



# Older Adults

## Activity-Friendly Routes to Everyday Destinations

### What are activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations?

Activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations are connections that let people safely and easily walk, bike, or move actively using an assistive device to reach key locations, such as homes, doctor's offices, parks, grocery stores, churches, and other community amenities. Activity-friendly routes look different in every community, but can include sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, or access to transit stops.

Learn more about activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/activepeoplehealthynation/index.html>

### Benefits of walkability for older adults



Walkable neighborhoods allow older adults to **independently access grocery stores, healthcare facilities, and social or recreational activities.**<sup>2</sup>

Older adults who live in walkable neighborhoods are **more likely to be physically active.**<sup>4</sup>

Physically active older adults enjoy many important **health benefits**, including:<sup>5</sup>

- Better sleep
- Reduced risk of falling
- Better joint mobility
- More years of active life
- Delayed cognitive decline
- Reduced social isolation
- Reduced depression

By 2030, as many as one in five U.S. residents will be over age 65.<sup>1</sup> Surveys show that the vast majority—80 percent—of older adults prefer to **age in place** by remaining in their current communities, meaning these places must support independent mobility for older adults.<sup>2</sup> However, too many communities are only navigable via car, leaving many older adults unable to access the resources they need including healthcare and grocery stores due to driving restrictions.<sup>3</sup>

Activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations play an important role to support aging in place. Land use interventions, such as building mixed-use places and reducing parking requirements, bring destinations closer together. Transportation interventions, such as providing sidewalks, protected crosswalks, and accessible public transit, ensure that safe routes connect those destinations. Together, they can create activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations that result in communities where older adults can get around independently without needing to drive or rely on caregivers for rides.

Sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails must consider the unique mobility needs of older adults, many of whom may walk at a slower pace or use wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility-assistive devices. When sidewalks and crosswalks are not designed to support older adults, the results can be disastrous: data show that over the past decade, **adults age 50 or older were 50 percent more likely to be struck and killed by drivers while walking** compared to younger people.<sup>6</sup> This occurs even after accounting for differences in walking rates. Similarly, **adults over 75 were 82 percent more likely than younger people to be struck and killed.**<sup>6</sup>

## Designing activity-friendly routes for older adults

Photos: Simon Law, Scott Beale, Dr. Scott Crawford, Oran Virivincy



**Level, well maintained sidewalks** are safer and more comfortable for older adults, who may use wheelchairs, walkers, or canes or who may be unsteady on their feet. Avoid textured pavements like brick.



**Crosswalks** should include curb cuts that provide an easy transition from an elevated sidewalk to a street-level crosswalk. Timed intersections should provide enough time for an older adult to make it all the way across the street at a slow, comfortable pace.

Zoning ordinances in many communities can also make it difficult for older adults to age in place. Specifically, zoning that only allows for single-family homes often increases the cost of housing and decreases walkability, because homes are farther away from key destinations. This makes it difficult for older adults to downsize in their communities and can leave many older adults isolated.<sup>2</sup> However, zoning reform can be a win-win for walkability and for aging in place by allowing mixed-use zoning so destinations like grocery stores are reachable within a very short walk. Zoning reform can also support aging in place by permitting **accessory dwelling units** or **ADUs**. ADUs, such as separate basement apartments, apartments over garages, or additional dwellings in backyards have several important benefits for older adults:

- They **increase affordability** of aging in place, by offsetting costs of living.
- They provide opportunities for **caregivers** to live nearby, increasing semi-independent living and **reducing social isolation**.
- They increase residential density, which also **increases walkability**.

## CALL TO ACTION

Adopt Complete Streets policies that prioritize safe, accessible activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations for older adults. Adopt guidance that ensures crosswalk timing accounts for mobility of older adults and people living with disabilities. Update zoning ordinances to create dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods and allow for flexible, affordable housing choices including allowing accessory dwelling units.

1. U.S. Census Bureau (2018) Older People Projected to Outnumber Children for First Time in U.S. History. Available from: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html>.  
 2. Ball SM (2012) Aging in Place: A Toolkit for Local Governments. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Regional Commission.  
 3. National Prevention Council (2016) Healthy Aging in Action. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General.  
 4. Berke EM et al. (2007) Association of the Built Environment with Physical Activity and Obesity for Older Adults. American Journal of Public Health 97(3): 486-492.  
 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) Physical Activity: Why it Matters. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/about-physical-activity/why-it-matters.html>.  
 6. Smart Growth America (2019) Dangerous by Design. Available from: <http://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design>.