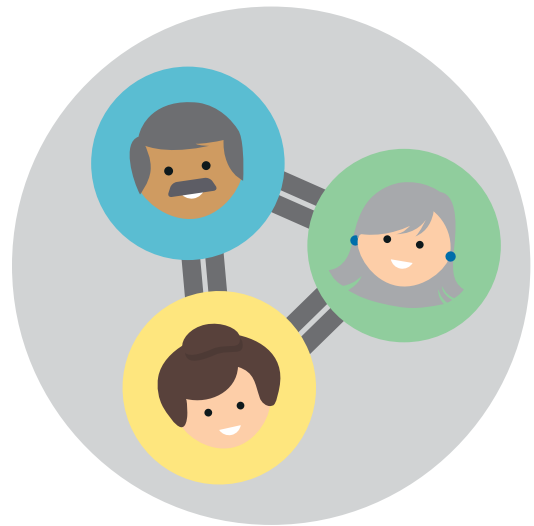


BEST PRACTICES

Age-Friendly Examples from Australia, Belgium,
Canada, Japan, and the United States

MELVILLE, AUSTRALIA

ENGAGING AND CONNECTING RESIDENTS



Among the communities in the WHO Network of Age-Friendly Communities, Melville has been a leader in innovative ways to keep people socially engaged in later life.

The problem of social isolation is especially common among older men. In many cases, men rely on their work or spouse to provide them with a social network. Retired men and widowers often lack a friend group or the means to make one. Australia's Men's Shed Movement is helping address this, and Melville has aided their efforts.

Traditionally, backyard sheds have played an important role in many men's lives. Sheds provide a space for men to tinker, build things, and have their own hobbies and projects outside the more domestic spaces of the home. Melville's Men's Sheds provide a similar function by creating community spaces for woodworking and metalworking, as well as comfortable places for men to sit and chat. By working with or alongside individuals like themselves on manual

projects, Men's Sheds provide a place for older men to meet new people.

Community spaces like Men's Sheds are one important component of keeping older people connected to others, and technology is another. Until earlier this year, Melville had partnered with the company Fone Zone to provide older people with classes on smartphone use. These classes were intergenerational, with younger—often high school-aged—people teaching older residents. Melville's mobile phone classes were part of the city's new "Digital Hubs," which provide free-of-charge lessons on a wide variety of technology-related topics, from basic computer use to social media. ●

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

LISTENING TO THE NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE

Since joining the WHO Network of Age-Friendly Communities in 2010, Brussels has undertaken an array of important initiatives to improve the lives of its older residents.

Among the city's top priorities are encouraging older people's mobility, expanding their access to leisure and sporting activities, fostering an environment where they can stay in their own homes longer, and combating ageism.

As part of the process of formulating these objectives, Brussels has recognized the importance of giving older people a central role in the government's decision-making. Research into the concerns of Brussels' older residents revealed that many people wanted better information from the city and were also concerned about neighborhood safety.

To improve communication between the city and its residents, one of Brussels' age-friendly initiatives sought to provide information about services and activities through a senior guide in addition to information sessions hosted at local community centers and libraries.



Brussels also created Platform Senior Focus. This program was aimed at making the police more responsive to the needs of older people and more vigilant about spotting cases of abuse. The city implemented special training for police inspectors in matters relating to the community's older residents.

Brussels has since retired Platform Senior Focus and is working on a new comprehensive plan that will be completed in fall 2015. However, their ongoing efforts to create an age-friendly community—from free Tai Chi lessons for older people in the park to computer lessons in the Espace S—continue to show how listening to older people and their needs allows cities such as Brussels to create a community for all ages. ●

EDMONTON, CANADA

BUILDING AGE-FRIENDLY HOMES



By 2041, 31 percent of people living in Edmonton, Canada, will be ages 55 or over. By the same year, compared with 2006, the number of people ages 80 and over is expected to increase by as much as 266 percent. To prepare for this rapid demographic change, Alberta's second largest city is adapting.

In 2010, Edmonton released a report on the status of its city's older population entitled "Edmonton Seniors: A Portrait." Edmonton used this report to identify areas for improvement in a 5-year plan jointly produced by the City and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council in 2011. Edmonton's City Council approved the plan in 2012 and has provided 5 years of funding for implementation.

One of the eight domains identified by the WHO as being crucial to the development of age-friendly communities is housing. Edmonton has begun to address this challenge head-on through its Home for Life™ initiative. Home for Life™, a trademark of the University of Alberta, is one of the constituent programs of Age-Friendly Edmonton. The initiative has developed

guidelines and best practices to enable new-home builders to design residences that are attractive and functional for people of all ages. Its key foundation is that, if homes are built with the functional needs of older people in mind, then home owners will have homes that meet the needs of all stages of life, eliminating the need to move or undertake costly renovations as they age or face mobility changes.

Home for Life™ recommends providing an entry to the front door that does not require steps. Other important features include larger hallways and showers with no raised thresholds. The full list of recommendations covers every space in the home, from door and hallway widths to positioning of switches and electrical outlets. Complete information can be found on their website, www.homeforlife.ca. Home for Life™ does not only aim to provide a set of best practices, it is also aims to work with builders to make homes available in the Edmonton marketplace, and to increase public awareness about the initiative. ●

AKITA CITY, JAPAN

MAKING THE CITY MORE ACCESSIBLE



The need to create an age-friendly community is clear in Akita City, Japan; of the city's 320,000 residents, more than one-third are ages 60 and over. To better address the needs of its older population, Akita City joined the WHO Network of Age-Friendly Communities in 2011.

In its effort to become more age-friendly, Akita City has a wide array of goals and programs designed to improve the lives of its older residents. One of Akita City's most popular age-friendly programs is a simple change to the city's bus fares. The Coin Bus Project was created to simplify and lower fares for older people by allowing anyone 70 years or older to ride one of the city's buses for ¥100, or about one American dollar. In 2013, the Coin Bus Project lowered the participation age to 68, allowing even more individuals to take advantage of this benefit. In areas where bus routes have been discontinued, Akita City has even provided alternative transportation for older people.

The enthusiastic support the Coin Bus Project has received is testament to the crucial role adequate public transportation plays in older people's lives. By allowing

them to more easily and cheaply leave their homes and move about the city, Akita City has helped keep its older population active and connected—a key goal for any community that wishes to be age-friendly.

The Coin Bus Project is only one aspect of Akita's holistic approach to making the city accessible for older people. Once individuals get to where they're going, it is important that those spaces are accessible for all people, regardless of age or physical disability. The Akita City train station provides an example of this concept of "universal design." At the station, a mix of escalators, elevators, and stairs provides accessibility to all, and ridged pathways on the ground help the visually impaired. ●

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS, USA

PROMOTING THE HEALTH OF ALL RESIDENTS

When it joined AARP's Network of Age-Friendly Communities in 2014, Brownsville reaffirmed its commitment to making the city livable for all of its residents. "Our goal is to ensure that our aging neighbors, as well as our youngest members, have the resources to be healthy, independent, and integrated into community life," wrote Mayor Antonio Martinez in a letter to AARP.

Brownsville is serious about the health of its residents, and given its challenges, it has to be. In this city of more than 180,000 residents, located at the southernmost tip of Texas, one in three residents has diabetes. Eighty percent of the population is obese or overweight. However, the city's commitment to changing these statistics is being recognized; in 2014 Brownsville was recognized as an All-America City by the National Civic League, which grants the distinction to "cities where citizen action has succeeded in making the community a better place to live."

To create a livable city that promotes health for people of all ages, Brownsville has created new bike and



walking paths. By integrating these new biking and walking options with the existing Brownsville metro system, the city has made itself more accessible to older people who may prefer not to drive. The city's focus on creating a community where people don't need a car is further evident in the new sidewalk ordinances created by the city government and events such as "CycloBia," during which portions of Brownsville's downtown close to car traffic to promote walking and biking.

While the city has made important strides, Brownsville is also thinking about additional ways to promote the health of its residents. City Commissioner Rose Gowen has suggested that improving the city's parks is an important next step. By creating well-designed green spaces in people's neighborhoods, older residents will gain a safe and accessible place to walk, enjoy nature, and spend time with family and friends. ●

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