

HOME MODIFICATIONS

Helpful Information for Prescribers, the Veteran or their family

Home Modifications

- DVA will provide funding for modifications based upon **assessed clinical need as prescribed by an appropriate health professional and only for a gold card or white card holder (with assessed need due to an accepted disability)**.
- Simpler options should be trialled prior to any major modifications are considered. This includes consideration of alternative aids or equipment.
- The process of decision making through to the completion of major home modifications can take up to six months following initial review of the Occupational Therapy report in DVA.
- A 3-month post operative recovery period is required prior to consideration of major modifications e.g. post knee or hip replacements, (bathroom modification or ramps). Installation of rails may be considered earlier if the need will be ongoing.
- As a general rule, home modifications will only be provided for one residence. If an entitled person changes residence following home modifications, it is expected that they take into account their lifestyle needs and requirements in choosing a new residence.
- Home modifications are not funded by DVA for temporary or casual use, such as weekend leave from nursing home or respite.
- If an entitled person has a condition known to be degenerative and purchases a home which will present difficulties in the foreseeable future, the Department is not obliged to meet the costs of modifications or major equipment for that property.
- Home modifications will only be considered when the entitled person intends to remain living at the residence for the foreseeable future.
- DVA may not assume financial responsibility for major modifications to properties where it is obvious that internal or external access would have proven a problem given the natural ageing process of the individual.
- DVA will not be responsible for repairing structural defects/problems encountered during a modification and will not be liable for modifications to unsound structures.
- It is considered the homeowner's responsibility to maintain his/her own property. The Department will not accept financial responsibility for maintenance (repair) tasks within the home.
- DVA does not modify properties owned by the State Government (e.g. Department of Housing or Residential Care facilities). It does not provide modification to privately owned residential care facilities or community housing.
- The Department does not provide modifications on council owned land.
- The Department may not carry out major or minor modifications in retirement villages.
- An Authority to Install consent must be signed by the property owner, whether the resident or not, prior to commencement of work.
- The Department does not finance modifications in common areas (e.g. rails or paths in blocks of units used by other residents).
- Modifications will be made using basic cost items only and required based on the assessed clinical need. The homeowner may choose higher cost items or arrange for additional modifications to be completed at the same time as the essential modifications. This work should be itemised and a separate quote presented to the homeowner. The homeowner is responsible for all additional costs, and should make private arrangements with the builder for these items.

- The Department does not restore a property to its former state when the modification is no longer required. This should be understood and agreed to by the owner through the signing of the Department's 'Authority to Install' consent form. Demountable ramps will be retrieved by DVA when no longer required.
- Veterans may not be eligible for home modifications if they are in the process of, or in receipt of, a compensation/insurance settlement. In the latter instance however, the Department generally claims against the settlement.
- While the Department does ensure all trades people completing home modifications hold relevant licences and insurance, the Department does not guarantee the standard of workmanship. Any disputes should be directed to the relevant trade organisation. Home modifications are checked by the prescribing health professional upon completion to ensure the clinical needs are met.
- Where appropriate, all modifications should meet State Government and Local Government building standards. Wherever possible and appropriate, modifications should meet either of the following standards:
 - AS4299-1995 Adaptable Housing; or
 - AS1428-2001 Design for Access and Mobility.
 - All electrical work in wet areas should comply with AS/NZS 3018:2001.
 - If other Australian standards are developed, compliance is required

Bathroom modifications

- Bathroom modifications are provided according to assessed clinical and functional needs. DVA will only fund the simplest modification to meet these needs.
- Building materials should be basic to meet functional and clinical need. The beneficiary may wish to select more expensive items. These costs should be separately itemised and paid for by the beneficiary. The cost of shower curtains, shelves, mirrors, vanity units with storage, cupboards, towel rails etc. is the responsibility of the veteran. If the veteran wishes to renovate his/her bathroom at the same time as the modification, they are able to negotiate a separate quote with the builder.
- Simpler options should be trialled before major modifications are considered. This includes consideration of alternative aids or equipment (e.g. portable shower recess or chemical toilet)
- The Department **does not** finance the installation of basic utilities (e.g. water, sewerage, lighting and heating).
- The Department **does not** provide or recommend the use of sliding/hinge opening shower screens in most cases. A curtain rod can be supplied for the veteran to purchase an appropriate shower curtain. Where the eligible veteran makes private arrangements with the builder to install sliding screens, or hinged shower doors, during the modification and at their own expense, the Department will not accept any financial responsibility for their removal or repair, if required at a later date.
- If there is more than one bathroom in the residence, both should be considered for minor modifications and equipment in the first instance. The Department will fund major modifications to one bathroom only.
- The Department is able to make good the walls and floor area disturbed by the modification. It is unable to consider modifying the remainder of the room to match the new wall and floor covering. The veteran may wish to proceed with this at his or her own expense.

Toilets – modification, installation and relocation

- DVA is able to consider providing funding for toilets to be raised or moved within the same room. The Department cannot pay for the installation of a new toilet, or for toilets to be brought in from outside or moved from the back of the house to the front. This constitutes the connection of a utility and would be outside the scope of consideration.

Ramps and external rails

- The Department can only provide ramping when the veteran is wheelchair dependent, using a wheeled walker or unable to negotiate steps.
- The Department will generally only accept financial responsibility for providing a ramp at one entrance.
- Generally one rail will be supplied at an entrance unless functional need can be established for two rails.
- Temporary timber ramps placed over or beside existing steps should be considered when prescribing a ramp. If the homeowner decides to remove the ramp in the future eg when reselling the home, the cost of this work is the responsibility of the homeowner.
- Modular ramps (demountable ramps) remain the property of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. When the ramps are no longer required they must be removed from the property and returned to the Department as per specific ATI for demountable ramps. Demountable ramps should be installed over existing steps.
- It is the homeowner's responsibility to install rails in areas that do not currently meet council requirements. An example being the installation of a safety rail around a porch area, where the porch is raised more than one metre above ground level. *(Some Local or State Government programs offer subsidised assistance for minor home maintenance, repairs, modifications and security. Contact details can be found in the white pages or discuss possible options with your treating Practitioner)*
- The Department will finance ramps and rails to provide direct access to the home.
- Rails and ramps to the garage can be considered if this is the main access route for the eligible veteran. Ramps and rails to general areas (e.g. to work shed or garden beds), cannot be considered.
- Rails to the letterbox cannot be considered if the veteran uses an alternate route to gain access to the home. *(These may be considered under HomeFront, the Department's falls and accident program. Telephone 1800 801 945. Alternatively, Local or State Government Programs may assist).*

Paths

The Department considers that the provision of a general access pathway is the responsibility of the homeowner.

DVA is able to provide full paths in conjunction with the installation of a DVA funded ramp, if the:

- ramp and path then provide direct access to and from the home;
- eligible person's physical ability has altered from independent walking with or without equipment, to reliance on a wheelchair, the access path may be widened, or extended to accommodate the wheelchair.

The Department does not carry out maintenance on paths or replace cracked paths. The Department's falls prevention program, HomeFront, may provide some assistance for repairs if recommended by a HomeFront assessor. For further information contact HomeFront on 1800 801 945.

Stair lifts or Waterlifts

In addition to the information provided for Home Modifications, the following points are also applicable for Stairlift/Waterlift Modifications:

- Simpler options should be trialled before installation of a stairlift/waterlift is considered. This includes consideration of other less sophisticated modifications (e.g. additional hand railing; residing on one level of the house), or whether further treatment will restore stair climbing ability.
- A stairlift/waterlift can be installed for individual home use only. Stairlifts are not installed by DVA on public access routes.
- Provision of a stairlift is based on acceptance of appropriate clinical need and not on leisure or recreational or home security needs.
- DVA decides, in partnership with a supplier, the prescriber and the potential user, which type of stairlift is most suitable.
- DVA retrieves stairlifts when no longer clinically required for use by the entitled person.
- DVA may not fund the repairs or make good the area when the stairlift is removed.
- If an entitled person changes residence following installation of a stairlift/waterlift, it is expected that they take into account their lifestyle needs and mobility requirements in choosing a new residence.
- Installations are not funded by DVA for temporary or casual use, such as weekend leave from nursing home or respite.