



Contents

- [Purpose](#)
- [Definitions](#)
- [Finding Accessible Rental Housing](#)
- [Making Changes to Existing Rental Housing](#)
- [Buying an Accessible Home](#)
- [Sources](#)

Purpose

This tip sheet shows how to find accessible housing to rent or to buy. It also suggests what to say to landlords or property owners. It tells about laws that ensure people with disabilities have access to housing.

Definitions

Accessible Housing: *This housing is built or remodeled for people with disabilities or for older adults who want to age in place. This housing lets people live on their own. It may have wider halls and doorways, lever door handles in place of door knobs, or room for people who use wheelchairs or walkers to turn around. There may be built-in communication tools or alarms.*

Section 504: *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a U.S. law that protects people with disabilities, including those buying or renting a home. Section 504 says programs that get federal funds cannot discriminate based on disability. This includes housing providers who get federal funding. They may have to make “reasonable accommodations” to buildings for people with disabilities.*

Fair Housing Act: *The Fair Housing Act is a U.S. law that protects people who buy or rent homes from discrimination by the seller or landlord. This includes discrimination based on disability.*

Housing Modifications/Reasonable Modifications: *These are structural*

changes made to a rental unit or home to make it possible for a person with disability to enjoy its full use. The law says the tenant asks for and pays for these changes. It also says the landlord must agree to these changes as long as they are reasonable. (See more about this below.)

Universal Home Design: *This means the set-up of a unit or home gives full use to each person, young or old, with or without disabilities. This may mean bathroom grab bars and a roll-in shower. It may mean a bedroom on the main floor. It may mean a kitchen with appliances that are easy to reach.*

Disability Discrimination: *This means to treat someone with a disability not the same as someone who does not have a disability.*

Finding Accessible Rental Housing

Where to Look

- **IowaHousingSearch.org:** IowaHousingSearch.org is a rental housing locator funded by Iowa Finance Authority. The locator also can identify properties that have accessible features, and those that accept public housing assistance.
- **Local ads:** Look at listings in the classified section of local newspapers or community bulletins boards. Check out places where people get together like local community centers, coffee shops and gas stations among many others. These are common locations for private landlords to advertise available properties.

- **Local property management companies:** Find property management companies in your area through the phone book or use the words “property management near me” in a google search. Ask property managers about accessible apartments or houses available for rent. Ask if an accessible unit will be open soon.
- **Rental listing websites:** There are now many websites that list rental housing. Several landlord/tenant-focused websites recommend these websites in their top five most reputable rental listing websites. The Better Business Bureau warns about rental scams through online listings.
 - [Craigslist](#)
 - [Trulia](#)
 - [Zillow](#)
 - [Apartments.com](#)

Making Changes to Existing Rental Housing

You may be able to modify a rental unit to meet your accessibility needs. For example, you could add a ramp to a rental home. Or modify the bathroom of a rental apartment.

The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 says you have the right to request permission to make “reasonable modifications” of a rental unit at your own expense. If the landlord requires you to remove the modification when you move out, this will also be at your own expense. Learn more about “reasonable modifications” under the Fair Housing Act from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Justice

publication [Reasonable Modifications Accommodations Under the Fair Housing Act](#). Iowa Legal Aid's tip sheet [What Duty Does a Landlord Have to Accommodate](#) is also a good source.

Learn more about landlords' responsibilities for making rental properties accessible in these tip sheets:

- [Making New Apartments Accessible to Persons with Disabilities](#) by Iowa Legal Aid
- [Design Construction in Fair Housing](#) by the Iowa Civil Rights Commission

Buying an Accessible Home

Where to Look:

- **Real estate agents:** Local real estate agents can help you find accessible homes for sale. If there are no accessible homes for sale, the real estate agent might be able to help you find a home you can remodel to make it accessible. They may also help find property for sale to build a new accessible home.
- **Property listing websites:** Many of the rental listing websites above also have properties for sale.
- **“For sale by owner”:** Some owners choose to sell their homes without the help of a real estate agent. You can find these homes listed for sale in local newspapers. They are also listed on community and “for sale by owner” websites. These sellers may have a “for sale” sign in their front yard. To find local “for sale by owner” houses online, use keywords “for

sale by owner” or “for sale by owner Iowa.”

- **Local disability organizations:** Some experts suggest getting in touch with local disability organizations to find listings. Other people with disabilities may be able to offer tips on buying an accessible home. Landlords may try to get the word out about available accessible housing through these organizations.

What to Say:

Make a list of all you need to get full use of your new home. This list will show the realtor, contractor, landlord or property manager what will make the home accessible for you. Their sense of accessibility may not be the same as yours. Give details. For example, if you need widened doorways, say how wide. List both common and accessibility features:

- Common features: the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, the style of the home, closeness to bus stops.
- Accessibility features: accessible parking/garage areas, no-step entryways, widened doorways, lowered kitchen, and bathroom sinks.
- For more ideas on home accessibility check out the [Universal Home Design booklet](#) from the Iowa Program for Assistive Technology.

[Get in touch with Iowa Compass](#) to learn more.

Sources

- [15 Top Locations to Find Bulletin Boards and Pin Up Business Cards](#), Michael Sturba, (2017).
- [Top 35 Listing Sites for Rental Properties and What They Cost](#), Jimmy Moncrief (2017).
- [Five Best Apartment Search Tools](#), Alan Henry (2014).
- [Best Apartment Rental Sites and Apps](#), Jessica Dailey, Matthew Marani, Selina Cheah, and Jenny Xiehe, (2018)
- [BBB Tip: Rental Scam](#), Better Business Bureau (2018).
- [Handicap-accessible housing market is still a work in progress](#). The Washington Post. Sandra Fleishman (2011).
- [Affordable Accessible Housing: A Guide for People with MS](#), National MS Society

Disclaimer: *This tip sheet is for information only. Iowa Compass makes regular updates to give current and accurate information. We cannot be held liable for any outdated or incorrect information.*

Developed by Iowa Compass. Last Update: March 14, 2019

[vc_btn title="Back" style="classic" color="blue" align="center"
link="url:http%3A%2F%2Fiowacompass.org/tip-sheets/%2F|||"]