

The Home Modifications Fact Sheet for Centers for Independent Living

Presented by NCIL and the KU RTC/PICL



The Research and Training Center on
Promoting Interventions for Community Living

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Home Modification Programs at Centers for Independent Living

Home modifications or “home mods” are changes a person makes to make their home accessible to them. Home mods can be as simple as a small threshold ramp to get through a doorway or as major as a full renovation. Some of the most common home modifications are ramps, improvements to doorways and entrances, and bathroom modifications.

A lot of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) operate home modification programs to help people make their homes more accessible. In a 2021 NCIL / RTC/PICL survey on home mod programs, 70% of CILs reported operating a formal home mod program. Some CILs help recommend improvements, others help with minor home mods, and some CILs assist with everything from recommendations, planning, and construction.

This fact sheet will share resources for your CIL, along with promising practices and real world examples from several CILs with successful home modification programs:

accessABILITY in Indianapolis, Indiana; The Ability Center of Greater Toledo in Ohio; and Placer Independent Living Resource Services (PIRS) in Auburn, California.



The Ability Center

accessABILITY

Why should CILs operate home mod programs?

Accessible housing is a significant barrier to community living. According to [HUD's Analysis of the latest American Housing Survey](#) (PDF), less than 1% of housing units are wheelchair accessible. Fewer than 5% are considered to be “livable” for people with “moderate mobility difficulties.” More troubling, these dismal numbers are disproportionately worse for immigrants and people of color.

There is hope. The same study finds that about a third of US housing stock is potentially modifiable. This presents a huge opportunity for CILs, not only to make modifications for existing owners and tenants, but to increase the number of accessible homes. Simply put, home mod programs are a natural fit for CILs that can also increase the accessible housing stock in your community.

“Consumers are key in determining the impacts of modifications—this is the first question that the review team will ask: How will this improve the independence of the consumer?”

– Tammy Themel, accessABILITY

How to pay for home mod programs

As with most CIL programs, funding varies widely across states and communities. The RTC/PICL and the RTC on Rural Independent Living have an excellent list of potential home mod funding sources: [Home Usability Program Funding Resources](#).

The Ability Center funds their home modification program through a grant. They also complement that funding with other sources. Currently, those other sources include Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and a small grant through the Ohio SILC.

accessABILITY blends funding from a variety of sources, including their federal CIL funding, Medicaid Waivers, and local government funding to pay for home modifications and associated staff and program costs.

PIRS receives funding through the Agency on Aging to support home mods for consumers above 60. For consumers younger than 60, they blend donations and mini grants from a local casino, local foundations, and individual donors to cover those expenses.

Promising practices for operating home mod programs

“Having a licensed carpenter on staff has been a huge benefit. We do work with outside contractors, and we really like some of them, but it’s just not as personal as our staff carpenters. They really provide a personal touch and a more holistic approach to disability access and recommendations on modifications.”

– Mindy Metzger, The Ability Center

Consider these promising practices and tips from our featured CILs. They may give you some ideas and help you avoid pitfalls as you build or expand your program.

- Hire construction staff or carpenters to complete home mods for your program. While it will certainly require additional fundraising to hire them, these staff can work with consumers and approach home mods from a holistic perspective. That’s not something your consumers are as likely to get from contractors.
- If you do decide to work with contractors, make sure they are fully licensed, bonded, and insured before they do any work for your consumers.
- Are there other programs or funders you can partner with? The Ability Center was able to access modular ramps from the Ohio Temporary Ramp Program. When a permanent ramp was installed, the Ohio Temporary Ramp Program had to remove the modular ramp and store them. The Ability Center offered to take the used ramps and install them at consumer’s homes. It’s provided a real benefit to everyone involved and funders love to see their resources maximized.
- Carefully consider your program’s eligibility and the terms of the work to be completed. Create a consumer contract that states exactly what work will be done. It manages risk, expectations, and it protects you and the consumer alike.
- Take before and after pictures of all projects. This gives you an opportunity to document your progress and share outcomes on social media, your annual report, local media, and other publications.

- Build a program that works for your community. Some CILs employ carpenters and handle complex construction projects; others only do small home mods like toilet seats, threshold ramps, and offset hinges that do not require building permits. Carefully consider your community needs and CILs capacity and build the program that fits best.
- Regardless of the scope of your project, considering using volunteers for smaller, less complex projects that do not require a permit. Volunteers can be an excellent resource for small projects like the ones listed above, installing lever doorknobs, putting together a shower seat, and other relatively simple tasks that can still have big impact for consumers. Keep in mind that it's especially important to do background checks or meaningful vetting of volunteers who will be working in a consumer's home.
- Talk with your insurance broker to ensure that your coverage is sufficient for providing home modifications in your consumers' homes.

“We really had to be creative during the COVID-19 pandemic. We learned that we could provide a lot of home mod assistance remotely. We would help people fill out applications and assessments over the phone. Then we would drop off any equipment and we would identify a volunteer or someone they trusted to help them install the final items.”

– Tink Miller, PIRS

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