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Home Health: Keeping Your Environment Safe and Accessible



“Like keeping our bodies and minds fit, it’s equally important to keep the home that we live in healthy, safe and in good shape.”

Like keeping our bodies and minds fit, it’s equally important to keep the home that we live in healthy, safe and in good shape. Our homes are our refuge, a place that we can be ourselves, relax, feel safe, and be at peace. However, our homes can become a place of stress too, depending on the physical and emotional environment. Managing stressors, whether it be reducing clutter, organizing the closets, drawers, or garage, ensuring the bedroom remains a place for sleep and not the laundry, office, or playroom, working collaboratively with your partner to develop a budget (and reduce arguments related to finances), or ensuring times for communication with family and friends, are important to enable this sense of harmony in the home. But another way we can keep our home environment healthy is by thinking proactively – preparing for the changes that WILL occur in life, now, in order to enjoy our homes throughout our life span.

Whether you’re thinking of buying your first home (or tenth!), or looking at renovating the one you’re in, keeping our life span in mind can help enable us to choose options that allow for these changes. Your life cycle might look something like this:

- *Buying your first home as an individual or couple*
- *Considering a space for rentals for an additional source of income*
- *Having children and requiring bedrooms close to the master bedroom*
- *Room(s) for older teenagers, to enable independence or privacy*
- *Suite for elderly parents*
- *Personal aging and needs*
- *And at any point in the cycle, experiencing illness or disability within the family*

So how can you prepare for any or all of these changes? Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is an excellent resource that discusses the concept of “FlexHousing™” or a home that can adapt to meet the needs of the ever-changing home owner.



With permission from the CMHC, the following excerpt was taken from their website and can be found at: http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/buho/flho/flho_004.cfm

The 4 Principles of FlexHousing™ :

- Adaptability
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Healthy Housing™

FlexHousing™ is the best of everything we know about housing - under one roof.

Any home can be a FlexHouse - a suburban bungalow, high-rise condominium or infill townhouse. FlexHousing™ is simply an approach to designing and building homes based on the principles of:

- *Adaptability*
- *Accessibility*
- *Affordability*
- *Healthy Housing™*

In the past, homebuyers - particularly those planning a family - either bought a

larger home than they needed so they could grow into it or looked for a new home every time their housing requirements changed.

Because the FlexHouse adapts easily to meet changing needs, it alters that pattern. FlexHousing™ design makes it possible for the house to change as the owners' wants and needs change.

In a house designed on FlexHousing™ principles, space can be arranged and re-arranged to meet future needs without expensive retrofits and renovations. Designing a FlexHouse involves anticipating possible uses for rooms, potential traffic flow and future

Adaptability

Adaptability means designing a home for a variety of possible arrangements. For example:

- Designing an attic to allow for conversion to an apartment by roughing-in bathroom or kitchen plumbing at the time of construction.
- Reinforcing bathroom walls during construction to allow for the installation of grab bars.
- Installing modular kitchen counters and cabinets that can be adjusted vertically on brackets or that can have sections either inserted or removed below countertops.

Building such features into a new home during initial construction saves time, money and inconvenience when changes are needed or desired down the road.

With FlexHousing™, prospective buyers get many homes in one. Through adaptable features such as convertible rooms or pre-designing for external additions, occupants can create a home that's right for today *and* tomorrow without the troubles and expense of conventional renovation.

In the end, the adaptable nature of FlexHousing™ makes it possible to create "housing for life".

"Building such features into a new home during initial construction saves time, money and inconvenience when changes are needed or desired down the road."

Accessibility

The FlexHousing™ concept is user-friendly and its features add convenience and practicality to the functions of a home. For example:

- Wider than usual doorways allow for greater access whether for moving furniture, carrying an armful of groceries or allowing mobility for a wheelchair or walker.
- A bathtub with free space along its entire length provides for ease of access, not to mention being less awkward to clean.
- On grade access provides a convenient and safe entrance to the home.

A fundamental consideration of FlexHousing™ is the reduction of

potential hazards. Examples include:

- Non-slip flooring in kitchens, bathrooms and laundry rooms.
- Handrails that start before the top of the stairs and end just past the bottom to provide guidance and support.
- Side-opening wall oven reduces risk of burns and injury
- Security is a basic element of design and construction in FlexHousing™ — not an afterthought. Pre-wiring for the installation of an alarm or surveillance system makes it easy for homeowners to take measures they need to feel secure. Strong, easy-to-use locks and latches are standard FlexHousing™ features.



Affordability

Although the initial cost of a FlexHouse is slightly more than a conventional home, FlexHousing™ features recover their investment over the long-term because pre-engineered features allow for easy and inexpensive change and renovation. In addition, staying in a FlexHouse avoids the significant costs of moving.

FlexHousing™ is the design of living spaces

that do not become obsolete. In a FlexHouse, buyers purchase a home that provides the space required today, with the option of adapting it later if their needs change.

Because a FlexHouse offers more potential and comfort than a conventional home, it is desirable to consumers. This makes for a superior long-term investment. The quality of the features, the

attention to detail and the ability to become exactly what a homeowner wants and needs increases the curb appeal and resale value of a FlexHouse.



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Healthy Housing™

The fourth principal of FlexHousing™ incorporates the concept of Healthy Housing™. The integration of healthy building materials and innovative housing technology protects the health of the occupants and the environment. There are four predominant features of a Healthy House:



Occupant Health: Healthy Housing™ uses low-emission building materials, finishes and flooring to help keep indoor air healthy and fresh.

Energy Efficiency: Healthy Housing™ uses integrated and properly sized heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems to get the greatest energy efficiency possible.

Resource Efficiency: Healthy Housing™ uses long-lasting, environmentally appropriate building materials. Resource-efficient landscaping techniques help to conserve water and reduce maintenance for homeowners.

Environmental Impact: In addition to using alternative water and wastewater systems where practical, Healthy Housing™ communities promote transportation patterns that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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Resources:

Resources to help you create FlexHousing™ or modify your home:

- **Occupational therapists** have the knowledge and education to assist people with identifying, planning, and problem solving needs within the home environment at various stages in the life span. They work closely with the home owner and contractor (and possibly architect), to ensure changes consider current and future needs.
- **Contractors and Architects** with a background in accessibility and universal design.
- **CMHC** offers many resource guides and services for buying, renovating, upgrading, calculating budgets, home inspections, etc.
- **Local vendors** such as Lawtons Drugs Home Health, Medichair, Sears, Home Depot, or HomeSafeLiving offer products that can be used to increase accessibility and/or adapt the environment.
- The **CAOT website** also provides considerations for building or planning changes for an existing home. It has general design goals and considerations for accessibility and barrier-free living. These can be found at <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageID=3691>

Please find the second document attached to the Be Well email as a printable pdf. as taken from their website.