

# The Range of Home Modifications: Costs and Decision-Making



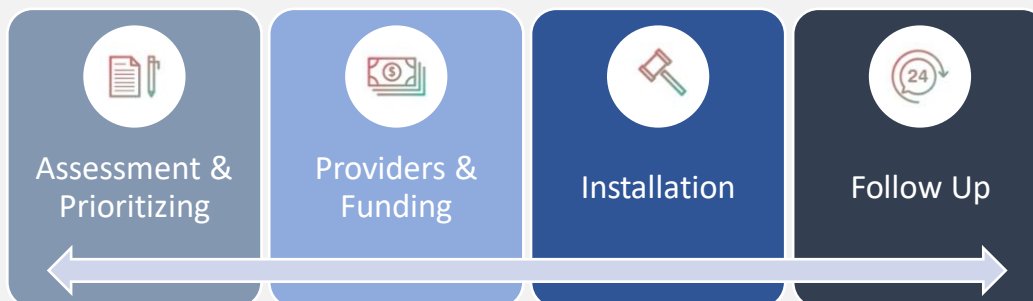
## A Technical Assistance Brief for Professionals Who Work with Older Adults

When people plan to stay in their home as they age, or “age in place,” there are many things to consider. Will the home support their changing needs as they age? What might help them to stay safe and independent at home for years to come?

Home modifications, or making changes to the home, can help. Changes such as removing hazards and adding supportive features range from simple and inexpensive to costly and complex. Read on to learn how you can help people make informed decisions and play a supportive role in the home modification process.

### How Does It Work?

Home modification is a process: Check the home for ways to increase safety and support using a checklist or a professional. Choose immediate and future changes. Select providers and determine how to pay for the services. Install and ensure the changes are effective.



## Types and Costs of Home Modifications

### Examples of Free and Relatively Low-Cost Modifications

- Install bright lighting at outdoor entrances
- Install sturdy hand rails on both sides of indoor and outdoor stairs
- Remove clutter from the floor and remove or secure throw rugs
- Repair or remove worn or torn carpeting
- Add high-contrast non-slip stair treads
- Install bright, non-glare lighting
- Replace knob-style door and faucet handles with lever style handles
- Replace toggle electric switches with rocker-style switches
- Secure wires to walls or floors
- Use nightlights to illuminate the path from the bedroom to bathroom
- Install anti-scald faucets
- Install grab bars in the shower and bathroom
- Purchase a shower seat and hand-held shower head
- Place adhesive anti-slip treads on the shower or tub floor

Sources: HUD and Bipartisan Policy Center.

## Types and Costs of Home Modifications

### Examples of More Costly Modifications *(Typically require a professional)*

- Install a ramp for at least on zero-step entrance
- Widen entryways and doorways to 36 inches
- Adapt the home to include a bedroom and full bathroom on the main floor
- Remodel the bathroom to include a shower with no threshold and supports (e.g., seat, grab bar, handheld shower)
- Install kitchen countertops at different heights and add space underneath
- Purchase appliances with front-mounted controls and access
- Create level flooring
- Install a chairlift, stair glide, or elevator
- Rewire wiring to eliminate extension cords

Sources: HUD and Bipartisan Policy Center, Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University (2014).

## Types of Professionals Involved in Home Modification

<p><b>Health Care Professionals</b> (e.g., Occupational and Physical Therapist)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers the person and how they interact with their home environment</li> <li>• Provides health care perspective</li> <li>• Provides a functional needs assessment of medical need</li> <li>• Can advise on how to plan now for a person's future needs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Design Professionals (e.g., Architect)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does onsite assessment</li> <li>• Ensures the modifications can be safely implemented within the home condition and structure</li> <li>• Provides clear and accurate design plans for contractors to carry out</li> </ul>
<p><b>Housing Professionals</b> (e.g., Contractor/Remodeler, Handyperson)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executes the designs to carry out the modifications</li> <li>• Should have experience or training in home modification</li> <li>• Should be licensed and insured</li> </ul>	<p><b>Aging and Disability Professionals</b> (e.g., Care Manager, Social Worker)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connects people to additional supportive services such as home-delivered meals, transportation, and home modification funding</li> </ul>

### Ways to Plan Ahead

*Remodeling the home presents an opportunity to incorporate changes that will be helpful now, and in the future. Consider the ideas below to share with consumers.*

- Flooring that is slip resistant, non-glare, and easy to maintain.
- Extended flooring under sinks. In the future, if open access under the sink is needed to accommodate a wheelchair or seating, the flooring will be in place.
- Flush thresholds between rooms and surface materials.
- Pull-out work surfaces and areas to sit while preparing food.
- Base cabinet drawers, which bring all the contents to the user.
- Pull out cabinetry that can store trash bins, spice racks, and utensil drawers.
- Varied countertop heights for people of different ages, seated or standing.
- D-style handles or touch latch hardware that opens without the need to pull.
- Grab bars, which come in many colors and styles. Work with a contractor or occupational therapist to ensure they are installed properly and at the best height.

- An adjustable height hand-held shower head to make bathing easier. Some come with a slide bar that doubles as a grab bar.
- A curbless or roll-in shower and built-in shower seat.

## Creative Solutions for Special Situations

*For those who do not own their home, have limited resources or time, or are recovering from an injury, the temporary and lower-cost solutions below could be good options.*

- Foldable portable ramp: helpful temporary solution
- Motorized stair-climber: uses a motor to help a caregiver pull a person in a wheel chair up the stairs; the caregiver should be assessed for ease of use
- Vertical platform lift: cost-effective option when a ramp is over 20 feet long; easier for the person and their caregiver to use
- Elevator: though initially costlier, it can be of service longer as needs change over time; chairlifts can only be used while people can keep themselves upright
- Sliding shower commode transfer system: includes a track system and a commode chair that acts as a wheelchair, goes over the toilet, and slides into the tub/shower; costs less than removing the tub; is helpful for renters; a caregiver must be able to lift the person's legs up over the tub wall
- Teak flooring: can raise the shower floor to be level with the curb; a small ramp can be used for entering and exiting with a wheelchair
- Prefabricated shower systems: reduce labor costs and eliminate the need for tile
- Pop-up shower: connects to kitchen faucet, drains into sink, and can be set up in a living space; a ledge keeps water in and pops down for roll-in entry and exit; less costly than remodeling a bathroom, ideal when upstairs bathroom is inaccessible

**Resources:** The Fall Prevention Center of Excellence offers information on how to make homes safe and where to find services, programs, and funding support in your area.

[www.homemods.org](http://www.homemods.org)



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