

Accessibility of Canadian Seniors' Homes

INTRODUCTION

By 2036, seniors aged 65 and over will account for one quarter of the Canadian population, compared with just 14% in 2011. The growing proportion of seniors in Canada is expected to have major implications for the housing market.

As people age, their housing needs are likely to change: seniors may require home modifications to enable them to live safely and comfortably in their homes for as long as possible. Yet, researchers have found that many seniors lack adequate preparation for aging in place. In light of the knowledge gaps and potential mismatch between current supply and demand of accessible housing, CMHC commissioned research to examine the extent to which accessible features have been incorporated into the homes of Canadian seniors.

THE RESEARCH

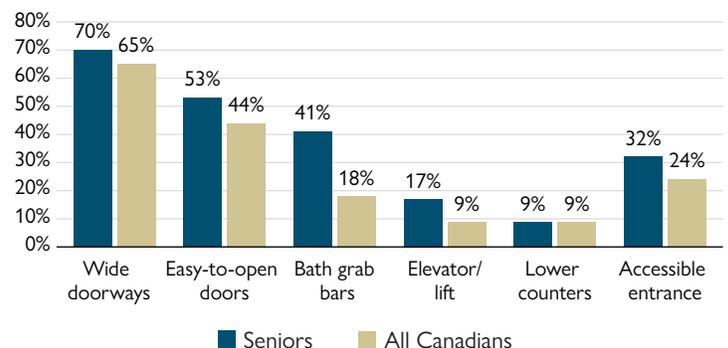
The presence of accessibility features and awareness of government programs supporting adaptation of homes were examined across socio-economic and demographic categories of Canadian seniors as well as across building type and tenure. CMHC used the 2012 General Social Survey on Caregiving and Care Receiving (GSS) with some comparisons to similar data gathered by the 2002 GSS. The research focuses on seniors, aged 65 and older, and to a lesser degree on pre-seniors, aged 55 to 64. For the purposes of this report, CMHC created accessibility categories based on the limitations of the data. For example, an accessible entrance means a home with a street-level entrance with no steps or a home with a ramp at the entrance.

KEY FINDINGS

- About one quarter (24%) of households and one third (32%) of senior households had an accessible entrance, with either a level, no-step entrance or a ramp. A large proportion of survey respondents 65 years and older claimed their homes had doorways wide enough for a wheelchair (70%), easy-to-open doors including lever handles (53%) and grab bars in the bathroom (41%). Homes with an elevator or lift or having lower countertops in the kitchen or bathroom were much less common (see figure 1).
- Between 2002 and 2012, the incidence of grab bars in seniors' homes increased from 35% to 42% (see figure 4).

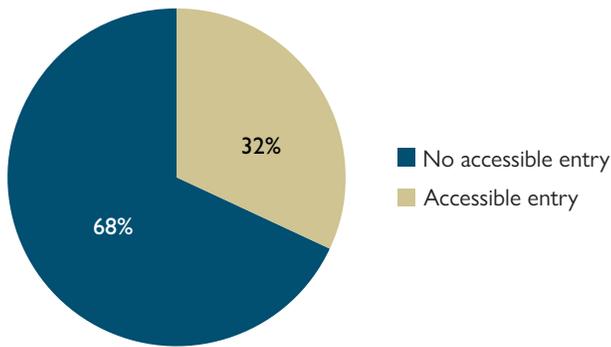
- Seniors' apartments, whether in low-rise or high-rise buildings, were much more likely than other dwelling forms (that is, detached, semi-detached or row houses) to have an accessible entry, and also to have other accessibility features. About 19% of seniors in single-detached dwellings reported having accessible entries compared to 33% of those in multi-unit dwellings, 62% in low-rise apartments and 89% in high-rises.
- More than half (55%) of seniors requiring a wheelchair, mechanical support or aid from other people as a result of mobility limitations lacked an accessible entrance in their homes.
- Seniors who recently moved were more likely to have accessible features in their homes. For example, 58% of recent movers (in residence less than one year) had an accessible entrance compared to 26% of those who had been in their homes for 10 or more years.
- Low-income seniors and those with mobility problems were no more likely than higher-income seniors and those with no limitations to be aware of government accessibility programs, despite being the target population for the programs.

Figure 1: Self-Reported Accessibility of Seniors' Homes, Canada, 2012



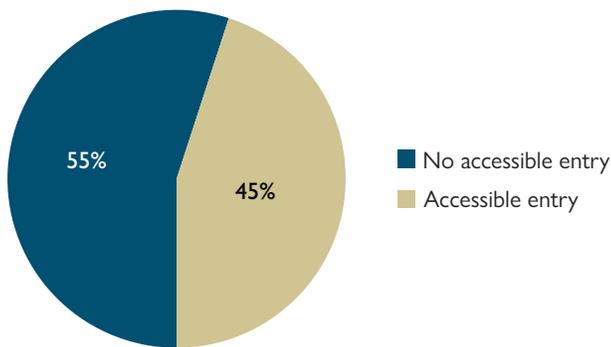
Source: CMHC, adapted from Statistics Canada (General Social Survey Cycle 26—Caregiving and Care Receiving)

Figure 2: Senior Households with Accessible Entry



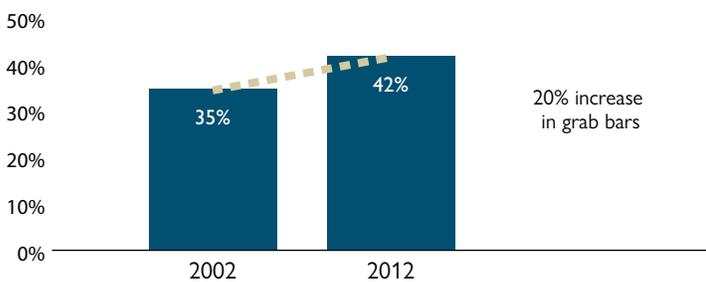
Source: CMHC, adapted from Statistics Canada (General Social Survey Cycle 26—Caregiving and Care Receiving)

Figure 3: Proportion of Seniors Who Use a Wheelchair or Require Mechanical Aid or Support to Walk AND Who Have an Accessible Entry



Source: CMHC, adapted from Statistics Canada (General Social Survey Cycle 26—Caregiving and Care Receiving)

Figure 4: Incidence of Grab Bars in Senior Households 2002-2012



FAST FACTS

- Seniors with lower income levels were more likely to live in a home with accessibility features; they were also more likely to be living with a disability.
- About 28% of seniors said they had heard of “government grants to make homes more accessible to persons with disabilities.”

IMPLICATIONS

Multi-unit dwellings, specifically apartment buildings, are meeting the housing needs of seniors

This study confirms the important role that multi-unit residential buildings, specifically high-rise and low-rise apartment buildings, play in meeting the accessible housing needs of seniors. Apartment buildings offer an accessible option especially among low-income seniors, who were also more likely to be living with a mobility disability compared to higher-income seniors. An aging population suggests growing demand for multi-unit dwellings to meet the housing needs of seniors looking for more accessible housing.

A significant share of seniors with mobility challenges are living in housing that is not accessible

The high proportion of seniors with mobility disability living in homes without accessible entrances may be indicative of barriers to overcome, such as the high cost of renovations or resistance to moving. Given the desire of a large majority of seniors to stay in their homes and communities, the finding that many are living in homes without accessible entrances may point to a lack of accessible housing options in the same neighbourhoods and communities.

Targeted government regulations and incentives seem to be an effective way to increase housing accessibility

From a regulatory and cost perspective, it is relatively easy to make apartments accessible. Governments can explore ways to improve regulatory and planning strategies to better incorporate multi-unit housing into neighbourhoods and communities. The right mix of raising awareness and adequate funding for accessible homes will help maximize the uptake of housing accessibility investments for those in need, particularly for accessible home entrances.

By investing in affordable and adaptable homes, seniors who wish to remain in their homes may be able to postpone moving as their needs change. With targeted regulations and incentives, the government and the industry can take concrete steps to increase the available stock of accessible homes for the growing senior population and ensure a more flexible housing stock to meet future housing needs.

FURTHER READING

Full Report – Accessibility of Canadian Seniors' Homes, 2012:
ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccdhd/Research_Reports-Rapports_de_recherche/2017/RR_Acc_Canadian_Seniors_Homes.pdf

The Cost of Including Accessibility Features in New Homes and Apartments: What You—and Your Clients—Need to Know [electronic resource] (OPIMS 68943):
ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccdhd/PamphletsOPIMS/68943_w.pdf

Study of the Cost of Including Accessibility Features in Newly Constructed, Modest-Cost Housing, 2015 (full report):
ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccdhd/Research_Reports-Rapports_de_recherche/eng_bilingual/RR_Cost_of_Accessibility_EN_Nov10.pdf

Study of the Cost of Including Accessibility Features in Newly Constructed, Modest-Cost Housing, 2015 (OPIMS 68479):
<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/68479.pdf>

Analysis of Housing Choices and Changing Housing Needs of Seniors and Pre-seniors, 2016 (OPIMS 68656):
<ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccdhd/RHSE-PenRSE/68656.pdf>

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ALTERNATIVE TEXT AND DATA FOR FIGURES

Figure 1: Self-Reported Accessibility of Seniors' Homes, Canada, 2012

	Seniors	All Canadians
Wide doorways	70%	65%
Easy-to-open doors	53%	44%
Bath grab bars	41%	18%
Elevator/lift	17%	9%
Lower counters	9%	9%
Accessible entrance	32%	24%

Source: CMHC, adapted from Statistics Canada (General Social Survey Cycle 26—Caregiving and Care Receiving)

Figure 2: Senior Households with Accessible Entry

	Proportion of senior households
Have an accessible entrance	32%
Do not have an accessible entrance	68%

Source: CMHC, adapted from Statistics Canada (General Social Survey Cycle 26—Caregiving and Care Receiving)

Figure 3: Proportion of Seniors Who Use a Wheelchair or Require Mechanical Aid or Support to Walk AND Who Have an Accessible Entry

	Proportion of seniors who use a wheelchair or require mechanical aid or support to walk
Have an accessible entrance	45%
Do not have an accessible entrance	55%

Source: CMHC, adapted from Statistics Canada (General Social Survey Cycle 26—Caregiving and Care Receiving)

Figure 4: Incidence of Grab Bars in Senior Households 2002-2012

	Incidence of grab bars in senior households
2002	35%
2012	42%