



Photo Credit: Tim Parker, New York Times

Retrofitting

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Frequently, the elderly are forced to restrict their lives or give up their homes too early because their current housing cannot meet their needs. As people age their ability to remain mobile and independent decreases and they will frequently relocate to facilities that are more accessible but often far from their former community. These facilities can be quite costly and in most cases seniors would be happier staying in their own homes. Through retrofitting, seniors would be able to stay in their homes longer, if not indefinitely.

Housing

Retrofitting a house can be quite costly. There are a number of ways to alleviate some of the costs associated with retrofitting. Firstly the best way to alleviate costs is to plan for retrofitting in the future. When constructing a new home:

- Design hallways that are wide enough to accommodate a walker or wheel chair
- Build a large bathroom on the main floor
- Have a bedroom (or a room that can be converted into a bedroom) on the main floor
- Have entrances on grade

Performing these tasks can make it much cheaper to retrofit in the future as one won't need to start tearing out walls or installing ramps. Furthermore, this will make it easier for someone who is differently abled to visit your home.

Financial Assistance

Due to the costs associated with retrofitting and there are a few Federal and Provincial programs that assist with the costs.

The **Residential Adaptations for Disabilities Program** is for low income homeowners and tenants. Landlords can also apply if they plan to renovate units to be occupied by people who are differently abled and low income. If a person qualifies they can receive a loan of up to \$16,000. If they remain in the home for five years the loan will be forgiven.

The **Home Adaptations for Seniors' Independence Program (HASI)** is for low



Photo Credit: Betty Dion, CMHC

Figure 1: A gentle slope up to the entrance. Railings can be added later if needed.



Figure 2: Kaiser's age friendly plan



Figure 3: Super A Foods, Gimli

income seniors (65+) to make minor adaptations to their permanent residence. They can receive a loan of up to \$3,500 to make permanent, fixed adaptations like railings, grab bars and hardware changes. The loan is forgiven after six months of occupying the residence.

There are a few other programs available. The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) can be used to build a secondary suite/garden suite or perform mandatory home repairs. At the provincial level there is the Manitoba Emergency Repair Program, the Homeowner Renovation Assistance Program and the Rental Housing Improvement Program. Manitoba Housing determines the eligibility criteria.

Businesses

With the percentage of seniors steadily rising, businesses should accommodate them in order to take advantage of a growing market. Due to businesses differing widely offering specific requirements can be difficult but there are a few things that generally apply to all businesses.

- Items should be at eye level
- Wide aisles- entrances at grade
- Places to rest
- Large signs
- Well lit
- Rest rooms in the front or multiple locations

Kaiser's Grocery Store in Berlin has done these things and also provide magnifying glasses on carts, carts with seats, steps to reach the top shelves, help buttons and non slip floors. These changes increase sales by 25% above forecasted figures.

There are government resources to help businesses become age friendly. Age Friendly BC put out a guide book for age friendly businesses. The book include tips for specific types of business such as pharmacies and restaurants on things

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Figure 4: Kaiser shopping cart

Figure 5:
Pool ramp



Photo Credit: Brisbane City Council

Figure 6: Pool
lift



Photo Credit: Next Day Access

It is important for public buildings to be accessible and age friendly as they should set an example for others to follow.



Photo Credit: Google Earth

Figure 7: Kilarney Senior Horizon Centre

they can do to become age friendly. The book also include an assessment business owners can do to see if they have an age friendly score.

Gimli's Age Friendly Committee encourages business to become more age friendly. They have a yearly competition to determine which business is most age friendly. Winning business receive a plaque and coverage by the local media.

Other Manitoba business initiatives include Minitonas Age friendly Committee who helped establish the Minitonas Coffee House to promote local performances and socializing between all ages. Rossburn has an Access Awareness Week in which it invites businesses to become aware of the importance of accessibility.

Public Buildings

is important for public buildings to be accessible and age friendly they should set an example for other to follow when buildings or retrofitting private buildings in the community. Public buildings access to funds in order to make their buildings age friendly. There a few Manitoba examples including the RM of Kilarney-Turtle Mountain's Senior Horizon Centre. They received a grant and used make the building safer and more accessible by installing anti slip flooring and new lighting. Also both Minitonas and the RM of Victoria have begun installing automatic doors in their public buildings.

It is not just public buildings that need to be accessible but also public facilities. For example pools should not have any barriers of access. This can be done with assistive devices such as lifts or ramps. It is also important to mark the edges to the pool to prevent people from falling in.

Final Thoughts

Retrofitting is an important way to keep seniors in their community whether it be in housing, businesses or public buildings. Retrofitting public buildings for accessibility sets a good example that businesses will follow. In addition to setting an example, communities can create incentives for businesses such as awards. Finally, by keeping seniors in their homes, they can remain in their communities. There are a number of government programs to help seniors age in place.



Figure 1. Walker's age friendly plan



Figure 2. Super A's Plan, Chula

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