

Basic Access in All* New Houses: 9 Myths and Facts

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1. **MYTH:** *Only a small percentage of houses need to have access because only a small percentage of people need disability-friendly features.*

Fact: 60% of all new houses are projected to have a resident with long-term, severe mobility impairment over the lifetime of the house itself. ** First, it's not just wheelchair users who can't go up a step, it's people using walkers and others who have stiffness, weakness, or poor balance. Second, like other people, people with disabilities move from house to house; each house needs access. Third, a "percentage approach" disregards the fact that it's not possible to predict in which house a disability will occur. Further, people with disabilities want to visit the homes of friends and relatives.

2. **MYTH:** *In practice, a variety of construction and enforcement complexities make it impractical to mandate access in virtually all new houses. It can't be done.* **Fact:** It already has been done. Existing ordinances since 2002 and earlier demonstrate indisputable success. For example, the 21,000+ houses built to date in Tucson AZ and the 3,700+ houses built in Bolingbrook IL show that administration and construction can be accomplished without negative unintended consequences.

3. **MYTH:** *A long list of universal design features, like lowered cabinets, knee space under kitchen sinks, and roll-in showers should be included in every new house.*

Fact: It is not practical to include a long list of features in all new houses. That would undermine the overall housing affordability essential for millions of people with and without disabilities. But it IS practical to construct the most crucial features in all new houses: at least one step-free entrance, and wide enough interior doors, including bathroom doors (32 inches or more of clear passage space).

4. **MYTH:** *A zero-step entrance requires a conventional ramp, with 90-degree drop-offs at the edges and hand rails.*

Fact: On new construction, the lot can be graded so that a sidewalk ties directly to a porch.



5. **MYTH:** *A zero-step entrance works only on a flat lot.*

Fact: A steep lot is often even easier than a flat lot.



The driveway may need to be steep, but a gently-sloped sidewalk can lead from the driveway to the porch. Or, an alley or attached garage may provide access.

*(Nearly all. Basic access has been demonstrated to be practical in more than 95% of situations.)

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6. MYTH: The zero-step entrance must be located at the front of the house.

Fact: The best location for the zero-step entrance depends on the specific site.



This house on a steep lot has many steps at the front and none at the back. Depending on the lot and house type, a zero-step entrance can be located at the front, back, side or through the garage.

7. MYTH: A Zero-Step entrance is not practical when building over a basement or crawl space.

Fact: Building over a basement or crawl space does not deter a cost-effective zero-step entrance.



To keep the wood flooring system away from moisture and termites, the traditional method (a floor high above grade on all sides) is not the only solution. For instance, in Bolingbrook IL, where nearly all houses have basements, a local ordinance requires all new houses to have a zero-step entrance. Builders have used a reliable, low-cost method to create access in the 3,700+ houses already built in Bolingbrook to date. The entry sidewalk ties into the porch with no step.

8. MYTH: Basic access on new houses undermines affordability.



Fact: Basic access is compatible with affordability. A zero-step entrance and 32-inch-clear doorways require no additional cost to a new house built on a concrete slab, and about \$260 to a new house built over a basement—less than the cost of one bay window. **But the current norm of constructing barriers IS unaffordable**—in human distress and financial consequences. Steps at all entrances and narrow bathroom doors undermine affordability through renovations that strain family and public funds; through health and safety problems caused by inability to exit one's home independently or enter one's bathroom; and through institutionalization when barriers contribute to moving into a nursing home.

9. Myth: When it comes to achieving density in urban areas, basic access is impractical.

Fact: Improved townhouse access is feasible---and important. It is also important to begin constructing low-rise multi-family buildings rather than townhouses in areas where density , but not high-rises, is desired.



Chicago townhouses with basic access.



4-story apartment building under construction in Atlanta offering basic access in all units (Fair Housing Act requirement)