

Build Homes for a Lifetime

Make Visitability a Standard Part of New Housing

Homes should be designed with the understanding that people's needs can change over the course of their lives.

A home that works well for someone today may become difficult or impossible to navigate after acquiring a disability, experiencing an injury or developing mobility needs later in life.

Basic accessibility features incorporated when a home is built can make it easier for that home to accommodate changing circumstances in the future.

WILN is calling on Wisconsin to establish a minimum standard of **visitability** for new housing so more homes can support people throughout their lifespan.

The Problem

Wisconsin continues to build homes without basic features that can support accessibility and aging in place.

Visitability refers to a basic set of accessibility features incorporated into the design of a home.

The standard described by WILN includes:

- At least one zero-clearance entrance
- A bedroom and bathroom on the first floor
- 36-inch doorways

These features do not make every home fully accessible for every person.

They do, however, create a foundation that can make a home usable by more people and allow for additional modifications as an individual's circumstances change.

According to WILN, Wisconsin state and local building codes currently do not enforce a standard of visitability.

As a result, new homes can continue to be built in ways that may become difficult to use when a resident develops changing mobility or accessibility needs.

WILN's Solution

Establish a statewide minimum standard for visitability in new housing.

WILN is calling for housing policy that requires homebuilders to incorporate basic visitability features into new homes.

At a minimum, WILN's proposed standard would include:

1. A zero-clearance entrance

At least one entrance should allow someone to enter the home without navigating a step.

2. A first-floor bedroom and bathroom

Essential living spaces should be available on the home's primary level.

3. 36-inch doorways

Wider doorways can accommodate a broader range of mobility needs and make future accessibility modifications easier.

Building these features into homes from the beginning would create housing that is better prepared to accommodate residents as their needs change over time.

Why it Matters

The home someone needs at 30 may not be the home they need at 70—but it can still be the same home.

Disability, injury and changing mobility can occur at any point in life.

A home designed with basic accessibility in mind gives residents more options when those circumstances change.

Visitability also extends beyond the person who owns or rents the home. Basic accessibility can make it possible for a friend, relative or neighbor with a mobility disability to enter and use essential areas of the home.

For older adults, these features can make remaining at home more feasible as mobility needs change.

For people with disabilities, they can increase the number of homes that are usable or capable of being modified to meet individual needs.

WILN believes Wisconsin should build today's housing with tomorrow's needs in mind.

The Ask

WILN calls on Wisconsin policymakers to:

Create statewide housing policy establishing minimum visitability standards for new homes, including at least one zero-clearance entrance, a first-floor bedroom and bathroom, and 36-inch doorways.

These basic design features would help create a housing supply that can better accommodate disability, changing mobility and aging throughout a person's lifespan.

The Bottom Line

It is easier to build accessibility into a home from the beginning than to discover later that the home no longer works for the person living there. Wisconsin should build homes designed to work across a lifetime.