

The Silver Living Home Checklist

How to make a shared home genuinely livable for residents 55 and older — without a renovation budget.

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Why this checklist exists

More than 1 in 4 adults 65 and older falls each year. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related death in this age group, sending about 3 million older adults to the emergency room annually — and the death rate is rising. Over 95% of hip fractures come from falls. (Sources at the end.)

Here's the part most landlords miss: **“ADA accessible” and “livable for a 70-year-old” are not the same thing.** ADA compliance is wheelchair code — ramp slopes, door widths, turning radii. Most 55+ residents don't use wheelchairs. What they need is a home designed for the realities of aging: changing vision, slower balance recovery, weaker grip, and joints that don't love bending. That's what this checklist targets.

Almost everything below costs under \$100 per item. The most expensive line on this list is still cheaper than one vacant room-month.

Cost key: \$ = under \$25 | \$\$ = \$25–\$100 | \$\$\$ = \$100–\$500

1. Lighting (the cheapest fall prevention there is)

Aging eyes need roughly three times more light than young eyes and adapt slowly between bright and dark. Most falls involve a lighting problem somewhere in the chain.

- Motion-sensor night lights on every path from each bedroom to the nearest bathroom (\$)
- Light switch reachable from the doorway of every room — no walking into a dark room (\$–\$\$ if adding switch or smart bulb)
- Stairways lit top and bottom, with switches at both ends (\$\$)
- Bulbs upgraded to bright, warm-white LEDs in all task areas — kitchen counters, bathroom mirrors, reading spots (\$)
- Closet lighting in every private room (battery puck lights work) (\$)
- Outdoor entry lights on motion sensors or dusk-to-dawn timers (\$\$)
- No glare traps: shades or diffusers on bare bulbs; avoid glossy floors under strong light (\$)

2. Floors and thresholds (where falls actually happen)

- Zero loose rugs. Remove them or secure with full non-slip backing — edges that curl are trip wires (\$)
- Interior thresholds flat or under 1/2 inch; add mini transition ramps where needed (\$–\$\$)
- High-contrast tape or paint edge on any step or level change — a single step into a sunken living room is the most dangerous step in the house (\$)
- Non-slip treatment or mats on any smooth flooring that gets wet (kitchen, entries) (\$\$)
- Clear 36-inch walking paths through every common room — furniture placement is a safety decision (\$0)
- Electrical cords off all walkways, secured to walls (\$)

3. Bathrooms (the highest-risk room in the house)

- Grab bars at the toilet and inside/outside the tub or shower — anchored into studs or with rated mounting, never suction cups (\$\$ per bar)
- Non-slip strips or mat inside the tub/shower (\$)
- Hand-held shower head with a slide bar (\$\$)
- Shower chair or built-in seat available on request (\$\$)
- Raised toilet seat or comfort-height toilet in at least one bathroom (\$\$–\$\$\$)
- Water heater set to 120°F or below — aging skin scalds faster (\$0)
- Night light that's always on (\$)
- Lever handles on faucets, not knobs — arthritis-friendly (\$\$)
- Bathroom doors that can be unlocked from the outside in an emergency (\$)

4. Stairs and steps (if the home has any)

- Solid handrails on BOTH sides, running the full length, ends returned to the wall (\$\$–\$\$\$)
- High-contrast strip on the edge (nosing) of every step (\$)
- No storage on steps, ever — house rule, not just hardware (\$0)
- Ideal Silver Living setup: all resident rooms and at least one full bath on the ground floor. If bedrooms are upstairs, reserve ground-floor rooms for residents with mobility concerns (\$0 — it's a room-assignment policy)

5. Kitchen (shared use, designed for shared aging)

- Everyday dishes and food storage between knee and shoulder height — no step stools required for daily life (\$0 — reorganization)
- Lever or single-handle faucet (\$\$)
- D-shaped cabinet pulls instead of knobs (\$ per pull)
- Bright task lighting over counters and stove (\$\$)
- Stove with front controls or clearly marked controls; consider an automatic stove shutoff device as residents age in place (\$\$\$ for shutoff)
- Sturdy step stool with a handle for the rare high reach — because someone will climb on a chair if you don't provide one (\$\$)
- Labeled, assigned storage per resident — reduces conflict and reduces reaching into unfamiliar spaces (\$)

6. Private bedrooms (dignity lives here)

- Bed height 20–23 inches from floor to top of mattress — knees at roughly 90 degrees when sitting on the edge (\$0 — adjust frame/mattress choice)
- Nightstand with lamp reachable from bed (\$\$)
- Clear path from bed to door, wide enough for a walker (32+ inches) (\$0)
- Solid-core door with privacy lock (emergency-openable from outside) (\$\$)

- Seated dressing spot — a sturdy chair with arms (\$\$)
- Closet rod at reachable height (about 48 inches) or a pull-down rod (\$\$)
- Room darkening shades — sleep quality drives daytime balance and cognition (\$\$)

7. Wayfinding and cognitive ease

Small design choices that keep a home navigable through normal age-related change — and they make the house feel calm and intentional for everyone.

- Consistent, high-contrast color between floors and walls; between doors and frames (\$–\$\$ paint)
- Bathroom doors visually distinct (color or clear signage) — the #1 nighttime navigation need (\$)
- Large-print, high-contrast labels where they help: thermostat, laundry controls, pantry zones (\$)
- House information board in one consistent spot: emergency numbers, house calendar, contact info (\$)
- Declutter as policy: common areas stay visually simple; storage is closed, not stacked (\$0)
- One-page “how the house works” sheet in every room binder — thermostat, wifi, trash day, who to call (\$)

8. Community spaces (this is what makes it Silver Living)

Isolation is a health risk on par with smoking. The design goal: make gathering the path of least resistance.

- One “anchor” gathering space with comfortable seating for all residents at once — firm cushions, chairs with arms (easier to stand up from) (\$\$–\$\$\$ used/estate-sale furniture shines here)
- A shared table that seats everyone for meals — the single most valuable piece of furniture in the house (\$\$\$ used)
- Good light and a reason to linger: puzzle table, bookshelf, cards, big-piece jigsaw (\$–\$\$)
- TV positioned so it doesn’t dominate the main gathering room — TV rooms end conversations (\$0 — placement)
- Porch or patio seating that’s stable and easy to rise from — no low, soft, or folding chairs (\$\$)

9. Outdoor spaces

- Walkways smooth, level, and at least 36 inches wide; repair lifted concrete edges — mark them with contrast paint until fixed (\$–\$\$\$)
- Handrail at every exterior step (\$\$–\$\$\$)
- Motion lighting on all paths from parking to door (\$\$)
- House numbers large and visible from the street — for EMS, not aesthetics (\$)
- Parking or drop-off as close to the door as the lot allows; reserve the closest spot for the resident who needs it (\$0 — policy)
- Raised garden beds (24–30 inches) if you garden — gardening without kneeling is a beloved amenity that doubles as gentle exercise (\$\$–\$\$\$)
- A bench or seat along any longer outdoor path (\$\$)

10. Systems and emergency readiness

- Smoke and CO detectors in every bedroom and common area — test dates logged (\$\$)
- Emergency contact card for each resident, stored in one known location (\$)
- All items that are taller than 60 inches, including shelves, appliances, and televisions must be attached to the wall in areas with any risk of earthquake
- Lever-style door handles throughout — grip strength is often the first thing to change (\$\$ per door)
- Thermostat with large display, locked to a safe range — heat sensitivity increases with age (\$\$–\$\$\$)
- Flashlight in every bedroom (power outages + nighttime) (\$)
- House policy: a daily rhythm that ensures every resident is naturally seen each day — shared coffee, mail time, a check-in knock. In a Silver Living home, no one goes unnoticed for 48 hours. (\$0 — and it’s the whole point)

The honest limits of this checklist

This checklist makes a home safer and more livable for independent adults 55 and older. It does **not** make a home a care facility, and it’s no substitute for one. Residents who need daily personal care, medication management, or supervision need licensed care settings — and a responsible operator knows the difference and says so out loud.

Sources

- CDC, Older Adult Falls Data and STEADI Initiative (cdc.gov/falls, cdc.gov/steady)
- AARP HomeFit Guide (aarp.org/homefit) — free room-by-room guide, highly recommended
- The Center for Universal Design, NC State University — the 7 Principles of Universal Design
- U.S. Surgeon General, “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation” (2023)

This checklist is part of the Silver Living standard project — building the first quality framework for 55+ shared housing in America. Follow the work at ralphpombo.com and [The Co-Living Insider](#).