



Consumer Factsheet

Arranging Home Modifications

PEER
REVIEWED

Introduction

Most existing homes are not designed to accommodate older people, younger people with a disability, or carers and if you need help to:

- get in and out of your own home;
- go to the toilet;
- shower and dress yourself; or
- prepare your own meals.

Modifying your home may enable you to remain in the same home longer.

What is a home modification?

Home modifications are changes made to the home environment to help people to be more independent and safe in their own home and reduce any risk of injury to their carers and careworkers. Modifications to the home include changes to the structure of the dwelling e.g. widening doors, adding ramps, providing better accessibility etc. and the installation of assistive devices inside or outside the dwelling e.g. grabrails, handrails, lifts etc. Home modifications assist people with disability and older people to be more independent and may reduce the need for ongoing assistance.

Who do I contact if I want to modify my home?

The Aged Care reforms and incremental roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) across Australia means that the way people arrange home modifications varies from place to place and will change over the coming years. The flowchart on the back page outlines the process for arranging home modifications, depending on the type of home you live in and how you would be funding your home modifications (Figure 1).

What if I need an interpreter?

For assistance with translation or hearing impairment services when arranging your home modifications contact:

- Translation and Interpreting Service. Tel: 131 450
- Telephone Typewriter (TTY). Tel: 1800 555 677
- Speak and Listen user. Tel: 1800 555 727
- Internet relay user: visit the National Relay Service website, www.relayservice.gov.au

What home modifications will help me to be more independent?

Examples of home modifications include:

- Grab rails
- Ramps or landscape modifications for access
- Accessible bathrooms

If you want to know more about what home modifications are possible, contact HMinfo on Tel: 1800 305 486 or visit the HMinfo website, www.homemods.info.

How do I arrange an assessment by an Occupational Therapist?

An Occupational Therapist (OT) is a health professional who will work with you to assess your home and life goals to determine what changes will make your home more enabling for you.

- The method for arranging assessment by an OT will differ depending on how you are funding your home modification.
- If you are eligible for NDIS services, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) will organise an OT for you. For more information contact the NDIA. Tel: 1800 800 110 or visit the NDIS website, www.ndis.gov.au
- Some Aged Care Assessment Authorities and some Home Modification Service Providers employ their own OTs. Contact My Aged Care for further information. Tel: 1800 200 422 or visit the My Aged Care website, www.myagedcare.gov.au.
- A Public Health OT can be found through your local public hospital or community health centre. You can consult your GP for assistance with this.
- A Private OT can be found by contacting Occupational Therapy (OT) Australia. Tel: 1300 682 878 or visit OT Australia's website, www.otaus.com.au.
- Veterans should contact the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) who arranges OT

assessments and home modifications for veterans. Tel: 133 254 or visit the DVA website, www.dva.gov.au.

The assessment process

The OT will visit you at your home for the assessment. You may wish to have a family member or advocate present at the assessment. The OT will look at the design of your home, observe some of your home activities and discuss these with you. They will then make suggestions about how your home could be modified to assist you to be more independent now and in the future. The OT will take into account any equipment (assistive technology) you currently use and may suggest new equipment and ways of doing things that could assist you or your carer.

The OT should also conduct a follow-up evaluation once the home modifications are complete. This review will check that the home modifications work for you as intended.

Selecting your home modifications

As well as your assessment by an OT, there are several other important considerations when selecting and planning your home modifications:

- who will undertake and pay for the modification and the maintenance and when will it need replacement or upgrading;
- whether the modification will be permanent, or if it needs to be removed, the ease and cost of doing so;
- any disruption requiring changes to your living arrangements during the installation or construction process; and
- how other household members will be affected by the modification.

Undertaking your own home modifications

Home modifications are usually undertaken by licenced trades people and builders. In addition to the information provided by your OT, State and Territory Consumer Affairs agencies can provide you with information to assist you with the building process, such as how to find a builder, what questions to ask your builder and advice on getting quotes and signing contracts.

Should you decide to undertake your own modifications, you will still need to meet any legal or regulatory requirements, especially for those tasks which require a licenced tradesperson.

Licence checks

If you proceed with completing the modifications yourself, it is important that all contractors you use are licensed for the work being done. Each State and Territory has a website where you can check that a builder's or trades person's licence is valid for the work being undertaken.

Quotes and contracts

Before accepting a quote or entering into a contract ensure that the contract details the:

- exact works which will be undertaken in detail including fixtures and fittings;
- Australian Standards that will apply to each area of the work, for example Electrical Safety Standards for electrical work;
- quality of the workmanship; and
- payment schedule including contingency and retention amounts.

If you need assistance with any of the above, seek advice from your State or Territory Consumer Affairs agency. All construction work is guided by the National Construction Code, which references Australian Standards. Generally, the type of home determines the construction code clauses that apply and private dwellings are generally exempt from compliance with accessibility standards. However, some sections under the Building Code of Australia cannot be deviated from, particularly in relation to all sub-trades e.g. electrical, waterproofing. Your local government authority or home modification service provider can explain what is required in the State or Territory where you live.

Planning and permissions

You may require specific permissions to undertake home modifications. If consent is unreasonably withheld, you can approach the [Anti-Discrimination agency](#) in your State or Territory for assistance. Some common permissions are:

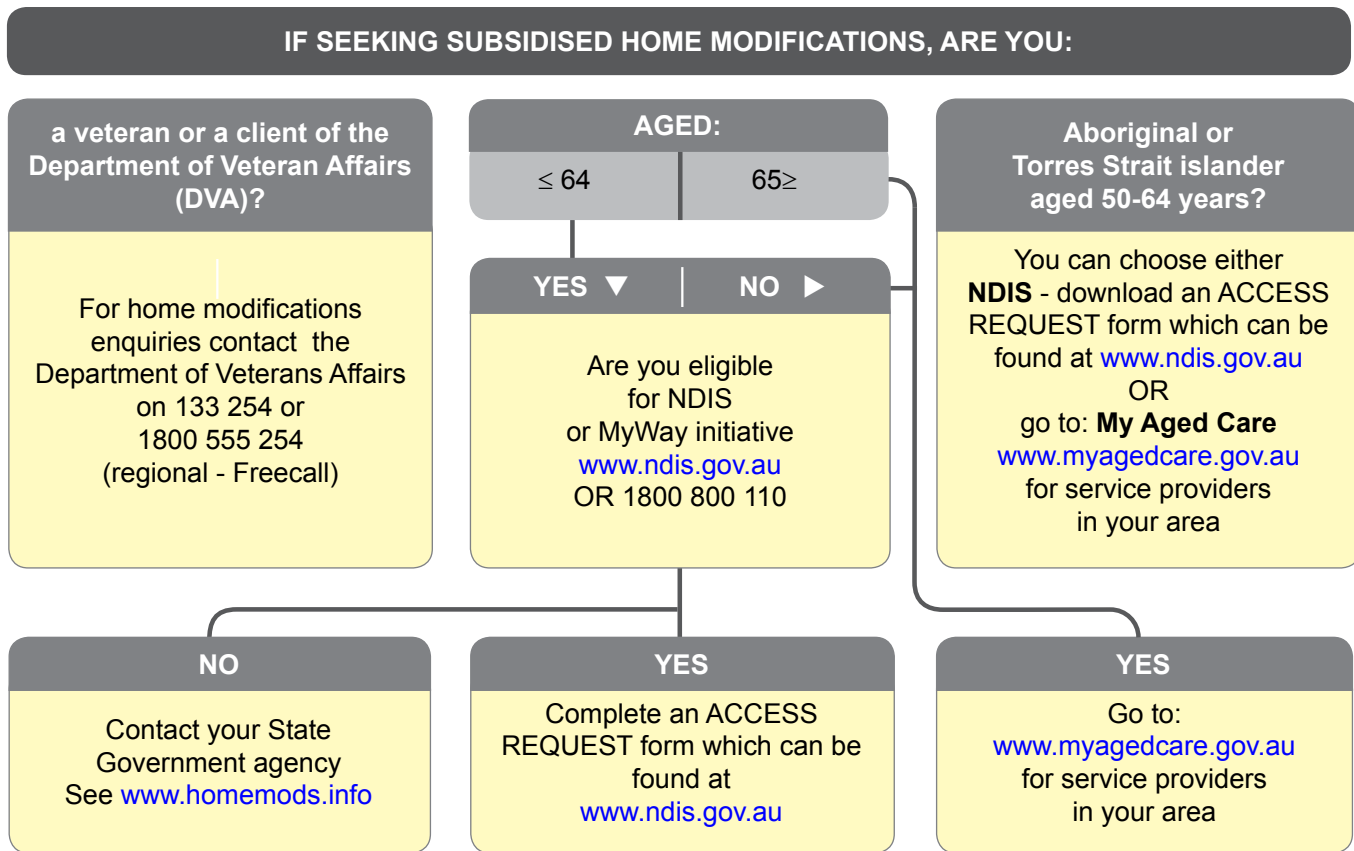
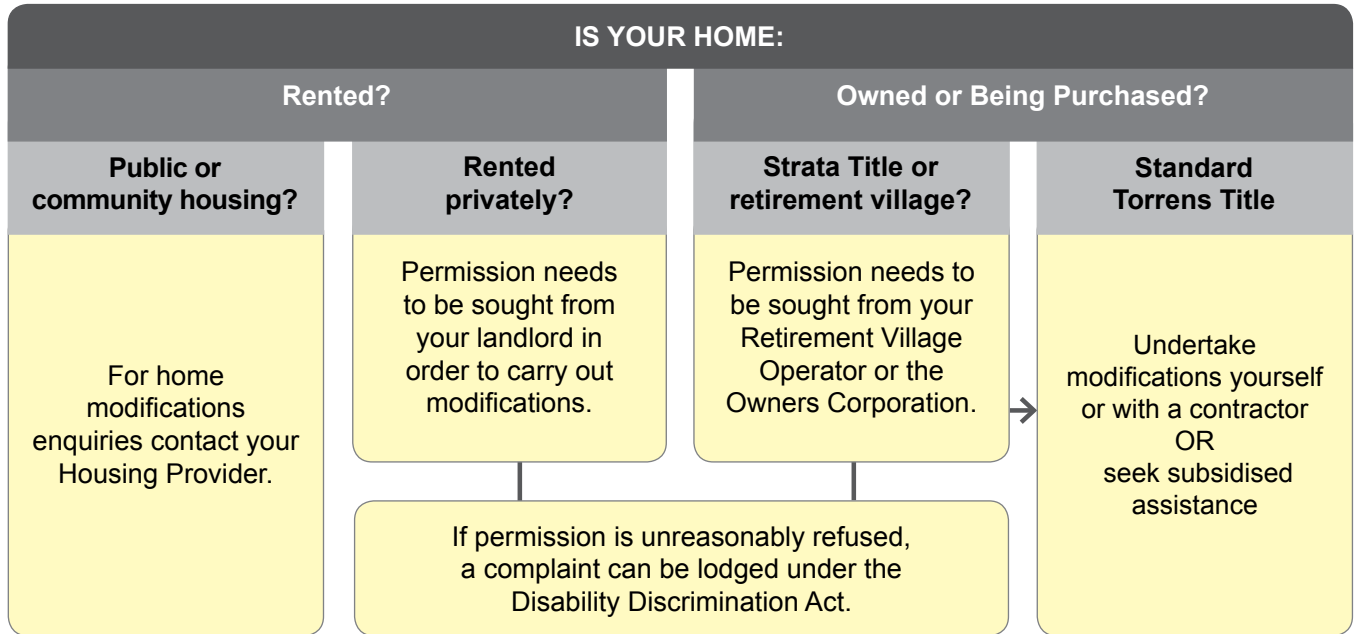
- Some work may require planning approval from your local council. You or your contractor should seek advice from your local council.
- If you live in Strata Title or a retirement village you, or your landlord, will need to discuss the planned home modifications with the Owners Corporation or Retirement Village Operator and obtain their consent if needed.
- If you are renting from a landlord other than a Public/Community Housing Authority, you must have the permission of your landlord to undertake the modifications.
- If you live in Public/Community Housing, contact them first as they may undertake the modifications.

Equipment (assistive technology) to help at home

The Independent Living Centres of Australia (ILCA) provide free information about equipment, i.e. assistive technology, and how to access your State or Territory's ILC. To contact ILCA Tel: 1300 885 886 or visit ILCA's website, www.ilcaustralia.org.au

***This information was correct at time of printing.*

Who do I contact to arrange for home modifications?



NOTE: Due to the provider networks being in the process of change this flow chart is a general guide to finding the correct provider for your needs and was relevant and correct at the time of publication.

Figure 1: Arranging Home Modifications