



## **National Home Modification Action Coalition, Inc.**

**Making the Vision of Independent Living Real**

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### **Background Information On The National Home Modification Action Coalition (NHMAC), Inc.**

By the 1990's our society's changing demographics included the increased aging of our population and a greater number of persons with disabling conditions. These demographic changes impacted an increasing number of people who were confronted with obstacles and barriers in their homes that were inconvenient, limiting and hazardous. Many didn't realize or understand that their homes could be modified to make them more comfortable, safer, supportive of their lifestyles, and would allow them to remain in their homes and neighborhoods for as long as they wish. The number and types of individuals who needed home modifications was growing dramatically. Middle-aged couples planning for the future, families welcoming aging parents into their homes and an increasingly older population aging in place. All were seeking homes that were attractive, comfortable, convenient, and safe. Many were looking for homes that were supportive of their lifestyles and that enhanced their independence while retaining the home's value.

In response to these issues, The Center for Universal Design (formerly, the Center for Accessible Housing) convened the First National Conference on Home Modification Policy in November 1993. Funded by the North Carolina Assistive Technology Project and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, this conference addressed the growing gap between the need and available assistance for home accessibility. The conference brought together policy makers, professionals, and consumers with a common interest in bridging this gap. The conference resulted in a commitment to continue exchanges among the participants and work toward a national agenda for increasing the availability and funding for home modification services. Working groups generated recommendations that were incorporated into conference white paper, "**Fix It!**" that outlined the barriers and solutions and proposed priorities for future action.

Following the conference, a working group of fifteen individuals and organizations (also known as "The Mod Squad") continued to meet concerning these issues. The organizations included the Center for Universal Design, Adaptive Environments, AARP, NAHB Remodeler's Council, National Association of the Remodeling Industry, AOTA, RESNA, the Andrus Gerontology Center, the IDEA Center at SUNY Buffalo and others. This working group evolved into the National Home Modifications Action Coalition that met regularly throughout the rest of the decade.

The Coalition organized the second national conference, which took place in April 1996, at the Georgetown University Conference Center in Washington D.C. The conference had public and private sponsorship that included and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Lowe's

Home Safety Council, the Administration on Aging, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and GE Appliances. Additional support was provided by: The Home Depot, the North Carolina Assistive Technology Project, and KraftMaid Cabinetry, Inc.

This conference offered an opportunity to develop an action plan whereby community, state, and national organizations could:

- Create and coordinate service delivery systems,
- Increase the availability of home modifications to all who need them, and
- Document the impact of home modification assistance on improved safety and independence in the home.

The two-day working conference, *A Blueprint for Action: The Second National Working Conference on Home Modifications Policy*, brought together over 60 of the nation's leading experts in disability, aging, housing finance, remodeling, design and construction, community development, and long term care. Participants shared service delivery strategies and models that have proven successful in diverse communities. The conference was organized around four key themes-*Consumer Knowledge, Funding, Service Delivery, and Systems Change*. Panels on these topics were formed around paper presentations developed for the conference. Working groups convened to address the issues raised in the papers and during the panel discussions.

The conference white paper, *A Blueprint for Action*, was developed from the major paper topics, discussions and working groups at this second conference. This report includes a discussion of barriers and recommendations for change at the national, state, and community levels. *A Blueprint for Action* reflects the diverse perspectives and approaches of the many experts who contributed to the conference and the papers. Most importantly, *A Blueprint for Action remains an action plan for promoting home modifications through coalition building, and sustained and coordinated activities.*

There were several important follow-ups to this second conference; notable was the creation of a home modifications e-mail listserv (now joined by a visitability listserv) by SUNY Buffalo. That listserv continues to thrive and grow and is currently serving as an international focal point for the exchange of information about home modification trends, practices and policies for hundreds of members throughout the world.

During the last five years, the coalition has been maintained, with support from NIDRR, the Center for Universal Design, the National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification, SUNY at Buffalo, AARP, and many others. During this time, the National Home Modifications Action Coalition developed into a strong network and a credible force for addressing the housing crisis caused by the increasing number of children, adults, and seniors with disabilities, and the lack of support offered by most existing housing. During this same time, first the online then a hard copy version of the NHMAC newsletter was produced with support from the University of Southern California, National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification (NRCSHHM). This national resource center (and its web site) has evolved to a reliable

source of information and the newsletter has been sought out and read by many housing and related professionals, researchers and academicians.

In January of 1997, the USC Andrus Gerontology Center received funding from The Archstone Foundation to develop the, “Successful Aging in Place: The Home Modification Action Project” (HMAP). The goal of this project was to increase the availability of home modifications so frail older persons would have the choice to age in place and receive care a supportive environment. Their goal involved four long-term objectives: 1) increase consumer and professional knowledge; 2) stimulate the development of home modification programs; 3) promote innovative state and local policies and financing mechanisms; and 4) mobilize state and local home modification coalitions and task forces.

### **Reorganization Of The National Home Modification Action Coalition (NHMAC)**

Different individual and organizational circumstances have evolved over the years. Several organizations have taken the lead in supporting Coalition activities in the past five years: The Center for Universal Design, The Andrus Gerontology Center, AARP, and The State University of New York at Buffalo.

Meanwhile, the increased number of older persons and the number of persons with disabilities continue to increase along with the scope and size of home modification problems and issues. In view of the current situation, it was evident that there was an increasing need for a strong creditable organization to take the lead in confronting and tackling the issues that have been identified by the coalition.

Recently, The National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification (NRCSHHM), in collaboration with the other key agencies and organizations, assumed lead responsibility for managing the ongoing activities of the coalition and took steps to reorganize and strengthen the coalition. Leon Harper, one of the founding members of the coalition, and currently an Associate of the NRCSHHM center, assumed the role of president and helped organize a series of teleconferences that lead to the convening of a national meeting of the coalition in conjunction with the ICADI international conference in Washington DC in December, It was at that meeting that the membership, aware of the growing need, encouraged the coalition leadership to take steps to move the coalition to the next level. In June 2004, the NHMAC steering committee took the next step and incorporated the coalition as a 501- (c) (3) non-profit organization.