

New services, technologies can help with aging in place

27 February 2018, by Katherine Roth



In this undated photo a Meals on Wheels America volunteer delivers a meal to homebound senior in Takoma Park, M.D. From ride-sharing apps to grocery deliveries, digital door locks to "smart" medicine dispensers, more help than ever is out there to help people live safely and comfortably in their own homes as they get older. (Meals on Wheels America via AP)

There is nothing quite as devastating for many older people as having to leave the comfort of home because of poor health or limited mobility.

But a new generation of services and technology is making it possible to stay at home longer, safely and happily, experts say.

"Most people would rather stay in their own homes as they age, and technology has made that easier in so many ways," says Amy Goyer, a family and caregiving expert with the AARP and author of "Juggling Life, Work, and Caregiving," published by the AARP and the American Bar Association.

"There are a lot of resources to tap into, even for those on a limited budget."

She recommends starting with the "caregiving"

page of AARP.org and your local Area Agency on Aging network (see www.n4a.org), which is federally funded and also can lead you to a range of state and local resources.

Beyond technology, a little creativity often goes a long way toward helping people manage to live at home longer, Goyer says.

"If a person can't do stairs, for example, consider ways to put everything they need on the main floor, like maybe bringing a washing machine up from the basement," she says.

Some of the latest services and technologies that make it easier to "age in place":

SAFETY

Digital locks, which can be part of a smart home system, can be set so the door is unlocked for a small window of time to allow a caregiver into the house. Different codes can be set up for different people. They can be monitored from afar on phones, as can digital doorbells, which might help both the hearing and mobility impaired.



In this undated photo a Meals on Wheels America volunteer delivers a meal to homebound senior in

Trenton, N.J. From ride-sharing apps to grocery deliveries, digital door locks to "smart" medicine dispensers, more help than ever is out there to help people live safely and comfortably in their own homes as they get older. (Meals on Wheels America via AP)

Digital medication dispensers can send text notifications to loved ones to let them know whether someone has taken their pills. Cameras can be installed so loved ones know whether home health aides have come by. And there is a wide range of medical alert systems, some even including a GPS.

"My aunt fell in a parking lot and luckily someone was there and picked her up, but if they hadn't been there, a medical alert system could have made a world of a difference," Goyer says.

Also, simple things like lowering thresholds, improving lighting, putting in railings and removing small rugs can make a home much safer.

TRANSPORTATION

Many counties and community agencies have some kind of senior taxi run by volunteers to take seniors to doctors' appointments, grocery stores, senior centers and other errands. Ride-sharing companies have also proven helpful for many. The site www.GoGoGrandparent.com, for example, is designed to be easy to use for seniors—they don't need to use a phone—and taps into local ride-sharing services. It can be paid for by relatives living out of town, who also receive notifications of pickups and drop-offs.

Justin Boorgaard co-founded the company with friend David Lung in 2016 to help Boorgaard's grandmother maintain her mobility and independence.

"Her independence, and the independence given back to her family is something we believe the world needs," he says. "We screen drivers and use only those with the best reviews. We filter them to make sure they have cars with room for walkers, canes, foldable wheelchairs or service dogs, and we step in to help if something's not going right."

FOOD

"Meals are a big thing when you're trying to set everything up for aging at home, and a lot of people don't have the energy or ability to cook for themselves," Goyer says.

In addition to Meals on Wheels, which is administered by local communities and delivers reasonably priced prepared meals to those unable to cook for themselves, "there are all kinds of interesting options out there for all kinds of budgets," she says. Services like BlueApron and HelloFresh will deliver either ingredients or meals, and Pea Pod, Amazon Fresh and Instacart can deliver groceries and other items across most of the country.



In this undated photo a Meals on Wheels America volunteer delivers a meal to homebound senior in the

greater Baltimore area of Maryland. From ride-sharing apps to grocery deliveries, digital door locks to "smart" medicine dispensers, more help than ever is out there to help people live safely and comfortably in their own homes as they get older. (Meals on Wheels America via AP)

"Even [grocery stores](#) that don't have a delivery service will often deliver grocery bags out to the car for those who can drive up," Goyer says.

SUPPORT

The Agency on Aging and other local groups often have lists of services, many run by volunteers, that can provide help with household chores as simple as changing a light bulb or doing the laundry.

Caregivers, too, should make sure they have supports in place for themselves as well as their loved ones.

SOCIAL NETWORK

Isolation and loneliness are health threats that should not be taken lightly, Goyer says.

Faith-based organizations often have networks of people who can stop by and say hello every so often. Goyer says it's also worth looking into national programs like the Foster Grandparent Program, which pairs seniors with younger people, and also the Senior Companion Program and the Senior Corps volunteer program. All are administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the same organization that runs the Americorps volunteer program, and can be found at www.nationalservice.gov.

Many communities have started a Village to Village Network, where people can pool resources to get things done more efficiently; for example, someone who can drive might deliver groceries to a neighbor in exchange for a cooked meal.

"Sometimes it takes some creative thinking to figure out all the pieces of the puzzle," Goyer says.

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