

**Title:** Marketplace Research in Housing Adaptations for the Elderly

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**Abstract:** The goal of this project is to help the participants learn more about what types of products are available in retail stores for home modifications. While the project is designed around a focus on home modifications for the elderly, it could be adapted easily for students who are interested in adaptations for the disabled or universal design techniques.

**Objectives:**

1. To identify products available in the marketplace to adapt homes for the elderly and/or the disabled.
2. To identify price ranges of products that can be used for home adaptations.
3. To identify alternative modifications (*i.e.*, homemade) or alternative sources (*i.e.*, more specialized) for products when commercially available devices are not affordable or products are not available in the local marketplace.

**Target Students:** This activity could be conducted with graduate or undergraduate students in a wide range of fields, such as home health care, interior design, social work, and family and consumer sciences. Groups other than students could also benefit from this session; consumers and professionals wanting to learn about home modifications would learn a great deal from this project.

**Materials Needed:** All you need is to identify a home retail store nearby that you can use as your “laboratory.”

**Length of Time Required for Activity:** Planning: 1.5 hours; Executing: 1.5 hours; Summarizing/Debriefing: 45 minutes

**Guidelines:**

1. Students should decide exactly what they want to get out of this project and design their own scenario (example included) to guide their search.
2. Students should be divided into groups and given different budgets to consider.
3. Students should take notes while in the store about what products are available and what the prices are. If catalogues are available, or if it is possible to talk with people who work at the store, those are good sources of information as well.
4. After searching for products, students should regroup and discuss their findings.

**Possible Outcomes:** group presentations

## **Example Scenario:**

*Gladys is 83 and has lived alone since she became a widow ten years ago. She lives in a two-story home in a rural area of Georgia, which is far from any commercial development. The second story has been unused for five years because Gladys is afraid to go up the stairs. On the first floor there is a kitchen, a dining room, a living room, a bedroom (converted from an office after her husband passed away), and a full bathroom (converted from a porch shortly before her husband passed away). Gladys wishes to stay in her own home, as she has lived there since 1943.*

*She has many senior friends from church, but they are similarly limited in mobility due to physical problems, inability to drive, and/or lack of transportation. Therefore, they mainly stay in touch by phone calls and at Sunday School. She has a granddaughter who lives only a few miles away and visits on Sundays to take her to church and to the store. All of her siblings have passed away, along with her only daughter. Her son and his family live in California. Gladys loves to garden, but there are no paved sidewalks, so she worries about falling when she goes outside. She does her own cooking, laundry, and cleaning.*

*Her health problems include: emphysema, which necessitates the use of an oxygen tank; high blood pressure; and edema in her ankles, which means that she has to use a walker and can't wear tight shoes. She always wears slippers and shuffles in them, which has led to her falling twice in the past month – both times in her bathroom. She also worries about one day being in wheelchair. After her last visit with her doctor, he strongly suggested that she improve her home safety or move into a retirement home in the town 20 miles down the highway. She wants to do everything she can to stay in her home and not move to a strange place, far from the familiarities of her home, community, and friends.*

*Gladys is working on a plan for home modifications with her granddaughter. The church has offered to hold a fundraiser to help Gladys pay for some of the improvements. Gladys is thankful for the monetary help, but she knows that she will still be working with a limited budget. (She lives on a fixed monthly income of \$1,800 from her husband's pension.) Also, she doesn't know what types of products to look for or how much they cost. It will be difficult for her to walk around a large home improvement store, so she needs some help knowing what products are available in the marketplace. Her granddaughter has gone to the university in the town nearby and asked a professor in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences for assistance. The professor has agreed to take her class to the home improvement store in town to determine what products are available, which will have to be special ordered, and the price ranges of different products. Gladys has asked them to start with the bathroom, since that is where she seems to be having the most difficulty.*

**Example Budgets:** Low: \$250; Middle: \$500; High: \$750

**Example Chart of Difficulties:**

<b><u>Problems in the Bathroom</u></b>	<b><u>Possible modifications</u></b>	<b><u>Comments/ priority</u></b>
Commode too low	Raised commode	High priority
Using shaky towel bar to get off of commode and out of shower	Grab bars	High priority
Difficulty opening and closing doorknob in bathroom	Lever door knobs	Low priority – lives alone; does not have to fully close door
Difficulty opening and closing faucets in sink (possibly resulting in higher water bill the past few months)	Lever faucets	High priority because of high water bill due to leaving the water running
Bathing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drops soap in bathtub when showering (this has caused her to slip once)</li> <li>• Difficulty getting legs over tub to get into bathtub</li> <li>• Difficulty getting down to the bottom of bathtub (she rarely does tub bottom bathing anymore for fear that she won't be able to get up)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shower seat/shower bench</li> <li>2. Hand-held showerhead</li> <li>3. Grab bar to go in the shower</li> </ol>	High priority for a tub bench and/or a grab bar so she has some postural security while bathing; will help her get into/out of tub and hopefully make falls less likely
Flooring in bathroom is old and worn, and there is a hole in the linoleum near the bathtub and near the door threshold.	Skid-resistant tile (linoleum)	High priority – especially since she carries her walker into the bathroom with her.
Difficulty maneuvering her walker into her bathroom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wider door</li> <li>2. Pocket door that slides into the wall</li> </ol>	There is enough space to put grab bars along a wall in the bathroom so she doesn't have to bring her walker into bathroom, but she worries about one day being in a wheelchair.
Difficulty with visual recognition of dirt and difficulty seeing to fix hair and groom self	Lighting: cross-lighting instead of down-lighting	High priority – need to be concerned about glare
Cannot open medicine cabinet due to arthritis in hands	New medicine cabinet that is easier to open	Low priority