



## Family Caregivers of British Columbia

### Home Adaptations Can Ease the Demands of Caregiving

As people age or their health declines, caregiving at home can be extended and made easier by making modifications to the home where the care recipient lives. These modifications can make the home more safe and accessible for the care recipient, family caregiver and other family members.

Adaptations to a home can make it easier and safer to carry out activities such as bathing, cooking or moving around the home, as well as changes to the physical structure of the home to improve its overall safety and condition. Modifications might include handrails, stair lifts or making the bathroom safe and accessible by installing grab bars.

Home modifications can help relieve the emotional, physical and time burdens placed on family caregivers. These burdens can be eased through knowing that their family member is safe when the caregiver is not there, by making it easier for the care recipient to be more independent and also to help the caregiver carry out personal care activities.

The costs of home modifications can vary greatly. Low cost changes may include installing lever handle door knobs or grab bars. More expensive changes might include installing an exterior ramp.

Recently the Province of BC launched the new Home Adaptations for Independence (HAFI) program to help low-income seniors and people with disabilities finance home modifications for accessible, safe and independent living. The HAFI program is funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia. Financial assistance up to \$20,000 per home is available to both homeowners and tenants. The amount is based on the cost of materials and labour necessary for the required adaptations and is in the form of a grant or forgivable loan. Eligible adaptations include items that directly address the household's disability or diminished abilities, such as handrails in hallways, ramps for ease of access, easy to reach work areas in the kitchen or walk-in showers with grab bars. For more information on the HAFI program, visit [www.bchousing.org/HAFI](http://www.bchousing.org/HAFI) or call BC Housing at 1-800-407-7757 (ext. 7055).

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has also published several free books on adaptable housing including, "Maintaining Seniors' Independence: A Guide to Home Adaptations" and "Maintaining Seniors' Independence through Home Adaptations: A Self-Assessment Guide. These can be found on the CMHC website at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca) and are available in digital and hardcopy formats.

*Barbara Small, Program Development Coordinator, Family Caregivers' Network Society*