



By Jesse Klimitz and Frances Jewett (above)

Smart no-cost design decisions will save money and improve resale value in the long term.

Lasting Renovations Include Accessibility

Boomers are setting new trends in every industry, especially housing. As this large population group ages, demand for houses that accommodate people with disabilities is growing. In recent years, the concept of universal design or adaptable housing (houses that can be easily modified to meet the changing needs of residents) has become increasingly popular for aging homeowners who are considering renovating or downsizing.

"More and more people are choosing to stay in their homes later in life rather than move to specialized facilities, and therefore it is important to think about the future and incorporate a basic level of accessibility when renovating a home or condo. This in turn may increase the resale value of a home," says Susan Ruptash, Principal Architect at Quadrangle and AccessAbility Advantage.

Accessibility should be a consideration in every home renovation project. Whether or not improved accessibility is a current priority, smart no-cost design decisions will save money and improve resale value in the long term. Renovations should always make the home more adaptable to the changing needs of residents.

Renovating for Accessibility

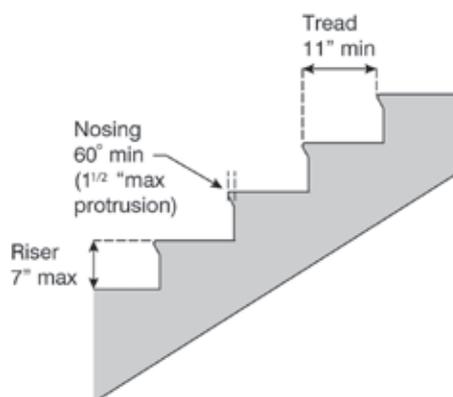
Renovation tips which incorporate a basic level of accessibility include:

#1 Home Entry:

Exterior doorway thresholds are a common barrier for mobility device users and seniors with limited gait. Install thresholds no higher than 1/4" and replace typical decking near the threshold with slotted boards to allow for water and snow accumulation to drain away.

#2 Stairs:

Falls on stairs are a major threat to the health, independence and confidence of seniors. Soft treads should be avoided. An easy solution is to remove cushioning under carpeting or use a slip resistant, grit finish on wooden treads. Also, consider creating colour contrast between stair risers and treads. Use best practice dimensions for stairs as illustrated in the diagram.



Use best practice dimensions for stairs.

#3 Adaptable Design:

The majority of Canadian seniors will live in their own home as they age and will require adaptable and accessible spaces. Consider the following simple and cost effective tips.

- Stack closets above one another and incorporate knock-out floor panels for future hoist way adaptations.
- Consider the location of wall studs to allow for future door widening.
- Integrate flexibility in kitchens by including movable storage, adjustable shelving, clear counter space beside all major appliances and clear knee space under the kitchen sink.
- Create accessible spaces with open concept planning by removing unnecessary doors and walls to provide for flexible space.
- Prepare for future grab bar installation in bathrooms by installing plywood paneling behind drywall around the shower, bath and toilets.



Avoid steps and barriers at entrances.

#4 Other tips:

- Keep exterior walkways well lit with motion activated or timed lights.
- Install windows with low sills no higher than 30" to provide views to the outdoors for wheelchair users.
- Use slip resistant flooring such as low-pile carpet, laminate, cork and linoleum.
- Paint the side edge of doors with colour contrast to adjacent surfaces for visual acuity.
- Install lever handles on doors, faucets, cabinets and window hardware.
- Consider newer innovations such as digital tab keyless locks and intelligent home systems.

It's now more important than ever to add value to homes by ensuring that accessible features are in place and that spaces can be easily adaptable to meet changing household needs for residents in the long term. 🏠

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