

The Senior and Disability Home Modification Assistance Initiative Act of 2019

Senators King (I-ME), Collins (R-ME), Schatz (D-HI), Klobuchar (D-MN), Warren (D-MA), and Casey (D-PA)

Background: Older individuals and individuals with disabilities overwhelmingly express a preference for living safely and independently in their own homes.¹ However, there can be obstacles to confidently living at home, including the costs of modernizing homes that lack basic accessibility features. The National Association of Homebuilders reports that 80 percent of home modifications are paid for out of pocket.² Even the cost of small fixes—like installing grab bars in showers—can add up quickly, adding strain to the budgets of seniors and individuals with disabilities already depending on limited incomes.

For those on a tight budget, aging and living at home may not just be a preference, but the only viable option.³ For such older adults and individuals with disabilities, there are existing Federal programs, benefits, and waivers spread across different departments. These critical resources can be used to help pay for home modifications, often meaning the difference between an individual with disability or senior being able to live at home versus moving into a higher level of care. The convoluted mix of programs and requirements, however, can be difficult to understand, meaning that many programs are often not fully utilized.

The Senior and Disability Home Modification Assistance Initiative Act would help make it easier for seniors and individuals with disabilities to access federal home modification resources that would enable them to age safely and live independently. Helping seniors and individuals with disabilities live at home may have important federal budgetary implications as well. By making low-cost, discretionary investments in improving home accessibility for older adults and individuals with disabilities, federal programs that provide an upfront investment in housing updates may reduce costs in mandatory health care programs as life outcomes improve.

Bill Summary: *The Senior and Disability Home Modification Assistance Initiative* would:

1. **Establish a crosscutting initiative, carried out by the Assistant Secretary for Aging, to coordinate the numerous Federal efforts and programs that provide home modification resources and assistance.** By coordinating existing programs and reporting annually on key data, the Assistant Secretary would allow for an enhanced understanding of how federal home modification programs are helping older Americans and individuals with disabilities live independently and safely at home—as well as where program improvements may be needed.
2. **Require the Assistant Secretary for Aging to publish an educational, consumer-friendly brochure on home modifications and repairs available for seniors and people with disabilities.** The brochure would be distributed in coordination with National Eldercare Locator Services and independent living centers.

¹ AARP PPI, “What is Livable? Community Preferences of Older Adults.” April 2014.

² <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/fall13/highlight1.html>

³ <http://rebuildingtogethermc.org/the-challenges-of-aging-in-place/>