

# Tips for Contractors Working with Seniors

## HOW TO KEEP YOUR CLIENTS SAFE AND HAPPY – AND KEEP YOUR PROJECT RUNNING SMOOTHLY

Canada's population is aging at a faster rate than ever before. Seniors are the fastest-growing age group in the country. According to Statistics Canada, more than five million Canadians are now over the age of 65.

Whether you're building a new house or renovating an existing home, working with seniors poses some unique challenges. The following tips can help you keep clients of all ages and abilities happy and well-informed at each stage of the process, and help make sure your project goes as smoothly as possible.

### Planning the project

- **Learn more about aging issues and how they relate to housing.** Read Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) information on *Accessible Housing*, *Aging in Place*, *Universal Housing*, *Barrier-free Homes* and *Working with a Contractor* to familiarize yourself with the needs of seniors, and set your business apart from the competition.
- **Identify the main decision-maker, caregiver or home owner, and try to deal with them directly.** If the decision-maker isn't the home owner, try to meet with both the owner and their caregiver or decision-maker before starting the project, or ask if there's anyone else they'd like you to speak with.
- **Build trust with your client and their caregiver.** Spend time with senior clients in their home to gain their trust and build rapport. Avoid high-pressure sales tactics, and let them know that you're there to help keep them safe.
- **Be patient.** Some seniors have trouble remembering things or get stressed or confused easily because of pain, medication or anxiety. So put yourself in their shoes, and try to be as sensitive, professional and patient as possible.
- **Be clear and consistent.** Let them know in advance if you are not going to show up, and be sure to follow-up and return any calls promptly. Get to know any family members or friends who are involved in their lives, and take steps to address their questions or concerns as well.



### Designing the project

- **Be clear about the budget and scale.** Don't make any assumptions about the budget without first discussing it with the home owner or their caregiver. And make sure your client understands exactly what you can do with the budget they've given you, and what the result will look like.
- **Watch out for project creep.** Get approval of any changes that need to be made to either the project budget or schedule. Determine what the client really needs, and separate those needs from any optional upgrades they might want.
- **Give them a written implementation plan.** Use plain, simple language, and include visuals if possible. For pricing, always provide a written quote, and try to use clear, concise terms, without any technical jargon.

- **Help them understand the plan.** Use modelling software, 3D models, demonstration boards, samples from your portfolio or even tape to mark out changes and help them understand what to expect. Give them a range of options, from a basic economic choice to more elaborate renovations.
- **Manage their expectations.** Present realistic, achievable timelines and prices. Use the implementation plan to let them know in advance what you'll be doing at each stage of the construction, and roughly when it will happen.
- **Identify any potential issues and explain how you will handle them.** Be sure to build in a contingency of cost and time to cover anything that might come up, which isn't included in your initial quote.
- **Respect their needs and concerns.** Ask every member of your team to treat the client's home as their sanctuary. If health issues require a pause in the project, be as flexible and patient as you can. Some health issues you may have to deal with include:
  - Visual or hearing impairment;
  - Dementia or loss of memory;
  - Sensitivity to noise, disruption or mess;
  - Language barriers or trust issues;
  - A fear of change or of having their home look too "institutional";
  - A reluctance to admit they need help; and
  - Trouble making decisions or a tendency to change their mind.

## Carrying out the construction

- **Introduce each member of your team to the client or caregiver,** including any trades or subcontractors. Get their agreement on who can access their home, and how you can help make sure they feel comfortable and secure.
- **Make extra time for feedback.** Check in regularly with the client or caregiver to let them know how it's going, and ask if there's anything else you can do. Try not to miss any appointments without letting the client know as far in advance as possible. If they call or e-mail you, try to respond within 24 hours or less.
- **Consider other aging issues you may have to deal with.** Try to schedule the work and any meetings during daylight hours. If they're dealing with health issues, senior clients might forget some of what you talk about, or even want to stop the project all together. It's in your best interests to be patient, and remind them about everything you discussed if they get scared or confused.

## Follow-up and maintenance

- **Ensure quality control and carry out a final inspection.** When the job is done, do a final inspection to make sure the work meets your standards, and have the home or job site thoroughly cleaned. Ask the client for a deficiency list, and do your best to fix or deal with each item to their satisfaction.
- **Make sure they understand how to use and maintain their home.** Before you leave, make sure they know how to use and take care of everything that has been added to, or changed in, their home. Give them a demonstration of how any new equipment works, and check to be sure they understand.
- **Review the recommended maintenance, and give them a detailed schedule of what they need to do and when they need to do it.** Discuss the warranty if there is one, and let them know who to contact if they need help. Give them a printed manual (if applicable) and your business card, and let them know they can give you a call if anything goes wrong.

### Find out more

Special thanks to the [March of Dimes](#) for its expertise and partnership in developing this information.



To find out more about seniors and their housing needs, visit the CMHC website at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca).



[cmhc.ca](http://cmhc.ca)



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Printed in Canada  
Produced by CMHC

23-03-17

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