



Home Modification Planning Guide

Leacey Brown | SDSU Extension Gerontology Field Specialist



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



Introduction

Remaining in the home is a high priority for many adults as they get older. Without prior-planning, it may be difficult to achieve that goal. As we near end-of-life, the chance of us developing activity-limiting disabilities increases. As a result, we need accessible housing. The unfortunate news is the accessible housing is difficult to find. For this reason, anyone who wants to stay in their home through end-of-life is well served to evaluate the feasibility of renovating their home for accessibility.

Most homes will require renovations (i.e., home modifications) in order for someone who has mobility limitations to live there. Some homes simply cannot be renovated effectively. For example, split foyer homes require you to either go up or down stairs once you enter the building. These types of homes are difficult and costly to renovate for accessibility. Other homes may be more appropriate for home modifications.

The questions included in this document are for anyone who is thinking about renovating their existing home. These questions will help you think about some of the key elements in the home you should consider as you think about investing in home modifications. Some items are simple fixes such as changing door hardware, while other changes may require structural changes, such as making a bathroom larger. Please be aware this is not an exhaustive list of renovations that might be needed in the home. Perhaps the most important thing to remember about renovating for accessibility is to ensure that essential features (bedroom and bathroom) can be accessed through a no-step or ramped entrance.



Quick Start Questions

Exterior

1. Is there a step-free path between parking and the entry?
2. Are steps required to enter the home?
3. If steps are required to enter the home, is there space for a ramp? You will need one foot of ramp for every inch of rise above grade.
4. Does exterior lighting effectively illuminate door handle and keyhole?
5. Does the entry door have porch or roof to protect from inclement weather?
6. Are entry doors at least 36 inches wide?

Accessible Routes

7. Are interior doorways at least 36 inches wide?
8. Are hallway widths and pathways at least 36 inches wide?
9. Are threshold heights throughout the home no more than 0.5 inches?
10. Are interior stairs and pathways well lit?
11. Are stair treads at least 36 inches wide?
12. Are tread-depths and riser-heights consistent throughout the stairs?
13. Are hand rails present on both sides of the stairs?
14. Is flooring throughout the home slip-resistant, trip-resistant, and durable?
15. Is color and texture contrast used for transition between spaces?
16. Are stairs required to access the laundry room?
17. Are stairs required to access the kitchen?
18. Are stairs required to access entertainment spaces (e.g., TV room)?

Essential Features

19. Is at least one bedroom on the same level as the entrance?
20. Is there at least one full bathroom on the main floor?
21. Is floor space of at least 5×5 feet available in the bathroom, unobstructed by open door?
22. Is a walk-in shower available without any step or curb?
23. Is lighting available over the shower?
24. Is there clearance under the bathroom sink for seated access?
25. Are grab bars available in shower and near toilet?
26. Is a handheld showerhead with an adjustable height wall mount available?

Using the Home

27. Can door hardware throughout home be operated without gripping or grabbing (e.g. lever)?
28. Do the water faucets throughout the home have lever, push-button, or electronic controls?
29. Can laundry machine controls be accessed from a seated position?
30. Can kitchen switches/controls (e.g. lights, garbage disposal, vent/hood, microwave, oven, etc.)
be accessed from a seated position?
31. Can storage throughout the home be accessed from a seated position (closets, kitchen, linen,
bathroom, etc.)?
32. Does the storage throughout the home have interior lighting?
33. Are electrical outlets between 16 and 20 inches from the floor?
34. Are window controls and locks no higher than 48 inches from the floor?



Consulting Professionals

Consulting with professionals can help individuals and families make informed decisions about improving accessibility, safety, and independence in the home. Every home is unique, and modification needs will vary based on a person's mobility, disability, and long-term goals.

When searching for contractors, remodelers, occupational therapists, or other service providers with experience in accessibility and wheelchair-accessible renovations, the following terms may be helpful:

Key Terms for Searching Virtual Resources

- Accessible Design
- Accessible Remodeling
- Adaptable Design
- Aging in Place
- Barrier-Free Design
- Home Accessibility
- Home Accessibility Assessment
- Home Modification
- Home Safety Assessment
- Inclusive Design
- Livable Design
- Occupational Therapy
- Universal Design
- Usable Design
- Visitability / VISIBLE
- Wheelchair Accessibility

Certifications or Trainings

- Certified Environmental Access Consultants (CEAC)
- Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS)
- Executive Certificate in Home Modification Program (University of Southern California)

Planning ahead gives individuals and families time to explore home modification options and find professionals they trust to complete accessibility renovations. This planning tool is designed to help you become an informed consumer as you evaluate options and service providers.



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY®
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, COUNSELING AND
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

SDSU Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer in accordance with the nondiscrimination policies of South Dakota State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Learn more at extension.sdstate.edu.

© 2026, South Dakota Board of Regents