

Home Modifications for Older Adults with Disabilities: Special Considerations



Most older adults prefer to remain in their homes as long as possible. To do so, it is essential that their home environment supports them to do their daily activities safely. *Home Modification* - making changes to the home environment to support a person's changing needs - can promote health, safety, and independence, and support the work of caregivers.

Why are Home Modifications Important for Aging in Place for Older Adults with Disabilities?

28% of the 28.5 million households with an adult age 65 and older include a person who has difficulty using the home, such as climbing stairs or bathing. Among households with adults age 85 and older, that figure rises to nearly half.

Yet, only 1 in 10 homes have a step-free entryway, a bedroom and full bathroom on the first floor, and at least one bathroom accessibility feature such as grab bars or a built-in shower seat. This makes the vast majority of homes unsuitable for persons with disabilities such as those who use wheelchairs and the growing number of people with activity limitations.



Home modifications such as the accessibility features described above maximize independence, participation, and quality of life, regardless of disability. They place the individual in control of their environment by changing it to meet their needs, such as supporting their ability to transfer to and from a wheelchair or enter and exit their home via a ramp.

Low-Cost Home Modifications

This checklist contains inexpensive and easy tips that will help individuals to **REMAIN** at home independently: **R**emove, **E**nhance, **M**odify, **A**ccessorize, **I**nstall, and **N**otice.

<p>Remove:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Clutter</u> on floors for clear pathways• <u>Electrical cords</u> from pathways by tacking them to the walls• <u>Tripping hazards</u> such as throw rugs, loose carpeting or uneven areas on floors• <u>Heavier and frequently used items</u> from out of reach locations and place within easy reach• <u>Furniture</u> from walking pathways	<p>Enhance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Safety at night</u> with night lights to mark the path between the bedroom and bathroom and a lamp by the bed• <u>Navigation</u> by marking uneven thresholds with contrasting tape or paint or remove thresholds entirely• <u>Bathing safety</u> with non-skid strips on tub or shower floors, secured bathmats, and shower chairs for sitting while bathing
<p>Modify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Toilet seats</u> to make them higher so that it is easier to sit down and stand up• <u>Light switches</u> to rocker switches and change <u>round door handles</u> to levers for easier use• <u>Shower head</u> to be adjustable height and/or a hand-held shower head to improve reach• <u>Doorways</u> to 32" through offset hinges	<p>Accessorize with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>An emergency alert system</u> if a fall or urgent need takes place• <u>A bell on a small dog or a cat</u> - small pets can be obstacles when not seen or heard• <u>Gripper rug pads</u> under throw rugs• <u>Added seating for dressing and cooking prep</u>• <u>A simple Smart Home Device</u> that provides interaction may reduce loneliness
<p>Install:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Soft corners and edges</u> to sharp furniture• <u>Grab bars</u> for support in and around tubs, showers, and toilets with wall reinforcement and anchored to studs• <u>Anti-scald</u> water devices to keep the temperature below 120 degrees	<p>Notice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>After modifications are made</u>, are they used, and if so, used correctly? Awareness is key to continued use; if not, it is important to determine why• <u>Needs change over time</u> - new circumstances may merit different modifications

How to Get Home Modifications

1. Funding Sources

Depending on income, abilities, and age, people may qualify for financial support to make home modifications. Examples include the Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities program, Statewide Independent Living Councils, and Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants Programs. **For information on home modification funding sources in your state, visit www.homemods.org/hmin**

2. Finding A Professional

When a professional is needed to check the home and/or make modifications, a home modification program or specialist can be located through:

- The [Local area agency on aging](#): Call the Eldercare Locator at: 800-677-1116
- An [Independent Living Center](#)
- Your state/territory [Assistive Technology Program](#)
- The [National Directory of Home Modification and Repair Resources](#) lists providers by city

3. More Information

- The **Fall Prevention Center of Excellence** at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology offers information on how to make homes safe and where to find services, programs, and funding support: www.homemods.org
- For educational resources on home modifications for older adults, caregivers, and people living with disabilities, visit: <https://homemods.org/acl/consumerawareness/>

References

Vespa, Jonathan, Engelberg, Jeremy, and Wan, He. U.S. Census Bureau, *Old Housing, New Needs: Are U.S. Homes Ready for an Aging Population?*, P23-217, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2020.

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