

Home modification refers to assistance with modifications and repairs to the homes, gardens and yards of frail older people, younger people with a disability or their carers to help them live independently and safely in their home.

This might mean adding assistive technology such as mechanical lifts or making structural changes to a home. Modifications can range from replacing cabinet doorknobs with pull handles to full-scale construction projects installing wheelchair ramps, widening doorways or bathroom modifications.

Home modifications improve a home's:

- **Accessibility:** making doorways wider, clearing spaces to make sure a wheelchair can pass through, hobless showers, lowering countertop heights for sinks and kitchen cabinets, installing grab rails and placing light switches and electrical outlets at heights that can be reached easily.
- **Adaptability:** grab rails on bathroom walls and movable cabinets under the sink so that someone in a wheelchair can use the space.
- **Universal design:** appliances, fixtures and floor plans that are easy to use. Flexible to be adapted for special needs, sturdy and reliable, and functional with minimum effort and understanding of the mechanisms involved.

Why do people need home modifications?

Home modifications help people who would otherwise be prematurely or inappropriately admitted to residential care to live independently in their own home.

What types of home modifications are required?

The best way to identify the need for home modifications is to examine each area of the home and consider how safe and accessible each area is for the resident:

- appliances, kitchen and bathroom
- closets and storage spaces
- doors and windows
- driveway and garage
- electrical devices, switches and outlets
- floors, hallways, steps and stairs
- lighting and ventilation

Who is eligible for subsidised home modifications?

- frail older people
- people with a disability
- their carers

Getting home modifications

Referrals to home modification services can be made by:

- the client, a carer or family member
- a GP or other medical practitioner
- a specialised aged or disability assessment team/service
- a hospital/rehabilitation facility
- a Commonwealth Carelink Centre
- other Home and Community Care (HACC) providers

What happens when home modifications are accessed?

Once a referral is received, a comprehensive assessment of the client at home will be conducted by an occupational therapist to identify the modifications required. The home modifications service will scope, cost and plan modification work, sourcing appropriate materials and suitably qualified tradespeople in accordance with agreed quality standards for the building industry and the HACC Program.

What does it cost?

The HACC Program subsidises costs for home modifications. Where possible, materials required for home modifications are at a discounted rate.

The home modifications service is required to have a fees policy with the flexibility to reduce or waive fees according to a client's financial situation. The fees will be discussed with the client and carer prior to the delivery of services.

A client will never be refused access to services due to an inability to pay. Full cost recovery work is completed for clients who fall under other programs such as the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Where can I get more information?

- The NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care administers the HACC Program in NSW and can be contacted on (02) 8270 2000 or via www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au.
- The NSW Home Modification and Maintenance Services State Council is the peak organisation representing home modification services across NSW and can be contacted on (02) 6622 8386 or via nswhmms@bigpond.net.au.
- The www.homemods.info website provides information and resources for occupational therapists, builders, designers, architects, consumers and other professionals working with home modifications, universal design and adaptable housing. The website is run by the University of Sydney and funded under the HACC Program.