

## HOME IMPROVEMENT

# Tips to Make Homes Accessible For People With Disabilities

NewsUSA

(NU) - In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act made it mandatory for public buildings to be accessible for people with disabilities, yet the law did not extend the same guidelines to private homes.

So when it comes to making a home's features more functional for people with disabilities, many homeowners don't know where to start. However, the need for more accessible housing is expected to grow at a rapid rate in the next 15 years, experts say.

"More than 54 million Americans live with a disability," said James E. Williams Jr., president and chief executive officer of Easter Seals, an organization that helps people with disabilities gain greater independence. "The aging population is expected to reach 70 million by 2030. And, baby boomers are concerned about finding homes they can grow old in as an alternative to nursing homes and retirement communities."

To help homeowners create barrier-free spaces for family and friends with disabilities, Easter Seals and its corporate sponsor, Century 21 Real Estate LLC, have teamed up to provide guidance and a variety of resources through the Web site, [www.easterseals.com/easyaccess](http://www.easterseals.com/easyaccess). They offer the following tips.

- **Skip the stairs.** Entrances should be made of flat, even surfaces that gradually slope toward doors. Consider wide entrance doors that provide enough space for a wheelchair.

- **Keep it light.** Since light-



**Lowering electrical outlets is one way to make a home more accessible for wheelchair-users.**

ing is a big consideration for people with low vision, make use of large windows and overhead lighting.

- **Add visuals.** Visual devices can be attached to doorbells, telephones and fire alarms to alert people with hearing disabilities.

- **Recreate the kitchen and bathroom.** Lower cabinets, shelves and countertop heights by a few inches and allow for knee room beneath cabinets for better access to the sink and countertops. Look for side-by-side refrigerators and choose appliances with voice-operated or easy-to-reach controls. In the bathroom, install non-slip and flat surface flooring, grab bars and removable shower heads.

- **Adjust heights accordingly.** Lower or raise the height of peepholes, mailboxes, electrical controls and outlets to meet the needs of wheelchair-users.

For more tips, log on to [www.easterseals.com/easyaccess](http://www.easterseals.com/easyaccess).