

HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

HOME MODIFICATION AND REPAIR

WHAT IS HOME MODIFICATION AND REPAIR?

Home Modification and Repair includes adaptations to homes that can make it easier and safer to carry out activities such as bathing, cooking, and climbing stairs and alterations to the physical structure of the home to improve its overall safety and condition.

WHY IS HOME MODIFICATION AND REPAIR IMPORTANT?

- Home modification and repair can help prevent accidents such as falls. Research suggests that one-third to one-half of home accidents can be prevented by modification and repair.
- Home modification and repair can allow people to remain in their homes.
- Older people tend to live in older homes that often need repairs and modifications. Over 60% of older persons live in homes more than 20 years old.
- Home modification and repair can accommodate lifestyle changes and increase comfort.

HOW CAN HOME MODIFICATION AND REPAIRS PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE AND PREVENT ACCIDENTS?

TYPICAL PROBLEMS:	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:
Difficulty getting in and out of the shower	Install grab bars, shower seats or transfer benches
Slipping in the tub or shower	Place non-skid strips or decals in the tub or shower
Difficulty turning faucet handles/doorknobs	Replace with lever handles
Access to home	Install ramps
Inadequate heating or ventilation	Install insulation, storm windows, and air conditioning
Problems climbing stairs	Install handrails for support

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Some home modification and repair programs make loans or provide services free of charge or at reduced rates for eligible older people. For more information, contact:

- **Rural Housing Services:** Various grants and loans are available for rural, low-income elders.
- **Local Community Development Department:** Many cities and towns use Community Development Block Grants to help citizens maintain and upgrade their homes.
- **Local Welfare or Energy Department:** Two programs from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) of the U.S. Department of Energy provide funds to weatherize the homes of lower income persons.
- **Physician or Health Care Provider:** Funds from Medicare and Medicaid are available for durable medical

equipment with a doctor's prescription.

– **Local Area Agency on Aging:** Funds from the Older Americans Act Title III often can be used to modify and repair homes.

– **Local Lenders and Banks:** Some lenders offer Home Equity Conversion Mortgages (HECM's) that allow homeowners to turn the value of their home into cash, without having to move or make regular loan payments.

GOOD NEWS FOR RENTERS:

The Fair Housing Act of 1988 Section 6(a) makes it illegal for landlords to refuse to let tenants make reasonable modifications to their house or apartment if the tenant is willing to pay for the changes. The law also requires new construction of dwellings with four or more units to include features such as wheelchair accessibility, reinforced walls to accommodate later installation of grab bars in bathrooms, and accessible electrical outlets and thermostats.

WHERE TO GET HELP

There are several ways to modify and repair your home. You can:

- 1) do it yourself, or get a friend or relative to help;
- 2) hire a handyman or contractor;
- 3) contact a home modification and repair program. Programs can be located through your: Local Area Agency On Aging, State Agency On Aging, State Housing Finance Agency, Department of Public Welfare, Department Of Community Development, Senior Center, or Independent Living Center

If you need to use a contractor consider taking the following steps:

1. Get recommendations from friends who have had similar projects completed.
2. Hire a licensed and bonded contractor. Be specific about changes you wish to make in advance.
3. Ask for a written agreement, with only a small down payment. Make the final payment only after the project is completed.
4. Check with your local Better Business Bureau regarding the contractor's reliability and performance record.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Home Safety Guide for Older People: Check It Out/Fix It Up, by Jon Pynoos and Evelyn Cohen, Serif Press, Inc., 4019 5th Road North Arlington, VA 22203. For more information, call: 703-465-5222
Price: \$18.45

Safety for Older Consumers, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Washington, D.C. 20207.
For more information, call: 1-800-638-2772 Price: Free

The DoAble Renewable Home: Making Your Home Fit Your Needs, (D12470), AARP Fulfillment, Consumer Affairs 601 E Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20049. For more information, call: (202) 434-2277
Price: Free (single copies).

Eldercare Locator: For information about services to the elderly, call 1-800-677-1116.

For more information, write to the National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification, USC Andrus Gerontology Center, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0191. Tel. (213)740-1364; FAX (213)740-7069; E-mail: homemods@usc.edu