

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. 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 safer 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 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.

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.

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

The Aged Care reforms including the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) across Australia means arranging 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 your home modifications will be funded (Figure 1).

How do I arrange an Occupational Therapist assessment?

An Occupational Therapist (OT) is a health professional who will work with you to assess your home and life goals to determine what changes to your home would be appropriate for your health-related needs.

Arranging an OT assessment will differ depending on how the home modification is funded.

- If you are not an NDIS or Aged Care participant, you can consult your GP or other medical staff, who can refer you to a Public Health or Private OT.
- If you are eligible for NDIS supports, 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, <http://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 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: 1800 555 254 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 current layout of your home, observe some of your home activities and discuss these with you. They will then make recommendations as to how your home is to be modified to assist you to be more independent now and in the future. The OT will consider any equipment (assistive technology) you currently use and may suggest new equipment and ways of doing things that could assist you or your carer.

An OT report must include figured measurements for the changes, e.g. widths of doorways, heights of grabrails, diameter of grabrails etc. 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, such as:

- who will undertake and pay for the modification and any ongoing maintenance needed. It may also be necessary to discuss and plan for replacement or upgrading depending on materials chosen and weathering;
- whether the modification will be permanent, or if it needs to be removable or replaceable, and the ease and cost of doing so if required;
- 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 contractors. In addition to the information provided by your OT, State and Territory Consumer Affairs agencies may provide you with other information to assist you with the building process, such as how to find a

contractor, information on insurance and building warranties, what questions to ask your contractor and advice on getting quotes and signing contracts.

Should you decide to implement simple modifications, some of these may be done independently. If you want to explore this as an option please download the [DIYmodify App](#) from the HMinfo website. No matter what you decide, you will still need to meet any legal or regulatory requirements, especially for those tasks which require a licenced contractor.

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 contractor's licence is valid for the work being undertaken.

Quotes and contracts

If the OT prescribes modifications for your home and funds are included in your NDIS support plan, you will be required to provide the NDIA one quote from a contractor, and two quotes for modifications exceeding \$15,000. The contractors' quotes must include:

- the dimensions of the area being modified (for example length, width and height of walls to be tiled);
- separate costing for each stage of the job (for example demolition, plumbing and electrical work may be separate stages);
- a description of any fixtures or items being provided by the contractor (including make, model and cost);
- an overall quote for the job, inclusive of GST;
- the deposit to be paid (prescribed by the Department of Fair Trading or your State equivalent), and
- the contract to be used for the work.

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

- exact works which will be undertaken including any 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;
- payment schedule including contingency and retention amounts, and

- permission to proceed with the work from the building owner may be required (see Figure 1).

If you need assistance with any of the above, seek advice from your State or Territory Consumer Protection agency. Legislation can be difficult to interpret. Home modifications within the dwelling are not new building works. Also, internal parts of the dwelling are currently not subject to accessibility requirements. However, any works in common areas, as well as some sub-trades e.g. electrical, waterproofing, etc, are subject to legislated standards and requirements. 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

Assistive Technology (AT) Australia provide advice and information to people with disabilities, older people, carers and the general community on assistive technology solutions for independent living. To contact AT Australia Tel: 1300 452 679 or visit AT's website, www.at-aust.org.

The Independent Living Centres of Australia (ILCA) can provide free information about equipment, i.e. assistive technology, To contact ILCA Tel: 1300 885 886 or visit ILCA's website, <https://ilcaustralia.org.au/>. Please note that ILCs have closed in some states and more changes are expected after June 2020.

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: 133 677
- Speak and Listen user. Tel: 1300 555 727
- Internet relay user: visit the National Relay Service website, <https://www.dss.gov.au/contact/national-relay-service>

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

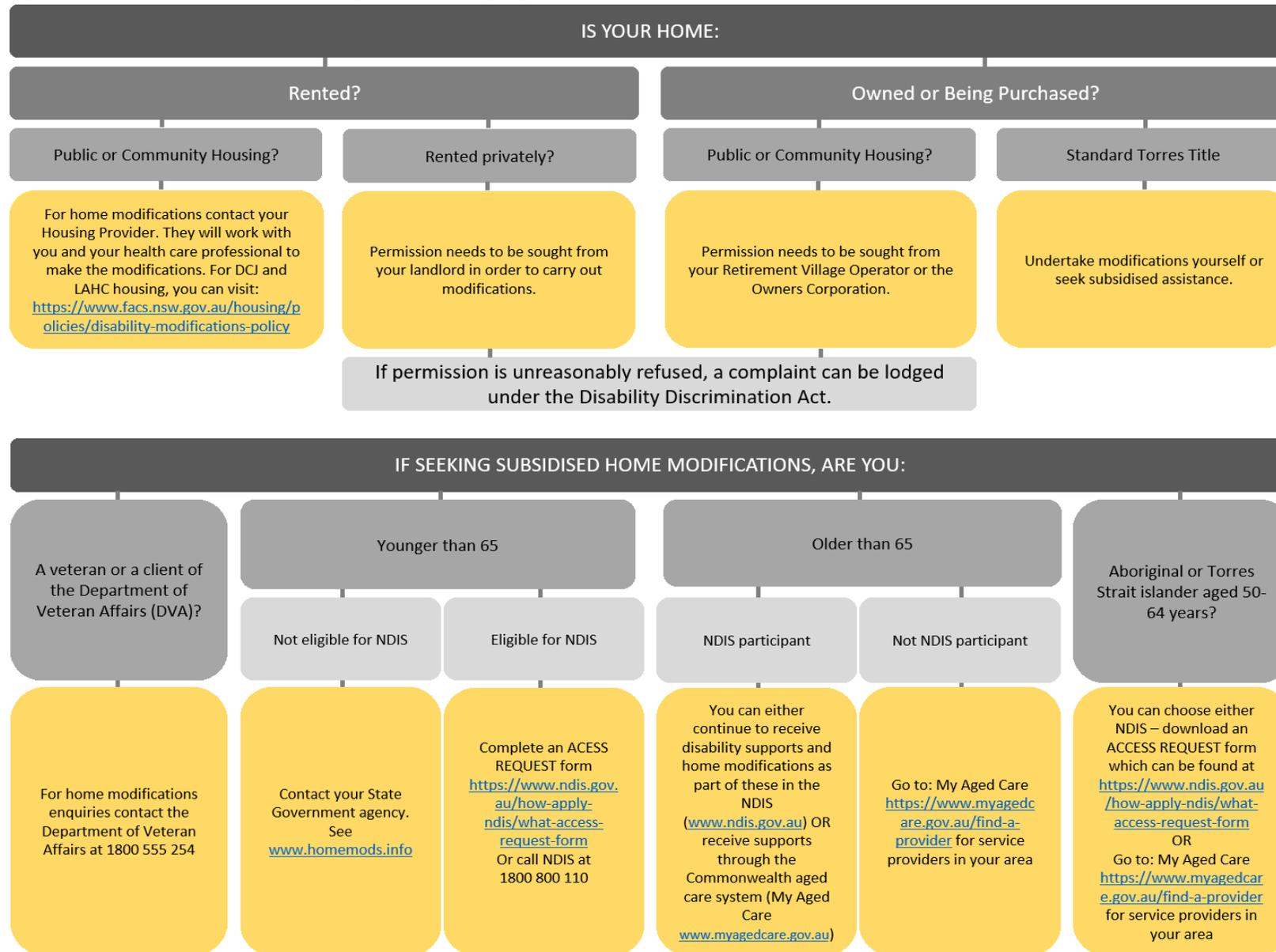


Figure 1. General guide for arranging home modifications