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Seven Questions To Assess Your *Where* In Retirement

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Retirement planning is all about the numbers. Yet, there is one number most of us take for granted or don't even consider.

We are told that retirement is all about dollars and cents. How much money do we have to ensure our financial security? One financial services firm even had an advertising campaign where people asked, "What's my number?" The ad portrayed people walking down the street with images of large digit amounts of money over their heads.

Other numbers become part of our retirement life as well. Blood pressure, good and bad cholesterol, body mass index, and other measures that indicate our physical health become part of our everyday concerns or at least conversations with our doctor.

One health insurer ran ads stressing that you should "know your numbers." In many ways the numbers reflecting our health and wealth become the equivalent of SAT scores in older age. And, like SAT scores, they are, at best, an incomplete approximation of our future.

Another number may be even more indicative of how you will live in older age – your Zip Code. Where you live has an incredible impact and predictive power on how well you will live.

Place and well-being are a topic for many researchers, especially those examining health disparities between income, race, and other groups. One study's title poignantly frames the issue best with respect to health outcomes of mothers and children: "Why Your Zip Code Matters More Than Your Genetic Code." A recent study, conducted by researchers at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine, provides new insights into how place affects life expectancy. Factors such as access to quality food, density of alcohol and tobacco outlets; walkability; parks and green space; housing characteristics; and air pollution, all have some impact on life expectancy. This study, and many others, indicate that within the same metropolitan area, or even the same city

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or town, life expectancy and quality of life can differ widely. Sometimes only a few blocks can mean many more years of life.

Longevity Planning & Assessing Your "Where" To Live In Older Age

So how might you factor in your *where* in older age?

Most of us think where we'll live in retirement is answered by where we live now. That is, we choose to age in place and stay put. However, as we age, our needs, desires, health conditions, social connections, and more will change. This can often create a disconnect between what works now and what will work later.

Others plan to move to smaller homes, to warmer climates, or to locations that offer leisure and reward after a lifetime of work. Retirement is likely to be a long time. For many people, it can be one-third of adult life. Choosing where to live based on recreation interests or vacation memories alone may not support living well in older age for decades.

Here are seven questions to begin your assessment of your ***where*** in retirement.

1. Will you have friends or family nearby?
Does your location offer places and spaces that provide chances to meet new people, to continue investing in your social portfolio of friends, and to introduce you to other people that simply make you smile?

2. Does your retirement where offer easy and frequent air or rail transportation to visit family or to have them visit you?

3. Are there places to play, to experience, and to join others in something new?

4. Have you identified places you might find enjoyable to work or to volunteer?

5. How will you get to the places you need and want?
Driving may not be a lifetime alternative. Are there transportation alternatives to make the required trips, such as grocery shopping and doctor's appointments, as well as the just-for-fun trips, like going out to get an ice cream cone on a hot summer night?

6. Where might you access the healthcare you need?
Just because there is an emergency room or doctor's office nearby does not mean that the care provided in these places is the care you need. Assess your, and your family's, unique health conditions and the specialists that are nearby.

7. Does the community where you wish to retire have multiple choices for quality home care and community aging services?

Resources

AARP Livability Index is a free online tool to assess the livability of your town by simply inputting the zip code. https://livabilityindex.aarp.org

USAging offers a web portal to identify home care and elder care services in your community. https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx