

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 support mental well-being, overall health, safety, and independence.



## Why are Home Modifications Important for Older Veterans?

16% of adults age 65 and older are Veterans.<sup>1</sup> Older Veterans may have service-connected disabilities (SCD) and/or disabilities due to aging.

Older Veterans with disabilities can benefit from home modifications that increase safety, help support daily activities, and support independent living in their communities.<sup>2</sup> Research has shown that providing home modifications to Veterans is associated with fewer hospitalizations and more preventative outpatient care visits.<sup>3</sup>

## Home Modifications for Veterans Who Rent

For Veterans with disabilities who are renters, finding accessible rentals or modifying units to improve accessibility is not always easy. However, under the **Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (FHAA)**, landlords of buildings with four or more units must



allow tenants with disabilities to make **"reasonable modifications"** (structural changes to the environment such as installing ramps or grab bars) or **"reasonable accommodations"** (rules, policies, practices, or services such as adjusting the rent due date, allowing a service animal) that allow renters to remain living in their home. To learn more, click [here](#).

# U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Home Modification-Related Programs

VA programs that provide home modification for Veterans with disabilities include:

## Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) Program

- **Eligibility:** For Veterans or Servicemembers with service connected disabilities (SCD) and non-service-connected disabilities (NSC):

Monetary benefit to provide medically necessary home modifications, improvements, and structural alterations to an eligible person's primary residence.

**Lifetime benefit:** \$6,800 for eligible persons with SCDs and \$2,000 for eligible persons with NSC disabilities

## Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) and Special Housing Adaptation (SHA) Grants

- **Eligibility:** For Veterans and Servicemembers with SCDs in owner-occupied housing:

SAH	SHA
Monetary benefit to buy, build, or change one's permanent home (owned or to be owned by the Veteran/Servicemember)	Monetary benefit to buy, build, or change a permanent home (owned or to be owned by the Veteran/Servicemember <b>or their family member</b> )
<b>Disability:</b> Permanent SCD (e.g., loss, or loss of use, of multiple extremities, permanent blindness in both eyes, certain severe burns)	<b>Disability:</b> Permanent SCD (e.g., loss, or loss of use, of both hands, certain severe burns, certain inhalation injuries)
<b>Lifetime benefit ceiling/number of times to apply:</b> \$101,754 (FY22)* up to 6 times	<b>Lifetime benefit ceiling/number of times to apply:</b> \$20,387 (FY22)* up to 6 times

\*For updated grant \$ amounts, always refer to the SAH website

Source: Semeah, et al., 2017.<sup>4</sup>

## Temporary Residence Adaptation (TRA) Grants

- **Eligibility:** For SAH or SHA eligible individuals who temporarily reside in a family member's home:

Grants to change a **family member's home** where the Veteran/Servicemember **temporarily** resides

**Lifetime benefit ceiling/number of times to apply**  
One-time benefit:

- If qualified for an SAH grant: up to \$40,983 (FY22)
- If qualified for an SHA grant: up to \$7,318 (FY22)

# Low-Cost Home Modifications

This checklist contains inexpensive and easy tips that can help Veterans **REMAIN** at home independently:

**Remove, Enhance, Modify, Accessorize, Install, and Notice.**



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

\* Items with an asterisk can also help with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the effects of traumatic brain injuries, or TBIs, which include increased potential of seizures and fainting.<sup>5</sup>

# How to Get Home Modifications



## 1. Funding Sources

Veterans may qualify for home modification funding support.

- Learn more about the VA HISA Program:  
<https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/psas/hisa2.asp>
- Learn more about the VA SAH, SHA, and TRA Grants:  
<https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/disability-housing-grants/>

## 2. Finding A Professional

For Veterans who do not live near a VA facility or are not enrolled in VA healthcare, home modification funding and services may be accessed from other sources. Find home modification professionals and programs through:

- The [local area agency on aging](#): Call the Eldercare Locator at: 800-677-1116
- An [Independent Living Center](#)
- The [National Directory of Home Modification and Repair Resources](#) which lists providers by city
- Search online for a local provider; there are many non-profit organizations that provide adaptations or new homes to Veterans with SCDs and no cost (e.g., [The Gary Sinise Foundation](#), [Habitat for Humanity](#), [Easterseals](#), [Homes for Our Troops](#), [Operation Finally Home](#), [Purple Heart Homes](#)).

**For information about other home modification funding sources by state, visit**  
<http://www.homemods.org/hmin>

## References

1. American Community Survey, 2019, U.S. Census.
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3. Semeah, L. M., Ganesh, S. P., Wang, X., Cowper Ripley, D. C., Ahonle, Z. J., Lee, M. J., Orozco, T., Hale-Gallardo, J. & Jia, H. (2021). Home modification and health services utilization by rural and urban veterans with disabilities, *Housing Policy Debate*, doi: [10.1080/10511482.2020.1858923](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2020.1858923)
4. Semeah, L. M., Ahrentzen, S., Jia, H., Cowper Ripley, D. C., Levy, C. E., and Mann, W. C. (2017). The Home Improvements and Structural Alterations Benefits program: Veterans with disabilities and home accessibility. *J Disability Policy Studies*, 28(1): 43-51.
5. California Interagency Council on Veterans Housing Workgroup. "White Paper: Home Modification Fund Allocation for Underserved Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities in California." May 2016.

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