

Communities Fall Short on Livability for Seniors

Yes, an age-friendly house is the first step in aging in place. But another crucial and often overlooked component that allows for aging in place is the community at large.

Livable neighborhoods are age-friendly spots that provide things like safety, affordable housing, transit options, access to quality health care, healthy water and air quality, proximity to destinations, and opportunities for seniors engage with their communities.

Yet many communities fall short, and many older Americans aren't living in places that provide the qualities necessary for a good life.

Those are some findings from a new report, "Which Older Adults Have Access to America's Most Livable Neighborhoods? An Analysis of AARP's Livability Index," by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University and the AARP Policy Institute.

AARP's Public Policy Institute (PPI) developed the "Livability Index: Great Neighborhoods for All Ages" (Index), an online, interactive resource providing livability scores (<https://bit.ly/3f53ptp>) for neighborhoods across the United States.

AARP and the Joint Center evaluated (<https://bit.ly/2UBniyM>) whether access to livable communities is evenly distributed across the older adult population and how different groups of older adults might have access to different sets of livability features. They also tried to understand the characteristics that contributed to higher-scoring communities.

Among the findings:

There's a disconnect between what people have and what they need in communities to age in place.

Researchers found that more people over the age of 50 live in neighborhoods that score lower on the Index than in areas with the highest scores.

Not all livable communities are alike. Some with high scores may have good transportation and lack affordable housing options. Some may do well in providing opportunities for engagement but have not such great transit. Even neighborhoods that are considered highly livable have room for improvement.

People of color, those with disabilities, and people with lower incomes may miss out on amenities and services to help them age well.

Also, communities with higher Index scores tend to have higher housing costs, which creates obstacles to accessing benefits that livable communities can provide.

AARP's tool allows you to type in a zip code and see just how well a given community ranks on livability in the various categories. It's especially useful if you want to compare the livability of several communities and see side-by-side results.

Learn more about the "Livability Index: Great Neighborhoods for All Ages" at the SRES blog.

Is yours a 15-minute city?

You may be familiar with Walk Score (<https://bit.ly/3f6SH60>), the site that lets you type in an address to see how walkable a prospective house or condo is.

A newer tool, the 15-minute city app (<https://bit.ly/35G94U1>) by digital mapping company Here Technologies, shows you what's accessible to an address within a 15-minute walk or bike ride.

Type in a U.S. address to discover the medical care, grocery stores, cultural attractions, transit stops, education facilities, and leisure spots situated within a 15-minute walk or bike ride of a given address.

The app can be useful when you're researching new cities, especially if you have given up your car and want to be sure that you'll be able to lead a full life in your next city without wheels.

The 15-minute city concept also has broader implications for city planning, transit, and climate health. Read more:

- Next City: <https://bit.ly/3IEoBch>
- StreetsBlog: <https://bit.ly/3f3gUtE> and <https://bit.ly/36JSxNM>
- The Urbanist: <https://bit.ly/3nuypGu>

Keeping seniors safe behind the wheel

Giving up the car is a significant and sad event that can drastically reduce seniors' freedom.

And when seniors live in inaccessible, unwalkable areas, surrendering the car also often forces them to move, even if they'd prefer to age in place.

Sometimes, seniors' driving life can be extended by refreshing their driving skills and modifying cars with adaptive technology.

Learn more about keeping seniors safe behind the wheel by checking out the resources from Older Driver Safety Awareness Week (<https://bit.ly/3fbZmf1>).

Between December 7 and 11, 2020, the American Occupational Therapy Association will address improving senior drivers' safety, provide insight on how best to have the giving-up-driving conversation with a loved one, and ways seniors can remain active once they do surrender the car keys.

Each day AOTA will cover a different topic. They are:

- Monday: "Anticipating Changes That Can Affect Driving"
- Tuesday: "Family Conversations"
- Wednesday: "Screening and Evaluations with an Occupational Therapist"
- Thursday: "Interventions That Can Empower Drivers and Families"
- Friday: "Staying Engaged in the Community with or Without a Car"

Additional information:

- CarFit (<https://bit.ly/35BrVPZ>) promotes safe driving among older drivers through in-person and virtual events that show seniors how to improve safety and comfort behind the wheel by making their cars "fit" them. That includes appropriately adjusting mirrors, seats, and so forth.
- SeniorDriving (<https://bit.ly/2IJhpk>) offers resources to help seniors drive as long as possible safely.

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