



CAREGIVER FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES ASSESSMENT

Best Practices: Housing



Many homes today are not designed for aging safely – they may involve stairs, have thresholds which are hard to cross by wheelchair and walker, have bathrooms without zero-entry showers, benches, or grab-rails. Some communities provide assistance to update older homes and apartments for safe and easier aging. For caregivers, the home environment can be a critical support or challenge in providing good care – sometimes this includes home maintenance and repair issues as well.

The Caregiver Friendly Communities Assessment scores this domain in two primary categories: 1) access to resources for home improvements (both financial and informational), and 2) the availability of a variety of affordable housing options. Below, you'll find the scoring factors along with recommended practices.

1. Home Improvement Resources

- **Financial Resources.** Caregivers often face the challenge of managing their own finances and the finances of their loved one. Making needed changes to one's existing home or the care recipient's home can be daunting and unaffordable. Finding resources to assist with upgrades to improve the safety for their loved one is also important. ***Recommended Practice: Identify existing community resources, including local nonprofit and faith-based organizations to assist in making home upgrades.***

Sample Programs & Resources:

- Habitat for Humanity has an “aging in place” program to evaluate senior homes and make appropriate upgrades. <https://www.habitat.org/impact/our-work/aging-in-place>
- The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which distributes assistance to vulnerable Michigan residents through 39 agency partners and a series of annual mobile processing events. Last year, THAW distributed more than \$15 million in utility assistance to nearly 18,000 Michigan households with more than 70% of the households including a child or senior in the home. <https://thawfund.org/about-us/>



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- **AARP HomeFit.** AARP Michigan works with volunteer occupational therapists to offer HomeFit workshops to help older adults determine what changes they may need to make in their homes to age in place safely. They have online home assessments as well as home-assessment guidelines.

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>

- **Informational Resources.** The Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) designation program teaches the technical, business management, and customer service skills essential to competing in the fastest growing segment of the residential remodeling industry: home modifications for aging-in-place. <https://www.nahb.org/> **Recommended Practice: If you don't currently have a CAPS builder in your area, work with local builders to support certifying local professionals.**

2. Affordable Housing Options

Access to nearby housing options for their loved ones is essential for caregivers as the care recipients' needs change over the course of their illness. Affordable memory/dementia care, assisted living, and skilled nursing residential communities are important for both care recipients and their caregivers who will be regularly traveling to and from the location. As healthcare costs increase, financial strain on families also increases. Homelessness among the elderly is on the rise and is mainly due to a rise in poverty and a lack of affordable housing. **Recommended Practice: Identify available and affordable housing options in your community and work with community partners to explore strategies to expand housing options.**

Resources:

- **Housing Rights Center of Michigan.** A division of Elder Law of Michigan, they provide information about housing rights for elders in Michigan.
<https://advancingSMARTly.org/category/housing-rights-center-of-michigan/>
- Older adults may qualify for a number of different government-subsidized housing programs for those who are lower income. Options include:
 - 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program provides housing and supportive services to older adults 62 years old or older.
 - Public Housing provides federally subsidized housing to people 80% or more below the area median income and gives preference to older adults.



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- Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) provides housing assistance to people at or below 50% the area median income; this program tends to have a long waiting list for assistance.
- Project-Based Section 8 is a partnership between the housing owner and HUD to provide affordable housing to low-income people.
- Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Program provides extremely low income older adults with rental assistance in rural areas.