

National Guideline
for
Home Modifications – Complex
(RAP Schedule No AL10 & AL15)

NOTE: PRIOR APPROVAL FROM THE DEPARTMENT **IS REQUIRED** BEFORE THE SUPPLY OF THIS ITEM.

Objective

Home modifications are intended to enable the entitled person to remain in their home with enhanced independence and safety; and

- reduced dependency upon a carer; and
- reduced likelihood of admission to care.

Definition of home modification

Home modifications are defined as partial changes to an existing dwelling that enable the entitled person to achieve the objectives above.

Australian Standards

Where appropriate, all modifications should meet state government and local government building standards. Modifications must 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.

Prior financial approval

Subject to the Treatment Principles, the Department will be financially responsible only for those modifications for which it has provided prior financial approval. Refer to RAP Schedule Items AL15.

Further eligibility

Entitled persons may not be eligible for major home modifications if they have received an insurance settlement which should encompass their home modification needs, or when a claim is pending. In the latter instance, however, the Department generally claims against the settlement.

Entitled persons resident in an institution (including a retirement village) will not normally be eligible for major home modifications. For further details see “retirement villages” below under “types of residence”.

Assessment

A request for major home modifications must be accompanied by an **assessment** and **report** by an Occupational Therapist.

The assessment and report should consider the:

- additional criteria;
- Australian Standards;
- builder’s qualifications;
- residential status (*see next section*);
- entitled person’s consent;
- potential for change of residence; and

- relevant state building codes.

Additional criteria

- The entitled person's inability to use certain necessary facilities within their home is permanent.
- Non-structural modifications and RAP aids and appliances are inadequate to the purpose.
- Assistance from carers and community services are inadequate to the purpose.
- The residence to be modified should be the entitled person's primary residence.
- In the judgement of the delegate, the entitled person is likely to remain living in the residence for the foreseeable future.
- The residence should be structurally sound and able to be modified safely.
- The property needs to be of sufficient structural soundness as to accommodate the modifications.
- Having regard to the entitled person's illnesses, injuries and disabilities, the need for the modifications could not have been reasonably foreseeable at the time of purchase.
- Relocation to a more suitable residence is not viable.
- In respect of a fixed ramp, the entitled person should be unable to safely negotiate steps.

Registered tradespersons

Input from State-registered and licensed builders must be obtained during the preparation of the quotation, particularly for complex modifications.

Only licensed or registered builders can undertake major home modifications.

Types of residence

Introduction

Consideration must be given to the type of residence prior to approving home modifications.

State-owned housing

The Department does not provide home modifications to Government-owned homes. The responsible State/Territory housing agency will modify residences or organise alternative accommodation, in accordance with their own procedures.

Private rental accommodation

Delegates will consider the length of time the entitled person has lived in the residence. If less than five years, and / or the entitled person has moved house on a regular basis, consideration should be given to either minor modifications or moving to a more suitable residence.

The owner of the rental accommodation will be provided with the specifications and drawings of the scope of work to be done. The owner should indicate in writing:

- agreement to the work proceeding;
- agreement to the specifications of the modifications;
- not to seek financial assistance for the restoration of the property to its former state when modifications are no longer required; and
- that the entitled person will be able to remain in the residence for at least five years.

Owner-occupied residence

Where accommodation is owner-occupied, the owner should agree in writing to the following:

- that the work may proceed;
- that the specifications of the modifications will meet the needs of the entitled person; and
- that the owner will not seek financial assistance for the restoration of the property to its former state when the modifications are no longer required.

Strata title may be approved after consideration of relevant circumstances, such as whether the modifications will intrude onto common or shared space.

Retirement villages

Delegates could approve modifications if the resident could not reasonably have foreseen – in light of their existing medical conditions – that such modifications would either be necessary on entering a particular residence, or become necessary in order for them to remain living in that residence.

This discretion enables the delegates – where there is some element of doubt – to take individual circumstances into account and make a considered decision.

However, it should be kept in mind that retirement villages are purpose built institutions designed to cater for the needs of older persons. It is therefore reasonable for the Department to take the approach that home modifications for such institutions will not be normally considered unless there are exceptional individual circumstances.

- Agreement in writing by the retirement village operator is necessary.

Lifestyle villages

Often known as ‘resort style’ living and are principally targeted at active over 50s with less emphasis on provision of aged care services such as personal response system (PRS) and emergency medical treatment.

In the event that such an institution markets itself as *not* providing *any* form of aged care service – PRS, personal care/nursing assistance, mobility and functional support equipment etc. – then consideration *may* be given to the installation of home modifications. The delegate should also confirm that the facility is not a ‘retirement village’ for the purposes of the VEA.

Where accommodation is owner-occupied, the owner should agree in writing to the following:

- that the work may proceed;
- that the specifications of the modifications will meet the needs of the entitled person; and
- that the owner will not seek financial assistance for the restoration of the property to its former state when the modifications are no longer required.

Or if applicable

Agreement in writing by the retirement village operator is necessary

Parks

Residence may comprise:

- privately owned, prefabricated, relocatable homes located on leased land within a park complex, similar to a caravan park but without short-stay (less than three months) arrangements; or
- leased, prefabricated, relocatable homes located on leased land within a park complex, similar to a caravan park but without short-stay (less than three months) arrangements.

If the park is not restricted to retired persons and offers no aged care service then it may fall outside the scope of the relevant State/Territory retirement villages' legislation. In that case, it is appropriate to treat the dwelling as an ordinary house. Such dwellings may be eligible for home modifications if the residence was purchased before knowledge of any foreseeable problems that might arise from a disability (related to the need for a modification) or the degenerative nature of the disability could not reasonably have been foreseen.

Rental park dwellings have limited eligibility and are privately owned rental assets located on leased ground. If DVA were routinely to pay for home modifications in such dwellings, it would be value adding to a privately owned rental asset which may well be occupied in the future by a person with no RAP eligibility, but who would nonetheless have the benefit and enjoyment of the modification(s). Therefore, home modifications would only be considered for long-term residents who are assessed as likely to remain in the rental park dwelling for five years.

Where accommodation is owner-occupied, the owner should agree in writing to the following:

- that the work may proceed;
- that the specifications of the modifications will meet the needs of the entitled person; and
- that the owner will not seek financial assistance for the restoration of the property to its former state when the modifications are no longer required.

Or if applicable

- Agreement in writing by the park operator is necessary.

Liability for the standard of workmanship

The Department does not accept liability for the standard of the workmanship. There are a number of dispute resolution mechanisms available through trade associations should there be disagreement about the standard of workmanship.

Extent of modifications

Introduction

The Department generally only pays for basic modifications. For example, entire floors will not be retiled if matching tiles are unavailable. The closest match to existing tiles is usually considered adequate.

Utilities

The Department does not generally finance the connection of basic utilities (water, sewerage, electricity and gas) where they were not connected previously. If an existing utility should be changed or moved to enable an alteration to be functional, then the Department will accept responsibility (as examples: the removal of a bathtub and the installation of a hobless shower recess, the grading of a floor, the installation of new hand shower fittings).

Relocation of toilets as part of bathroom modifications

Toilets may be moved within the same room, but the Department will not normally pay for them to be relocated from outside or from opposite ends of the house. This would constitute the connection of a utility and is outside the scope of consideration. In situations such as these, the provision of suitable aids or equipment, such as a porta-potty or commode, should be considered. In **exceptional** circumstances, toilet relocation may be provided at the discretion of the Executive Director, Client Programs.

Home maintenance

The Department does not pay for the repair of existing structures as this is classified as the homeowner's responsibility.

Access modifications

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Where an entitled person's physical ability has altered from independent walking with or without equipment to reliance on a wheelchair or walking aid, an access path may be widened and may be extended..

After the work has been completed

Inspection of modifications

The assessing occupational therapist should inspect the work upon completion to determine that the modifications meet the specifications. This should occur **before** payment is made for the work.

Entitled person's responsibilities

Except for the items affected by the modifications, the entitled person is responsible for normal household items (e.g. mirrors, soap holders, towel rails, fans, lights, heaters and hot water services, security doors and windows). The Department will not pay for the cost of non-essential items, such as a spa bath or an additional toilet. This should be clearly stated in the specification.

If an entitled person chooses to change the decor at the same time as the essential modifications are carried out, these changes should be quoted separately to the entitled person before the work begins and will **not** be funded under RAP.

Additional information

Defence Service Home Loans

Defence Service Home (DSH) loans may be available to eligible entitled persons to pay for the cost of any additional work which is carried out at the same time as the authorised home modifications.

Entitled persons should check their eligibility and/or entitlement before agreeing to pay for the cost of any additional work. Further information is available from the DSH National Processing Centre, freecall 1800 722 000.

Home Support Loans

Home Support Loans (HSLs) are a possible source of funds for entitled persons to pay for the cost of any additional work.

Entitled persons advised of this option should check their eligibility and/or entitlement before agreeing to pay for the cost of any additional work. Further information is available from the DSH National Processing Centre, freecall 1800 722 000.

Pension lump-sum advances

A possible additional source of funds for additional home modifications is a pension lump-sum advance. Recipients of DVA pensions and income support supplement may be eligible for one such advance per year from the Department.