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— HOME BUYING —  
FOR THE DISABLED

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## **Home Buying Guide for the Disabled**

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# Overview

We know how important independence is, and disabilities shouldn't get in the way of living the life you want. Whether your disability is mental or physical, home ownership is not out of reach. There are plenty of programs out there to help those with disabilities through the home-buying process. Your options are plentiful, convenient, and affordable. In this guide, we'll cover all the basics you need to get started on your homebuying journey. This guide was made possible thanks to the [Disability Resource Agency for Independent Living](#), [Disability is Natural](#), and [The Kennedy Center](#).

## Pros and Cons

If you have a disability, you've probably had plenty of practice making decisions with your strengths and weaknesses in mind. Owning a home is no different. There are plenty of factors you should consider before making the decision to buy.

### Pros

**Independence.** Most importantly, owning your own home

means you can maintain your independence. While buying and maintaining a house is no easy feat, a disability alone won't keep you from homeownership.

Even if your condition requires specialized care, you're in luck. Many nurse and aid services make home visits. While this may be a bit costly depending on your area, sometimes these services are covered by medical disability insurance. Check with your provider to be sure.

**Money.** You've probably heard that buying is cheaper than renting, and generally speaking, this is correct. Whereas you can't get rent back, monthly mortgage payments are converted into equity. That being said, depending on your individual needs, you may find the cost differences narrower than you might expect.

## Cons

**The cost.** Long-term assisted living costs may be high, but the cost of owning your own home may be higher thanks to closing fees, maintenance, and modifications. Refer to the list at the end of this guide for examples of specific home modifications.

**The neighborhood.** When you have a disability, you can't choose a house in a vacuum. There's the location of the home to consider, including things like the distance to the grocery store, hairdresser, bank, etc. You'll also have to familiarize yourself with the area. Make sure that the sidewalks are smooth, and that you can access surrounding shops and businesses. Finding a home that meets all your criteria may make the search for a suitable home more challenging.



## Homebuyers Rights

Making the decision to pursue home ownership is just as big as signing the closing papers. If you've decided to take the plunge, then it will help to be aware of your rights as a homebuyer.

### You have the right to:

- Know how much the mortgage broker is getting paid by both you and the lender for your loan.
- Ask for a "Good Faith Estimate" of all of your loan and settlement charges before you agree to sign the loan or pay any fees.
- Shop around for the best loan available and compare the charges of various brokers and lenders.
- Be informed on the total cost of the loan, including the interest rate, points, and other fees.
- Know why your loan was turned down.
- Ask questions about charges and loan terms that you don't understand.
- Know which fees aren't refundable if you cancel the loan agreement.
- A credit decision that's not based on your race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or whether or not you receive income from public assistance organizations.

Remember that predatory lenders do exist. They may try to dodge some of the questions mentioned above or give you a hard time. Just as it's their responsibility to truthfully assist you through the home buying process, it's also your duty to look out for yourself.

If your lender is giving you a hard time, find a lender that won't.

## Programs and Resources

Many programs exist to help people with disabilities find homes, take out loans, and protect their basic rights. You need to apply for some, but others are available to anyone seeking aid.

Here are some top resources available to people with disabilities.

### Supplemental Security Income

This financial assistance program provides funding to stabilize income, giving qualified applicants an improved chance of qualifying for government-backed loans. The requirements are as follows:

- The applicant must be legally blind or disabled
- The applicant will have limited income
- The applicant will have limited resources
- The applicant will be a U.S. citizen

For more information, visit <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityssi/ssi.html>.

### Social Security Disability Insurance

Although this option isn't directly related to the home-buying process, it may be a viable option for you or your family member.

To be eligible, the applicant must be a disabled or blind individual, and must have paid social security taxes. The monthly amount you can receive is based on your Social Security earnings record. In addition to payment, you will automatically receive Medicare coverage after receiving disability benefits for two years.

Find out how to [apply online](#).

### Home Ownership Voucher Program

This federal housing program helps moderate- or low-income families with disabilities purchase a home. The Home Ownership Voucher Program is associated with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Section 8, with a focus on first-time home buyers who need help meeting their monthly mortgage payments. All applicants must qualify to receive support.

#### Requirements include:

- You must be a first-time home owner or cooperative member.
- No family member will have, or have had any ownership interest in a residence of any family member during the last three years (exceptions are single parents or displaced homemakers who have owned a home whilst married).

- The applying family must have at least one member with a disability.
- The annual income of the adult family members who will own the home can't be less than the monthly Federal Supplemental Security Income benefit for an individual living alone multiplied by 12. Your local PHA (Public Housing Agency) may also establish a higher minimum income requirement for either or both types of families. Except in the case of an elderly or disabled family, welfare assistance is not counted in determining whether the family meets the minimum income requirement.
- The family must attend and satisfactorily complete the PHA's pre-assistance homeownership and housing counseling program.

Click [here](#) to find out more about the program.



## Legislation you should know about:

### Fair Housing Act

The [FHA](#) offers protection to those with disabilities. The rights that they help protect include the following:

- Realtors can't discriminate against borrowers on the basis of sex, creed, race, sexuality, etc.
- Providers must make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. This can include a change in the rules, policy, practices, or services.
- Landlords must allow people with disabilities to make reasonable modifications to the home or dwelling.

In addition to protecting basic rights, the FHA has also put standards in place for multi-family living units. They include the following:

- The ground floor must comply with FHA design and construction requirements.
- There must be an accessible entrance and route into and through the unit.
- There must be usable doors.
- The bathroom walls must be reinforced.
- There must be accessible public and common use areas.
- It must have accessible light switches, outlets, thermostats, and environmental controls.
- All kitchens and bathrooms must be usable.

## Americans with Disabilities Act

The ADA safeguards the rights of people with disabilities. This includes accommodating the disabled in restaurants, stores, libraries, hospitals, offices, warehouses, and just about any other major public establishment.

Visit [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) for more details.

## Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act

RESPA ensures that consumers are provided with more helpful information about the costs of mortgage settlements, and protects them from unnecessarily high settlement charges caused by abusive practices. Recently, RESPA has implemented a new rule that requires a standardized loan estimate (estimate of settlement charges and loan terms), to facilitate shopping among settlement service providers, and to improve disclosure of settlement costs and interest rate-related terms.

Visit [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov) for more information.

### Organizations:

#### National Opportunities for Affordable Housing Foundation

N.O.A.H is a non-profit agency committed to the provision of affordable housing through a diligent pursuit of home ownership opportunities for homebuyers, and exit strategy counseling and education for home sellers. They also help locate mortgage assistance programs at the state and local levels.

#### Homes for Our Troops

This non-profit organization provides individually adapted



homes for severely injured or disabled veterans at no cost. The program is supported by donations from cooperating building industries, and commercially organized donors.

For more information, visit [www.homesfourtroops.org](http://www.homesfourtroops.org).

#### Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity constructs homes for in-need families and individuals, including those with disabilities. The organization builds and grants accessible homes, with mortgages sponsored by donations and private and federal sources.

If you're chosen as a candidate, Habitat will build your home for you. In return, you help build a home for another eligible recipient. This allows all participants to generate a sense of self-worth, independence, and communal strength.

## American Association of People with Disabilities

The [AAPD](#) is the largest national cross-disability organization in existence. It partners with other organizations to ensure economic, social, and political security for disabled Americans. The overall goal of the organization is to create economic freedom for all.

## National Disability Institute

The goal of the [NDI](#) is to build healthier financial futures for individuals and families dealing with disabilities, through employment initiatives, technical housing assistance, and financial resources.



## Housing Counselors

Buying your first home can be challenging. If you don't know anyone who has experience with the process, then consider hiring a housing counselor. While housing counselors generally deal with foreclosures, they also assist first-time homebuyers with the home-buying process.

If you decide to hire someone to help you through the process, look for a HUD-approved counselor. HUD housing counselors will assist their clients at little to no cost if they determine that the client can't afford the counseling. If you're inquiring about foreclosure prevention or homeless counseling, then your consultation will always be free of charge.

Regardless, agencies require their counselors to inform all clients of the payment structure before they provide any services.

### A counselor can:

- Give you full information on loan down payments, mortgage interest rates, monthly principal payments, and additional outgoing costs, with the help of a bank loan officer
- Explain the local housing options to you
- Research available financial assistance programs
- Help you to reach a housing solution based on your current financial situation
- Outline your wants and needs in a budget



- Make sure that you avoid unnecessary and expensive mistakes during the home-buying process

People are often skeptical about hiring someone else to help them through an already expensive process. The potential mistakes that you could make will be far more costly than consulting with a HUD housing counselor for even a few sessions.



## Applying for a Loan

The loan-application process isn't exactly something most people look forward to, but it's a crucial part of buying a home. The basic steps to applying for a loan are as follows:

1. Choose a Lender. Not all lenders are the same. Do your research and weigh your options before settling on one.
2. Get pre-approved. Before you even start looking for a home, you'll want to get pre-approved. A loan officer will review your financial situation and tell you which types of loans you can qualify for and how much you can spend.
3. Start your search. With this information in mind, you can go out and browse the housing market.
4. Apply for the loan. Whether you choose to take out a loan through a private lender or a bank, your financial status (annual income, yearly expenses, outstanding debt, and credit history) will be checked.

5. Close. Once you get approved, you'll find yourself closing on a new house. Depending on the loan type, you'll likely be required to pay a down payment of 3-20%.



## Common Mortgages & Loans

Although counselors, lenders, agents, and loan officers will likely fill you in on all of your mortgage options, it can't hurt to have a general understanding before you meet with any of them. The more you know, the more informed your decision will be.

**Fixed-Rate Mortgage** -A fully amortizing mortgage loan where the interest rate remains the same throughout the term of the loan, as opposed to loans where the interest rate is subject to change.

**Adjustable Rate Mortgage** - A type of mortgage where the interest rate is periodically adjusted. This means that your interest rate can become higher or lower over time depending on the index.

**VA Loan** -These loans are guaranteed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to help ensure long-term financial stability for American veterans and their families.

**FHA Loan** - This program from the Federal Housing Administration was intended for the lower credit scores of first-time and lower income homebuyers. Today, though, it's popular for its low down payment options.

## Home Modification List

Most people change their new home to suit their convenience and taste, and you're no different. What follows isn't a complete list of modifications, but it's a good starting place. You may want to meet with your physician (or another professional familiar with your needs) to outline a list of requirements and modifications for your home.

### Weakened Sensory Modification

- Purchase ultra-quiet machines (dishwasher, clothes dryer) to reduce unnecessary background noise.
- Increase the volume on all of your home telephones.
- Make sure entrances and exits are well-lit.
- Install smoke detectors with strobe lights.
- Install brighter light bulbs, and lights in every room, including all closets, stairwells, walkways, and entrances.
- Mark the edge of each step and countertop with a different color than the rest.



- Purchase a stove with bigger numbers that can be seen from across the room, and one that uses different colors to identify which parts of the stove are hot.

### Modifications for Physical Ailments and Related Issues

- All floors should be slip resistant to prevent falling.
- Install handrails and/or grab bars on ramps, and in hallways, stairs, and bathrooms.
- Consider elevated toilet seats, and putting a seat or bench in the bathtub or shower.
- Invest in a trash compactor to limit the amount of actual trash in the home.
- Make sure that all doors have lever handles rather than knobs.
- All countertops should have rounded edges so that they are not a hazard.

### Wheelchair Accessibility Modifications

- Make sure any walk-in closets are wide enough for a wheelchair to pass through.
- Organize your closet so that you can reach all of your belongings easily. Make sure the rods are set at a lower level.
- All appliances should have controls at the front of the machine for easy accessibility.
- Cabinet shelves should be no more than 10 inches deep.

- Doors and hallways need to be wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair.
- You need plenty of open floor space. All of the floors, walkways, and driveways should be smooth.
- Your bathroom should feature a roll-in shower, space to transfer from a wheelchair to the toilet, and bars or seating to make transferring into the bathtub as simple as possible. A handheld shower is also recommended.
- Consider installing a ramp to all entrances. The ramp should have an edging.
- Keep all smaller appliances (microwave, toaster, etc.) and electrical outlets at a lower level.

One more thing to keep in mind. If you see yourself struggling to get around in the future, then account for that when picking out a home. If a one-level home will be the best choice for you in the future, there's no sense in buying a three-story condo now.



## Take a Risk

The bottom line? Sure, there may be a few extra difficulties involved in getting a house, but they're not nearly as large as you may think. Don't let them get in your way of buying your dream home.

*An important note: The information in this guide is NOT legal advice and therefore should not be relied upon when making any home buying decisions. Readers should consult with their own attorneys for legal advice specific to their situation.*