



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

To determine the strengths and weaknesses of LTHS in Northern Ireland and provide suggestions for how LTHS could be improved for individuals with visual impairments.

Meeting the needs of visually impaired people living in lifetime homes

Rooney, C., Hadjri, K., Rooney, M., Faith, V., McAllister, K., & Craig, C. 2016 | *Journal of Housing For the Elderly* Volume 30, Issue 2, Pages 123-140

Key Concepts/Context

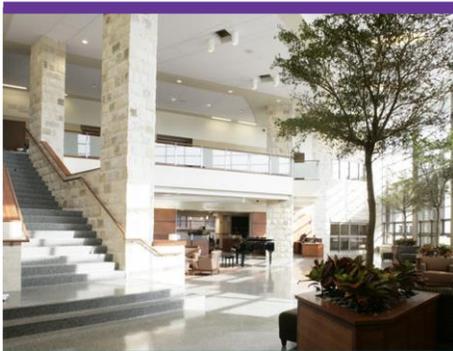
Lifetime Homes standards (LTHS) are a group of mandatory public-sector housing design interventions used in the U.K. They attempt to provide a model that ensures adaptable and accessible homes for the entire duration of an occupant's stay. Changes in one's physical environment, much like the ones implemented by LTHS, could help reduce the impact of disabilities such as visual impairment, and could help give patients different degrees of communal living with some level of independence.

Methods

The authors provided a review of LTHS features and conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 key stakeholders who were involved in allocating and assessing LTHS homes for visually impaired people within the region of Northern Ireland. These stakeholders included researchers, members of housing associations, and sensory support teams. Stakeholders were each asked a set of 18 questions concerning their professional backgrounds and assessments of LTHS conditions from the perspective of visually impaired inhabitants. All interviews were transcribed, reviewed, and organized into groups of recurring themes.

Findings

The interviews revealed both benefits and drawbacks of LTHS. One beneficial theme that emerged was the concept of future-proofing features, or design features that successfully prepared LTHS buildings to respond to future challenges while avoiding expensive refurbishments. This feature allowed occupants to remain in their homes despite unpredictable changes in health. Another positive feature of LTHS homes was the adequate space that was provided to occupants, granting both freedom and comfort. Features that benefitted visually impaired occupants included accessible, covered parking, gently sloped/graded approaches to



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entrances, and lighting under door canopies. Issues with LTHS included “box ticketing,” which describes architects and designers who adhere to a minimum of LTHS design standards in order to comply with the standards rather than going “above and beyond” and creating more helpful designs. There was also a lack of multidisciplinary collaboration between among stakeholders during the creation and implementation of LTHS guidelines, and an agreement among stakeholders that within the LTHS framework there seemed to be a primary focus on physical disabilities other than visual impairment. The standards themselves were also seen as inflexible by multiple participants.

Design Implications

The LTHS points to several beneficial design features that could aid visually impaired individuals, such as accessible, covered parking spaces, gently sloped/graded approaches to all entrances, and lighting under door canopies. Designers and architects creating buildings intended for individuals that are impaired in any way should try to be aware of the conditions affecting the occupants and tailor their work to cater to these needs.

Limitations

All data from this study were derived from a small number of interviews, so the researchers did not visit any LTHS structures in order to make original assessments of amenities or features and their potential relation to visually impaired occupants. No visually impaired occupants of LTHS buildings were interviewed to provide their personal experiences or perspectives on the matter; such input could point to issues that have been overlooked by stakeholders. Since the standards discussed in this article are intended to aid a specific population of public housing occupants in a specific region, its findings may be difficult to generalize.

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