



2017  
**AGING IN PLACE**  
REPORT

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*Prepared by*

**MARIANNE CUSATO**

Adjunct Associate Professor at the University  
of Notre Dame's School of Architecture

# AGING IN PLACE STARTS WITH HOLISTIC HOME IMPROVEMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homeowners typically don't consider how the home improvements they're making today may help or hinder their quality of life down the road. But every home project — from roof repairs to kitchen remodels — offers an opportunity to create a home in which they can safely and comfortably live for decades to come (or “age in place,” as it's often referred).

HomeAdvisor recently completed our annual survey to gain insight into how people are preparing their homes for aging in place. This year, we did things a little differently. First, we surveyed two groups of homeowners — one aged 55 to 75 and the other aged 75 and over. And second, we asked each group about their motives for completing home projects without first tying them directly to the term aging in place. Interestingly, in sharp contrast to the survey results we've seen in previous years — which indicated homeowners are not preparing for aging in place — we found this year that homeowners in both age groups are completing projects now that will facilitate their lives as they grow older. In fact, they're even putting ease of living improvements ahead of aesthetics in their approach to home projects. The thing is: Most are not connecting these projects with either the term “aging in place” or the intention, even as they actively age in their homes.

As we've learned from past surveys, the term “aging in place” doesn't tend to resonate with homeowners. That's because people don't think of themselves as aging — even when they are. There's no specific age or moment in time at which people become officially “old.” Additionally, the stigma surrounding aging keeps most people in denial long past the point at which the process is clear. So, how do homeowners prepare for aging in place when they can't admit that they're aging in the first place? They perform regular maintenance and complete projects to keep their homes in good working order, for starters. And that sets them up to layer on the aging-related projects as their aging-specific needs are revealed.

This report examines the motivation behind home projects at different life stages, providing advice and perspective from both homeowners who've watched loved ones age in place and those who've aged in place first-hand. Ultimately, the takeaway is this: Taking a holistic approach to home improvement lays the foundation to help homeowners live better now and later, no matter their current age or objective. And they don't have to call it aging in place to reap the benefits.

## WHAT IS AGING IN PLACE?

Aging in place is the act of remaining in our homes and communities as we get older, as opposed to moving in with family or entering a nursing home or assisted living facility.

## WHO'S AFFECTED?

According to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies<sup>1</sup>, in 2035, one in five people will be over 65 years old. And an overwhelming majority — 90 percent, according to AARP<sup>2</sup>, plans to remain in their homes as they age.

Every person who wishes to remain in their homes and maintain their quality of life as they get older — and every one of their loved ones and caretakers — should give some consideration to what it means, and what it means to prepare for, aging in place.

## KEY FINDINGS:

### 1. **A holistic approach to home improvement lays the foundation for aging in place.**

Keeping a regular home maintenance schedule — and keeping the future in mind when making improvements big and small — helps homeowners keep their homes in good working order. This not only ensures that their homes are project-ready when the time comes to make aging-specific improvements, but it also ensures that they're not faced with costly, unexpected home disasters when they're at their most vulnerable down the road.

### 2. **The term “Aging in Place” is elusive.**

Just 43 percent of participants aged 55 to 75 — and just 52 percent of participants over the age of 75 — say they're familiar with the term.

### 3. **Homeowners are completing future-thinking projects without connecting them to aging in place.**

Survey respondents aged 55 to 75 and aged 75 and older are making home improvements that will facilitate aging, citing ease of living as their motive for completing most projects — even over safety and aesthetics.

### 4. **Life stages influence homeowners' home project selections.**

While all participants cite ease of living as their motive for completing most home projects, homeowners in different life stages report completing the same home projects for different reasons.

### 5. **Watching loved ones struggle impacts how homeowners view aging in place.**

Roughly three in five homeowners aged 55-75 report seeing a loved one (a parent, sibling, partner etc.) struggle to get around their home as they got older, further reporting that this experience has changed their feelings about how they will age in place personally.

### 6. **Planning pays off.**

Nearly half of homeowners aged 75 and over report renovating their homes in anticipation of getting older. Correspondingly, less than 30 percent report struggling to get around the house as they've aged.

### HOLISTIC HOME IMPROVEMENT LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR AGING IN PLACE

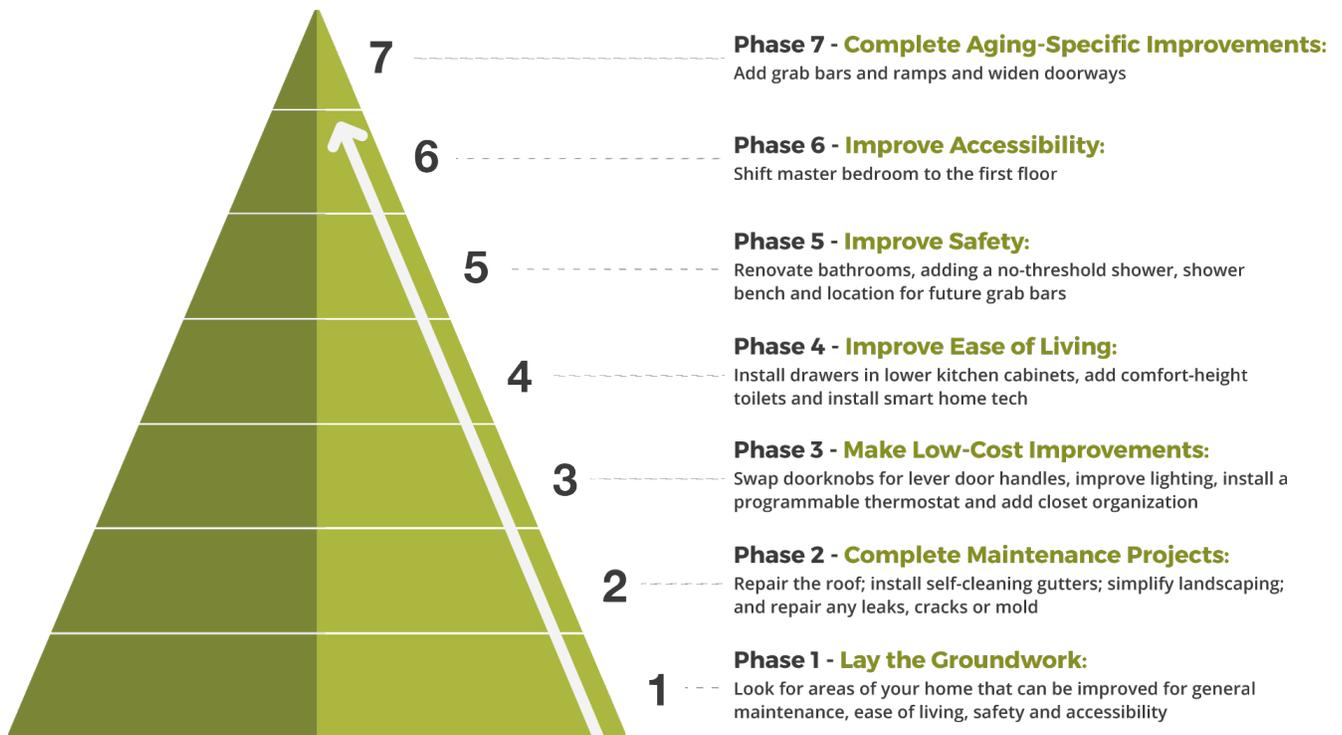
While aging is a fact of life, aging uncomfortably, unsafely or unhappily doesn't have to be a given. As one survey respondent in the 55 to 75 age group noted: It's hard to anticipate the modifications homeowners may need to make as a result of aging, so some modifications — like grab bars or widened door frames — may need to be implemented as the need arises. But other home improvements — like self-cleaning gutters; accessible storage; and plumbing, walkway and roof repairs — not only offer greater ease of living in the short term, but they also stabilize the working order of a home for the long term, which provides the best foundation for aging in place as well as future aging in place improvements.

Typically, people think of projects like ramps, stair lifts and main-floor master suites as the key to facilitating aging in place, when in fact the inverse is true. As we heard from survey respondents both aged 55 to 75 and aged 75 and over, the key to facilitating aging in place is actually taking a holistic approach to home improvement leading up to aging in place — doing things like simplifying landscaping, repairing and replacing windows, swapping out door handles, and organizing closets and storage areas.

Take a front walkway, for example. If there are cracks or dips in the concrete, homeowners would want to address those existing safety issues before consider installing a wheelchair ramp or a railing that they're not sure they'll ever need. And installing self-cleaning gutters will not only make life easier in the short term, but it will also ensure that gutter cleaning is covered when climbing a ladder becomes too precarious later on.

As homeowners age, they may experience vision and hearing loss, reduced mobility and reduced mental capacity, among other changes. And while it may not be possible to modify the home to prepare for every possible scenario, there is a lot homeowners can do in the interim to set themselves up for success — through projects big and small. In fact, every home maintenance, improvement and repair project offers an opportunity for homeowners to consider: "Are there choices I can make here that may make my life easier now and in the future?"

The good news is that many homeowners are completing projects now that will help them remain safely and comfortably in their homes as they get older. They're just not attributing those projects to aging in place — or aging at all, for that matter. The next sections provide a glimpse into the motivations, learning experiences and recommendations of homeowners age 55 and over.



## THE PLANNING PYRAMID

Think about preparing for aging in place as a pyramid: By establishing a home in good working order and understanding how home improvements and technologies work holistically to create a foundation for future needs, homeowners can effectively work their way from the bottom to the top. Starting with basic home maintenance projects like roof repairs, for example, they can move up to smart home tech and bathroom renovations — eventually having readied their homes and budgets for aging-specific improvements like grab bars, which may in the future become a necessity.

## SECTION 2:

### EASY LIVING PAVES THE WAY FOR EASY AGING

Improved ease of living is a key motivator for homeowners making home improvements. Both homeowners aged 55 to 75 and homeowners aged 75 and older cite ease of living as the impetus for most of their home projects, even above aesthetics, safety, accessibility and increased home value. Interestingly, the projects

they're completing to improve ease of living — projects like installing smart thermostats, replacing appliances and replacing lower kitchen cabinets with drawers — will facilitate aging in place, even though only about half of respondents are familiar with the concept by name. (Presumably, homeowners find the term

20 Most Popular Projects for Homeowners Aged 55-75:		Improve accessibility	Improve aesthetic	Improve safety	Improve ease of living
1. Added pullout shelves in kitchen cabinets	Ages 55-75 & 75+	✓			
2. Changed doorknobs to lever handles	Ages 55-75 & 75+		✓		
3. Changed tile or stone to wood or carpet	Ages 55-75 & 75+		✓		
4. Changed wood or carpet flooring to tile or stone			✓		
5. Installed a smart fire detection system	Ages 55-75 & 75+			✓	
6. Installed a smart security system	Ages 55-75 & 75+			✓	
7. Installed a smart thermostat					✓
8. Installed a voice activation device					✓
9. Installed comfort height toilets					✓
10. Installed grab bars in bathrooms				✓	
11. Installed new cabinets and countertops	Ages 55-75 & 75+				✓
12. Installed new closet organization					✓
13. Installed sensors to be notified if there's an issue				✓	
14. Installed smart blinds and drapes					✓
15. Installed smart lighting					✓
16. Installed smart locks				✓	
17. Renovated a bathroom - any floor	Ages 55-75 & 75+		✓		
18. Renovated a kitchen			✓		
19. Replaced appliances					✓
20. Replaced lower kitchen cabinets with drawers					✓

“ease of living” more relatable than the terms “aging in place” and “accessibility” because it doesn’t carry the same negative connotation.) So, while both homeowners aged 55 to 75 and homeowners aged 75 and older cite ease of living as the impetus for most of their home projects, it’s not surprising to see that they are

completing some of the same projects — namely adding pullout shelves in kitchen cabinets, changing doorknobs to lever handles, installing new cabinets and countertops, and renovating bathrooms — for different reasons.

20 Most Popular Projects for Homeowners Aged 75 & Over:		Improve accessibility	Improve aesthetic	Improve safety	Improve ease of living
1. Replaced appliances					✓
<b>2. Added pullout shelves in kitchen cabinets</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>				✓
<b>3. Changed doorknobs to lever handles</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>			✓	
<b>4. Changed tile or stone to wood or carpet</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>				✓
5. Changed wood or carpet flooring to tile or stone			✓		
<b>6. Installed a smart fire detection system</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>		✓		
<b>7. Installed a smart security system</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>				✓
8. Installed a smart thermostat					✓
9. Installed comfort height toilets					✓
10. Installed grab bars in bathrooms				✓	
<b>11. Installed new cabinets and countertops</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>		✓		
12. Installed new closet organization					✓
13. Installed sensors to be notified if there's an issue				✓	
14. Installed smart blinds and drapes					✓
15. Installed smart lighting					✓
16. Install Smart Locks				✓	
17. Rearranged home so master bedroom is on the ground floor					✓
<b>18. Renovated a bathroom - any floor</b>	<b>Ages 55-75 &amp; 75+</b>				✓
19. Renovated a kitchen			✓		
20. Replaced lower kitchen cabinets with drawers					✓

\*Highlighted tasks indicate both age groups frequently completed these projects, but for different reasons.

### EXPERIENCE IS THE GREATEST TEACHER

Watching a loved one struggle to get around their home has had a profound effect on homeowners. Of survey participants aged 55 to 75, 62 percent report having witnessed a sibling, parent or partner struggle with aging in place — and 60 percent say that the experience impacted their feelings about

how they will age in place personally. Interestingly, many homeowners indicated that while they see a clear need to prepare their homes for aging in place as a result of watching others, they do not consider themselves old enough to warrant immediate changes.



Three in five homeowners report watching a loved one struggle with aging in place



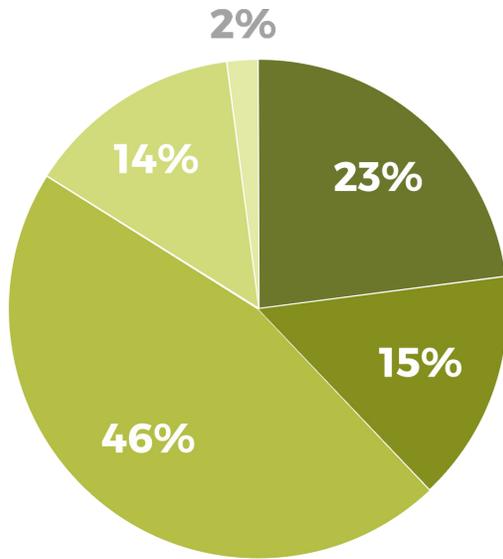
60 percent of homeowners say this experience impacted their feelings about how they will age in place personally.

While three in five homeowners aged 55 to 75 recalls watching a loved one struggle with aging in place, just one in four over age 75 reports having trouble getting around their home as they've gotten older. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the majority of respondents over age 75 report making home improvements for aging in place, either in anticipation of getting older or after becoming physically unable to stay at home without making modifications.

And more than one-third of homeowners report being unable to access certain parts of their homes; having to rely on the assistance of others to complete daily activities; and taking longer to complete simple tasks in the home due to barriers like steps, high cabinets and narrow doors. Further, while nearly half installed comfort height toilets, replaced appliances and installed grab bars in their bathrooms, many wished they'd also installed pull-out drawers in kitchen cabinets, renovated a

**INSIGHTS SHARED FROM SURVEY PARTICIPANTS AGED 55 TO 75 ABOUT WATCHING LOVED ONES AGE IN PLACE:**

**How Homeowners Age 75 and Over Prepare for Aging in Place**



- Remained in home and did not renovate due to time or expense
- Renovated the home after becoming physically unable to stay without changes to the home
- Renovated the home in anticipation of getting older
- Moved out of the home
- Other

bathroom, and changed door knobs to lever handles. These findings highlight the need for homeowners to plan ahead and consider all aspects of living as they make home improvements. After all, grab bars in the bathroom can't help someone who insists on climbing a ladder to clean the gutters.

"After my husband was diagnosed with a movement disorder later in life, we had to make our home safe for him. It made me think about aging and the need to prepare for the possible loss of mobility for both him and for myself."

"After seeing what they're going through, I'm determined to not let it happen to me. I would like to help them too."

"Seeing my mother-in-law become weak and incapable of moving around the house on her own made us realize how to change our living environment so our children do not have to put up with the struggles we went through."

"It makes one more aware that age will necessitate changes in lifestyle and to prepare so that it doesn't come as a burden to others in the family — some of these changes have already been made to my home so I feel I am ahead of schedule to complete these things as needed in the future."

"My father never thought about making improvements. I do. I'm already considered a senior citizen but not old enough that it's an emergency."

"Watching my dad in a motorized chair helped me to understand the challenges, and to look for ways to improve my home to meet those challenges and others before they occur."

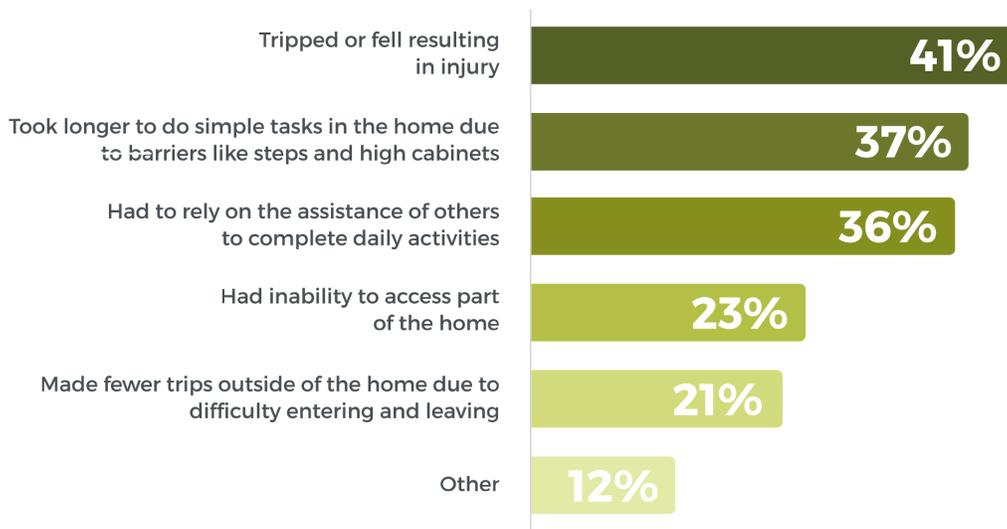


## CONCLUSION:

Bottom line, it doesn't matter what motivates homeowners to complete home projects — or how they relate what motivates them with others. So long as they're keeping up with home maintenance and making choices and modifications

to improve the comfort and safety of their homes, homeowners will have laid the foundation for aging in place. And, they'll have made it much easier for themselves to implement aging-specific projects as they become necessary.

### Issues Homeowners Experienced in Their Homes as They Got Older



### INSIGHTS SHARED FROM SURVEY PARTICIPANTS AGED 75 AND OVER ABOUT AGING IN PLACE:



"I wish we had done some of the things we are now doing, like the renovation of the bathroom to have a walk-in shower with grab bars and seats a few years ago instead of waiting until it was a major issue."

"Wish we had finished the garage floor and driveway, covered a bigger part of the patio, installed closet organizers, remodeled bathrooms, and installed pendant lights over the kitchen counter."

"I have no regrets because I did relocate. I worked with my two adult children after the death of my husband, downsized from my big colonial house and moved into a one-floor condo that had some of the conveniences I wanted. Then I remodeled to get the other conveniences I wanted. The only thing I didn't do was to put pull-out shelving into the pantry. That would have been nice, but I did not think of it."

"We keep up with any repairs needed. We try to keep everything in good working order, so when we sell there will be no repairs to be done."

"I wish we had changed the lighting. The biggest thing we did was enlarging the shower, adding a built-in shower seat, grab bar, and pull-down shower hose."

"We built this house when we were 58 and planned most of the items you have suggested. We are now 78 and have no trouble except stairs to the upper level which we seldom use now."

## Methodology:

Data included in the Aging in Place Report is based on two online surveys conducted by HomeAdvisor. One survey was conducted nationwide from August 8-15, 2017 among 500 homeowners aged 55-75 who had completed a home improvement project in the last 12 months. The other was conducted from August 15-22, 2017 among 332 homeowners aged 75+.

## Works Cited:

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2. American Associations for Retired Persons. 2017. *Can you Afford to Age in Place?* Retrieved October 17, 2017. <http://www.aarp.org/money/budgeting-saving/info-2017/costs-of-aging-in-place.html>. All rights reserved.

## About Marianne Cusato:

Marianne Cusato is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame's School of Architecture. Cusato is a designer, author and lecturer whose work speaks to the ever-changing needs of homeowners striving to balance the practical requirements of economy and durability with the desire to love where we live.

## About HomeAdvisor:

HomeAdvisor® is a digital marketplace evolving the way homeowners connect with service professionals to complete home projects. With HomeAdvisor's on-demand platform, homeowners can find and vet local, prescreened home service professionals; view average home project costs using True Cost Guide; and instantly book appointments online or through HomeAdvisor's award-winning mobile app, which is compatible with all iOS, Android and virtual assistants, including Amazon Echo. HomeAdvisor is based in Golden, Colo., and is an operating business of ANGI Homeservices (NASDAQ: ANGI).

For additional information about this survey or HomeAdvisor.com, contact:

**Steffanie Finkiewicz, Senior Public Relations Manager**

HomeAdvisor | [PublicRelations@homeadvisor.com](mailto:PublicRelations@homeadvisor.com) | 303-963-8384