

Integrated Housing Adaptations Team

Advice for Self-Funding Disabled Facilities Adaptations

Accessible bathrooms

A bathroom adaptation might be required if a person is unable to maintain their personal hygiene safely and independently with current facilities, for instance, due to restricted mobility. There are several different options that could make their daily life less difficult and promote safety and independence in the home.

Desired Outcome

To facilitate use of essential personal hygiene facilities, enabling independent or assisted maintenance of an acceptable level of personal cleanliness and skin care.

Examples of adaptations

- Installing an accessible shower,
- Replacing a bath or inappropriate shower with an accessible shower.

Equipment options

Before considering adaptation, or as an interim measure while waiting to complete an adaptation, equipment options should be explored as these may be cost-effective and can be implemented without the lengthy timescales that an adaptation involves. They may be able to have disability living equipment provided and installed free of charge by Social Services, the NHS, or their housing association if they have eligible social care or health needs. Disability living equipment can also be bought from independent stores. You can view examples of equipment available on our website.

Different types of accessible shower

What type of shower to recommend is not always straightforward. Level access showers are often the obvious choice because they will cope with any level of mobility with an appropriate shower seat. However, they do require the maximum amount of work and disruption, and even a simple bathroom conversion may leave the room out of action for a week as it must be stripped bare and the floor prepared.

1) Level access shower

This is also referred to as shaped floor shower, dished floor, sloping/sloped floor, graded floor shower, or as a wet room. In this type of shower, the anti-slip floor covering of the sloping area is continuous with the floor outside the shower area.

2) Bath replacement tray

In this type of shower, a preformed or proforma tray is inserted into the floor that results in a minimal threshold where the tray meets the flooring of the remainder of the bathroom. This type of shower is often used where the shower is replacing the footprint of an existing bath allowing the surrounding floor to be left undisturbed. The threshold lip may be enough to make it awkward to wheel a shower chair over.

3) Low threshold shower

This is also referred to as a low-profile tray shower. This may be the best that can be achieved if the floor cannot be breached, for instance, in upper floors of construction within blocks of flats or where the fall for the drain would be insufficient for a level access shower. Pumped wastes can be considered to overcome lack of fall height.

You can see examples of different accessible showering facilities on our website.

The key factors to consider when choosing an accessible shower

Most bathroom adaptations should be straightforward and easily manageable by competent builders who are able to identify the different options for you if you are clear about what you want to achieve. Here are the key factors to consider:

- What is the person's current functional ability and prognosis?
- Will they walk or be wheeled into the bathroom?
- Will they need assistance in the bathroom from a carer?
- Will the shower be used seated or standing or both? The footprint of a shower chair is a useful starting point for size allowing for feet and knees in seated and bent over. They will need room to turn around in front of a seat.
- Will they operate the controls? Where and at what height should controls be?
- Will the person undress and dry off in the bathroom?
- What type of flooring is required?
- Who else will be using the facility and will it work for them?
- Is there sufficient space for the required type of shower?
- Are there technical limitations or impracticalities? Some may be obvious, others will be identified by the contractor, e.g. concrete upper floors, drainage.
- Will a better space be created by combining a separate bathroom and toilet?
- Where is the bathroom in relation to other facilities? If upstairs, will the person be able to continue to access the upper floor in the longer term?

General points

Here are some further general points to consider:

- The control unit should be fitted at a lower level, so it can be easily reached from sitting as well as standing. Similarly, the shower header rail should extend low down, so they can easily reach this from a seated position too.
- One or two grab rails are useful as you enter the shower area.
- Having some colour contrast between floor and wall can help with depth perception. It can also help to have dark grab rails against a light colour wall.
- Wall-fixed seats can be included as part of the building work or free-standing seats can be requested from Social Services or the NHS upon completion.
- Shower areas can never be too big, especially if managing complex needs or accommodating carer support. The useable shower area is the line of the curtain rail which always falls within the tray or sloped area. For an average build person, avoid anything smaller than 1000 x 1000mm area. A preferred minimum should be 1100 x 1100mm. And as large as possible is beneficial.
- Some people like having fixed or moveable shower screens. However, we rarely provide screens for installations as they are another obstacle that can constrict often limited space. If the shower area is large enough and the floor well laid and away from the doorways, water escape should not be a problem.
- Avoid bathroom makeover companies that tend to charge more than builders.
- As the toilet will be removed during the adaptation, this is an opportunity to install a slightly higher toilet that may benefit the person, particularly if they are taller than average. We also often request rails on both sides of the toilet during installations, which may not be to everyone's taste but are better than having a free-standing frame around a toilet that could be a trip hazard.