



Ten Universal Design Features
to include in a Lifetime Adaptable
and Age Friendly Home

Acknowledgement

This document is an updated version of a Fingal County Council publication called 'Ten Ways to Construct a Lifetime Adaptable and Age Friendly Home' (2019)



An Age Friendly Home

- is well-connected to local amenities
- is easy to approach and enter
- is connected to the outdoors
- is easy to move about in
- has accessible and adaptable toilets and bathrooms
- has a guest bedroom
- has easy to use fittings and fixtures
- is energy and cost efficient
- has good security and technology systems



What is an Age Friendly Home?

An Age Friendly Home is a dwelling that is suitable for use across the lifecourse for people of all ages. It is particularly suitable for older people whose needs often change as they age. Age Friendly Homes incorporate key features such as level access and connection to the outdoors. They are integrated into the neighbourhood and are capable of incorporating assistive technology to support ageing in place. Developing Age Friendly Homes helps to future proof housing for an ageing population.

Lessons learned from an extensive body of research into health and ageing, which has been reinforced by the Global Pandemic COVID-19, make it clear that older people should be supported.

Improving housing design and conditions for older people will support independence, prevent falls, and improve general health and well-being.



Who is this leaflet for?

This information is for anyone who is interested in making homes more Age Friendly, including practitioners involved in providing social housing for the ageing population, private developers, and individual homeowners who wish to adapt their current home or move to a more suitable home.

This leaflet is applicable to all types of dwelling, such as houses (single and two storey) and apartments.

The principles are relevant for the design of new accommodation but can also be used as a guide to assess existing units and to plan their upgrading.

The following recommendations are based on Universal Design principles and follow consultation with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design [CEUD]

www.universaldesign.ie



Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. Universal Design Homes work well for everyone and look good.

They are designed to **four key principles**:

- 1 They are **integrated** into their local neighbourhood
- 2 They are **easy to approach**, access and move about in
- 3 They are **easy to understand**, use and manage
- 4 They are **flexible, safe, cost effective** and **adaptable** over time

There are **ten important features** of an Age Friendly Home that greatly enhance the living experience of residents. Some specific technical guidance is suggested for each feature below.



Further detail on Universal Design Homes is available in the publication
'Universal Design Guidelines for Homes in Ireland'





External Approach

1 Neighbourhood Location and Close to Amenities

The house should be located close to amenities such as shops, health, cultural and leisure facilities and be within walking distance of public transport. The public realm should be safe and well maintained with accessible routes for walking and cycling. Communal space to facilitate interaction with neighbours is important, with low maintenance seating and planting to create a pleasant environment.

Home zones / areas that prioritise pedestrians in mixed communities.

Key Technical Specifications

- Distance to shops and services should be circa 1.5 kms.
- Avoid steeply sloping sites, or factor in from the outset, how to ensure that gradients will not compromise accessibility when the site is developed.
- Footpaths should have a minimum width of 2000mm, narrowing only to 1800mm where unavoidable for electric junction boxes, etc.

2 Connection to the Outdoors

Access to the garden, balcony or terrace from the home should be level and wide enough for everyone to use easily. There should be sufficient space for a range of activities for all ages and sizes, for recreation and more functional needs such as drying clothes and growing food. Views onto the external environment help people orientate themselves in the neighbourhood, and also appreciate the time of day or night.

Access to outdoor space has been particularly important in the context of a pandemic.

Key Technical Specifications

- Provide an access door to the outdoor space of between 800mm and 850mm clear width with level access
- In houses, provide a paved area against the house at least 1800mm in depth for the full width of the house
- In apartments, provide balconies and terraces that are a minimum 1500mm in depth
- Window sills in habitable rooms should be no more than 850mm above floor level.
- Avoid windows transoms between 800mm and 1500mm from floor level for unobstructed views in at least one section of a window.





Entering & Moving Around

3 Easy to Move About In

Include wider external and internal doors. Features such as sliding or pocket doors, 'cat and kitten doors', or barrier free doorways may be considered for ease of movement. There should be sufficient internal and external storage space for mobility aids and other items.

Consider nibs (the distance from the door opening to an adjacent wall) at leading edges of doors. Extra space makes it easier for a person using a wheelchair to approach and open the door.

Key Technical Specifications

- Door sizes to be 850mm unobstructed opening section
- Provide a width of corridor of 1050–1200mm between walls. (UD homes)
- Clear access space of 800mm on both sides and at the end of the double bed
- 750mm wide clear routes between furniture items and in front of windows and routes between doors

4 Easy to Approach & Enter

- Provide level access at front and rear of the home.
- The approach route to the home should be accessible with a level or gentle gradient.
- A covered porch provides shelter.
- External illumination is important for navigation and security.
- Consider a hard-standing patio area to the rear of the house flush with the internal floor level.
- Age Friendly car parking should be provided for residents and guests.
- A distinct design helps people to identify their own entrance, for example by using design features such as door colours, planting or porch canopy design.

Key Technical Specifications

- Provide an accessible approach route with a level or gentle gradient
- Provide an entrance door with level access and with a clear width of between 800mm and 850mm
- Provide an entrance hallway with a space of between 1500mm x 1500mm and 1800mm x 1800mm adjacent to the entrance door



Spaces for Living

5. Has a Guest Bedroom

Older people have told us that having additional space in their home for overnight guests is very important to them; **93% of survey respondents said they wanted a minimum of two bedrooms in order to consider rightsizing.**

For this reason, an Age Friendly Home should incorporate a second bedroom, or some additional space such as a 'box room' or shared guest facility. Older people want the flexibility to invite friends and family, including grandchildren, to stay. This additional space can also be used as a home office.

Some Age Friendly units should incorporate a lockable separate bedroom for a carer.

Key Technical Specifications

- Ensure that double and twin bedrooms are at least 13 m² in area
- Ensure that a single bedroom is at least 8m²
- In a double bedroom, provide clear space for a turning circle of at least 1500mm and clear access space of 800mm on both sides and at the end of the double bed



6. Accessible and Adaptable Toilets and Bathrooms

An Age Friendly home should have accessible and adaptable toilets and bathrooms on the ground floor.

In the entry level toilet, ensure that it is designed for the future installation of a wet-room level access walk-in shower including walls of adequate wall strength to take future fittings such as handrails, drop-down rails and a shower seat. Below floor drainage, level access, moisture resistant plasterboard and light fittings.

Consideration should be given to locating the toilet room adjacent to the living room. This would facilitate the conversion of the living room into a bedroom if the need arises.

Locate the main bathroom immediately adjacent to the main bedroom with a “soft spot” for future installation of a door between them to create an en-suite. Ensure that provision is made for future adaptation to a wet room shower including the features listed for the entry level toilet. To reduce the risks of falls, the entrance to an upstairs bathroom should not be directly opposite the entrance to the stairs.

Technical Specifications

- Provide an entry level WC compartment of at least 1500mm x 1800mm, with below floor drainage and a drainage point for a future shower installation, tank floor and walls up to 2000mm
- Ensure that all walls and ceilings in bathrooms and toilets are constructed to be strong enough to take fittings and rails
- Provide a bathroom with minimum internal dimensions of 2100mm x 2400mm
- Locate the bathroom immediately adjacent to the main bedroom with a full height door or ‘soft spot’ between them



7. Energy and Cost Efficient

The home should be designed to reduce energy requirements and be energy and cost efficient. Heating systems should be low maintenance and reliable with simple instructions and accessible controls. Underfloor heating is particularly useful in the event of a fall.

Key Technical Specifications:

- Recommend getting a BER assessment to identify energy improvements
- Control panels for heating systems should be positioned between 1200 and 1400mm above floor level, with a clear space of 1100 x 750mm in front



Elements & Systems

8. Technology

Technology and security features such as video door entry, alarm, community alarm/panic button, remote management of heating system and broadband should be considered for incorporation as required. The home should be capable of adopting further assistive technology in future such as automatic windows/blinds. Provide points for front door illumination, security camera and/ or intercom.

Electrical points to be located adjacent to internal doors, above and beside window heads (for future automatic devices such as assisted door openings, ceiling hoists and automatic curtain/blind opening).

Include two-way or three-way switching for lighting as necessary throughout the home.

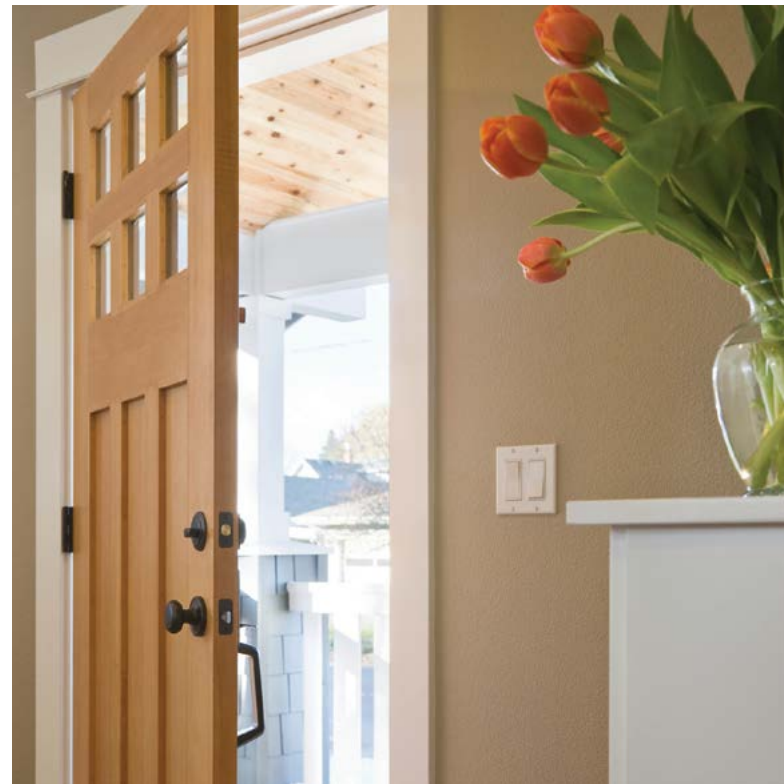
Ensure all outlets, switches, sockets and controls are clearly visible and easy to reach and operate using one hand and do not rely on single finger operation.

Provide capped electrical points for future installation of a stair lift or through floor platform lift.

An external power socket at the front porch allows for charging mobility vehicles.

Key Technical Specifications

- All outlets, switches and controls should be installed at a consistent height between 450mm to 1200mm from the floor and at least 500mm away from any internal room corner
- High standard (CAT 6) cabling should be provided if adequate broadband connection is not available. Consider router/hub locations in hallway
- Provide capped electrical points at 2000mm height for future electrical shower installation in wet room



9. Good Security Systems

Design should be completed in accordance with current Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidance. Use CPTED principles including good natural surveillance, good lighting, community interaction, public/private space definition and good physical security.

Key Technical Specifications:

- All alarm systems should allow for future adaptation to both audible and visual signals
- Install alarm control boxes and panels at between 7500mm and 1000mm above finished floor level
- Doors and windows to use locks in accordance with PAS:24 2016 or EN:1627 2001
- Provide a master key for all rooms



10. Easy to use Fixtures and Fittings

Ensure that all fixtures and fittings such as lever door handles and lever taps are Age Friendly and easy to use. Controls (for example, heating system) should be accessible.

Simple features such as visual contrast, signage, labeling of switches, will make it easier for all residents to understand and interact with their living environment as their needs change.

Technical specifications:

- On doors, provide pull and lever handles rather than knobs and ensure that the lever handle returns back towards the door to avoid catching clothes
- Install lever mixer / taps which can be used single handed and with a closed fist. Ensure mixer taps have a clear indication of the difference between water volume and temperature control
- Provide colour contrasting fixtures and fittings and ensure all fittings contrast visually with their background





Useful Links

www.universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Housing

www.universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Housing/Dementia-Friendly-Buildings

www.agefriendlyireland.ie

www.igbc.ie/

www.agefriendlyhomes.ie

Did you Know?

Do you know that every local authority in Ireland has an Age Friendly Housing Advisor who can advise both individuals and developers about how to make homes more Age Friendly? Contact your local authority and ask to speak to your Age Friendly Housing Technical Advisor

Buildings Featured

Page 2 Proudstown Road, Navan, County Meath

Page 4, 6 Rowlestown, Fingal

Page 7 St Joseph's Court, CLANN Housing, Clifden, County Galway

Page 8 Great Northern Haven, Dundalk, County Louth



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