



Home Accessibility Guide



The following information packet serves as an introduction to modifying your residence to accommodate changes in mobility needs. Before proceeding with home modifications please refer to your town's building and zoning codes and acquire necessary permits for your renovations and modifications.

When embarking on the journey to make your home more accessible, it's essential to be aware of the guidelines set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA provides comprehensive requirements and recommendations for accessible design, ensuring that individuals with individualized mobility needs can enjoy equal access to public and private spaces. **While the ADA primarily addresses commercial spaces, many of its principles can be applied to homes to create a universally accessible environment.**



Disclaimer

Gaylord Hospital shall not be held responsible for any injury, loss, or damage resulting from the use of or reliance on the information provided in these guidelines. The content is intended for general informational purposes only. Individuals are encouraged to use their own judgment and consult appropriate professionals when planning or carrying out home accessibility modifications.

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Personal / Household Factors

Your Occupational Therapist can assist with recommendations for home modifications. These modifications are only what is **medically necessary** for the patient to return home safely. Please consult with your medical team to determine what accessibility changes will be needed to live safely and comfortably in your home. Things your medical professional will help you determine are:

- Is the individual primarily utilizing a wheelchair for mobility or are they ambulatory?
- Does the individual have the capability to live independently or need assistance for personal care and transfers from caregivers / family?
- What is the individual's current strength and mobility like?
- Will the individual's situation change over time (e.g., an improvement or worsening of function)? When change can be predicted, modifications should be designed to fit or adjust to current and future needs.

If cost is a key consideration, prioritize environmental changes based on medical necessity. Additionally, explore whether portable equipment can safely and effectively meet the need, potentially avoiding the necessity for permanent, more costly modifications.

Consider whether personal assistance could serve as an alternative to physical modifications. Major changes may be unnecessary if caregivers can provide long-term support. Compare the value—both in terms of caregivers' time and capabilities or the cost of paid services—against the expense of making modifications.

If you've concluded that home modifications are necessary, consider the following factors:

- Consider how the modifications will impact other household members—plans may need to be adjusted to balance competing needs.
- When deciding on the type and quality of materials and the durability of construction, take into account the expected intensity and frequency of use over time, as well as the effort required for regular maintenance and cleaning.
- Check whether some or all of the costs may qualify for a federal income tax deduction under medically related capital expenses. For more information, contact the IRS and request Publication 502, Medical and Dental Expenses.



Walkways, Stairs and Ramps

Walkway Width

- 1. Ample Space for Maneuvering:** Walkways should be at least 48" wide. This width allows safe passage for individuals who use wheelchairs or mobility devices. It also accommodates caregivers or family members who may be assisting.
- 2. Emergency Evacuation:** In case of emergencies, such as fires or medical situations, wider walkways provide an unobstructed path for swift and safe evacuation.

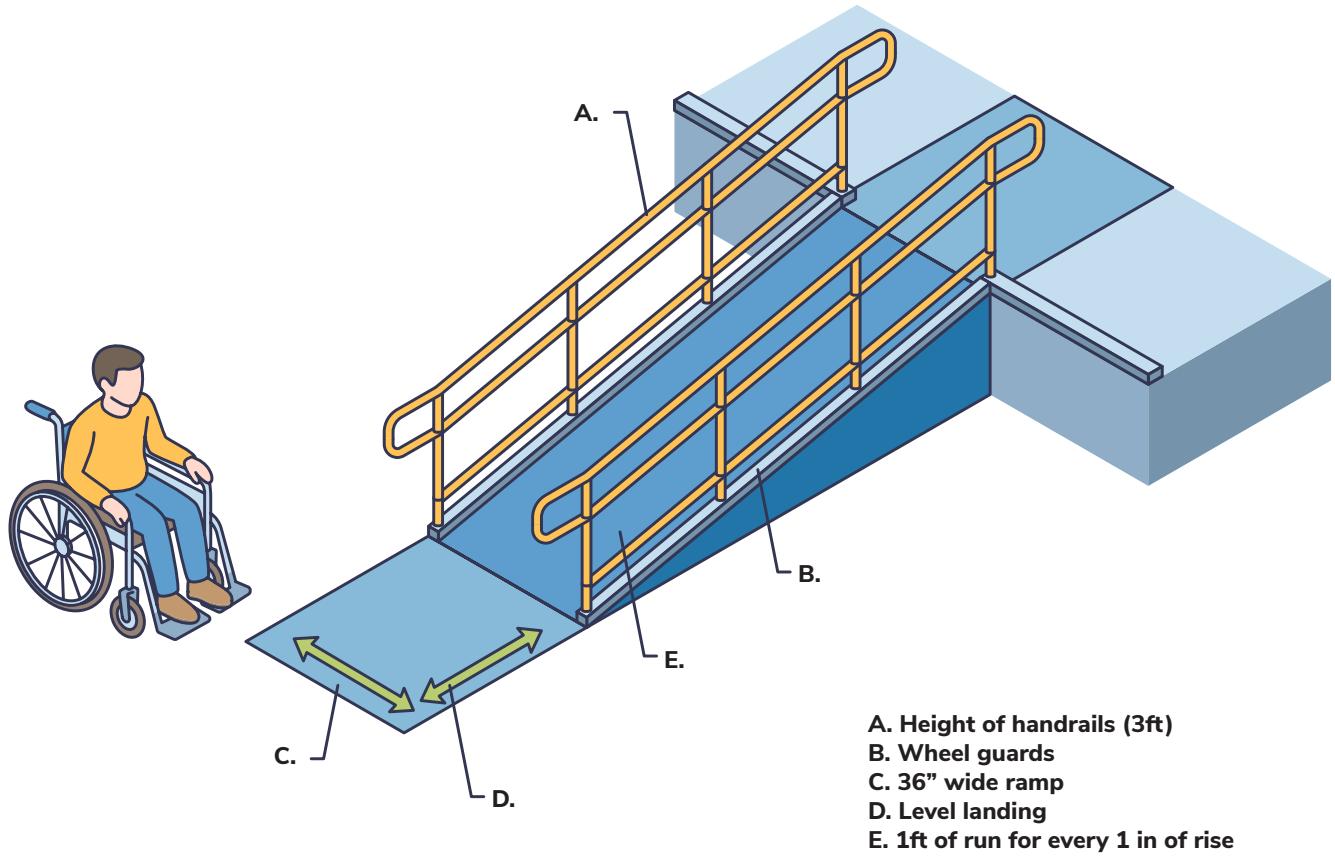
Stairs

- 1. Step Design:** Rolling walkers may need custom steps with longer-than-normal treads of 18" to 24" or more (compared to the standard 10" to 11" size). Consider lowering the rise of the steps to 4" to 6" for improved accessibility.
- 2. Anti-slip:** Another safety factor to consider is installing anti-slip grit taping to the front edges of stairs.
- 3. Lighting:** Any stairwell in/outside the home should have ample lighting to promote increased visibility and safety.

Ramps

- 1. Slope:** For every 1 inch of rise, ramps need 1 foot of run. This slope provides a gentle incline that is manageable for individuals using wheelchairs / other mobility devices. A gradual slope ensures that ascending or descending the ramp is not overly strenuous for caregivers as well.
- 2. Width:** Ramps should be at least 36" wide.
- 3. Long Ramps:** For ramps longer than 30' or ramps requiring a change in direction, a minimum 4' by 4' landing is required.
- 4. Secure Handrails:** All ramps and porches must be equipped with secure handrails. Handrails provide crucial support and stability for individuals using ramps. They enhance safety and confidence, especially when navigating inclines. Handrails should be 3' high.
- 5. Material Selection:** The material used for ramps should be slip-resistant, even when wet. This prevents accidents and ensures stability during various weather conditions.
- 6. Threshold Considerations:** Ensure that ramps have a smooth transition from the walkway or

ADA Ramp Requirements



Types of Ramps



Portable



Wood



Aluminum

porch to prevent tripping hazards. A well-designed threshold ensures a seamless transition for all users.

7. **Wheel Guards:** All ramps should have wheelchair wheel guards for safety. A wheel guard is a raised lip along the sides of the ramp's surface to prevent wheelchairs or other mobility devices from rolling off the ramp's edge.

Walkways, Stairs and Ramps (con't)

Front Door & Home Entrance Modifications

Front Door

1. **Accessibility through Width:** The front door must be wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and mobility devices comfortably. A front door that is at least 34" wide is sufficient to accommodate the width of most wheelchairs.
2. **Clearance Space:** There should be at least 32" of wheelchair clearance between the door frame and hinges. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove the interior spring hinge door to facilitate wheelchair clearance.
3. **Lighting:** Ensure that there is ample lighting for improved visibility and safety.

Front Stoop

If your front entrance includes a stoop or porch, ensure it provides adequate space for maneuverability. Ideally, the front stoop landing should measure at least 4' by 4'. This space allows individuals using wheelchairs or mobility devices to approach the door comfortably and safely.

Threshold

Each exterior door should have a threshold that is **no higher than 1/2"** from the bottom of the door. This minimal height allows for effortless movement of wheelchairs or other mobility devices, preventing tripping hazards.



Accessible Bedroom Modifications

Bedroom Door

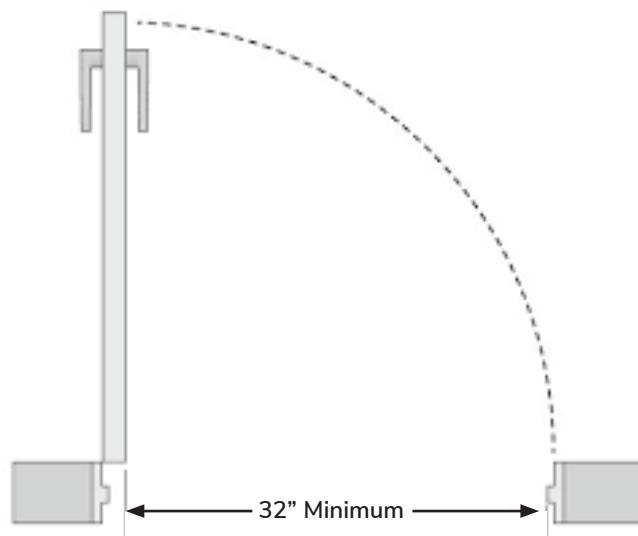
Width and Accessibility: Ensure that there is at least 32" of width for adequate wheelchair clearance through the bedroom door. This width provides ample space for maneuvering wheelchairs and other mobility devices. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove the door jams or hinges in order to facilitate wheelchair clearance. In those cases, a curtain can replace the door to allow for privacy.

Room Pathways

Ample Pathways: Maintain a 36" wide pathway on each side of the bed. Maintain a clutter-free space, with adequate lighting. Consider placing furniture around the perimeter of the room to improve passage and maneuverability in the center of the room for wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

Floor Surface

When possible, hard flooring surfaces, such as tile or hardwood, are best to promote safe and efficient maneuverability for wheelchairs and other mobility devices throughout the home. Removing throw rugs is also advised, as they can increase the risk of tripping or falls for ambulatory individuals, especially those who use mobility devices.





Bathroom Safety & Accessibility

Bathroom Door

Door Width: Ensure that there is at least 32" of width for adequate wheelchair clearance through the bathroom door. This width allows for easy passage and accommodates mobility aids such as wheelchairs and walkers. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove the door jams or hinges in order to facilitate wheelchair clearance.

Toilet

1. Toilet Seat Height:

Consider installing a comfort height toilet, which is 17 to 19" from the floor, to allow for increased independence with toilet transfers. Or consider a commode to increase the height of the toilet. A padded commode may be necessary for those individuals who are at risk of skin breakdown. Your occupational therapist can provide recommendations for appropriate toilet durable medical equipment.



2. **Grab Bars:** Installing grab bars is another way to increase safety when transferring on/off of the toilet. Consider installing grab bars on the wall beside the toilet or toilet safety rails, which are rails that attach to the toilet itself. Grab bars should be capable of withstanding a minimum of 250 pounds of weight.
3. **Clear Pathway:** Maintain a clear pathway to the toilet, with a width of at least 36". This unobstructed space allows for easy wheelchair access and maneuvering.

Sink

Sink Height and Clearance Space: Consider removal of the center board of a vanity sink if needed. Consider mounting the sink no more than 34" from the floor. This height allows for ample and comfortable wheelchair clearance underneath. Provide adequate space in front of the sink to allow for forward wheelchair approach. A minimum space of 30" by 48" is typically recommended.

Shower chair



Shower

When possible, walk-in or roll-in showers are ideal for wheelchair users and those with different mobility needs. Here are a few key items to consider:

- 1. Durable Medical Equipment:** Consider purchasing a shower chair, which can help to facilitate safety and independence when showering at a seated level.
- 2. Low Threshold Entrance:** Ensure that the shower has a low threshold or even no threshold, if possible. This design allows for seamless entry and exit, reducing fall risk.
- 3. Grab Bars:** Grab bars outside the shower entrance and inside the shower can be installed to increase safety with entry/exit from the shower. Grab bars should be able to withstand a minimum of 250 pounds of weight.
- 4. Handheld Shower Head:** Consider installing a handheld shower head unit with a hose that is at least 60" long. This feature allows individuals to shower while seated and facilitates easy reach for bathing.

Bathtub

- 1. Durable Medical Equipment:** A transfer tub bench may be recommended to increase safety when entering and exiting the tub. This also increases safety and independence of the individual to be able to shower in a seated position. A padded transfer tub bench may be necessary for individuals at risk of skin breakdown/wounds. Check with your occupational therapist to determine what equipment is most appropriate.

Transfer tub bench



- 2. Grab Bars:** Consider installing grab bars outside and inside the bathtub. These grab bars offer stability and support when entering and exiting the bathtub. Grab bars should be able to withstand a minimum of 250 pounds of weight.

Floor Surface

While bath mats may enhance comfort, they can present a significant tripping hazard for individuals with balance impairments. To minimize the risk of falls, the removal of bath mats from the bathroom is recommended.



Creating an Accessible Kitchen

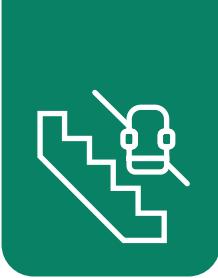
Cabinets & Countertops

- 1. Shelf Height:** The lowest shelves of upper cabinets should be no higher than 48" from the floor. This height allows individuals to access commonly used items without the need for step stools or excessive stretching.
- 2. Leg Room, As Needed:** Ensure that there is adequate legroom under countertops and sinks to accommodate a wheelchair comfortably, as needed. This space allows individuals to roll their wheelchairs up to the sink or countertop. The countertop height threshold underneath depends on the height of the wheelchair.
- 3. Countertop Accessibility:** Place frequently used items at countertop height to reduce risk of falling when reaching the outside base of support.



Appliances

- 1. Operable from Wheelchair Height, if applicable:** Ensure that appliances and the sink are operable from chair height, if needed. This feature allows individuals using wheelchairs to access and use the appliances independently.
- 2. Stovetop Controls:** Consider stovetop controls in front of the unit rather than along the top to allow for increased accessibility for individuals at wheelchair level. If this is not possible, your occupational therapist can recommend other adaptive strategies that can be used to improve accessibility.



Additional Modifications for Enhanced Home Accessibility

In addition to specific room-focused modifications, there are several miscellaneous modifications that contribute to overall home accessibility. These adjustments ensure a safer and more accommodating environment for individuals with different mobility needs and promotes a sense of comfort and independence throughout the entire home.

Stairlift Installation

Consider investing in a stairlift to provide easy and safe access between levels. Stairlifts are motorized devices that transport individuals up and down stairs, eliminating the need to navigate steps manually. They are particularly beneficial for individuals who have difficulty with climbing stairs.

In Connecticut, a permit is required for stair lift installations, specifically requiring a residential stair lift technician's license. This license is needed to ensure proper installation and safety, as stairlifts are considered a form of elevator in some jurisdictions. While some jurisdictions may not require permits for residential installations, Connecticut's regulations specifically address this.

In Connecticut, stairlifts require a minimum clear width of 32" for existing or replacement stairways. For new stairways, the minimum width is also 32", with handrails allowed to project up to 4" on either side. If a stairway chairlift is installed, a clear passage width of at least 20" must be provided.

Thresholds

Ensure smooth transitions between rooms and spaces by addressing thresholds. Keep all doorway thresholds no higher than ½". Lower thresholds eliminate tripping hazards and make it easier to transition from room to room, especially for individuals using wheelchairs or walkers.

Elevators

There are several companies in Connecticut who install residential elevators for individuals who desire them, should space and funds permit.

Flooring

Wherever possible, avoid the use of carpeting. Carpets can create friction, making it challenging for wheelchair users to move around. Additionally, carpeting can pose difficulties for individuals with mobility devices or those at risk of falling. If you must use carpet, select low-pile options. Remove throw rugs, as these can increase fall risk.

Interior Hallways

The width of interior hallways should allow unobstructed passage. A hallway width of 36" is sufficient to accommodate mobility devices and wheelchairs.



Choosing a Contractor

Tips for Working with a Contractor on Accessibility Modifications

1. Define Your Needs Clearly

- Make a detailed list of the modifications needed (e.g., ramps, grab bars, widened doorways).
- Involve an occupational or physical therapist if possible—they can help assess specific accessibility requirements.

2. Choose a Contractor with Relevant Experience

- Look for contractors who specialize in accessibility renovations or have experience with ADA-compliant designs.
- Ask for references or examples of similar projects.

3. Verify Credentials

- Ensure the contractor is licensed, bonded, and insured in your state.
- Check for certifications such as CAPS (Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist), offered by the National Association of Home Builders.

4. Discuss Permits and Inspections

- Ask who will be responsible for pulling permits and scheduling required inspections.
- Ensure all work complies with local building codes and accessibility standards.

5. Consider Long-Term Value

- Choose durable, low-maintenance materials.
- Think beyond current needs—plan for future accessibility if aging in place is a goal.



Financial Resources

Federal Programs:

- **Section 504 Home Repair Program:** <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-programs/single-family-housing-repair-loans-grants>
Offers grants (up to \$10,000) and loans (up to \$40,000) for repairs that improve safety, health, and accessibility.
- **VA Home Improvement and Structural Alterations (HISA) Grant:** <https://www.va.gov/fayetteville-coastal-health-care/programs/home-improvementsstructural-alterations-hisa/>
Provides funding for home modifications to address service-related disabilities.
- **FHA 203(k) loan:** A rehabilitation loan that allows homeowners to refinance their mortgage and add the cost of home modifications to their payments.
- **Fannie Mae's HomeStyle Renovation Mortgage:** Similar to FHA 203(k), this allows refinancing and including modification costs.

State and Local Programs:

Connecticut My Place

www.MyPlaceCT.org

Offers information and resources, including assistive technology loan programs and home modifications.

State Independent Living Centers (CILs)

<https://acl.gov/programs/centers-independent-living/list-cils-and-spils>

Provide information and referral services, including resources for home modifications.

Rebuilding Together

www.rebuildtogether.org

A nonprofit organization that provides home repair and modification services for low-income families, people with disabilities, seniors, and veterans.

Other Resources:

Medicaid

May provide financial assistance for home modifications through various programs.

Lions Clubs International

May offer financial assistance and resources for hearing and vision disabilities.

American Parkinson Disease Association

Provides grants for individuals with disabilities due to degenerative diseases.

National Council of State Housing Agencies (NCSHA)

Offers a directory of organizations in your state that provide housing modification assistance

Ramping Resources:

Collins Accessibility Solutions	(203) 307-2390	https://www.collinsmedical.net/
Lifeway Mobility	(860) 292-1111	https://www.lifewaymobility.com/
Am Ramps	(860) 295-0048	https://amramp.com/
National Seating & Mobility	(860) 666-7500	https://www.nsm-seating.com/
On the Mend	(203) 706-8122	https://onthemendmedical.com/
UpLift LLC	(860) 761-0008	https://www.upliftsct.com/

References

- Mobilitycity.com
- ADA.gov
- CT.gov

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