



HOUSING RESEARCH REPORT

Barriers and Enablers to the Uptake of VisitAble Housing in Canada: Stakeholder Perceptions

CMHC helps Canadians meet their housing needs.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has been helping Canadians meet their housing needs for more than 70 years. As Canada's authority on housing, we contribute to the stability of the housing market and financial system, provide support for Canadians in housing need, and offer unbiased housing research and advice to Canadian governments, consumers and the housing industry. Prudent risk management, strong corporate governance and transparency are cornerstones of our operations.

For more information, visit our website at www.cmhc.ca or follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

You can also reach us by phone at 1-800-668-2642 or by fax at 1-800-245-9274. Outside Canada call 613-748-2003 or fax to 613-748-2016.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation supports the Government of Canada policy on access to information for people with disabilities. If you wish to obtain this publication in alternative formats, call 1-800-668-2642.



Barriers and Enablers to the Uptake of VisitAble Housing in Canada: Stakeholder Perceptions

Final Project Report

June 2017

Prepared and Submitted by:



Acknowledgments

This work is an extension of work completed by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) over the past ten years, and most recently, a project carried out by the CCDS from 2013-2016 - the *Collaborative Knowledge Building and Action for VisitAble Housing in Canadian Cities*.

We acknowledge the individuals and organizations who have contributed their wisdom, experience and perspectives to this project. Many people contributed to this report, most importantly the 35 key informants from across the country – Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador – who so generously offered their time and insights about VisitAble Housing (VH). The enthusiasm, wisdom and critical thinking offered by these informants provided rich fodder for consideration in moving VH forward in Canada.

CCDS Team:

Kathy GermAnn (Consultant)
Lisa Casselman (Consultant)
Evan Wicklund (Special Projects Officer I)
Alyssa Goodbrand (Special Projects Officer II)
Susan Hardie (Executive Director)
Jay Harrison (Former Senior Research Officer)
Youn-Young Park (Former Senior Research Officer)

Project Sponsor: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Suggested Citation: GermAnn, K., Casselman, L., Wicklund, E., Harrison, J., Hardie, S. & Park, Y.(2017). *Barriers and Enablers to the Uptake of VisitAble Housing in Canada: Stakeholder Perceptions*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Disability Studies.

Sharing Guidelines: It is the hope of CMHC, CCDS, and those who contributed to this project that these findings are shared and used to benefit others and inform policy and practice to improve inclusivity of persons with disabilities in society both in Canada and abroad. Please acknowledge this work as that of CCDS with the project title and CCDS logo.

This project was funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), however, the views expressed are personal views of the authors and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them

Executive Summary

Barriers and Enablers to the Uptake of Visitable Housing in Canada: Stakeholder Perceptions

Canadian Centre for Disability Studies

A total of 35 key informants from four primary stakeholder groups (housing consumers/buyers, homebuilders, home developers, and policy makers/advocates) were interviewed. Participants came from four provinces where visitable housing was less known or not as well received (based on previous research): Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Key findings:

- Three perceptions of VH were: VH is a means to support inclusion for people with disabilities, VH makes life easier for everyone and VH is a first step on a continuum of greater accessibility.
- Key barriers identified included lack of awareness, societal attitudes and myths about visitable housing as well as lack of leadership and policy supports.
- Participants from all sectors identified the following issues:
 - Lack of clarity around definition and elements of VH
 - Societal attitudes - aversion to infirmity
 - Lack of leadership - reluctance of policy makers to champion VH, due to push back from developers, potential competitive disadvantage of having local requirements
 - Confusion about policies, contradictory policies, inflexible bylaws
 - Limited awareness of VH; lack of market demand
 - Developer/builder reluctance due to cost and risk
 - Inadequate supply of VH and costs of retrofitting
- A key enabler for increasing the uptake of VH in Canada, identified by interviewees from all sectors, was for a change of mindset around VH, where VH and inclusion are seen as “the social norm” in Canada.
- Other enablers were senior level champions, clarified definition and criteria for VH, enabling policies (local, provincial, federal), savvy marketing campaign as well as education of builders on VH specs and collaborative advocacy (builder/policy maker/advocate)

Résumé

Acceptation des logements visitables au Canada : obstacles et catalyseurs selon la perception des intervenants

Canadian Centre for Disability Studies

Au total, 35 répondants clés provenant de quatre groupes principaux d'intervenants (consommateurs/acheteurs de logements, promoteurs d'habitations et décideurs/défenseurs) ont été interviewés. Les participants provenant de quatre provinces où les logements visitables sont moins connus ou pas aussi bien accueillis (selon une recherche antérieure) : Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario et Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador.

Principales constatations :

- Les trois perceptions du logement visitable étaient les suivantes : le logement visitable est un moyen de soutenir l'inclusion de personnes handicapées, le logement visitable facilite la vie de tout le monde et le logement visitable est la première étape d'un continuum d'une plus grande accessibilité.
- Les principaux obstacles relevés comprennent le manque de sensibilisation, les attitudes sociétales, et les mythes à propos des logements visitables et le manque de leadership et d'appuis politiques.
- Les participants de tous les secteurs ont relevé les problèmes suivants :
 - Manque de clarté dans la définition et les éléments du logement visitable.
 - Attitudes sociétales - l'aversion pour l'infirmité.
 - Manque de leadership - la réticence des décideurs à se faire les champions du logement visitable, en raison de la résistance des promoteurs, du désavantage concurrentiel possible de l'établissement d'exigences locales.
 - Confusion à propos des politiques, politiques contradictoires, règlements rigides.
 - Connaissance limitée du logement visitable; manque de demande du marché.
 - Réticence des promoteurs/constructeurs en raison des coûts et des risques.
 - Offre inadéquate de logements visitables et coûts liés à la modernisation.
- Un facilitateur clé pour accroître l'adoption du logement visitable au Canada, relevé par des participants de tous les secteurs, était un changement de la mentalité entourant le logement visitable, où le logement visitable est perçu comme une « norme sociale » au Canada.
- Des champions au niveau de la direction, une définition et des critères clarifiés visant le logement visitable, des politiques habilitantes (locales, provinciales, fédérales), une campagne astucieuse de marketing de même que la formation des constructeurs sur les spécifications du logement visitable et un programme collaboratif de sensibilisation (constructeurs/décideurs/défenseurs) faisaient partie des autres facilitateurs mentionnés.



La SCHL fera traduire le document sur demande.

Pour recevoir une copie traduite de ce document, veuillez remplir la partie ci-dessous et la retourner à l'adresse suivante :

Centre canadien de documentation sur l'habitation
Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement
700, chemin Montréal, bureau C1-200
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0P7

Titre du rapport : _____

Je demande que ce rapport soit disponible en français.

NOM : _____

ADRESSE : _____
rue App.

_____ ville province Code postal

No de téléphone : (____) _____

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	2
Executive Summary	3
Résumé	4
Part I: Introduction and overview of the study	7
<i>Purpose of the research</i>	8
<i>Research questions</i>	8
Methods	8
<i>Approach</i>	8
<i>Participants</i>	8
<i>Data collection</i>	10
<i>Data analysis</i>	10
<i>Strengths and limitations</i>	10
Part II: Findings	11
<i>What do housing stakeholders think about VisitAble housing?</i>	11
What informants liked most about the definition of VisitAble housing	12
What informants liked least about the definition of VisitAble housing	13
<i>Barriers to greater uptake of VisitAble Housing</i>	16
Challenges with the concept of VH	16
Lack of awareness, societal attitudes and cultural norms	16
<i>Leadership and policy-related barriers</i>	20
Lack of leadership	20
Policy-related barriers	22
Unique perspectives: Consumers/homebuyers	24
<i>Challenges with getting into a VisitAble Home</i>	24
Finding or building a VisitAble home	24
VisitAble criteria met but need further adaptations	25
Retrofitting an existing home	25
<i>Limited consumer engagement in decision-making and related concerns</i>	25
Unique perspectives: Developers and builders	27
<i>Building VisitAble is costly and risky</i>	27
Costs associated with the zero-step entry	28
Costs of learning to build something different	29
Risk aversion	30
Enablers of VisitAble housing	32
<i>A change of mindset: Visitable housing needs to become the norm</i>	32
<i>Leadership, collaborative action and a comprehensive, national approach</i>	34
Leadership	34
Collaborative action and a comprehensive national approach	37

<i>Clarify and reach consensus on the definition and criteria for VisitAble housing</i>	38
<i>Marketing, education and advocacy</i>	39
Creating awareness and demand through marketing	39
Education	44
Advocacy	47
<i>Develop and implement appropriate policies</i>	50
Legislation	50
Mandate all publicly funded housing to be VisitAble	55
Adopt “encouraging” policy ...	56
Harmonize policies	57
Focus less on policy and more on education, marketing and incentives	57
<i>Conduct and disseminate research regarding VisitAble housing</i>	59
Part III: Discussion and opportunities for moving forward	61
<i>Perceptions of VisitAble Housing and implications for moving forward</i>	62
<i>Views of disability as “undesirable”</i>	64
<i>Summary of barriers and enablers to the uptake of Visitable housing in Canada</i>	64
<i>Other issues for consideration</i>	66
Leadership for VH	66
Marketing, education and advocacy for VH	67
What policy approaches are likely to be most effective for increasing uptake of VH?	67
The costs of retrofitting homes toward VisitAbility	67
The tension between developers/builders and other stakeholder groups	68
A note regarding future inquiries into the uptake of VisitAble Housing in Canada	68
<i>Opportunities and possible starting points for moving forward</i>	69
<i>Conclusion</i>	72
A potential role for the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies	73
Appendix A: Consent Form	73
Appendix B: Interview Guide	76
Appendix C: A partial list of stakeholder organizations identified by interviewees	82
Appendix D. Interviewee suggestions for marketing strategies, including representative quotes	84

Part I: Introduction and overview of the study

Accumulating research evidence demonstrates several benefits and positive impacts of VisitAble Housing (VH). The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) describes VisitAbility in the following way:

The concept of “VisitAbility” is one of the simplest and most affordable approaches to universal design. Simply put, VisitAble design is meant to benefit as many people as possible. Friends with disabilities, elderly relatives, new parents with strollers, visitors using mobility devices and people moving furniture all benefit.

A VisitAble house incorporates three basic access features:

- *A no-step entry*
- *A clear opening width of at least 81 cm (32 inches) at all main floor interior doors*
- *A main floor half-bath or (preferably) full bath with a 150-cm (60-in.) turning circle*

The criteria for establishing housing varies by jurisdiction, but the objective is the same – providing accessibility to visitors of all ability and mobility levels.”¹

While many jurisdictions in Europe, the United States and elsewhere have mandated or embraced VH, the concept has not been widely accepted or adopted in Canada. Some provinces have moved forward, but others have not moved as quickly. To help understand why this is the case, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) obtained funding from the CMHC to explore stakeholders’ perceptions about VisitAble Housing and to identify strategies to promote VisitAbility in Canada. Research consultants Dr. Kathy GermAnn and Lisa Casselman worked closely with a small team at the CCDS to conduct the interviews, analyse the resulting data and prepare this report.

This work is an extension of a previous project carried out by the CCDS from 2013-2016 - *Collaborative Knowledge Building and Action for VisitAble Housing in Canadian Cities* – in short, the *VisitAbility Project*. Funded by the Government of Canada’s Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability Component, the project’s objective was to promote VisitAbility in Canada. Working with the CCDS Project Team, six task forces across Canada worked to promote VisitAbility in their communities. The results of the project included updates to the body of research about VisitAbility, new resources to promote VisitAbility, and new partnerships to further these efforts across the country².

¹ CMHC Online. Retrieved from: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/housing-observer-online/2016-housing-observer/why-visit-able-housing-matters>

² Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. 2016. Collaborative knowledge building and action for VisitAble housing in Canada. Final Project Report. Author.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this project was to identify unique perspectives of key stakeholder groups within the housing system in order to determine the possible barriers and enablers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing in Canada.

Research questions

The overarching question guiding the inquiry was: *Why hasn't the concept of VisitAble Housing been more widely accepted and practiced in Canada?*

Specific research questions included:

1. *What do housing stakeholders think about VisitAble Housing?*
2. *What would discourage housing stakeholders from embracing VisitAble Housing?*
3. *What would encourage housing stakeholders to embrace VisitAble Housing?*

The latter two questions were slightly reframed as, *"What are the barriers to the uptake of VH in Canada?"* and, *"What are the enablers of increased uptake of VH in Canada?"*

Methods

Approach

To enable the capture of rich information, a qualitative approach was adopted, based on interviews with key informants who hold extensive knowledge of the subject matter. Prior to commencement of the study, community ethics approval was sought and received from the CCDS Research Committee.

Participants

A purposeful strategy for selecting participants was adopted. Informants were selected because of their knowledge of VH and in many cases, their previous and ongoing efforts to promote VH in Canada. They were selected from four primary stakeholder groups in the field of accessible housing (housing consumers/buyers, homebuilders, home developers, and policy makers/advocates), and from four provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, or Newfoundland and Labrador). A previous project - *Collaborative Knowledge Building and Action for VisitAble Housing in Canadian Cities*³ - had shown that VisitAble Housing was less known or not as well received in these provinces.

The CCDS staff took a leadership role in identifying potential interviewees. This included consulting the CMHC for recommended key informants. CCDS staff contacted potential interviewees by e-mail to invite participation, schedule an interview and obtain informed consent for participation in the project. (See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form.) Recruitment commenced in October 2016 and

³ For more information may be found at the CCDS VisitAble Housing webpage: <http://www.disabilitystudies.ca/ccds---projects-%E2%80%93-visit-able-housing-projects.html> as well as at the VisitAble Housing Canada website: <http://visitablehousingcanada.com/visitability-project/>

continued through February 2017 as during the interviews, participants were asked to identify others who they thought could offer a perspective on the topic.

Forty-two people originally agreed to be interviewed. In the end, a number of these people were unable to participate or did not respond to requests for interviews. A total of 33 telephone interviews with 34 key informants, and one conversation via e-mail were conducted, resulting in a total of 34 interviews with 35 respondents.

The distribution of interviewees across stakeholder groups and provinces is presented in Table 1 below. Note that the more than half of interviewees are those who described themselves either as policy makers or as advocates of VH. A number of these advocates work in government or not for profit organizations that deal with housing and/or disability. Also important to note is the comparatively small number of developers and homebuilders (which also includes representatives of the housing industry) in this sample. Efforts were made to recruit additional people from this group who have experience in VH, but without success. The consumer or homebuyer group, also smaller than the policy maker/advocate group, includes a number of people with mobility issues and who live in accessible homes; it also includes able bodied people with an interest in VH from the perspective of being inclusive and appreciating VH features for their own purposes, or providing a home for family members with mobility issues. Some interviewees represented more than one stakeholder group. For example, some consumers were also working in the field of housing and/or disability. Finally, at least seven participants were task force members from the previous Visitability project.

Table 1: Key Informants by Province and Stakeholder Group

	Alberta	Manitoba	Ontario	Newfoundland & Labrador	Total
Housing consumers	3	3*	1	1	8
Homebuilders and housing developers	1	3	2	1	7
Policy makers and advocates	4	6	6	4**	20
TOTAL	8	12	9	5	35
*Note: Includes one interviewee from the United Kingdom looking for a VisitAble home in Manitoba.					
** One interview was conducted with two participants; both are included in this table for a total of 35 key informants in 34 interviews.					

Data collection

Interview guides for the four stakeholder groups were developed by the CCDS research team and revised slightly based on input from the research consultants (see Appendix B for a copy of the interview guides). The research consultants conducted the interviews by telephone and each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, with the participant's permission. The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes. As noted previously, one interview was conducted by e-mail to accommodate the interviewee's preference.

Data analysis

Data analysis began and continued over the course of data collection. After each interview, summary notes were written up and key points were incorporated into an Excel spreadsheet; major categories included: perspectives of VH; enablers of VH; barriers to VH; and, recommendations for enhancing uptake of VH. This provided a high level overview of themes for each stakeholder group. Saturation was achieved early on, particularly in the policy maker/advocate group; that is, there was a high degree of convergence of ideas across interviewees and no appreciably different ideas after the first ten or so interviews.

A thorough review of interview transcripts was then undertaken to enable a more fine-grained analysis of themes, and identification of illustrative quotes from participants. This included an iterative process of thematic analysis – the identification of major themes and sub-themes within the data and between policy makers/advocates, housing consumers, and developers/builders. The two research consultants engaged in frequent dialogue to compare and contrast their observations/findings from the data. Consensus was achieved on the themes reported on herein.

A draft report of themes emerging from the data was shared with CCDS leadership and staff knowledgeable about VH and the housing environment in Canada. They offered insights about existing initiatives related to VH in Canada and potential opportunities for expanding efforts. Revisions were made, based on CCDS leader and staff input, resulting in this final report.

Strengths and limitations

Two strengths of this study are, first, the number of people interviewed and the extensive dataset that was generated; and second, the experience and wisdom of each interviewee regarding VisitAble Housing and efforts to advance its uptake in Canada. Consumers, advocates and policy makers, developers and builders alike generously and enthusiastically shared their insights, resulting in an extensive and rich dataset.

A limitation of the study is that the perspective of policy makers and advocates are over-represented (n=20)⁴, and the perspective of developers and builders (n=7) are under-represented. Similarly, there were also fewer housing consumers (n=8) than policy makers and advocates. Nevertheless, the findings presented herein are resonant with the findings of a previous literature review conducted by the CCDS

⁴ The breakdown of participants is divided equally, with ten (10) policy makers, and ten (10) advocates participating from each stakeholder group.

and other grey literature regarding VisitAble Housing. Furthermore, strong convergence of themes across interviews lends credence to the findings.

Part II: Findings

In this section, findings from the key informant interviews are presented. The findings answer the three major questions guiding the study, which include the following.

1. What do housing stakeholders think about VisitAble Housing?
2. What would discourage housing stakeholders from embracing VisitAble Housing?/What are the barriers to the increased uptake of VH in Canada?
3. What would encourage housing stakeholders to embrace VisitAble Housing?/What are the enablers to the increased uptake of VH in Canada?

The findings are organized as follows: First, informant perspectives about what they appreciate most, and least, about the concept of VH are presented. This is followed by presentation of perceptions across all stakeholder groups regarding perceived barriers to the uptake of VH. Next, are two sections presenting unique concerns of housing consumers and buyers, and of developers and builders. The following section focuses on key informant suggestions for things that would encourage them to embrace VH – or, what is described as enablers of VH in Canada. Because there was a high degree of convergence across stakeholder groups about these enablers, findings in this section are an amalgamation of suggestions from all groups. The report is concluded with a discussion section that includes consideration of opportunities for advancing VH in Canada.

What do housing stakeholders think about VisitAble housing?

In order to answer the first question about what housing stakeholders think about VH, key informants were provided the definition of VH and asked what they liked most, and least, about this definition. The definition provided was:

“The concept of designing and building homes with basic accessibility. VisitAble homes provide access on the main level for everyone. VisitAble homes have, at a minimum, three basic accessibility features:

1. *No-step entrance (at the front, back or side of the house)*
2. *Wider doorways and a clear passage on the main floor*
3. *A main floor bathroom (or powder room) that can be accessed by visitors who use mobility devices”*

In general, perceptions about the definition appeared to be influenced by the extent to which interviewees regarded VisitAbility as a unique, stand-alone concept or as an initial step on a continuum of accessibility features specifically for people who have disabilities. Those who considered VisitAbility as a stand-alone concept tended to be positive about its role in supporting inclusion and its broad applicability for people with disabilities and also for the general population. Amongst those who saw VH as a first step along the spectrum of accessibility for people with current or potential disabilities, there

were two stances. Some said that VH is positive, non-threatening way to introduce accessibility, while others said VH is insufficient, inconsistent and/or lacks clarity in terms of specifications.

What informants liked most about the definition of VisitAble housing

There was general support for the definition of VisitAble Housing, with respondents particularly favouring its simplicity and broad applicability. Interviewees liked that everyone could benefit from the VisitAble features and not just those with mobility challenges. The no-step entrance feature cited most frequently as a positive aspect.

Interviewees appreciated that the concept of VH facilitates inclusion and socialization, and reinforces human rights through consideration of the needs of all. Furthermore, VH helps normalize and de-stigmatize mobility needs, and provides features that, while supporting accessibility, also seem a natural part of the home.

Others said they like that VisitAble moves beyond focusing solely on adaptations for the person living in the house at this point in time and considers future needs that may result from aging or disability, as well as the people who will come into a person's life in the future. VH was also viewed as a good starting point – a simple cost-effective way of increasing access and facilitating dialogue about accessibility and future needs. However, there were some differences in understanding about the features included in the definition, with some respondents wanting to attribute more features to the definition.

A sampling of representative quotes is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. What key informants like most about the definition of VisitAble housing	
Sub-theme	Representative Quotes
VH is simple, to the point, easy to understand and prescriptive	<i>"I think the concept is very simple and easy to understand. That's extremely important especially if you want to get a concept adopted. If it's difficult, if it's challenging that just complicates things but when I speak with my colleagues, my counterparts at other municipalities or just speaking with everyday public developers, builders, other stakeholders, people get it."</i> [Policy maker]
VH has broad applicability: Everyone can benefit from it	<p><i>"What I love is that as a parent it's...for everybody. It doesn't matter. Every ability. I just love that. Strollers coming and going and things like that with ease and not having steps."</i> [Policy maker]</p> <p><i>"It makes sense – it is a better design for any house because it is better for people, for everything we do in a house e.g. moving furniture, for any of our abilities. It is good to live in and to visit it - aesthetically and functionally."</i> [Advocate]</p> <p><i>"We have shifting demographics as populations age or diversify, VisitAble adds the flexibility, particularly in rental realm, to apply to a broader variety of people."</i> [Policy maker]</p>

	<p><i>"I like that it speaks to everybody. You don't need to be mobility challenged today ... you just never know when....VisitAble means you can stay in your home regardless of what physically happens to you and your mobility." [Advocate]</i></p>
<p>VH facilitates inclusion, socialization and supports human rights.</p>	<p><i>"I also really like the fact that it's a minimum standard... it assures that a home can actually be visited by people, whether it's friends or family for those people with mobility issues...hearing some of the stories from people who have mobility issues and how they have not been able to visit family or friends, it's been heart wrenching. [VH] does allow those with mobility limitations to visit...That is tremendously important. Socialization is huge. Relationships are huge. This concept and these three elements allow to increase that. As a result, impacting somebody's quality of life for the better... it's a simple concept but it's a powerful concept that could have huge changes and impacts on somebody's quality of life." [Policy maker]</i></p> <p><i>"Pragmatically, [VH] reflects the values that I personally live... like inclusion and that welcoming part... if I can minimize or eliminate barriers to having true engagement with my neighbours and others, then I'll go for it." [Consumer]</i></p>
<p>VH is a good starting point for encouraging dialogue about accessibility</p>	<p><i>"Clever way to get things happening. In peoples' minds it feels cheaper, less expensive thing to implement. It's a little less daunting than full-scale accessibility. It seems innocuous – a Trojan horse strategy – but it opens the dialogue so people then consider other adaptable features." [Policy maker]</i></p> <p><i>"It is the thin edge of the wedge toward accessibility." [Policy maker]</i></p> <p><i>"VisitAbility is a low hanging fruit – if we are going to have success anywhere it will be with this." [Consumer]</i></p> <p><i>"The thing I like most about VisitAble Housing is that it's very action oriented. It's a great little recipe to get your foot in the door." [Policy maker]</i></p>

What informants liked least about the definition of VisitAble housing

A few interviewees mentioned that the definition elements of VH are inconsistent over time and across locations. Differences across geography were noted amongst the previous taskforces of the previous VisitAbility project. For instance, one task group called the concept "VisitAbility Plus", emphasizing the

need to have at least one space on main floor that could be used as a sleeping space and adding criteria about the washroom to ensure that the user could close the door and have privacy.

Inconsistencies in the definition appeared to have emerged in response to a need to provide more specificity, including about goals, and particularly in relation to functional use of washrooms. There were questions about whether or not rails and grab bars are required and if it is just a room with a sink and toilet, or if the home should be functional for an overnight guest who has mobility challenges. Others spoke about the need to ensure that washrooms allow privacy (i.e., ability to close the door), a full turning radius for a wheelchair, and also enough room for an attendant to help those requiring assistance.

These inconsistencies have revealed themselves in homes described as “VisitAble”. One interviewee spoke about a home in Bridgwater that had the three features of VisitAbility but a ledge rendered the sink inaccessible for someone in a wheelchair. Another example included a home with wide hallways but a sunken living room on the main floor.

Some interviewees mentioned uncertainty about how VisitAbility pertains to other definitions related to accessibility. More than one interviewee said that the term is a newer version of “universal design”. Since the term is perceived as a way of enhancing accessibility for people who have disabilities, there is a tendency to think the term applies only to people who have disabilities. Others emphasized that the definition can be reductionist and that by focusing only on three elements there is potential to minimize the issue of accessibility. A policy maker noted that, *“To say [VH] is increasing the accessibility housing stock is a problem”*.

There were also some concerns that VisitAble Housing as defined cannot be implemented cost-effectively across all geographic terrain. Finally, some interviewees said that the term, “VisitAbility”, might be the wrong one because it is hard to pronounce, doesn’t resonate with people and is hard to remember.

Table 3. What key informants like least about the definition of VisitAble housing

Sub-theme	Representative Quotes
VH definitions are inconsistent	<i>“I see lots of homes that are for sale that are called VisitAble and it's what I would call basic accessibility, right? So you've got the three criterions. Here in Winnipeg we actually went to a fourth criterion but that fourth one was social in the sense that you, you kind of have a space on the main floor so that if somebody wanted to stay overnight, whether it was a girlfriend, it was a relative or whether it was just somebody visiting, just having a space.” [Consumer]</i>
VH definitions lack specificity including dimensions	<i>“I think the definition that's out there needs to associate dimensions to it and those dimensions need to be consistent. In some cases the wider doorways were 36 inches, in other cases they were defined as 38 inches. The main bathroom, it was, “Oh you need a toilet and a sink,” in certain areas, in others it was a full turning radius.” [Policy maker]</i>

Probably one of the things, and we came across this as the taskforce, is the three ...standards that define visitability, they're the same no matter what. The no step entrance, the wider doorways and passages and then the main bathroom. I think its downfall or one of the challenges is, and we came across this as I said with the taskforce, is in terms of dimensions. [Policy maker]

VH definition does not go far enough

"What I don't love about it is that it doesn't account for... washroom [size]...if you can't clean yourself meaningfully, then it kind of loses its shine a little bit." [Policy maker]

"Would like to see VH include other things, such as reinforced drywall for grab bars... 'I would love that, but I'm also realistic in saying, well, going from 0-60 is always possible. You've got to go from 0-30 first, and maybe the first things are the front door, the level entry and the powder room.'" [Consumer]

"Then they also included a little bit more criteria in as far as what is that washroom, so that it is more functional then what the simple definition of being able to get in. I've seen presentations on VisitAble Housing where people have even suggested, well as long as the doorway is wide enough it doesn't matter if you can close the door. I'm going, no no, I'm sorry. If we can't have privacy in the bathroom, then we've achieved nothing." [Developer]

VH definition is confusing in relation to accessibility

"Sometimes I find individuals believe that VisitAbility is the same as accessibility. For the clientele that I have, if you were to buy a VisitAble home...If they were to buy one of those, and then hire me to say, 'Okay, now we've got to make this thing accessible'. I'm still going to be spending logically somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 more to actually make it accessible for somebody using a wheelchair so that they can live in the house." [Developer]

"It's part of the continuum. So, you know, you build with VisitAble. Those are the three and the minimum standards but it's like a continuum along the line and saying that, okay, so you've got VisitAble and then VisitAble plus and then accessible and then accessible plus and then universal." [Consumer]

"it would be nice if there was a product that could encompass most of these features instead of having VisitAble, VisitAble Plus, Accessible, stuff like that because people say it's too much...too many options." [Builder]

The term, 'VisitAbility' is difficult to remember; hard to pronounce

"It's a tough one for people to understand because they often would, would interpret it as Visible ... we've been very careful in, in writing it so that it's Visit-hyphen-able."
[Advocate]

"Or, you know, and it's hard to say, and people don't understand what it means, and...so a lot of people have tried looking at other ways to describe it, like "AdaptAble", and other things that aren't quite capturing the notion." [Policy maker]

"VisitAble is not a word that brings an image to mind – it has to be explained."
Advocate]

In the next section, interviewees' perceptions regarding barriers to the uptake of VisitAble Housing are presented.

Barriers to greater uptake of VisitAble Housing

In this section, barriers to greater uptake of VH described by all stakeholder groups are presented. These include: challenges with the concept of VisitAble Housing; lack of awareness, societal attitudes and myths; and policy-related barriers. Specific concerns of consumers/buyers and developers/builders are presented in subsequent sections of the report.

Challenges with the concept of VH

Following from the preceding section regarding perceptions of VH, those aspects that were critiqued by interviewees were also described as barriers to the uptake of VisitAble Housing. Specifically, these include inconsistency in use of the definition, lack of specificity in terms of dimensions, concerns that VisitAbility does not "go far enough", and confusion about the concept in relation to accessibility. Individually and collectively, these aspects may impact the extent to which the concept is adopted and implemented.

Lack of awareness, societal attitudes and cultural norms

By far, the most frequently cited barrier to the uptake of VH was lack of awareness across all stakeholder groups – the public, developers and builders and others in the housing industry and government. Other related barriers cited by interviewees were societal attitudes and cultural norms, including aversion to infirmity, the marginalization and invisibility of the elderly and the disabled, norms about desirable features of homes, and finally, myths about VisitAble housing. When interviewees mentioned these challenges, they invariably spoke to the solutions: increasing awareness and building knowledge through marketing, education and advocacy efforts. As such, greater detail and discussion is presented in the "Marketing, Education and Advocacy" component of the "Findings: Enablers..." section of the report.

Lack of awareness

Almost every interviewee mentioned lack of awareness and/or knowledge as a barrier to VH since lack of awareness translates into lack of demand and lack of response from the building industry.

“One of the barriers is definitely policy makers are not aware, in a lot of cases, of this concept. Not just policy makers but pretty much everyone. Builders. Developers and their industry. Everyday public. Other stakeholders.”
[Policy maker]

“One of the barriers is definitely policy makers are not aware, in a lot of cases, of this concept. Not just policy makers but pretty much everyone. Builders. Developers and their industry. Everyday public. Other stakeholders.”[Policy maker]

Some consumers spoke about builders’ lack of knowledge about VisitAble housing, as well as their own. One interviewee, for example, described looking for a “walk-in house” for her brother who has mobility issues. She wasn’t aware of the concept of VH until she discovered it on the CCDS website:

“The VisitAble home is actually what I always wanted but I didn't know it existed. ... Right now my mom has stairs to get into their house with my brother... I know how much of a challenge it is, just those three steps, so I wanted right from the beginning, a walk-in house. That's how I ended up going to building one rather than purchasing one and then the VisitAble Home was exactly what I wanted, I just didn't know it existed.” [Consumer]

Similarly, some developers and builders noted that a key barrier to the uptake of VH is the lack of awareness amongst the public, developers and builders:

“One of the biggest challenges we have is educating our consumers on what a VisitAble home actually is, what are the benefits, how can it benefit you in the future and now. I think as the world starts to become more educated, not only with VisitAble but eco friendly, all that kind of stuff, people become more receptive to it. It's definitely a challenge and a curve to get them up to the knowledge capacity that they need to have right now.” [Builder]

“I would think if you talk to 99 percent of the consumers and probably 95 percent of the builders, they don’t even know what a VisitAble home is.” [Builder]

Other interviewees also remarked on a lack of awareness amongst policy makers. This is described in the section on policy-related barriers below.

Societal attitudes and cultural norms

Another interviewee suggested that the biggest barrier of all is attitude:

“In the years and years of doing this work, I’ve realized that you can do anything construction-wise, structurally, landscaping, technology. I find the biggest barrier is attitude. That’s actually harder to change than anything else.” [Advocate]

“In years and years of doing this work...I find the biggest barrier is attitude. That’s actually harder to change than anything else.”
[Policy maker]

Stakeholders identified the following attitudes and norms that impact the uptake of VH: aversion to infirmity and disability; marginalization and invisibility of the elderly and those with disabilities; and, norms about “desirable” features in a home.

Aversion to infirmity and disability

A significant barrier to uptake of VH appears to be the association of VH with disability and infirmity. When VH is presented as a response to disability, it becomes associated with loss and not gains, and is thus something to avoid rather than embrace. Numerous interviewees suggested that people do not want to think about the possibility of becoming disabled whether due to aging, illness or injury.

An advocate, for example, noted that infirmity is part of our psyche as something to be avoided:

“[VH] ...is always associated with disability, with infirmity, with death, with the end of life, with dementia. It’s part of our psyche... as human beings to avoid [that].” [Advocate]

“I think part [of the problem] is the way we sell [VH]. It’s always associated. Doesn’t matter how you call it, how you re-brand it. It’s always associated with disability, with infirmity, with death, with the end of life, with dementia. It’s a part of our psyche, I think, as human beings, to avoid.” [Advocate]

A policy maker similarly commented that people don’t want to think of themselves as disabled; rather they want to think of themselves as healthy and happy. So, marketing on the disability argument is difficult. As an example, he described a competition amongst graphic design students regarding marketing ideas for VH:

“We hosted a little competition among the local students of graphic design and asked them to come up with marketing ideas for VisitAble Housing and all of them understood that the biggest problem is that it comes across as this kind of a problem of disability and degradation, and people don’t like thinking about themselves when they’re injured or sick. They want to think of themselves as healthy and wonderfully happy. So it’s hard to market around that stuff.” [Policy maker]

Builders noted that VisitAble homes are difficult to sell given the association between VH and disability; in short, it is hard to sell people something that they see as a negative. One homebuilder spoke at length about this. He noted that when selling a home to people, one is in essence selling a dream of a new, exciting life to be lived in that home: *“You’re creating a lifestyle in their head – it’s supposed to be a positive thing.”* Making people realize that they may have struggles or disability in the future goes against that positive allure. He noted that this conversation is perhaps the most difficult part of VisitAbility:

“It’s hard to create that positive buzz...[broaching the fact that people might eventually have a disability]...is not the most positive sales approach...That acceptance and that conversation, I think is the most difficult part of VisitAbility. Not just about the technical requirements with grading and all the re-designs and stuff like that, but that actual realization where the individuals accept that they will not be able to do everything that they are doing right now”. [Builder]

Another interviewee similarly commented that VisitAble homes are typically marketed as, *“Oh well, I’m getting older. I’m not as mobile, or whatever it may be”*. He concluded, *“That is a depressing way of marketing.”*

Finally, others commented that people tend to be in denial about the potential for disability until it happens to them, thereby making the disability argument for VH irrelevant:

“Millennials and Gen X, Gen Y, they don't see [infirmary] coming.” [Consumer]

“People are generally in denial until they have a personal experience and then they realize, ‘Those steps that I always thought were a good idea, actually...[they’re] a major obstacle’.” [Advocate]

Marginalization and invisibility of the elderly and the disabled

Some interviewees offered a different perspective that relates specifically to the link between VH and disability. These people noted that the elderly, especially those with mobility issues, and those with disabilities, are often marginalized and invisible in society. Consequently, their rights and needs may be forgotten or overlooked when public buildings and private dwellings are designed and built. Further, they may experience difficulty in joining together to advocate for change. One interviewee, for example, noted that the aging population is forgotten and is not a driving factor for change:

“I think a lot of the aging population is simply forgotten, regardless of whether they have mobility issues or not...they’re a forgotten community. They are not a driving factor because nobody’s even thinking about them.” [Advocate]

“I think a lot of the aging population is simply forgotten...They are not a driving factor because nobody’s even thinking about them.” [Advocate]

Similarly, some said that all people with mobility issues are overlooked, and there is a perception that this is a small population that only requires amendment of certain things such as public buildings. One interviewee spoke about the downtown area of her city and how it was designed without consideration of people with mobility issues:

“There is [a prominent avenue]; it's a tourist attraction, it's beautiful, a lot of people come here, but you walk into most restaurants on [that] Avenue, and their bathrooms are downstairs. There's no elevators... That's been done with zero idea in mind of anybody that has accessibility issues...Why can't [people with mobility issues] dine at the same restaurants that I can dine at?”

This failure to consider the disability community, she noted, is a significant barrier:

“That's where my frustration comes in is that ... when those buildings were built, the attitude and the perceptions that went along with it is that that part of the population wasn't even considered. I think that's a big barrier. I think unfortunately you will get some people that have accessibility issues that will never visit these restaurants that are great restaurants and great social environments and great social interactions because basically they either can't go through the door or if they are there can't get to the washroom. Those types of things. I think that's a huge barrier. Those types of attitudes and perceptions.” [Advocate]

Aesthetics: Norms about “desirable” features of a home

Others noted that “pretty things” such as granite countertops, and “prestige” are often more important to buyers than practical matters and inclusivity. One person noted, for example, *“Aesthetics will make or break things”* given that a home, one of the greatest outlays of disposable income, is a reflection of one’s personality or lifestyle:

“Aesthetics...will make or break things... Everybody has such an individual preference...some people love that beautiful old porch... the old farm house kind of look... and others want something very modern, very clean. The VisitAble home I attended was a beautiful home but it was very modern, clean line home and a lot of people do not like that. It does not appeal to them.” [Policy maker]

“There’s still a lot of homebuyers out there that are looking for prestige and certainly not thinking about their future.” [Consumer]

A number of interviewees spoke about norms regarding the desirability of stairs both outside and inside of a home. Some said that houses are more prestigious if they stand high up out of the ground – however, it is these features that exclude people with mobility issues. One person, for example, noted:

“There’s a cultural, subconscious value we place on stairs and it comes from a history of stairs...it’s for aesthetic reasons and also for maybe cultural reasons, but functionally speaking, they’re exclusive.” [Advocate]

Myths about VisitAble Housing

Finally, some interviewees suggested that in the case where people *are* aware of VH, there are some myths associated with the concept that create barriers to its uptake. Three myths were consistently reported, and described succinctly by one interviewee as, *“it’s ugly, it’s too expensive, and I don’t need it [because I’m not disabled]”*. Another interviewee noted:

“The buy in is very difficult. Even at the consumer level. Because, all they’re thinking is, ‘I don’t need it and I don’t want it’...All the negative stuff.” [Advocate]

It is difficult to get buy in to the concept of VH when these myths are in play.

Leadership and policy-related barriers

The third group of barriers identified by interviewees is about a perceived lack of leadership for VH, and policy-related barriers, including confusion about policies across jurisdictional levels; contradictory policies; and inflexible or restrictive bylaws.

Lack of leadership

Some interviewees referenced a general lack of leadership for VH as a barrier to its uptake. One person, for example, noted the need for a spokesperson that is credible in the eyes of decision makers and that someone needs to articulate why VH is important. However, that is not yet occurring:

"I think the problem is that the movement doesn't have a champion; it doesn't have a spokesperson that is credible in the eyes of the people that need to make the decisions. So, it's a wonderful concept, but I need somebody who's going to speak to it and say...there is a reason why this must be done. And that message is not getting across, in my mind." [Builder]

A number of interviewees talked about the reluctance of policy makers to champion VH. They suggested that policy makers don't understand VH very well, and tend to look at it only from a financial perspective rather than from a long-term perspective. Some said there might be too much focus on money and not enough on the "people side of it".

"I believe the government does try, but I also think that they focus too much on the money side of it and not enough on the people side of it." [Advocate]

"Honestly, I think that the government tries, but I think that they just see dollar signs when it comes to things like this. I think that they view this as very expensive.... I believe government does try but I also think that they focus too much on the money side of it and not enough on the people side of it." [Advocate]

"I think maybe one of the things that [policy makers] struggle with is lack of knowledge and the whole, 'This is going to cost a lot of money and this is very costly'. Sometimes I think policy makers don't really see the longer-term implications of not implementing this stuff even if it is the five percent or whatever increase on your project. If we're not making these places accessible for everyone, then we're incurring costs elsewhere in the system." [Advocate]

A number of policy maker and advocate interviewees surmised that city/municipality councillors don't want to upset the public by implementing policies that might be unpopular. They further noted that councillors are often influenced by developers and builders and may not want to "rock the boat" by mandating the building of VisitAble homes, particularly single family homes. An underlying fear appears to be that developers may decide to go elsewhere. As two policy makers noted:

"In 2006, people in [this city] were afraid to challenge developers and make anything tougher for them because we were quite hungry for somebody to step up and build things. So I think that was one of the underlying anxieties is, we don't want to do anything, or make any policies that are going to be hard on the developers and maybe make them think about going elsewhere." [Policy maker]

"One of the barriers, from the city's perspective... is that we have to be careful what we do to the industry because of course, that is how we generate income, is by having development, and therefore property taxes. If we start putting in these policies that make it unpalatable for developers to do what we think should be going on, then they go elsewhere." [Policy maker]

"We have to be careful what we do to the industry... If we start putting in these policies that make it unpalatable for developers...then they go elsewhere." [Policy maker]

Policy-related barriers

Interviewees described a number of policy-related barriers including confusion about policies across jurisdictional levels and the multitude of codes and standards across the country; contradictory policies; and inflexible or restrictive bylaws.

Confusion about policies across jurisdictional levels

Analysis across interviews revealed differing understandings about the relationship between federal, provincial/territorial and local building codes. Different regulations at different jurisdictional levels can create confusion. As one interviewee noted:

“Trying to develop policy in Canada, especially, is very, very difficult because we’ve got building codes that are provincially regulated, basically. You’ve got housing policies especially for affordable and accessible housing being guided in Ontario, anyway, by the municipalities.” [Policy maker]

Others mentioned the multitude of codes and standards across the country and the difficulty of trying to understand them all. As one interviewee commented:

“Trying to break down all the different standards and codes and whatever else - to try and put something coherent together, it’s been really challenging.” [Advocate]

And there are also issues with policies for different aspects of housing. For example, there are policies related to affordable housing and policies related to accessible housing, but these policies are not necessarily aligned.

Contradictory policies

Another challenge articulated by interviewees is contradictory policies. One contradiction that surfaced several times was between policies that promote population densification in towns and cities and VH. Densification means smaller lots and often, multi-story homes, both of which make building VisitAble homes more difficult.

“You can’t do those zero lot lines and make a bathroom downstairs to fit this person in a wheelchair because that would take up half the house.”
[Consumer]

One interviewee noted lot sizes in Winnipeg tend to be larger than those in Toronto or Vancouver where the lots may only be 20 or 25 feet wide. These small lot sizes are part of high-density housing and the general trend of “building up, not out”. This may be attractive to cities because more houses generate more tax revenue. However, high density housing such as this may be a barrier to construction of VisitAble homes given smaller lots are more difficult to properly grade for a zero-step entry. Further, the small footprint of the home can make it difficult to have larger, VisitAble bathrooms. One interviewee noted, for example that, *“You can’t do those zero lot lines and make a bathroom downstairs to fit this person with a wheelchair because that would fully take up half the house.”* [Consumer]

Another issue is related to the energy code now being adopted across Canada. This code requires a higher quality of doors such that there is a good seal when the door is closed, thus preventing leakage of cold air in winter and hot air in summer. This seal creates a bump almost an inch high in the doorway, interfering with the zero step entry. What is needed, however, is not a policy change, but rather, a conversation with door manufacturers to find a way to solve this problem. Nevertheless, this is an example of how various codes and policies can make VH more difficult.

Inflexible or restrictive bylaws

A small number of developer/builder interviewees also talked about being limited by restrictions in bylaws that do not allow flexibility or creative problem solving.

“Let’s not put rules in place that hamper making it VisitAble. Let’s keep the things that are free to do, or less expensive. There’s a lot of cases where a municipal rule was put in place for one reason, that made it much harder to make it VisitAble.” [Developer]

“Let’s not put rules in place that hamper making it VisitAble... There’s a lot of cases where a municipal rule was put in place for one reason that made it much harder to make it VisitAble.” [Developer]

One example cited was the inability to build cul de sacs, which are ideal for both VisitAbility and accessibility. However in his jurisdiction, the municipality doesn’t allow this feature:

“From an accessibility point of view and a use point of view, cul de sacs are great. No traffic running through, very little congestion and stuff on them, you can move

around between the houses more easily without having cars zipping through. There’s not only mobility things, you’ve got hearing impaired, visually impaired. You might have some mental issues you’ve got to deal with, a whole pile of things you’ve got to deal with. Not having to avoid cars in all those respects. The municipality comes in, and says, “You can’t put cul de sacs in”. From an accessibility point of view as the developer, best thing I can do is put all cul de sacs. ... None of that stuff I’m allowed to do. Developers are limited by restrictions in the bylaws I guess basically. Cookie cutter rules ...that make it not really be able to be creative around that.” [Developer]

Another example was a requirement that the main floor of all houses must be one metre above the street, even if not necessary. This creates difficulty not only for a zero step entry but also for building ramps:

“In [province] we have a rule that all houses, the main floor has to be a meter above the street. Even if it doesn’t have to be, you’ve got to put it a meter above the street. [That] means you have a 12 meter long ramp. You’re not allowed to have 12 meter long ramp without having a few turns in it. So, you’ve got a 20 meter long ramp. Essentially, your whole front yard is covered in ramp because there’s a rule there you’ve got to keep the house up a full meter. Drop that down, so that’s 150 millimeters above the street, no problem. I can go into that, you wouldn’t even know the ramp’s there.” [Developer]

In the following section, views unique to consumers and homebuyers are presented.

Unique perspectives: Consumers/homebuyers

The group of consumers/homebuyers interviewed for this study included several people with mobility issues and who were living in accessible homes, two who purchased a home for family members with mobility issues, and one who wanted a home that friends and family could visit. These consumers and homebuyers expressed concerns that have already been described above; but they also spoke to a number of unique concerns, including challenges associated with getting into a VisitAble home (i.e., finding one, building one, retrofitting an existing home). In addition, some thought that VisitAbility is not perceived as an inclusion and social justice issue, and that the voice of consumers is not strong enough or sufficiently unified to foster change.

Challenges with getting into a VisitAble Home

Several consumers spoke to the difficulty of either finding a VisitAble home, building one, or retrofitting their current home to incorporate VisitAble features.

Finding or building a VisitAble home

Two consumers were currently seeking homes and having some difficulty with this; others who had built a VH described the process in positive terms. One interviewee from Winnipeg noted that availability of VisitAble homes is “getting better all the time”, although choices are limited; he had not yet found the right home. Another consumer found a builder and was very satisfied with the constructed VisitAble home. Although this experience was positive, the interviewee noted that he was fortunate to be working with a builder who was willing to build a VisitAble home on a lot that was not designated for VH. He suggested that larger builders would not have been interested in doing this.

Another consumer spoke about making an offer to build a home for a family member with disabilities and was in the process of finalizing this when she became aware of VisitAble housing. She was able to make some modification to the VisitAble home plan to make it more accessible and was very pleased with the final plan and anticipated cost. However, she emphasized that she had not been aware of the concept of VisitAble housing, nor was the builder s/he originally contacted. It was by searching on the Internet that she located a builder involved with VH. This interviewee also spoke about the cost of building a VisitAble home including that some models are very expensive. The builder s/he located was receptive to scaling the house down to meet the client’s needs and budget.

The costs of VisitAble housing also surfaced in these discussions, particularly in regard to the Bridgwater development in Winnipeg in which 50 percent of housing will be VisitAble. At least two interviewees noted that homes in this development are expensive, making them out of reach for many people with more modest resources. One comment was that VisitAble homes must be financially accessible, too:

“So, I’m gonna say, you know, 35 to 40 percent of the homes are VisitAble in [Bridgwater] but they’re in the hole for \$500,000. ... So that’s probably my biggest concern, is that the only ones that are available are probably out of reach for 90 percent of the people that are needing them.”

It was suggested that more modest housing in the \$200,000 to \$250,000 range would certainly increase the possibility of people owning a VisitAble home.

VisitAble criteria met but need further adaptations

For some interviewees, the characteristics of a VisitAble home met their needs while others needed further modifications to make the home more accessible. Some who had purchased or were exploring purchase of VisitAble homes indicated that further adaptations and modifications were needed so that they, or their family members, could function in the home. One consumer said that VisitAble housing is insufficient for his/her needs, stating that, *“We have to make things accessible first and VisitAble second, because VisitAble house wouldn’t give me housing.”*

“For our purposes, we need to make sure as well that it can fit a wheelchair, so even though the VisitAble home does meet the easy entry access, we still needed to widen all of the doors inside the main level and add a roll-in shower to be able to accommodate a wheelchair.”

For another buyer, bathroom modifications included the addition of grab bars and the need for more space for turning around in a wheelchair and space to accommodate a support person providing assistance with toileting and hygiene.

“We halted construction on the entire house to have them work out how they were going to attach these grab bars. ... They wound up taking down walls to provide wood support and structure behind the tub and diagonally to fit the contours of the tub such that they could have a firm point of attachment for the grab bars. ... I think we paid an additional \$750.00 to have them work out these details.”

Retrofitting an existing home

Consumers also spoke about the challenges of retrofitting an existing home, stating that the renovations required could be extensive and the costs prohibitive:

“I just don't think that many houses lend themselves to the possibility of being retrofitted. ... I think it's a pretty firm barrier that unless you're willing to tear down walls ... it's just not going to happen.”

“On the other hand, if you own a home and you want to retrofit it to those three basic needs, then it becomes a little more costly to tear things apart and rebuild.”

Limited consumer engagement in decision-making and related concerns

Some consumers mentioned that their voice is not sufficiently cohesive or strong, and is at times discounted by builders and policy makers. Further, there is limited engagement of people with disabilities by governments.

"I don't know about the rest of the provinces, or the rest of the country, but in [my province], there's been no engagement [of people with disabilities]. The National Housing Strategy and federal government is asking about access. So, certainly I'm seeing that from the federal government."

"I don't know about the rest of the provinces, but in [my province], there's been no engagement [of people with disabilities]."
[Consumer]

"I don't think I was loud enough. I think you kind of sit back and you think, 'Okay, you don't want to be too pushy', but I think now I wish I were more pushy... It's changed [at the city] now from when I was there, a bunch of changes. But at one point it was more that we were a token more than actually useful."

"Our disability organizations - they're just not doing their job because they don't have the money to."

"You know, every committee I go to, there's me and maybe one or two other people with disabilities. Well, we're not going to make change that way- when we're not the dominant voice in the conversation."

As well as feeling that their voice is not heard, some consumers with disabilities spoke about basic

"[VH] would allow me to visit my family, which I would greatly appreciate, which will never happen in my lifetime. I have family here... that I never see because I can't get into their homes." [Consumer]

human rights being violated including being marginalized from decision making through to not being able to visit family and friends. There were also concerns about stigma, including that accessible housing is associated with social housing.

"It would allow me to visit my family, which I would greatly appreciate, which will never happen in my lifetime. Um, and so I have family, like cousins and stuff here in the city... that I never see because I can't get in their homes."

"The number one thing that human rights legislation says is we need to be involved in the decision-making processes."

"That's what really upsets me right now is most accessible housing is considered social housing. That's ridiculous."

This concludes the presentation of consumer and homebuyer concerns. In the next section, the perspective of developers and builders is presented.

Unique perspectives: Developers and builders

The stakeholder group of developers and builders includes seven people from Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador. In addition to developers and builders, this group also includes two people involved in the building side of the housing industry (i.e., design, industry associations) but not specifically as developers or builders. All interviewees were experienced in terms of VisitAble housing.

These interviewees spoke at length about the things that discourage them and their peers from building VisitAble homes. Importantly, the insights and comments of developers and builders are grounded in the fact that they are business people who must make a profit in order to survive in a highly competitive market.

“As a builder, our primary focus, of course, is that we need to generate sales.” [Builder]

“[Builders’] initial concern is, ‘I’ve got to meet code’. That’s their first requirement. Whatever the code says, that’s what I have to do. If I need to do more than that, what’s the cost to do it and am I not being competitive anymore in the marketplace? The margins are very, very tight in the residential world, that any significant cost difference that is not an advantage to sell, most builders will not look at it seriously. That’s just the reality of the conversations I’ve had.”

[Developer]

One interviewee also referenced the broader context in which developers and builders work, mentioning a recent increase in the HST in his province, new federal legislation around mortgage requirements, and economic decline due to changes in the oil and gas industry. All of these large system factors have placed increased pressure on builders to build as economically as possible. Another factor to consider is the market price of single-family homes. Where prices are high (i.e., \$500,000 or more), it is easier to absorb the costs of building VisitAble, compared to markets where single-family homes sell for significantly less.

Analysis of interview data revealed that, within this broader economic and political context, the major factors that discourage developers and builders from building VisitAble communities and homes included lack of awareness and demand for VH; inflexible or restrictive bylaws; and the costs and risks associated with building VisitAble homes. The first two items of this list have been incorporated into previous sections of the report. In this section, findings related to costs and risks are presented.

Building VisitAble is costly and risky

Several developers and builders spoke about the costs and risks associated with building something different in general, and VisitAble homes in particular. They noted that profit margins are tight in the residential world. While they build according to building codes (national, provincial, local), anything that costs even slightly more than a regular build is viewed to be less profitable. It seems that VH is still not established enough (i.e.,

“There has to be a cost to value equation that makes sense...If I’m spending \$20,000 more and I’m selling for the same price, I’m essentially just eating 20 of my profit.” [Builder]

there isn't enough public awareness and demand yet) to make builders and developers confident that they can build VisitAble housing and still make a profit. As one builder said, *"the cost-value equation has to make sense"*. He noted further that,

"I think price comes into play so frequently, that a lot of builders are getting resistance because they go, "Well, if I'm going to build it for more and sell it for the same price, then it negates the profit margin that we're getting... there has to be the cost to value equation that makes sense to everybody... If I'm spending \$20,000 more and I'm selling for the same price, I'm essentially just eating 20 of my profit." [Builder]

These interviewees typically noted that the costs of building materials are generally negligible; however, the costs that concern them have to do with designing VisitAble homes, achieving the zero step entry, and, costs associated with learning to build things differently.

One interviewee, speaking about the Bridgwater development in Winnipeg, summed up the costs of building VisitAble homes in the following way:

"Building a VisitAble home is more expensive than the regular because, right from the development standpoint, your grading is different. So grading the lots for zero-step entry means you have to do some specialty work in the neighbourhood to create the grade. Then you have to create a whole new design that you haven't done before because of that grade. Then the elevation for basement windows is also completely different.

And then of course you're redesigning things like bathrooms, doorways et cetera; just a passage space on the ground floor of the house. I guess if you were doing it for a number of years then you would have some tried and true patterns, but all these people were doing it for the first time and therefore there was considerably more expense in creating a brand new design." [Builder]

These various costs are expanded upon further in the sections below.

Costs associated with the zero-step entry

The zero-step entry appears to be of most concern to developers and builders. Almost all developer/builder interviewees spoke about this, all in regard to single-family homes. (It was typically noted that the zero step entry is much easier to accomplish for multi-family homes). Grading the lot of a VH is difficult because of the need to meet minimum standards for drainage and proper elevations for utilities coming into the home while not impacting neighbouring houses.

Lot sizes and topography were described as crucial considerations regarding whether building a VH is feasible or not. In essence, the flatter the topography, and the larger the lot size, the easier it is to grade the lot and achieve a zero-step entry. One developer commented that,

"In a place...where everything is flat, getting in and out of the house and not having ramps is all very cheap... In Newfoundland, where your street is 10 percent grade, your door might be seven feet above the road. That's a little bit more challenging."
[Developer]

"[In] a place like Orlando or Winnipeg, where everything's flat, getting in and out of the house and not having ramps is all very cheap. In ... Newfoundland, where your street is on a 10 percent grade, your door might be seven feet above the road. That's a little bit more challenging." [Developer]

Some illustrative quotes from developers/builders about achieving a zero-step entry include:

"When you're grading, if you've got a whole new subdivision you have to be very concerned with House A being next door to House B. You can't have one house graded one way and then right next door a different way, because then the drainage and water flow would be problematic. Whereas in the rural areas, you've got more space. You can create whatever kind of drainage you want to accommodate water flow."
[Builder]

"So, one of the problems that people see is if you sink the house down into the ground you're not going to have good natural light in the basement. So that's certainly a big issue for a lot of people. The other problem that happens in infill development even in new neighbourhoods, sometimes our sewer lines ... and they call it an invert ... So, when we flush our toilet it goes to that invert and it ends up making its way to wherever like a sewage ... And if it happens and our basement floor ends up being lower than that invert then we have to have a sump pump in our house. So it goes from our toilet to the sump pump and then to the city sewer line. And that's not a terrible thing but a lot of people just see it as like an extra cost that's not really needed." [Developer]

Costs of learning to build something different

Several interviewees including developers, builders and advocates spoke of what might be called a learning curve associated with building VisitAble homes. This learning curve can be costly especially for the first few builds. For example, many advocates were critical of designers and builders who build "cookie cutter" homes. They noted that builders get comfortable building the same design over and over again and when they try to build something new, especially without training, there are inevitably errors, some of which can be costly. Some builders said they weren't interested in building something new, particularly when there is no demand for it. Doing so is risky, they noted. Others noted that they had tried building a VH but would not do it again because of challenges they encountered in their initial build. Some examples of comments offered include:

"We had one fellow and he brought in a crew that was laying a zero-step entrance with concrete – a slab coming right up to the house, and it took four or five houses to get it right and it was the same crew and they got better and better with time, but they really had to understand how to pour that concrete. It was interesting to hear how long it took them to catch on. That they were doing it for the first time, they knew what they had to do, but you need a little practice and experience... if we could give them that in school ahead of time that would be great." [Advocate]

“I’ve visited both Bolingbrook and [Bridgwater]... and I could say from when the very first houses, to about a few years into the project. You can see it goes from an afterthought to impeccable design. The skill set of the housing industry, once they get on board, once they get their head around the skill set, then it becomes, ‘Okay, now we can do this beautifully, like every other model home that we have’.” [Advocate]

Risk aversion

Given the need to make a profit in a competitive market, developers and builders appear reluctant to take a chance on something that costs more and may not sell; some may even tell their clients that it is not possible to build a VisitAble home because they perceive it to be difficult, expensive and not in demand. A key challenge is the tension between entrepreneurialism – trying something new, tapping into new markets, and even creating demand by presenting something new – and sticking to what one knows best and has always done and profited from. While policy makers and advocates might be quick to blame builders for not wanting to take a risk or being reluctant, others have come to respect that builders do take a big chance when building something new or different. As one home developer observed:

“In the last twenty years I’ve kind of flipped flopped back and forth as to who I’m more frustrated with... or who I want to encourage more to embrace VisitAble housing. And I can say I used to be one of these people that just thought builders you know made nothing but money and you know VisitAble housing is only a few hundred dollars extra. Like, they’re stupid not to do it, right? But I’ve met enough builders now that I realize that’s just not true and they often take a really big chance building a house. Especially a spec house. ...So you’re just building a house hoping somebody will like it.” [Developer]

This same interviewee spoke further about the gamble that builders take when they build something different, even if it makes a lot of sense. For example, one builder added additional fire safety features to a home outside the range of a fire station, but found that neighbouring houses were selling faster because they had granite counters in the kitchen:

“I talked to one builder and she was telling me about a house she did that had extra insulation because it was outside of the range of the fire station, so she put in a fire fighting sprinkler system. So, she said all of that was about six thousand dollars extra and she said the neighbouring homes were selling faster because they had the shiny granite counter tops in the kitchen.” [Developer]

Another developer said that anything different results in long, costly delays and is generally not worth the effort:

“There’s a real hesitance on developers and builders to suggest anything that’s not 100 percent normal. If it’s not 100 percent what you’ve always done, you’re into big long costly delays. Most of us will look at that and say, I’d really love to do this but I’m not going to. Not worth the effort. As much as I’d love to do it, and as much as some customers would want it.” [Developer]

However, more than one interviewee also noted that developers and builders were happy to see others take the risk and if that risk takes off, then they, too, may be more open to building differently:

"[For developers] what sells is the bottom line. ...And they don't like to take chances so they do what everybody else is doing in a sense and if somebody does do something a little different and it works and they start making money and selling their units then the other developers will go, 'Hey this guy's got a good idea. We'll do that too'. ... Most developers want another developer to do all the work for them. Make it a selling feature and then they'll do it. And I don't blame them. That's just business. They're not in the business of designing homes to be accessible...They really look for trends that work..." [Developer]

"Most developers want another developer to do all the work for them. Make it a selling feature and then they'll do it." [Developer]

This concludes presentation of findings related to interviewees' perceptions of barriers to greater uptake of VisitAble Housing.. A summary of key points from this section is presented in the box below. In the next section, perceptions regarding enablers of VH are presented

Summary Points – Barriers

- *Divergent views about the definition, intent and elements of VH*
- *Limited awareness of, and understanding about VH*
- *Societal attitudes and cultural norms including aversion to infirmity or disability, marginalization and invisibility of groups who most benefit from VH (older people and others with mobility issues)*
- *Lack of market demand due to limited awareness of VH and societal attitudes*
- *A general lack of leadership for VH, and reluctance of policy makers to champion it*
- *Confusion about policies across jurisdictional levels, contradictory policies, inflexible bylaws*
- *Finding, building or retrofitting a VisitAble home (for Consumers)*
- *Lack of advocacy, engagement and leadership (for Consumers)*
- *Cost, technical challenges and risk associated with construction (for Builders, Developers)*

Enablers of VisitAble housing

In this section, perceptions of interviewees from all stakeholder groups regarding what would enable greater uptake of VisitAble Housing are presented. The foundation of these enablers is the sentiment that “VisitAble Housing needs to become the norm” – that a process of social change is required to increase uptake of VH. Interviewees consistently described five broad areas of action that would help realize the goal of VH as a norm: leadership, collaborative action and a national approach; clarity and consensus regarding VH definition and concepts; marketing, education and advocacy; policy; and research. These are described in detail.

A change of mindset: Visitable housing needs to become the norm

Across policy makers, advocates and consumers and some developers/builders, many people said that for optimal uptake, VisitAble housing needs to become a social norm in Canadian society, or, as one interviewee said when asked what would enable greater uptake of VH: a “*change of mindset*”. This means a change in culture, specifically how we think about inclusion, mobility issues and aging.

Some described the way to get there as a slow process of social change not unlike the tobacco campaign, seat belts, power door openers in public building, standard electrical outlets in washrooms, curb cuts, low step entry buses, and others. One advocate noted, for example, that if people just started seeing more VH, it would become the norm:

“If people just start seeing more [VisitAble homes], and it would just become common place, then it would be accepted as the norm. To me, it’s like when we first started introducing power door openers on buildings. That was kind of weird for a lot of people, but now you just wouldn’t think of going to a grocery store or Wal-Mart or whatever without a power door opener. In a lot of buildings now I see the button in front of the door and everybody using it. They don’t have any disability, but they’re pressing the button just to walk through, or they have something in their hands and they’re pressing it. It just wouldn’t have been done 20 years ago, but now it’s so commonplace, part of our culture.” [Advocate]

S/he spoke further about changing the culture from one that expects stairs up the front entrance of a home to one where VH is the normal way of doing things:

“There’s a culture that a house shall have stairs up the front entrance. That is a cultural barrier... We have to change how we think... One way is if you had more [VisitAble homes] around, that would start to change the culture... influencing how designers think and how different practitioners think... start changing perceptions of different people in society. You start building more of them... [Then] it just becomes the normal way you do things.” [Advocate]

A consumer commented that while there might be some initial complaining, an innovation such as VH would eventually become the norm:

“If it can become just normal to have a larger washroom and everything is built in... this becomes the norm that people wouldn’t even think twice about it... Once we started doing it, everyone

complains about it, and it's, 'Oh, all this extra cost'. But eventually it's just what it is and no one even thinks about it and just does it." [Consumer]

Another stated, simply,

"The biggest thing is changing peoples' minds, trying to make it the norm...so it will just become natural and everyone will become more joined. Where the average guy in a wheelchair can actually go to the next person's house and actually borrow a cup of sugar." [Consumer]

An advocate who spoke more to accessible housing described her community where homes are essentially "carbon copies of one another". "They're beautiful", she noted, "but they all have stairs...there is not one house that's pre-built to be accessible". Anyone with a limitation or challenge might fall in love with the neighbourhood but they would have to spend thousands of dollars to make the home accessible. She asked:

"Why are we living in an environment where form is the normal and we have to make adjustments for those with limitations?... We have to change the mindset." [Advocate]

"Why are we living in an environment where form is the normal and then we have to make adjustments for those with limitations? Why is the normal not that everyone can access this? I think it's changing the mindset to say, 'Well, there's a few people that have limitations are part of our everyday life. It could be your brother, your cousin, or whoever. Why are we not making changes so [these homes] are automatically accessible to them? Why do we have to go and make special requirements? It just be just something that gets done'... I think it's changing a lot of mindsets of people in general. Instead of having an after-then sort of thing, it should be all for one and one for all sort of thing." [Advocate]

Based on an analysis of interviewees' responses to the question of what would enable or encourage greater uptake of VH, five broad areas of action were dominant; they are, in many cases, the "flip-side" of barriers to uptake of VH. They are:

- Strengthen leadership for VH and engage in collaborative action for a comprehensive national approach
- Clarify and reach consensus on the definition and criteria of VisitAble housing
- Develop and implement strategies for marketing, education and advocacy
- Develop and implement appropriate policies
- Conduct and disseminate research related to VH

These five areas of action are depicted in Figure 1, and described in detail in the sections below.

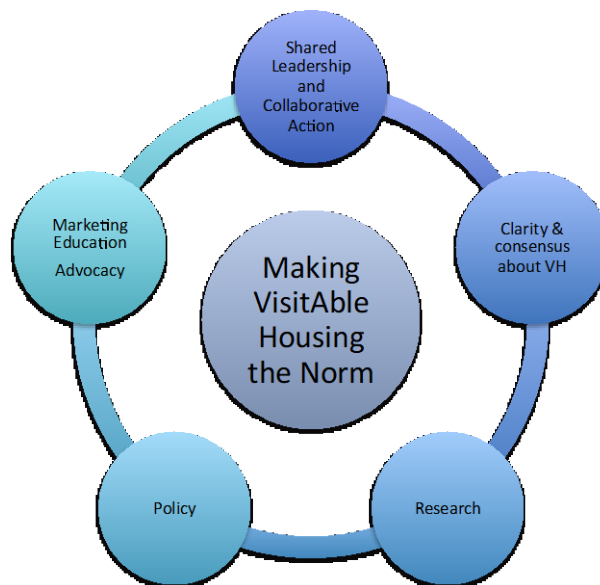


Figure 1. Five broad areas of action for making VisitAble Housing the norm

Leadership, collaborative action and a comprehensive, national approach

A number of interviewees spoke of the importance of champions, advocates and sustained leadership for VH. Others spoke of the importance of collaborative action – bringing people together such as government, and developers and builders and working closely together to advance VisitAble housing across the country. Many people spoke about reconvening the task forces from the previous VH project. Some suggested a comprehensive, national approach.

Leadership

Leadership for VH was noted to be a key driver for enhanced uptake of VH. Most fundamentally, it was thought by many that there is a need for enthusiastic leaders at all levels of government and advocacy from relevant groups. One interviewee, when asked what was driving some pockets of success that s/he had seen, responded that there are people in leadership and decision making roles who “get it” and understand how to advocate from within their systems:

“I think it’s social action. I think there are...people in some decision-making roles and leadership roles who get it and who understand and who also understand how to advocate from within those systems, trying to bring about change.” [Policy maker]

This person further noted that while some people complain and rail against government, others want to work as a team with government because they understand it has to be a collaborative effort.

Leaders in government

Interviewees spoke about the crucial importance of champions, advocates and formal leaders; several described leaders from other jurisdictions who have successfully promoted VH. These included leaders from Manitoba, British Columbia (BC), and Bolingbrook, Illinois:

"BC is really good. BC is really far ahead as far as housing is concerned...they have a very active and aware group of policymakers over there. They've been fantastic. They've done great things. I think a lot of it has to do with the 1986 World's Fair and the Olympic Games. It brought the whole topic of accessibility to the provincial level. I think that had a big, big influence on the number of restaurants, the number of housing units, just the general accessibility of everything from transportation to government services. Very high awareness of the need for inclusion." [Advocate]

"There's a place near Chicago...called Bolingbrook, where they mayor got really excited about this concept and just said, 'Every house will be VisitAble'. ..They have a different political set up there where there is a lot more power invested in the mayor [than here], so he's able to make these sweeping requirements. There was a huge backlash from his building community and so he just

"There was a change in Minister who was responsible for the [Bridgwater project in Winnipeg] halfway through... he was even more enthusiastic than the person who had launched it, so he really wanted to jump in with both feet and get this thing going." [Policy maker]

took them one-by-one into his office and went through it all and said, 'Here's what I want to do and here's how we're going to get it done and we'll give it a couple of years to try out and if I'm wrong then we'll make a change'. So in those couple of years they figured out how to make it work and they've been doing it ever since." [Policy maker]

"There was a change in Minister who was responsible for the [Bridgwater project in Winnipeg] halfway through... he was even more enthusiastic than the

person who had launched it, so he really wanted to jump in with both feet and get this thing going. He saw this as a reasonable thing to get going and there were lots of wins that might come out of that. He was definitely an advocate, kind of a fearless one. So it was very nice." [Policy maker]

Leadership of CCDS and CMHC

Some people spoke to a potential leadership role for the CCDS and the CMHC. One person, for example noted his/her encouragement that CMHC and CCDS are pursuing VH and suggested CMHC could play a larger role:

"I'm very encouraged that the CMHC and the CCDS...are pursuing this and are continuing to get funding to study the idea and raise awareness where they can...I think the CMHC could play a huge role in this. They've have some resources and they've got lots of people with great housing experience and they've been doing things similar to this." [Policy maker]

One interviewee similarly recognized the ongoing support of CMHC and suggested it could augment current efforts by, perhaps creating design awards, promotional materials, funding special initiatives and serving as a clearinghouse of information.

Builders as champions and leaders

In contrast, some people recommended a grassroots approach that would lead builders to recognize the need for VH and to become a champion themselves:

“If you just had a really good grassroots campaign where all of these groups are talking about it and saying we need it, maybe the builder... can say, ‘You know what? I’ve seen this great need for this, and I’m going to be the champion of this, and I’m going to start building these homes’.” [Advocate]

Another interviewee suggested that what’s required to engage the development industry is to find an advocate – a “big person” who really understands the industry:

“One of the ways to [engage developers], is to find a great advocate who understands the development business. Who can be a spokesperson, who can be a representative, who can speak to, ‘You know what? If you guys would only do this, me and my fellow wealthy retirees, we could buy in your community.’ ... It can’t be just a person like myself or somebody who is a strong advocate around VisitAbility. It needs a really big personality who understands development business, who is older, to say, ‘Look. You’re developing land that I’m not willing to buy because I can’t live there’.” [Developer]

In Winnipeg, it was observed that builders from the Bridgwater development are now taking a leadership role in building other housing, including a new 97 unit apartment building that is all VisitAble and also includes some barrier free units. It was noted that builders are taking what they learned in Bridgwater and passing it on to other developers. [Advocate]

Task forces from the previous VH project

The strongest theme in the leadership-related data, and the most frequently cited solution regarding leadership, was about the good work that was done in the task forces from the previous VH initiative. Those who spoke about their work in the task forces did so with great enthusiasm, noting how promising that work had been. This group of people is keen; they are strong champions of VH and AH and have continued to work toward greater uptake of VH. A few mentioned how important it was to have had a strong community of VH proponents.

There was a general consensus amongst these interviewees that:

1. The task forces did a significant amount of work and achieved a lot
2. However, they ended too soon and there was much work left undone
3. They would be interested in participating if the task forces should be re-convened

A sampling of comments includes:

“We really got a great momentum going and it was just too bad that we were just starting to... the city was starting to get to know our group. They were starting to say, ‘Oh, well maybe we should talk about VisitAbility’, and then the funding ended.... We all had to go our separate ways and that was really too bad.” [Advocate]

"It was too bad we couldn't have kept up some of the momentum from the original project. We came up with a lot of good literature and we felt like we'd just laid a really good framework... things were really taking off towards the wrap up of the project and things were going so fast that the task force was having trouble keeping up because so many things were coming to fruition.... We had modernized the standards for the region, we were really getting out there and doing awareness and there were so many people interested in terms of the education and the presentation that we were offering." [Advocate]

"I would go back [to the task force] again, in a second, if they asked." [Advocate]

"We're really proud of what we put out. ...we worked very hard... it was an exciting group ... we really felt there needed to be another year, another phase, to be able to roll out." [Advocate]

"We're really proud of what we put out. ...we worked very hard... it was an exciting group ... we really felt there needed to be another year, another phase, to be able to roll out. Because we spent so much time coming up with standards – it takes so much time to do that work and it was excellent work but we had all this product, all these materials...[we did roll out some things] but we could have used is another year of being

able to roll it out in a real significant way." [Advocate]

Collaborative action and a comprehensive national approach

A number of interviewees also spoke to the importance of collaborative action – bringing people together, working closely with the developer and builder communities, with government and other stakeholders. Such an approach would include development and use of a consistent set of data, specifications for VH, presentations and messages. One person spoke about "bringing the powers together", including people who have already succeeded at VH:

"It's not just the engineers and all that because that only goes so far. They need to have the MLAs together, the association of municipalities, those kind of people, and bringing up mayors of different cities, different groups. Something like that - people who have done it and it's worked: 'Here's how it works. Here's what we did. Now you have to move forward and change the law'. I think that's what has to happen." [Advocate]

A policy maker said what's needed is to build a critical mass or ground swell to create a greater sense of urgency and "speed up the political machine":

"I think as jurisdictions are working on this, if we built up that critical mass and sped up through the political machine, through the Ministers who are responsible for housing. There has to be that ground swell to create that sense of urgency about it, because there's so much on everyone's radar all the time, it seems you have to create that sense of urgency." [Policy maker]

Re-convene and expand the previous task forces for a national approach

Several people suggested that perhaps the previous task forces could be re-convened and expanded to other provinces and territories, and that they could work collaboratively toward a national approach. One advocate noted that the original task forces focused more on talking with each other and spreading the word to people they knew. However, he suggested that the CCDS and CMHC could develop a national program and partner with other stakeholder groups to create momentum:

“Our mandate originally was we were supposed to advocate and educate, but we really didn’t have any kind of presentation or a national presentation. We didn’t go out and go to a group and say, ‘Hey, this is what we’re all about. This is what we’d like you to do’. It was more talking to each other and getting out to people we knew, and spreading the word and explaining what VisitAble was. I think the CMHC and CCDS could actually come up with a national program that could be presented, make a partnership where we would go to [numerous stakeholder groups] And say, ‘Look, we want to partner and create this huge momentum in huge groups of people to realize this is best for Canada as a whole’...And then the next phase would be actually going out.” [Advocate]

This collaborative could then target large national stakeholder groups such as the Canadian Association of Retired People, Chambers of Commerce, and many more. See Appendix C for a partial list of organizations identified by interviewees.

Clarify and reach consensus on the definition and criteria for VisitAble housing

As noted in the barriers section, there is currently confusion and debate about the minimum aspects for “VisitAble”. One interviewee, a policy maker, spoke passionately about the importance of creating a solid, standard definition of VH that is consistent across the country in order to move the concept forward. S/he argued that advocating for VH gets “muddy” even with the three basic criteria, let alone other criteria that some groups have added:

“[I just want to reiterate] the importance of creating an absolutely solid, standard definition of what VisitAble housing is, and being consistent with that throughout the country. The way these different task forces went rogue and started re-defining is and changing it in ways that were fundamentally different than the original simple three step process. I think that’s doing a disservice to this and the advocates who are getting excited and wanted to get those other features included, I think they need to understand that we should just wait on those things.

Let’s get our foot in the door with this strategy and get people talking about accessibility in all housing and then we can take the next step. But let’s not throw it all in at once. It just gets muddy and it gets more frightening and it’s tough enough just to get these three basic things in without pushing further than we need to... when you start losing the clarity of the idea, we’re hooped. It’s got to be crystal clear and it’s got to be consistent.” [Policy maker]

Other interviewees made similar comments, noting that a simple, clear definition is a necessary starting point. In any event, it would seem that clarifying and achieving consensus about the concept of VH would be one of the first things to focus on when implementing a collaborative, national approach.

Marketing, education and advocacy

When asked about what might encourage stakeholders to adopt VH, or what the key enablers to increased adoption of VH might be, almost all interviewees spoke about the crucial importance of building awareness and knowledge through marketing, education and advocacy. These efforts, they hypothesized, should result in increased demand for VH. As one interviewee noted,

“We need to applaud the people who are doing [VH], we need to support the people who are interested in doing it, and we need to educate the people who have no idea what it’s about.” [Consumer]

“We need to applaud the people who are doing it, we need to support the people who are interested in doing it and we need to educate the people who have no idea what it’s about.” [Consumer]

Creating awareness and demand through marketing

Given the general agreement amongst interviewees about the lack of knowledge amongst the public, policy makers and developers/builders, creating awareness of VH through marketing was mentioned almost universally. Marketing is required, they said, to increase the profile and visibility of VH, and is a precursor to creating greater demand for VH. One interviewee noted, for example that the main thrust is to increase public awareness and build the public’s appetite for VH:

“We’re proposing that if the government invested in an awareness campaign about these sorts of things, and that there are some open houses – there’s things that can be competitions, there’s a whole bunch of different ideas that we’re throwing about - but the main thrust of it is just to get public awareness up and build the public appetite for these features and at the very least, have them on the list of different features that people can opt for in their houses, and what they cost, and then, that’s a huge start.” [Policy maker]

Interviewee comments about marketing as an enabler of VH centred on three intersecting points: key audiences, key messages, and key strategies/approaches to get the messages out.

Key audiences

Interviewees identified four key audiences as listed below:

- **The general public.** Since it is the public who need to rent or buy homes, they are fundamentally important as a target audience. Interviewees further segmented the public audiences into those who have disabilities, those who are older or aging, families, and young adults, each of which has unique characteristics and needs.
- **Influencers.** Those individuals, groups, organizations and associations that that can influence others who, in turn, increase the profile and uptake of VH. Influencers include advocacy groups (e.g., those that lobby for social inclusion or for people with mobility issues), professional institutions and associations (e.g., associations of occupational therapists, architects), post-secondary institutions (e.g., schools for architects, trades, occupational therapists), and elected officials. This was termed, “influencing the influencers.”

- **Policy makers.** Those who make decisions and set direction. Interviewees talked about those who work in policy at the local government level (e.g., city, municipal district, county), at the provincial or territorial level, and at the federal level. This was considered to be a key strategy.
- **Developers and homebuilders.** Those who design and build housing developments and homes, and associated groups in the building industry (e.g. homebuilders' associations). Developers and builders were considered a critical audience to reach in order to increase their uptake of the VH and ultimately result in more development and construction of VisitAble housing sites and homes.

Key messages

Interviewees offered numerous ideas for key messages – some for all audiences, and some for specific audiences. In addition to defining VH and its three dimensions⁵, two universal messages are:

- VH is for everyone, not just for people with disabilities or who are aging.
- VH supports inclusion by providing a basic level of accessibility into all homes.

Interviewees highlighted a number of additional messages including:

- A VH can be a “forever” home – you won’t have to move if someone living in or regularly visiting the home develops mobility challenges.
- VH can be beautiful and desirable.
- VH increases convenience for everyone.
- The cost of building a VisitAble home is minimally more expensive than regular homes and resale values are good.
- It is more economical to build a VH than to try and retrofit a home.

As noted above, a universal message defined by many interviewees is that **VH is for everyone** and that **VH supports inclusion by providing a basic level of accessibility into all homes**. This is a response to one of the perceived barriers to the uptake of VH – that the concept is seen as being primarily for people who have disabilities and to a lesser extent to those who are older and experiencing loss of mobility. For some, there is a sense that this focus has made VH irrelevant to other audiences. To address this, it was suggested that VH should be more strongly marketed in terms of inclusion, social justice and human rights:

“[The CCDS/CMHC] really need to get out there and make it more about all inclusive rather than seniors. Don’t target one specific market, but target everybody and their conscience. Their sense of community, where you don’t want someone to be left out. I think that’s really a key.” [Advocate]

⁵ A builder commented on the importance of educating the public about VH: “You can advertise VisitAble homes until we’re blue in the face, but if they don’t know what it is and how it benefits them, then it’s a moot point.”

"I think [the inclusion argument for VH] would really reverberate with a lot of folks. I think we all know someone that has a challenge." [Advocate]

In addition to the inclusion argument, interviewees emphasized the need to expand the VH market by increasing its appeal across age spans and abilities. Not everyone is interested in features that support aging or disability. For some populations the appeal might be more about convenience and even luxury:

"And so, we have to also shift in that marketing plan we have to shift the way we market VisitAble housing again as a thing of convenience and luxury, not as a thing that you will need in the future because you're going to be in a wheelchair." [Developer]

Key considerations for maximizing the impact of marketing messages

Interviewees suggested a number of key messages for marketing; they also underlined five key considerations for maximizing the impact of these messages. These considerations are described below.

Tailor the message for each target group. Knowing the characteristics of each audience is critical since some may be more convinced by facts, figures and evidence that VH has worked well in many other jurisdictions, while others may be more convinced by personal experience or by stories that have an emotional appeal. For example, one interviewee talked about targeting a message in relation to minimizing daily irritations such as moving golf bags.

"The only way you can get more people to buy it is to talk about what is ticking them off on a daily basis. Gee, moving your golf clubs in, your golf carts, your little rack with your golf bag back and forth with wheels. Wheel it in and out, you don't have to carry it up and down the stairs. There's all sorts of different things that we find cumbersome on a daily basis." [Builder]

Find the "win" in VH for each target group. This approach answers the question of "What's in it for [this group]?" One interviewee noted, for example, that when targeting policy makers, it is valuable to think about what matters most to that group – for instance cost savings, as indicated below:

"Whenever you're talking about change, it has to have some kind of appeal to the stakeholder.

"Whenever you're talking about change, it has to have some kind of appeal to the stakeholder."
[Advocate]

What's in it for the policy-maker to do it? To a policy maker, one of the things that they're interested in now is cost saving, for instance, because there's only so much money the government has. Because I've dealt with healthcare, making the case even on the healthcare side, 'What kind of money will this save us in the long-run',

might be helpful.... Understanding how you introduce change to people and to entities would be an important part of how to move forward with VisitAble Housing." [Advocate]

Others talked about how to target different age groups such as boomers or young families. For the boomer generation, aging in place is becoming increasingly relevant as identified in the following quote:

"Some of the younger people, and definitely the boomers want bungalows if they can get them. Pretty much all of them will accept a two storey, but they're looking for more open plans on the first story, and different things. I have one couple now, they're retired and they'll take a two storey, but they'd like one with a den on the first floor in case they need to turn it into a bedroom, and the stairs can't be too steep and too narrow. They need them a little easier, because the lady has a bit of problems with her knees." [Advocate]

In contrast, the approach to young people and young families may be quite different. One interviewee, a mother with children, wondered how lovely it would be to be able to "scoot" into her house with her baby's stroller:

"I am thinking of how lovely it would be for me to, like, on a cold day, because we live in Canada, to just be able to scoot on into the house without having to take [baby] out and fiddle with everything. Like, I could keep my groceries in the stroller and just wheel her right in, take her out inside the house, and then take all of the stuff outside of the stroller. And then once I'm done with everything, put the stroller away. ... And I could imagine if I had a VisitAble home, how convenient that would be." [Advocate]

People need to see it to believe it. A message heard repeatedly in the interviews is the power of first-hand experience, and that "seeing is believing". While all of the facts and figures and arguments for VH can make sense intellectually, many interviewees noted that people don't really understand the concept until they actually walk through a VisitAble home and experience the ease of living; or try to navigate a home that is not VisitAble in a wheelchair; or traverse steep and icy steps. As one advocate said, *"I think the more that people see those houses, the more it's going to strike a chord and [people will say], 'Hey, wait a minute. It would be nice if my house was kind of like that'."* Another noted,

"Sometimes human beings just have to have a personal experience directly... live a day in the shoes of somebody who encountered those barriers, and then they will be appreciate the need. I think it has to be personal... If we could do advertisements that make it personal for people, that might work." [Advocate]

"Sometimes human beings just have to have a personal experience directly... live a day in the shoes of somebody who encountered those barriers ..." [Advocate]

Appealing to emotions can be powerful. Related to the above point, some interviewees spoke of the impact of stories that pull on the heartstrings or features that have emotional appeal. One story circulating in the VH community is about a boy in a wheelchair who can finally come up to the front door of a VH to collect his Halloween treat, rather than waiting on the sidewalk for his friends to get the treat for him. Another interviewee spoke of the impact that his own home, with three steps to the front door, had on his father, a full-time wheelchair user:

"We used to own a bungalow and there were three steps at the front door which is pretty common. And, so for my Dad, he would often do his errands and shopping on Saturdays and then he would like to get his grandchildren gifts and treats and he would park his van on the driveway and then he would just phone and the kids would come running out and grab their treats and then

they'd go running back in the house. By the time I even figured out what was going on he was already gone so his experiences with his grandchildren were less than ideal simply because of three steps.” [Developer]

Others stressed the importance of the emotional impact of having a “forever home” that supports inclusion of family and friends.

“I think if we could just say, ‘Wouldn’t it be great that you can get an all inclusive house, no matter who comes to visit you, no matter what challenges your friends face physically, or your grandparents, or your parents, you can always get them into your house. There’s no struggles; there’s no concerns. And then, if you choose that that’s the house you want to stay in for the rest of your life, you don’t have to worry down the road that you’re going to have to spend thousands upon thousands of dollars to modify it for you to stay there’. I think if it’s sold that way, and presented that way, I think it changes everything.” [Advocate]

It was noted by some that buying a home is an emotional process; in essence people are buying a dream. Often, it is the visual things – the granite countertops, for example – that people view as highly desirable. One developer, for example, said, *“The buying market is really kind of seduced by the visual side of things and they ... they don't often see merit in a lot of practical things”*. Another noted that people buy homes as “an image thing”. For these people, marketing on the basis of “arthritic knees” is much less likely to fly than the argument that it is easier to shovel the walkway, or moving a fridge and other functional reasons for VH features: *“Suddenly, you’ve got a different buy in.”*

Marketing strategies

As well as talking about key audiences and messages, interviewees suggested a range of marketing strategies and approaches such as branding, advertising campaigns, open houses and home tours. Underlying all of the suggestions is the need for a strategic marketing plan for VH. One interviewee, for example, suggested, *“It might be better to get a marketing company that doesn't know a whole lot about VisitAble housing and approach it from a really, really fresh perspective.”* A list of suggested approaches is presented below. This list, with descriptive quotes from interviewees can be found in Appendix D.

- Advertising campaigns, using for example, social media, YouTube, particularly to educate people about what a VisitAble home is, and to do some “myth-busting” about VH
- Personal stories of those affected and who benefit from VH
- Profile VH in real estate - work with realtors who are the link between builders/developers and buyers. Success has been had with development of a VisitAbility checklist as part of the MLS listing system.
- Build model homes including “modest” ones; have open houses and host home tours
- Build inventories of VisitAble homes for potential buyers
- Offer VisitAble housing awards – recognize people who are on board and recognize them publicly

- Hold design competitions amongst students (or other groups) for designing VisitAble homes amongst students

Education

Interviewees offered many suggestions about using education to support VH with a particular focus on the housing industry. Target audiences were identified as developers, builders and construction trades (e.g., plumbers, framers), professions (e.g. occupational therapists, architects, designers, engineers), realtors, and high school and post-secondary educational institutions. Education for these target groups could serve a range of purposes from sensitization to the needs of those seeking VH building plans to practical hands-on materials and skill development about how to build VH features.

Builders, developers and tradespeople

The most frequently mentioned target group for educational initiatives were builders, developers and tradespeople. It was thought that effective education could help reduce the learning curve about building VH and show how problems can be addressed. As one advocate said, it is important to be *“building up that knowledge base so that people don’t have to start from scratch”*. Suggested educational strategies included the following:

Make the business case for building VH. One builder spoke strongly about the need to make the business case for VH. He noted that the argument about it “being the right thing to do” does not put food on the table. Instead, builders need to know that building VH can be profitable.

Ensure that alongside technical education there is also functional education. Some interviewees noted that for those in the building industry, technical knowledge in and of itself is insufficient and rather that it must be integrated with functional knowledge. That is, they must understand and be able to visualize how people with mobility issues would move through a house. One interviewee, for example, spoke of visiting the Bridgwater community in Winnipeg. This interviewee spoke of numerous developers describing the merits of VisitAbility, but upon touring some of the homes, found that while the three visitability criteria could be checked off on a list, in fact the homes were not entirely visitable. One, for example, had a sunken living room; another had a bathroom where a wheelchair could not fit under the sink. Another interviewee noted that building professionals don’t understand, for example how folks transfer from a wheelchair to a regular chair:

“A lot of building professionals don’t understand why things are as they are; they just see some specs and follow them. They don’t understand that folks transfer and sometimes when I’m talking to building professionals, talking about transfer, they think, ‘Transfer what? Transfer bank accounts?’ I’m like, ‘No, they transfer from chair to toilet or the chair to bed, right?’” [Advocate]

One builder explained that he trains his workers by having them traverse a home in a wheelchair; *“I do training for our guys in a wheelchair; make them move around the subdivisions and try to drive a wheelchair around a 2 percent slide slope on a sidewalk. That ain’t so easy.”* Initially, he worked with an occupational therapist, physiotherapist and others to help figure things out; this has been a big advantage for his company.

Develop and disseminate technical information and resource documents. Many interviewees spoke to the importance of providing detailed technical information presented in ways that are easy to comprehend. Many mentioned the importance of clarifying technical requirements such as requirements for bathrooms and no step entries. One developer emphasized the importance of having short, succinct and practical educational materials; in short, he said, “*make it easy for me*” by providing short, concise documents with clear guidance about how to build VH features, rather than providing long, bulky documents. He suggested that YouTube videos might be helpful:

“Make it easy for me. Provide me with information that is not a big bulky document but just tells me in two minutes or less what I need to do.... I don’t want them to give me a website with a four hundred page document which will tell you everything you need to know.... And that’s where VisitAbility I think is pretty easy to do. We can do a one pager and say here it is, right? Now, having said that, we have to be very clear on how to do a no step entrance and ...what is a VisitAble bathroom... Even like a YouTube video or something where it’s a two- minute video.”
[Developer]

Develop and disseminate case studies that highlight how VisitAble homes have been successfully built and that explain how to address technical challenges:

“Quick little case studies, very simple, quick to the point and getting them to be intrigued that this could be a good business option that differentiates them from their competitors. ... Here’s how you can do this. Here’s the average cost to do it. Here’s an example of how builders have done it and have been successful with that approach.” [Builder]

“Quick little case studies, very simple, quick to the point and getting them to be intrigued that this could be a good business option that differentiates them from their competitors.” [Builder]

Develop and disseminate VH building plans. Given that builders are often reluctant to develop new building plans, several interviewees spoke to the value of making VisitAble home plans freely available to them.

“Available housing designs or built homes that show it can be done.... Having some house designs that we can show, including row houses. Or built houses. The more you can show different ways of doing it the better.” [Consumer]

Build model homes and have open houses. Model VisitAble homes were mentioned as a way of educating builders and developers about VH, and helping develop confidence that these homes can and are being constructed. This approach can be instructive for both the public and the building industry. A current example is a model VH being built by Maplevue Homes in Prescott, Ontario.

Provide continuing education with practical, hands-on solutions.

Offer free education. One advocate spoke to the fact that education can be costly and timely for builders, and as such, that free education that breaks each step down of building VH, for example, concrete work for the no step entry, would go a long way toward increasing uptake of VH:

“If free education could be provided to builders and ... the steps broken down of how it can be done, and the things for contractors, worker contractors, like the people that pour the cement, and all that kind of stuff. If that education could happen ... that would make a tremendous effort to this being incorporated.” [Advocate]

Collaborate with experts to solve difficult problems. One developer noted that there could be some challenging technical issues in building VH, particularly with the no-step entry. Solving these problems requires collaboration of experts who can then educate and support builders:

“To make VisitAble more acceptable to builders is to be able to provide real technical information. ... It really requires a design person... and it requires an engineer, an energy specialist, and manufacturers of doors to all come together to say, ‘How can we solve this?’, and do it in an appropriate way for the Canadian climate so that builders are going to recognize that a), they don't have to solve it, we've already solved it, and b) that there's product that is going to meet this, and it is not going to come back and bite us later that the doors are leaking, or that we've got frozen doors.” [Developer]

A developer from the Bridgwater community in Winnipeg provided an example of how well this can work. Lot grading in the development was a significant issue that required additional costs. The developers worked with their engineers and the city of Winnipeg to generate an aesthetically pleasing and effective solution: a pathway at the back of homes.

“[To accommodate grading issues in Bridgwater], we had to come up with an effective lot grading plan with our engineers ... It meant working with the City of Winnipeg because certainly...one issue was lot drainage... so one of the unique concepts that our engineers came up with was having...pathways at the rear of the homes ...it makes a really nice amenity to the lot because now instead of backing on directly onto a neighbour right behind you, you now have a nice pathway that acts as kind of a bit of a buffer. But that pathway was, was incorporated in order to enable the lots to drain to the back. And to deal with those potential drainage concerns that the city had”. [Developer]

Draw upon the repertoire of educational materials developed in the previous VH project. Importantly, the various task forces of the previous VH project generated a great volume of resources for builders, including technical documents, home plans, and so on. One interviewee, for example, described the creation of a Regulatory and Technical Analysis document, an aggregation of a variety of relevant documents. This group also developed summaries of documents from a planning perspective and an analysis of a provincial policy statement, including what the policy does and does not allow. These documents were very well received by stakeholders.

High school and post-secondary education students

Several interviewees, including some who were or are currently involved with this, raised the benefits of educating post-secondary students about VH. It was generally thought that working with the professionals of the future is a powerful strategy for increasing awareness, and building practical skill and knowledge in VH and accessibility in general. Some said that students are open to new ideas and thinking outside the box. Students in occupational therapy, architecture, engineering and trades as well as drafting programs at colleges were mentioned as target audiences. Some interviewees from the previous Winnipeg task force spoke about adding VH and accessibility into the high school drafting curriculums, noting the VH is a good entry point for discussions of more accessible features. They also spoke of holding competitions for designing VisitAble homes in high school drafting classes.

Consumers

Related to creating a market demand, is the notion of increasing consumers' awareness of VH and of how housing needs can change over time.

"There needs to be a little bit more education for the general public about what their own housing needs are and be that from how to age in place, how to consider your own environment to plan ahead. These types of things just to demystify some of these things and just to get people talking about them." [Advocate]

Realtors

Also important to note is the importance of educating realtors about VH, since they are the bridge between buyers and builders. Training and education could occur through realtor association conferences.

Education across target audiences

Finally, some interviewees emphasized that education needs to include opportunities to bring different target audiences together so they can share their knowledge and collaborate. One interviewee, for example, spoke about getting builders to the table and having an open forum for engineers, builders and planners – having everyone in the same room to hear each other.

Additional suggestions for educational strategies

Additional suggestions for learning and education included:

- Develop and host webinars or other collaborative learning venues regarding various aspects of VH.
- Create a speaker's bureau - consumers, builders, advocates, policy makers – who speak about VH at meetings and other forums.
- Develop a VH community of practice.

Advocacy

Interviewees—particularly consumers, policy makers, and advocates—talked about the importance of advocacy work in raising the profile of VH and in keeping the issue front and centre. There were two threads to this conversation. One thread was about supporting people with lived experience to take on advocacy efforts; the other was around the substance and strategy of advocacy efforts.

Engaging consumers at planning and policy development levels

For some, advocacy has become tiring with the sense that there has been little progress or power to effect change. One advocate interviewee commented that consumers might feel a sense of powerlessness; indeed at least one consumer expressed great frustration over her long-term efforts to foster change with little success. To increase advocacy efforts, some interviewees suggested greater inclusion of consumers at planning and policy sessions. They thought that “*being at the table*” was critical and that there should be “*nothing about us, without us*”. An advocate spoke to how important it is that people feel that they and their cause are supported by their city, and by the country. Consumers need to be viewed as legitimate, she said, and that legitimacy can be obtained by having the support of governments and prominent groups or people. She also reinforced the power of building a strong network of champions.

Interviewees reported mixed experiences with consumer inclusion at these planning and policy development tables. One interviewee noted there was far less engagement now than ten years ago. In another case, a policy maker was enthusiastic about the engagement of people with disabilities and the power of their perspective, saying that their involvement could be through advisory groups or advocacy groups.

“That’s such a challenge in advocacy, isn’t it? Is to help develop that capacity of people to see their potential to influence when they feel powerless.” [Advocate]

“That’s such a challenge in advocacy, isn’t it? Is to help develop that capacity of people to see their potential to influence when they feel quite powerless.” [Advocate]

From another perspective, a policy maker thought that people with lived experience had a powerful impact.

“The evidence is there and it’s undeniable that when you have people who are sitting around the table with lived experience looking at government and saying, ‘Well, you’ve asked the questions and we’ve told you, so what are you going to do now?’ ... it is more effective when people with disabilities are at the table and looking into the eyes of government.” [Policy Maker]

This interviewee went on to elaborate about her office’s positive experiences with engaging consumers and people with disabilities. She described several active groups and coalitions in the community, all of which feed into a provincial advisory council for persons with disabilities that interacts with the Minister. This interviewee described ongoing efforts to build capacity in some of these groups, including identifying a mandate and work that could be done. One activity coming out of this work has been hosting of a booth at a well-attended home show event.

Beyond the role of consumers and advocates, this interviewee also spoke about the importance of having people within systems who are able to advocate effectively:

“It’s also though people in some decision-making roles and leadership roles who get it and who understand and who also understand how to advocate from within those systems to try to bring about change.” [Policy maker]

A consumer described engagement of people with disabilities or community agencies involved with disabilities in committee work.

“We do have representatives from disability service, community agencies on various committees that we have. We have a representative from Empower, which is a local disability agency and he's the advocacy coordinator, so he's talking quite a bit about the need for affordable, accessible, rental accommodations.” [Consumer]

Another interviewee spoke about the importance supporting advocacy groups who want to make policy recommendations by providing resources for them to do the research to make their case.

The approach and substance of advocacy efforts

Suggestions relating to the approach and substance of advocacy included being clear about target audiences, involving consumers at planning and policy development levels, using personal stories and experiences, and cultivating champions. Similar to the marketing discussion earlier in this document, one interviewee spoke about the importance of having clarity about key audiences for advocacy efforts.

“And then thinking when you're doing all this advocacy work, and all the presentations you're doing, who are your audiences? Is it policy makers? Or the public, or builders?” [Advocate]

Further elaboration of this notion of targeted advocacy came from a developer/designer who thought that advocacy to industry needs to focus on how to create a market rather than on social merits:

“I will sell it on a social basis ...for the governments to talk about socialization and things like this, but to the industry people? It's not socialization. They couldn't care less about socialization. It's how do I get more people to buy it?” [Builder]

The power of personal stories and experiences

Related to inclusion of consumers and advocates was the sense that exposure to personal experiences and personal stories is a powerful form of advocacy with significant potential for changing perspectives.

“I think that nobody can explain the situation better than people who live with it. When it comes to having an awareness campaign...that's great, but to have it backed by those who truly know how their lives are affected by this, that would be the key.” [Advocate]

“That's why sometimes human beings just have to have personal experience directly or indirectly, somebody they know, to realize ... Live a day in the shoes of somebody who encountered these barriers and then they will really appreciate it, the need.”
[Advocate]

“I think the thing for me that would definitely increase the adoption is to get the stories of those that are personally affected. Truly understand what it is like on a day-to-day basis to live in a situation where you are confined or where you have mobility challenges. I think that nobody can explain the situation better than the people who live with it. When it comes to having an awareness campaign or promotion or anything, that's great,

but to have it backed by those that truly know how their lives are affected by this, that would be the key.” [Advocate]

The role of champions

There was mention about the need for champions from consumer, policy maker/advocate and builder/developer groups. This is addressed in the section regarding leadership and collaborative action.

Focus on human rights

A few interviewees talked about the relationship between human rights and VH and suggested that advocacy efforts could focus on basic rights including existing or potential violation of these.

“So I do have, sort of, the broad-based agenda to say, I went right to the National Building Code because if that fails, I hope at some point that I can go to the United Nations and say, ‘Okay, we ratified the convention. Article 9 speaks of accessibility of housing, we’re in violation of that, so what do we do from here?’.” [Advocate]

Advocacy with developers and builders

One advocate from a supportive living agency spoke about advocacy efforts with builders and developers. This person said that the agency’s approach is to work with people who are open or receptive to the idea of building VH and AH, and then to *“lean into that and say, ‘We can do some cool work... we can work hard to profile your work and tell the story of this work’.”*

Develop and implement appropriate policies

Most policy maker and advocate interviewees spoke about policy as a strong driver for the uptake of VH. A general sentiment was that without some kind of policy intervention, VH would likely not advance significantly. A typical comment was:

“It’s not going to come organically out of the development community or the building community. There’s just no incentive for them to make this change.” [Policy maker]

However, there were differences of opinion about which policy approaches would be most appropriate. While some interviewees emphasized federal legislation through changes to the National Building Code, others were cautious regarding the implications of such a blanket, nation-wide policy. These interviewees leaned toward local development policies/bylaws; others tended toward greater reliance on education and awareness to create more demand for VH, and the use of incentives primarily for developers and builders, but also for the public in regard to retrofitting houses. These themes are described in greater detail below.

Legislation

Many policy makers/advocates and some consumer interviewees stated that change needed to come “from the top”; that is, legislation developed by the federal government. Specifically, the integration of the three VH criteria into the National Building Code was mentioned as an important step to provide the

impetus for broader adoption by the provinces and territories. The National Building Code is a model code developed by the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes (CCBFC). Using a committee based process involving the provinces, territories, industry experts, and consumer representatives, the CCBFC encourages uniformity of building and facility regulations throughout Canada.

"We can encourage and we can provide the information and mobilize groups that become aware...[but] where the real strength lies is with the National Building Code with the [Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes], and that's where it becomes mandatory." [Policy maker]⁶

"I think there has to be a decision made that in Canada or in every jurisdiction that, moving forward, any new build is VisitAble. I think there are times when you just have to draw a line and say, 'This point, moving forward, this is what it will be'." [Policy maker]

"We can encourage and we can provide the information and mobilize groups that become aware...[but] where the real strength lies is with the National Building Code with the [Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes], and that's where it becomes mandatory." [Policy maker] (see footnote 8)

"I think if we can sort of get [VH] into the Code, it's even easier to do. You know, once you start doing it in the Code, it then becomes normal and becomes successful and then you would really see how much actually you would use it, or how many people will use it." [Consumer]

Some based their argument for legislation on the issue of human rights, an inclusive society, and social justice consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

"We're ignoring Section 15 of the Charter....So for 31 years, our very highest national law states that we can't discriminate against someone with a physical disability, yet our building codes exempt houses where we spend the greatest portion of any day.... Our policy is completely in violation of the Charter which has primacy over everything else." [Advocate]

"I think this has to be a top-down approach...You have to make it a legislation. You can't leave it to [bottom up]... The generosity and goodness of peoples' hearts are going to follow after that but... you have to mandate it...Legislation is really important and setting the expectation from the top down. This is basic human rights we're talking about. We're talking about social justice." [Advocate]

Others recognized that legislation may initially be unpopular, but over time would come to be accepted. They equated this with tobacco policy that was also initially unpopular, but over time, has become the accepted norm. Some examples of comments include:

"I think as far as policy is concerned, you have to be heavy handed, in a sense. You have to say in the same way you said, 'Okay, no smoking in restaurants'...It took a long time for people to buy

⁶ This is only the case if the province or territory adopts the provisions of the NBC. The federal government does not implement building codes

into the whole idea of no smoking in public places, but everybody loves it now. It's the same thing with housing in a sense. " [Policy maker]

"If we look at other things, say tobacco legislation and things like that, until you actually pass a law, things don't change that much....I think that's really where we have to go. Just make it happen. It's really having leadership involved in making those changes, and championing the cause to do it. I really think that's it." [Advocate]

Current efforts to change national-level policy

In fact, an effort is already underway to change the National Building Code. Roger Gervais, a long time advocate for VisitAbility and accessibility, submitted a Code Change Request (Code Change Request 964) to the NRC in 2016. The change is a request to provide "visitability" features for all new dwelling units constructed on grade level and those accessible by elevator. It points out large-scale and long-term benefits of cost savings for providing in-home care and for productivity and life quality of people with mobility issues. The request specifies that there should be at least one no-step entrance; doors shall have a width dimension of at least 915 mm, and hallways shall not be less than 1100 mm wide; and finally, one powder room that can be accessed by a resident or visitor who uses a mobility device shall be provided⁷. The change request is currently under review.

Also noted was that VH is already contained in a CSA Standard (CSA B651-12). Section 7 of this Standard refers to the residential sector (but only for housing that is federally regulated) and includes VisitAbility and accessibility; it is to be harmonized into the 2020 National Building Code. There are also policies requiring VisitAble housing for indigenous peoples.

Should all new builds be VisitAble, or just a proportion?

Within this larger discussion about legislation, there is a debate about whether all new builds should be VisitAble, or whether it is sufficient to require that a certain proportion of new builds are VisitAble. One policy maker, for example, spoke of discussions with colleagues about setting minimum percentages of housing to be VisitAble, noting that requiring 100 percent of builds to be VisitAble would not sit well with the development community:

"One of the discussions we've had is to say for example, if the province was to provide some enabling policies, then the discussion becomes, do you set a minimum for example, of all new development that's built, like five per cent of units have to be VisitAble? Is it something else? 20 percent? Is it 50 percent? There's some out there that think it should be 100 per cent.... The second point would be, well, what exactly would you be looking at in a 100 per cent requirement across the board? I don't think it would go over very well with [the development industry].... Whatever that number is, someone's not going to be very happy." [Policy maker]

A consumer suggested, *"It sure would be nice if the city had the same policy saying every new development has to meet 50 percent to be VisitAble."*

⁷ Summary for Standing Committee on Housing and Small Buildings – CCR 964, provided by R. Gervais.

Another interviewee, more focused on accessibility, noted that putting a quota on the number of houses designed to be accessible for wheelchairs is “lunacy”:

“There’s another thing that they do with the building code that is absolutely just lunacy. That is that they put a quota on the number of houses or number of dwellings, units, that are to be designed to be wheelchair accessible. For instance, if you had a building with a hundred units in it, I think it’s only four units have to be accessible, which to me is a very strong indicator that they don’t really understand. You can’t predict a disability, so if you’re in one of the other 96 units, and you acquire a disability, what are you going to do? Kick the person out from the other one? Are you going to move? It does not work. It’s not logical. That’s something that needs to change at the federal level...they have to say that that percentage has to be thrown out and all housing should be adaptable.” [Policy maker]

Arguments against changes to the building code

At least two builders argued there would be significant resistance from the developer/builder community, and the public, to legislation mandating all new builds to be VisitAble. Some advocates also mentioned this is problematic. A key argument is that mandating all homes to be VisitAble removes consumer choice. One builder said, for example:

“If there was a movement to make this compulsory, then there’d be tremendous resistance...Passing legislation would be the absolute worst way to go.” [Builder]

“If there was a movement to make this compulsory for all new houses, then there’d be tremendous resistance. Because not everybody wants that. The whole concept with housing is affordability and choice and that would take away choice...and the consumer should be able to choose what kind of home they want.... Passing legislation would be the absolute worst way to go... that would kill it for certain... because then people would just stop. They’ll say, ‘Oh forget it, I’ll just buy an existing home... you can’t tell me what I do or don’t have to buy or what my house has to look like’.”

Another interviewee, however, countered this argument by stating that given the amount of existing housing stock, there would still be choice for consumers.

“I think there’s also sort of this weird idea like if you build every new house to be VisitAble from here on in [consumers will have no choice, but], you’ve got so much housing stock in your city that isn’t VisitAble, so you still have the choice. They’re afraid of, ‘Well, a lot of people don’t want that’. 99 percent of your choice is not VisitAble right now. If we build every new house in the next 20 years [as VisitAble], we’d still only have about 10 percent of the houses being VisitAble.”

[Advocate]

Nevertheless, this argument implies that consumers would only be able to buy existing non-VisitAble housing stock and not new homes, which still removes choice regarding new builds. Yet another interviewee said that policies already prescribe what people must buy (e.g., various safety features, building requirements), and adding VisitAble criteria would be no different. Hence, there are a variety of different arguments around the “choice” issue.

A third argument against mandating all homes to be VisitAble is that expecting 100 per cent of new builds to be VisitAble is unrealistic, given the topographical diversity across the country. Building homes in flat, dry areas is one thing, but it is another to build VisitAble homes in areas prone to floods, or where the topography is hilly and grades are steep. Building VisitAble homes to match these conditions is more expensive, and if all houses were to be VisitAble, this could make the costs of housing prohibitive:

“To simply make the statement of, ‘We should have all Visitable housing’...then you do not understand the complexity of the issue...people that have been the strong advocates for [VH] they don’t have enough knowledge or experience... this has implications that we have never considered.”
[Builder]

“To simply make a statement of, ‘We should have all Visitable housing’...then you do not understand the complexity of the issue...this has implications that we have never considered.” [Builder]

“If the land is flat, sure, but not in places like Newfoundland where some streets have a 10 percent grade and front doors are seven feet above the road. Building every house as VisitAble then drives up the cost of every house.” [Builder]

An important consideration, however, is that legislation requiring all new builds to be VisitAble can include provisions for waiving the requirement to build VisitAble when the circumstances make it too difficult to build in such a manner.

Development bylaws, not building codes

A number of interviewees said it would make more sense to deal with VH through development policy – that is through local development bylaws or policies that can account for local conditions including topography. One interviewee noted that use of development bylaws rather than building codes has been how Great Britain achieved good uptake VH. This person noted that some advocates for VH have not seriously enough considered some of the potential ramifications of mandating all builds to be VisitAble and that failure to do so could result in hardships for some people:

“I’m an absolute supporter that this really has to be driven from a development policy.... I firmly believe that [VH] is a nice idea, however, it’s not recognizing the difficulty that VisitAbility as a concept has geographically for certain regions.... There are real reasons why this is going to create a hardship on the people that have the greatest need for housing at this moment in time...to do it on a building code basis, that applies on such a broad spectrum and there are implications for housing, there’s implication for First Nations housing that Visitability folks have not thought to look at.” [Builder]

One example offered is the cost of building ramps in a particular First Nation community where the main level of all houses must be 65 inches about the ground because of flooding issues. These ramps are very costly, and to require that all houses should have them would significantly increase housing prices for everyone in the community.

The conclusion to this argument is that it makes sense to build VisitAble homes where it is possible to build without incurring extraordinary costs. For example, some communities in a city may be flatter than others; these could be designated as requiring VisitAble homes.

Another interviewee advocated for focusing on policy at the local level, such as land use planning, where many decisions about building are made, arguing the greatest opportunity for change is at this level:

“My impression is that [policy work] is reflective at the community level, and that’s a much greater exercise because we have hundreds more small municipalities in this country than we have provincial governments. Land use planning, to a great extent, is really being done at that municipal level. That’s where these decisions are being made...the greatest opportunity is at that level in terms of what could be done to encourage VisitAble housing.” [Policy maker]

Federal legislation with provincial discretion

Two interviewees suggested what might be viewed as a hybrid approach wherein federal requirements for the three VH criteria would reach across the entire country, but some degree of discretion could be allowed at the provincial level. Discretion at the provincial level is also important given that provinces have jurisdiction of health and housing policy:

“But, but how much [discretion] do you want to give? Having the minimums in place – the definition, three basic minimums ...whether you choose to have a no step entrance at the street level or whether you choose to have that by having a ramp or whatever else is the case, that’s great. You need the sort of discretion for the provincial level, but these are the three minimums that have to be implemented when building. The only way to do that is to change the building codes and the legislation when it comes to building.” [Advocate]

“I do think that ultimately the majority of the work around VisitAble housing does need to continue in the federal sphere on the building code and then really primarily in the provincial sphere just because of jurisdictional reasons...because they have health and housing and all that stuff in their jurisdiction that the feds don’t have.” [Policy maker]

Mandate all publicly funded housing to be VisitAble

There appears to be much greater support for mandating VisitAbility when public funds or public lands are being used. This support appears to come from the perspective that many people living in these homes have some kind of mobility or health issue; or if they don’t their neighbours may. So it makes good sense to have all units be, at minimum, VisitAble. One policy maker, for example, noted, “On

“On the public housing side, [VH] should just be a requirement.” [Policy maker]

the public housing side, [VH] should just be a requirement.” An advocate noted that this “helps build the infrastructure for a much more inclusive, participatory kind of community.”

Interviewees provided examples of cities or provinces mandating VisitAbility (and in some cases, accessibility) in affordable housing developments. In some cases, there is a required percentage of VH or AH; in other cases, the intent is to have 100 percent VisitAble. Some of the examples provided include:

- An interviewee from Alberta said that the building code specifies any new government funded build needs to have 10 percent built as accessible.
- Manitoba Housing, a Crown Corporation, is applying VisitAbility to the construction of *all* new units for which it provides housing. Ten percent of all new units are designed to meet accessible design criteria. Wherever possible, VisitAbility is the minimum requirement for renovation of existing social housing units.
- An interviewee from Ottawa said that when the city is doing affordable housing developments, it pushes VisitAbility unless there is a very good reason why it can't be done. Currently the city is working on a 100 per cent VisitAble, affordable neighbourhood.
- Ontario requires that 15 percent of units in buildings taller than three storeys must be VisitAble.
- Another interviewee from Ontario said his/her municipality has a policy that if someone is applying for government funds to build affordable housing, they must pitch their proposal and one of the selection criteria is VisitAbility.
- St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, currently has a target of 500 affordable homes for seniors. A proportion of those homes must be "age-friendly", meaning that universal design and VisitAbility must be considered in their design.

In addition to mandating VisitAbility in affordable housing developments, provinces and municipalities can also mandate VisitAbility in new developments built on public land. The greatest example of success in the interview data is the Bridgwater community in Winnipeg. In this case, the province of Manitoba released a large parcel of land in Winnipeg with the requirement that specific percentages of homes built in this area would be VisitAble. This has been noted to be a highly successful strategy⁸.

Adopt "encouraging" policy ...

One person spoke about the value of "encouraging policy" in Ontario. There are no provincial policies that require VisitAble housing and therefore, local city/municipal policies cannot require this either. The best that can be done, this interviewee noted, is to "encourage and inform". In this way, VisitAble and accessible housing is included via statements of encouragement. For example, the City of Waterloo has a growth plan and a planning statement that describe the provision of safe and healthy, well-connected environments that facilitate social interaction and foster sense of place. They also state that the city will plan for an appropriate range and mix of housing types, sizes and costs and so on. While there is no stated requirement for VH or AH, there is an "encouraging" statement that says, "Encouraging accessible and visitable housing in order to facilitate ease of living and aging in place." Definitions of VH and AH are included. This is one way the city is educating the community and those that deal with its official plan about VH and AH. It was noted that the development community has been very receptive to this approach.

⁸ See: <http://visitablehousingcanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Final-Bridgwater-Case-Study-Report.pdf>

Harmonize policies

In response to the barrier of fragmented and piecemeal policies (see Barriers section re: policies), some interviewees said there would be value of harmonizing policies so that they are more coherent and consistent. This includes, for example, harmonization of housing policy across federal, provincial and local areas; harmonization of related policies such as inclusion, accessibility, affordability, and perhaps also eco-friendly policies; and, harmonization of health and housing policies. One interviewee suggested that the federal government could develop a broad conceptual framework that illuminates “*the key directions we want to go*”. This is important, she said because, “*it’s the reality of the people living in our communities, now and into the future.*”

Another interviewee argued for harmonization of the National Building Code, the National Housing Strategy at the national level, and at the provincial level, harmonization with affordable housing and, essentially, that any policy impacting peoples’ lives should line up and have VH as a basic standard:

“We would like to see harmonization at all levels, so the national, starting with the Building Code.... [and the National Housing Strategy should identify VH as a basic standard]...And then at the provincial level, I want there to be some harmonization with affordable housing directions and their building code. Every policy that has a finger in people’s everyday lives and quality and affordability and appropriateness of housing should line up and have VisitAble housing as a basic standard.” [Advocate]

Perhaps related to the notion of a broad conceptual agreement is the notion of a “social minimum” described by a policy maker. This term refers to a level of wellbeing beneath which no one should be permitted to fall. Again, this implies harmonization of policies across sectors such as health and housing⁹.

“In my years in government, this whole idea of ‘This issue is over here and this issue is over there’. Well, no. That’s a health issue and that’s a housing issue. These are all human issues and the more we can just get at that.... For me I keep coming back to the concept that’s being talked about federally as well, this whole idea of a social minimum. What’s the line beneath which we say that it is not acceptable for any of our citizens to live or exist in? I think we’re getting closer in identifying what that social minimum is and that will take in things like income and housing.” [Policy maker]

Focus less on policy and more on education, marketing and incentives

There is a tension between policies that force developers/builders to build VH and generating public demand through awareness raising and education. It was noted by developers, builders and policy

⁹ Note also that a number of interviewees talked about the disconnect between housing and health policy and argued that better collaboration between health and housing sectors would be mutually beneficial. However, these comments were focused more on accessible housing and not VisitAble housing.

makers/advocates alike that builders will resist policy solutions, and that politicians are often reluctant to force the hand of developers. So, there is widespread agreement that change won't come from the building industry on its own and thus there is a need for legislation. But, on the other hand, there is the notion that it's better not to force people and instead to educate/inform and perhaps incentivize changes in developer/builder behaviour and decision-making. Two interviewees summarized this situation in the following ways:

"On the private housing [side], our recommendations were that we need to try and find ways to get the public interested and then the public will demand those features and industry will follow. So trying to force industry to make those changes...that's fraught with difficulty." [Policy maker]

"On the private housing [side], our recommendations were that we need to try and find ways to get the public interested in this and then the public will demand those features and then industry will follow. So trying to force industry to make those changes and introduce them to the public – that's fraught with difficulty...We're proposing that

if the government invested in an awareness campaign about these sorts of things...that's a huge start." [Policy maker]

"I think there tends to be pushback whenever it goes as far as prescribing or requiring [VH] of the private sector. That's probably the biggest hurdle is that it's one thing to put it in policy that encourages it and regulation that allows it, but to actually get the private sector, who is building... 99 per cent of our housing stock, to actually incorporate it, I think that's a real challenge that we as a society are facing... even any discussion of mandating politically, I find the elected officials will shy away from it, but on the other hand, that's the only way you're going to deal with it... Success is through either mandating or providing incentives that encourage it." [Policy maker]

Incentives

Following from the quote above, numerous interviewees mentioned that incentives for building VH could be a valuable tool. It was noted by some that given the current economic situation, financial incentives would be difficult. However, other kinds of incentives, such as taxation based incentives, relaxation of zoning laws, donation of land or granting certain concessions in terms of other things that developers might want, might be effective. It was suggested that it would be helpful to speak to developers and builders about what would entice them to build VisitAble homes.

“Certainly, incentivizing would be a recommendation. I’m a bit cautious about mandating it. Because I don’t think you win any battles in the long term by making people feel that it’s imposed upon them. You’re much better off convincing them of the benefit so that they can make the choice on their own.” [Policy maker]

“Whether it’s grants, or tax rebates or some kind of incentive process. There has to be some kind of incentive because the housing industry is all about profit margin. And so, they’re not going to do it unless they’ve got a gun to their head or if they’re given incentives. ... To legislate is the most effective way but if you’re going to make it voluntary, then you have to have some kind of an incentive.” [Advocate]

“Whether it’s grants or tax rebates...there has to be some kind of incentive because the housing industry is all about profit margin. And so, they’re not going to do it unless they’ve got a gun to their head or if they’re given incentives.” [Advocate]

There was also mention of incentives for consumers. One consumer suggested, *“maybe more grants could be given out, too... that the federal or provincial gave to people to make their homes VisitAble.”* Indeed several interviewees noted such programs are already in place, however, the grants may not fully cover required costs.

Conduct and disseminate research regarding VisitAble housing

Several advocates and policy makers spoke to the importance of more research, and additional funding for research, about VH. As one person noted, *“A little more science could go into this stuff.”* This research, they said, will provide an even stronger foundation for marketing, advocacy and policy-making efforts. Topics for additional research suggested by interviewees included more information regarding supply and demand for VH; further exploration of the benefits and cost effectiveness of VH, including the costs of not having VH; and market/building trends. The value of finding ways to share and analyze data across various agencies was also described. Additional detail is provided below.

More information regarding supply and demand for VH, considering all potential users (i.e., young families, older people, those with mobility issues, etc.)

- Availability and sufficiency of VisitAble housing
- Who is demanding VH?

One advocate, for example, spoke of working with a disability advocacy group that wanted to make policy recommendations. However, this group lacked data to “make the case”:

“We don’t have the stats, we don’t have the information. It would take a huge amount of money to collect it, a large amount of people to do the work, and we just didn’t have that resource.” [Advocate]

Benefits and cost effectiveness of VH in light of:

- Costs of supportive living or long term care in contrast to costs of VisitAble housing in the community with provision of supports such as home care.
- Benefits of VH to society and the economy in contrast to the costs of not building VH.
- The costs of VH translated over the life cycle.
- The costs of having to buy another home when one cannot age in place in one's current home.
- The resale value and marketability of VH; ability of VisitAble homes to hold their value.

"[An enabler would be] putting money toward more research ... I think there's a whole bunch of questions that have come up through the work so far about why it's not being adopted and why there are roadblocks. Is it really more costly? How do those costs translate into a longer life time, life cycle? Costs for housing in a community where, if you cannot age in your home, then you have to own two houses, so are you really saving any money not including that zero step entry... So there's sort of a little more science could go into this stuff." [Policy maker]

"The other thing is to actually do studies of the cost effectiveness of [VisitAble housing]... There's a lot of different studies that could be done that we need to look at. What are the benefits to society, to our economy, et cetera? Those kinds of things would actually show to people the benefit of it. I think the other thing is perhaps building studies. ... Really infiltrating the market of design... [And], what if we don't do it? What's the ramification of not doing this? That would then show you that the cost/benefits of not doing it over time. I think that would be very interesting. If we don't do it, what's that going to mean to us as a society? I think that would be interesting... it's also looking at precedents (e.g., how things were done in Bolingbrook, Illinois)." [Advocate]

Market and building trends – an examination of trends in the housing market and their impact on VisitAbility, including for example, infill housing in established neighbourhoods. One interviewee noted a trend in infill housing toward narrow lots, which, combined with peoples' desire to have a big house, translates into homes with multiple floors and many stairs. Another suggested there is value in exploring what is happening internationally. An extrapolation of this, based on comments made by developers and builders, might be to explore what features of new homes buyers consider to be highly desirable, and/or how to market VH in a way that makes it highly attractive to buyers.

Technology to facilitate VH and accessible housing – one interviewee suggested that incentivizing research into technology to facilitate VisitAbility and accessibility would be helpful. Perhaps government could view this as an economic investment in small business. Another noted there is research underway at the University of Alberta - a living lab called the Smart Condo. This is a one-bedroom apartment equipped with various accessibility solutions including universal design and assistive technologies.

Sharing and analysing data across agencies to strengthen the case for VH. One interviewee observed that there are many organizations (e.g., Salvation Army, Red Cross) that serve people with mobility challenges. Each collects data that would be relevant to VH, and from large numbers of people. Her organization, for example, serves 30,000 people each year. However, there are no mechanisms in place to ensure consistency of data collection or analysis of data across agencies. This is a lost opportunity to

give people – developers, builders, and policy makers - a better idea of issues and experiences of people with mobility issues. Rectifying this situation would enable a more robust evidence base for VH/accessible housing. She noted further:

“There’s so many agencies in [our city] who serve the same people that we do... I feel like there should be something stronger between these agencies. Because we are the ones that deal with the raw data, we’re the ones that deal with those that come in on a day-to-day basis. There’s not enough communication between us; there’s not enough data gathering, research, analysis, that kind of thing to really understand the numbers that we deal with and what our solutions or referrals are. [That information] is not really being used. I think that’s a huge barrier, too, is that we’re not making use of the information that we have...I definitely think that there should be more collaboration between agencies and there should be a better way of centralizing our data and our information so that we have access to information much easier.” [Advocate]

This concludes the presentation of enablers for the uptake of VisitAble Housing. A summary of enablers is presented in the box below. In the next and final section of the paper, a discussion of findings and opportunities for moving forward is presented.

Summary Points – Enablers

- *Overarching: A change of mindset; VH needs to become the norm*
- *Leadership, collaborative action and a comprehensive, national approach*
- *Clarify and reach consensus on the definition and criteria for VisitAble Housing*
- *Marketing, education and advocacy to enhance awareness and create market demand*
- *Education, particularly for builders, developers, and tradespeople*
- *Advocacy - engaging consumers at planning and policy development levels*
- *Policy solutions – legislation; development bylaws; mandating VH for publicly funded housing; incentives*
- *Research to inform and support the above activities*

Part III: Discussion and opportunities for moving forward

Overall, the findings of this study validate previous research that has identified similar barriers and enablers to the uptake of VH. However, this study provided an opportunity to explore barriers and enablers in greater detail and to consider the extent to which they are perceived similarly and differently among stakeholder groups, specifically policy makers/advocates, consumers and builders/developers.

In this section, a high-level review and discussion of findings is presented. This includes an analysis of varying perceptions of VH and how different ways of viewing VH may shape actions for moving forward, including views of disability as “undesirable”; a synthesis of barriers and enablers to the uptake of VH in Canada; and other issues for consideration. Also included are some questions for further deliberation and dialogue, and a brief discussion about potential opportunities for moving forward.

Perceptions of VisitAble Housing and implications for moving forward

Analysis of interviewee perceptions of VisitAble Housing revealed three patterns of thought in relation to its nature and purpose. These different perceptions may interfere with, or support, uptake of the concept. Further, they may shape what are deemed to be appropriate actions for moving VH forward and increasing uptake. These three views and their implications for moving VH forward include the following:

1. **VisitAbility supports inclusion, socialization, wellbeing, and quality of life for people with mobility issues** by enabling them to visit the homes of their family and friends. The word “visit” is the ground of this perspective; it is about being able to *visit* someone, but it is not necessarily about a home where people with mobility issues can *live*. VH provides a framework that supports inclusivity for all persons in society, including those who have disabilities and/or mobility impairments. Grounded in a human rights perspective, an increased uptake of VH might improve the well-being and quality of life of persons with disabilities and might increase societal participation by increasing access.
2. **VisitAbility is for everyone**; young people, families and older people alike can all benefit from the three features of VisitAbility. For example, VH makes life easier for families with young children and who use strollers; or for moving or carrying heavy items such as luggage, golf carts, or furniture. VH is also beneficial for persons who experience temporary disabilities, as well as makes it possible for friends and family members who have mobility impairments to visit. Further, VisitAble homes are safer for everyone because the no-step entry reduces the likelihood of falls. Increasing the uptake of VH from this perspective centres on education and marketing, especially finding the “win” for each audience, and strategically targeting messages so that various audiences see the benefit of VH for their circumstances.
3. **VisitAbility is the “doorway to accessibility”; it is strongly linked to disability**. For some interviewees, the terms “VisitAbility” and “accessibility” were often used interchangeably, to the point that it was not always clear if interviewees were speaking about accessible or VisitAble housing. For others within this group of interviewees, VH was seen as an initial step along the accessibility continuum – a basic starting point. Some people adopting this perspective felt VH is inadequate, that it “doesn’t go far enough”, and as such, could be a disservice to the disability community. They argued that VH should encompass additional features to make homes more accessible. Increasing uptake of VH from this perspective appears to be more about VH as a strategy toward a greater focus on accessibility. The emphasis is on persons with disabilities and older people.

Interestingly, CCDS staff involved with the previous VH initiative said that project had emphasized the inclusion argument; VH was marketed as being “for all”. Perhaps the strong focus on accessibility amongst interviewees stems from the fact that many work in the disability field and are immersed in that world daily.

The perspectives from interviewees may be valuable when considering how to increase awareness and uptake of VH in Canada in the years to come. Although there was much overlap of perspectives from participants, it must be noted that depending on the perspectives of VH, opinions that are contradictory may in fact thwart, rather than promote the uptake of VH.

Views of disability as “undesirable”

Another factor influencing actions to increase uptake of VH is negative views associated with disability. As Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer (2003) claim, conventional ideologies in the Western hemisphere situate disability as a biomedical phenomenon and equate disablement with “flawed” minds and bodies (p. 1).¹⁰ Recent efforts by scholars, artists and activists have sought to conceptualize disability within a “wider material and political context” by applying social, rights and intersectional frameworks (p. 8). Despite these efforts, disability in mainstream discourse is often subjected to medical, professional, and academic interventions that seek to manage, repair and conduct maintenance of “physical and cognitive incapacity” (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997, p. 24).¹¹

In congruence with this historical context of disability, many interviewees noted that association of VH with disability might be a key factor in the lack of uptake since people are averse to thinking about becoming disabled, or being labelled disabled. The aforementioned view of disability as “undesirable” may extend to VH, if the framework of VH, co-creating an inclusive society for all is not reinforced. As such, marketing/awareness efforts that emphasize the relationship between VH and disability may fail to capture the attention of the public.

Of greater concern is that negative views of disability imply that disability is a negative state of being and something to be avoided at all costs. Such views deny that one can be happy and healthy while also having a disability. And, they deny that people with disabilities can and do live rich and satisfying lives, especially when they live in an inclusive and accessible society. This finding implies that, beyond increasing the uptake of VH, a broader effort may be required shape a more realistic and positive view of disability.

Summary of barriers and enablers to the uptake of Visitable housing in Canada

The findings revealed a number of barriers to the uptake of VH in Canada, including:

- Limited awareness of, and understanding about VisitAble housing.
- Societal attitudes and cultural norms, including: aversion to infirmity or disability marginalization and invisibility of groups who most benefit from VH; and myths about VH.
- Lack of market demand due to lack of awareness, societal attitudes and cultural norms.
- A general lack of leadership for VH and reluctance of policy makers to champion VH.
- Confusion about policies across jurisdictional levels, contradictory policies, and inflexible bylaws.
- Inadequate supply of VisitAble homes and perceived (or real) high costs of retrofitting existing homes.
- Developer and builder reluctance due to costs and risks of VH (i.e. costs of zero-step entries, and learning curve associated with building VH; and technical challenges related to construction.

¹⁰ Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2003). *Disability*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹¹ Mitchell, D., & Snyder, S. (1997). Disability Studies and the Double Bind of Representation. In *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (pp. 1-31). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Interviewees suggested that overall, the greatest enabler of VisitAble Housing is that it needs to become the norm in Canada and this requires a change in mindset. That is, attitudes and norms regarding disability, inclusion and perhaps even the kinds of houses deemed to be “desirable” need to change toward a more inclusive and accessible society where all can fully participate. Five broad action areas to achieve this were identified by interviewees:

- Strengthen leadership for VH and engage in collaborative action for a comprehensive national approach, including the possible re-constitution and expansion of previous VH project task forces
- Clarify and reach consensus on the definition and criteria of VisitAble housing
- Develop and implement strategies for marketing, education and advocacy
- Develop and implement appropriate policies
- Conduct and mobilize research

Essentially, the barriers and enablers are parallel in nature, with enablers often being the “flip-side” of barriers. The relationship between barriers and enablers is depicted in Figure 2 below.

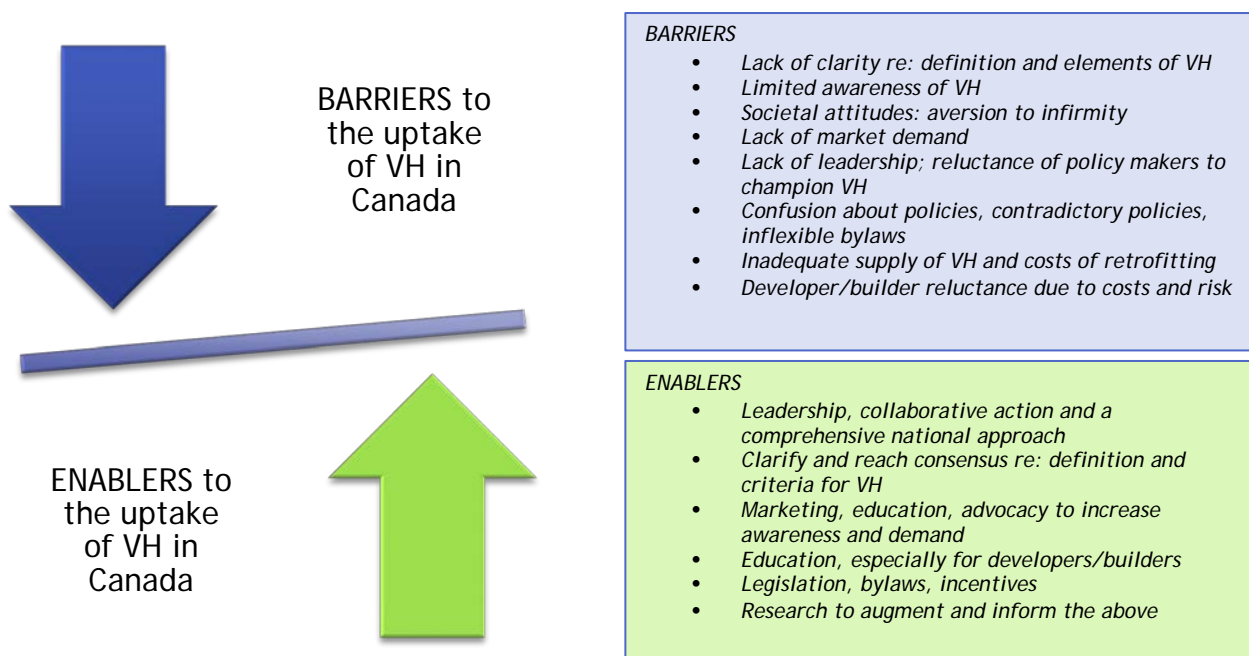


Figure 2. Barriers and enablers to the uptake of VisitAble Housing in Canada

These barriers and enablers are no surprise; they, or variants of them, have been identified in numerous studies and reports that have similarly concluded that policy and awareness raising efforts are necessary and that perhaps different approaches are required for publicly funded and private sector housing¹².

Other issues for consideration

In addition to the above findings, a number of issues for consideration surfaced from the data. These are described below.

Leadership for VH

While several interviewees spoke to a lack of leadership for VH, a key observation is that each interviewee appeared to be a champion and leader for VH. Many are working tirelessly on VH, demonstrating great strength in leadership. Perhaps the issue is less the lack of leadership, per se, and more the need to connect existing leaders in synergistic ways, to strengthen leadership at senior levels, and to strive toward shared and sustained leadership across levels, sectors and organizations to optimize efforts and impact. Another area for deliberation would be the potential value of finding a “face” (or faces) to champion VH in Canada; that is, someone prominent and credible to advocate for VH, particularly to the public and to the developer/builder communities.

Of particular note are the comments from consumers that, collectively, their voices are not sufficiently cohesive or strong enough to foster change, that policy makers often discount their voices, and that they have limited engagement at policy and decision making tables. Having those with lived experience at such tables can change the dialogue and decision making that occurs, and as such, strategies to make this a reality are needed. Again, this issue extends well beyond VH, per se; however, VH might provide a platform to help change the status quo and strengthen leadership and advocacy from this community.

Key questions for future consideration might include:

- *How can existing leadership for VH be strengthened, coordinated, formalized and sustained over time?*
- *How can leadership for VH at senior levels (e.g., in government and other relevant organizations) be strengthened?*
- *How can consumers be supported in bringing forth their collective voices from different social locations?*
- *How could “meaningful” consumer participation in policy and decision-making be enhanced?*

¹² See, for example:

- Canadian Centre on Disability Studies. 2013. *VisitAble Housing: Knowledge, practice and policies*. Author. See: <http://visitablehousingcanada.com>
- Maisel, J., Smith, E., & Steinfeld, E. 2008. *Increasing home access: Designing for Visitability*. AARP Public Policy Institute. Retrieved from: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_14_access.pdf
- Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation. 2006. *VisitAble housing. Community building through VisitAble and Adaptable Housing*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/mh/progs/pdf/visitable-housing-visitable-housing-community-building.pdf>

Marketing, education and advocacy for VH

Interviewee suggestions regarding marketing and education strategies were plentiful. The crucial importance of increasing awareness of VH, the wide array of key messages, target audiences and potential strategies for reaching those audiences means that a marketing and education strategy will necessarily be complex. Engagement of marketing expertise, perhaps from a housing/real estate perspective, would be highly advantageous in terms of identifying and implementing the most promising strategies. Similarly, efforts will be required to determine the most appropriate approaches toward education and advocacy.

Key questions for consideration might include:

- *What were the most effective marketing and education strategies from the previous VisitAbility project? What lessons learned from the previous project could inform development and implementation of marketing, education and advocacy strategies?*
- *What the most promising and feasible approaches to marketing VH to multiple stakeholder groups?*
- *What are the most promising and feasible approaches to education and advocacy for VH?*
- *Who should undertake these efforts and how might they be resourced?*

What policy approaches are likely to be most effective for increasing uptake of VH?

There are differences of opinion about what is the best policy approach for advancing VH in Canada. While many argued for changes to the National Building Code; others were reticent, stating that buy in might be better achieved through local development policies and/or through education and marketing strategies. There seems to be more comfort with mandating VisitAbility for publicly funded housing and land use, however. It is likely that a mix of strategies will be optimal, but dialogue will be required to sort out what the best mix of options might be. This dialogue might fruitfully include discussions about what the actual changes to the National Building Code might be and whether or not there may be allowances to deviate from the Code in circumstances where building all homes in a community as VisitAble may not be feasible (e.g., in relation to topographical considerations).

Key questions for future consideration might include:

- *What VH-relevant policies currently exist (or are in development), at what levels, and how do they impact VH?*
- *What are the pros and cons of various policy approaches to increasing uptake of VH? How might the “pros” be augmented and/or the “cons” be ameliorated?*
- *What might be the optimal mix of policy and other strategies (i.e., marketing, education, advocacy) to increase uptake of VH?*
- *How could various VH-related policies be more aligned and coordinated?*

The costs of retrofitting homes toward VisitAbility

Interviewees seemed to dismiss retrofitting as generally being too difficult and too costly. People did refer to various grant programs to help people retrofit their homes, but these were generally viewed as

being insufficient to fully support required renovations. This appears to be different from literature stating that costs of retrofitting are reasonable¹³. There may be merit in examining this discrepancy; that is, whether this is just a matter of perception, or whether costs of retrofitting may exceed those estimated in cost analysis studies.

Some key questions for future consideration might include:

- *What factors have been (or not been) considered in existing cost analyses of retrofitting homes to be VisitAble?*
- *How sufficient are available grant programs for helping people retrofit their homes? What changes to such programs, if any, might result in more attention to retrofitting?*

The tension between developers/builders and other stakeholder groups

The data reveals a tension between developers/builders and other stakeholder groups. Other reviews of VH have concluded there is a need for closer relationships between the building industry and consumers, policy makers and advocates for VH. The findings herein reinforce those conclusions. Many advocates have information, material and resources to support developers and builders in problem solving around some of the design challenges of VH. And, advocates could learn much from talking with building industry members about the challenges of working in a difficult economic environment and specific design and building challenges in different situations (e.g., topography). The developers and builders interviewed for this project were champions for VH and may be strong allies in efforts to bridge these stakeholder groups.

Key questions for future consideration might include:

- *How could stakeholder groups come together to build relationships and more fully understand each other's experiences and insights regarding VH?*
- *What forums currently exist or could be created for ongoing mutual exchanges and learning?*

A note regarding future inquiries into the uptake of VisitAble Housing in Canada

Finally, there was strong value in speaking with people knowledgeable about VH and with extensive experience in the VH field. These people provided rich insights based on their previous and ongoing efforts to promote VH in Canada and their insights can inform the way forward.

However, it may also be advantageous to speak with people who are not invested in, or even aware of VH. Marketing-style focus groups, particularly with homebuyers, might be one approach to this. Findings of such an inquiry would add understanding about what the general public thinks about VH and what key messages and approaches might be most effective. It would be particularly helpful to also conduct

¹³ See, for example, *The Costs of Building VisitAble Homes*, developed in the previous VH project:

<http://visitablehousingcanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Costs-of-VisitAble-Housing-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

further inquiry with developers and builders, as these groups (in addition to consumers/homebuyers) are somewhat under-represented in the current study.

Opportunities and possible starting points for moving forward

In this section, some possible opportunities and starting points for moving forward are suggested. Note that these are merely suggestions and that more robust and informed dialogue will be required.

Leadership, collaborative action and a comprehensive national approach. As noted in the Enablers section of this report, one option is to reconvene and potentially expand the task forces from the previous VisitAble Housing project led by the CCDS. Given the enthusiasm of several interviewees in this regard, consideration of re-engaging these taskforces thus might be a first step in moving forward.

Regardless, however, of what the vehicle or group for collaborative action is, at the heart of any effort will be the creation of spaces and opportunities for dialogue that leads to action. Given the plethora of organizations and groups that have a stake in VisitAbility, there are numerous opportunities for linking with, and building on other initiatives and collaborations to advance VH, whether the focus is on disabilities, an inclusive society, or social justice.

Collaboration would help to build a critical mass of advocates and leaders, create synergies, gain access to and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders and audiences, and enable the sharing and extension of resources. This in turn could help to increase capacity, avoid duplication of effort and promote greater consistency of messaging. Ideally, these efforts would reach beyond the disability community and into all parts of society.

One set of opportunities for leadership and collaboration might be to leverage the many recent and emerging policies and initiatives that are relevant to VH, including, for example:

- The imminent release of the National Housing Strategy, which is expected to include VisitAble Housing.
- Canada is a signatory to the “New Urban Agenda”, the outcome document agreed upon at the Habitat III cities conference in Ecuador in 2016 and which, “provides an opportunity to include and further implement accessibility and universal design as a key principle guiding how cities, towns and villages are planned, built and managed.”¹⁴
- Development of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which have a core message of “ensuring no one is left behind”. The goals specifically reference accessibility for people with disabilities, social inclusion and equality.
- Actions currently underway to implement changes in the National Building Code.
- The many successes of previous VisitAbility initiatives including the Bridgwater development in Winnipeg and the First Nations Task Force in British Columbia.

¹⁴ Disability Inclusive and Accessible Urban Development Network. 2016. *The inclusion imperative: Towards disability-inclusive and accessible urban development*. Author, pg. 11. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/Disabilities/CivilSociety/CBM-TheInclusionImperative.pdf>

- Existing and planned provincial and federal policies and legislation regarding accessibility, including: the Accessibility for Disabled Ontarians Act, the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, a similar Act in Quebec, planned accessibility legislation in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, and, planned federal accessibility legislation to “promote equality of opportunity and increase the inclusion and participation of Canadians who have disabilities or functional limitations.”¹⁵
- As noted previously, the success of the previous VH initiative implemented by the CCDS: *Collaborative Knowledge Building and Action for VisitAble Housing in Canadian Cities*. And, most importantly, the *legacy* of that initiative: a community of former taskforce members who remain enthusiastically committed to continuing their work; their experience; their established networks; and, the wealth of VH materials they developed.

Other possible opportunities and/or partners for collaborative action might include:

- The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS)
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)
- Office of Disability Issues – Employment and Skills Development Canada
- Networks and working relationships currently in place (e.g., those of CCDS, CMHC, previous VH initiative task forces)
- Expand the network of VH supporters and influencers; perhaps explore potential new champions such as the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities
- Canadian Council on Social Development
- Social Planning Councils
- National, provincial and local Chambers of Commerce
- Community Economic Development Networks
- Canadian Real Estate Association
- Seniors groups
- Disability-related groups
- Existing provincial and territorial reference groups (e.g. housing and mental health)
- Public Health Agency of Canada (e.g. Seniors initiatives, mental health promotion)
- Canada’s 150th Anniversary
- Also see Appendix C which lists numerous other organizations suggested by key informants

Clarifying and achieving consensus on the definition of VH and its elements. A possible starting point for achieving this direction might be to convene a working group to arrive at a solution.

Marketing, education and advocacy. As noted previously, a key starting point in regard to marketing might be to engage a range of partners in developing a marketing strategy with leadership from a

¹⁵ Government of Canada, online. *Consulting with Canadians on accessibility legislation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/planned-accessibility-legislation/consultation-legislation.html>

professional marketing company. In addition to suggestions made by interviewees, other possible strategies might include:

- Create a branding/rating symbol and strategy for VH (for example, similar to Energy-Star branding).
- Find a way to identify developers, builders, architects and others as “VisitAble Housing qualified”.
- Work with developers and builders to shift thinking about “cookie cutter” home designs; that is, perhaps VisitAble homes could be included as standard designs; or VisitAbility could be offered as one package of options for new builds.
- Move beyond a focus on disability to reach the general public (i.e. to strengthen the perspectives of social inclusion and “VH is for everyone”).
- Develop a 30-second elevator speech to articulate the concept and elements of VH.
- Ensure consistency in messaging about VH.
- Hold forums about VH with various stakeholders to facilitate dialogue and develop strategies to increase awareness and uptake.

In terms of education, opportunities might include:

- Leveraging previous or existing partnerships with schools and post-secondary educational institutions involved in design or construction of VH (e.g. architects, engineers, OTs, builders, developers) to help identify their issues, challenges and to support or amplify their initiatives. Co-presenting with them at conferences, annual meetings and other events would help gain access to their members/audiences, and also to better understand their issues.
- Related to the above, continuing with student design competitions for VisitAble homes – perhaps have annual competitions until VH design becomes part of the curricula for these programs.
- Increasing awareness about existing tools and resources regarding VH.¹⁶

Policy enablers. A possible starting point for policy work might be to map existing and planned policies related to VH and hold a forum to identify an optimal mix of policy solutions and education/marketing strategies.

Research. There are many possible places to start in regard to developing a research strategy for VH. Some possible activities include:

- Partner with others who conduct research related to VH (e.g., CMHC, universities, communities)
- Map existing research regarding VH, identify gaps and key areas for new or additional inquiry
- Conduct research

¹⁶ See for example, the list of resources developed in the previous VH project at:
<http://visitablehousingcanada.com/visitability-project/project-publications-and-resources/>

- Mobilize knowledge generated from research and VH projects
- Facilitate educational activities (e.g., webinars)
- Host a community of practice
- Work with relevant agencies and organizations to develop a standard set of measures of relevance to VH

Conclusion

The concept of VisitAbility has been in play for over a decade in Canada, supported by the CCDS, the CMHC, the federal government, and many community partners throughout Canada. Significant progress toward greater uptake in Canada has been made; however, the same degree of traction for VH hasn't been achieved in Canada as it has in the United States and other countries. This study sought to explore the perceptions of key stakeholder groups – consumers/home buyers, developers, builders, policy makers and advocates – regarding enablers and barriers to greater uptake of VH in Canada. The findings reinforce those of other studies while also providing greater detail and suggestions for moving forward. Of particular note are the importance of awareness, education and advocacy for VH; policy solutions; and collaborative efforts to move VH forward in Canada.

Given a number of recent developments (e.g., imminent release of the National Housing Strategy; Canada signing on to the New Urban Agenda; and others); the previous VH project accomplishments; the energy, enthusiasm, and indeed passion for VH amongst the key informants interviewed for this study; the insights generated from this study; and the commitment of the CCDS to continue working on VH, the circumstances are ripe for a significant leap forward. What is needed now is effective, appropriately resourced and sustained coordination of multi-level and multi-pronged efforts to make VH the “norm” and to support inclusion and accessibility for all Canadians.

A potential role for the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

A key opportunity to advance VH in Canada is the willingness and desire of the CCDS to continue its work on VH toward a more inclusive and accessible society for all Canadians. The Centre has been engaged in VH research, education, and knowledge development and mobilization for over a decade¹⁷. It has an extensive network and positive working relationships with numerous stakeholder groups and government. The CCDS, in partnership with others, could help facilitate design and implementation of collaborative community-based VH initiatives throughout Canada. It could also play a key role in supporting VH research and knowledge mobilization.

Appendix A: Consent Form

CMHC VISITABILITY PROJECT Information and Consent Form – INTERVIEWS

Research Team

Principle Investigator: Dr. Susan L. Hardie, PhD, Executive Director, Canadian Centre on Disability Studies

Project Coordinator: Jay Harrison

Research Assistants: Evan Wicklund, Alyssa Goodbrand

You are invited to participate in a research study funded by the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation with in-kind support from the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS).

You have been invited to participate in this study because of because of your participation in the Canadian housing market as a housing consumer, home builder, housing developer or policy maker.

About the Study

The purpose of the study is identify the unique perspectives of key stakeholder groups within the housing system in order to determine the possible barriers and enablers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing in Canada.

The study will involve phone interviews with key housing stakeholders across four regions of Canada.

If You Agree to Participate in the Study

¹⁷ For examples of the projects CCDS has completed in the areas of inclusive education, seniors with disabilities, accessible housing and more, please visit <http://www.disabilitystudies.ca/ccds---projects.html>

If you agree to participate in the study you will be asked to participate in a single interview by phone that will last for approximately 1 hour. With your permission the interview will be audio-recorded and the researcher will also take hand-written notes.

Your Participation is Voluntary

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. If you withdraw from the study every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study and have it destroyed. It may not be feasible to remove your data once it has been aggregated.

Potential Risks

You may be concerned about the confidentiality and anonymity of your responses and the effect of your responses on your jobs or professional partnerships. For example, if you share knowledge or opinions with the researcher that you would prefer that your colleagues or superiors did not know about or may jeopardize your employment if publicly attributed to you. The research team will endeavour to mitigate these risks by ensuring that the data from interviews is kept securely and confidentially. Only the members of the research team will be aware of who participates in the interviews. No identifying information will be shared in final reports. Final reports will use generic titles to refer to stakeholders, e.g., “federal policy maker”, “housing developer”, “homebuilder”, “housing consumer”.

Benefits

During the interview you will have an opportunity to explore the concept of VisitAble Housing in the context of your role in the Canadian housing market as a housing consumer, home builder, housing developer or policy maker. By participating in this interview you may benefit from becoming more aware of the concept of VisitAble Housing and may identify and reflect upon your own barriers and enablers to implementing this model in Canada.

VisitAble Housing represents a unique model in the housing system and new evidence on the barriers and enablers to the implementation of VisitAble Housing may lead to an increase in the implementation of VisitAble Housing within Canada.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study is confidential. The information you share will be kept confidential. It is your choice whether to allow the researchers to use direct quotes from your interview. When direct quotes are used the researchers will ensure that quotes do not identify you through the context of your situation, your use of language, etc. Any identifying information will be removed and will not be shared in any future reports. You will be assigned a unique ID to be used on audio files, transcripts or notes from the interview instead of your name. A key for linking your unique ID to your name will be kept separately and will only be accessible by the research team. Only the research team will have access to the audio files, transcripts and notes from the interviews. The audio files, transcripts and notes from the interviews will be kept on a locked computer drive with identifying information removed. The audio files, transcripts and notes from the interviews will be kept by the research team on a secure CCDS server and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Please note that telephone and email are not a secure means of communication; therefore confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Study Results

The results of the study will be shared in reports, conferences, and presentations and may be published in the following formats: in electronic newsletters or blogs, other promotional materials, reports and in published journals.

You may choose to receive an electronic copy of the final report on the final page of this form by providing your email address. Summaries of the results of this research will be made available through the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) website upon completion of the project.

Contact for Information About the Study and Contact for Complaints

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher, Dr. Susan L. Hardie, at shardie@disabilitystudies.ca, and 204-287-8411 ext. 25.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Peter Dunn, Chair, CCDS Research Committee at pdunn@wlu.ca or 1-905-627-7557.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

VisitAble Housing Definition

The concept of designing and building homes with basic accessibility. VisitAble homes provide access on the main level for everyone. VisitAble homes have, at a minimum, three basic accessibility features:

1. No-step entrance (at the front, back or side of the house)
2. Wider doorways and clear passage on the main floor
3. A main floor bathroom (or powder room) that can be accessed by visitors who use mobility devices

Housing Consumers

Introduction

1. Are you familiar with the concept of VisitAble Housing?
 - a. **If yes** How did you learn about VisitAble Housing?
 - b. **If no** Let's briefly review the definition I've provided for you. **Read the definition.** Do you have any questions about the definition of VisitAble Housing before we proceed?
2. Are you currently a home owner?
 - a. **If yes** Does your home have any of the visitable features?
 - b. **If no** Are you currently in the process of purchasing a home or considering the purchase of a home?
 - i. How long have you been in the market to purchase a home?
3. How important is accessibility in your decision to buy a home? Why?

#1 What are stakeholder's perceptions of VisitAble Housing?

4. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like most about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
5. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like least about the concept of VisitAble Housing?

#2 What are the perceived enablers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

6. When making a home purchasing decision, [is] / [was] there anything that would encourage you to buy a home with visitable features?
7. When making home improvement decisions, [is] / [was] there anything that would encourage you to adapt your home to include visitable features?
8. What, if anything, do you think might enable other home owners to own a home with visitable features?

#3 What are the actual and perceived barriers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

9. When making a home purchasing decision, [is] / [was] there anything that would discourage you from owning a home with visitable features?
10. When making home improvement decisions, [is] / [was] there anything that would prevent you from adapting your home to include visitable features?
11. What, if anything, do you think might prevent other home owners from owning a home with visitable features?
 - a. Purchasing a home with visitable features
 - b. Adapting their existing home to include visitable features

Conclusion

12. Is there anything I haven't asked you yet about VisitAble Housing that you think I should have?
13. Is there anyone else you would recommend that we speak with to better understand housing consumers' perspectives about VisitAble Housing?

Home Builders

Introduction

1. Are you familiar with the concept of VisitAble Housing?
 - a. **If yes** How did you learn about VisitAble Housing?
 - b. **If no** Let's briefly review the definition I've provided for you. **Read the definition.** Do you have any questions about the definition of VisitAble Housing before we proceed?
2. How long have you been building homes?
3. How often and when do you consider accessible design in your work?
4. Have you ever built a home with all 3 of the visitable features?
 - a. **If yes** Approximately how many VisitAble homes have you built?
 - b. **If no** Is there any specific reason why you have never built a VisitAble home?

#1 What are stakeholder's perceptions of VisitAble Housing?

5. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like most about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
6. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like least about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
7. In your opinion, what are the perceptions of other home builders toward VisitAble Housing?

#2 What are the perceived enablers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

8. What, if anything, do you think would enable more home builders to build homes with visitable features?
9. What, if anything, do you think would enable you to build [more] homes with visitable features?

#3 What are the actual and perceived barriers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

10. What, if anything, do you think discourages home builders from building homes with visitable features?
11. What, if anything, has ever discouraged you from building homes with visitable features?

Conclusion

12. Is there anything I haven't asked you yet about VisitAble Housing that you think I should have?
13. Is there anyone else you would recommend that we speak with to better understand home builders' perspectives about VisitAble Housing?

Housing Developers

Introduction

1. Are you familiar with the concept of VisitAble Housing?
 - a. **If yes** How did you learn about VisitAble Housing?
 - b. **If no** Let's briefly review the definition I've provided for you. **Read the definition.** Do you have any questions about the definition of VisitAble Housing before we proceed?
2. How often and when do you consider accessible design in your work?
3. Have you ever included homes with all 3 of the visitable features in your developments?
 - a. **If yes** Approximately how many developments with VisitAble homes have you developed?
 - b. **If no** Is there any specific reason why you have never included VisitAble homes in your developments?

#1 What are stakeholder's perceptions of VisitAble Housing?

4. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like most about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
5. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like least about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
6. In your opinion, what are the perceptions of other housing developers toward VisitAble Housing?

#2 What are the perceived enablers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

7. What, if anything, do you think would enable more housing developers to include homes with visitable features in their developments?
8. What, if anything, do you think would enable you to include [more] homes with visitable features in your developments?

#3 What are the actual and perceived barriers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

9. What, if anything, do you think discourages housing developers from including homes with visitable features in their developments?
10. What, if anything, has ever discouraged you from including homes with visitable features in your developments?

Conclusion

11. Is there anything I haven't asked you yet about VisitAble Housing that you think I should have?
12. Is there anyone else you would recommend that we speak with to better understand housing developers' perspectives about VisitAble Housing?

Policy Makers / Advocates

Introduction

1. Are you familiar with the concept of VisitAble Housing?
 - a. **If yes** How did you learn about VisitAble Housing?
 - b. **If no** Let's briefly review the definition I've provided for you. **Read the definition.** Do you have any questions about the definition of VisitAble Housing before we proceed?
2. In what ways is housing policy a part of your work?
3. Have you been involved with the adoption or implementation of VisitAble Housing or housing accessibility policies?

#1 What are stakeholder's perceptions of VisitAble Housing?

4. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like most about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
5. Reflecting on the definition of VisitAble Housing, what do you like least about the concept of VisitAble Housing?
6. In your opinion, what are the perceptions of policy makers toward VisitAble Housing?

#2 What are the perceived enablers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

7. What, if anything, do you believe would increase the adoption of VisitAble Housing in your jurisdiction?
8. What, if anything, has enabled the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing in your jurisdiction?
9. What role, if any, do you believe housing policy plays in affecting the adoption of VisitAble Housing in your jurisdiction? At the federal level? Provincially? Locally?

#3 What are the actual and perceived barriers to the increased adoption of VisitAble Housing by different stakeholders?

10. What barriers, if any, do you believe are affecting the adoption of VisitAble Housing in your jurisdiction? For example, barriers could include policies, practices, attitudes, knowledge.
11. What barriers, if any, have you encountered to increasing the adoption of VisitAble Housing in your jurisdiction? For example, barriers could include policies, practices, attitudes, knowledge.

Conclusion

12. Is there anything I haven't asked you yet about VisitAble Housing that you think I should have?
13. Is there anyone else you would recommend that we speak with to better understand policy makers' perspectives about VisitAble Housing?

Appendix C: A partial list of stakeholder organizations identified by interviewees

Accessible Housing, Calgary
Advisory Committee on Accessibility, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa
Alberta Disabilities Forum
Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Canadian Institute of Health Research
Canadian standards association
Canadian Veterans Disability Study
Coalition of Persons for Independent Living, Newfoundland
Coalition of Persons Living with Disabilities. Newfoundland
Council of Canadians with Disabilities
Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Hearth Homes
Kerby Centre, Calgary
Kitchener Waterloo Association of Realtors
Manitoba Housing
Mapleview Homes, Ot
National Accessibility and Inclusion Act Committee
National Capital Commission Advisory Committee on Universal Design
National Research Council
Newfoundland Housing Corporation
Ontario Home Builders' Association
Public Health Agency of Canada
Smart Condo, University of Alberta

Social Development Centre Waterloo Region
Spinal Cord Association, Edmonton
Stephanie Chipeur Accessibility Research Fund, Edmonton
Ten Ten Sinclair Housing Inc.
Union of BC Municipalities
Universal Design Institute
Universal Design Institute, University of Manitoba
University of Alberta, Department of Occupational Therapy
Urbandale Construction
Voice of Albertans with Disabilities
Waterloo Region Home Builders' Association
Winnipeg Housing

Appendix D. Interviewee suggestions for marketing strategies, including representative quotes

Strategy	Interviewee quote
Branding	<i>"A big thing is branding. Energy Star, which is a third party verification for energy efficiency in Ontario, we've adopted that as far as a marketing campaign, that we build to that standard. It's got enough branding power within the market that people want it. ... It's the public branding that they want it now. Someone has done the heavy lifting of getting the message out that there is a benefit for that. Then, the builders will also take on notice to say, people keep asking about it. Obviously maybe it's got some branding awareness in the market and it's something that we should look at."</i> [Builder]
Advertising campaigns	<i>"We're going to do a big social media advertising push and we'll be trying to at least educate some of the consumers about what a VisitAble home is. You can advertise VisitAble homes until we're blue in the face, but if they don't know what it is and how it benefits them then it's a moot point. We want to try to not only advertise but educate at the same time."</i> [Builder]
Personal stories	<i>"I think the thing for me that would definitely increase the adoption is to get the stories of those that are personally affected. Truly understand what it is like on a day-to-day basis to live in a situation where you are confined or where you have mobility challenges. I think that nobody can explain the situation better than the people that live with it. When it comes to having an awareness campaign or promotion or anything, that's great, but to have it backed by those who truly know how their lives are affected by this, that would be the key. Once you get that raw data, that sort of information that is so critical to taking it to those who have the power to make this happen, that will be the difference. It's really making government and policy-makers and budget-makers aware of how dire the situation is."</i> [Advocate]
Profile VH in real estate e.g. to realtors, in listings, in the 'homes' sections of newspapers	<i>"The other really great success we had was with realtors. So we succeeded in getting a checklist for accessibility, room by room, whole house accessibility, and the VisitAble Housing features as part of the MLS system."</i> [Advocate] <i>"And we certainly- we even brought the realty- the Winnipeg- we did a great presentation for the Winnipeg Realtors Association and they were so interested in the concept and could see the merits of it."</i> [Advocate]
Model homes, Open houses and home tours	<i>"It kind of speaks to that whole model home issue. If you had examples that you could direct people in the community, I think that would help people."</i> [Consumer] <i>"The design that we're building with our model home now it's going to have all of the features and hopefully when people can visually see that it doesn't look any different from a normal home, that will give them more incentive to purchase one of ours."</i> [Builder] <i>"We've been wanting to work with those lottery homes. Build a few homes that are just gorgeous and don't even talk about VisitAbility or accessibility. Don't even promote it. Get people into it, and once they fall in love, say, 'You know what? By the way, look. You open</i>

	<i>these two front doors, you can roll anything you want through there. It happens to be VisitAble and accessible. You don't have to turn away your guests'.</i> [Advocate]
Have inventories of VH	<i>"One of the things that we found is people might have VisitAble housing, it's not very well known. No one's ever kept an inventory. It's just not known, they might not know it, they might not know that they have a home that's VisitAble and/or has VisitAbility features. One of the things that the website did is it allowed people in the community who bought or had seen a VisitAble house to include it in."</i> [Policy maker]
VH awards	<i>"We also did, uh, a lot of recognition for the people who were on board who, who understood what VisitAbility was and, and recognized them publicly, whether through an award, uh, program or something in that line."</i> [Consumer]
Design competitions	<i>"Ryerson University did hold a student competition for VisitAble town housing."</i> [Developer] <i>"We're actually doing awards programs with students in colleges, universities, and high school just to kind of promote understanding on VisitABLE and further up the spectrum as well too, but of course the main emphasis being on VisitAble."</i> [Advocate]

cmhc.ca

