

BUILD IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

The Aging-in-Place Design Checklist

A parent's ADU has one job most builders don't design for: to still work when they're eighty-five, not just today. These are the 14 details that make the difference — and cost almost nothing to build in now, but a fortune to retrofit later.

The details that matter aren't the obvious ones.

Anyone can add a grab bar. Designing a home a parent can actually grow old in — safely, with dignity, without it ever looking like a hospital — takes forethought most general builders simply don't bring to a backyard unit. The good news: nearly every one of these costs little or nothing when it's built in from the start. It's only expensive as a retrofit, after a fall.

Use this as a checklist when you plan, and again when you review drawings. At KĒĒP, every one of these is standard on a unit built for a parent — not an upsell.

THE TEST BEHIND EVERY ITEM

Design for the hardest day, not the easiest. If it works for someone using a walker, recovering from surgery, or with failing eyesight, it works for everyone — and it'll still work in fifteen years.

01 Getting in and moving through

Most falls and most “we had to move them out” moments trace back to these five.

- ☐ **Zero-step entry**
At least one entrance with no threshold to trip on and no step to climb. This single detail is the difference between a home that works with a wheelchair or walker and one that doesn't.
- ☐ **Wider doorways — 36 inches**
Standard doors are 30–32". A wheelchair or walker needs 36". It costs nothing extra at framing and is nearly impossible to widen later.
- ☐ **Hallways at 42 inches**
Enough width to turn a walker or wheelchair without a three-point maneuver.
- ☐ **Single-story, no interior steps**
No sunken living rooms, no split levels, no step down to a patio. One continuous floor plane.
- ☐ **Lever handles, not knobs**
Arthritic hands can't grip a round knob. Levers open with an elbow, a wrist, a closed fist.

02 The bathroom — where it matters most

More aging-in-place failures happen here than anywhere else. Four non-negotiables.

- ☐ **Curbless roll-in shower**
No lip to step over. A bench, a handheld sprayer, and a slope to a linear drain. Looks modern, works forever.
- ☐ **Blocking in the walls for grab bars**
You may not want grab bars today. Have the walls reinforced with blocking now so they can be added in an afternoon, anywhere, later — no demolition.
- ☐ **Comfort-height toilet**
A few inches taller than standard — far easier to sit and stand.
- ☐ **Slip-resistant flooring**
Matte, textured tile or vinyl. Never polished stone or glossy porcelain where water lands.

03 The details that quietly extend independence

None of these look like “aging” features. All of them add years of living alone, safely.

- ☐ **Rocker light switches at reachable heights**
Large paddle switches, placed lower for seated reach, with motion-sensor lights on the path to the bathroom for night trips.
- ☐ **A curbless, low-maintenance kitchen**
Varied counter heights, pull-out shelves instead of deep low cabinets, a front-control cooktop so nobody reaches over a hot burner.
- ☐ **Excellent, glare-free lighting**
Aging eyes need two to three times more light. Layered, even lighting with no dark corners or harsh glare prevents missteps.
- ☐ **A layout the door opens into, not away from**
The main living space visible and reachable the moment you walk in — and a floor plan a caregiver or paramedic can move through easily if the day ever comes.
- ☐ **Wired for the future**
Conduit and power for a future stair-free ramp, video doorbell, or medical-alert system — run now, invisible until needed.

YOUR FREE NEXT STEP

Want to see how these would lay out on your property? KĒĒP's 48-hour feasibility assessment maps a parent-ready unit to your actual lot — every item on this list built in as standard, at a fixed price. Free, no obligation, at keepadu.com.