



# Home Modifications Guide

State of Rhode Island  
Department of Human Services  
Office of Rehabilitation Services  
40 Fountain Street - Providence, RI 02903

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# **This Information on Home Modification is offered as a guide and may not be all inclusive of the Home Modification process with ORS**

## **Home Modifications**

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If you are a person with a disability who requires home modifications in order to obtain or maintain competitive integrated employment, where do you go for answers? What kinds of modifications are needed so that you can enter, maneuver within and exit your home safely? What financial assistance is available for home modifications?

The answer is:



Department of Human Services  
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# What Are Home Modifications?

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Home modifications are structural alterations to your home that allow you to work in competitive integrated employment or participate in an Employment Plan leading to competitive integrated employment. Examples of home modifications include installation of a ramp or a lift, and the alteration of a doorway so that you can enter, maneuver within, or exit your home unassisted. They may also include bathroom modifications or other alterations you need to achieve your employment goal.

## What Home Modification Services Are Provided by the Office of Rehabilitation Services?

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The Office of Rehabilitation Services provides home modifications for eligible individuals when they require them in order to participate in employment activities and enter or maintain competitive integrated employment. Modifications to your home are limited to and designed to meet your functional needs for employment purposes.



The Office of Rehabilitation Services will not participate in financing extensive reconstruction, new construction or major structural additions.

For ORS to modify a home, the home must be found to be up to all city codes, or we cannot do any modifications.

If the property is not owned by you, then you must provide a notarized statement from the property owner, that states you will be allowed to reside on the premises for a ten (10) year period.

When property associations are involved, such as condominium associations, it will be up to you to research the procedure for making changes to the property.

The following are examples of home modifications that the Office of Rehabilitation Services may provide:

- ◆ Widening doors
- ◆ Doing minor bathroom modifications
- ◆ Installing a roll-in-shower
- ◆ Constructing ramps
- ◆ Adding grab bars or handrails
- ◆ Installing residential stair/chair lifts

The ORS will not assist with modification on properties owned by a public entity such as a housing authority that otherwise has a legal obligation to provide accessible housing



# How Does the Home Modification Process Work?

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## Determining Eligibility for the Office of Rehabilitation Services Program

In order to be provided by ORS, home modifications must be part of an approved Employment Plan. The first step is to determine if competitive integrated employment is your goal. If this is the case, you may apply for vocational rehabilitation services. When you apply for vocational rehabilitation services, a VR counselor will ask that you provide information about your disability, and how it has affected your ability to find and/or keep a job.

With your VR counselor, you also will review your employment and educational history. This and other information you offer will help your counselor determine if you are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

The eligibility criteria are:

- ◆ You have a physical, intellectual or emotional impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment;
- ◆ You can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from VR services; and
- ◆ You require VR services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain gainful employment.



## Your Employment Plan

If you are eligible, you will develop an Employment Plan, called the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which identifies what you need in order to attain your specific vocational goal. Home modification services may be included in this plan, if they are required for you to attain or maintain your vocational goal.

## Your VR Counselor and an Adaptive Housing Coordinator are Available to Help You with the Home Modification Process

The process of home modifications through the Office of Rehabilitation Services is complex and involves an investment on your part, and by ORS. It may require a financial investment on your part as well. For this reason, the Office of Rehabilitation Services has assigned an Adaptive Housing Coordinator who assist you and your VR Counselor through the process. Once you, your counselor and their regional supervisor have determined that home modifications are needed for you to achieve your employment goal, a referral will be made to this Coordinator.

This Adaptive Housing Coordinator works with you and your VR Counselor on the home modification process, per the DHS/ORS Regulations and Procedures; coordinates with the contracted/licensed architects to review,



recommend, approve, and inspect your home modifications; and responds to inquiries from consumers, counselors, home improvement contractors, vendors and building officials regarding the home modification process.

## **Time Frame**

The entire home modification process from initial site visit to final inspection can take up to a year. Sometimes it takes longer, depending on the extent of the project, the availability of the products, the availability of qualified contractors, and the decisions you make. The process begins with an Independent Living Assessment, which will help you determine what modifications are needed in order to help you prepare for competitive integrated employment. The assessment will be completed on-site by an occupational therapist or other professional skilled in assessing adaptations to the home.

After the referral for adaptive housing has been made, the VR Counselor, Region Supervisor and Adaptive Housing Coordinator will discuss the process and scope of work, and the architect will take measurements and pictures of your home based on that discussion. The architect will prepare preliminary drawings. Once the preliminary drawing is received by your VR Counselor and the Adaptive Housing Coordinator, your VR Counselor will review them with you. If changes need to be made



your VR Counselor will schedule a conference call among the architect, yourself, the Adaptive Housing Coordinator and anyone else you wish to have input into the design revision.

After this discussion, the architect will produce the final specifications and drawings. When these drawings and specifications are received, you and your VR Counselor will bid the project (see **Bids, Awards & Client Responsibilities** below).

At times, home improvement contractors encounter unavoidable delays due to weather conditions, town zoning and permit requirements, the availability of accessibility products, equipment fabrication, or cooperation from equipment installers. If you feel that the contractor is taking unnecessarily long to complete the job, you should contact your VR Counselor.

### **Bids, Awards & Client Responsibilities**

ORS requires you to obtain bids from at least 3 qualified home improvement contractors in your area. You should begin this search shortly after the initial site visit with the architect and your VR Counselor. You may find home improvement contractors through your town building inspector's office, family, friends, neighbors, local newspapers, or the telephone book.



**They also must apply for and be approved as a State of RI approved vendor with ORS.** If the home improvement contractor is not already an ORS-approved vendor, it may delay the start of the project.

This is your opportunity to interview prospective home improvement contractors and to do a reference check, so you will feel comfortable with the contractor who may work in your home.

ORS will provide names of contractors with whom we have previously done business. You are not required to use these contractors. Home improvement contractors must be licensed and have proof of insurance. Additionally, the contractor must apply for and be approved as a State of RI vendor with ORS.

Once you have obtained at least 3 bids, you may submit them to your VR Counselor who will review them with the Adaptive Housing Coordinator. Selection is done in accordance with the State bidding requirements, and generally ORS awards the work to the lowest qualified bidder.

It is your responsibility to provide reasonable access to your home to perform the work. Without your cooperation, your project will be delayed. Should you arrange with the contractor to upgrade the work proposed, or to do additional work not covered in the contract, you must make



arrangements directly with the contractor, and be responsible for payment.

**If the changes in any way impact the original design or specifications for which ORS approved, those changes must be coordinated with your VR Counselor, the Adaptive Housing Coordinator, and the architect. ORS is not responsible in any way for the consequences of privately contracted work.**

You must notify your VR Counselor when the home improvement contractor begins the work on your home, anytime throughout the process when you have any questions or concerns, and when your project is completed, so that ORS may conduct a final inspection. It is important that you maintain contact with your VR Counselor throughout the modification process. Notify them of any changes in your personal situation that may require amending, revising, or canceling your home modification and Employment Plan.

When the project is completed, there is a one-year warranty on the products and the job. During this year, if any problems arise, you may contact the contractor directly, or call your VR Counselor. After the first year, it is your responsibility to repair and maintain any equipment or construction completed on your property.



## Home Improvement Contractor Requirements And Responsibilities

The contractor shall provide all services, materials, and labor that are necessary to complete the project as indicated on, or can reasonably be inferred from, the construction drawings.

The contractor shall be registered with the RI Secretary of State. The contractor must show evidence of a valid home improvement registration and evidence of workers' compensation (if applicable) and liability insurance, at the time of the bid award.

The contractor shall base the bid on the referenced drawings and specifications. If the contractor wants to substitute a product, s/he must submit all the specifications and manufacturer's product literature to the architect for review and approval.

The contractor shall verify existing conditions and dimensions before starting the project and be responsible for the same. The contractor shall verify all dimensions with the consumer to satisfy specific accessibility needs.

The contractor shall contact the architect before starting the project if there are any discrepancies between the drawings and actual conditions that could affect the successful completion of this project.



The contractor shall apply for, obtain, and pay for all permits. All work shall be done per applicable city/town building codes, regulations and standards of construction.

The contractor shall remove and discard all demolition materials off site. The consumer has the right to salvage selected demolition items if it does not adversely affect the construction schedule.

The contractor and you shall schedule and coordinate the work to reduce disturbances to you and your family who will be occupying the premises during construction.

Within applicable code, the contractor shall functionally patch and repair all surfaces disturbed or altered by construction and/or renovations.

The contractor shall clean up the site daily.

When the work is complete, you and the contractor shall contact your VR Counselor to schedule a final inspection which is completed by the Architect.

The contractor shall coordinate all work detailed in the project specifications with work required in the installation of the equipment (See **Equipment-Vendor Responsibilities** which follows).



Generally, when the project involves special equipment, a separate vendor will supply the equipment. Examples include: stairlift, ramps, etc.

The contractor shall warrant all work including work coordinated/sub-contracted out by them i.e. electrical, plumbing, etc., including labor and materials, for one year from the date of acceptance by the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

### **Equipment - Vendor Responsibilities**

When equipment is required to make your home accessible, a separate vendor may provide and install the equipment. The vendor must coordinate and cooperate with the home improvement contractor to ensure a smooth and efficient installation. It is the responsibility of the equipment vendor to give you instruction on the use of the equipment, manuals and all warranty information. The vendor will contact you to arrange a convenient time to install the equipment.



# What Should I Know About Having My Home Modified?

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A home renovation can be both exciting and stressful. Your normal routine and family life may be disturbed, and you may encounter some inconveniences. Some mess and dust are inevitable, and patience is required. When the home improvement contractor starts your modifications, unexpected conditions may be found, such as asbestos, carpenter ants, corroded pipes, or inadequate electricity. Repair or any upgrade is the responsibility of the homeowner(s), as ORS only patches to match existing conditions that are disturbed in the modification process.

Often the tile, carpet, linoleum or wallpaper is no longer manufactured, and the home improvement contractor must find the best match. If you wish to redo the finish work, you may contract separately with the contractor to do this work. It will be your responsibility to pay the contractor on the schedule you have arranged with him or her. ORS takes no responsibility with the contractor if the outcome is not satisfactory to you.

Many home improvement contractors are small businesspeople who may have several small jobs going at the same time. This may mean scheduling delays. When this happens, you should contact the contractor immediately and find out



what happened. If you are not satisfied with the reason or would like assistance, contact your VR Counselor, so appropriate action may be taken. ORS expects the home improvement contractor to clean up and store his/her tools after each day's work. You may be asked to store tools and supplies at your home. Again, these arrangements are directly with you and the contractor.

If a proposed external ramp is close to your property line, your town may require a variance. The fees associated with this town requirement are the responsibility of the property owner(s). While you work with the town or the surveyor to satisfy this requirement, the home improvement contractor cannot proceed on your job. You should know that this may cause a delay in the completion of your project. Weather conditions may also prevent your job from being finished on time.

If your bathroom is modified to accommodate your needs, you may be without its use for a week or more. It is your responsibility to make arrangements for your family and yourself during this time. Also, when a roll-in-shower replaces a tub or shower, some water on your floors will be a common occurrence.

You will need to be prepared to take the necessary measures with each use.



# What Are Some Potential Funding Sources?

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If you **are not eligible** for assistance from ORS, the following are other potential funding sources:

- ◆ The Division of Worker's Compensation (401) 462-8100 (for individuals who have been injured on the job)
- ◆ Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) (401)-738-1013
- ◆ RI Livable Home Modification Grants, Governor's Commission on Disabilities (401)462-0100
- ◆ The Veteran's Administration (800) 827-1000 (for veterans with service-connected disabilities)
- ◆ Donations from civic/religious organizations
- ◆ Neighborhood improvement grants
- ◆ Tax deductions

It may be possible to deduct your home modifications as a medical expense on your federal income tax. If you have questions concerning capital improvements, request a copy of IRS Publication 502, Medical and Dental Expenses, which contains additional information and examples.

Publication 502 also has information about upkeep and operating expenses that are deductible for these capital improvement items, and about tax incentives for landlords who improve accessibility or rental property for persons with disabilities.



# What Will the Home Modifications Cost Me?

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Your VR Counselor will let you know the overall cost of the home modification, and the extent to which ORS will provide financial assistance. ORS may ask that you contribute toward the cost of the home modification.

# What is the Client Assistance Program?

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The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is an independent advocacy program located within the Disability Rights Rhode Island. CAP provides advice, advocacy, and, if necessary, legal representation to individuals who have concerns about the rehabilitation services they are receiving from ORS, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, independent living centers, or other community rehabilitation programs.

CAP is located at the Disability Rights Rhode Island 33 Broad Street, Suite 601, Providence, RI 02903; (401) 831-3150 Voice; (401) 831-5335 TTY; (401) 274-5568 (Fax).



# Notice of Non-Discrimination

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The Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services, is an Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action Employer and offers its programs regardless of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities. For further information, contact: The Community Relations Liaison Officer at 401.462.2130 (V) or 401.462.6239 (TTY).

ORS hopes that this handbook has been a useful resource of information to you. If there are any parts of it that you do not understand, please call: Your VR Counselor or Sandra Perez, Adaptive Housing Coordinator at (401) 787-3094.

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