

## Case Studies of Sector Initiatives to Meet Accessible Housing Needs

CMHC is focused on achieving our aspiration that everyone in Canada have a home that they can afford and that meets their needs. Accessible and adaptable housing enables people of all ages and abilities to stay in their homes and communities if possible. Demand for affordable and accessible housing is increasing with the growing number of seniors and people living with disabilities. Developers, builders, and architects are working to create affordable housing across Canada using the concepts of accessibility, visitability, and universal design. The following study highlights 11 pan-Canadian multi-unit residential buildings (MURBs) with innovative features that meet a broad range of housing needs with some costs comparable to conventional market housing.

### Project overview

CMHC contracted this research project with DesignABLE Environments Inc to highlight a sample of successful affordable MURBs in a variety of Canadian geographic locations where builders and developers have included accessible, visitable, or universal design features in market and non-market housing. The case studies provide information about the project context, site, accessibility features, sustainability approaches, innovative aspects, financing, benefits, successes, and market

response. They highlight a range of subsidized and non-subsidized housing aimed at supporting vulnerable people identified in CMHC's National Housing Strategy. Housing is dedicated (but not limited) to: low-income seniors; people at risk of homelessness; individuals overcoming addiction; individuals living with disabilities, medical and mental health challenges; and other individuals with limited mobility. While almost all the projects are rental housing, one case study, Axxess Condos, is an ownership housing development.

## About CMHC Research Insights

Research insights are summaries of our research reports.

These insights:

- identify a housing research issue, gap or need
- provide an overview of the research project undertaken to address it
- present major findings of the research

The research presented in this series explore the areas of Housing Need, Housing Finance, Housing Supply and Outcomes of the National Housing Strategy.

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## Key features of the case studies

Affordability and accessibility features were key aspects considered in the housing developments featured in this report, as described below.

### Affordability

- The affordability levels achieved by the selected projects varied based on the target populations. Often, housing developments offer a mix of unit types and a range of affordability levels to increase diversity. For example, in Place La Charrette in Winnipeg, 50% of the units are geared to tenant income, and 50% are set at the median market rent.
- To increase affordability for specific groups, some projects set rents as a proportion of income (e.g., 25% of income), while others target individuals or households with annual incomes below a certain threshold, such as \$49,500. In other cases, rents are set relative to the local housing market, such as 80% of the median market rent.

### Accessible, visitable, and Universal Design features

The following MURBs are designed with accessibility considerations and a few other key features. The case studies describe the various features provided in each of the buildings, such as audio, tactile, and visual features, or accessible balconies and patio/backyard areas.

- **Carlington Community, Ottawa, Ontario:**  
This innovative 42-unit MURB offers 12 barrier-free and 30 visitable homes, supporting seniors with low energy costs, a ground-floor health centre, rooftop garden, social rooms and other facilities.
- **Front Street Seniors' Residence, Whitehorse, Yukon:**  
This 48-unit MURB dedicated to low-income seniors is centrally located and close to transit. Of the 48 units, 38 are accessible one-bedroom units and 10 are barrier-free units.
- **Place La Charrette, Winnipeg, Manitoba:**  
This 32-unit development in Winnipeg features a combination of apartments and bungalows based on Universal Design, enabling residents to remain in place if their accessibility needs change.

- **Storeys, Richmond, British Columbia:** Winner of the 2018 Canadian Institute of Planners' Social Planning Award for Planning Excellence, this development offers 129 units for lower-income residents. It also features a café, classrooms, office space, commercial kitchens, and other multi-purpose spaces.
- **Le Pélican, Montréal, Quebec:** All 179 units and shared spaces are adaptable and universally accessible. This Montréal project offers housing for people with varying accessibility needs and focuses on the well-being of people aged 50 and over.
- **Inclusio, Calgary, Alberta:** This 45-unit MURB features barrier-free design and is equipped with kitchenettes and private bathrooms. All suites have design features that enhance independence. For example, iPhones and tablets are used to control window coverings, door openings, lighting, and TVs.
- **Axess Condos, Pickering, Ontario:** This 336-unit development promotes real-life functionality and mobility in condominium living, offering both barrier-free designs specifically to aid independent living, as well as traditional suites.
- **The Salvation Army Ches Penney Centre of Hope, St. John's, Newfoundland:** This 20-unit permanent supportive housing project offers wrap-around services for people at risk of homelessness. Two units are fully accessible, and the remaining units can be easily modified for full wheelchair accessibility, based on tenant need, with little post-construction cost.
- **Cornerstone Housing, Whitehorse, Yukon:** This 53-unit affordable, accessible and supportive housing project was developed to address housing shortages for individuals with moderate disabilities and mental health challenges. All public areas will be accessible by design.
- **Veterans' House, Ottawa, Ontario:** A three-level building with 40 affordable units targeting the needs of the rising number of homeless veterans living in Ottawa. All units meet Universal Design standards.
- **Ambrose Place, Edmonton, Alberta:** A 42-unit MURB providing housing and support services within a culturally sensitive environment to Indigenous people who are at risk of homelessness. Accessible features exceed the barrier-free design requirements of the Alberta Building Code (ramps, accessible doorways, hallway are wider, etc.).

**Accessibility advisory group (AAG):** An AAG is a group of people with a range of disabilities who review ideas and designs and help identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility.

Using an AAG during the planning, development, and construction phases is a good practice that improves the likelihood of a project being truly accessible and visitable, since it enables developers and builders to understand and consider the distinct needs and requirements of people with disabilities. Early consideration also makes it easier and more affordable to integrate feedback and the measures required.

## Implications for the housing industry

The housing models and design features presented in these case studies demonstrate that inclusive housing, designed to support people of all ages and abilities, can be practical and feasible, both in market and non-market housing contexts. Partnerships with community support programs are important ways to provide better tenant services while innovating to meet local housing needs. Throughout the research process, several issues were raised by the industry experts consulted. It was suggested that the outcomes of this research should be considered within the context of the following issues:

- The need for consistent definitions of accessibility, visitability, universal design, etc.
- Building codes vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.
- Further information about the costs associated with building accessible housing is important, because it may address questions about budget feasibility.

The non-profit sector appears to be the most active agent in creating visitable, accessible and Universal Design housing, taking advantage of partnerships and available subsidies. Their experience helps pave the way for broader acceptance and uptake of design approaches that make housing accessible to all.

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## Full Report

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