

8. HOUSING OPTIONS

For the older adult, housing is a major determining factor supporting their ability to continue to age in place in the community as opposed to being institutionalized in a long-term care facility. Home ownership provides a significant cost saving alternative to a nursing home. Eighty percent of seniors own their own homes. Almost two million older adults, mostly low-income single women, live in federally assisted multi-unit rental housing, more than the number living in nursing homes. Government-subsidized programs (Section 202 and Section 8) support low-income elderly; however, in 1999, there were nine applicants for each available Section 202 unit. In addition, many seniors are still faced with high housing costs and structurally deficient homes or apartments. In 1999, 7.8 million older families lived in unaffordable (paying more than 30% of their income for housing) or poor quality dwellings.

Low-income, frail seniors, people living alone, and those living in rural areas are the most likely to have unmet housing needs. Although seniors would like to remain in their homes, homes require modifications and assistive technologies if the individual with chronic illnesses and disabling conditions is to remain living independently in the community. Changes in housing design and community planning need to reflect the limitations in mobility of current and future seniors.



There really is no place like home. When asked about their preference for housing, most seniors answer, "What I would really like to do is to stay right here." A person's own home represents security and independence to most Americans.

Most housing, however, is designed for young, active, and mobile people. To live at home, a person must, at the very least, have access to transportation and be able to go shopping, cook, and do household chores. Many of us will lose one or more of these abilities as we grow older.

Home modification and repair includes adaptations to homes that can make it easier and safer to carry out activities such as bathing, cooking, and climbing stairs and alterations to the physical structure of the home to improve its overall safety and condition.

Why Is Home Modification And Repair Important?

Home modification and repair can help prevent accidents such as falls. Research suggests that one-third to one-half of all

home accidents can be prevented by modification and repair.

Older people tend to live in older homes that often need repairs and modifications. Over 60% of older persons live in homes more than twenty years old. Home modification and repair can accommodate lifestyle changes and increase comfort.

Typical Problems:

- Difficulty getting in and out of the shower
- Slipping in the tub or shower
- Difficulty turning faucet handles or doorknobs
- Access to home
- Inadequate heating or ventilation
- Problems climbing stairs

Possible Solutions:

- Install grab bars, shower seals or transfer benches
- Place non-skid strips or decals in the tub or shower
- Replace door knobs with lever handles
- Install ramps
- Install insulation, storm windows, and air conditioning
- Install handrails for support

Housing With Services

Residential Housing with Services include: Boarding Homes also known as Assisted Living, Adult Family Homes, and Nursing Facilities

* SEE Residential Housing Options Chart
Number of Beds per Community
(page 26, sec B-4)

The demand for affordable and accessible housing with services for older adults and people with disabilities exceeds the existing housing stock. Affordable housing is defined as mortgage or rent and utilities that do not exceed 30% of the household's annual income. In 1994, 7.5% of senior households in Washington State spent more than 30% of their income on housing. Several factors contribute to a growing gap between the demand for and availability of housing with services over the next four years:

- * Increasing population of older adults and people with disabilities who are living longer,
- * Lack of an adequate number of Section 8 vouchers and housing units available.

Current Characteristics of Rural Elders and their Housing

- 26% of persons age sixty-five and over live in non-metropolitan areas.
- Elderly non-metropolitan renters consistently live in the poorest quality housing.
- Housing gaps exist in rural communities between single independent housing and higher care facilities (assisted living, nursing homes).
- Housing choices for rural elders are few and far between, and can result in premature institutionalized care.

Elderly persons in rural areas spend more years in poverty and/or have a much higher likelihood of slipping into poverty, largely due in part to lifelong employment disadvantages associated with rural economies.

- Widows are more likely to move to metropolitan areas.
- Widowers are more likely to remain in rural areas.

Garfield County has no HUD or low income housing. There are no Assisted Living facilities. There is only one eight-person capacity group home with a waiting list. When people leave the area to seek appropriate assisted living or retirement housing, they never return and the whole community suffers a loss.

Rents in Asotin County are very high for people on fixed incomes. There is a waiting list of one and a half years for HUD and three years for Section (8) subsidized housing.

The Future of Senior Housing:

- Successfully Aging In Place is a goal of almost everyone.
- Aging in Place means different things to different people based on health and care needs.
- Finding supportive services for seniors in their own homes (including a residential setting) **can** delay moving to a new care setting – **if** the resident is safe remaining at home with the level of care they need and such care can be provided within state regulations.

GOAL: Collaborate with others to advocate for more affordable, safe housing for seniors and the disabled throughout our eight county region.

OBJECTIVES:

- Advocate for tax incentives for contractors wishing to build more affordable housing or rehabilitate

existing buildings into safe and decent housing for seniors. **Ongoing**

- Advocate for federal policy changes and the development of new mechanisms at the state and local level regarding funding for senior housing projects. **Ongoing**
- Educate the community regarding home modifications which allow aging in place. **Ongoing**
- Advocate for all new construction to incorporate Universal Home Design. **Ongoing**
- SE/ALTC and the Yakima Advisory board will advocate for a sliding fee instead of an overall cutoff amount for qualifying for senior housing. **Ongoing**