



## Visitability

Visitability is a national movement to build homes with three primary accessible design features. They are:

1. One zero step entrance on an accessible path of travel from the street, sidewalk or driveway
2. Doorways that provide 32 inches clear space throughout the home's main floor and hallways that provide 36 inches of clear width
3. Basic access to a half or (preferably) full bath on the main floor



Having a VISIBLE home means that a friend or family member with a physical disability, or who has difficulty walking or using stairs, can easily visit you in your house. It means that visitors using the restroom can close the door, even if they use a wheelchair, walker or other mobility device. It also means that you will be able to remain living in your own home as you age with less chance of needing costly renovations.

In Montana, less than 20% of homes have a zero-step entry. Of those, many do not have a bathroom usable

by someone who uses a wheelchair or hallways wide enough to allow someone to move along that floor.

A lack of access means many people are unable to visit the homes of their friends and relatives in their community or even to remain living in their own homes due to age related declines in mobility or by having acquired some sort of mobility limiting disability, such as a spinal cord injury. This lack of home access is one of the leading reasons people have to move into nursing homes or other costly institutional settings.

As people are forced into nursing home type settings, it is often Medicaid or Medicare paying the costs of them living there. This results in taxpayers shouldering these costs, which are enormous compared to the low cost of incorporating VISIBLE design features in new home construction.

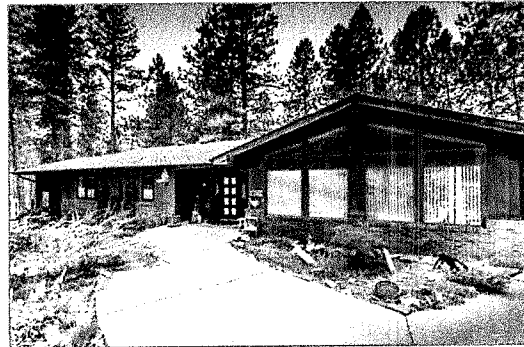
## *What can the Legislature do to help more homes become Visitable?*

There are several ways legislators could help make our communities better for everyone. One would be to pass a financial incentive, a tax credit like those used to encourage adding renewable energy options to a home, for building a Visitable home.

Another would be to change a provision in the building codes that prevents local communities from choosing to pass ordinances that could increase the number of Visitable homes in their communities. Currently, Department of Labor and Industry Rule 24.301.202 of the Building Codes states that all codes adopted by cities, counties, and towns must be the same as those adopted by the department. It may be possible for the legislature to encourage a change to this rule so that local communities could promote rules exceeding these requirements within their jurisdictions to make their communities healthier and safer.

In new construction, it costs a negligible amount to make a home Visitable, especially when compared to the cost of providing services in a nursing home or other institution as well as the amount of work and cost it takes to renovate an existing home, which can sometimes be impossible depending on the home the original design.

There are already communities talking about Visitability, and various home builders who make building Visitable homes a part of their mission. Here are pictures of a couple of Montana homes that have been built with Visitability in mind.



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