

Delaware Housing Coalition
on Accessibility, Adaptability, Visitability, and Universal Design
June 24, 2011

The Delaware Housing Coalition (DHC) and the Housing Sub-Committee of the Governor's Commission on Community-Based Alternatives for People with Disabilities are completing a year-long, statewide study of disability housing needs. Some preliminary comments on the related issues of housing accessibility, including "visitability," "adaptability," and "universal design," are provided here.

- 1) Incentives for Universal Design and Visitability:
Funders should add incentives for different levels of accessibility, including universal design and visitability, not just full compliance with Section 504*, to promote greater use by households with various accessibility needs, short-term accessibility needs, and visitation by friends and family with disabilities.
- 2) The Affordable, Accessible Homeownership Market:
Nonprofit developers are responding to the call to add accessibility features to new and rehabbed units, but are not always having success marketing these units and need better sources of referrals and help understanding the market.
- 3) Consumer Education:
There is a need to help increase demand for universally designed, visitable and adaptable homes. Individual reports of strong desires to age in place and increased interest in housing options that allow people to remain in the community have not translated into strong demand that can be responded to by market-rate developers.
- 4) Using One Vocabulary:
These issues are troubled by a lack of clear and generally accepted definition of various levels of accessibility. An entity like the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA) could help the discussion, and implementation, of new benchmarks, by setting its own standards for these terms, which would likely be adopted by many other funders and could be a statewide point of reference, like DSHA's Minimum Construction Standards. These standards, along with the incentives referred to above, would enable progress on creating supply.

*Section 504 of the [1973 Rehabilitation Act](#), Pub. L. No. 93-112, 87 Stat. 394 (Sept. 26, 1973), codified at [29 U.S.C. § 701](#)