

# Home Modification Design and Construction Strategies for Aging in Place

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Evidence derived from numerous studies conducted by federal and state government agencies, and advocates for independent living attest to the need for accessible housing for individuals desiring to remain in their homes as they age, i.e., age in place. A recent American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) study found that 73 percent of individuals aged 45 and older would like to stay in their current residences as long as possible, and 67 percent would like to stay in their communities as long as possible. That being said, contractors and designers typically do not “build in” the appropriate measures within residential structures to allow individuals to do so. A group of researchers from Auburn University have begun to develop design strategies to address this need, in cooperation with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

An initial research objective was to determine what home modification suggestions are currently available for contractors and designers to reference when conceptualizing an aging in place-related project. The research methodology included three steps: (1) perform a literature review to discern all pertinent publications, (2) review each publication for content, and compile recommendations into a single Microsoft Excel data table, and (3) analyze findings from the literature review to develop a list of suggested home modifications.

Nine separate documents and web-based databases describing aging in place home modifications were reviewed. Three publications were found to provide limited recommendations, and were discarded. The remaining six publications provided 165 separate home modification recommendations, with significant crossover between the publications. The authors further summarized the 165 recommendations into 56 generalized action items. Moreover, each of the action items were cross-referenced against federal guidelines such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Housing Act Design Manual, and the National Institute of Building Sciences Design Guidelines for the Visual Environment

The research findings show that there are substantial resources available for contractors, designers, and homeowners to reference when conceptualizing an aging in place project, but the information is scattered and not widely utilized. These results show the need for a centralized resource where project stakeholders can gain knowledge regarding aging in place strategies. Future research should address the development of a repository for such information.

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