

Home Modifications for Renters with Disabilities: Special Considerations



Most people 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.

What Do Renters with Disabilities Need to Know About Home Modifications?

Under the **Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (FHAA)**, landlords of structures with four or more units must allow tenants with a disability to make **"reasonable modifications"** or **"reasonable accommodations"** to their unit if there is a disability-related need and the modifications or accommodations would not impose an excessive financial and administrative burden on the housing provider.

"Reasonable modifications" and **"reasonable accommodations"** provide persons with disabilities equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.

Reasonable Modifications

Structural changes to the environment such as installing ramps or grab bars for persons with mobility impairments

Reasonable Accommodations

Rules, policies, practices, and services (e.g., adjusting rent due date for a person on income assistance, allowing a service animal)

Who Pays for Reasonable Modifications and Reasonable Accommodations?

While it is the tenant's responsibility to pay for changes to their individual unit, sometimes the landlord will agree to pay for the home modification.

The FHAA states that covered multifamily dwellings built after March 13, 1991 must meet certain accessibility and adaptability standards. If any of the structural



changes needed by the tenant are ones that should have been included in the unit or public area when constructed, then the housing provider may be responsible for paying for those requested structural changes.

The tenant is obligated to restore interior modifications to their previous condition if the landlord requests the restoration and as long as “it is reasonable to do so.”

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Another important legislation that covers home modifications for persons with disabilities is **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** which applies to housing providers that receive Federal financial assistance including public housing authorities and many affordable rental housing providers. Unlike the FHAA, Section 504 does not distinguish between reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications. Instead, both are captured by the term “reasonable accommodations” and the housing provider is obliged to pay for the home modification unless doing so presents an excessive financial and administrative burden.

Low-Cost Home Modifications

This checklist contains examples of changes that can help people **REMAIN** at home independently: **R**emove, **E**nhance, **M**odify, **A**ccessorize, **I**nstall, and **N**otice. Some are eligible under the FHAA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

<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 <u>door knobs</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>
<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, renters may qualify for financial support to make the changes from a variety of public funding sources. To learn about home modification funding sources by state, visit

www.homemods.org/hmin

2. Finding A Professional

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

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

3. More Information

To learn more, visit the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's [Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity](#) and other sources below:

- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#)
- [Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications](#)
- [Accessibility Requirements for Buildings](#)

To cite this document: USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. *Home Modifications for Renters with Disabilities: Special Considerations*. Los Angeles, California: March, 2022. **Questions?** Contact homemods@usc.edu



This project was supported, in part, by grant number 90PPHM0001 from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201 as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$749,712 with 70 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$321,145 and 30 percentage funded by non-government source(s). Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. The contents are those of the author(s) do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.