

**Affordable & Accessible Housing  
Units for Albertans with  
Physical Disabilities**



ADF Affordable & Accessible Housing Working Group

March 2017

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## Definitions

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**Accessible Housing** – accessible housing refers to wheelchair accessible units that could be occupied by a person in a wheelchair on a full-time basis. These units have zero-threshold entrances, wider doorways, and accessible bathrooms with a roll-in shower. They may also include an accessible kitchen.

**Affordable Housing** – for the purpose of this brief, affordable housing refers to the relationship between household income and shelter cost. Capital Region Housing defines affordable units as units subsidized to 30% rent geared to income and units that are rented at 10-15% below market.

**Disability** – for the purpose of this brief, disability is referring to individuals with physical disabilities who require housing modification.

## Who We Are

The Alberta Disabilities Forum (ADF) is a partnership of 35 not for profit member organizations supported by Voice of Albertans with Disabilities who have come together to speak with a unified voice to advance public policy on issues of importance to Albertans with disabilities. Through ADF's member organizations, we represent the perspectives of thousands of Albertans with disabilities. ADF uses the collective expertise of its member organizations to develop strategies for improving a broad range of disability-related supports and services in areas such as health, housing, transportation, income supports, employment, education and community inclusion. Our working groups focus on specific issues and develop strategies to address barriers encountered by Albertans with disabilities when accessing these supports and services.

## Our Purpose

The ADF has been an advocate for people with disabilities for over twenty years. Access to appropriate housing has been a common issue throughout this work. The ADF membership has identified affordable and accessible housing as a critical issue for Albertans with physical disabilities. It is common knowledge that it is more cost effective to keep someone in their own home when compared to acute care, long term care or some form of institutional housing. Home modification to existing housing or new builds to ease mobility can ensure individuals remain, over the long term, in their neighborhoods and same social circles. Without the foundation of a home that meets an individual's basic requirement, simple living tasks can occupy a tremendous amount of energy and planning, leaving little for family, work and community life.

In 2016 the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities found affordable, accessible housing to be one of six major issues for people with disabilities across Alberta. <sup>18</sup> This issue continues to be a major barrier to community integration for people with disabilities, <sup>16</sup> who often live on extremely low, fixed incomes, making it difficult to afford most housing options." <sup>4,17</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to

1. Demonstrate the short fall in housing units that are accessible and affordable for Albertans with physical disabilities.
2. Demonstrate the need for investments in affordable and accessible housing.
3. Government policy changes to facilitate the unmet need for accessible and affordable housing for Albertans with physical disabilities.

Using the 7 cities criteria, the working group wanted to identify the availability of public housing units in Alberta that are both accessible and affordable. A representative from each city was contacted for the information. The table below is a record of the information that was forwarded to the working group.

Community	Total Number of Affordable Housing Units	Total Number of affordable housing that are also Accessible <sup>1</sup>	Accessible units as a percentage of all affordable units	Comments from Data source
Medicine Hat	564	33	5.85%	
Calgary	16,702	443	2.65%	
Edmonton <sup>2</sup>	5,162	164	3.17%	
Red Deer <sup>3</sup>	310	17	5.48%	
Grande Prairie	110	25	0%	No wheelchair accessible units in affordable units
<b>Cumulative</b>	22,848	682	<b>2.98%</b>	

Even though the Alberta Building Code requires 10% of publicly funded housing projects (affordable for low income), to be accessible, we found only 2.98% of these units met this percentage.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this survey, we translated the building code definition of adaptable into a colloquial definition: "Wheelchair accessible units are those that could be occupied by a person in a wheelchair on a full-time basis. These units have zero-threshold entrances, wider doorways, and accessible bathrooms with a roll-in shower. They may also include an accessible kitchen."

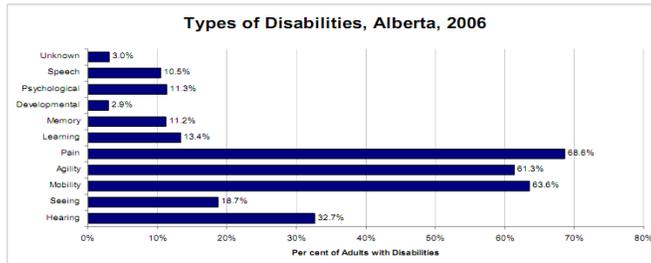
<sup>2</sup> These units represent those reported by Capital Region Housing (including units subsidized to 30% rent geared to income, and units that are rented at 10-15% below market). Data was unavailable in a comprehensive way from other housing providers

<sup>3</sup> Red Deer units were reported per the Red Deer Housing Authority.

In 2006, 15.8 % of Albertans reported having a disability, 63.6 % of these individuals reported mobility as their primary disability.

The following types of disabilities were reported in PALS: unknown, speech, psychological, developmental, memory, learning, pain, agility, mobility, seeing, and hearing. Respondents could report more than one type of disability.

Figure 3

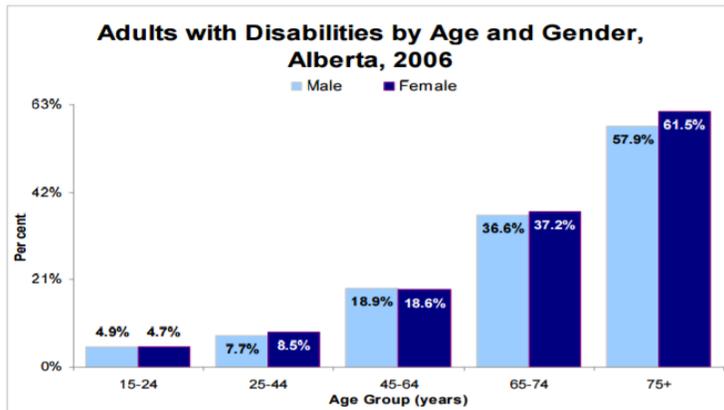


Source: Statistics Canada, PALS 2006  
Adults age 15 and over

Pain was the most commonly reported disability in 2001 and in 2006 in Alberta. The proportion of persons with disabilities who reported a pain limitation in 2006, at

The 2006 Federal Census Analysis shows that disability increases with age and that mobility is the highest incident of disability.

Figure 2



Source: Statistics Canada, PALS 2006  
Adults age 15 and over



We are now a decade closer to seeing these statistics become reality with only 2.98 % of affordable housing available to meet this ever increasing need for individuals with physical disabilities.

## ADF Recommendations

People with disabilities must have access to accessible, affordable housing. To achieve this, the Alberta Disabilities Forum recommends that the provincial government take the following actions.

**Recommendation 1** - All funding agreements for affordable housing to be built in the Province of Alberta include the stipulation that 15% of all new units be constructed to be barrier free. These units would be built, at minimum, in accordance with Section 3.8 of the Alberta Building Code (2014).<sup>1</sup>

ADF recommends that the funding agreements for building affordable housing require that the number of accessible units goes above and beyond the requirements in the Alberta Building Code, to the following:

- In projects funded in part or in whole by the Government of Alberta, 15% of dwelling units will be adaptable dwelling units:
  - 3 or more in a project of 10 to 25 dwelling units (currently 2)
  - 8 or more in a project of 26 to 50 dwelling units (currently 5)
  - 15 or more in a project of 51 to 100 dwelling units (currently 10)
  - 23 or more in a project of 101 to 200 dwelling units (currently 15)
  - 30 or more in a project exceeding 200 dwelling units. (currently 20)

### Rationale

- Long term Systemic Change –by increasing the percentage of accessible housing at the policy level, begins to address the need for accessible affordable housing in the future, and requires no additional dollars at this time.
- Aging is closely associated with disability – the disability rate goes from 23% at age 55, to 73% at age 85.<sup>6</sup>
- Aging Population – the number of seniors in Alberta are expected to double within the next 20 years.<sup>7</sup>
- Decrease Health costs - appropriate accessible and affordable housing supports health and wellness of individuals with disabilities decreasing adverse impacts of fall related injuries; caregiver burden which in turn will reduce admission rates into long-term care,<sup>10</sup> low subjective well-being,<sup>13</sup> poor perceived health, and poor psychological well-being.<sup>14, 19</sup> It will also allow for the reduction of healthcare costs through patients being discharged faster from hospitals into appropriate housing, in addition to significant savings through prevention of waste. In the UK for example, there was evidence that much of the waste regarding adaptations comes from under-funding that causes delay, or supply of inadequate solutions that are ineffective or psychologically unacceptable. Delay was leading to more costly options. One person received 4.5 additional home-care hours a week for 32 weeks, at a total cost of 1,440 pounds, when a door-

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widening adaptation costing 300 pounds was delayed for 7 months for lack of funding.<sup>10</sup>

➤ Transitional and other uses (Cal)

People with disabilities who are transitioning out of institutions or have emergency relocation needs should be prioritized on housing lists. There is an urgent need to connect people with housing upon discharge from hospitals. Currently there are times when people are being released from hospital to shelters and the streets because affordable, accessible housing is not available. This occurs for a number of reasons including: lack of sufficient housing resources, lack of equal access to existing housing resources by all hospitals, lack of assigned responsibility for assisting hospital patients with housing and financial resources.

Safe, affordable, accessible and integrated housing is critical to the support of an individual's health and recovery.

**Recommendation 2** – Allocate additional capital funding to build accessible and affordable housing.

We commend the Government of Alberta's commitment to improving the state of affordable housing in Alberta, through critical actions such as building an affordable housing strategy, reviewing the Alberta Housing Act and investing in new projects.

However, more than 15,000 households are on the waitlist for affordable housing in Alberta, and this number is steadily increasing. The Government of Alberta must invest capital funding for affordable, accessible housing as a fundamental step towards alleviating this pressure for Albertans with disabilities and their families.

**Rationale**

- Proactive – investing in affordable housing is a cost-effective way to prevent or address social problems<sup>11</sup>
- People First – accessible, affordable homes provide a safe space home from which more Albertans can rebuild their lives
- Inclusive – community-based accessible and affordable housing contributes to dignity and helps Albertans with disabilities to fulfill their potential<sup>8</sup>

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## Conclusion

As the province continues to develop its affordable housing strategy, we urge the province to consider and to ensure that the housing needs of persons with disabilities are reflected in the housing strategy.

There are many policy tools that could be considered in tackling the shortage of affordable housing including:

- Provide incentives for the development of affordable and accessible housing (i.e., density bonusing for accessibility),
- Review existing programs targeted at improving accessibility in people's homes (i.e., Residential Accessibility Modifications Programs), and
- Ensure that all housing investments work cross-ministry to ensure social supports are provided so residents are adequately supported.

There is a crisis of unmet housing needs for people of all ages with disabilities. Alberta must increase affordable, accessible, and integrated housing for people with disabilities who have the right to live at home, not in institutions.

Increasing scattered site housing. Scattered site housing refers to having people with disabilities of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds residing in different neighborhoods, being geographically spread out, as opposed to being concentrated in specific neighborhoods.

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## **Endorsing Organizations**

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