

CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

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Which Older Adults Have Access to America's Most Livable Neighborhoods? An Analysis of AARP's Livability Index

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AARP's [Livability Index](#): Great Neighborhoods for All Ages is an online, interactive resource that evaluates livability for neighborhoods across the United States. It details the key features, services and amenities, (housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement and opportunity), that make communities livable and support residents as they age. And the Livability Index helps to identify gaps between what communities have and what their residents need to thrive.



The most livable places have features and amenities such as places to exercise and socialize, access to job opportunities, a variety of housing options, access to health services and affordable and convenient transportation options, among others. Livable communities can provide opportunities for people to remain active and engaged in the community at every life stage.

However, who has access to the most livable communities—the places that score high on the Livability Index? This report, *Which Older Adults Have Access to America's Most Livable Neighborhoods? An Analysis of AARP's Livability Index*, combines what the Livability Index tells us about neighborhoods with what the American Community Survey tells us about who lives there. The central questions of the report are: What are the key characteristics of communities that score high on the Livability Index? To what degree do older adults, including those who rent or own or are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, among other

demographic characteristics, have access to the most livable places across the country? When older adults move, do they tend to move to places with greater livability?

Key Takeaways

1. Most older adults do not reside in livable communities.

More older people ages 65 and over are living in neighborhoods that score lower on the Index than in neighborhoods that receive the highest scores. This finding suggests that lower-livability neighborhoods, where more older people live, have work to do to become better places to live for people of all incomes, ability levels, and ages. However, even the most livable places can still do more to ensure the community features that make them livable are accessible to all people as they age.

2. Livable communities are not necessarily livable for the same reasons.

Communities with high overall livability scores are not all alike. For example, some communities with high overall livability scores offer more features related to transportation choice but lack many options for affordable housing; others offer more opportunities for engagement but score lower on transportation. An implication of this finding is that even neighborhoods that score highest on livability have opportunities to improve specific elements.

3. Older Adults' access to livable communities is not evenly distributed.

Access to the most livable places differs by several variables: tenure (i.e., whether a person is a homeowner or renter); presence of a disability (as identified by the American Community Survey); race/ethnicity; income. For example, by tenure, renters are more prevalent in neighborhoods with high livability scores. Meanwhile, the percentage of older adults with disabilities is lower in high livability neighborhoods than in low livability neighborhoods. And as for the demographic of race/ethnicity, Asian older adults make up a larger share of the population in more livable neighborhoods, while the share of White older adults falls as livability increases. Meanwhile, the shares of both Black and Hispanic older adults hold fairly steady across neighborhoods at all levels of livability. Notably, the shares of middle-income older adults are highest in low-livability neighborhoods, while shares of lower-income older adults are higher at both the highest and lowest levels of livability (with smaller shares of lower-income older adults in places between). The analysis cannot say, however, whether access to livability resources within a neighborhood is equitable.

4. There is a relationship between different types of livable neighborhoods and income, race/ethnicity characteristics, and homeownership status.

Although many lower-income and other older adults with higher risk of vulnerabilities do reside in communities with high Index scores, these communities nevertheless differ from highly livable places occupied by higher-income, White, and home owning older adults. For example, renters and non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic older adults are overrepresented in livable neighborhoods that feature high scores on housing, neighborhood amenities, and transportation. Meanwhile, homeowners and non-Hispanic White older adults are overrepresented in places with higher scores on opportunity, engagement, and environment,

and higher-income older adults are overrepresented in neighborhoods with high scores on all dimensions of the Index except for housing and transportation. As a result, there are many features of livability that vulnerable older adults may not find nearby, even if they reside in neighborhoods with high overall scores on the Index.

5. Within neighborhoods at every level of livability, homeownership status and income play important roles in accessing features that contribute to high scores in specific livability categories.

Regardless of the overall livability of a neighborhood, renters are overrepresented in places with the highest scores for transportation and neighborhood amenities and underrepresented in places with the highest scores for engagement and environment. Both older renters and owners with lower incomes are underrepresented in those places with the highest scores for health.

6. Older adults who move tend to relocate to new places with similar levels of overall livability as their previous neighborhoods.

When older adults relocate, they are typically not moving to a more livable neighborhood. The analysis showed that three-quarters of older movers relocated to neighborhoods with roughly the same livability score as their previous location, with only 11 percent moving to more livable locations and 14 percent moving to those that received lower livability scores. The analysis did not reveal why this occurs, but previous research suggests that older adults' housing decisions are influenced by a number of factors, including consideration of neighborhood characteristics, proximity to family, constraints on household budgets, and financing limitations.

Conclusion

All communities, including the Livability Index's high scoring places, have challenges with meeting the needs of older adults. Local officials and other stakeholders are searching for effective solutions to address them and continue on the path of becoming more livable. The report includes recommendations for the seven categories included in the Index: housing, transportation, neighborhood, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity. The recommendations include but are not limited to expanding housing options for people at all income and ability levels, creating a safer travel environment that reduces risks to pedestrians, and ensuring that all older adults, including people of color and those with disabilities, have access to community amenities and services where they live.

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