

No matter who you are, no matter where you live, at some point you've probably watched as an aging parent or grandparent has found it harder and harder to move around their house.

Going up the stairs gets a little more difficult.

Hard-to-reach places to clean, while never fun, become impossible-to-reach places.

You start calling parents and grandparents a little more often, to make sure they're OK.

And when driving is no longer an option, trips to the grocery store or church become next to impossible.

This story is playing out in more and more families as one of the largest generations in our history – the baby boomers – gets older.

In 2019, one-in-seven Americans was over 65. By 2040, it will be more than one-in-five.

And as people live longer, the homes and communities where they've made their lives – and where they want to stay – aren't keeping up.

Across the country, whether you rent or own, housing is too expensive and not accessible enough to meet the needs of the growing number of older adults.

And while most seniors own their own home, homeownership isn't offering as much financial protection as it used to.

A smaller share of seniors own their homes today than they did in previous generations. And more of today's senior homeowners are still paying a mortgage.

Seniors who rent have even less to fall back on. And we know that Black and brown households face barriers to homeownership, and are more likely to rent their homes.

That leaves more seniors than ever realizing they can't stay in their homes without some kind of assistance – and HUD, local governments, and nonprofits just can't keep up.

In 2017, long before the pandemic, nearly 10 million seniors paid more than 30 percent of their income for housing. That's an all-time high. And 5 million of these households paid over half of their incomes towards housing.

With less money left over each month, it's too expensive for older renters and homeowners to do the renovations and modifications they would need to keep their homes safe and affordable – things like adding a ramp or grab bars, or weatherizing to save on heat bills.

Just 10 percent of homes are accessible for people with the mobility challenges that come with age.

If your home isn't safe anymore, and you can't afford to make it safe, it leaves seniors with no choice: go into a nursing home.

And that's often even more expensive, and may be more care than they want or need.

The challenges facing seniors today shouldn't be a surprise.

We've been watching baby boomers age for decades, but we've done nothing that meets the scale of this change.

Back in 2014, Dr. Molinsky's organization, the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard, warned that the "existing housing stock is unprepared to meet the escalating need for affordability, accessibility, social connectivity, and supportive services." Their report concluded that "the time to act is now."

Unfortunately, it's eight years later, and we haven't acted.

People around the country who work with seniors and work on these issues know what could help us meet this challenge.

Today we'll hear from Mrs. Hamernik from Nevada HAND about how investments in affordable housing and services, like food delivery and transportation, are helping thousands of seniors in Nevada stay in their community without crippling rent.

We'll also hear from Mrs. Guzman about how communities are making investments that help seniors modify their homes to age in place, and in the kinds of services and transit that make it possible for older adults to stay in their homes, and active in their communities.

Unfortunately, there's been far too little investment in efforts that could make a world of difference – and save money – for millions of seniors and their families.

We have legislation that would make the investments we need to fix that.

We need to invest in additional housing and services to support low-income senior renters, and help seniors do the basic home improvements they need to stay in their homes.

We need to give communities tools to address local barriers to building more homes that fit the needs of an aging population.

And we need to combine those efforts with reducing prescription costs and strengthening Medicare. That would finally allow seniors a little financial breathing room.

These Americans have worked hard their whole lives. Many have scraped by. And they want to age with dignity, in the communities they love, near family and friends. It's what we all aspire to.

It's why we created Social Security and Medicare. It's why we will fight against ending them within five years. And it's why we need these investments in senior housing today.