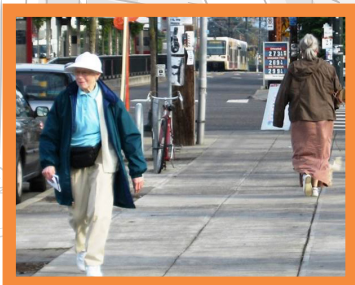


The Case for Age-Friendly Communities



Prepared for
Grantmakers In Aging

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Age-Friendly Lloyd Center business review, Elders in Action.

Executive Summary

The movement toward age-friendly communities is growing, with the key impetus being population aging. In the U.S. in 1900, 4.1 percent of the population was 65 or older. In 2015, this figure was 14.5 percent. By 2020, it is expected to increase to 16.1 percent, and by 2050, to 20 percent—one in five Americans. Medical, public health, and technological advancements have led to increased longevity, with the years added extending middle age—the period when people are most productive and creative—rather than lengthening extreme old age. Beyond what individuals themselves can do to age optimally, the movement to create communities that are age friendly focuses on how the economic, physical, and social environments can be improved to address not only the needs but also maximize the assets of an aging population, for the benefit of all.

An age-friendly community is one that is a great place to grow up and grow old. It has safe and accessible public transportation options; affordable, accessible, and safe housing; pleasant and safe parks and outdoor spaces; quality community and health services; sufficient employment and volunteer opportunities; and engaging social activities and events for people of all ages. The needs and preferences of older adults are taken into account. Older adults are respected, and their knowledge, skills, resources, and contributions are sought out. They are integrated into the fabric of the community.

The reasons why creating an age-friendly community makes good sense, economically and socially, are presented in this document, supported by research conducted by academicians, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and corporations. The reasons are based largely on two key premises:

- Unlike most natural resources, older adults are a growing resource. Thus, population aging presents a set of opportunities, if handled well.
- An “age-friendly” community can benefit people of all ages and abilities.

Business leaders and private sector investors, government officials and staff, philanthropists, educators, civic groups, advocacy organizations, service organizations and providers, and residents themselves can use the information presented to take advantage of the resource that older adults represent and shape places that work not only for residents who are older now but also for residents across the life course.

Reasons for creating an age-friendly community can be categorized in six broad areas: economic benefits, social capital benefits, opportunities related to innovations in housing and physical infrastructure, and health and other benefits.

Economic Benefits

- Older adults are an important part of the workforce and expand the labor pool from which employers can hire.
- Attracting and retaining older workers will help address labor shortages of qualified workers.

- Older workers can enhance organizational productivity and business outcomes.
- Older workers have significant accumulated knowledge and skills and help to retain institutional memory.
- Having an age-diverse workforce can result in positive outcomes for employers and employees.
- Attracting or retaining older adults who might otherwise leave a community can be an important economic development strategy.
- Older adults start more new businesses than younger adults, helping to grow the local economy.
- Continued work later in life brings economic benefits to the community and financial, health, and other benefits to older adults themselves.
- Older adults have enormous economic clout as consumers.
- The older adult market is stimulating new companies, new products and services, and new technologies.
- The older adult market is also bolstering the larger U.S. economy through U.S. social insurance benefits.
- Older adults bring tourism dollars.

Social Capital Benefits

- Older adults provide care and resources across generations.
- Older adults serve the community through volunteering and civic engagement.
- Volunteers themselves receive health benefits from volunteering.
- Age-friendly communities reduce barriers to volunteering.
- Older adults make philanthropic investments and charitable contributions.

Opportunities Related to Housing

- The aging of the population presents the opportunity and an imperative to make changes in the housing sector to enable older adults to age in place, maintaining their social, business, and service connections.
- Affordable housing can have positive economic and fiscal impacts for the public and private sectors.
- The growing older adult population will increase demand for alternative housing arrangements.
- Age-friendly communities offer a continuum of housing options and supportive services for the independent through the dependent, allowing for aging in one's present home or community, reducing the need for moves, and preventing or postponing costly public and private expenditures for long-term institutional care.

Opportunities Related to Physical Infrastructure

- Age-friendly communities have physical environments that work for everyone.
- Age-friendly communities have a range of transportation options, facilitating mobility.
- Age-friendly communities have healthy and connected neighborhoods that save residents time and money and improve quality of life.
- Investing in age-friendly housing and environments can lead to public as well as private cost savings.
- Housing location preferences appear to be changing to include consideration of transportation and mobility options.
- The challenges associated with creating age-friendly physical environments bring opportunities for cross-sector coordination and collaboration.

Health Benefits

- Age-friendly communities result in lower public and personal costs related to illness and health care.
- Many chronic diseases can be prevented or controlled through attention to the physical environment.
- Designing age-friendly environments specifically to encourage physical activity can improve health and lower health care expenditures.
- Age-friendly communities facilitate healthy behaviors of older adults through their design and infrastructure.
- Age-friendly communities address issues that also influence health, such as pollution, access to health care and social services, safety, and social support.
- Age-friendly environments reduce social isolation and improve health and community engagement.

Other Benefits

- Older adults make significant contributions to the social, political, and environmental fabric of society.

In summary, our population is aging and public resources are limited, yet older adults constitute a valuable human resource that has been overlooked. There is broad recognition that the economic, physical, and social environments in the community where we live, as well as our individual lifestyle choices, affect how well we age.

The economic, social, and personal benefits to be gained make clear the wisdom of taking action to create communities that are more age friendly. What we do now to make our communities good places to grow up and grow old will yield returns not only for today's elders but also tomorrow's—that is, for all of us.

Please see the link below for the full report with documentation:
www.giaging.org/resources/the-case-for-age-friendly-communities/