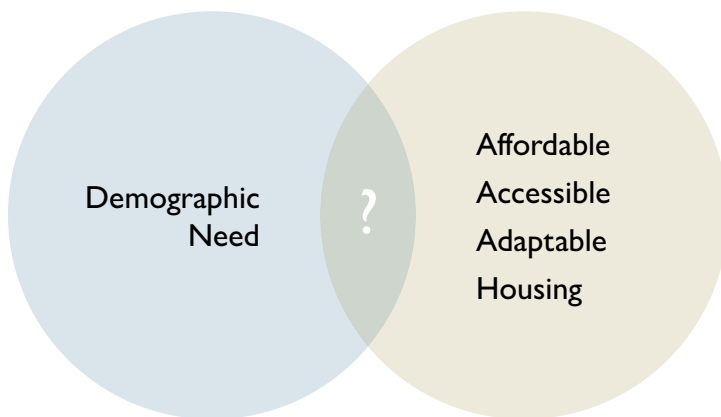


Assessment of Adaptable Affordable Housing Design Needs and Solutions – Literature Review

THE RESEARCH

CMHC commissioned a literature review to explore the potential demand for adaptable, accessible, affordable housing that responds to changing household needs and demographic patterns, and to source economical, sustainable and flexible solutions in the affordable housing sector, with particular attention to multi-unit residential buildings (MURBs). The scope of work included identification of gaps in the area of study and recommendations for further research or updating of previous studies.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Research was conducted by searching, reviewing and documenting existing literature to collect information on the needs and challenges of building or renovating adaptable affordable housing to meet changing demographics and user needs. An annotated bibliography was created of the most informative results of the environmental scan of existing research from Canadian, U.S. and international resources and projects developed within the last ten years. Based on the resource research, key contacts were listed, questions were formulated and interviews conducted to obtain qualitative information from housing providers and experts.

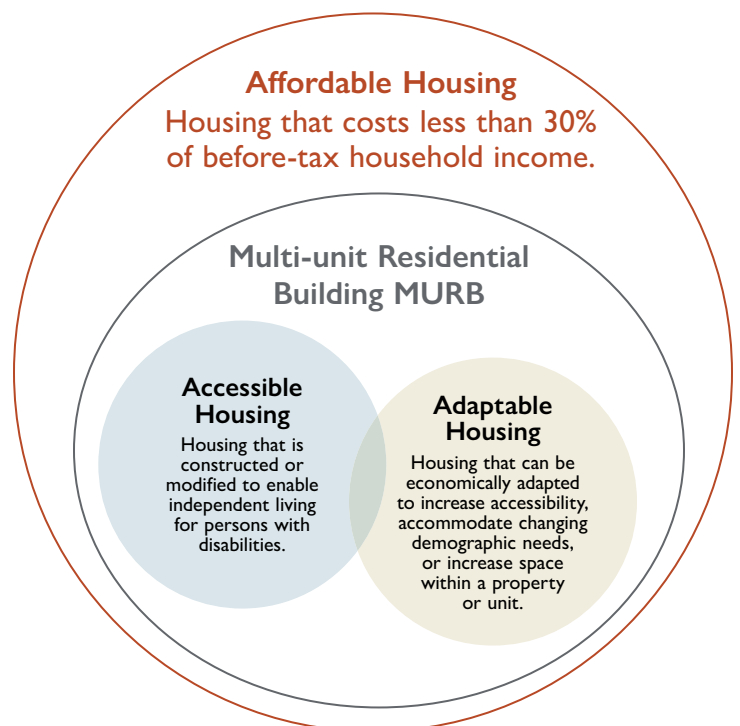
KEY FINDINGS

Need and demand mismatches

This review found evidence that socio-demographic changes are inevitable and seem to be happening more rapidly than in the past. This is having a profound effect on the types of housing needs for

existing and future buildings. There is a broad spectrum of residents in need of more affordable and appropriate housing, from the elderly to youth, and from indigenous communities to newcomers.

There is a growing need in Canada for more MURBs in general. This is expected to continue into the future due to aging baby boomers, most newcomer households needing the affordability offered by multi-unit dwellings and increasing urbanization that increases housing costs—particularly single-detached dwellings.



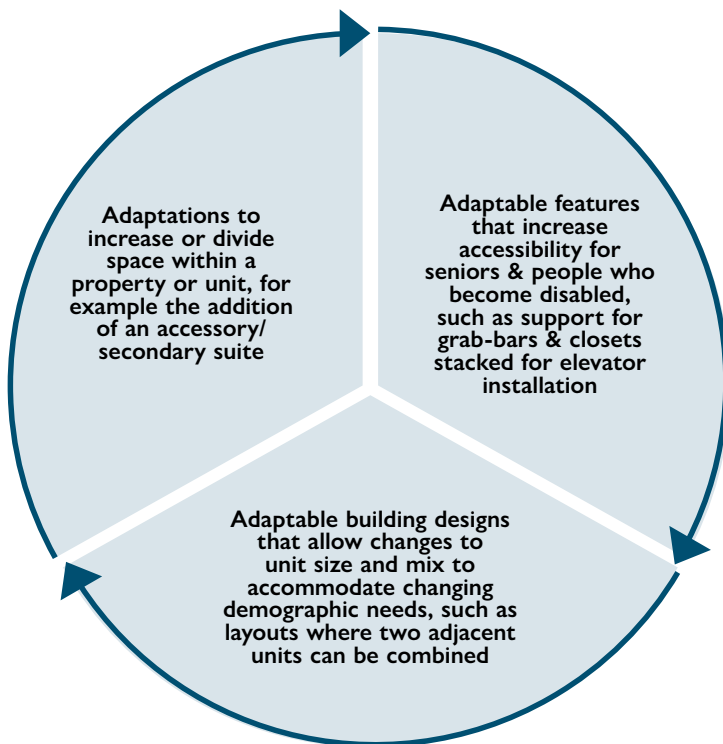
In general, there is a need for adaptable and affordable housing to accommodate changing demographics because of the following:

- Aging building stock was built with little or no incorporation of accessible features
- People are living longer and wishing to age in place
- Diminished incomes, unstable economy and rising energy costs
- Changing “family” size and nature
- Newcomers requiring larger units; singles requiring smaller units, generally in MURBs due to affordability

However, the idea of adaptability is not something that the affordable housing providers who participated in the interviews reported as a need, nor is it incorporated into the provincial housing strategies that were researched. However, once the ideas were described to them, the providers agreed it would be beneficial for adaptability features to be included in new housing and in regeneration projects as much as possible. They noted that before adaptable features could be incorporated, the benefits would need to be considered and the costs analyzed, along with the bigger picture of all the priorities dealt with in the production of affordable housing.

Challenges faced by those trying to incorporate flexibility, accessibility and adaptability include regulatory controls such as restrictions on secondary suites, the rigid physical nature of the construction of existing MURB stock and a mismatch of unit sizes to needs in existing MURBs. Challenges in new MURBs include resistance to new approaches, lack of data and information on costs and benefits, minimal regulatory requirements for incorporation of barrier-free and aging-in-place features, and construction budget limitations.

Three general types of adaptability that have the potential to be incorporated into affordable housing



Solutions and strategies

In Canada, strategies in support of adaptable, accessible and affordable housing include regulatory changes to allow accessory suites; funding for accessibility upgrades; and addition of accessibility features in federal, provincial and municipal housing programs. In the market sector for MURBs, some developers are responding to consumer demand with innovative design of adaptable units. International strategies include national affordable housing frameworks with mandatory adaptable features, and innovation in design and construction of new MURBs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HOUSING INDUSTRY

The research shows that there is a need to make affordable housing adaptable. Societal and demographic changes are happening more rapidly than in the past and are having a profound effect on housing needs now and in the future. Affordable housing providers can benefit from an adaptable approach that can more cost-effectively and efficiently accommodate changes in housing needs. Features such as flexible floor plans and embedded features that facilitate future accessibility upgrades are part of the solution. However, this review also indicated that there is insufficient knowledge and experience with the costs and benefits of adaptable housing solutions—particularly in the affordable housing stock—and this represents a significant barrier to awareness and adoption. Research, development and demonstration of practical, cost-effective approaches in new and existing residential housing projects are needed to more fully understand the full range of costs and benefits of adaptable housing solutions.

FURTHER READING

Full report – *Assessment of Adaptable Affordable Housing Design Needs and Solutions – Literature Review* (https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_2/assessment_adaptable_housing_design_needs.pdf)

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