



Retirees embrace ways to stay put, age in place

Nanci Hellmich

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Although some people want to move to a warmer climate or exotic locale in retirement, for most folks, their current home is where their heart is.

They want to age in place, continuing to live in their home or at least in the same community. And they're not afraid to remodel and try new technologies to make that happen, new research shows. They'd even be willing to have a cleaning robot or heated driveway.

The vast majority of people age 50 and older want to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible, AARP data show. The group has expanded the definition of aging in place to include people either remaining in their own home or staying in the same community in other possible housing options, says Rodney Harrell, director of Livable Communities in AARP's Public Policy Institute.

It's no wonder retirees want to stay put. About two-thirds (65%) of retirees say they're living in the best home of their lives, according to a recent national survey of more than 3,600 respondents. Most respondents were over age 50; 1,668 were already retired. It was sponsored by Merrill Lynch in partnership with Age Wave.

Before age 55, more homeowners say the financial value of their home outweighs the emotional value, the survey found. But by age 65, 56% say the emotional value is more important, and by age 75, 63% say the emotional value is more important to them than the financial value.

"There is something deeply nourishing about our homes, and people become increasingly appreciative of that emotional connection as they get older," says gerontologist Ken Dychtwald, CEO of Age Wave. "It's a rich emotional nest."

Many people want to stay in their home "because they are most comfortable with what is most familiar," agrees psychologist Mary Languirand, co-author of *How to Age in Place*, written with her husband, Robert Bornstein. "People are going to do whatever they can to maintain that sense of comfort. That is the ideal place in a lot of people's minds."

And they are willing to try technology. The Merrill Lynch-Age Wave survey found:

- 80% of retirees are interested in new technologies to reduce their home expenses, such as smart thermostats or apps to control appliances.
- 76% are interested in technologies to monitor their health at home, such as sensors, alerts or medication reminder apps.
- 67% are interested in home technologies to help them optimize their health, such as devices for air purification or to improve sleep.
- 58% are interested in technologies to help them maintain their home, such as cleaning robots or heated driveways.

In homes of the future there may be cleaning robots, thermostats that go up and down as you go in and out of rooms, alerts to take your medication or go to your doctors' appointments, Dychtwald says. "There may be homes that can be reshaped and remodeled to accommodate visitors or guests. Imagine walls moving and desks disappearing and trundle beds coming out when the grandkids come."

Dychtwald says 52% of people over the age of 75 live alone, and there will be more technologies that let adult children know if a parent slips or needs help. "Technology can help people keep an eye on mom or dad."

"The good news is that all of these breakthroughs are on the drawing board or already available, but they are waiting for the market to take more full advantage of them," he says.

New technology is a huge boon for people who want to continue to live in their home, Languirand agrees. "The smart-home concepts are wonderful because there are so many functions of the home that can be programmed and made automatic. Help is often one button push away so you are never really out of touch. It helps people feel more secure."

She says many age-in-place concepts could be useful to people of all ages, such as easy-to-operate window hardware; easy-to-read, programmable thermostats; lighting fixtures that make rooms brighter; low-maintenance exteriors and anti-scald devices on showers.

As people get older, they should continue to evaluate their situation, she says. They may need ramps to make their homes wheelchair-accessible, wider doorways, grab bars and shower seats in bathrooms to prevent falls, she says.

Harrell says technological advancements can help make up for the fact that most homes are not designed for aging.

"High-quality Internet access is an essential component of many of these technologies, and when we looked at older adults, we found that those with low incomes, those who lived in rural areas,

and those who did not drive were less likely to have access than their counterparts," he says. "If people don't have adequate Internet access, they may miss out on the advantages that technology can provide."

AARP has a home guide with dozens of suggestions to help you live as long as possible in your current house, Harrell says. Those include making sure that area rugs have non-slip grips to prevent tripping and slipping; having an entrance door that's easy to unlock and lock, open and close and automatic night-lights plugged into outlets near steps and staircases.

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