



BIOETHICS FORUM ESSAY

The Place in “Aging in Place”: Housing Equity in Late Life

by [Nancy Berlinger](#)

Share: [f](#) [🐦](#) [✉](#)

Published On: September 30, 2022

Posted in [Aging](#), [Hastings Bioethics Forum](#)

Health policy research demonstrates that housing and community are crucial determinants of safety, health, and well-being across the lifespan. The United States is an aging society, where more people are over age 65 than under 15. Most older Americans want to age “in place” – in the community, not an

institution. This goal relies on housing. However, [housing policy research](#) reveals a poor fit between our nation’s housing stock and our aging demographics. Most older Americans have [difficulty paying for both housing and care](#). The [racial wealth gap](#) contributes to fewer housing options and greater precarity for Black Americans. The National Academy of Medicine’s 2022 *Global Roadmap for Healthy Longevity* identified [late life housing affordability and accessibility](#) as key health variables, whether an older adult is living independently or with others.

Health policies aimed at [reducing health care cost burdens for older adults](#) may ease some housing cost burdens by freeing up limited income. Yet these welcome policy approaches alone cannot compensate for our society’s persistent failure to foresee, value, and support the experience of aging by zoning, planning, and building or remodeling housing stock that is affordable, accessible, and “livable”—a good fit, with proximity to transportation, services, and opportunities for social engagement. Housing policy research shows that [less than 4% of the U.S. housing stock](#) meets basic accessibility requirements, for example.

Housing equity for older adults is a bioethics issue. It is integral to health equity because housing is a powerful socio-environmental determinant of health. And it is integral to the capability to flourish in late life, a stage of life typically experienced at or close to one’s home. For older Americans to age in place and experience well-being despite foreseeably deteriorating health and modest or inadequate fixed income, the scope of bioethics should attend to a broader range of policymaking ideas and processes that support—or undermine—equity in access to a good life in late life.

Over the past six years, The Hastings Center, in partnership with a diverse array of researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and advocates, has explored ethical and societal questions arising from population aging that are not resolvable through mechanisms for medical decision-making or health care resource allocation—the traditional touchstones for bioethics work on aging—nor through appeals to concepts such as dignity or intergenerational equity. This line of research and public-facing work—[Bioethics for Aging Societies](#)—produced a [report in 2018 that laid out the landscape of bioethics issues](#) in this area and launched a series of collaborative projects funded by the Retirement Research Foundation for Aging, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Institute on Aging, and others. Jennifer Molinsky, a housing policy expert and

community planner who directs the [Housing an Aging Society](#) program at the Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS), a preeminent source of policy-relevant research and analysis, is a key partner in this work. Milestones in Hastings Center-JCHS collaboration include a 2019 [public symposium on aging in place and housing inequality](#); the creation in 2020 of a multidisciplinary research [network](#) that includes policymakers; and an innovative [empirical study](#) of housing-focused responses to the needs of older adults during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our study's final report will be released on October 6 and explored through a [webinar series](#), also beginning on October 6. The final report describes the bioethics standpoint—a “housing lens” –that we developed and applied in this study and offer for further use in age-focused policymaking and social innovation.

The housing lens is grounded in the ethical and social importance of housing to safety, health, and well-being and the moral imperative to balance [private-sector options](#) available only to the wealthy minority of older adults with far greater attention to housing equity in late life. As a tool for integrating bioethics considerations into policymaking, a housing lens highlights the importance of housing to security, health, and well-being in late life; focuses on the material conditions that make aging in place feasible, including inequities in access to homes and neighborhoods supportive of aging; and [corrects](#) distorted framing, such as the perception that being able to afford the housing one needs to accommodate aging and disability is a personal responsibility, despite a national shortage of affordable housing affecting millions of older Americans and others.

By foregrounding housing and de-centering health care as the dominant policy narrative about aging, the use of a housing lens encourages critical thinking about why age-focused policymaking should also incentivize housing development and related services and supports for aging in place. Our goal in sharing this new tool is to foster creative collaboration across policymaking domains and to sharpen media and public discussion of [what it takes](#), in terms of public priorities, public and private investments, and community-level networking and advocacy, to create real options for all older Americans to age in place.

Nancy Berlinger is a research scholar at The Hastings Center and co-author, with Jennifer Molinsky and Bailey Hu, of Advancing Housing and Health Equity for Older

Adults: Pandemic Innovations and Policy Ideas (*Joint Center for Housing Studies and The Hastings Center, October 6, 2022*).

Share: [f](#) [🐦](#) [✉](#)

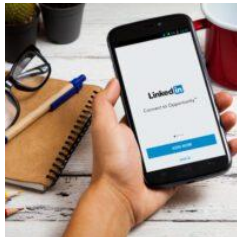
Tagged [Aging In Place](#), [Equity](#), [Housing](#)

Read More Like This ▾

Be the first to leave a comment on
"The Place in "Aging in Place": Housing Equity in Late Life."

RECENT CONTENT

BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY



**Clicking
'Accept' Is
Not
Informed
Consent**

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY



**How Many
Covid-19
Deaths
Should We
Accept?**

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY



**The Place
in "Aging
in Place":
Housing
Equity in
Late Life**

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM

BIOETHICS FORUM

BIOETHICS FORUM

ESSAY



Could Alarm Over Genetic Manipulation Get in the Way of Environmental Conservation?

Read the Post



ESSAY



Philanthropy is Not Enough: Oil and Gas Giants Must Consider Medical Ethics

Read the Post



ESSAY



Requests for Sterilization, Abortion Bans, and Reproductive Justice

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY



Back to School: The Covid Vaccination Choice

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY

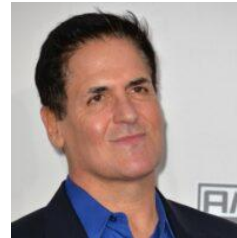


Dusting Off Double Effect for the Post-Dobbs Era

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY



Mark Cuban's Innovative Pharmacy: A Band-Aid on Drug Prices

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY

**From
Gene-
Edited
Embryos
to Covid:
China
Faces
Regulatory
and
Ethical
Challenges**

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY

**Public
Health
Officials
and Gun
Rights
Advocates
Must Work
Together**

Read the Post



BIOETHICS FORUM
ESSAY

**Abortion
Law—
Lessons
from
Medical
Aid-in-
Dying?**

Read the Post



The opinions expressed here are those of the authors, not The Hastings Center.

WHO WE
ARE

Our Mission
Our
Research
Our Public
Engagement
Our Team
Diversity,
Equity, &
Inclusion

OUR
FOCUS
AREAS

The Human
Life Span
Health &
Health Care
Science &
Technology
Environment

PUBLICATIONS
& RESOURCES

Hastings Center
Report
Special Reports
Ethics & Human
Research
Bioethics
Briefings
Hastings
Bioethics Forum

SUPPORT
US

Why We
Give
Ways To
Give
Gift
Planning
Contact
Us



Search

Webinars
What is
Bioethics?
Our
Financials
Service to
Bioethics
For The
Media

FAQs on Human
Genomics
Books by Hastings
Scholars
Bioethics Careers
& Education

Registered 501(c)(3). EIN: 02-0594709