

STRATEGY 8

Enhance Learning Opportunities Related to Housing Programs and Services

- a.** The North Carolina Falls Prevention Coalition should partner with statewide and local housing organizations to host annual summits rotated to different regions that include education for interested and responsible parties and consumers about what can be done to reduce the risk of falls in the home and community. The summits should include a focus on housing considerations and issues for people in rural areas, people with physical and sensory disabilities, people who live in public or rental housing, and other groups who may be underserved.
- b.** The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services and Area Agencies on Aging should identify opportunities to support learning and enhance efficiencies for older adult community service providers about possible uses for Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) funds when there is an increase in funding availability, other funding sources, and available community resources to help ensure safe and affordable housing for older adults (e.g., home modification programs). All trainings/presentations/efforts should include a focus on housing considerations and issues for people in rural areas, people with disabilities, people who live in public or rental housing, and other groups who may be underserved.
- c.** The North Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council, local Centers for Independent Living, and state and local housing coalitions should partner to develop educational opportunities for local Housing Authorities and Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly known as Section 8) landlords on the needs of older adults and people with disabilities related to home modifications and how universal design features can support the aging population and people with physical and sensory disabilities.

Desired Result – North Carolinians will have access to housing that meets their needs and helps prevent injury because of increased knowledge and partnership related to safe housing for older adults.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – As stated in Strategy 7, “Housing has a very real and direct impact on the ability of older adults to age in place, prevent falls, maintain adequate nutrition, and remain mobile and connected in their communities.” The task force recommends the activities in Strategy 8 to increase the knowledge of those working in the housing sector about the needs of older adults, deepen connections between the housing and aging sectors, and catalyze partnerships to improve access to safe housing for older adults.

Context – See Strategy 7, Pages 40 and 41 for information about home modification and universal design.

Home modification programs can be an effective method of helping older adults and people with physical and sensory disabilities continue to live in their homes safely. However, the circumstances from which individuals come and in which they live may impact their ability to access those modifications. For renters, partners in the housing sector, such as landlords, have an important role in determining whether older adults can make modifications to their homes to make them safer and more accessible.

“ [There is a] real issue when it comes to rental properties if the landlord agrees to home modifications. [Often the] burden falls on the individual to pay for it. Some [assistance] programs require the person to be the homeowner to get funding. Some landlords we worked with would allow grab bars and the material of shower required glue to be used for the bar, but the landlord wanted it to be removed when the person moves [which can be difficult to do without damaging the shower]. We try to do education around some of the benefits of doing these adjustments. ”

– Director of a housing advocacy group

Even if the person owns their home, some modification programs require a portion of the repair to be paid by the homeowner over time. Unpaid funds after a program participant passes away can create a lien on the property, making surviving family members responsible. To protect family from taking on that responsibility, some people choose not to accept funds for necessary home repairs. These issues highlight the importance of education for housing partners and inclusion of community members and advocacy groups that represent historically marginalized communities in the process of program development and policymaking.

PARTNERS

NC Falls Prevention Coalition - The NC Falls Prevention Coalition is made up of seven regional coalitions that cover 77 counties. Their mission is to “bring together researchers, planners, health care providers, housing specialists, aging services providers, and many others to work together to reduce the number of falls and fall-related injuries among North Carolinians.”¹⁵⁴ The Coalition hosted a March 2023 summit on the topic of Powerful Innovative Practices to Prevent Falls, which included discussions of universal design, among other topics.¹⁵⁵

North Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council (NC SILC) and Local Centers for Independent Living – The NC SILC is “a federally-mandated, not-for-profit, Governor-appointed council. A majority of council members must be people with a disability. By federal law, the SILC is charged with:

- Developing a state plan and provisioning statewide independent living services (SPIL).
- Developing and supporting a statewide network of Centers for Independent Living (CILs)
- Monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating the state plan (SPIL)¹⁵⁶

There are eight local Centers for Independent Living (CIL) that provide services for people with disabilities in 42 counties.¹⁵⁶ Each CIL is an independent nonprofit with funding largely from the federal Administration for Community Living. CIL services include guidance and counseling, rehabilitation



engineering, home and vehicle modifications, independent living skills training, certain equipment purchases, assistance with leisure activities, personal assistance services, and service animals for people with disabilities.¹⁵⁷

State and local housing coalitions – The North Carolina Housing Coalition’s (NCHC) mission is to “lead a movement to ensure that every North Carolinian has a home in which to live with dignity and opportunity.”¹⁵⁸ It conducts legislative advocacy and coalition projects and hosts the Housing Counseling Network and Homeowner Assistance Program, among other work. NCHC also helps to build capacity for local housing coalitions across the state. Local coalitions have specialized knowledge of local drivers of housing challenges and local housing supports.

Local Housing Authorities – North Carolina law gives counties and local governments jurisdiction to create local housing authorities. The role of these entities is to:

- “Prepare, carry out and operate housing projects, both rental and homeownership;
- Acquire property or interests therein, including by eminent domain;
- Own, hold, clear, and improve property;
- Sell, exchange, or assign property; and
- Provide for the construction, reconstruction, improvement, alteration or repair of any housing project or any part thereof.”¹⁵⁸

There are 15 housing authorities in North Carolina with information available online.¹⁵⁹

Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly known as Section 8) – “Section 8 or housing choice vouchers are rental assistance from the federal government that can be obtained from a local housing authority.”¹⁵⁹

Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) – HCCBG funds are administered by the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services and help to provide in-home and community-based services for older adults. County Commissioners determine how their local allotment of HCCBG funds will be used. Housing and home improvement is one of the services allowed to use HCCBG funds.

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Safe and accessible homes are a key strategy to prevent falls.



Homes that have been built or modified to allow for ease of movement and safe entry and exit will help older adults maintain their independence within the home and more easily move about the community.



Safe and accessible kitchens can help older adults prepare food and maintain healthy nutrition.



Homes that have safe entry and exit allow older adults to get out into the community and maintain their social connections.