

# Secondary Dwelling Units: Aging in Place

Secondary dwelling units, sometimes called in-law suites or secondary suites, are becoming evermore popular in Kingston.

In a previous post, [we talked about secondary dwelling units and why they're becoming so popular in the Kingston area](#). We suggest you start there if you're not sure what a secondary dwelling unit is because in this post we're going to dive a little bit deeper and talk about how you can use a secondary suite to assist elderly relatives and friends to "age in place."

The concept of aging in place is not new. The idea is to ensure in-home access to services and supports that elderly people require as they age. Building a secondary dwelling unit for elderly loved ones can be done by caregivers to prepare for family members entering your care, or by homeowners who are looking to age in place themselves. There are also a few other ideas that can help you stay in your home longer.

## How to "age in place"

### 1. Avoid Stairs When Possible

Stairs offer a unique challenge to new home construction and renovation. Simple solutions like chair lifts can be expensive, and not all homes can accommodate them. For those who have not yet purchased a home, and those who are building a new home, an even simpler way to solve the stair issue is to buy or build a bungalow.

If you're unable to avoid stairs entirely, there are many ways to make your home safer and more accessible.

- Place gates at the top of stairs to prevent falls
- Add a small bench or chair at the top and bottom of staircases as rest spots
- Install posts at the beginning and end of stairs to signal they're about to end
- Use strip lighting to make the stairs easier to climb at night

Outside your home, it's important to make sure you have the space to install a ramp. A quick rule of thumb for determining if you'll have room for a ramp is to add 10 inches of ramp for every inch of height. So, if your stairs are 10 inches tall, you'll need 100 inches of ramp.

### 2. Create More Space

Often overlooked is the extra space required for assistive mobility devices like walkers and wheelchairs. One of the easiest ways to facilitate easy mobility in your home is to design or buy an open concept. Not only will this make mobility easier, but it will make organizing furniture easier as well.

In rooms like ensuites, you should allow for at least three feet of space around the bed, though more is encouraged. In computer rooms or living rooms, it's important to keep cords out of pathways. Power bars can help with organization and conduits can be used to safely run wires across ceilings or walls.

### **3. Make Bathrooms Safer**

Did you know that [50% of all senior injuries are caused by falls](#)? Hard surfaces, small spaces, and puddles make bathrooms one of the most dangerous rooms in your home, thus mitigating risks in this room should be a top priority.

- Elongated toilets are an ADA requirement and their shape make them easier to use and more comfortable
- Grab bars provide stability in slippery tubs and showers
- Low-threshold showers or walk-in tubs make entering and exiting safer
- Slip resistant flooring or coating can help mitigate the risk of falls from puddles
- Low-to-the-ground and shallow sinks provide access from a seated or standing position
- Sinks with lever faucet handles are easier for people with weakened grip to use

These are just some methods to make your bathrooms safer. If you'd like to learn more strategies, you can find more on the [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's](#) website.

### **4. Make the Garage More Accessible**

A well thought out garage can make accessible living so much easier. The first step is to determine what kind of garage you need—double or single. If you have a garage already, is it accessible? Is it large enough? Is it full of clutter? These are questions you should be asking yourself.

- There should be 5 feet of space minimum between cars, more if one of your vehicles is handicapped-accessible.
- Single garages should be 14 feet wide, doubles should be 32 feet
- A depth of 30 feet is recommended
- A no-step entrance to the garage should be created if possible
- If you'll require ramps or lifts, ensure your garage has space to accommodate them

Not all garages can be renovated or extended, so it's important to thoroughly investigate before purchasing your home.

## **Final tips to make your home more accessible**

## **5. Miscellaneous**

There are a myriad of ways to make sure your house is designed for you or your loved ones to age in place. What matters most is that you consider your specific needs and take time to design a home that will be perfect now and far into the future.

A final few tips:

- Use a keyless entry instead of sharing keys
- Remove rugs to make moving with mobility assistive devices easier
- Temporary grab bars can be moved and placed where needed
- Shower seats make bathing less physically intensive
- Night lights and light sensors can be invaluable for late-night care

**Start planning for your future today.**

It's never too early to build secondary dwelling units for elderly loved ones (or yourself), as your suite can be used for rental income until the time comes for them to move in with you. Building a secondary suite can even be an incentive for personal support workers (PSW), nursing students, or family members if you require live-in care.

## **Ready to build your secondary dwelling unit?**

If you're looking for more guidance on how to successfully age in place, schedule a phone consult and let's build a new home for your future.