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## Purpose

This tip sheet shows how to find accessible housing to rent or 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. 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.

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

**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:** Structural changes made to a rental unit or home to make it possible for a person with a 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.)

**Reasonable Accommodation:** Changes in rules, policies, practices, or services so that a person with a disability has an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling unit or common space.

**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.

**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.

## What Are Your Needs

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.

Contact Easterseals Iowa at (866) 866-8782 to learn more about what you can do to make your home (either current or future) accessible.

## Where to Look When Renting

- **IowaHousingSearch.org:** [Iowa Housing Search](#) is a rental housing locator funded by Iowa Finance Authority. Properties are listed that have accessible features and that accept [housing choice vouchers \(Section 8\)](#).
- **Local ads:** Look at listings in the classified section of local newspapers or community bulletin 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 if there are none available when you ask.
- **Rental listing websites:** There are now many websites that list rental housing in addition to IowaHousingSearch.org. It can be a challenge to find sites that list properties in Iowa and even more challenging to identify which ones have accessible features. With all the different listing websites we have identified a few of the better sites below. Specifically, the sites that have the most listings in Iowa and some that have

accessibility features built into search results. Keep in mind that rental scams can be common. The Better Business Bureau warns about these scams in their [rental scams tip sheet](#).

- [Craigslist](#)\*
- [Facebook Marketplace](#)
- [Trulia](#)
- [Zillow](#)
- [Apartments.com](#)\*
- [Rent.com](#)\*

\*Website lets you search for wheelchair access.

## 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” to 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 [Housing Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) is also a good source. Learn more about landlords’ responsibilities for making rental properties accessible [Design Construction in Fair Housing](#) by the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.

## Where to Look When Buying

- **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. Property owners may try to get the word out about available accessible housing through these organizations. Call or text Iowa Compass at (800) 779-2001 for help finding

local disability-related organizations.

## Sources

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- [HomeMods.org](https://www.homemods.org), National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modifications (2021).

***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.*

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