

A Home for Life

EDMONTON INITIATIVE OFFERS A BLUEPRINT FOR HOUSES THAT WORK FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

By the year 2051, as many as one in four Canadians will be over the age of 65. According to most experts, the vast majority of today's seniors would prefer to stay independent and in their own homes for as long as possible. In Edmonton, a new initiative called "Home for Life™" is helping to meet this growing demand by raising awareness of the importance of accessible home design for homeowners of all ages and abilities, at every stage of their lives.

"I've seen many families get caught off guard by an illness or injury that affects their mobility," says Grace Maier, Co-chair of the Home for Life™ Committee and Director of Specialized Geriatrics at Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital. "It's heartbreaking to see people forced to leave their homes because they can no longer manage stairs, get into the bathroom or get around the kitchen safely. Home for Life™ could help them avoid all that."

Home for Life™: a brief timeline

The idea that would eventually become Home for Life™ began in 2008, after staff at Glenrose Hospital realized that many of their patients who had developed new or progressive disabilities had no place to go after they were discharged. In many cases, their existing homes simply weren't set up to accommodate someone with a disability. In addition, there were very few truly accessible homes available anywhere in the city to purchase or rent.



Quick facts

- Around 13% of Albertans are 65 years or older. By the year 2036, that proportion will have grown to 20%, with more than 1 million seniors calling the province home.
- By 2041, one in three Edmontonians will be 65 or older, and the number of seniors aged 85 or older will have increased by as much as 266%.
- More than four out of five Canadians over the age of 50 say they would prefer to stay in their own homes as they grow older.
- In nearly two thirds of the cases where an older adult moves out of the family home, the reason for the move was a change in the health.
- As many as 85% of all Canadian seniors are unprepared for the cost of housing in retirement. In 2015, the average rent for one-bedroom units in a retirement community in Alberta was \$2,922 per month. The average monthly rent for a two-bedroom units was \$3,533.

Source: Home for Life™

To address this issue, a group of stakeholders including health and senior-serving agencies, disability organizations, builders, designers, realtors, the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta came together to brainstorm ways they could better support both current and future residents with special housing needs.

In 2009, their efforts inspired the Mayor to host a round table on the topic of *A Blueprint for the Next Housing Boom: Accessible Housing and Universal Design for Seniors*. The round table led to the creation of the Home for Life™ Action Committee, which was established with two key goals in mind:

1. **to increase the number and variety of housing options available to help the city's seniors age in place;** and
2. **to make seniors (and other homeowners) in Edmonton aware of those options.**

“One of the main recommendations that came out of the round table was that, if everyone was encouraged to build a home that included key features that made it more accessible, the challenges of a home meeting an individual’s changing needs over a lifetime would no longer be an issue,” Maier says.

The first step in achieving that goal was for members of the committee to make a presentation about the need for more accessible housing to Edmonton City Council and meet one-on-one with several city councillors to talk more about Home for Life™ and its goals. In 2014, they received funding from the City under the *Vision for an Age Friendly Edmonton* umbrella, which enabled the group to create the Home for Life™ website: www.homeforlife.ca.

Age Friendly Edmonton™

Home for Life™ is an initiative of Age Friendly Edmonton™: a collaborative partnership between the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, senior-serving organizations and other community groups that is part of the global movement to make cities friendlier and more livable for people of all ages. Age Friendly Edmonton™ works with local partners to help build a city that values, respects and actively supports the well-being of its seniors.

Seven essential features of an accessible home

At the core of Home for Life™ is a set of clear design guidelines that give homeowners, builders, developers and renovators all the information they need to create single-family homes that will allow occupants to live safely comfortably and independently in their own homes, both now, and into the future. The guidelines focus on the **seven essential features** that are needed to transform any house into an accessible home, including:

- **Essential feature 1:** A zero-step entrance.
- **Essential feature 2:** An accessible kitchen.
- **Essential feature 3:** An accessible three-piece bathroom (ideally on the main floor).
- **Essential feature 4:** An accessible bedroom or flex room (ideally on the main floor).
- **Essential feature 5:** An accessible laundry area (ideally on the main floor).
- **Essential feature 6:** Doorways that are at least 36 inches (915-mm) wide.
- **Essential feature 7:** Hallways that are at least 42 inches (1,065-mm) wide.



Main floor laundry area with a 60-inch (1,525-mm) diameter turning circle

Photo credit – Home for Life™

Homeowners can use the guidelines as a starting point when planning their next home or renovation project or when deciding where they want to live after they retire. Builders and renovators, on the other hand, can access all of the technical specifications, sample floor plans and other information needed to create more accessible homes at the click of a mouse, on the Home for Life™ website.

To make sure the information would meet the real-world needs of both consumers and professionals, the Committee held focus groups with a variety of interested parties, from homeowners to builders and developers. The Home for Life™ guidelines were then created based on their needs, feedback and insights.

Home for Life™ builder’s rule

While a large part of the appeal of the Home for Life™ guidelines is how comprehensive they are, the Committee realized that a more simplified version might better appeal to the needs of today’s busy homeowners and builders.

So the group created what Roger Laing, Home for Life™ Co-chair and the Executive Director of the Sage Seniors Association calls the “builder’s rule”: **Zero – 36 – 42 – 60**, meaning zero steps and thresholds (including in the shower); 36-inch (915-mm) wide doorways; 42-inch (1,065-mm) wide hallways; and 60-inch (1,525-mm) diameter turning circles in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and laundry areas.

“Some people have told us that these criteria can’t be achieved,” Laing explains. “But we know that they can. There are many families right here in Edmonton who have built homes that meet, or exceed, our criteria.”



Builder's rule: Zero – 36 – 42 – 60

- **Zero** steps and thresholds (including in the shower)
- **36-inch** (915-mm) wide doorways (or larger)
- **42-inch** (1,065-mm) wide hallways
- **60-inch** (1,525-mm) diameter turning circles in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and laundry

Next steps: the way forward

Since it was launched in 2014, the Home for Life™ website has received more than 10,000 page views, with thousands of both new and returning visitors. There is also a growing awareness of the initiative among residents in nearly every part of the city. In addition, several Edmonton-based builders and developers have started using the Home for Life™ guidelines to make their home designs and floor plans more accessible to changing needs or to help guide their renovation projects.

According to Maier, one of the greatest selling features behind building homes that are accessible right from the design stage is how cost-effective they can actually be.

“When you compare it to the cost of having to carry out a complete new retrofit or renovation down the road, the cost of integrating the potential for accessibility into a new home or reno is surprisingly minimal,” she says. “Another myth is that an accessible home is unattractive. Our emphasis is that Home for Life™ homes can be truly beautiful. When that happens, the accessibility almost becomes like an added bonus.”

As Maier explains, the other real lesson to be learned from the success of Home for Life™ is the importance of emphasizing that accessible homes aren't just for seniors or people with a disability. They're for everyone, because you never know how your housing needs might change as you grow older—or how quickly and unexpectedly it can happen.



Zero-step entrance benefits everyone

Photo credit – Home for Life™

“Planning your home to meet your long-term needs is as important as having life insurance or saving for retirement,” Maier says. “Most people aren't asking for accessible features in their homes, because they don't think that they will need them. They don't realize that having a Home for Life™ can be the difference between living independently and moving to assisted living or long-term care if they become sick or injured.”

To find out more about Home for Life™ and see how this initiative is helping to build a more accessible future for the community, visit the Home for Life™ website at www.homeforlife.ca.





cmhc.ca



©2017, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Printed in Canada
Produced by CMHC

08-03-17

Although this information product reflects housing experts' current knowledge, it is provided for general information purposes only. Any reliance or action taken based on the information, materials and techniques described is the responsibility of the user. Readers are advised to consult appropriate professional resources to determine what is safe and suitable in their particular case. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation assumes no responsibility for any consequence arising from use of the information, materials and techniques described.