

Key Messages Toolkit -- Updated January 2025

About the Accessible Housing Network

The Accessible Housing Network (AHN) is a collaboration of non-profit Canadian organizations, with the mission of ensuring that all people in Canada, whatever their age or ability, can live in housing that is fully accessible.

New members who align with this mission are invited to join AHN. Members are expected to join monthly meetings when they are available, contribute to the advocacy efforts of the Network, and amplify these key messages when advocating with government and others.

Key Messages

We call on every level of government to make universal design mandatory in every unit in all new multi-unit residential buildings, both rental and ownership, by amending the Building Code within their jurisdiction.

This is AHN's primary request because:

- No tax dollars should ever create accessibility barriers.
- Housing is a human right, but there is an accessible housing crisis in Canada.
- Many people are born with a disability, and we're all just a fall, accident or illness away from a disability – temporary or permanent.

About Universal Design

Universal design will accommodate anyone of any age or ability, going beyond mere accessibility.

The seven principles of Universal Design are:

- **Equitable Use:** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- Simple and Intuitive Use: Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- Perceptible Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
- Tolerance for Error: The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
- Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
- Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

(Source: [IDEA Center: Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access](#))

Some facts about disability:

- Nearly one in three (27%) of people in Canada live with a disability ([Statistics Canada](#))
- People with disabilities make up 41% of those below the poverty line in Canada ([Statistics Canada](#))
- 45% of unhoused people in Canada live with a physical or mental disability ([Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing](#))

The Benefits of Accessible Housing

When people have accessible housing that keeps them safe and independent, they have better mental and physical health. Accessible housing reduces healthcare costs through:

- Fewer falls, ambulance calls, and hospitalizations
- Less reliance on home and community care services

- Prevention of premature institutionalization in expensive long-term care

There is no additional cost to build an apartment to universal design standards, when planned from the design stage. It is renovations/retrofits to existing housing that are extremely expensive.

Accessible Housing in Law

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, provincial Human Rights Codes, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities all protect against discrimination on the basis of disability.
- Yet there is no provincial law requiring that housing be accessible.
 - For example, the Ontario Building Code only requires that 15% of units are visitable, with no requirement that they are fully accessible for residents.
- Provinces have indicated that they follow the lead of the National Building Code. To harmonize all provincial Building Codes, the National Building Code must be updated so that all Canadians have access to the housing they need.
- Provinces and municipalities can also play a leadership role in mandating universal design for the receipt of public funds for housing projects.

What You Can Do

1. Use these key messages in your conversations with government and others (such as developers).
2. Include these key messages in your public-facing communications and advocacy.
3. Ensure that conversations about affordable housing include an accessible housing aspect, with an emphasis on mandating universal design.