

Principles *for*

Developing Integrated Housing

in the Community

for Individuals with Disabilities

CITIZENS' HOUSING AND PLANNING ASSOCIATION

**T**Hese principles have been developed to provide a framework for funders and developers to develop appropriate housing for individuals with disabilities who desire to live independently in the community.

People with disabilities are a diverse population with individualized needs and preferences. While surveys indicate that independent living in the community is the predominant preference for individuals with disabilities, we acknowledge that there are other types of supported housing that may be desired by, and may be appropriate for, some individuals with disabilities. In particular, there are transitional models and peer support models that may be appropriate as part of a continuum of options.

The Principles articulated below are a guide for the creation of integrated, permanent, long-term housing in the community for individuals with disabilities. We developed these principles in the context of housing units for people with disabilities built by state agencies or their proxies specifically for people with disabilities—programs like Community-Based Housing (CBH), Facilities Consolidation Fund (FCF), Chapter 689 or other targeted funds. It is important to emphasize that true integration can only happen when people with disabilities have full and equal access to all kinds of housing opportunities, not just housing dedicated to people with disabilities. Separate housing for people with disabilities is only appropriate when necessary to promote equal or better access. The principles are intended to build and improve on these concepts, not diminish them.

## PRINCIPLE

### Integration of Independent Units for Disabled Individuals into Conventional Housing

*Included within this category is guidance regarding how the principle of integration is made operational in housing developments. Primarily, the message is that individuals with disabilities should have access to the full range of housing options in the marketplace. With the proper design, planning and financial support, most housing can be available to individuals with disabilities.*

- **Most conventional and affordable housing developments can and should include units for persons with disabilities.**

It is a bedrock principle of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights law that the existence of housing programs serving only people with disabilities cannot be the basis for excluding people with disabilities from conventional housing programs. Instead, state agencies and housing providers must assure that people with disabilities have access to conventional housing, including conventional affordable housing, without regard to dis-

ability. Housing programs serving only people with disabilities must also be integrated. Integration means that people with disabilities have full and unfettered opportunities to interact with people who are not people with disabilities; that there are full and unfettered opportunities to participate in the social, political, and economic life of a community; and that people are free to live in the community identified only as individuals and not as people labeled by disability or diagnosis.

Units should *not* be clustered unless by individual choice to be in close proximity to share services. Specialized housing situations can be considered where individuals with disabilities choose to live independently but in close proximity to share services or peer support.

- **Housing developed under the community-based model can be the full range of conventional and affordable housing types: condominiums, mid or high rise buildings, townhouses, garden apartments, duplexes, single family homes and home ownership opportunities.**

Individuals with disabilities have a range of preferences in types of units that mirror the continuum of choices in the private and affordable marketplace. However, conventional multi-level townhouses may create problems of accessibility and visitability. We encourage the creation of single floor units even within townhouse developments. Good design can accommodate single level units within larger townhouse developments and create additional visitability at least on the ground floor level of other townhouses. And remember, not all individuals who have disabilities have mobility impairment. Some conventional units can accommodate individuals with disabilities who are not mobility impaired.

- **Whenever possible, housing should have a full range of unit sizes and configurations from studios to multi-bedroom to maximize choice for individuals, families or roommates of choice.**

A full range of housing sizes from studios to multi-bedroom will provide flexibility for individuals with disabilities and families with a member who has a disability. While single individuals may be the majority of users, some family-sized units should be available. In addition, some units should be able to accommodate Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) with a bedroom or alternate accommodation such as a den for overnight care. Developers should plan for additional storage space and accommodation for medical equipment in some of the units.

## PRINCIPLE

### Independent Living with Right to Services in the Community to Sustain Successful Tenancies

People with disabilities who need and choose support services should have these readily available to them in the community.

For some tenants with disabilities, the availability of community-based supports is critical to ensuring successful tenancies. People with disabilities should have the right to receive community-based supports as they need and desire; the services need not be tied specifically to the housing. However, housing developments should also receive adequate funding to ensure that they can provide appropriate maintenance, subsidy and resident service coordination as needed and wanted by tenants regardless of disability.

It is the responsibility of the Commonwealth and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services in particular to ensure the availability of supports.

- **Independent living with full rights of tenancy.**

Individuals with disabilities should have their own lease and ability to control their tenancy in the housing. The tenant's ability to remain in the housing should not be tied to service requirements or programs. Frequently individuals with disabilities arrange their own services as necessary. In limited cases, exceptions may be made to accommodate special program requirements.

## PRINCIPLE

### Eliminate Barriers to Physical Access

*Housing developments must comply with state and federal access requirements. Beyond the legal requirements, however, adherence to the principles of universal design and visitability will ensure more effective and efficient occupancy over the lifetime of a housing unit by people of all ages, with and without disabilities.*

- **Universal Design.<sup>1</sup>**

Following principles of universal design creates environments that can accommodate a wide range of abilities and can be easily adapted as residents' needs change. This is common sense and good marketing. It will allow all residents, regardless of whether they have a visible disability today, to remain in units as they age or acquire physical or sensory disabilities.

For new units, universal design should be required as it adds little to the upfront cost of construction. For rehabilitation projects, developers should work with access design experts to provide the maximum feasible adaptable design possible.

<sup>1</sup>Principles of Universal Design can be found at [www.design.ncsu.edu/cdu](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cdu).

- **Visitability for all units.<sup>2</sup>**

Visitability is critical to providing opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be full members of their residential community. All new construction must include specific features that make all units within the development easier for individuals with mobility or sensory impairments to visit. It will be a challenge in older, urban neighborhoods and with rehab projects. Nevertheless, developers should embrace innovative solutions to accommodate visitability of all common space and as many of the units as possible.

## PRINCIPLE

### Location

*The choice of location for housing for individuals with disabilities can be personal and varied. Individuals must have access to all 351 Massachusetts cities and towns. Housing should not be isolated from the community and should provide good access to services and transportation.*

- **Whenever possible units should be located in convenient locations close to accessible public transportation and services**

Many individuals choose to live in housing that is in close proximity to services and accessible public transportation. Communities should work to insure that persons with disabilities have transportation connections that are readily accessible to avoid isolation or over-dependence on service providers for transportation and support.

## PRINCIPLE

### Affordability

*Providing units that cost no more than 30% of a household's income is the key to affordability.*

- **Rents or other monthly housing payments should be affordable at no more than 30% of income.**

Many residents—particularly those who are on Supplement Security Income (SSI) who make less than 15% of the Area's Median Income (AMI)—will need very affordable rents. There are a number of ways to accomplish this including seeking operating subsidies such as HUD Section 8 or Massachusetts Affordable Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) or creating a market rate internal operating subsidy in conjunction with capital subsidy resources.

<sup>2</sup>Visitability is a movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes, whether or not designated for residents who currently have disabilities, offer a few specific features that make the home easier for people with mobility impairment to visit.

**The principles articulated here provide a basis for developing integrated, community-based, independent housing. Five threshold principles should guide the production of and access to housing for individuals with disabilities.**

**They are:**

- **Independence and integration of units**
- **Right to services in the community to support successful tenancies**
- **Reduction of barriers through maximized physical and communication access**
- **Convenient location near services and accessible public transportation and**
- **Affordability to a range of incomes.**

**Developed by:**

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