

DisabilityCampaign.org

Accessible Housing Tips and Considerations

If you've ever gone house or apartment-hunting, you know that finding a new place to live isn't easy. You're concerned about the price, the community, your commute to work ... you name it. But when you have a disability, there are extra considerations to make, such as whether the entrance to your home is accessible, how far you'll have to travel to visit your doctor, and what your housing rights are as a person with a disability. Below are some general tips on how to get started, as well as factors to consider when looking for housing when you have a disability.

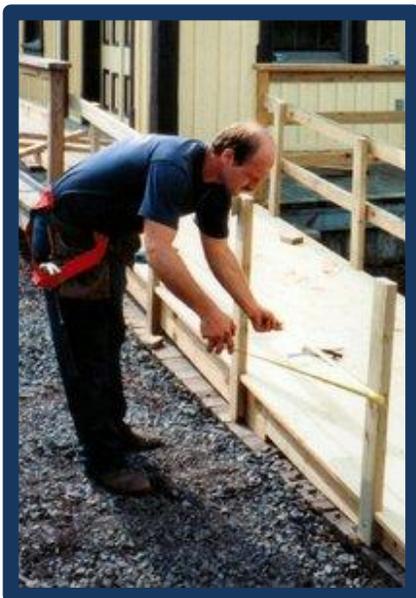
1. **Know the law.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Federal Housing Act protect the rights of people with disabilities when it comes to accessible housing. This is regardless of whether you live in private or public housing.

a. By federal law, **a person with a disability is defined as:** "Any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment."

b. **Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities.** A housing provider can't refuse rent or not sell a home to someone simply because that person has a disability. They cannot impose a different or "special" application or qualification criteria, or create different rental/sales terms or conditions from those given to people who are not disabled.



c. **Requires housing providers to make reasonable accommodations.** These can be a change in rules, policies, practices, or services that help to ensure that you, as a person with a disability, will have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling unit or common space. The landlord or housing provider should do everything he or she can to assist you, but they aren't required to make fundamental changes that would drastically alter the housing program or create undue financial and administrative burden. So, for example, you may be given access to a reserved parking spot in front of the entrance to your unit, even though parking is unreserved for other tenants.



d. **Requires housing providers to allow you to make reasonable modifications.** This doesn't mean you'll be able to completely renovate your rental home or apartment to make it fully accessible, but you can make changes such as installing a ramp that leads to your entrance or grab bars in a bathroom. These are usually made at your expense, meaning the housing provider or landlord may or may not be responsible for the costs.

e. **Considers service animals and assistance animals.** An assistance or service animal is not a pet. Housing providers that prohibit residents from having pets need to evaluate a request for a reasonable accommodation to possess an assistance animal in a dwelling. To qualify, you must have a disability **and** you must have a disability-related need for that assistance animal. Your request may be denied if (1) your animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, or (2) if your animal would cause substantial damage to the property that can't be reduced or eliminated by reasonable accommodation.

- f. **Requires that new covered multifamily housing be designed and constructed to be accessible.** Certain newer units are now required to have accessible entrances on an accessible route, accessible public and common areas, accessible light switches and controls, reinforced walls in the bathrooms, and usable kitchens and bathrooms.

g. **Housing not covered by the Fair Housing Act:**

- i. Rental dwellings of 4 or less units, where 1 unit is occupied by the owner
- ii. Single family homes sold or rented by the owner without the use of a broker
- iii. Housing owned by private clubs or religious organizations that restrict occupancy to their members



For a more detailed description of what housing complexes are required to do by law, [visit the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development website on Disability Rights in Housing.](#)

2. **Ask the right questions.** By preparing a list of questions ahead of time, you'll be ready to ask the apartment manager, real estate agent, or landlord questions that will help give you a better idea on the accessibility of the house or unit. Here are some general questions, but come up with questions that are specific to your disability, as well.

- a. Is there an elevator?
- b. Are the doors at least 32 inches wide?
- c. Is there hard flooring or carpet, and are the carpeted surfaces easy enough to roll up on?
- d. Do you offer automatic payments?
- e. Are the light switches and thermostats low enough to reach?
- f. Do you have any units with pre-installed accessible features, like walk-in showers or low kitchen counters?
- g. How accessible is the laundry facility?

3. Checkout the location.

- a. Use Google Maps or some other mapping program to calculate the distance to your doctor's office, the grocery store, laundry mat, place of faith, local gym, etc.



- b. Checkout the curbs and sidewalks to make sure they're easy to access.
- c. Assess the road safety, such as appropriate lights and crossing chimes.
- d. Learn more about the city or town, including public transportation options available to people with disabilities.

4. Consider the community.

- a. Having a supportive community is vital to anyone's wellbeing, but perhaps even more so to someone with a disability.
- b. Will you be close enough to your family, friends, or emotional support group?
- c. Do the people in the neighborhood appear kind and helpful?
- d. Does the city or town have programs for people with disabilities? These may include free exercise classes at the senior center or reading and writing classes at the local library.



5. Know your budget.

- a. Take into consideration your monthly medical expenses, income, and any social security benefits.
- b. If you're moving further away, consider the cost of having to commute to your workplace or doctor's office. Checkout the gas prices in the area or look up the cost of public transportation.
- c. If you need help coming up with a housing budget, consider talking to a financial advisor who can help you assess your finances.

Finding accessible housing that meets your needs and budget may be challenging, but it's doable. Remember to stay positive, thank those who help you along the way, and consider your options carefully. For more information on accessible housing laws, [visit the Fair Housing Accessibility First website](#), supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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