

# Aging in Place:

A State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices

A Research Report by the  
National Conference of State Legislatures  
and the AARP Public Policy Institute



## In Brief

The vast majority of older adults want to age in place, so they can continue to live in their own homes or communities. As the older population grows, the degree to which it can participate in community life and reach needed services will be determined, in part, by how communities are designed. This report examines state policies that can help older adults age in place. These policies include integrating land use, housing and transportation; efficiently delivering services in the home; providing more transportation choices, particularly for older adults who no longer drive; and improving affordable, accessible housing to prevent social isolation.

This In Brief summarizes a new research report, *Aging in Place: A State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices*, written by the National Conference of State Legislatures with the AARP Public Policy Institute.

Nearly 90 percent of people over age 65 want to stay in their home for as long as possible, and 80 percent believe their current residence is where they will always live. However, for older adults to age in place, their physical and service environment must be accommodating.

### Findings

This report identifies the following land use, transportation, and housing policies as well as promising state practices that enable aging in place.

- 1. Land Use:** Certain land use policies can help older adults live closer to or within walking distance of the services they need.
  - Integrating land use and transportation planning to reduce reliance on automobile travel. California, Florida, and Washington

are among the states with statutes requiring this.

- Implementing transit-oriented development within a quarter- or a half-mile from a transit stop. Statutes in at least 12 states, including California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Utah, address this issue.
- Encouraging joint use of community facilities such as a senior center or health clinic in a school. Promising practices include those in California and Wyoming.

**2. Transportation:** Increased mobility options can reduce reliance on transportation by personal car.

- Designing “Complete Streets” to enable all users, regardless of age or ability, to get to where they want to go. Twenty-five states plus D.C. and Puerto Rico have complete streets policies, 16 of which state legislatures enacted.
- Ensuring pedestrian safety given the vulnerability of older adults in vehicle



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and pedestrian fatalities. At least 10 states have considered “vulnerable users” laws within the past five years to better protect pedestrians and bicyclists.

- Ensuring access to services in rural areas. States such as Idaho and Montana have policies that address access to services for people who live a significant distance from city centers.
- Improving human service transportation coordination to more efficiently use limited resources. Twenty-eight states have coordinating councils, 14 of which were created by statute and 14 by governor’s executive order or initiative.
- Enacting volunteer driver laws to protect volunteer drivers from civil liability. Only Georgia and Oregon explicitly protect volunteer drivers.

**3. Housing:** Affordable, accessible housing can decrease institutionalization and meet consumer demand.

- Accessing the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program to leverage funds for development of housing near transit and in livable community settings. These states include Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, and New Jersey.
- Encouraging developers to use building standards that promote accessibility. At least three states—Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Texas—have these statutes.
- Promoting aging in place by supporting neighborhoods with large populations of older adults involved in social and community life. Promising practices

include models to provide services at home such as Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities and Communities for a Lifetime.

## Conclusion

State legislators will continue to grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by significant growth in the older adult population. Without changes in how communities are constructed and services are delivered, older adults may find it increasingly difficult to live in their communities and may have to consider institutional care. This could mean increased costs for states. State policy makers may consider the above strategies to facilitate aging in place, which people overwhelmingly prefer.

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