



i D E A S  
L A B

# ESSENTIAL YET OUT OF REACH: Home Accessibility for Children with Disabilities

May 21, 2026

# Moderator



**Carolyn Foster, MD, MS**

Tenure Track Assistant Professor of Pediatrics  
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

# Panelists



**Rebecca Seltzer, MD, MHS**

Associate Professor of Pediatrics  
Johns Hopkins University



**Tamara Morgan**

Associate Director  
Adaptive Design Association



**Crystal Thomas**

Patient & Family Advocate  
Children's National Hospital

# Agenda

**Introduction**

Carolyn Foster

**Home Modification Overview**

Rebecca Seltzer

**Panel Discussion**

Rebecca Seltzer, Tamara Morgan, Crystal Thomas

**Q+A**

Panelists, Moderated by Carolyn Foster

# Introduction

Carolyn Foster, MD, MS

# Welcome

**Instructions**

Q&A

**Funding**

Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health

**Co-Sponsor**

Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics

**Acknowledgement**

Research Team Members , Parent Partners, Advisory Team Members, iDEAS Lab

# Home Accessibility is a Right, Not a Luxury

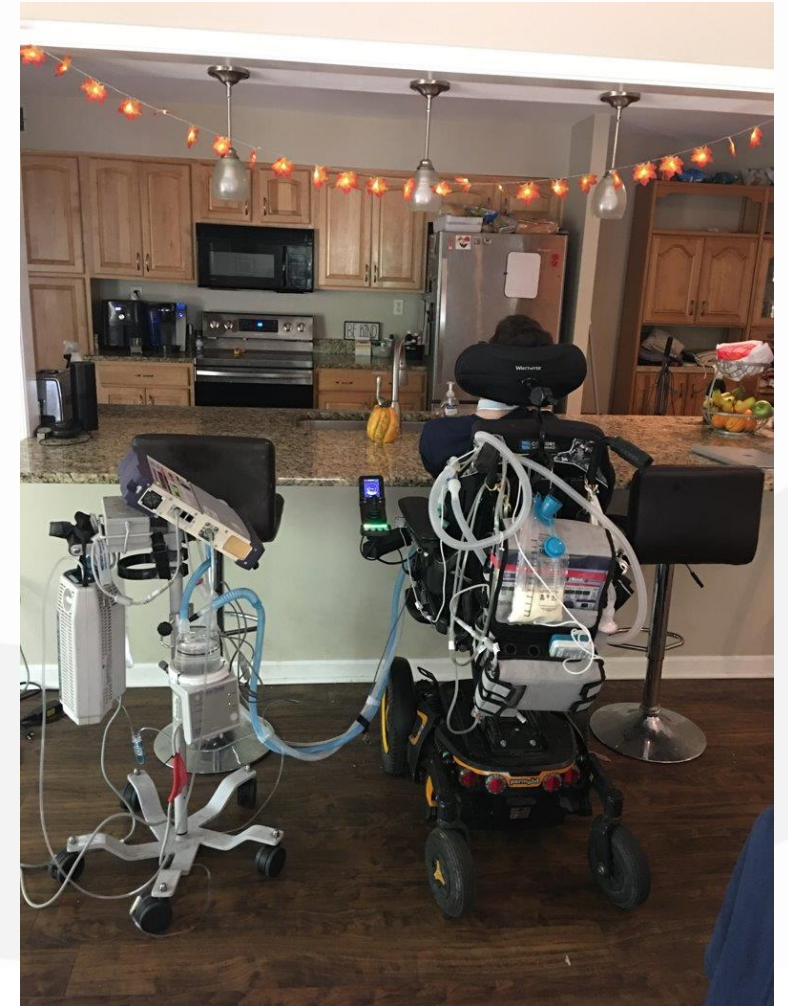
**Home modifications** are integral to ensuring integration in the home and community.

**Living in the home and community setting is a:**

- Legal right (Civil right)
- Human right

**As codified by:**

- Americans with Disabilities Act - 1990
- Olmstead vs LC Supreme Court Case - 1999
- UN Convention on the the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - 2006



# Project Overview

**Background:** Prior research in Maryland and Illinois shows insufficient resources and information to ensure accessibility for safe, independent, and developmentally appropriate life at home for children with disabilities (CWD).

**Overall goal:** Inform and galvanize more effective, equitable home accessibility programs and policies for CWD nationally.

**Activities:** Analysis of key informant interviews from 10 states (n=61) to understand and communicate about the current national landscape of programs and policies that promote home accessibility for CWD and their families.

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# Overview of Home Modifications

Rebecca Seltzer, MD, MHS



Her **impairment** is the problem!  
They should cure her or give her prosthetics.

The *medical model* of disability



The **stairs** are the problem!  
They should build a ramp.

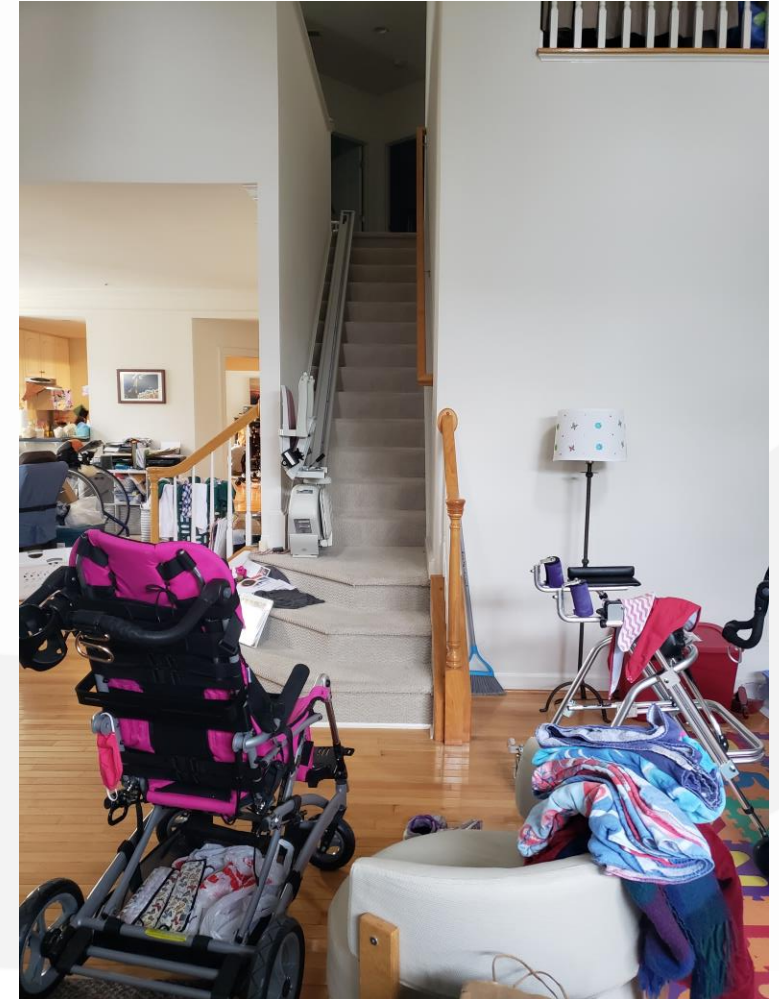
The *social model* of disability

Image by UAA: <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/accessibility/topic/architecture.cfm>

# Terminology: Children with Disability

Children with physical, intellectual, emotional, developmental or sensory impairments whose independence, function, participation, safety, and/or caregiving needs are influenced by their interaction with the home environment.

- A child with vision loss who can move around more safely in a home with an open layout.
- A child with a spinal cord injury who can shower on their own if they have a roll-in shower and a removable showerhead.
- A child with autism whose mood improves with softer lighting and whose safety is better supported by special door locks and alarms that help prevent them from running away.



# Terminology

## ACCESSIBLE HOMES:

Homes that are constructed or modified to allow persons with disabilities to safely and independently participate in activities of daily living (e.g. bathing, moving around the home, getting dressed, preparing meals, etc.) and minimize caregiving needs.

## HOME MODIFICATIONS:

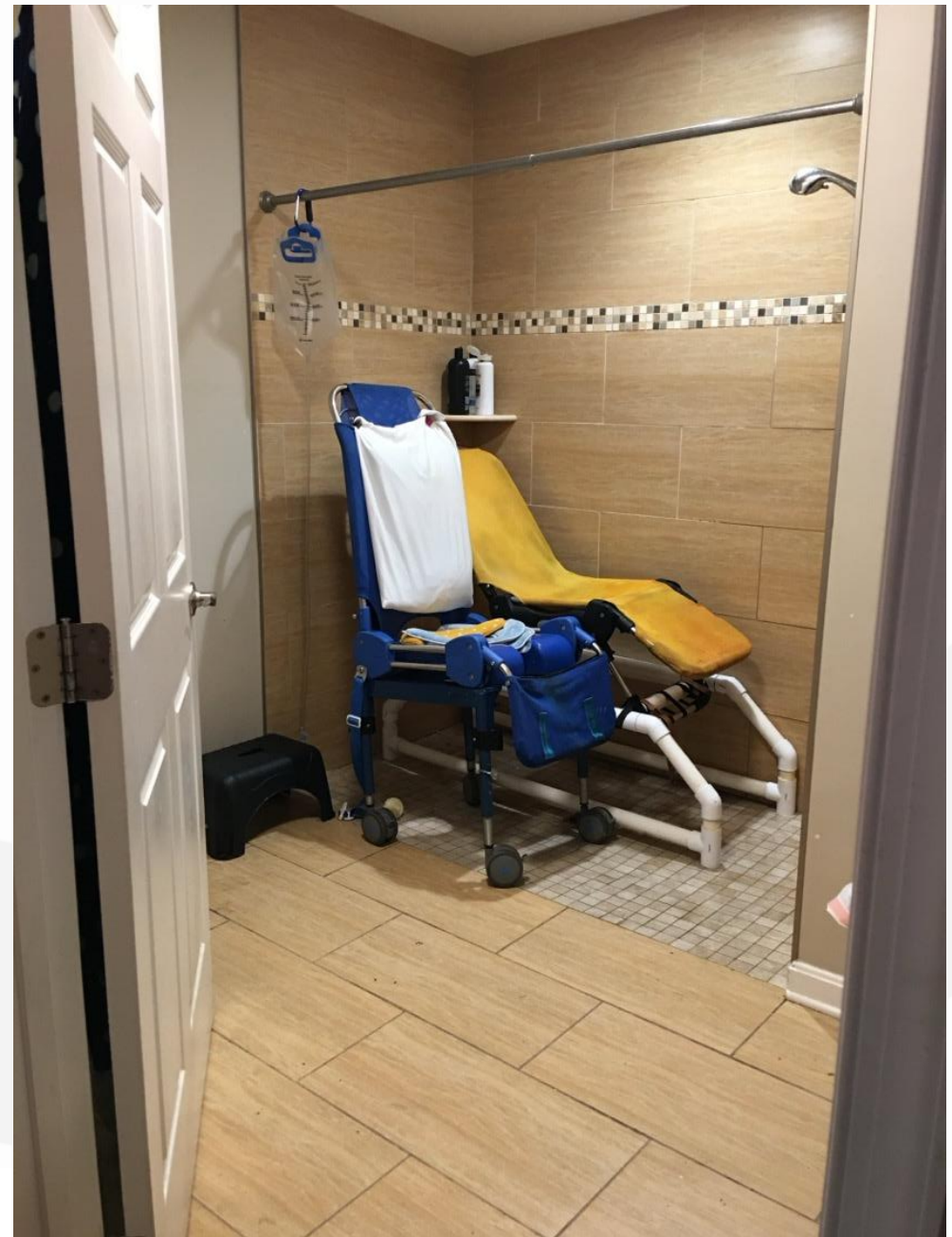
Changes made to the home environment, both interior and exterior, to promote accessibility and ease of caregiving. Changes can be structural, organizational, layout, or obtaining adaptive furniture, equipment, or assistive technologies.



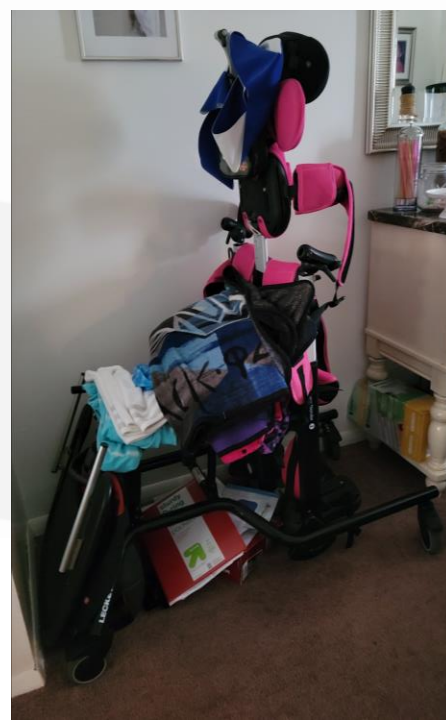
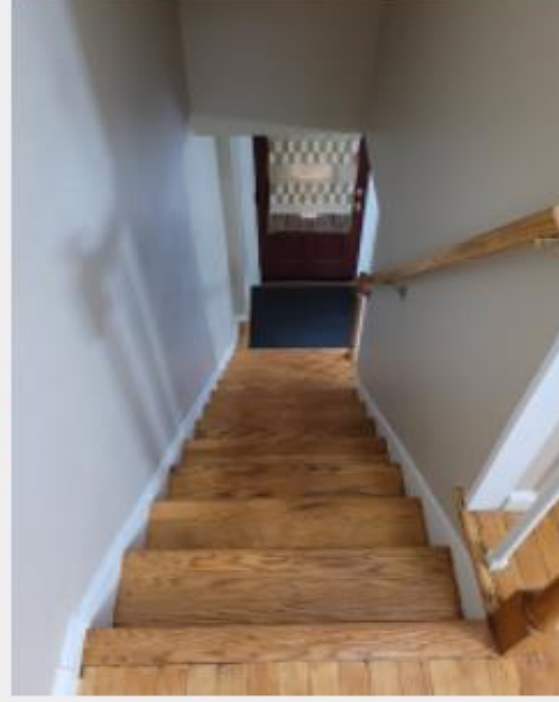
# Impact of an Accessible Home

- Improve child QOL, health, self-esteem, and functional independence
- Improve social participation
- Improve family interaction
- Reduce caregiving demands
- Reduce risk of injury
- Reduce healthcare utilization

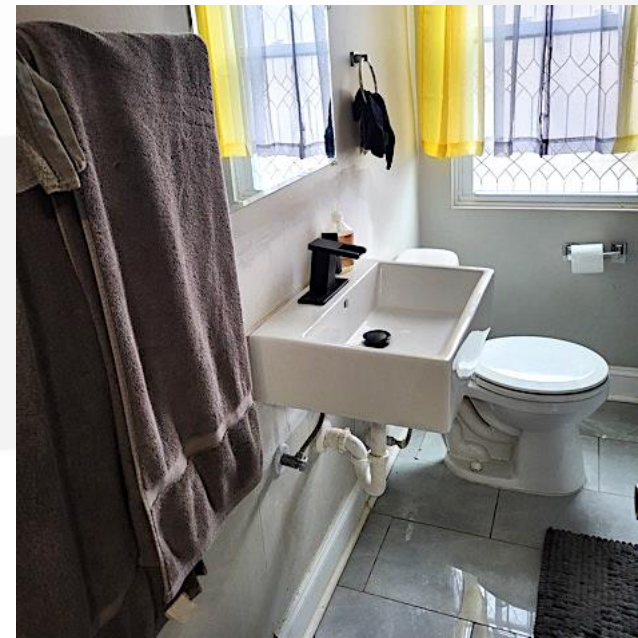
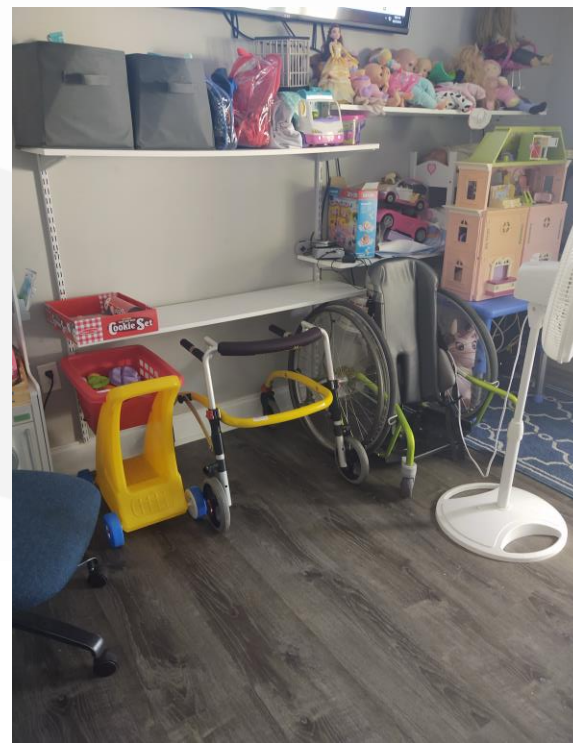
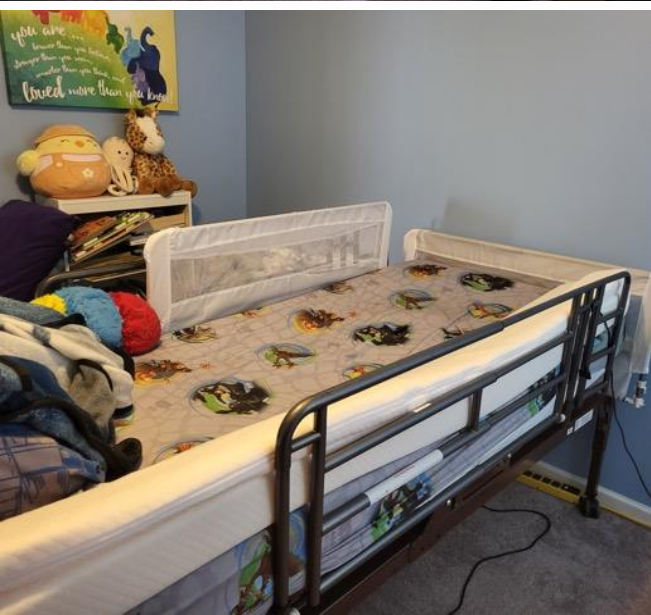
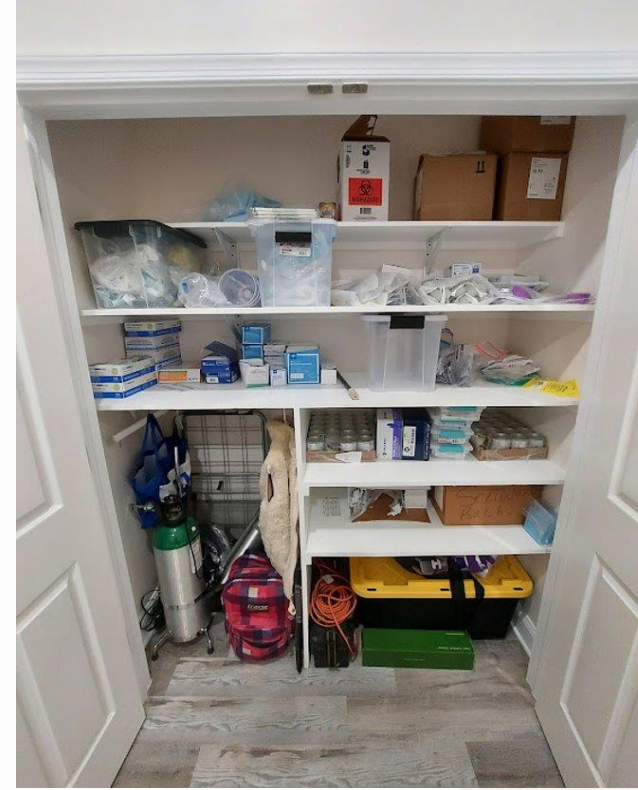
Carnemolla et al. 2020; Vaughn et al. 2022;  
Ostensjo et al. 2005; Cho et al. 2016; Lindsay 2024



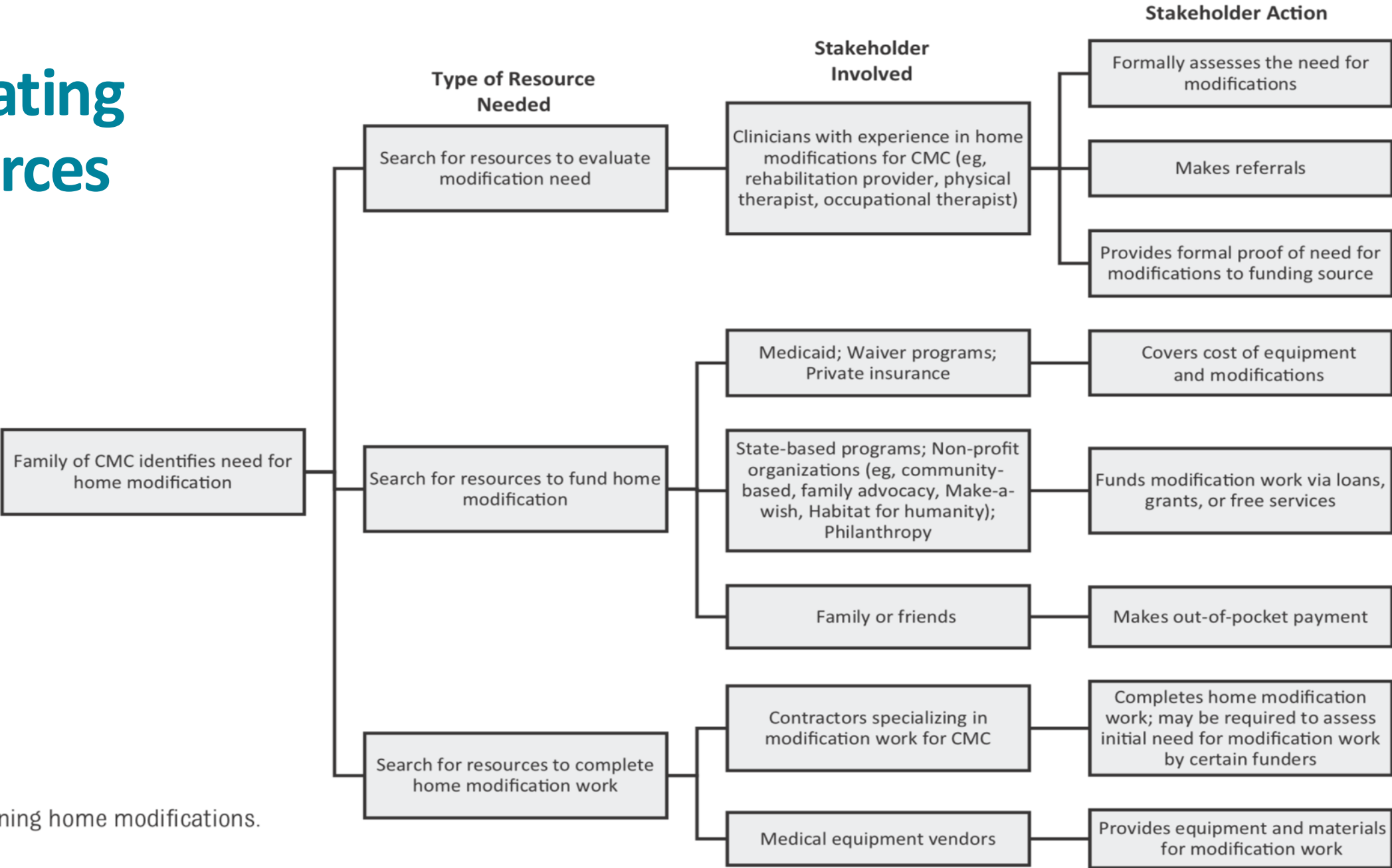
# Barriers in the Home



# Role of Modifications

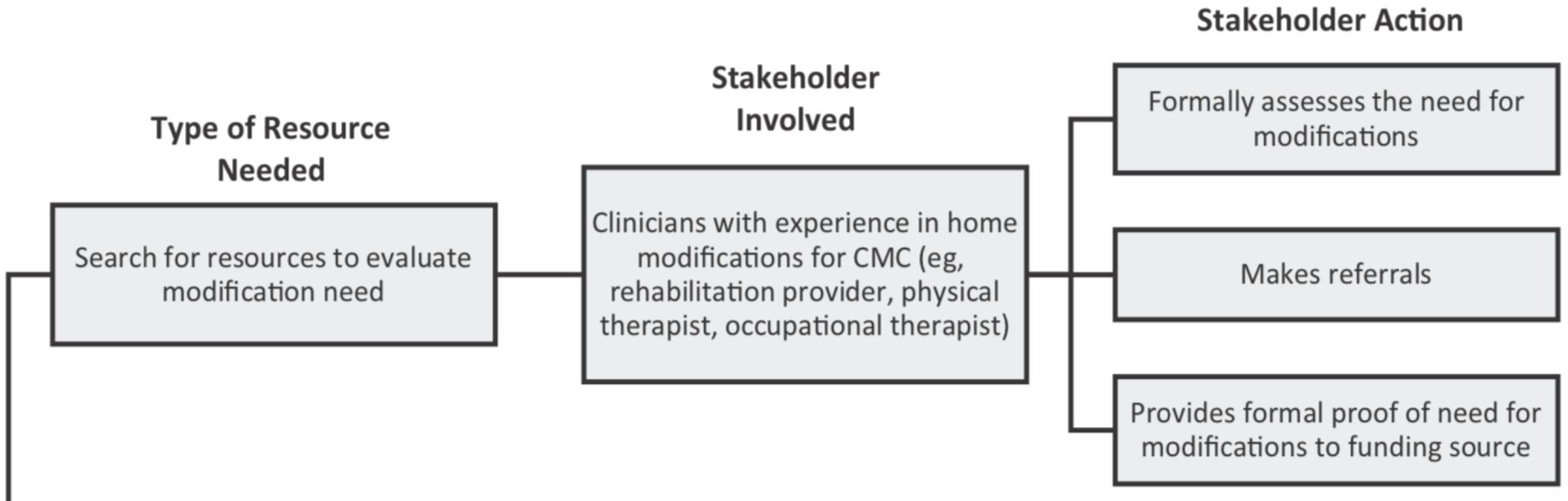


# Navigating Resources

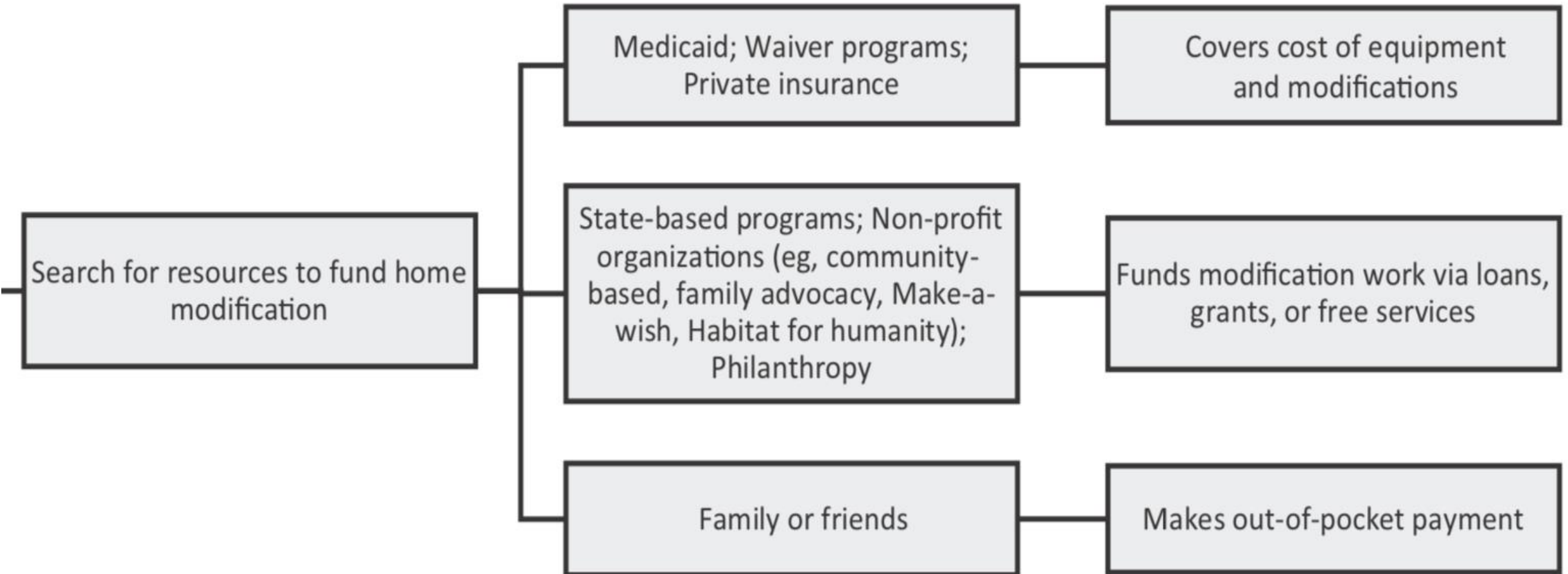


**FIGURE 1**  
Process of obtaining home modifications.

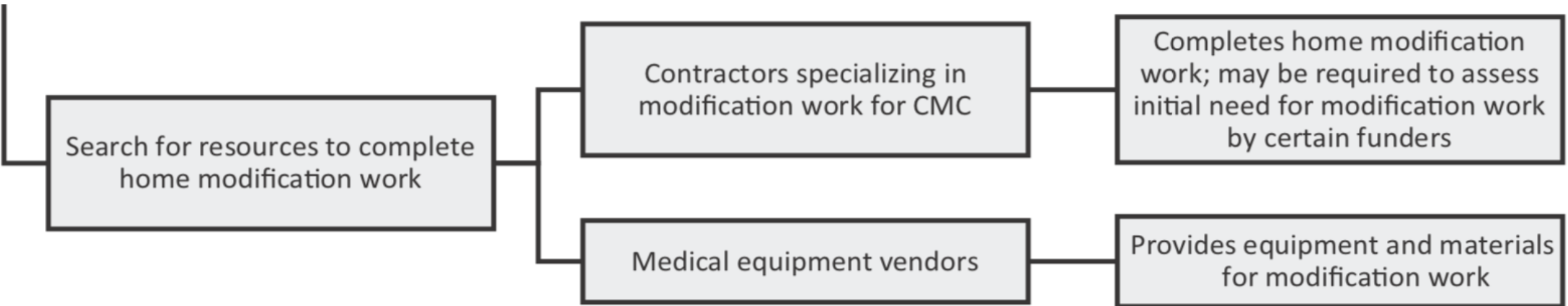
# Evaluate Modification Need



# Fund Modification

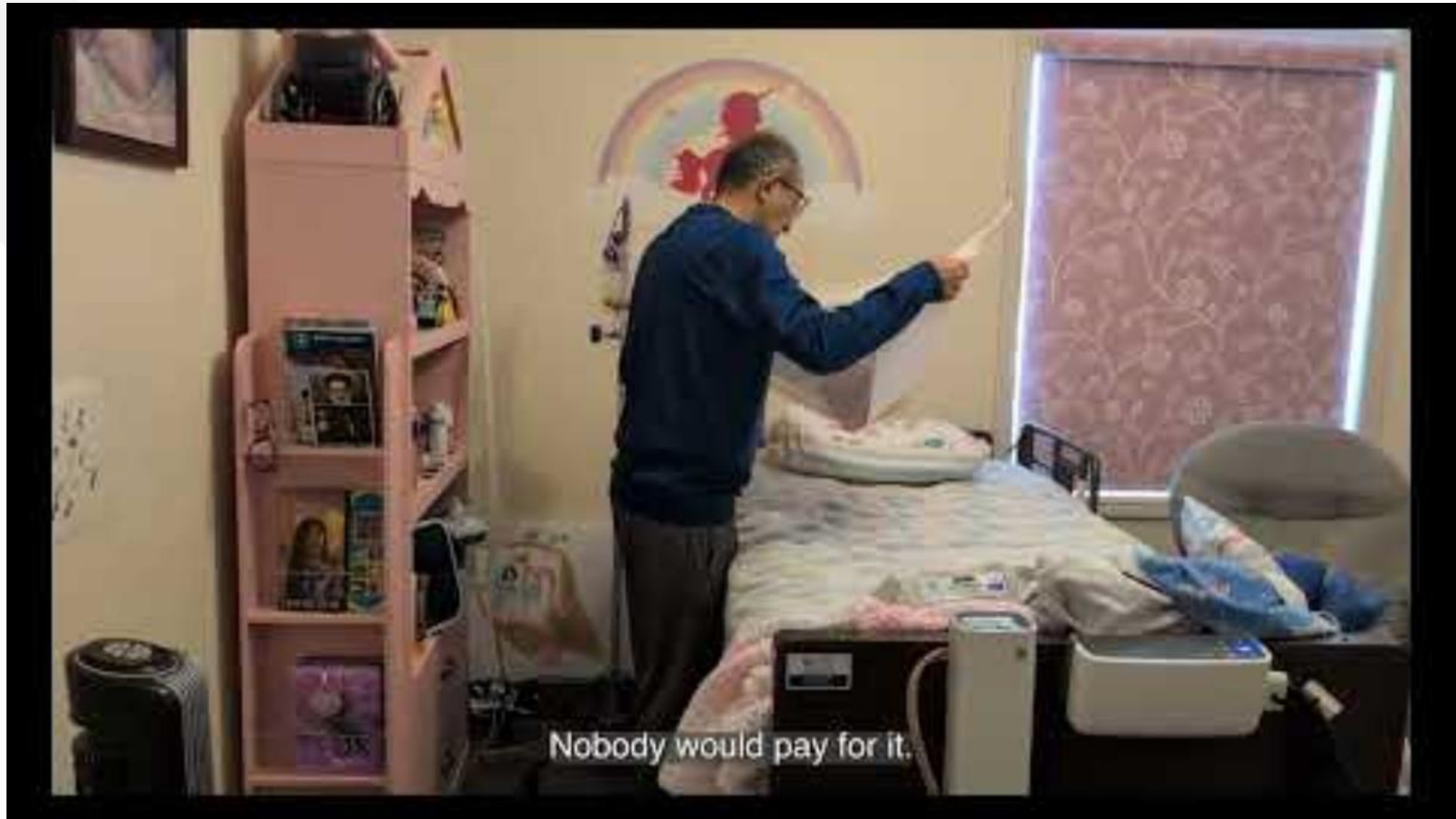


# Complete Modification Work



# Feels Like Home





# Panel Discussion

Rebecca Seltzer

Tamara Morgan

Crystal Thomas



# WHAT BECOMES **POSSIBLE** WHEN A CHILD HAS **EXACTLY** WHAT **THEY** NEED?

Without it, an adult needs to support every action and activity. Even downtime needs support.





# THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT CHANGES EVERYTHING

## MANY KIDS NEVER GET IT

They gain more than access. They gain the confidence to engage independently, strengthening their sense of self and supporting healthy emotional development.



# Feels Like Home

Immersing audiences in the homes of children with medical complexities and disabilities, and their families.

# Opening doors to home accessibility





[Home](#) / [Hopkins Housing & Health Collaborative](#) / [Projects - Hopkins Housing & Health Collaborative](#) / [Optimizing the Home Environment for Children with Disabilities: Understanding Current Policies and Planning for the Future](#)

# OPTIMIZING THE HOME ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: UNDERSTANDING CURRENT POLICIES AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

**Funder: Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health**

# Q+A

# More to come!

## Please stay tuned for details about our next Webinar in Fall 2026

“The Best Kept Secret”: Programs and Policies  
Across States to Support Accessible Homes  
for Children with Disabilities