

## **Aging Happens: Program offers certification of 'lifelong housing'**

*By Ellen Waldman*

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When asked, most people say they want to remain in their own homes for the duration of their lives. But only a small minority of them have taken the necessary steps to make sure their home is adequate for their changing needs. There is now an agreed-upon standard for what makes a workable home for your whole life. Most, if not all of us, live in what are called “Peter Pan” housing: houses for those who do not think they will grow up or get old. This includes stairs to the front door and inside the home; inaccessible bathrooms; inadequate lighting; and no safety features.

I spoke to Connie Saldana, senior and disability services planner with Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG), to find out about the new Lifelong Housing Certification program. These homes are not just for aging adults, but are also friendly for people with young children, or those who might have visitors who need special accommodations.

### **1. What is a Lifelong Housing (LLH) certificate? How did it develop?**

Lifelong Housing Certification is a way of identifying homes that have been built or remodeled to a certain standard, in order that people who are looking for such homes can find them. Home owners, builders and remodelers start the process by obtaining a copy of the checklist of features and deciding which ones to incorporate in the home. For new construction, the first consultation with the inspector might come at the planning stage and another on completion. Once a home has been inspected and certified at one of three levels, notification of the certification is indicated on the Jackson/Josephine County Multiple Listing Service.

The three levels consist of:

- Level 1 “Visitable.” Guests in wheelchairs can enter easily and access the main entertainment area and a bathroom comfortably.
- Level 2 “Fully Accessible.” The resident of the home can live life comfortably. In addition to the level one features, each room of the living area includes certain features — some mandatory for certification and some suggested.
- Level 3 “Enhanced Accessibility.” The home meets the standards for levels one and two. In addition, it contains modifications for a specific disability, such as a ceiling track to get from the bed to bathroom or dementia monitoring system.

The Lifelong Housing Certification program was developed by Senior and Disability Services of RVCOG in partnership with AARP Oregon. Work began in 2010 with a diverse committee of consumers, building contractors, a realtor, a rental owner, and the Center for Independent Living. One of the contractors was a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) — a designation given to an individual after training, by the National Association of Home Builders.

### **2. What is the purpose of having this program?**

The underlying purpose of the program is to increase the availability of accessible housing for people who need it. In addition, education on the topic is key — to raise awareness in the minds of the general public, home builders and real estate professionals.

3. How does having a LLH certificate help homeowners or home buyers?

The certification itself assists both homeowners and potential buyers find these homes when the dwelling goes on the market. However, the LLH Checklist (find this under “getting started” on [lifelonghousing.org](http://lifelonghousing.org)) is a useful tool for people who want to maximize their ability to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, as they age or become disabled. It is also useful for households which find themselves planning to accommodate a parent or family member who have disabilities.

4. How might it help people who want to improve their home’s livability, even if they are not planning to sell it?

The Universal Design features listed on the LLH Certification Checklist makes living at home easier for everyone of all ages and abilities. An open floorplan in the entertainment area, levered handles throughout the home, wider doorways, no-step entry, and even a carefully-placed color-coordinated grab bar near the tub make life pleasanter, more convenient and safer for all the home’s residents.

5. Are there any costs associated with this program?

The cost of the inspection varies with the number of visits the inspector must make, but is approximately \$150. There is an additional \$35 administration fee to enter the property in the Lifelong Housing database, issue the certificate, and forward the information to the Rogue Valley Association of Realtors for inclusion in the MLS.

6. How can people get more information on this?

People can learn more by going to the Lifelong Housing website ([lifelonghousing.org](http://lifelonghousing.org)) or by phoning 541-423-1383.

Frankly, I can’t see any downside to having homes that are LLH Certified. Let’s get the ball rolling in Ashland and lead the way.