

Building Community Capacity to Serve Older Adults: The Role of Area Agencies on Aging in Home Modifications and Repairs

A Data Brief of the 2019 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging

Introduction

Most older adults want to live at home and in the community for as long as possible,¹ making home modifications and repairs increasingly important as the older population rises to historic levels. By making changes that adapt or convert features of a home to meet the needs of the older adults who live in them, home modifications help support independent living, caregiving and the prevention of falls. Examples of home modifications include changes that increase accessibility, such as widening doorways, or changes that reduce falls and related injuries, such as securing rugs to the floor, improving lighting or installing grab bars and a walk-in shower in the bathroom. More complex changes include renovations to make everyday tasks easier, such as lowering kitchen counters and adjusting cabinets to heights accessible for individuals who use wheelchairs. Some homes may need repairs before they can be modified to meet the needs of the older adults who live in them (e.g., fixing a leaky pipe before making a bathtub or shower accessible).

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), local organizations that plan and coordinate services for older adults in their communities, are important leaders in this work. Operating in virtually every community in the nation, AAAs have a mission to help older adults age with independence and dignity at home and in the community through a coordinated system of services and supports. Established by the Older Americans Act in 1973, there are more than 600 AAAs across the country.



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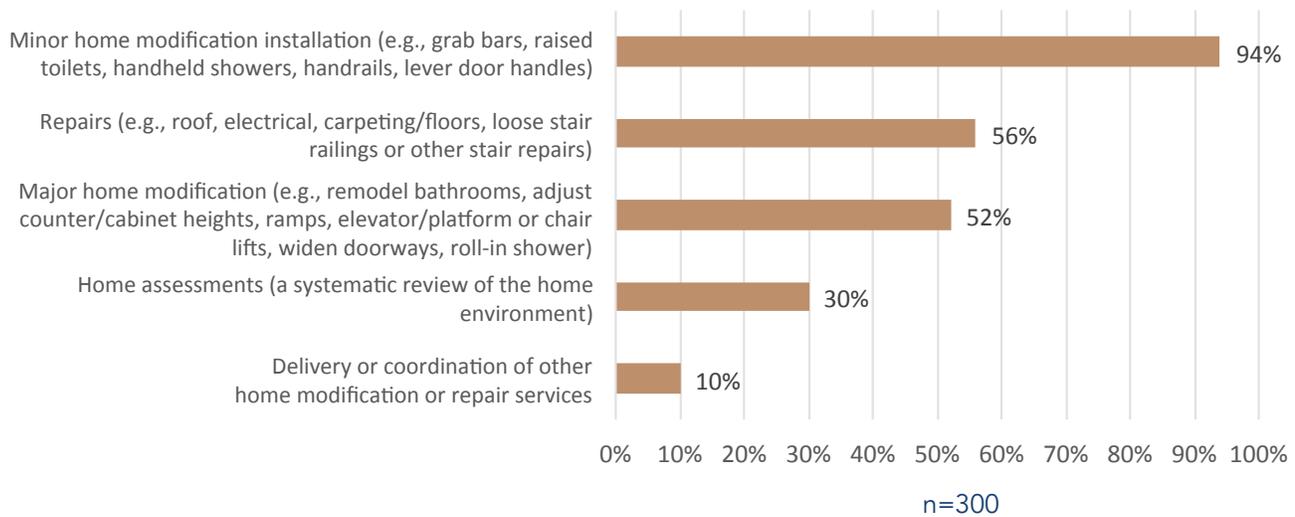
Information presented in this data brief was gathered through the 2019 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) in partnership with the Scripps Gerontology Center, with funding from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL). The survey questions for this data brief were developed in partnership with the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence at the University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, also with funding from ACL. The response rate of 78.5 percent is based on 485 of 618 AAAs responding to the survey, a representative sample.

Home Modification and Repair Services

AAAs are involved in an array of activities related to home modifications and repairs, providing the services directly or by making referrals to local programs that provide home modifications and repairs. Sixty-one percent of responding AAAs directly provide or contract with local providers for home modification and repairs. Forty-six percent of AAAs make referrals to local programs that make home modifications or repairs.

Figure 1. Home Modification and Repair Services Provided by AAAs

Which of the following services does your home modification or repair program deliver and/or coordinate? Check all that apply.



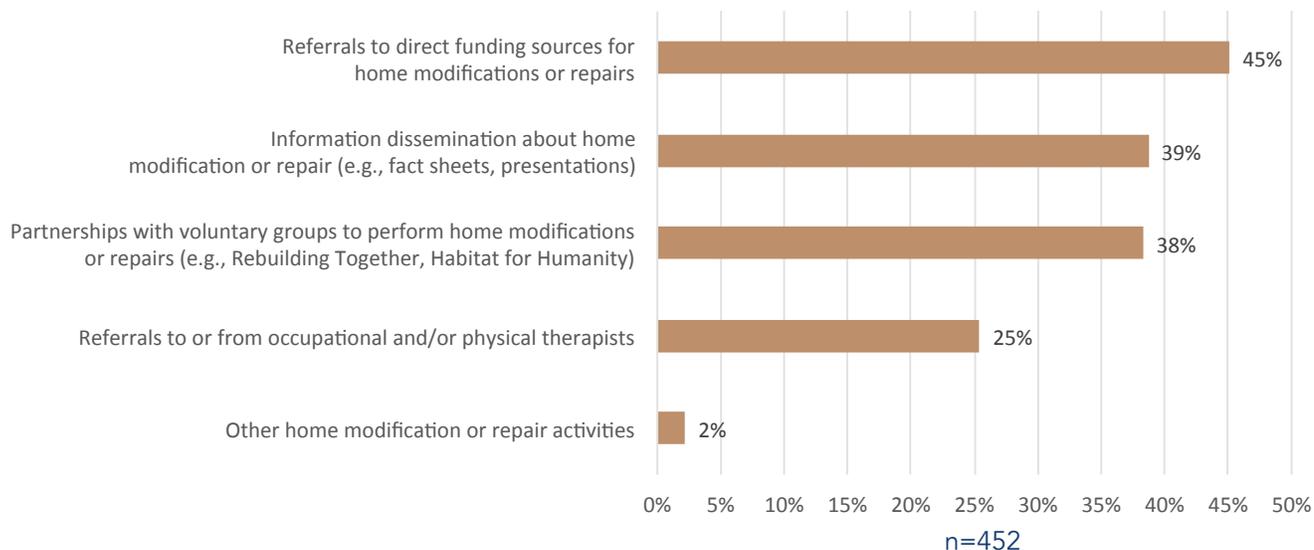
As shown in Figure 1, of the 61 percent of AAAs that provide home modifications directly or through contracted providers, 94 percent provide minor home modifications, such as the installation of grab bars and raised toilets. Fifty-six percent provide repairs, and 52 percent provide major home modifications, such as remodeling bathrooms and widening doorways.

Other Activities Related to Home Modification and Repair

In the survey, AAAs were asked about other home modification and repair activities they undertake besides service provision, such as partnerships or referrals to funding sources that can assist individuals with affording the cost of home modifications and repairs. Figure 2 shows the most common activities.

Figure 2. AAA Involvement in Other Home Modification or Repair Activities

Is your AAA involved in other home modification or repair activities?



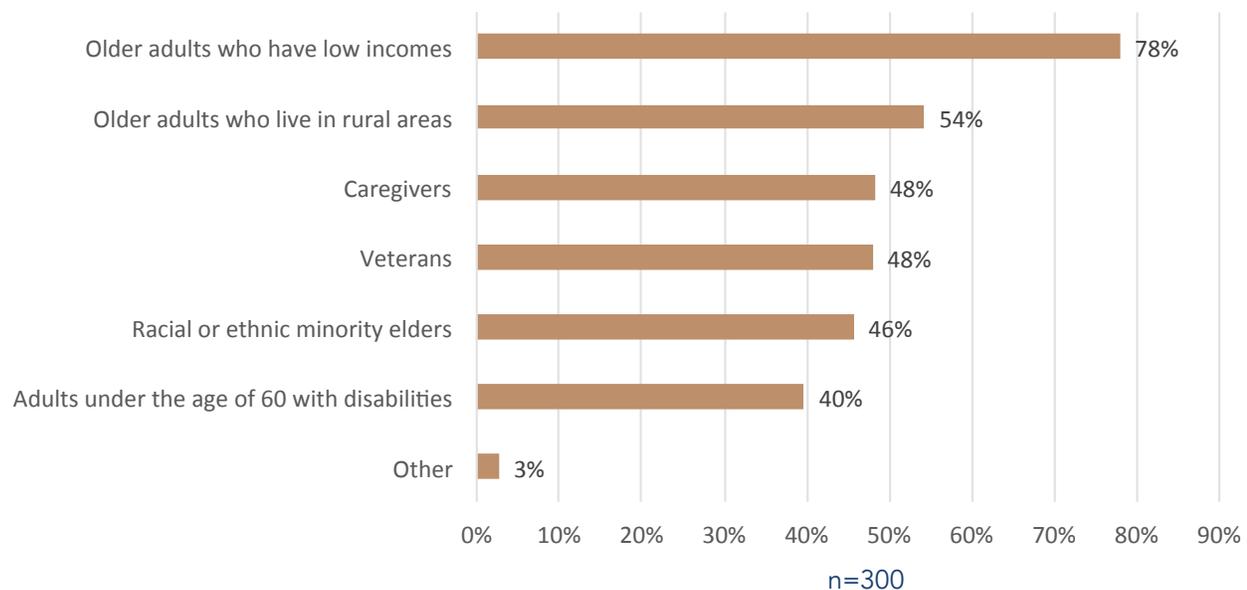
Of the 45 percent of AAAs that refer clients to direct funding sources, AAAs most commonly (88 percent) refer individuals to the Weatherization Assistance Program, a program funded by the U.S. Department of Energy that provides home upgrades for low-income households to improve energy efficiency and address health and safety concerns. Beyond this, the most common referrals to direct funding sources include nonprofit organizations such as Habitat for Humanity or Rebuilding Together (62 percent), local city/county housing/community development departments (62 percent) and Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waivers (59 percent).

Reaching a Broad Population with Home Modification and Repair Services

Of the AAAs providing home modification and repair services directly or by contracting with providers, more than three-quarters (78 percent) serve older adults who have low incomes through these programs, and more than half (54 percent) serve older adults living in rural areas. Nearly half of AAAs in this group serve a diverse clientele that includes caregivers, veterans and older adults from racial or ethnic minority groups. Forty percent of AAAs with home modification and repair programs serve adults younger than the age of 60 who are living with disabilities (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Groups Served by Home Modification and Repair Services

In addition to older adults age 60+, do your home modification or repair services specifically address the needs of any of the following groups?

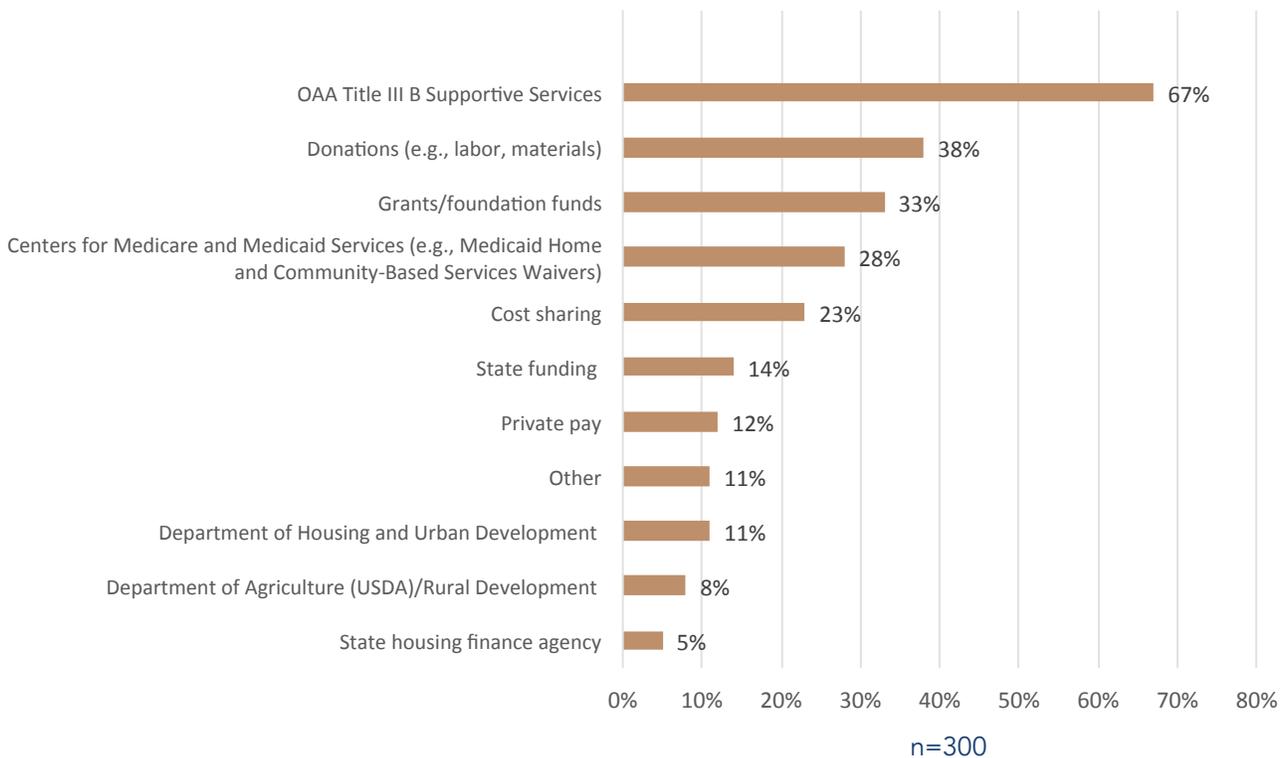


Funding Sources for Home Modification and Repair Services

AAAs were also asked to share which funding sources their agencies use to deliver or coordinate home modification and repair services. Figure 4 shows the funding sources most commonly used by AAAs to provide home modification and repair services. As seen in Figure 4, the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III B Supportive Services program is the main source of funding for home modification and repair services. AAAs rely on this source to also fund many other important services, such as transportation, legal services, in-home care and other supportive services, which limits the amount that can be dedicated to home modification and repair. In addition to OAA Title III B, AAAs support their home modification and repair services through donations, grants/foundation funds, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) funding, and cost sharing.

Figure 4. Most Common Funding Sources for Home Modification and Repair Programs

Which of the following funding sources are used by your AAA to deliver or coordinate these home modification or repair services? Check all that apply.



Summary

The vast majority of older adults want to age at home and in their communities. But, for many if not most, the homes they currently reside in will need some degree of modifications or repairs—whether major or minor—to accommodate changing needs and abilities in order to support safe and independent living.

AAAs provide home modifications and repairs as part of their mission to support the ability of older adults to remain in their homes and communities as they age. The 2019 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging found that 61 percent of responding AAAs provide home modification or repair services, and 46 percent make referrals to local programs that make home modifications or repairs. Of the AAAs contracting for or directly providing home modifications and repairs, the most common type is minor home modification (94 percent) with over half also providing repairs (56 percent) and major home modifications (52 percent). Since even minor home modifications have been found to contribute to quality of life, this effort by 94 percent of AAA home modification and repair service providers is critical.

Additionally, core to their mission of developing a coordinated system of services for older adults in their communities, AAAs often work through partnerships and systems of referrals to meet needs. The fact that 46 percent of AAAs provide referrals to home modification or repair programs and that 45 percent refer clients to direct funding sources that can help finance these services indicates that AAAs are a go-to local resource for connecting older adults to local programs that can improve their ability to continue living at home as they age. Since a supportive home environment has been found to impact health, it is encouraging that over one-quarter of AAAs are using sources via the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services as funding for home modifications and repairs. Through a range of activities, AAAs connect older adults and their families to home modifications and repairs, which are key services that support the needs of older adults living in the community.

¹ <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/community/info-2018/2018-home-community-preference.html>



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