

## What Is Livable? Community Preferences of Older Adults

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**This report examines the community features older adults want and need, especially as they age. The findings can help local decision makers improve the quality of life of people of all ages.**

### Using Preferences to Measure Community Livability

AARP is developing a web-based index to measure community livability for people of all ages. Work on that initiative has included focus groups and an extensive community preference survey of more than 4,500 older adults. These research tools were specifically designed to investigate the diverse needs and wants of the older adult population and to support the development of the index. The survey results enhanced our understanding of general preferences for livability and how they differ both within the general population of older adults and among subgroups. (For more information about measuring community livability, see In Brief 217, “Is This a Good Place to Live? Measuring Community Quality of Life for All Ages.”)

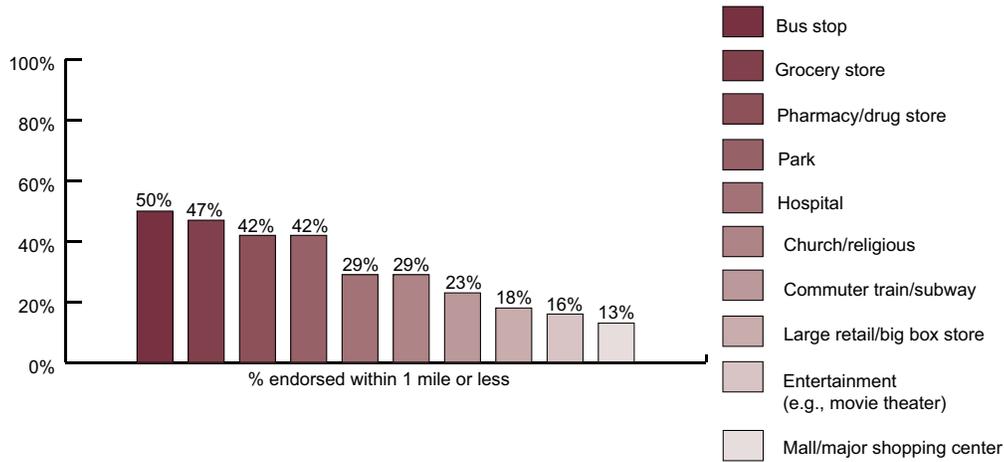
### Key Survey Findings

General findings about the population ages 50 and older include the following:

- Most older adults want to age in place. They prefer to stay in their current homes and communities.
- The importance of proximity to community amenities varies greatly and depends heavily on personal preferences (figures 1 and 2).
- Most older adults want local governments to increase police presence and improve schools.
- The older population is made up of many groups, and while there are some common preferences, there are differences. For example:
  - Many African Americans make social connections at church.
  - Personal safety is more of a concern for family caregivers, people with disabilities, nondrivers, and people with lower incomes.
  - Renters find funding for affordable housing programs to be particularly important.

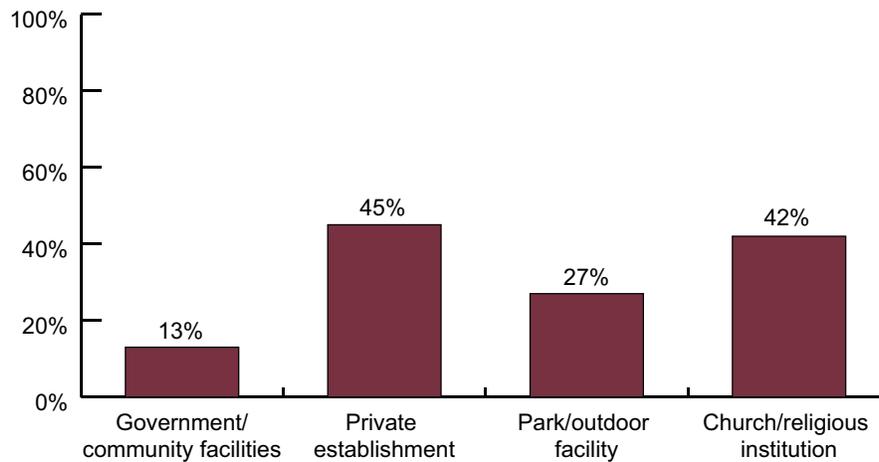
These findings, which offer several lessons for policy makers, indicate that the preferences of older adults are complex,

**Figure 1**  
**What community amenities do you want close to home?**



Sample: Probability-based 50+ population (n = 893).  
 Source: AARP-PPI Community Preference Survey 2012.

**Figure 2**  
**Where do you connect and meet with fellow community members? (General Population)**



Sample: Probability-based 50+ population (n = 893).  
 Source: AARP-PPI Community Preference Survey 2012.

intertwined, and sometimes conflicting. Many people avoid facing the realities of aging until they find themselves no longer able to do things they once did.

Understanding the preferences of older adults is a first step in the development of a livability index. The AARP Public Policy Institute is augmenting these findings with objective measures of livability and policy interventions to build a meaningful tool to measure livability.

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 This In Brief is a synopsis of the AARP Public Policy Institute Research Report *What Is Livable? Community Preferences of Older Adults*, by Rodney Harrell, Jana Lynott, and Shannon Guzman of AARP Public Policy Institute and Cheryl Lampkin of AARP Research. AARP Public Policy Institute, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049, <http://www.aarp.org/ppi>, 202-434-3890, [ppi@aarp.org](mailto:ppi@aarp.org). © 2014, AARP. Reprinting with permission only.