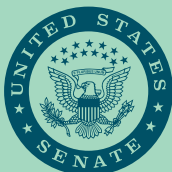


# Modifying Your Home for Accessibility and Safety

*Resources for Pennsylvanians*



**U.S. Senate**  
**Special Committee on Aging**

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# Introduction:

## What are Home Modifications?

Most people want to continue to live independently in their homes, but many homes are not accessible or designed for the needs of older adults or people with disabilities. Home modifications are changes to living spaces to ensure people can continue to live in their homes independently, safely, and comfortably. Modifications may also help prevent falls and make caregiving easier.

Modifications range from smaller efforts such as installing grab bars, modifying doorknobs, and installing night-lights to larger-scale projects like building wheelchair ramps and widening doorways.

Many people, however, do not know where to turn for assistance in making these home modifications, or may lack the resources to make necessary changes to their house or apartment. **This pamphlet describes resources that may be able to support and fund the changes you want make to your home.**

## WHAT MODIFICATIONS ARE RIGHT FOR ME?

Before making changes to your home and using the resources this pamphlet describes, experts suggest going from room-to-room in your home and asking questions about the accessibility and safety in each space. It can also be helpful to work with an occupational therapist or other specialist to conduct this home assessment.

Questions to ask when assessing your home include:

- Can I get into and out of my home easily?
- Is the home well-lit? Can I get around my house when it is dark?
- Do I need supportive and safety features in the bathroom?
- Are there throw rugs or other items on my floors that may cause me to fall?
- If my home has stairs, are railings installed? Do I need additional support to use the stairs?
- Are the things I use often on high shelves? Can I retrieve the items I need easily and safely?

Longer checklists to assess your home for accessibility, fall hazards, and home safety can help you inspect your living spaces and understand the changes you might need to make to your home.

**Link to external checklists:** [here](#), [here](#), or [here \(longer AARP guide\)](#).

# Resources for Veterans





## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING (SAH) GRANTS**

The SAH grant provides support to Veterans with service-connected disabilities. These grants can be used to purchase an adapted home or to remodel a home so that it is accessible.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the grant, Veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities are eligible for grants after the events of September 11, 2001, if:

- Veterans have a loss of two or more limbs, or a lower extremity
- Blindness in both eyes
- Severe burn injuries
- And/or loss or loss of use of a foot or leg

### **How to Access**

Apply via [eBenefits](#) with a DS Logon or connect with your county [Veteran Service Officer](#) or a nationally accredited [Veterans Service Organization](#) for assistance with completing and submitting the application forms.

Asistencia en español.

Contact Information: [sahinfo.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:sahinfo.vbaco@va.gov) OR  
**877-827-3702 OR 800-827-1000**

Link to site

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: SPECIAL HOME ADAPTATION (SHA) GRANTS**

The SHA is intended for Veterans who have service-connected disabilities to assist them to buy, build, or adapt their permanent home to suit the needs of their disabilities.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the grant, Veterans must have service-connected disabilities that include the loss or loss of use of their hands, blindness in both eyes, respiratory injuries, or severe burn injuries.

### **How to Access**

Apply via [eBenefits](#) with a DS Logon or connect with your county [Veteran Service Officer](#) or a nationally accredited [Veterans Service Organization](#) for assistance with completing and submitting the application forms. [Asistencia](#) en español.

*Contact Information:* [sahinfo.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:sahinfo.vbaco@va.gov) OR  
**877-827-3702 OR 800-827-1000**

[Link to site](#)



## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: TEMPORARY RESIDENCE ADAPTATION (TRA) GRANTS**

The TRA is intended for Veterans who have service-connected disabilities and require an accommodation in a temporary residence that is a family member's house. If a Veteran qualifies for a Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant or a Special Home Adaptation (SHA) grant, they qualify for TRA.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the grant, Veterans and service members must have service-related disabilities that are listed under the SAH or SHA grant eligibility requirements.

### **How to Access**

Apply via [eBenefits](#) with a DS Logon or connect with your county [Veteran Service Officer](#) or a nationally accredited [Veterans Service Organization](#) for assistance with completing and submitting the application forms. [Asistencia](#) en español.

*Contact Information:* **800-827-1000**

[Link to site](#)

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: HOME IMPROVEMENTS AND STRUCTURAL ALTERATIONS (HISA) GRANTS**

The HISA grant is intended to make the homes of Veterans or service members with disabilities more accessible and to accommodate necessary medical equipment.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the grant, Veterans' and service members' homes must not be or are currently not designed for disability accessibility or medical equipment. There are no specific qualifying medical conditions or injuries to qualify for the grants. Applications are evaluated on whether the requested accommodations are necessary for the Veterans to live independently in their homes.

### **How to Access**

Apply via your county [Veteran Service Officer](#) or a connect with a nationally accredited [Veterans Service Organization](#) for assistance with completing and submitting the application forms. [Asistencia](#) en español.

*Contact information:* **800-698-2411**

[Link to site](#)

# Resources for Rural Homeowners



## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA): SECTION 504 HOME REPAIR PROGRAM

The Section 504 Home Repair program provides loans and grants to low-income homeowners to repair, improve, or modernize their homes. It also provides grants to older very low-income homeowners to improve home health and safety standards.

### Eligibility

To qualify for the program, homeowners must own and occupy the house, be unable to obtain affordable credit elsewhere, have a household income that does not exceed a limit for their county, and for grants, be ages 62 or older and not be able to repay a repair loan. The home must also be in a qualifying rural area.

### How to Access

Apply by contacting a USDA home loan specialist using the [directory](#) for your area. Applications are accepted year-round at USDA's local Rural Development office. [Formularios](#) en español.

*Contact Information:* **800-414-1226**

Find your [local office](#) for the contact information or proceed to the [directory](#).

[Link to site](#)



# Resources for SSI Beneficiaries

SOCIAL SECURITY

SOCIAL SECURITY

## **SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION: PLAN TO ACHIEVE SELF-SUPPORT (PASS)**

The PASS program enables individuals to retain Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits while transitioning to work. The program provides home modifications or disability services to support individuals transitioning to the workforce.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the program, applicants must be 15 years of age or older, receive SSI disability benefits or can become eligible for disability benefits through SSI, and have income or resources to set aside.

### **How to Access**

Apply by writing a [\*\*SSA-545-BK\*\*](#) plan to your local Social Security office or to your PASS Cadre. If your employment goal is self-employment, your PASS must include a detailed business plan.

Información sobre [\*\*PASS \(plan para lograr la autosuficiencia\)\*\*](#) en español.

*Contact Information:* **1-800-772-1213**

Find your [\*\*local office\*\*](#) for the contact information.

[\*\*Link to site\*\*](#)

## **SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION: IMPAIRMENT-RELATED WORK EXPENSES (IRWE)**

IRWE are costs for items or services, including home modifications, that you need in order to work because of your disability. Social Security will deduct the costs of an IRWE from your countable income when determining your continuing eligibility for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for an IRWE, applicants must receive either SSDI or SSI due to a disability.

### **How to Access**

Apply for an IRWE in person at your local Social Security office and submit copies of your receipts for each IRWE for which you are applying. Prior to submitting, consult with a Social Security Claims Representative.

*Contact Information:* **1-800-772-1213**

[Link to site](#)



# Resources for Older Adults



## **PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING: CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM**

The Caregiver Support Program is designed to provide resources and assistance to caregivers to encourage a healthy, ongoing relationship with their care receiver. Each caregiver is assigned a care manager and can also be reimbursed for home modifications and expenses for caregiving related services or supplies like assistive devices and supplemental services.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the program, the caregiver and care receiver must be Pennsylvania residents. The amount of reimbursement is based on the income of the care receiver and is determined on a sliding scale.

### **How to Access**

Apply for the Caregiver Support Program through your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). To find the AAA that serves your county, use the [AAA Locator](#).

*Contact Information:* **717-783-1550** OR [aging@pa.gov](mailto:aging@pa.gov)

[Link to site](#)

## **PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING: HELP AT HOME (OPTIONS) PROGRAM**

OPTIONS provides assistance to Pennsylvania residents who are ages 60 and older and who would like to stay in their home. The program offers services that include payment for personal care services, health services, and home modifications that help increase safety, functionality, or accessibility.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the program, applicants must live in Pennsylvania, must be at least 60 years of age, must be a U.S. citizen or legal resident, and must be determined to have unmet needs that impact daily functioning. There are no income requirements for the program. Depending on the individual's income, they might be required to contribute to the cost of services on a sliding scale.

### **How to Access**

Apply for the OPTIONS program through your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). To find the AAA that serves your county, use the [AAA Locator](#).

*Contact Information:* **717-783-1550** OR [aging@pa.gov](mailto:aging@pa.gov)

[Link to site](#)

# Resources for People with Disabilities





## **PENNSYLVANIA HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY: ACCESS HOME MODIFICATION**

The ACCESS Home Modification Program provides mortgage loans to assist people with disabilities or who have a family member(s) living in the household with a disability who are purchasing a home that needs accessibility modifications.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the program, applicants must be homebuyers who have a permanent disability, or have a family member living in the house with a permanent disability who are purchasing a new or existing home with a loan through one of the Agency's homeownership loan programs.

### **How to Access**

Contact a [Participating Lender](#) to start the mortgage application. [Información](#) en español.

*Contact Information: 855-827-3466*

[Link to site](#)

## PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY: VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES (VRS)

VRS can be used for a variety of resources to help people with disabilities prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. In addition, VRS can help with obtaining assistive technology, home modifications, adaptive or special household equipment, job site modifications, and personal care assistance.

### Eligibility

To qualify for the rehabilitation services, applicants must have a disability and need support preparing for and acquiring a job.

### How to Access

Apply for services by contacting your local [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (OVR).

*Contact Information:* **717-787-5279**

[Link to site](#)

## **PENNSYLVANIA WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (WAP)**

The WAP is designed to help residents lower their energy costs by increasing the energy efficiency of their homes. Services are focused on assessments of home cooling/heating leakage, safety, and electric wiring and energy conservation education.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the program, applicants must be Pennsylvania residents with an income 200% or below the federal poverty guidelines. Priority is given to higher-risk residents including the elderly, people with disabilities, families with children, and high energy users.

### **How to Access**

Apply for services by contacting your local [WAP agency](#).

*Contact Information:* **866-466-3972**

[Link to site](#)



## **PENNSYLVANIA CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (CIL)**

CILs offer support, advocacy, and information on services available for individuals with disabilities. Some centers provide grants or loans for home modifications and/or referrals for enhancing community living for persons with disabilities.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify for the services, applicants must be considered a person with disabilities or a senior citizen and may obtain the services in their local center or independent living center.

### **How to Access**

Find a CIL either by service or county using the [\*\*PA SILC Website\*\*](#). Contact the individual service or residence that is of interest.

*Contact Information:* **717-364-1732** OR [\*\*info@pasilc.org\*\*](mailto:info@pasilc.org)

[\*\*Link to site\*\*](#)

# National Resources and Directories



# NON-PROFITS AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

## NEIGHBORWORKS

NeighborWorks is a non-profit organization that aims to help meet the affordable housing and community development needs of a locality. NeighborWorks assists individuals and families with counseling. They also work to increase rental home stock and assist homebuyers.

### Eligibility

To qualify, any individual or family that requires housing repair or assistance can consult with their closest NeighborWorks affiliate for specific eligibility requirements for available services.

### How to Access

NeighborWorks has affiliates nationwide that contribute to the mission of community level collaboration for safe housing. Contact your local NeighborWorks Network organization through this [directory](#) to obtain more information.

*Contact information:* **202-760-4000**

[Link to site](#)

## **REBUILDING TOGETHER, INC.**

Rebuilding Together works to repair the homes of families, seniors, people with disabilities, and victims of disasters.

### **Eligibility**

To qualify, individuals or families who are in need of services can consult with their closest Rebuilding Together affiliate for specific requirements.

### **How to Access**

Determine what program you are interested in through the programs page on the Rebuilding Together website. After you have determined what service you require, find the contact information of your [local Rebuilding Together affiliate](#).

*Contact Information:* **202-518-3100**

[Link to site](#)

# DIRECTORIES

Existing directories and referral services can help you find a local provider to make home modifications and connect you to other local supports and organizations providing financial assistance for home modifications.

Your county Area Agency on Aging (AAA), such as the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, may offer special programs supporting home modifications. Local government and non-government resources like this can be found via the below directories.

## U.S. ADMINISTRATION ON AGING'S ELDERCARE LOCATOR

The Eldercare Locator is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources including help with home modifications.

Si necesita traducción, un especialista estará a su disponibilidad de 9 a 8pm de Lunes a Viernes.

*Contact Information:* **800-677-1116**

[Link to site](#)

## **NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER ON HOME MODIFICATION'S NATIONAL DIRECTORY**

The National Resource Center provides home modification and repair resources for each state with a health care professional to advise on changes.

*Contact Information:* **213-740-1364**

[Link to site](#)

## **AARP LOCAL ASSISTANCE DIRECTORY**

The AARP Local Assistance Directory allows for individuals to search for free or reduced cost services like medical care, food, home modifications, and more.

*Contact Information:* **1-800-775-6776**

[Link to site](#)



# About the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

Established in 1961, the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging is the focal point in the Senate for discussion and debate on matters relating to older Americans.

**ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.**

**Pennsylvania**

**CHAIRMAN**

Learn more about the Committee at

[aging.senate.gov](https://aging.senate.gov)