



Age-Friendly Design for Small Dwellings

Design Criteria for ADUs and Other Forms of Missing Middle Housing (MMH)

This age-friendly design criteria is derived from the Better Living Design Institute's (BLD) Better Living Design features, which have their origins in Universal Design concepts. Residential environments have unique needs compared to public spaces. BLD specifically tailors Universal Design principles to the home setting, creating safer, more convenient, and user-friendly living spaces. This document focuses on essential design criteria for small dwellings. These features address common areas and promote aging-in-place by supporting most older adults as they mature. While elements like stairs and second levels may be present, focusing on a primary level that follows these guidelines can significantly improve functionality.

The age-friendly criteria outlines essential features for creating safe and livable homes that empower older adults to maintain their independence. This functional criteria is a subset of a more comprehensive guidance document.

Mainstreamed Appearance

The design criteria reveals a critical aspect of BLD (and universal design)—aesthetics, which helps to differentiate Better Living Design from design solutions that are just functional. With a BLD approach, usability characteristics are built-in and integrated into the overall scheme, and therefore mainstreamed—not separate and distinct. A BLD solution has to work well, look good and be marketable to a broad audience.

Over the course of its useful life, an age-friendly home might be occupied by individuals or couples across the age spectrum, young to old, and with varying ability levels. As such, these dwellings need to have improved functionality but need to appeal to a broad audience. While these criteria focus on the particular needs of older adults, no one wants to live in a home that has stereotypical or stigmatizing features. A successful design will demonstrate that they don't have to.

All features must be integrated into the overall design intent of the home. A successful home will have a mainstreamed appearance, inside and out. Incorporating the BLD guidance into your design will insure housing that is usable and easily adaptable.

Long-Term Flexibility

While featuring far more utility than a standard home, a BLD home is not expected to eliminate the need for households to customize their home over time. Everyone customizes their home over time in a variety of ways, but BLD features will help to avoid the most costly and extensive remodeling that is most often associated with long-term livability.

Scale

Age-friendly (or Universal, or Better Living Design) is realized at both large and small scales. At the level of foundation type and grading, as well as door width. Bathroom size and fixture location matters, but so does door and window operability. Each element listed below might not be fully achieved, and may not even apply to your situation (i.e. garages), but addressing all that apply will result in a successful design.

- We welcome substantially equivalent solutions. If you have a creative or alternate solution that achieves the same result, don't hesitate to contact UDI.
- While the inclusion of each element in this list will make a positive difference in the lives of those who live in these homes, some elements clearly make the biggest difference: exterior and entry, interior circulation, and bathroom.
- Designs should meet or exceed state building code, and municipal zoning ordinances.

AROUND THE HOUSE

Paths	
	1:20 max slope
	Min 42" wide surface
	If present: step free route to gardens, remote patios, at-grade cooking eating areas
Entrances (See Notes and Guidance document for important information about entrances and garages)	
	One zero-step entrance with minimum 60"x72" covering
	Level (2%) landing at entry
	36" wide entry door

INSIDE THE HOUSE

Doors/Cased openings	
Width	
	At least 32" wide hinged door
	Sliding, pocket, barn doors at least 32" wide clear opening
	At least 36" wide cased openings
Clearances	
	18"-24" clear floor space beside door on pull side at latch jamb
Windows	
	48" Maximum hardware height for window controls
	Easily operable windows
Hallways/Passages/Thresholds	
	42" Wide minimum hallways (note: minimize hallways)
Bathroom	
General	
	Adequate maneuvering space provided at lavatory, toilet and bathing fixture
Components of Bathroom	
	Clear space (36") in front of toilet
	Toilet centered 18" from any side wall, cabinet, or tub
	Minimum 60" x 36" (48" preferred), curbless shower, or tub
Controls	
	Offset controls in tubs and showers for easy reach
	Controls unobstructed by other fixtures and cabinetry

Kitchen	
Circulation	
	Kitchen layout with 42" between cabinet faces
Cabinets/Shelving/Drawers	
	Drawer base cabinets
	Cabinets with loop or touch latches
Appliances	
	Range with front or side controls
	If wall mounted oven, controls no more than 48"H
	Locate microwave within easy reach range— i.e not over stove
Work Surfaces	
	Continuous countertop between stove and sink
	One lowered, 32" H, work surface with knee space (could be eat-in kitchen table)
Laundry	
	Clear floor space 36" wide across full width in front of washer and dryer
	Washer/Dryer unit(s) have controls on front $\leq 54''$ aff
	Front loading washer and dryer
Living Room/Flex Space	
	Allow a 24" clear passage to maneuver between couch and coffee table
	Allow a min. 36" clear passage to maneuver to seating
Bedroom(s)	
	Allow for 36" clear aisle on one side of the bed and between bed and furniture
	Maximized storage in 18"–54" reach zone
	Allow for 36" clear aisle on both sides of bed and 36" clear passage between bed and furniture
Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ)	
	Low VOC sheet products, cabinet materials, and floor and wall finishes
	Thermostats at 42"–48" aff
	Layered lighting
Switches and Controls	
Lighting	
	Light switches 42"–48" above floor
	All light switches are easy to operate
Electrical Panel	
	Locate 24"–54" aff with a minimum 30" x 48" clear floor space in front
Outlets	
	Locate general purpose convenience outlets 18"–24" aff
	Outlets over counters and tables are within reachable range

	Added electrical outlets at beds and desks, 4-plex boxes each side
	Outlet near toilet in bathroom

WHOLE HOUSE FUNCTIONALITY

Maintenance

	Low maintenance exterior siding
	If applicable, low maintenance decking