

the physical disability

FILE

information for and about people with physical disabilities

## Visitability: A New Twist on Access

For many years, *accessibility* described the degree to which a building or service was designed to be usable by people with disabilities.

Recently an additional concept has been gaining interest: *visitability*. The idea is to promote home designs that—while not completely accessible—are accessible enough for a person with a disability to easily enter and to use a first-floor bathroom. By focusing on just a few essential features with limited cost, proponents hope to substantially decrease the isolation of people with physical disabilities.

“Homes still routinely isolate and segregate people with disabilities,” says Eleanor Smith of the advocacy group, Concrete Change. “Mobility-limited people often have trouble finding places to live, and we rarely can freely enter other people’s homes to visit. We and our families are cut off from mingling in the community.”

Smith’s group recommends two basic features in the construction of homes: (1) at least one zero-step entrance, and (2) interior passage doors with a minimum of 32 inches of clearance. With such a design, Smith says, “people of all ages, with short-term or long-term disabilities can join the party, the meeting, the club, the rhythm of everyday contact with others.”

To learn more about visitability, plus states and cities that have incorporated these provisions into their building code, check out these web sites.

### Concrete Change

<http://concretechange.org/>

### Strategies for Providing Accessibility & Visitability

<http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/strategies.pdf>

### Center on Supportive Housing & Home Modification

<http://www.homemods.org/>

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FILE #29: June 2002, Revised 2013. This edition was updated by Dan C Johnson. Alternative format versions are available. Write us at: PO Box 7851, Madison, WI 53707-7851. E-mail us at: [Dan.Johnson@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Dan.Johnson@dhs.wisconsin.gov) Wisconsin Coordinator of Resources for Persons with Physical Disabilities—Department of Health Services, Division of Long-Term Care, Bureau of Aging & Disability Resources. Visit our web site at [www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/disabilities](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/disabilities).