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## Age-Friendly Communities

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April 2010

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The world's population is getting older. In 2006, the proportion of people age 60 or older was 11%; by 2050 that number is expected to double. Providing affordable housing that supports the wellbeing of elders is a major challenge. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed guidelines for Global Age-Friendly Cities. These guidelines provide eight key aspects of civic life that promote age-friendly cities.

### WHO Guidelines for Age-Friendly Cities

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
  - Ample public areas and green spaces that are pleasant, well-maintained, and safe
  - Destinations (stores, libraries, clinics, and other services) that are nearby
  - Adequate sheltered areas with benches
- Transportation
  - Sufficient affordable public transportation options
  - Clear information on destinations, schedules, and fares
  - Boarding areas with benches and adequate lighting
- Housing
  - Safe and accommodating housing located close to services
  - Affordable options for people with a wide range of incomes
- Social Participation
  - Affordable activities that are diverse and well-publicized
- Respect and social inclusion
  - Recognition of elders for past and present contributions to the community
- Civic participation and employment
  - Post-retirement training for elders
  - Involvement of older adults in public decision-making, planning, and civic activities
- Communications and information
  - Provision of printed information using large text
  - Information available in multiple languages
  - Availability of information in alternate formats (e.g., Braille)
- Community support and health services
  - Conveniently located, easily-accessible health and social services

### **Livable Communities Act, Minnesota Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, USA**

The state of Minnesota enacted the Livable Communities Act (LCA) in 1995 providing voluntary, grant-based programs, funded by tax levies to promote more livable communities. The three programs promoted transit and pedestrian oriented neighborhoods, affordable housing, and the clean-up and redevelopment of polluted land.

- Livable Community Demonstration Account provided \$87.4 million for 162 grants in 50 communities between 1995 and 2008.
- The Local Housing Initiatives Account provided 119 grants totaling \$19.9 million to 57 communities.
- Thirty-six communities received grants totaling \$77.5 million to clean-up and redevelop 263 sites.

On-site research of three case-study senior housing projects found that while the Livable Community Act was not explicitly designed to address Age-Friendly guidelines, the law and subsequent funding did improve the livability of neighborhoods for elders who lived there.

### **Livable Region Strategic Plan, Vancouver Metropolitan Area, British Columbia, Canada**

The Vancouver Metropolitan Area adopted a Livable Region Strategic Plan in 1996. The plan is a mandatory growth strategy for the 21 municipalities and one electoral district in the Great Vancouver Regional District. This plan provides specific objectives that support Age-Friendly cities.

- Promote diversity of housing types, tenures and costs within the Metropolitan Core and Regional Town Centers
- Public transit and pedestrian oriented improvements
- Maintain land as open areas and green space

Reports indicate that the District was able to achieve these objectives at a rate that surpassed the population growth. While these accomplishments indicate potential for improved livability of the neighborhoods for older residents additional research is needed to determine how the planning strategies impacted this population group.

### **From Guidelines to Action**

Promoting Age-Friendly Livable Cities is one strategy to create a healthier environment for all residents. The recommendation is that local communities incorporate evaluation of both the physical and social environments and take positive steps to incorporate the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Guidelines.

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