

## Executive Summary

In 1982, people with disabilities were included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since then, there has been a lot of progress to ensure equal access to many areas of life however; housing has continued to be constructed to be inaccessible to many.

This report discusses visitability, as a means to provide basic accessibility into new housing developments and to build more inclusive communities. The key features of visitable housing are defined as zero-step entrances, wider doors and hallways, and larger bathrooms (with a five-foot turning radius) on the same level as the zero-step entrance.

The purpose of this report is to illustrate how visitability features have been applied in new rental housing developments, the impacts and challenges, and the need for broader policies on housing accessibility.

The research questions addressed in this report are:

1. To what extent have visitability standards been incorporated in new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston in the past five to ten years?
2. What were the challenges in implementing visitability in these new affordable housing developments?
3. What were the impacts of visitability on project costs and housing affordability for residents?
4. Is a visitability policy (or standard) feasible for new social/affordable housing developments in the City of Kingston?

The three main research methods in this report are: a literature review, document review, and key informant interviews. Three case studies of visitable social/affordable housing developments were chosen, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of visitable housing development in Kingston, Ontario's social/affordable developments. The three case studies chosen in this study were:

- 233 Queen Mary Road, Kingston, Ontario
- 40 Cliff Crescent, Kingston, Ontario
- 35 Lyons Street, Kingston, Ontario

Visitability is a fairly new concept in Canada, so there were not many examples of visitable social/affordable housing developments in Kingston, so all developments that had visitable features that had been started or completed within the last five years were studied for this report.

This report showed that it is possible to provide 100% of units in a building with visitable features in social/affordable housing developments. Key findings include:

- These buildings have different levels of visitability ranging from 27% of units – 100% of units being visitable.
- The inclusion of additional accessibility features beyond the three standard visitability features
  - Many of the projects included additional features like power door operators and zero-step showers
- The cost of visitability could not be found within this study due to the way costing is done, however there is a general sense that the cost of visitability is quite low
- There were many challenges in making visitable housing, namely, the size and space requirements, zero-step balconies, and sloped sites.
  - Some of these challenges were also identified within the literature review as being issues in other municipalities.

Regardless of the challenges that were faced in developing these visitable housing developments, it is important to note that they were completed or are under construction, meaning that it is possible for social/affordable housing developments to be built to visitability standards.

These findings raise a broader question of whether a visitability policy should be implemented to encourage increased visitable housing stock and led to general recommendations which include:

**Recommendation 1: Implementing a mandatory visitability policy for social/affordable housing**

The research found that in other municipalities the most successful way to implement visitable housing is to make it a mandatory requirement.

**Recommendation 2: Creating buildings that are fully visitable (100% visitability)**

There are different levels of visitability that were implemented within the buildings that were studied. By providing a visitable building, it works to include everyone within the building, since anyone can visit any unit, so they can visit their neighbours and visitors can visit anyone within the building.

**Recommendation 3: Looking at promoting visitable housing in private housing developments**

This research demonstrated that it is possible to build visitable housing in social/affordable developments. These developments typically have the tightest budgets with less room to provide additional features for tenants compared to the private sector. If social/affordable developments are able to incorporate visitability even with their small budgets, private developments should also be able to incorporate these features, given their larger budgets.