



Age Friendly  
**IRELAND**



**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)



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Centre for Excellence  
in Universal Design

Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais  
National Disability Authority

## 10 Universal Design Features in an Age Friendly Home:

- 1 is well connected to local amenities
- 2 is connected to the outdoors
- 3 is easy to approach and enter
- 4 is easy to move about in
- 5 has a second bedroom
- 6 has accessible and adaptable toilets and bathrooms
- 7 is energy and cost efficient
- 8 has good technology systems
- 9 has good security systems
- 10 has easy to use fittings and fixtures



## 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.

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

These guidelines should be applied with consideration of the Design Manual for Quality Housing, published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

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Designers can also use the **Internal Layout Checklist for Universal Design Homes** to ensure that Universal Design features are considered at the early stages of housing design. This checklist is co-published by Age Friendly Ireland and the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. [www.agefriendlyhomes.ie](http://www.agefriendlyhomes.ie)

## 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 our 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 features are relevant for the design of new accommodation but can also be used as a guide to assess existing homes 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](http://www.universaldesign.ie)





Brady's Court, Tallaght, Co. Dublin - 2024 Age Friendly Housing Award Winner

## What is Universal Design?

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible 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 Universal Design features** of an Age Friendly Home that greatly enhance the living experience of residents. Some specific key considerations is suggested for each feature within this publication.



Further detail on Universal Design Homes is available in this publication.

[‘Universal Design Guidelines for Homes in Ireland’](#)





## External Approach

### 1. Well connected to local amenities

An Age Friendly home 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.

The site selection tool known as the ASSIST TOOL, developed by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, can be used to evaluate potential sites and their proximity to amenities for Age Friendly homes. Please contact the Age Friendly Technical Advisor in your local authority for further information.

## Key Considerations

- Ideally homes should be located as close to shops and services as possible. The ASSIST TOOL can aid the site selection process.
- Site topography should be considered during the site selection process. Sites with a steep gradient should be avoided and Universal Design principles should be applied to ensure ease of access.
- Accessible footpaths, road crossings and public realm infrastructure between Age Friendly homes and shops and services is vital and should adhere to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS).



## 2 Connected 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 to orientate themselves in the neighbourhood, and also to appreciate the time of day or night.



### Key Considerations

- External access doors to outdoor spaces should be wide enough for everyone to use, including wheelchair users.
- Gardens should have a paved area adjacent to the dwelling, to allow easy access for all to the outdoors, including, for example people using a rollator.
- Balconies and terraces in apartments should be deep enough to allow people using mobility devices to move around and turn easily.
- Within habitable rooms, window should provide unobstructed views to the outside by people standing or seated, by careful positioning of transoms.



### Key Considerations

- Ensure the approach route is accessible, featuring a level or gentle gradient.
- Entrance doorways should be wide enough to allow easy access and have a level threshold.
- The entrance hallway should have sufficient space adjacent to the doorway for easy of movement, for example someone using a mobility device.
- Provide internal space adjacent to the main entrance for storing outdoor mobility devices, clothes and footwear.

## Entering & Moving Around

### 3 Easy to Approach & Enter

The approach route to an Age Friendly home should be accessible with a level or gently sloping gradient. Age Friendly car parking spaces should be provided for residents and guests. The installation of level access thresholds to front and rear access doorways provides universal access throughout the home. Providing a covered porch or canopy at the entrance will provide shelter during inclement weather. The provision of adequate external lighting to all external approaches is important for navigation and security. To help residents identify their own entrance, distinct design features such as door colours, planting or porch canopy designs can be used. The location of bin storage should allow for easy access to dispose of household rubbish, with consideration given to ease of moving bins to a collection point along a safe and accessible route.

## 4 Easy to Move About In

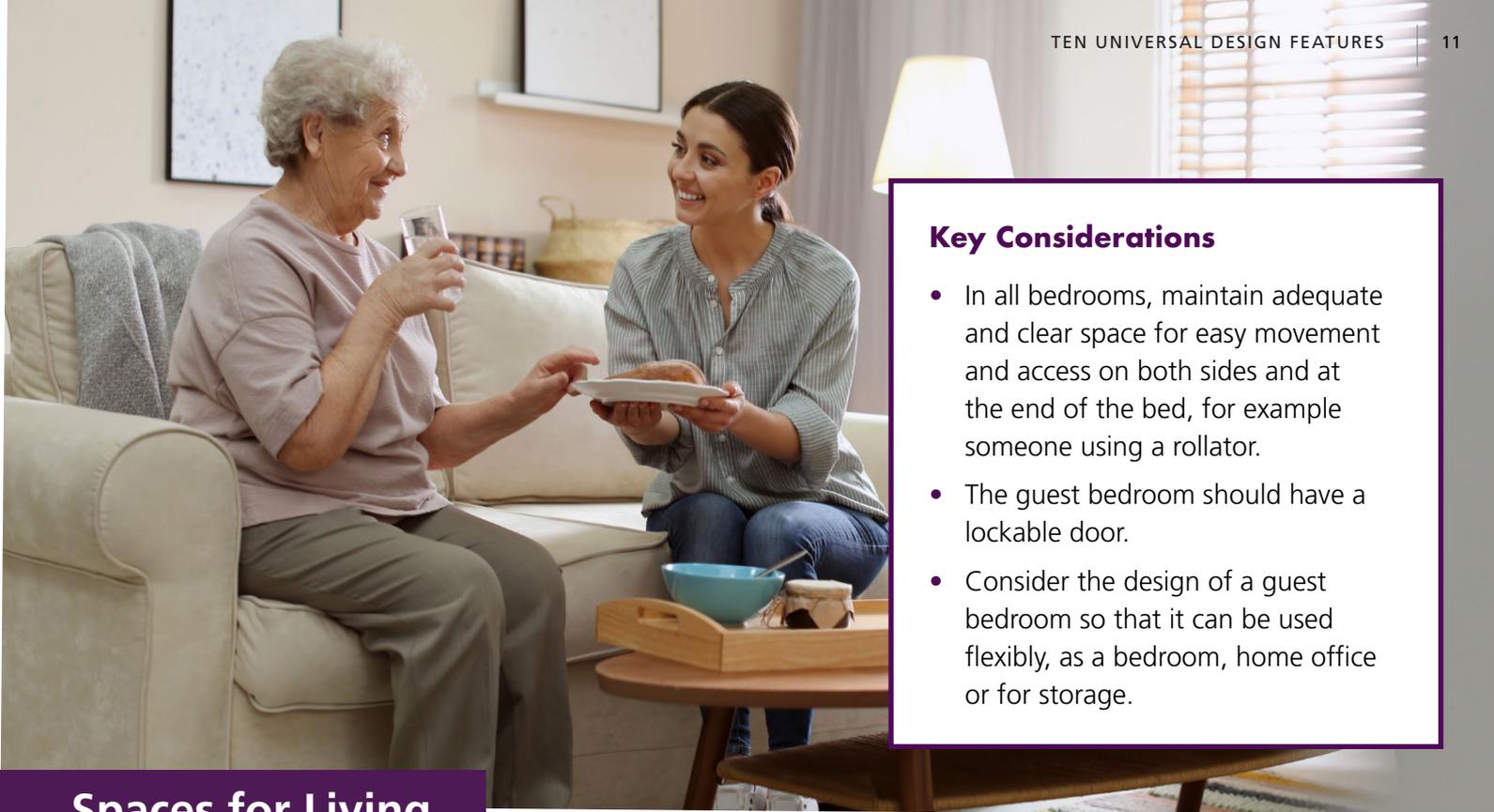
An Age Friendly home should have sufficient internal space to permit a person to move independently around their home. The provision of doors and circulation routes with adequate width, level access throughout and turning spaces are important to enable ease of movement. Sufficient internal and external storage space for mobility aids and other devices should be provided.

Accidents can be caused by steep stairs. A shallower stairs is easier to use and may enable a person to remain active in their home for longer. Ensure that the wall at a stairs is constructed to allow for provision of a second handrail to the stairs, if needed in future. Stairs should not have winders / tapered treads. Height adjustable worktops, shelving and storage units should be considered to enable ease of access for those with reduced mobility.

### Key Considerations

- Door widths should be sufficiently wide to allow easy access, particularly for persons using mobility devices.
- Ensure ample space between walls in corridors for comfortable movement to allow people using mobility devices to move around and turn easily.
- Maintain clear access space on both sides and at the end of the beds.
- Provide clear routes between furniture items, in front of windows and between doors for easy navigation.





### Key Considerations

- In all bedrooms, maintain adequate and clear space for easy movement and access on both sides and at the end of the bed, for example someone using a rollator.
- The guest bedroom should have a lockable door.
- Consider the design of a guest bedroom so that it can be used flexibly, as a bedroom, home office or for storage.

## Spaces for Living

### 5. A Second 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.**

To facilitate the needs of older people and to promote rightsizing among Ireland's ageing demographic, an Age Friendly home should include a guest bedroom to:

- Enable a carer to stay for a short period to support the older person.
- Enable a friend or a family member, including grandchildren, to stay.
- Provide the older person with additional storage and space for a home office.

## 6. Accessible and Adaptable Toilets and Bathrooms

An Age Friendly home should have accessible and adaptable toilets and bathrooms.

In a home with more than one level, the entry level toilet should be designed to allow for easy future installation of a wet-room level access walk-in shower including walls of adequate strength to take future fittings, such as grabrails and a shower seat. Below floor drainage, level access, moisture resistant plasterboard and light fittings should be provided. If a bath is provided, provision should be made for future installation of a level access shower, including the features listed above for an entry level toilet. 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.

The main bathroom should be located 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 and non slip floor finishes should be installed.





### Key Considerations

- Provide an entry level toilet with sufficient space and below floor drainage for a future shower installation. Ensure the floor and walls are waterproofed to an appropriate height.
- Ensure that all walls and ceilings in bathrooms and toilets are constructed to structurally support grab rails and a shower seat.
- Locate the main bathroom immediately adjacent to the main bedroom with the provision of a 'soft spot' between them to enable a future doorway to be installed.



## 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 Considerations

- A BER (Building Energy Rating) assessment should be carried out in older housing stock to identify potential energy improvements. Further details are available from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.
- Control panels for heating systems should be positioned at a convenient height for easy access, with a clear space in front to allow for comfortable operation.



## Elements & Systems

### 8. Good Technology Systems

Technology features such as a video door entry, community alarm/panic button, security camera and/ or intercom, remote management of heating system and broadband should be considered.

Provision for future automatic devices such as assisted door openings, ceiling hoists and automatic curtain/blind opening should be considered and installed in accordance with suppliers instructions.

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

Ensure all electrical and data switches, sockets and controls are clearly visible, easy to reach and operate.

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



The provision of an electrical socket adjacent to the front entrance doorway facilitates the charging of mobility devices and should be considered.

The provision of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors is crucial for the safety of older people in Age Friendly homes.



### Key Considerations

- Install all outlets, switches and controls at a consistent height for easy access, ensuring they are positioned away from any internal room corners.
- Consider the location of broadband Wi-Fi hubs for ease of access. Ensure that Ethernet cables are hardwired according to service providers' instructions to support assistive technologies.

## 9. Good Security Systems

Age Friendly housing developments should incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidance. CPTED principles such as good natural surveillance, good lighting, community interaction, public/private space definition and good physical security should be considered.

Architects and Planners should liaise with An Garda Síochána Crime Prevention Office in the application of CPTED principles within Age Friendly developments.



[Contact details for your local Crime Prevention Officer.](#)



### Key Considerations

- Ensure all alarm systems can be adapted in the future to include both audible and visual signals.
- Install alarm control boxes and panels at a convenient height for easy access.
- Doors and windows to use locks in accordance with PAS:24 2016 or EN:1627 2021.
- Provide a master key for all rooms.



## 10. Easy to use Fittings and Fixtures

Ensure that all fittings and fixtures such as lever door handles and lever taps are fully accessible and easy to use. Control interfaces on heating system and cooking devices should be accessible.

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

### Key Considerations:

- Use lever handles on doors instead of knobs, and ensure the lever handle returns towards the door to prevent items of clothing from catching.
- Install lever mixer taps that can be operated with one hand or a closed fist and ensure there is a clear distinction between water volume and temperature controls.
- Provide colour contrasting fixtures and fittings and ensure all fittings contrast visually with their background.



## Do you Know?

Do you know that every local authority in Ireland has an Age Friendly Technical 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 Technical Advisor.

Contact details  
for Age Friendly  
Technical Advisors





## Useful Links

[www.universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Housing](http://www.universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Housing)

[www.universaldesign.ie/built-environment/housing/dementia-friendly-dwellings](http://www.universaldesign.ie/built-environment/housing/dementia-friendly-dwellings)

[www.agefriendlyireland.ie](http://www.agefriendlyireland.ie)

[www.agefriendlyhomes.ie](http://www.agefriendlyhomes.ie)

[www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)

[www.seai.ie](http://www.seai.ie)

[www.igbc.ie](http://www.igbc.ie)

[www.gov.ie/housing](http://www.gov.ie/housing)

## Buildings Featured

### Page 2

Proudstown Road, Navan, County Meath

### Page 6

Rowlestown, Co. Dublin

### Page 4,7

Brady's Court, Tallaght, Dublin

### Page 10

Great Northern Haven, Dundalk, County Louth

### Page 9,12

Cornamona Court, Ballyfermot, Dublin

### Page 13

Cúirt an Troisc, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal





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