

Where We Live, Where We Age: Fostering Aging in Place Through Information & Communication



Communities greatly influence their residents' quality of life and are fundamental to people living happier, healthier lives. Communities are places where residents build relationships with friends and neighbors, healthcare providers, community organizations, schools, and businesses. Given the impact communities have on residents' long-term well-being, particularly for older adults, they should include features that allow people of all ages to thrive, age with dignity, and offer choices in how and where residents want to live.

Reliable information sources and effective ways to reach all residents, regardless of their level of digital connectedness, are important features for all aspects of community life: social participation, recreation, employment, housing, transportation, and health. Particularly, older residents need clear, concise, and easy-to-find information and communication tools to enable them to access key services that foster aging in place.

Aging in place refers to the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably as one ages.

Without quality and reliable information sources and communication tools, older adults are at risk of not being able to access key community services that enable them to successfully stay in their communities for as long as they want.





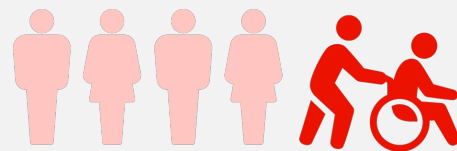
Older Adults' Information Needs for Aging in Place

Older adults aspire to age in their homes and to live in communities that support all facets of life including social participation, recreation, employment, housing, transportation, health, and well-being. Given that the majority of older adults have a strong desire to stay in their homes (77%) and communities (79%) as they age, it is crucial that communities include features and services that foster aging in place. Especially, 50-plus adults want to participate in their communities through a variety of activities involving things like fitness (48%), intergenerational activities (45%), cultural events (43%), and volunteering (42%). Many also want to have the opportunity to continue working and will likely seek out jobs that are flexible (51%) and can accommodate them should they have a disability (53%).

Housing and transportation are also essential for allowing older adults to remain active and engaged in their community. Fifty-plus adults believe their communities must provide affordable housing options (62%) as well as services to help older adults of all financial backgrounds (61%) maintain and stay in their homes for as long as possible. As older adults consider their future, many feel they may need to have alternatives to driving in their communities like public transportation that gets them where they need to go (47%), is affordable (45%), and is closely located to their home (34%). Together all these community features contribute to the health and well-being of residents, so it is no surprise that the large majority of 50-plus adults also want their communities to offer convenient, high-quality healthcare services (80%).



50-plus adults want to participate in their communities through a variety of activities.



Notably, more than one in five (21%) adults are caregivers providing care to another adult or a child with special needs.

Caregivers' lack of information on caregiving issues and services in their community can be detrimental to providing quality care for their loved one/s. According to the [2020 AARP Caregiving in the U.S. report](#), more than six in 10 (62%) caregivers want more readily available information in their communities on a range of caregiving topics, such as how to keep their care recipient safe at home (26%) and manage their own stress (26%). Additionally, one in four (25%) caregivers wish they had more information and support for managing their loved one's forms, paperwork, and eligibility for services. It is alarming that a significant share of caregivers (20%) report never having received any help or information about providing care.

Importance of having Social Opportunities

58% A variety of restaurants & shops

48% Affordable activities for all residents

43% A variety of cultural activities

41% Activities geared toward adults with dementia

55% Activities to support military members & their families

45% Activities geared toward older adults

42% Conveniently located entertainment venues

39% High-quality schools that involve older adults

50% Activities that offer senior discounts

45% Opportunities to socially connect across generations

42% Venues to meet & socialize with friends & neighbors

35% Continuing education classes

49% Entertainment venues that are accessible to all residents

48% Affordable fitness activities



Older Adults feel that it is of great importance to live in communities that support all facets of life.

Importance of having Volunteer Opportunities

47% Transportation to & from volunteer activities

42% A range of meaningful volunteer opportunities

41% Easy-to-find information on volunteer opportunities

40% Volunteer training opportunities



Importance of having Employment Opportunities

58% Policies that ensure older residents can work for as long as they need/want to

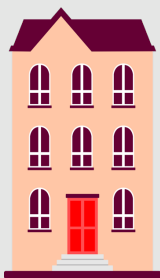
53% Jobs that are adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities

51% A range of flexible job opportunities

48% Job training opportunities



Importance of having Home Services and Housing Options

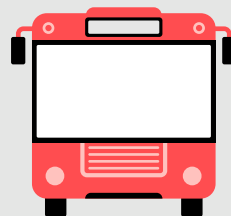


76% Trustworthy, affordable home modification & repair contractors

62% Affordable housing options for residents of different income levels

61% Services to help with home repair & yard maintenance for low-income & older adults

Importance of having Public Transportation Options

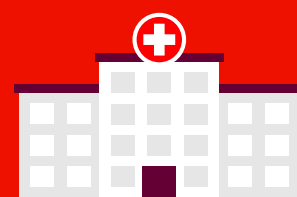


47% Public transportation that goes where I need it to go

45% Affordable public transportation

34% Public transportation that is close to my home

Together all these community features **contribute to the health and well-being of residents**, so it is no surprise that a large majority of 50-plus adults also want their communities to **offer convenient, high-quality healthcare services (80%)**.



% = Extremely/very important

Older Adults’ Technology Habits

Having easy-to-find information about services that older adults want and need, including community happenings and health services, is crucial for successfully aging in place. Communities must offer information through multimodal channels, including print, online, and in-person. According to a recent AARP Tech Trends study, 15 percent of the 50-plus, or about 120,785,304¹ older adults, reside in households without internet connection. Older adult residents living in rural communities, who comprise at least 17 percent of the 50-plus, are especially likely to be living without home-based internet service.

As demonstrated in related research from [AARP’s Older Adults Technology Services \(OATS\) initiative](#), older adults without access to reliable internet and digital devices are more likely to be socially isolated and face personal hardships like physical and mental health issues that have adverse impacts on the quality and length of their lives. Moreover, institutions, such as governments and private healthcare providers, along with caregivers are less able to effectively support disconnected older adults.

On the other hand, in times of societal distress, older adults who can easily access the internet and effectively navigate it for a variety of purposes are better positioned to feel connected to their communities than their counterparts who may suffer from more social isolation and feelings of loneliness, among other adverse outcomes.

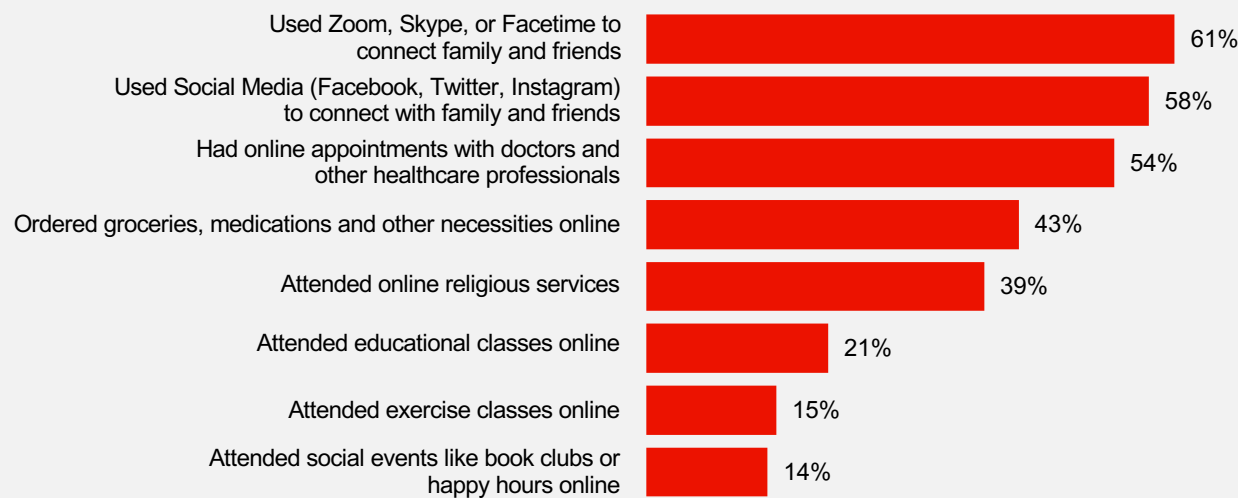
Among those who have access to home-based internet (85%), more than three-quarters (76%) go online several times a day while 11% go online about once a day. During the COVID-19 pandemic, having access to home-based internet became an essential lifeline to loved ones, health services, and for securing everyday essentials for many older adults. Those aged 50-plus were most likely to use video chat such as Zoom, Skype, or Facetime to connect with their family and friends, followed by social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Over half had online appointments or consultations with their doctor or other medical professionals, and many ordered everyday essentials like groceries, medications, or household supplies online during the pandemic. A considerable share of the 50-plus also used the internet during the pandemic to attend online religious services, educational classes, exercise classes, or other social activities like book clubs and happy hours.



“We now communicate in ways few could have imagined a decade ago. Age-friendly communities recognize that **information needs to be shared through a variety of methods** since not everyone is tech-savvy, and not everyone has a smartphone or home-based access to the internet.”

– [AARP Livable Communities](#)

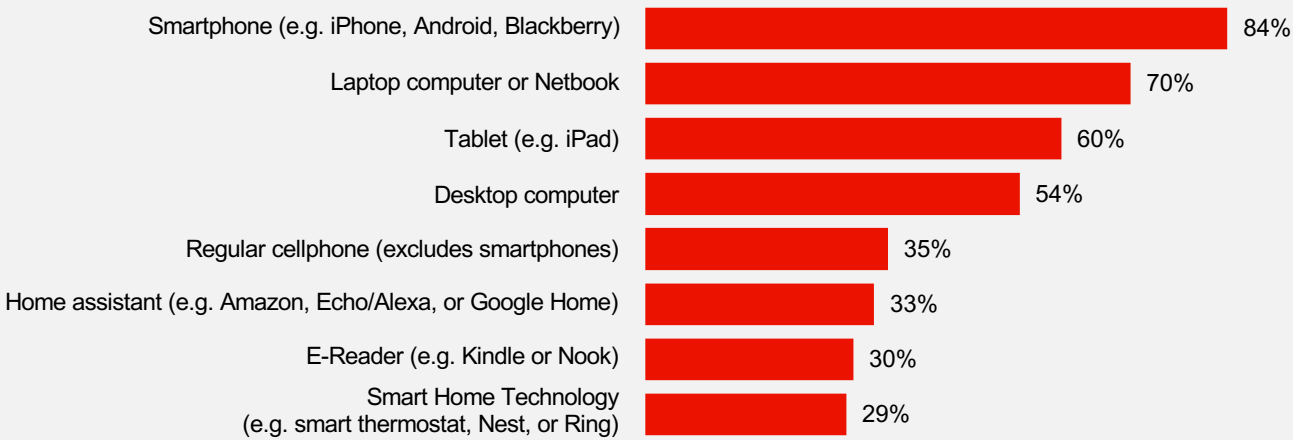
Online Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. “Age and Sex.” American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0101, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S0101?q=United States&g=010XX00US>. Accessed on January 10, 2024.

Adults 50-plus are most likely to report owning a smartphone, a laptop computer or netbook, a tablet, or a desktop computer. At the same time, roughly about a third of older adults report owning a regular cell phone (excluding smartphones), a home assistant, an e-reader, or smart home technology. For older adults with access to reliable and affordable internet connection, and the necessary knowledge for using it, digital devices can be effective tools for connecting them to their loved ones and broader community. Additionally, innovative technologies like smart security, lighting, and medical alert systems can facilitate safer and more comfortable aging in place. While 16 percent of older adults already have smart devices in their current residence, another 45 percent anticipate they will add them as a home modification for when they will need more physical assistance. Specifically, three in five (60%) plan to install a medical emergency response system as a form of home modification to be able to age in place. Moreover, as shown in the most recent AARP Tech Trends survey, since the COVID-19 pandemic, technology spending among 50-plus adults is up by 130% suggesting that even more older adults will be digitally connected in the future.

Device Ownership



Implications

Age-friendly communities should ensure older adults’ access to information and communication and thereby foster older residents’ avenues for aging in place in their communities. All aspects of aging in place, such as social connectedness, housing, and healthcare access, are tied to residents knowing information about related local resources and services. Additionally, it is key for older adults to have access to quality print, in-person, and online information sources. For example, local community centers, healthcare providers, restaurants, senior centers, and public libraries can be prime physical locations for providing older adults with print, online, and in-person information on local events, services, social activities, and employment opportunities. Given the significant share of older adults who remain digitally disconnected, communities must also invest in their digital infrastructure and provide support for older adults seeking training or learning opportunities for using digital tools like computers and smartphones.

Methodology

Data for this study was collected via an online survey of 2,826 adults aged 18 and older. The survey was fielded from June 9th to July 6th, 2021, by NORC using its online AmeriSpeak Panel which is representative of the U.S. population. The data were weighted by age, gender, Census region, race/ethnicity, income, and education to benchmarks from the February 2021 Current Population Survey (CPS). Additionally, the data were weighted by AARP membership using statistics from the AARP membership database. The data for this report are based largely on 1,320 survey respondents age 50 and older.



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