

“Aging in Place” through Home Modifications”

By: Beth Kofsky, MHSA, CEAC, CAPS

“Aging in Place” allows persons with physical and medical disabilities and the frail elderly to age in place with dignity within their home environment. This concept is accompanied by the needed home modifications required to achieve this goal. The purpose of an accessible environment through home modifications is to increase the environmental accessibility and remove architectural barriers for greater independence and safety for the individual in need. Each environment and individual is unique and this is an important factor when considering what type of home modifications may be needed. Research has proven that remaining in one’s home can often be more cost effective, if one’s medical care, health and safety and environmental accessibility is provided for.

Home Modifications Include:

Home modifications incorporate design solutions for independent living and can often be cost effective however some are more costly depending on the environment or structure and each and every individual and their specific needs. Home modifications are typically described as; removal of tubs, curbless showers, accessible bathrooms, higher toilets, grab bars, wider door ways, accessible ramps, hand railings, improved driveway/walkway access, accessible kitchens, lower or roll-under counter tops, cabinets with drawers, and front control appliances, accessible fixtures, safer flooring and wider doors and hallways. There is also variety of durable medical equipment and assistive technology devices to assist the client and are considered an important adaptive device or home modification.

Low Tech and High Tech Assistive Technology Products Technology:

These products and assistive devices are used with and sometimes in lieu of home modifications. Some of these products include; special transfer and shower chairs for bathing and toileting to more sophisticated devices described as; electronic door openers, stair lifts, vertical platform lifts, ceiling lifts for lifting and transferring and other health or safety equipment.

Checklist of Needs – Walk thru the Home to Determine Some of the Following Needs:

- Does the home have an accessible route and safe egress into and out of the home
- Can the home entry, garage or exit incorporate greater accessibility and safety
- Does the home have more than one level, staircase or sunken areas that are difficult and that may be inaccessible to user – can these areas have improved access added
- Does the home have smooth surfaces when entering or exiting and or throughout the home environment – can surfaces/flooring be changed to increase safety
- Does the home have the ability to increase the accessibility within the bathroom and bedroom
- Do the doors need to be widened to accommodate a mobility aid
- Does the home require improvements for health and safety – safe roof, windows, home alert or alarm system, improved lighting for interior and exterior, smoke detectors, safer electrical wiring and or up to code plumbing
- Does the home require assistive technology or specialty products and devices for increased access and for improved mobility, lifting, transferring and getting up and down a stair case

- Does the home have an accessible kitchen, counter, cabinets and appliances – will the kitchen require these changes for improved access
- Does the home have or require hurricane shutters, safe room or a generator
- Does the home require an additional accessible bedroom or bathroom and can a room addition be added

A Good Assessment Process:

The provision of a completing a good home modification project is like other professional services and it should include the services by a professional for conducting a good environmental accessibility assessment. The determination of what is often needed and what will work is based upon the individual need, physical or medical situation and cost parameters available to complete the project. This information is often obtained during the assessment process and incorporated into creating the plan for a cost effective home modification. The new technology and many product solutions available on the market today can benefit an individual in making their home more accessible and safer.

Cost Containment:

However, cost is an important factor so understanding the budget constraints and cost parameters of what actual modifications, construction, design and assistive technology solutions may be essential when assisting an individual or a Case Manager in developing a comprehensive and accurate environmental accessibility assessment report. Not all projects are cost effective as the cost of construction and assistive technology products to create a safe and or an accessible environment is sometime a high cost solution. Cost containment can be achieved using a professional who is knowledgeable of all the solutions that will work.

A Certified Environmental Accessibility

Consultant a “CEAC” is a professional who has a qualified background in the field of aging in place, home modifications, construction for the disabled and elderly and physical medicine or rehabilitation experience. They are credentialed to perform this service. **Certified Aging in Place Specialist or “CAPS”** professional of choice who is also a recognized through a national certification requiring experienced professionals.

Other professionals: who are licensed in the field may include; architects, engineers and allied health professionals with a similar background in these fields and or specific field experience may be qualified.

The Report and What to Expect: When using a professional for creating the necessary report of the appropriate home modifications, design solutions and assistive technology product solutions; they will complete an extensive assessment interview process to determine need and all options. CEAC or CAPS are professionals of choice are often up to date and current with all of the products and devices and know where to purchase or obtain the professional vendors to have assistive technology or products provided and installed. The CEAC-CAPS Consultant knows the cost as they often work with contractors and or view construction bids in the work they do. They are involved in projects from start to finish. As part of the assessment process the CEAC-CAPS Consultant can provide the following accompanying the report to include and not limited to; computer assisted drawings (CAD), product information, product recommendations and vendors and installers with regards to the recommendations. CEAC-CAPS Consultants often have extensive design and construction background with tens of thousands of hours of experience and expertise in the field.

It's highly recommended to use a team approach and hiring all of the needed professionals to ensure a smooth reentry back into one's home environment. One professional can handle some of the care and or medical services and one for the home modifications; however ensure all professionals work together for the end goal.

What to expect from Professionals who provide this service:

Around the country CEAC-CAPS Consultants' includes allied health professionals with extensive design and construction backgrounds. It is important to interview individuals not based on experience to ensure you feel comfortable working with them and their style or professional demeanor. Also, discuss their professional background and experience to ensure you have the right person to complete the job. It is great to find someone with a healthcare and design and construction background so they can properly assess an individual and their specific needs.

More Information on CEAC's:

CEAC-is a certification and is credentialed through U.S. REHAB. To find out more about the CEAC review the US-REHAB website: www.usrehab.com/ceac or contact US-REHAB at (1-800) 987-7342.

More information on CAPS:

CAPS-is a certification and is credential though The National Association of Home Builders "NAAHB". To find out more about CAPS review the NAHB website: www.nahb.com or contact NAHB at (1-800) 368-5242 ext 8216.

About the Author:

Beth Kofsky, MHSA, CAPS CEAC, is the Executive Director of Housing and Assistive Technology, Inc. (HAT) a not-for profit organization. She has over 14 years experience working with governmental organizations, private citizens, professional providers and South Florida housing agencies. She was the South Florida Regional Coordinator for Florida Alliance For Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST-Grant from 1994 – 2004). She has extensive experience in the fields of assistive technology and home modification design and construction services.

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