

Adapting your Home

THIS FACT SHEET describes ways in which you can make your home a safer and easier to manage environment for a family member with disability.

Planning and making home alterations can take time so it's wise to start as soon as possible. Remember that any significant alterations, such as rails or ramps, need to comply with Australian Standards.

Around the House

- > Occupational therapists can assess your situation and suggest the most appropriate equipments and aids, such as the need for wheelchair ramps or handrails near the stairs, outside steps and in the bathroom.
- > Arrange the furniture so that it is easy to move about. Some people need a clear passage. Others may need supports along the way.
- > Install smoke detectors in all rooms.
- > Keep the temperature inside the house comfortable for someone who cannot move about.
- > Remove extension leads or loose cords and don't use loose rugs or mats on floors.
- > Keep outside paths free of loose things you could trip on.
- > Room-to-room communication and alarms can be arranged with plug-in baby alarms or more sophisticated alarms. A buzzer or doorbell could be wired to a light-touch switch. Ask your occupational therapist.
- > A hands-free phone makes it possible to talk without lifting the handset. Choose one with a memory function for frequently used numbers. Phones are also available with large numbers for people with poor vision.

- > Get a "pick-up stick" – a metal stick with a lifting claw at one end that is closed by a trigger at the other end –for picking up things out of reach.

In the Bathroom

- > A plastic chair or stool in the shower allows your family member to sit down. A long-handled sponge, soap on a rope and a suction cup to keep soap in place may be useful. If possible, it is best to have no step into the shower.
- > Use a non-slip bathmat. Stick anti-slip adhesive shapes on the bottom of the bath.
- > Try a raised toilet seat or a mobile commode that can be wheeled over the toilet.
- > Install hand rails beside the toilet and shower.
- > An electric toothbrush is ideal for people who have difficulty cleaning their teeth.
- > Consider installing individual hot and cold taps or a hot water system that is thermostatically controlled to prevent hot-water burns.

In the Bedroom

- > A person should be able to sit on their bed with their feet flat to the floor. If the bed is too high, consider having its legs shortened. If too low, sit the bed on special raisers.
- > Bed sticks or "monkey poles" are available that provide something to hold on to so a person can swing themselves upright in bed.
- > A commode or urinal may overcome the problem of toileting at night. A plastic sheet on the bed is useful when someone has incontinence.

- > Special mattresses to increase comfort in bed are available: airbeds, waterbeds, net beds, deep mattresses. Mattress elevators raise a person from lying to sitting.
- > Consider satin sheets. They make it easier to move in bed.

Dressing

- > Use clothes that are easy to put on and quick to fasten – front-opening dresses, skirts or trousers with elastic waist bands, track suit trousers, clip-on ties, cardigans rather than jumpers, slip-on shoes, elastic shoelaces, stretch fabrics without zips or buttons.
- > Aids for dressing include devices for putting on socks, long shoehorns, gadgets for doing up shoes and foot stools.

In the Kitchen

- > Benches and tables should be the right height for the person to work at or have meals at while sitting – with room for a wheelchair if necessary.
- > Useful gadgets include: steel-pronged, wooden boards that secure vegetables for cutting; pot stabilisers that secure saucepans to stove tops during stirring; a tap “turner” for someone who cannot easily grasp a tap.
- > Special bowls, cups, knives, forks and spoons are available for people with restricted hand function.
- > Plastic is more practical and safer than china and glass if the person has difficulty holding objects.
- > A plate guard that attaches to the side of the plate stops food escaping and gives the person something to push against.

Financial Assistance

Talk to your occupational therapist or social worker to see if your family is eligible.

Victorian Aids & Equipment Program: This program provides funding for aids, equipment and home modifications for people who are not eligible for help under other government services. An occupational therapist, physiotherapist, your

condition-specific support organisation or the Independent Living Centre (below) can help to organise your application for funding.

Home and Community Care: This program can arrange maintenance and home modifications, such as the fitting of handrails. Contact your local council.

The Home Renovation Service: This service provides free home inspection and advice to those with a disabled family member. Telephone: (03) 9616 6170 or free call: 1800 134 872.

Equipment loans: Contact your condition-specific support organisation to enquire about equipment loans or hire services.

Contacts & Resources

Occupational therapists: These can be contacted through your doctor, hospital, community health centre or your condition-specific support organisation. Occupational Therapy Australia, Victoria, can provide the names of therapists in private practice: telephone (03) 9481 6866.

The Independent Living Centre: The centre has a wide range of aids and equipment on display. Occupational therapists and physiotherapists are available to answer questions, give advice and provide equipment-supplier details. Visit the centre between 9.00am and 4.30pm, weekdays, at 705 Geelong Rd, Brooklyn or 54 Railway Rd, Blackburn, Victoria.

Telephone: 1300 885 886 or (03) 9362 6111
fax: (03) 9314 9825.

Telstra Disability Inquiry Hotline: Ask Telstra about its range of telephone aids and services. Free call: 1800 068 424.