This report is prepared by HomeStars based on a survey of Canadian homeowners and home service professionals, in partnership with CARP (formerly the Canadian Association of Retired Persons), who conducted a similar survey with their membership. See editor’s notes for methodology and number of survey respondents.
FOREWORD

This spring, Canada hit a new record. Statistics Canada released its 2016 census figures and for the first time in our country’s history, seniors (Canadians over the age of 65) outnumber children (those under 14 years of age).¹

The growth is substantial with the number of seniors increasing a staggering 20 per cent since 2011. This increase was even larger when looking at the oldest Canadians where numbers showed growth of 19.4 per cent for those over 85 and up 41.3 per cent among those over 100.

These increases demonstrate the urgent need for resources for this group – both as it relates to housing, healthcare and more. We know that aging Canadians want to stay in their homes as long as possible and together we want to help drive awareness and share information on the steps to take to not just age, but thrive, in place. It’s not simply a case of staying put – it’s much more than that -- and together we hope to help aging Canadians, their families and caregivers to have access to the resources they need to do this successfully.

We realize that the subject of aging can be a polarizing issue. But we encourage you to read on for recent insights into why Canadians are planning to age in place and how they plan to do it. After all, life is too short to not love where you live!

Nancy Peterson and Anthony Quinn

Nancy Peterson is the CEO and founder of HomeStars and Anthony Quinn is the Director of Community Affairs at CARP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is considered ‘old’ nowadays? It is a debatable question that almost guarantees a wide range of answers. For some it could be considered the age of retirement eligibility, to getting your first grey hair or becoming a grandparent. Getting old is often a state of mind. But one thing is certain: we are all aging.

Aging is personal. Some of us are born “old souls”, while others can be vibrant and active well into their 90s. But one fact does not change: as we get older, our needs change. This is particularly evident when it comes to our homes. Those long and winding staircases or that claw-foot bathtub may have been sought-after features in your home when you purchased it, but can now be barriers to comfort, convenience and safety.

The country’s largest advocacy association for aging Canadians is CARP. With a membership in Canada of more than 300,000, their most recent member poll showed that 85 per cent of Canadian seniors would like to age in their homes. Although, with that being said, only 34 per cent would consider renovating a current or future home.

Cue the 2017 Aging-in-Place report from HomeStars, in partnership with CARP. The first annual report includes findings from two surveys – the first polled 2,161 homeowners across Canada (79 per cent of which are over the age of 50) and the second polled 280 home service professionals. The report uncovers Canadians’ attitudes around aging and planning for the future, while providing solutions to help Canadian seniors not just age, but thrive in their homes. The findings are presented with supplemental data provided by a recent survey of 2,924 CARP members across Canada on their attitudes towards downsizing.
SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The majority of homeowners intend to stay in their homes as they age. While there are many reasons for wanting to stay in your home, the most popular option for staying (72 per cent) was that their homes were conveniently located. This was followed by the more emotional response of “I love my home” at 66 per cent. For those who aren’t choosing to stay, the most popular response was a desire to downsize as they age. Interestingly, the days of moving in with your kids seem to be gone with only two per cent indicating they would move in with friends or family. Among CARP members surveyed, over 85 per cent still planned to age in place – whether or not this meant downsizing to a smaller home or condo.

Despite considering themselves proactive with aging in place plans, the majority of homeowners have only somewhat considered or never considered actually making any modifications because they don’t believe they are old enough yet for that. While 56 per cent of respondents consider themselves proactive as it relates to aging in place renovations, 37 per cent of homeowners have never seriously considered home renovations to make it easier to age in place. Of those respondents, the most common reason was that they didn’t feel they were old enough to need them (42 per cent), or that they weren’t necessary as they had no current disabilities that would hinder the way they used their home (39 per cent).

The majority of homeowners and service professionals are unaware that there are tax benefits for aging in place renovations. This is an area of opportunity for both seniors and professionals to benefit. Depending on the scope of your renovation, making significant updates to your home can become quite expensive. Fortunately, in most provinces, there are tax credits or grants that help subsidize the costs. This can be used towards major renovations such as a new ‘senior-friendly’ bathroom or smaller adjustments like handrails and ramps. Yet even though this financial support exists, the majority of homeowner respondents (62 per cent) were unaware of such benefits.

AGING IN PLACE: MYTHS VS. REALITIES

According the CARP, Canada’s largest association representing the 45-plus population, there are 15.8 million people in that group in the country. If this were a province, it would be the largest in Canada! 3

A whopping 13.1 million 45-plus Canadians own their own home. This accounts for half of all homeowners in the country. Think they’re slowing down on spending? Apparently not, with 1.9 million spending $1,000 or more on furniture in the past 12 months, with even more buying large household appliances in the past 12 months.

The reality is that this group is the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian population. The 45-plus age segment is the only one that will increase as a percentage of the total Canadian adult population over the next 20 years. Both the 18-24 segment and the 25-44 segment will decrease as a percentage of the total.

“This group of Canadians has tremendous influence and resources,” said Nancy Peterson, founder and CEO of HomeStars. “We know that most homeowners plan to stay in their homes, largely for emotional reasons. Making changes proactively in advance makes good economic sense, and affords the time to consider modifications that will not only protect you and your investment, but also enhance your lifestyle.”

3 http://www.zoomermedia.ca/advertise/what-is-our-market
Myth #1: Aging in Place is a Conversation for “old” People

That’s an old fashioned mindset to have, don’t you think? Whether you’re a retiree, or have parents who are in this phase of life, this is an important and useful conversation to have... now. Planning for the future isn’t something you should do on a whim or only when you ‘need’ to. By starting the discussions early, you can be better prepared for what the future holds. Where you live is a huge part of your life, and as you age what you require from your home will change too. Proactively talking about your options is the smart and responsible thing to do.

Why Are Homeowners Choosing to Age in Place?

- **72%** say their home is conveniently located
- **66%** say they love their home
- **59%** say they feel independent in their home
- **60%** say they are familiar with their neighborhood
- **56%** say they feel safe in their home

Reality: The Time to Think About Aging in Place is... now

Studies have shown that planning ahead is the best way to secure a healthy financial future. As it relates to retirement, a 2007 Pension Research Council study showed that those who thought about retirement — “a lot,” “some” or
even “a little” — approached retirement age with twice the wealth of non-planners.⁴

“Your home is your largest investment and it’s important to be thinking about how, and if, it will work for you as you age. If you’re looking to make sizeable changes, like chairlifts and ramps, you can begin planning for that in advance and avoid unexpected costs, which are much harder to handle,” says Anthony Quinn, Director of Community Affairs at CARP. “A little bit of planning ahead can save you a lot of stress down the road.”

**Myth #2: Aging in Place is About Aging**

Aging in place isn’t about getting older, it is about being prepared for the future and ensuring your living situation complements your changing needs. Interestingly, while Canadian homeowners consider themselves more proactive than reactive when it comes to aging in place renovations (56 per cent vs 44 per cent), most respondents have only somewhat considered or never considered actually making these changes.

**Reasons for Not Completing Aging-Related Renovations**

- **42%** homeowners don’t consider themselves old enough
- **39%** homeowners say they don’t have any physical disabilities

**Reality: Aging in Place Is About Livability**

So now we’ve established that aging in place isn’t about aging at all, it’s about quality of life and enjoying what you’ve taken years to build. With a few

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⁴ https://www.thestar.com/business/personal_finance/2017/06/05/the-most-important-money-habit-you-can-learn.html
modifications to your home, you can be happier than you’ve ever been. Personal health considerations, including elevated mental health, have been directly attributed to social activities. It seems that the more we socialize, the longer we live. Creating a safe space in your home that is functional for you, your family and friends not only makes economic sense, it is good for your long-term health.

“We know people want to stay in their homes because that’s where they are happiest,” says Nancy Peterson, CEO and founder of HomeStars. “A renovation doesn’t have to be a scary undertaking and we hope to provide homeowners with the resources they need to get the right professional support for their needs.”

**Myth #3: Smart Home Technology is a Luxury**

Although smart home technology can simplify life at home, as well as save you money, many homeowners (67 per cent) have not considered installing it. Yet 64 per cent of respondents indicated that it was related to aging in place, which shows a clear understanding of the benefits.

Of the various smart home products listed, home security was the most popular technology chosen by homeowner respondents – both from an awareness and consideration perspective. Other technology that was often considered included sensors if there’s a problem and a fire detection system.

Interestingly, the primary reason for not considering smart home technology was a lack of need and/or interest, followed by concerns of the expense. Education on this new technology is required so homeowners are aware of their options. For example, the Nest thermostat saves US customers an average of 10-12% on their heating bills and about 15% on their cooling bills – no small feat.⁵ There is also a line of products by WeMo that include a WiFi Smart Plug that allows you to control any device plugged in through your mobile device – no more wasted energy!⁶

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Reality: Smart Home technology supports independence

One of the greatest things about modern technology is the ability to do everything at the click of a button, or better yet – automate it. With smart home technology you can set everything from the temperature in your home, to the lights in your house (including window coverings) and door locks on a timer. It relieves the worrying that comes along with potentially forgetting to do something and that alone can be invaluable.

Smart Home Technology Interest (of homeowners)

- 45% consider installing home-security systems
- 37% would consider installing a Smart-Thermostat
- 37% consider installing smart door locks
- 32% would consider installing smart lighting solutions
- 40% consider installing smart sensors in their home

Myth #4: Age-Related Renovations Are Too Expensive

There are many government agencies that offer special programs to reduce age-related renovation costs and tax breaks, as well as solutions that will reduce your home’s carbon footprint while saving money. In Ontario, for example, Green Fund Ontario offers programs to homeowners such as installing a free smart thermometer to eligible homeowners.7 A majority, or 62 per cent of HomeStars’ respondents, were not aware that there are tax credits available for age-related renovations.

“While undergoing a renovation can seem daunting, in the long run it can be more cost-effective than moving into a retirement facility if you are still able to care for yourself; even if you need some help around the house,” says Anthony Quinn, Director of Community Affairs at CARP. “Fortunately there’s a fair way to go regarding education on the financial support available, as over half of our

7 https://www.greenon.ca/en/programs
members surveyed were unaware of tax credits for renovations to help age in your home.”

**Reality: Financial Grants and Tax Breaks Are Available**

If you are thinking of renovating, there is help available. CARP is a great resource for finding more information on tax savings and grants available for age-related renovations: [http://www.carp.ca/priority/retirement-income-security/](http://www.carp.ca/priority/retirement-income-security/).

Before starting a renovation, get an eco-energy assessment from a local certified energy advisor. You’ll pay about $1,000 for before-and-after audits, but provincial rebates can reimburse these costs. Renovations that make a home safer or more accessible for seniors and the disabled—including installation of grab bars and handrails, the construction of walk-in or wheel-in showers, widening doorways and lowering cabinets all qualify for a new tax credit that offers a rebate of 15 per cent. You can actually save up to $10,000.\(^8\)

Rebates depend on where you live but can include savings of up to $3,250 on improving insulation, $300 for installing a gas fireplace, up to $500 for replacing doors and windows, and $50 each for replacing appliances, among others. You can save up to $7,000 in total rebates. For more information, visit [www.canada.ca](http://www.canada.ca) and your local gas utility.

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Survey Says: Top Renovations by Room

As we age, our needs as it relates to our homes change. This is the time to live your best life and having a home that works for your lifestyle is an important step in that journey. With 92 per cent of Canadians 65 and older living in private households, renovations are important to ensure their homes continue to meet their needs.\(^9\) When looking at renovations for aging in place, those that addressed safety and accessibility were the most sought after. The most popular areas of the house included the bathroom and stairway/entrance.

In the bathroom, the top two modifications considered by homeowners were grab bars around the tub/shower or a shower seat (91 per cent), followed by adjustable or handheld showerheads (87 per cent).

In the entrance/stairway, sensor lights at entrancesways were the most popular consideration, followed by a no-step entry (74 per cent vs 72 per cent). Adding handrails along stairs or a residential elevator/lift were also widely considered at 62 per cent and 57 per cent.

Outside the home, low maintenance shrubs and plants were the top consideration.

What Room Is the Most Popular for Aging-Related Renovations?

![Bar Chart]

A Note on The Future of Aging in Place: User Centric Design

As the population ages companies are following suit, and continuing to develop products that cater to this segment’s unique set of needs and requirements. From easy grip handles – from kitchen appliances to doorways – to smart toilets that include a water spray for cleaning and eliminate the need for toilet paper. Many of these items were created overseas; Japan, for example has the oldest population globally and has been leading innovation in how it’s adapting to these changes.

We like to keep our eyes on Canada and have been following companies like Ecobee (a smart thermostat) for several years now. One company that we’ve been following recently is HealthCraft. Created by an engineer, occupational therapist and a former durable medical equipment (DME) store owner, the company specializes in unique ergonomic designs, which empower customers to “live as usual”. They create bars, rails and poles with innovative “pivot and lock” technology that provides superior stability and ergonomic support in all areas of your home – from the bathroom, to your stairs, kitchen or living room.\(^{10}\) It’s seemingly little additions like this to your home, which can impact your state of living so dramatically, and we’re excited to see what the future of thriving at home looks like.

\(^{10}\) http://www.healthcraftproducts.com/
RECOMMENDATIONS: REBRANDING AND EDUCATION

You know you have financial equity in your home. Now, think of functional equity. Making your home more functional changes everything. And, if done properly, it can improve the value of your home.

That’s why we are re-branding Aging-in-Place to “Thriving-in-Place”.

Gone are the days when retirees were “waiting it out”. Today’s seniors in Canada indulge in activities, entertainment, travel and take full advantage of their new lifestyles. They are seeking out new hobbies, volunteering, and some are even starting new businesses! Making lasting memories with family and friends remains important – and even intensifies – as Canadians age. Never has it been more important to share time with family and friends. Living independently as long as possible contributes to that feeling of being in control, which breeds happiness and a better quality of life. And because Canadians are staying in their homes longer, they are realizing greater financial security than ever before. And that’s good for all of us!

Further Education is Needed

Our research proves that there is plenty for Canadians to learn about how they can thrive in place. For example, while 64 per cent of respondents felt that installing smart home technology was related to aging in place, only 33 per cent would consider installing it. In this instance, there is undoubtedly a lack of knowledge about how it can truly help.

This presents an opportunity for home service professionals, 56 per cent of whom already provide services to homeowners to help them thrive at home. But, of the total number of projects completed in the last 12 months, 28 per cent of home service professionals said it amounted to less than 10 per cent of projects. This is essentially unchanged from the year before.

So, it seems there is an opportunity to educate both consumers and professionals about thriving in place. Only 22 per cent of contractors considered themselves “very knowledgeable” about age-related renovations. Sixty-seven per cent of contractors said they could benefit from training on
aging-related home services. Almost 60 per cent cited training in technology as most beneficial to this group.

Two-thirds of all respondents were simply not aware of any tax benefits that would help with aging-related renovation expenses: 67 per cent of home service professionals and 63 per cent of homeowners. There is clearly much work to be done to help Canadians understand what their options are when it comes to thriving in place, not just surviving.

Conclusion

“Aging in place” is a contradiction of terms. Whether we’re 25 or 85, our homes aren’t for aging. They’re for living. From kids’ birthday parties to drinks with friends, holiday dinners with family, movie nights with our spouses or just curling up with a good book, our homes are where we do the things we love to do, with the people we love to do them with. It is important to look at aging through a new lens that acknowledges how we live—not just how long we live. Our hope is to support a new generation of home-improvement projects that benefit the young, the young at heart and everyone in between.

Editor’s Notes:

The majority of the data is based on an online survey conducted by HomeStars. This survey was conducted nationwide with HomeStars’ client base, from June 15, 2017 – July 13, 2017 among 2,441 respondents. Two versions of the survey were sent: one to Service Professionals (280 responses) and the other to Homeowners (2,161 responses). Of the homeowner respondents, 76 per cent were between 50-79 years of age.

CARP also surveyed 2,924 of its members, from October 3, 2017 – October 10, 2017 on the subject of downsizing. The majority of respondents (73 per cent) were between 50-74 years of age.