



Age-Friendly Communities



Frequently Asked Questions

What is an age-friendly community?

An **age-friendly community** is one that works for people of all ages. It allows people to go to school, work, recreate, shop, and take care of health needs without significant struggle. It helps ensure that community members can engage in what the community has to offer, that they have the mobility to get to where they need to go (and back home), and that services and facilities are designed to meet their needs. This fact sheet focuses on how communities can be age-friendly for older adults.

An age-friendly community begins with policymakers and planners who respect past and continuing contributions of older adults. They recognize that older adults' interactions with other residents and the community at large should remain dignified as they age. The needs and preferences of older adults are included in local government planning, project design, operations, and maintenance. Age-friendly communities use policies that help older adults live within their means, such as reduced transit fares, income- or age-based caps on rent, and affordable healthcare options.

Related Resources: Active Living FAQs

World Health Organization and the American Association of Retired Persons

The focus on age-friendly communities began with the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2010. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) joined with WHO, establishing a United States-based age-friendly program and fostering an age-friendly network as part of their Livable Communities work.

A number of Ohio communities are in the age-friendly network and are implementing workplans developed through an AARP-supported process. This fact sheet is based on the work of AARP and others who work to understand how to make sure the lives of older adults remain meaningful and dignified.

[Learn how to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities](#)

What are the built environment elements of an age-friendly community?

An age-friendly community both designs itself to work for older adults and helps those adults to understand how the community works. It is especially important to make sure the transportation system accommodates older adults who may have mobility challenges, and allows them to reach their destinations safely and conveniently. Older adults who no longer drive are more inclined to use alternative modes of transportation, like walking and taking transit. Facilities that support these modes should consider older adults' needs. For example, an age-friendly community's transit system should be accessible and offer customized routes and schedules that connect older adults to healthcare, grocery stores, socialization, and recreation. Transit stops should have real-time service information, shelters, benches, and lighting, and be connected to well-maintained and complete sidewalk networks. Sidewalks should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and include curb ramps, accessible pedestrian signals, and other accommodations for users of all ages and abilities.

What is aging in place?

Aging in place means older adults can stay in their homes and in communities for as long as they are able. As many people age, their desire to

Portrait of an age-friendly community

In an age-friendly community, the policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help seniors "age actively." In other words, the community is set up to help seniors live safely, enjoy good health, and stay involved.

An age-friendly community:

- » Recognizes that seniors have a wide range of skills and abilities.
- » Understands and meets the age-related needs of seniors.
- » Respects the decisions and lifestyle choices of seniors.
- » Protects seniors who are vulnerable.
- » Recognizes that seniors have a lot to offer their community.
- » Recognizes how important it is to include seniors in all areas of community life.

stay put gets stronger due to their social connections, the familiarity of home and daily routines, and a sense of remaining independent. The actual process of aging in place begins as early as when children leave the home. Empty-nest feelings can prompt adults to consider what their life will be like as they age. "Old age" can last 30 to 40 years, depending on when one starts counting and how long one lives. Thus,





The six life-space mobility zones. Adapted from Peel et. al (2005). "Assessing Mobility in Older Adults: The UAB Study of Aging Life-Space Assessment. <https://academic.oup.com/ptj/article/85/10/1008/2804989>

aging in place is best considered a process of adaptation from two perspectives: (1) how the person adapts to where they live based on changes in their physical and mental condition; and (2) how the place they live adapts to them. Success in traveling outward through the six life-space mobility zones shown above depends on how well these adaptations take place. If adaptations do not occur, aging in place becomes challenging and the quality of life and health may decline.

How can communities support aging in place?

Age-friendly communities encourage aging in place and by doing so foster healthier older adults. Coordinated transit services between communities – fixed-route, paratransit, and subsidized taxi services for older adults – can support their medical, social, professional, and volunteer trip needs in the fifth and sixth zones (town and out of town). Land use, transportation, and public health policies and programs should ensure third and fourth zones (neighborhood and

town) support mobility, daily needs, and places to gather that can be enjoyed by people of all ages. Regulatory tools can help current homes remain affordable, and can help older adults adapt their homes to their changing needs. Local programs should help older adults assess individualized needs in their homes (zones one through three) to remain safe and comfortable, such as bathroom grab bars, lighting, railings, and threshold entry ramps.

Public health professionals have an important role in the home, as well as in working with other local government agencies to create community-based programs to provide for social participation and inclusion. For example, Bike Cleveland and the Cleveland Department of Aging offer Silver Spokes bike rides for older adults. Other local agencies may offer free or low-cost home repair, or a medical equipment exchange to give seniors access to needed equipment. It is important that agencies and programs share information in a variety of methods since not everyone is tech-savvy.

What are the health benefits of age-friendly communities and aging in place?

As communities become more age-friendly, they are likely to see better health outcomes, such as:

- » Reduced rates of chronic diseases and better management when they occur.
- » Reduced social isolation and improved community cohesion.
- » Increased rates of physical activity, especially walking, that improves overall health and reduces healthcare costs.
- » Better access to healthcare and social services.



What's happening in Ohio?

- » Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County. <https://agefriendlycolumbus.org>
- » What's 'Age-Friendly Athens County'? https://www.athensnews.com/whats-age-friendly-athens-county/article_e17e4c83-9c1b-578e-86df-420555e36294.html
- » Age Friendly Oxford. <https://www.agefriendlyoxford.org/>
- » AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/member-list.html
- » Akron begins five-year process of becoming an Age-Friendly City. <https://www.cleveland.com/akron/2019/05/akron-begins-five-year-process-of-becoming-an-age-friendly-city.html>
- » Cincinnati Joins AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/cincinnati-joins-aarp-network-of-age-friendly-communities-300769103.html>
- » Living On: Cleveland seniors 'get freedom back' as age-friendly efforts grow. <https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2019/01/living-on-cleveland-seniors-get-freedom-back-as-age-friendly-efforts-grow.html>
- » Age-Friendly Communities: concept could help Westerville's seniors. <https://www.thisweeknews.com/news/20180626/age-friendly-communities-concept-could-help-westervilles-seniors>

Where can I find more information?

- » Government of Canada: Age-Friendly Communities. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/aging-seniors/friendly-communities.html>
- » Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Healthy Aging & the Built Environment . <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/healthyaging.htm>
- » AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/member-list.html
- » Age-Friendly Communities. https://www.giaging.org/documents/130402_GIA_AFC_Primer.pdf
- » What makes a community age-friendly: A review of international literature. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1741-6612.2009.00355.x>
- » The Case for Age-Friendly Communities. https://www.giaging.org/documents/160302_Case_for_AFC.pdf
- » Designing Age-Friendly Communities. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/aging/2/age-friendly-communities>
- » Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Age-Friendly Massachusetts. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/age-friendly-massachusetts>
- » Maine Council of Aging: Age Friendly Community Workgroup. <http://mainecouncilonaging.org/afc-workgroup/>
- » AARP Maryland: Cool Things Coming to Frederick, Maryland. <https://states.aarp.org/maryland/seniorscapes-coming-to-frederick>
- » Multigenerational Planning: Theory and Practice. <http://cms.mildredwarner>



What changes are needed in my community's built environment to create an age-friendly community?

Use the list of approaches, actions, and outcomes below to assess how age-friendly your community is. Each item on the checklist below is worth one point.

Bedroom +
Home



Housing is affordable, appropriately located, built with accessible or universal design, and secure.

Yard



Homes can be accessed from the sidewalk by walkways and ramps.

Neighborhood



There are opportunities for seniors to participate in leisure, social, and cultural activities with people of all ages and backgrounds.



Aging adults are treated with respect and included in civic life.



There are intergenerational community centers that co-locate child and elder care systems, including quality early education and adult day programming.

Town



Outdoor spaces and public buildings are pleasant, clean, secure, have places to sit, have clear signage, and are accessible.



Sidewalks, crossable streets, bicycle lanes and public transportation are available and connect to important destinations.



There are opportunities for employment and volunteerism.



Age-friendly communication and information is available.



Community support and health is tailored to older persons' needs.

Out of Town



Public transportation is accessible and affordable.

Total _____

Select the number below that is closest to your score.



My community needs
to become more
aware

My community has a
plan to improve its age-
friendliness

My community is
doing a lot to be age-
friendly