Over 90 percent of Indiana residents would prefer to grow old in their current homes—a concept known as aging in place. However, 40 percent of Hoosiers worry that they won’t be able to age in place because their homes do not accommodate the physical challenges that often come with aging.

**Traditional home design practices have built barriers to aging in place into much of our housing supply.** These structural barriers—which include steps, narrow doorways, and the absence of a bathroom on the first floor—can prevent older adults, as well as people of any age who have disabilities, from leading independent lives. Almost all of us will experience an injury that impairs our mobility at some point during our lives. **Traditional design practices prevent individuals with impaired mobility from visiting friends, relatives, and neighbors and from participating fully in their communities.**

Federal law requires access for people with mobility impairments to all new multifamily residences and to five percent of single-family homes constructed with public funds. Thus, current housing policy does not address the vast majority of single-family homes, in which most people live. **Most of our homes lack basic accessibility features.**

Of course, homes and other buildings can be modified. Retrofitting, though, is often a costly solution. This brief explores two approaches to design that incorporate accessibility features from the start and how funders can support design that benefits everyone.

Sources: AARP, AARP Public Policy Institute
**Key Concepts**

**Universal Design**, also called Inclusive Design, is an approach to designing products, buildings and environments to be usable by all people without the need for adaptation. Practicing universal design means abandoning the notion of an "average" user, and designing products and environments that are usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone. The term reflects the fact that inclusive design often benefits everyone. For example, curb cuts are used by bicyclists and parents pushing strollers as well as wheelchair users.

"Rather than being geared solely to older adults and people with disabilities, universal design features are intended to have general utility and market appeal." (AARP Public Policy Institute)

**Visitability**, also called Inclusive Home Design, is an approach to designing houses that incorporates several basic accessibility features. A visitable home has:

- At least one zero-step entrance
- Wide doorways (32 inches of unobstructed passage space)
- At least a half bathroom on the main floor

Visitability advocates seek to change housing construction practices so that all new homes include these three features, regardless of whether the designated residents have mobility impairments. In addition to accommodating visitors who require basic accessibility features, visitable homes enable aging in place.

"Visitability focuses on new construction, but policymakers and the public also must increase accessibility in the existing housing stock. Retrofitting existing houses and changing the way new houses are built are both necessary to meet the demand that is emerging as Baby Boomers age." (AARP Public Policy Institute)

Sources: AARP, Concrete Change
Getting Involved

How to Help

Catalyze Action:
Require Capital and Relocation Grants to Incorporate Inclusive Design Principles
Consider your local community center’s capital project. What if you requested that this project—or any capital project—incorporate the basic universal design features, such as zero-step entries? What if you requested that the center consult with a Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist (CAPS)?
Integrating accessibility features into any new construction or remodeling projects will be of benefit to your community, making it more inclusive and livable for people of all ages and abilities. Working with a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist will greatly increase the likelihood that construction and interior design plans will result in safe, attractive, barrier-free environments that work better for everyone.

Convene Stakeholders:
Explore New Models of Service
Section 3026 of the Affordable Care Act, the Community-Based Care Transitions Program, is testing models that encourage partnerships between community-based organizations and hospitals for improving care transitions from hospitals to other settings and reducing readmissions for Medicare beneficiaries. Convening your grantees to discuss how patient homes can reflect universal design and become those “other settings” can create a sustainable model of service to improve transitions in care.

Communicate the Importance of Design for All Ages and Abilities
Unfortunately, the design industry’s most prestigious awards often honor some of the least inclusive buildings. Consider establishing a community award that recognizes outstanding examples of inclusive design.
Also consider providing support for the development and dissemination of educational materials. “If you want to change the world,” said design specialist Marcia Alexander, “you have to start with kids. Twenty years ago, we introduced the green movement in schools. The kids embraced it, and today it’s an integral part of their world. We need to do the same thing with universal design.” (Kansas City Communities for All Ages)

Contribute to Programs that Support Visitability and Enable Aging in Place
It’s easier and less costly to incorporate universal design into initial construction. However, we know that most existing homes lack basic accessibility features. With 10 million people turning 65 every day between now and 2030, the need to retrofit these homes will continue to skyrocket. You can help meet this growing need by supporting organizations and programs that provide home modification services. Also consider working with your local Habitat for Humanity to ensure that its new homes are built to be visitable by all and to accommodate the residents as they age.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

AARP Resources

**Expanding Implementation of Universal Design and Visitability Features in the Housing Stock**
This fact sheet can help community leaders understand the importance of implementing universal design and visitability features in homes.

**Increasing Home Access: Designing for Visitability**
This report from the AARP Public Policy Institute discusses the concept of visitability, implementation strategies, barriers to and benefits of implementation, and future directions. Download the [full report](#) or a [brief synopsis](#).

Many other resources and articles, including a [Home Fit Guide](#). Search for "visitability," "universal design," or "aging in place" at [aarp.org](https://aarp.org).

**Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access**
The IDeA Center at the University of Buffalo produces knowledge and tools to increase social participation of those who have been marginalized by traditional design practices.

**Concrete Change**
An international network that advocates for structural and legislative shifts that promote visitability.

**National Association of Home Builders**
A good source of information on [modifying or remodeling homes to support aging in place](#), including a [directory of Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists](#) (CAPS).

**Universal Design Education**
This website supports the teaching and study of universal design. It offers a wide range of resources.

Community AGEnda

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