



ACTION GUIDE

The Power of Cross-Sector Partnerships to Advance Home Modifications



This action guide is designed to provide tools for building cross-sector partnerships to promote home modifications that support community living. The audience for this action guide includes organizations in the aging and disability networks, other community-based organizations, housing providers, public housing authorities, and health systems and providers.

Why Are Home Modifications Important for Community Living?

Most people want to remain in their homes and communities as their needs change over time.¹ Yet, as people age or experience changes in their ability to perform daily activities, their home environments may no longer support their needs. In fact, the majority of existing housing does not meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. For example, less than one-third of homes have basic accessibility features—like a no-step entry and hall and door widths that accommodate a wheelchair—that help people to live and actively participate in their communities.²

This disconnect can have an impact on older adults and people with disabilities because housing affects health. A mismatch between a home environment and the needs of the people who live in it can lead to injuries that require care and may reduce well-being. Conversely, home modifications, like grab bar and shower seats, can reduce the risk of falls and other injuries.

Home modifications give people control of their own environment by changing the variables that surround them. Modifications

can help an individual bathe safely and independently, more easily enter and exit their own home, and can reduce the need for care. The home is also where many home and community-based services are delivered and a place for social interactions.

Not only do home modifications help older adults and people with disabilities live in the communities and homes of their choice, but they also provide a safer environment for the family caregivers, service providers, and volunteers who support them. Many opportunities exist for individuals, professionals, and organizations that serve older adults and people with disabilities to enhance the suitability of the home environment.

What Are Home Modifications?

Home modifications are changes made to a home that help create a living environment that is accessible, safe, and promotes independence. These changes can include removing hazards that could lead to falls or other injuries. Or they can involve adding supportive features, such as those that improve a person's ability to engage in daily activities, care for themselves, or maintain access to community participation.

Home modifications also include assistive technology (AT)—devices, technology, and services that help people manage everyday tasks and navigate the home, such as transfer benches for bathing and voice-activated controls for lighting, blinds, and thermostats.

Why Create Cross-Sector Partnerships for Home Modifications?

Home modification services are delivered by the housing, disability and aging, and health sectors. Each of these sectors contributes unique skills and services to address individuals' home modification needs.

Although organizations can and do sometimes work independently of one another, there is increasing recognition that cross-sector partnerships have the potential to yield benefits that are more difficult for a single organization to accomplish by itself. When an organization operates alone, it is more likely to experience challenges of limited reach, resources, and perspectives.

Working together can improve communication, coordination, and service delivery between organizations from different sectors that support the same population. These cross-sector partnerships can also combine knowledge, expertise, and insights. Together, they can expand the reach, quality, and effectiveness of home modification services. The partners also can conduct collective efforts toward shared goals such as streamlined access to home

modifications and AT, increased housing stability, and gains in people transitioning out of institutions to return to a home in the community. Examples of cross-sector partnerships and strategies to build them can be found under the Housing and Services Resource Center's [“Prior Events and Webinar Materials”](#) page.³

How Can You Create a Cross-Sector Partnership?

Forming a cross-sector partnership involves identifying potential partners with a shared commitment to person-centered approaches, pitching your idea for a partnership, and reaching an agreement on goals and how to work together. As you review the following details about these steps, consider whether you already have potential partners to engage.

1. Identify Potential Partners

Do a quick scan to identify community sectors and existing organizations involved in home modifications that may be interested in forming a partnership. Remember to look for existing organizations working on related issues—[falls prevention coalitions](#),⁴ home safety or healthy homes task forces, and organizations delivering grant projects such as ones funded by HUD's [Older Adult Home Modification Program](#).⁵

Below is a wide-ranging list of potential partners. Consider what types of partners could help to address home modification needs in your community to support community living.

AGING AND DISABILITY SECTOR

- Aging and disability resource centers;
- Aging service providers;
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) advisory boards;
- Area agencies on aging;
- AT specialists;
- Centers for independent living;
- City disability access commissions and/or implementation departments;
- Commissions on aging;
- Disability protection and advocacy system programs;
- Disability service providers;
- Elder abuse, rights, and justice programs;
- Local “village” organizations that provide aging in place and community living services for their members;
- Rehabilitation centers;
- Senior centers;
- State and local associations and advocacy organizations (e.g., AARP, Arthritis Foundation, Meals on Wheels);
- State and local councils on aging;
- State and territory AT programs;
- State councils on developmental disabilities;
- State units on aging;
- Statewide independent living councils; and
- Title VI Native American Aging Programs.

HEALTH SECTOR

- City, county, state health departments;
- Durable medical equipment suppliers;

- EMS and first responders;
- Federally Qualified Health Centers;
- Health educators;
- Health plans;
- Home health care agencies;
- Home health care providers;
- Hospitals;
- Managed care organizations;
- Occupational therapists;
- Physical therapists;
- Recreational therapists; and
- Speech and language pathologists.

HOUSING SECTOR

- Architects;
- Builders;
- City, county, state housing and community development departments;
- Contractors;
- Hardware and home improvement stores;
- Home modification and repair programs;
- Interior designers;
- Modular housing developers;
- Non-profit community housing organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together;
- Public housing authorities;
- Regional offices of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD);
- Remodelers; and
- State housing finance agencies.

Additional Partners

Education Sector

Consider universities as a potential partner. Universities have developed programs such as the [Community Aging in Place—Advancing Better Living for Elders \(CAPABLE\) program](#),⁶ administered by the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, and the [Home Hazard Removal Program \(HARP\)](#),⁷ administered by the Washington University in St. Louis. Some universities are federally funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL) through [Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers \(RERCs\)](#), which develop new rehabilitation technologies that support people with disabilities. University health education, nursing, occupational therapy, and physical therapy departments often have health promotion and safety programs in the community. Universities and communities can work together on a common issue that needs advancement but has few resources attached to it. Researchers and students can apply academic knowledge and gain insights into resident needs and community issues.

University departments can be a partner for student interns, joint grant proposals, and technical assistance. Community

vocational technology programs can also serve as valuable partners.

Technology Sector

Technology plays an important role in supporting community living for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Technologies—such as remote monitoring, algorithms that detect early signs of a fall or illness, remote exercise and medication management tools, smart appliances, and sensors—can be valuable tools that promote safety, independence, and quality of life and support the work of caregivers. Consider involving organizations that develop, supply, or provide access to personal technology devices with accessibility features and applications in cross-sector partnerships.

Funders

State and community philanthropy and private foundations can play an important role in advancing grassroots efforts to improve health, housing, and quality of life in their states and communities. As private philanthropy expands its focus on disability, there may be opportunities to partner with philanthropies that have related missions and funding initiatives.

Additional Considerations

Person-Centered

Include the people who will be directly affected by the plans and decisions of the home modification partnership as equal members of the cross-sector partnership (e.g., older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers who need home modifications). Partnerships that include, listen to, and reflect the input of these voices in their planning will ensure that their activities consider the diverse personal preferences, needs, and concerns of the people they aim to support. Offer stipends, transportation, child care, and other supports to encourage the participation of people with lived experience using modifications.

Reflect the Community

Invite members of historically marginalized and underserved communities to provide essential insights. Having veterans, tribal communities, older adults living in rural areas, people with disabilities, individuals from underserved communities, and a range of culturally diverse populations represented at the table ensures that the discussion reflects a wide range of perspectives.

Broadband Access

About 14.5 million Americans do not have access to broadband internet,⁸ leaving them unable to use some AT and smart technology that is available today. Partnerships can advocate to address this equity issue. Visit the [NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association website](#)⁹ to learn more and to [find partners](#)¹⁰ in your community.



TIP: Search for cross-sector partners in your state and opportunities to team up for home modifications at homemods.org/hmin.

2. Approach Potential Partners

Before reaching out to a potential partner, consider whether a mutual colleague or partner might introduce you and help set the stage for a productive discussion. Whether you have a referral or are introducing yourself, share information about your organization, the need in the broader community, and your ability to address the need. Identify mutually beneficial opportunities, challenges, and areas where both organizations' goals and interests align. Communicate the possible benefits of collaboration, be open to discussing shared interests, and suggest how the partnership may efficiently advance their goals and reduce challenges without expanding their workload.

3. Reach Agreement on How You Will Work Together

When developing a cross-sector partnership, determine how you will work together to promote person-centered approaches that reflect the needs of the community, and leverage the considerations listed above. Define the roles of each organization, including leadership and project coordination. A two or three-member collaboration may have well-defined roles for each partner, while a coalition requires a lead to manage the group and ensure that it focuses on shared goals rather than members' individual goals. Other leadership formats include co-coordinators, a steering committee, and subcommittees with co-chairs. Document the level and area of commitment for each

member of the partnership, if possible.

There are different types of partnerships with varying levels of scope, commitment, roles, responsibilities, risks, and rewards. Examples include:

- A memorandum of understanding, or MOU, between a local hospital and a non-profit in the community that provides AT and/or transition services so persons with accessibility needs may return home after discharge.
- A regional network of entities that convenes to coordinate activities to raise awareness of and provide educational opportunities for falls prevention in the home, create and maintain a webpage that lists falls prevention resources in the area, and share updates that are relevant to their work.
- A statewide home modification coalition with formal member roles and responsibilities, a steering committee, a two-year strategic plan, and subcommittees for advocacy, service delivery, and sustainability.

Smaller-scale partnerships between two organizations can improve service delivery for the people those agencies serve, while coalitions can bring about long-term systems-level impact by informing policies and delivering direct service programs. Working as part of larger-scale partnerships such as coalitions can help organizations take "ownership" of an issue within their state

or community. This is especially important with home modifications, as no one entity is responsible for home modifications, while the delivery of home modification services could potentially involve housing, aging and disability, and health promotion programs and industries.

4. Think Sustainability from the Start

Some partnerships are created for a project with a defined time period. However, if a cross-sector partnership is to be embedded in the community and maintained into the future, partners should consider how they will

sustain their work from the start.

It is important to secure commitment to participate from organization or agency leaders. This way, organizations can find replacements quickly if a staff person leaves their position in the partnership. Consider creating an external advisory group for the partnership to help with sustainability and community buy-in. Secure commitment by using confidentiality and data-sharing agreements, obtaining leadership buy-in and continuity commitments such as replacement strategy, and approaches to leverage and align resources.



TIP: Develop an “Inventory of Resources” based on assets that partners bring to the table and assess what additional services, contributions, or involvement might be needed.

5. Reach Agreement on the Home Modification Need to Address in Your State or Community

A cross-sector partnership must determine its geographic focus and target population. Conducting an environmental scan and identifying the home modification needs in a state or community can help a partnership determine a geographic focus. It can also specify the priority population, for example, people with disabilities of all ages, older adults, or individuals with a specific income level.

To demonstrate the home modification need in your community or state, seek data that define the problem. Sources of relevant data include the following.

DISABILITY AND AGING DATA

ADA PARC¹¹

This research collaboration between six regional ADA centers examines factors that influence the participation of people with disabilities in their communities in three areas: community living, community participation, and work/economic issues.

Local area agency on aging needs assessments and data are available from the [National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging](#)¹² or other national survey data from USAging.

[State Assistive Technology \(AT\) Plan](#)¹³

Each state must create a three-year plan that describes how it will implement its state AT program.

[State Plan for Independent Living \(SPIL\)](#)¹⁴

Each state must create a two-year state plan that describes how it will support residents' independent living needs.

[State Plans on Aging](#)¹⁵

State units on aging develop these plans which include results of a needs assessment of the state's older adult population and goals to address these needs.

HEALTH DATA

Health systems and hospitals can be sources of information on falls-related emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

[Local departments of public health](#)¹⁶ can help identify ZIP codes with high rates of falls-related injuries and deaths.

[State departments of public health](#)¹⁷ can provide state-level demographics and injury-related data.

Local 911 and/or emergency response data can be obtained to evaluate the most frequent type of emergency response calls (lift assists, etc.).

HOUSING DATA

[American Housing Survey](#)¹⁸

Sponsored by HUD and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, this national housing survey covers topics including housing tenure, householder age and disability status, and the year the structure was built. Data are available on nonmetro areas.

[Consolidated Plans](#)¹⁹

To obtain Community Development Block Grant funds for home modifications, a community must submit a consolidated plan to HUD. This requires a needs assessment of affordable housing, community development, and other issues related to the request.

POPULATION DATA

[American Community Survey](#)²⁰

Provides detailed population and housing data.

[Current Population Survey](#)²¹

Sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), this data source provides labor force statistics for the U.S. population.

To get first-hand perspectives, speak with people who have used or could benefit from using home modifications. Seek input from a range of populations within the community, including those from historically marginalized or underserved communities, to gain additional insights related to specific needs and potential gaps in service.

Such partnerships should also understand the current home modification activity in their state or community. The partners themselves are a great place to start, as they will likely know of

existing home modification efforts as well as gaps in services, resources, and opportunities.



TIP: Visit the data accordion on the [Housing and Services Resource Center Tools webpage²²](#) for additional sources of information, including links to aging, disability, health, and housing data from federal agencies that can help determine the partnership's geographic focus and priority populations. Search for disability and homeownership rates, then compare the percentages for different cities, counties, or states against the national average and against each other to identify areas with the greatest need.

6. Reach Agreement on Partnership's Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Use what you have learned about the home modification needs in your state or community to determine the partnership's mission, goals, and objectives. All should work together to develop a mission statement that sets the tone for partnership activities and unifies those involved. The mission statement should clearly identify the what, how, and why of the partnership's aims in clear, brief terms.

The goals and objectives set a plan for the partnership and guide its activities. Coalitions and other large-scale partnerships often combine their goals, objectives, and activities in a strategic plan—a “living” document that guides efforts over time. This should also include baseline data, measurable outcomes that have a reasonable chance of success, specific tasks, milestones, and timelines.



TIP: In drafting the mission, consider the partnership's vision for how its state or community would improve if it fully addressed its home modification needs.

7. Determine Activities to Move the Effort Forward

The partnership's activities should derive from its mission, goals, and objectives, all of which would be grounded in the state's or community's needs. Collaborations can discover solutions to identified gaps by increasing awareness about home modification needs, gaining grassroots support for policies, alternatives, and initiatives across the disability and aging, health, and housing sectors.

Types of activities to carry out the goals and objectives include the following.

PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

This can involve disseminating press releases and posting stories on the websites and social media channels maintained by the collaboration and the individual partners. Consider the most effective way to reach prospective stakeholders and the broader audience. You can reach potential partners and consumers with printed flyers from trusted places: health care facilities, faith-based organizations, as well as area agencies on aging, centers for independent living, and community centers. Such activities build awareness of the need for home modifications and AT and provide information on actions to address the need.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

These activities aim to increase awareness among consumers and professionals of the importance and availability of home modification services and AT in their communities. Cross-sector partnerships can also educate professionals and providers in the housing industry, aging and disability networks, and the health sector about ways they can be involved in increasing consumers' awareness of, access to, and use of home modifications and AT.

ADVOCACY

Cross-sector partnerships can gather the support of the community and advocate with public decision-makers for the right to community participation to be reflected in plans and policies related to disability and aging, housing, and health. Partners can present at city council, local aging commission, and chamber of commerce meetings. They can also work with their local centers for independent living and area agencies on aging to identify other community forums that partners may leverage to impact change.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Partners can engage in cross-sector collaboration to strengthen their response to the home modification and AT needs in their states and communities.



TIP: The week of the first day of fall each year is nationally recognized as Falls Prevention Awareness Week. Communities and organizations often use the commemoration to raise awareness about the risk of falls and the services or programs they offer through presentations, health promotion programs, health fairs, and workshops. Visit these websites for educational fact sheets and other resources to disseminate in your community.

- [Falls Prevention Awareness Week for Professionals²³](#)
- [Home Modification Consumer Awareness Resources²⁴](#)

8. Check-In to Review and Reassess

To improve functioning and measure success, partnerships should evaluate their activities to determine their impact. This takes planning. A dedicated individual or committee can help ensure that the right information is gathered at the right time. Analyze and interpret evaluation results in relation to your goals to understand the impact of partnership activities

on individuals, organizations, and the community or state. Use the results to:

- Develop a value proposition;
- Highlight accomplishments to members, potential partners, and funders; and
- Raise awareness of the importance of home modifications with decision-makers and the wider community.



TIP: In larger collaborations, partners start off eager, but unless they see value in the partnership, their interest may wane. Survey partners to determine whether they feel their expertise is being fully utilized and that their participation in the effort is worthwhile and appreciated. If ratings are low, find out why.

9. Know What Resources Are Available to Support Your Work

HOUSING AND SERVICES RESOURCE CENTER

The [Housing and Services Resource Center \(HSRC\)](#)²⁵ was created for people who work in the organizations and systems that provide housing resources and homelessness services, behavioral and other health services, aging and independent living services and supportive services, and others who are working to help people live successfully and stably in the community. Its goal is to foster collaboration and cross-sector partnerships to streamline access to services, better leverage resources, and make community living possible for more people. The center is part of a [partnership](#) between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and HUD and includes a federally coordinated approach to providing resources, program guidance, training, and technical assistance.

FALL PREVENTION CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

The [Fall Prevention Center of Excellence \(FPCE\)](#)²⁶ at the [University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology](#)²⁷ is dedicated to promoting aging in place and independent living for persons of all ages and abilities. It offers research, training, and technical assistance opportunities for professionals who wish to respond to the increasing demand for home modification services and address fall prevention in the home environment. FPCE

also serves as an information clearinghouse on home modifications for professionals and consumers with resources such as the [Home Modification Information Network](#)²⁸ and the [Home Modification Toolkit](#)²⁹ for professionals.

THE NATIONAL FALLS PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER

The [National Falls Prevention Resource Center](#)³⁰ is housed at the National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging. The resource center increases public awareness about the risk of falls and supports the implementation and dissemination of evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies across the nation. It provides a wide range of resources, including a fall risk assessment, home safety, community partnership guidance, available evidence-based health promotion programs, and Falls Prevention Awareness Week activities.

AT3 CENTER

The [AT3 Center](#)³¹ is the Assistive Technology Act National Training, Technical Assistance and Public Internet Site project funded under a grant award by ACL. The mission of the AT3 Center is to increase access to and acquisition of AT by individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. AT3 provides technical assistance and supports to State and Territory Assistive Technology Programs funded under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended (P.L. 108-364).

COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

The [Community Tool Box](#)³² is a resource for people working to build healthier communities and bring about social change. Provided as a public service by the University of Kansas [Center for Community Health and Development](#),³³ the Tool Box includes information on building multi-sector collaborations, coalitions, and partnerships.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO STATE COALITION BUILDING FOR FALLS PREVENTION

Developed by the [National Council on Aging](#),³⁴ this [guide](#)³⁵ provides practical tools, resources, a framework, and strategies to assist fall prevention coalition-building efforts that states can share with communities collaborating to implement fall prevention interventions.

Falls are the number one cause of injuries and death from injury among older adults,³⁶ and adults with disabilities aged 45 to 59 report fall injuries at higher rates than those 60 and up.³⁷

Conclusion

Home modifications alter home environments to support people as they age in place or experience changes in their ability to do daily activities. Multiple sectors deliver home modification services. The aging and disability networks can improve coordination and service delivery and increase access to home modifications for older adults and people

with disabilities by partnering with housing providers, public housing authorities, health systems and providers, and other community-based organizations.

To form cross-sector partnerships, do the steps and use the resources in this action guide. Additional information on home modifications, accessibility, and cross-sector partnerships is available on the [HSRC website](#).³⁸

Endnotes

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