visitability story at <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/%20>; or check with your state for local housing meetings.

Habitat for Humanity, a non-ecumenical Christian Housing ministry, builds and rehabilitates simple, decent houses alongside homeowner (partner) families throughout the U.S. Habitat affiliates in Missoula and Butte have adopted visitability minimum standards for all future housing projects.

For more information on visitability, visit www.concretechange.org.

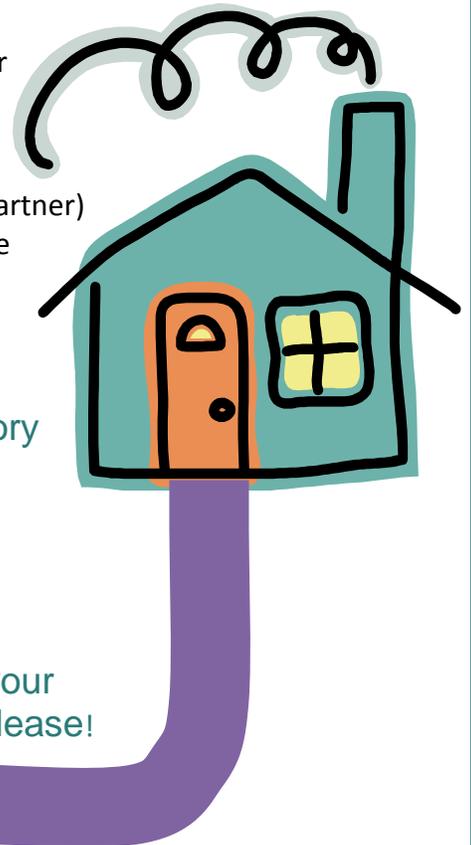
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Contribute your story
about visitability
<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/453201/visitability>

A penny for your
thoughts — please!



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