

# Accessibility Roadmap

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2475 SE Ladd Ave  
Suite 240  
Portland, OR 97214  
503-292-4964  
[www.cvision.org](http://www.cvision.org)

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## Section 1: Background

Oregon faces a growing shortage of accessible housing. While nearly one in five households has accessibility needs, the supply of homes designed to meet those needs remains far below demand. Decades of underproduction, combined with an aging population and increasing demand for accessible housing, have created an urgent challenge that requires coordinated action.

Over the past several years, Community Vision and its partners have worked to advance accessibility through research, advocacy, education, and direct service. These efforts have elevated accessibility in housing policy and planning discussions, supported legislation to increase accessible housing production, and provided practical tools to help housing providers effectively market, manage, and match accessible units with the people who need them.

Through Community Vision's Housing Access Program, staff work directly with Oregonians with disabilities seeking housing. This experience has highlighted persistent barriers, including limited housing supply, fragmented information systems, and insufficient coordination between housing providers and disability service organizations. It has also revealed significant opportunities to improve outcomes through stronger partnerships, better data, more effective housing navigation, and increased accessibility in new development.

The Accessibility Roadmap brings these lessons together into a shared strategy for action. It outlines practical steps to expand the supply of accessible housing, improve access and matching systems, and embed accessibility into housing policy, planning, and development practices across Oregon.

This roadmap is an invitation to work together to make accessible housing a standard feature of Oregon's housing landscape, not an exception.

## Section 2: Research Project

We conducted a qualitative research project to dig deeper into the challenges around accessible housing. We wanted to understand the perspectives of those building, funding, and regulating the housing market. Our intent was to learn about the barriers to building more accessible units as well as identify potential solutions to these challenges. Twenty-five respondents participated in detailed interviews conducted by Julie Cody of JV Cody Consulting. Interviewees who participated from across the state of Oregon included:

- 12 Developers, representing both affordable and market-rate entities
- 2 Contractors with large footprints in the Oregon housing market
- 3 Property Managers
- 3 Housing lenders or brokers
- 5 Public sector representatives, offering local, regional, and state perspectives

Some general learnings from the interviews were:

- **Lack of accessibility knowledge:** Very few people interviewed have a good understanding of the various types of accessible units and requirements for building Type A, Type B, or fully accessible units.
  - Only 34% of the respondents were familiar or very familiar with the unit types, while 66% were not familiar or somewhat familiar.
  - 39% were familiar or very familiar with the accessibility requirements for new multifamily projects, while 62% were not familiar or somewhat familiar with the accessibility requirements.
- **Desire, but confusion:** There was an overall desire to incorporate accessibility features into multifamily rental housing properties, though there is confusion as to the requirements, types of units, and what is desired by people with disabilities. Questions arose around what is needed beyond building code and fair housing guidelines and who and how compliance is administered. Interviewees noted the complexity related to type of funding and the need for shared definitions, guidelines, and compliance processes. Differences between state and federal requirements and compliance were called out by some interviewees as an increased risk and potentially increased cost for the on-going property operations. Fair Housing, with respect to marketing differently to people with disabilities, was also called out as a risk in the existing system.

**Beyond these general learnings, three major themes emerged around the key challenges to accessible housing according to interviewees: 1) cost differential, 2) marketing and matching, and 3) unit desirability.**

## Challenge #1: Cost Differential

The majority of respondents ranked cost as the greatest barrier to building more accessible housing.

It is a common perception that accessibility is too expensive to build. However, research conducted for Community Vision and analyses prepared for the City of Portland suggest otherwise. Studies consistently show that incorporating accessibility features during the design phase adds only modest costs, generally between 0.5% and 2.8% of total construction costs. Similarly, the City of Portland's analysis modeled approximately a 3% increase in costs for more accessible units, with developers reporting that the actual difference is often around 2.5% per unit when elevators are already included in a project. Respondents that have extensive experience in this area were aware of the marginal increase in cost, but shared that every cost matters in housing projects. Some of the specifics noted around cost were:

- Elevators are the highest cost differential when working to increase the number of accessible units in large projects. (Though it is noted that in the Portland area, many multi-story rental properties are being built to achieve higher density goals. Projects are being built with elevators without regard to the question of accessibility.) If a project has an elevator, the biggest desire is to add a second elevator to the project in case an elevator is out of order, to ensure safety in case of emergency, and to provide different points of access throughout the building. This further increases on-going operating costs.
- The next highest cost differential is the inefficiency in construction. Accessible units prevent stacking of like-units within the building because they are larger. The need for these units to have turning radii for wheelchairs in the living spaces, kitchens, and bathrooms impact the unit size. This is where the bulk of the incremental costs related to the actual unit come from.
- Another cost driver is the need to hire an accessibility consultant in the design phase. There are differing opinions on the benefit of this added expense as some consultants are focused on checklists for meeting regulatory requirements, while others are focused on increasing the potential tenant experience. Given the lack of knowledge of the development teams, it is difficult to know one design feature from another, what is required, and what may have the biggest positive impact in the potential tenant's experience.
- Costs can be driven up if issues occur during construction that impact precise measurements to meet federal and state accessibility requirements.

If the construction does not meet the applicable standard, a fix will be needed that could include tearing out and starting over to get in compliance. This can be very costly. Interviewees expressed a desire for having some tolerance/range to meet the requirements.

- Increased operating costs due to water damage from roll-in showers, repairs due to wheelchair damage, and elevator maintenance rounded out the concerns around cost.

## **Challenge #2: Marketing and Matching**

Matching accessible units to people needing the features was ranked second on average. Our research found that many existing accessible units are not effectively connected with people who need their features. As a result, accessible units are often underutilized or leased without regard to accessibility needs. Interviewees shared:

- The biggest issue for marketing and matching is compliance with Fair Housing laws when leasing apartments. There is confusion as to whether accessible units can be marketed differently or held for some period to allow matching accessible units to a household with a person with a disability. Using different marketing strategies, giving preference, or being seen as steering potential tenants toward or away from accessible units, is not acceptable given regulatory compliance and the litigious nature of our society. Even if there are strategies that can thread the needle to meet Fair Housing laws, landlords' attorneys advise against them to ensure they do not run afoul of regulatory requirements. Many cited their Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing marketing plan and federal preferences (if federal funding was utilized) as being their only option. A few respondents mentioned that they don't even advertise accessible features as it might violate Fair Housing laws.
- Developers and property managers are not tracking data around accessible units including: 1) whether or not accessible units are leased to disabled tenants, 2) requests for transfer (into or out of accessible units), or 3) reasonable accommodation/modification requests related to making a unit more usable for people with disabilities. Many didn't think tracking this information was allowable due to Fair Housing laws, even if the data gathered was optional for tenants to provide.
- Most interviewees do not have relationships with organizations that work with people with disabilities to assist in finding appropriate housing. Many suggested having Housing Navigators dedicated to assisting marginalized communities, of which people with disabilities is one, would be very helpful in matching accessible units to those in need of their features.

- Interviewees suggested the creation of a statewide database that is easily searchable by anyone looking for accessible units. This has been attempted in the past, but keeping the information up in real time creates a burden on the owners and property managers. Some thought that with the advent of online marketing sites and AI, it might be easier to manage.
- It was mentioned on multiple occasions that initial lease-up of a project with public funds is a critical deliverable and delays cause a negative financial impact. Without a mechanism to match people with disabilities to accessible units that are vetted with Fair Housing advocates and lawyers, there is not a focus on matching people to accessible units during the initial lease up phase, just first come, first served.

The overarching themes with this barrier are:

- There are multiple unit types and requirements based on state, federal, and funding requirements, and these don't always align with a potential tenant's needs
- The compliance risk is real and potentially costly and exacerbated by systemic complexity
- There are no clear ways to connect available accessible units to people with disabilities in real time.

### **Challenge #3: Unit Desirability**

Respondents raised a potential concern of accessible units being less desirable than typical units. All the information about this was based on anecdotal feedback received over time.

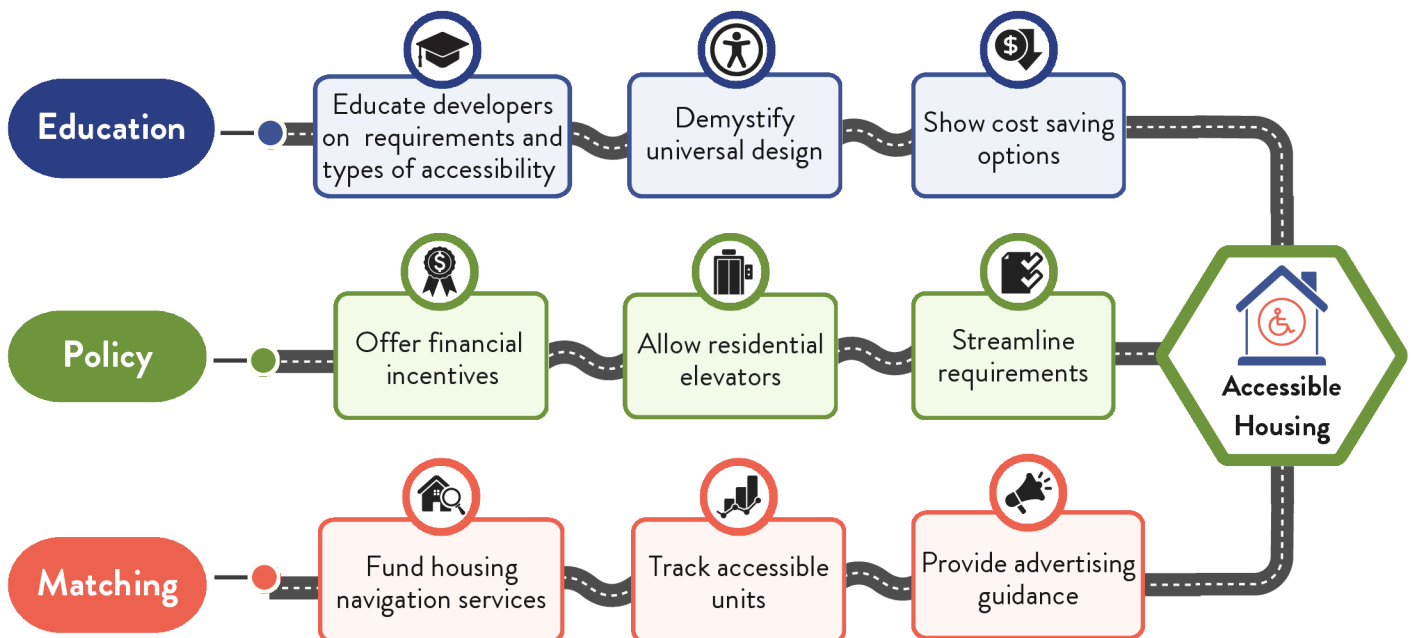
Interviewees noted that the Type A requirements in living areas, kitchen, and bathrooms, can decrease the bedroom size given the need to stack units within a building within a set overall dimension to keep incremental costs down. Some non-disabled renters living in accessible units complain about the lower counter height, less storage due to the removal of under sink cabinets, and reduced bedroom size. It is thought that it may take longer to lease an accessible unit and that they may be vacant a bit longer when the unit turns over, though this information is not specifically tracked.

On the flip side, interviewees report that if accessible units are matched to people with disabilities who need the features, their tenancy is longer than a typical unit housing a non-disabled tenant. This is due to the tenants' needs being met and the lack of suitable accessible units in the marketplace.

## Section 3: The Roadmap Forward

The sections above provide a clearer understanding of the need for more accessible housing and the challenges involved in creating it. Now, our focus moves to the key activities needed to achieve the goal of getting more people with disabilities into accessible housing.

### ACCESSIBILITY ROADMAP



#### Road 1: Education

First and foremost, education and clarity are needed to help housing stakeholders understand accessibility needs. Education should address the following three areas: 1) types of accessibility, 2) universal design, and 3) cost-savings options.



**Educate developers on types of accessibility:** Provide education about the differences between accessible unit types in state and federal requirements (Type A, Type B, Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS)). Housing stakeholders also need information about potential reasonable accommodations that may be requested if construction only incorporates minimum requirements, as well as potential costs of those modifications.



**Demystify universal design:** Provide education and best practices that help developers, architects, and contractors make informed decisions about how to incorporate additional accessibility within multifamily rental units. Decision makers would benefit from clear definitions of universal design, explanations of the range of options, and a menu of features, depending on target population. Offer a clear “why” behind the design changes – showing how certain features benefit certain populations or anyone living in the units.



**Show long-term cost savings options:** Bathrooms and kitchens are the most challenging, and potentially costly, spaces when it comes to accessible design. Developers need to know the best practices that may save costs in the long run. They are concerned about features such as roll-in showers due to flooding concerns. They need to know that a central drain in the bathroom can prevent water damage. Or a specific style of upper cabinets and appliances in kitchens can reduce the need for adapting units in the future.

## Road 2: Policy Changes

Education alone will not be enough to create the number of accessible units needed. Policy changes will also be required to achieve this goal. These policies involve financial incentives, allowing residential elevators, and streamlining requirements.



**Offer financial incentives:** While the costs associated with increased accessibility are minimal, they still make an impact on housing stakeholders' ability to provide these units. Local and state incentives will support the building of these much-needed units. It is critical that these incentives are tied to the desired outcome of full accessibility rather than merely allowing for adaptability. Some potential approaches include:

- Provide preference and/or points for public subsidy funding for proposals that increase the number of accessible units or the level of accessibility.
- Create a fund dedicated to multifamily housing projects that incorporate universal design and increase the number of accessible units beyond requirements.
- Develop options for funding accessibility consultants similar to current incentives for minority- and women-owned businesses (MWESB) working on state-funded affordable housing and development projects.



**Allow residential elevators:** Depending on the size of the multifamily rental housing project, exploring and allowing residential elevators instead of commercial elevators would greatly lower cost of construction for smaller projects and may incentivize additional accessible units. Currently, it is not financially feasible for smaller projects with 3-6 floors to include an elevator. Smaller, residential elevators would allow increased accessibility for a fraction of the current cost.



**Streamline requirements:** There is a need to streamline requirements and compliance with the various federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, codes etc. that govern construction of accessibility features within multifamily rental properties.

This would take coordination efforts to standardize definitions, best practices, measurements requirements, and variances so that it is easier to comply. This work would also reduce the risk to the developer that they are missing something during construction that could be a problem later.

### Road 3: Matching

Finally, it is clear that creating additional units is not the only solution to the problem. Pathways must be developed to match people with disabilities and older adults to accessible units. Three suggestions for improving matching include 1) funding housing navigation services, 2) tracking accessible units, and 3) providing guidance on advertising.



**Fund housing navigation services:** There is a need for housing navigation services that actively work with people with disabilities to find housing that meets their needs. Several states, including Maryland and Pennsylvania, have included housing navigation services as part of their Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) for people with disabilities and older adults. Using these states as a model, Oregon can fund organizations that provide housing navigation services for people with disabilities. Community Vision's self-funded Housing Access Program can serve as an example for how to develop this service across the state.



**Track accessible units:** Oregonians would benefit from a statewide database of accessible units and their availability. It is critical for users to be able to search for apartments with real-time information. It is also crucial to engage with the disability community to better understand the challenges they have in finding an accessible unit that supports their needs, and then utilize this information when creating any system/database for marketing the availability of accessible units both at initial lease-up and upon turnover.



**Provide advertising guidance:** Obtain legal advice and development best practices for marketing and matching strategies that adhere to Fair Housing laws. Provide guidance, vetted by lawyers, on best practices for marketing and matching accessible units to people with disabilities to avoid risks associated with Fair Housing law violations. We are aware that Fair Housing legislation guidance plays a role in this work, and federal changes will be necessary to achieve desired outcomes.

## Section 4: Getting to Work

The Roadmap section above gave a framework for the key changes that need to happen to improve the state of accessible housing in Oregon. This final section will outline how we can accomplish these changes.

### Road 1: Education Actions

Efforts to educate housing stakeholders on types of accessibility, universal design, and cost-savings options need to happen right away. The first step will be to organize the information that already exists. Thankfully, there is a significant amount of information out there. Second, we will fill in gaps based on current rules and best practices. Third, we will utilize housing coalitions and associations to identify the relevant developers and property managers to receive training. Finally, education sessions will be held in a variety of formats.

### Road 2: Policy Actions

The policy changes needed to improve accessibility will require a phased approach. Phase 1 is **Exploration**. This will include understanding efforts that are already underway at the state level around building codes and elevators. The City of Portland's incentives can be utilized as a model. Researching effective strategies from other areas will also be a part of the exploration phase.

Phase 2 is **Passing Legislation** at local and state levels. Once there are clear strategies for what financial incentives and requirements make sense, we will work with partners to organize around getting these actions codified. There will likely be multiple pieces of legislation passed to achieve the policy goals.

### Road 3: Matching Actions

Improving the matching process will require a unique approach for each change identified:

- Housing navigation – Utilizing the experience of Maryland and Pennsylvania's HCBS-funded housing navigation services, Oregon can take a similar approach to funding these services for people with disabilities. The state can build on Community Vision's pilot that has successfully matched over 300 people with disabilities to apartments in the Portland Metro area.
- Track accessible units – Creating a viable tracking database will require research. Some initial questions to answer are: Are there states or municipalities who have successfully implemented accessible tracking? Are there housing databases that could be tweaked to include accessibility information? Could technology be utilized to decrease the workload of maintaining a database?

What would be most user friendly? What is a reasonable expectation for uploading data? Answering these questions will help create a strategy for success.

- Advertising guidance – In the summer of 2026, guides on advertising and transferring and to and from accessible units were developed by Community Vision and partners. (<https://cvision.org/learn-advocate/tools-for-accessible-housing/>) These guides can be distributed to housing stakeholders to help the industry understand what is currently legally possible. Conversations initiated by the guides can lead to discussions around what needs to change in fair housing legislation to ensure people who need accessibility are matched to units that meet their needs.

## Section 5: Conclusion

Accessible housing is critical for a housing system that works for everyone. With nearly one in five Oregon households facing accessibility needs, and with our population aging steadily, the gap between demand and supply will only widen without deliberate, coordinated action.

The research underlying this roadmap makes clear that the barriers to accessible housing are not insurmountable. Cost is a modest increment when accessibility is designed from the start. The larger challenges are ones of knowledge, coordination, and systems: developers and property managers who lack clarity on requirements and best practices; a housing market with no reliable way to connect available accessible units to the people who need them; and a regulatory landscape that often leaves stakeholders uncertain and risk-averse rather than confident and proactive.

The three roads outlined in this roadmap: **education, policy change, and matching**, respond directly to these findings. Education closes the knowledge gap and reframes accessibility as good design rather than costly compliance. Policy change aligns incentives so that building accessible units is not just the right thing to do, but the financially sensible one. And matching ensures that once accessible units exist, they actually reach the Oregonians who need them most.

None of these roads can be walked alone. Progress will require developers, contractors, property managers, lenders, public agencies, disability service organizations, and people with disabilities working from a shared understanding and a shared set of tools. Community Vision is committed to leading this effort, but the scale of the challenge demands broad partnership and sustained investment.

This roadmap is the starting point. The work ahead is to turn it into practice. Let's get to work.



# About Community Vision

Community Vision provides services, education, and advocacy to ensure that people with disabilities direct their own lives. Since our founding in 1989, we have been dedicated to inclusion and individual choice. Our primary services include supporting people with disabilities to live in their own homes, find employment, and access technology. Our housing work has evolved from focusing primarily on homeownership to connecting people to affordable apartments. We have matched over 300 people to apartments that meet their needs. We have also been instrumental in passing legislation to increase accessibility requirements and led the way in bringing the disability community together around housing action. Our partnerships with housing stakeholders around universal design have begun to transform the industry. For more information about our work, visit our website at [www.cvision.org](http://www.cvision.org) or email us at [info@cvision.org](mailto:info@cvision.org).

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