

# Aging in Place and Home Modifications



*Why emerging?* The baby boomers are demanding a different approach to aging, including being able to stay in their homes as long as possible. In a recent AARP survey of Americans aged 50 years and older, 88% of respondents reported that it is extremely or very important to have long-term-care services that allow aging in place.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, only one in six home owners has made home modifications that would allow them to be safe and comfortable in their home as they age.<sup>2</sup> The goals of aging in place are to enhance the quality of life for older adults in their home environment, allow them to participate in valued activities, and ensure that people who plan to stay in their homes as they age make the necessary modifications to do so.

*Get Involved!* Working as a home health care occupational therapist, Tracy Van Oss, DHSc, OTR/L, SCEM, CHES, CAPS, started evaluating each client's environment or living space and developed a deep appreciation of how a space can enhance or inhibit a person's ability to safely engage in his or her home. In 1998, Van Oss started her business, Classic Care, and today she focuses on safe aging in place programs and home safety assessments. Van Oss notes that with baby boomers growing older and wanting to remain in their homes, the concept of aging in place may become more popular and familiar. "As other health care professions catch on to this new trend of aging in place, it has the potential to become saturated with competitors," she says.

Karen Smith, OT, CAPS, recommends that practitioners interested in aging in place and home modifications join the [home modifications network on OT Connections](#), take continuing education on the topic, and look into the [Certified Aging in Place Specialist \(CAPS\) designation](#) from the National Association of Home Builders as well as [AOTA's Specialty Certification in Environmental Modifications](#) (SCEM). Smith notes that practitioners can volunteer with the non-profit Rebuilding Together to provide home assessments and recommendations to help keep people safe in their homes. Rehabilitation centers, continuing care retirement communities, and home health agencies, as well as other facilities may also offer opportunities to sharpen your skills in home assessments and related aging in place efforts..

Van Oss recommends that practitioners who are interested in starting a home modification business should assess whether there is a need in the community and an expressed interest by the target audience, develop a thorough strategic plan that takes into account the time and money to create the business, and work with an accountant and a lawyer. "Occupational therapy practitioners must be prepared to deliver the services needed for our aging population," says Van Oss. "Further education and self development skills are necessary to ensure that the future of occupational therapy is secure in [aging in place]."

