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Creating Community for a Lifetime

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# HOME MODIFICATIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS IN KENT COUNTY

CREATING COMMUNITY FOR A LIFETIME... Planning for an elder-friendly community in Kent County

## Home Modifications Needed to Support Aging in Place

As their risk of injury and disability increases, older adults need homes that provide safe, comfortable and convenient environments. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, appropriate home modifications and repairs may prevent 30% to 50% of all home accidents, including falls, among older adults. In Kent County, one in twelve (8%) older adults needs to modify her/his home in the next five years, but a significant number of these elders are not sure they will be able to. A disproportionate number of those needing modifications are minorities, those in poorer health and women.

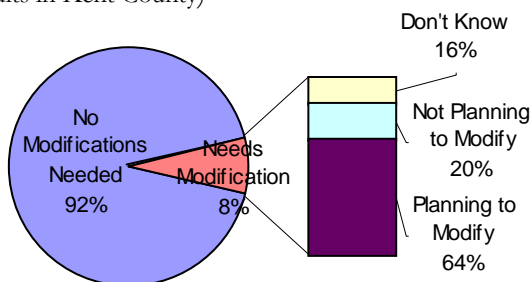
*An elder-friendly community enables older adults to age in place if they want to by helping them modify their homes to accommodate their changing needs.*

## Many Modifications Not Being Made

Although 95% of older residents in Kent County want to remain in their homes as they age, one in 12 (8%) – about 4,700 elders – see the need for significant, often costly, modifications to improve their ability to stay in their homes over the next five years. Nationally, 14% of older adults say they need such changes to their homes.<sup>1</sup>

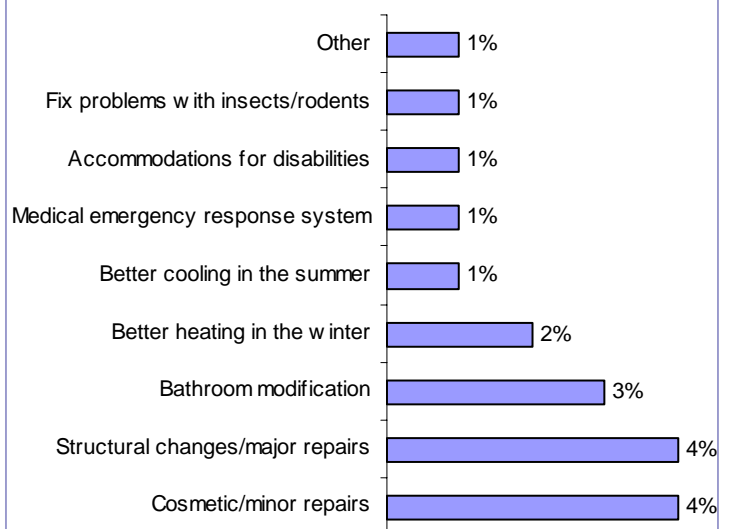
At least 20% of those who need home modifications indicated they have no plans to make them – usually because they can't afford them, they can't do the work themselves or they're not sure they'll still be living in the same place in five years. Although several community programs offer assistance with home repair and home modifications, nearly half of the older adults in Kent County are unaware of these services.

Exhibit 1 - Older adults (65+) with home modification needs and plans (as a percentage of the total population of older adults in Kent County)



The top needs cited in Kent County were structural changes/major repairs (i.e., new roof or plumbing), cosmetic/minor repairs (i.e., painting or floor refinishing), bathroom modifications (i.e., grab bars, handrails, high toilet or non-slip tile) and heating system upgrades.

Exhibit 2 - Types of modifications needed (as a percentage of the total population of older adults in Kent County)

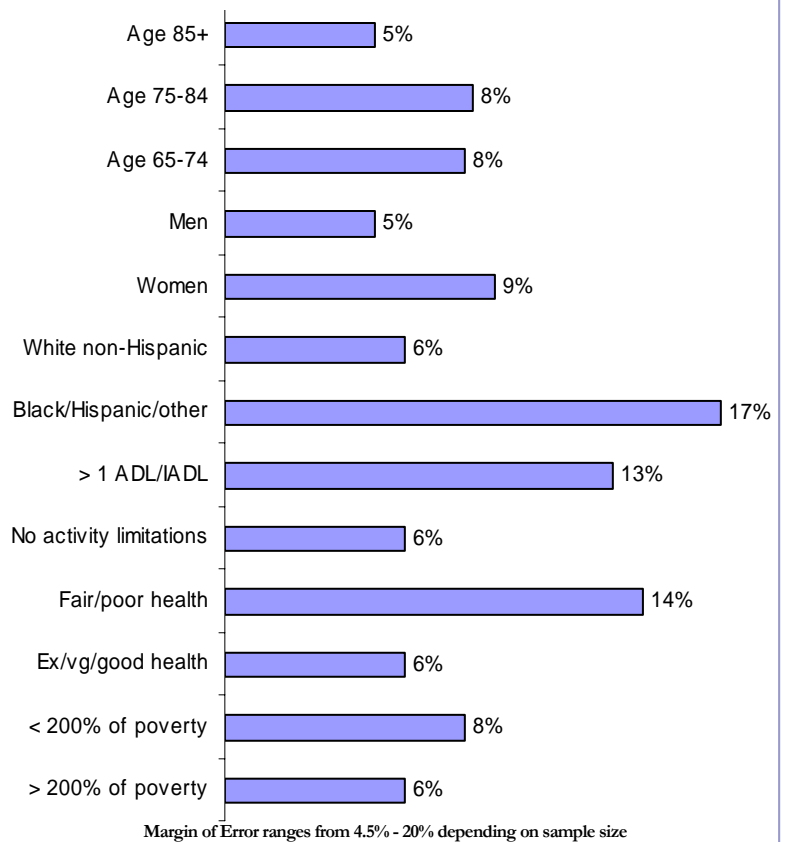


## Who Needs Home Modifications?

Among the nearly 5,000 older adults in Kent County who need to modify their homes to be able to remain in them, a disproportionate number are minorities, those in poorer health and women. Seventeen percent of older minority residents need modifications – nearly three times the proportion of White non-Hispanic elders (6%). Similarly, nearly twice as many women (9%) than men (5%) need home modifications.

The proportion of older adults in poorer health who need modifications (14%) is more than double that among those in good health (6%). Elders who require assistance with one or more activities of daily living (ADLs) or instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs)<sup>2</sup> are also more than twice as likely to need home modifications than their counterparts who have no activity limitations. This disparity takes on added significance when we consider the increased risk of injury among frail elders. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, appropriate home modifications and repairs may prevent 30% to 50% of all home accidents, including falls, among older adults.

**Exhibit 3 - Which older adults need home modifications?**  
(as a percentage of Kent County older adults in each demographic group)



## IT'S OUR FUTURE!

Today, one in ten Kent County residents – 62,102 people – is 65 or over. Most experts agree that, within the next 30 years, that number will double to nearly 125,000. Creating Community for a Lifetime is planning *today* so that the older adults of *tomorrow* can stay in their homes as their needs change, modifying their environments instead of having to relocate.

**Creating Community for a Lifetime** is a Kent County initiative seeking to build a framework for long-term planning to address the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging community. Lead partners are the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.

Information in this Data Sheet is derived from a 2004 AdvantAge Initiative (AI) survey of Kent County residents 65 or older. This survey provides an opportunity to compare local findings with results from AI Surveys conducted in other communities as well as nationally. Analysis of Kent County survey results was provided by the Community Research Institute at the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Grand Valley State University.

For more information about *Creating Community for a Lifetime* or a summary of the full AI survey results for Kent County, see [www.community4alifetime.org](http://www.community4alifetime.org).

For more information about the *AdvantAge Initiative*, see [www.vnsny.org/advantage](http://www.vnsny.org/advantage).

<sup>1</sup> Feldman, Penny H., Mia R. Oberlink, Elizabeth Simantov, and Michael G. Gursen (April 2004). A tale of two older Americas: Community opportunities and challenges. Report on the 2003 national survey of adults aged 65 and older. New York: Center for Home Care Policy & Research, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, page 8. Retrieved March 2, 2005 from [www.vnsny.org/advantage/survey.html#survey](http://www.vnsny.org/advantage/survey.html#survey).

<sup>2</sup> Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) include eating, dressing, bathing, toileting, transferring in and out of bed/chair, and walking. Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) include: preparing meals, shopping for personal items, medication management, managing money, using telephone, doing heavy housework, doing light housework and transportation ability.