

Podcast #1927

Home Modifications with Todd Vaarwerk

Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:07 Speaker 1

I am your host, Tracy LeBlanc, Chief Community Engagement Officer at Western New York Independent Living.

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One of the core values of Western New York Independent Living is our belief in empowering people with disabilities to make their own choices and live independently.

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But what happens when health issues challenge your ability to live independently in your home environment?

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Joining us today to talk about available options to modify your living space to ensure it meets your needs is WNL's Chief Policy Officer, Todd Vaarwerk.

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Welcome to the show, Todd.

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Always a pleasure.

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Todd, can you tell us what the term home modification means?

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Home modification is a physical change to a dwelling in order to make services provided in the home accessible to people with disabilities.

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So, when we're talking about a home modification, we can be talking about stuff like a ramp on the front door, a lift on the front door, accessible bathroom services, whether that be a roll-in shower or modifications to the bathing area so that you could use a hand shower or a wand.

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You could be widening doors. Right.

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You could be removing single steps.

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It's basically physical modifications of an existing dwelling so that you can live in it.

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Why are regulations on accessible housing important for people with disabilities?

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Okay.

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So, it's important to remember that we only get, right, when it comes to public planning for housing, we only get 5% of multifamily dwellings only

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for people with physical impairments and 2% for people with sensory impairments.

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That's not a real big pool in housing.

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While we can convince the state to do more, the state does promote 10% and 4% when they're funding projects by the State Office of Homes and Community Renewal.

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That's still not a really big pool.

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So, home modification is an important way

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for you to be able to stay in your home, but also an important way for housing to be available when you're not there in your home anymore. Right?

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So, regulations on accessible housing are really important.

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And one of the big struggles we have in finding housing is that there isn't any protection with single family homes, right?

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Single family homes normally built by developers, they spend all this time building all these homes.

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If they built accessible features at the same time they built accessible homes, it would be about 1% of the total cost of the home.

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If you wait until after the home is built and then do modifications, that can be up to 30% of the cost of the home.

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So not only is it a good idea because it widens our available housing, but it's a good financial idea because it makes it cheaper for the mods to get done.

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Are there programs and resources available to help someone get started in determining what home modifications may be of help to them?

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There are a bunch of them, but each of them has their own limited criteria.

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For example, the education department through ACCES-VR can help a person with a disability do modifications to their home but only if the modification is going to facilitate their ability to participate in employment.

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If you're a member of a Medicaid waiver like the OPWDD or getting OPWDD services, they can do home modifications for you, right?

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But there are limits to that, and you've got to be eligible for OPWDD services to do that.

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Some folks who are in managed long-term care plans can ask those people to help you with home modifications, but only if those modifications are going to help you effectively participate in your own health care.

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Make it into the doctor, get into your medication, you know, those kind of things, right?

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And then there are a couple of smaller programs about being able to make mods, some of them through your local cities, towns, and villages.

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And then there's a state program called Access to Home, which can allow you up to about \$25,000 to your home modifications.

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Great.

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Well, that's all the time we have for this week.

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Thank you for joining us today, Todd.

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And thank you for tuning in to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:04:53 Speaker 1

I've been your host, Tracy LeBlanc.