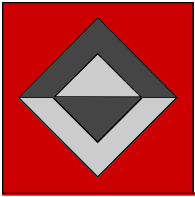




Communities for a Lifetime

Community Resource Kit



Communities for a Lifetime Overview

By 2030, one in four Minnesotans will be over the age of 65.

By 2020, there will be more Minnesotans over the age of 65 than school-aged children.

The vast majority of Minnesotans want to age in their homes and their communities for as long as possible. However, few communities have begun to address the needs of a rapidly aging population or assessed the “livability” of their communities for all ages.

Responding to the aging of our population offers local governments the opportunity to make their communities livable for *all ages* – good places to grow up and to grow old.

Retaining older adults who currently reside in the community and attracting new retirees to the area can be an economic development issue.

Retirees moving into an area provide a significant boost to the local economy and place fewer demands on municipal services than young families or frail older adults.

Neither governments, business nor non-profits acting alone can create a healthy community. It takes all three, working in partnership, to create a community that supports residents of all ages.

Fundamental to the concept of communities for a lifetime is the idea that transportation, housing, and health care/social services help people remain healthy and engaged in their communities. Features that support these goals include:

- * Public transportation that is easily accessed by people with mobility or other impairments,
- * Pedestrian-friendly environments that encourage walking,
- * Neighborhood based health and recreational programs that incorporate intergenerational interaction and support,
- * Consumer-directed care that allows elders to hire neighbors, friends and relatives to provide services,
- * Home sharing or other intergenerational housing arrangements,
- * Mixed residential and retail business land use, and
- * Social, educational and cultural programs aimed at promoting social engagement and healthy lifestyles among elders.

Needs are inter-related. Providing housing will not be sufficient if there is no transportation to medical appointments, the grocery stores or the pharmacy.

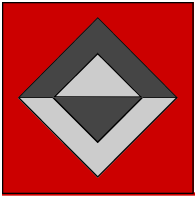


Communities for a Lifetime

Potential Community Action Steps

Although some changes may require a significant investment, many potential quality of life improvements can be accomplished with little or no costs:

- * Assess your community for how “livable” or age-friendly it is.
- * Keep sidewalks well maintained, lighted and clear of snow.
- * Look for ways to make streets and intersections more pedestrian friendly and safe.
- * Increase the duration of time for yellow and green periods of traffic lights and increase the size of street signs.
- * Implement measures that decrease the speed and frequency of automobile traffic in high pedestrian areas.
- * Add walking and bicycle paths that include points of interest (destination points).
- * Add new parks, maintain existing parks, and increase the number of benches or tables.
- * Add bicycle lanes and allow non-licensed, personal electronic vehicles or golf carts to use these lanes.
- * Change residential zoning restrictions to allow seniors walking distance access to needed goods and services (health clinics, grocery stores, shops).
- * Evaluate public transportation options and consider shuttle buses to points of interest or facilities such as malls or hospitals.
- * Implement property tax concessions for seniors.
- * Provide incentives for private sector investment to create housing options.
- * Support community-based nongovernmental organizations that address senior needs.
- * Facilitate senior participation in municipal government; look to seniors as a source of knowledge and labor.
- * Promote senior led volunteerism.
- * Increase the perception of security by making police presence a part of the community.



Elements of an Elder Friendly Community

Addresses basic needs

- * Affordable housing is available to community residents.
- * Housing is modified to accommodate mobility and safety needs.
- * The neighborhood is livable and safe.
- * People have enough to eat.
- * Supportive services are available and residents know how to access them.

Optimizes Physical and Mental Health and Well-being

- * Community promotes and provides access to necessary and preventative health services.
- * Opportunities for physical activity are available and used.
- * Obstacles to use of necessary medical care are minimized.
- * Palliative care services are available and advertised.
- * Appropriate work is available to those who want it.

Maximizes Independence for the Frail and Disabled

- * Transportation is accessible and affordable.
- * The community service system enables people to live comfortably and safely at home.
- * Caregivers are mobilized to complement the formal service system.

Promotes Social and Civic Engagement

- * Residents maintain connections with friends and neighbors.
- * Civic, cultural, religious and recreational activities include older residents.
- * Opportunities for volunteer work are readily available.
- * Community residents help and trust each other.

*Developed by:
AdvantAge Initiative
www.vnsny.org/advantage/communities.html*



Transportation

Transportation provides the vital link between home and community and connects individuals to places where they can meet their basic needs – grocery stores, medical services, worksites, recreational sites, churches, and friends and family. These community supports are only beneficial to the extent that community residents can access them.

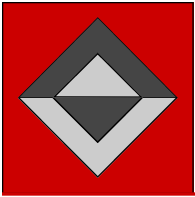
We live in a car culture, and we've built our communities with the expectation that people can drive to stores, churches, schools and medical providers. Older adults use private vehicles more than any other mode of transportation, traveling as a passenger or a driver. Even in urban areas where transit options are available, older adults chose vehicles for convenience, comfort and accessibility.

However, driving is not an option for many older adults because of cognitive or physical decline. One in three older drivers admits to having to compensate for vision problems, slower reaction times or fear while driving their cars. Many don't drive at all.

When older adults need to limit or stop driving, they often experience a drastic decline in mobility. Destinations are often too far to walk to, public transportation is poor or not available, taxi service is costly and special services are limited. This reduced mobility can put an older adult at higher risk for poor health, isolation and depression. Transportation options are needed at the local level to ensure that older adults can maintain mobility and independence.

Simple things can make a difference:

- * Brighter stop lights and larger stop signs
- * Dedicated left turn lanes
- * Extended walk times at pedestrian crosswalks
- * Highways with visible line stripes painted with non-glare paint
- * Street signs and directional signs with lettering large enough to read
- * Wider parking spaces that are easier to navigate
- * More benches in shopping areas so it's easier to rest
- * Local business that provide delivery of goods (groceries and pharmacies)
- * Volunteer driver programs
- * Coordination of existing transportation options to maximize efficiency and reduce duplication
- * Essential services located within walking distance of senior buildings



Housing

Most older adults indicate they would like to remain in their current residences, but many are uncertain if they will be able to do so. Some can't afford the base cost of their housing. Others don't know who to contact to adapt their homes because of physical limitations. Finding assistance with completing repairs – and/or affording them – may be difficult. Others are uncertain whether their physical frailty and inability to care for themselves safely in their own homes will force them out of their current living situation.

Different life cycle stages can affect the type of housing that people need as they grow older. To successfully age in their existing homes or another home within their community, older adults may need to modify their existing home or move to another residence that is more accessible, more affordable or more appropriate in size to accommodate their changing needs.

Too often seniors go from their homes to a nursing home with few options in-between. An inability to provide senior-friendly housing may affect the stability of communities. Communities that are surviving and flourishing as their citizens age are communities that create a variety of housing types to provide options for those who can't remain in their current homes. Creating housing options for older adults promotes housing turnover and opportunities for home ownership for young families.

Community recommendations:

- * Promote the development of home modification programs that assist older residents to adapt their existing homes to meet their needs.
- * Assess land use plans, zoning ordinances and building codes to promote the development of a range of house options to meet the needs of an aging population. Options may include active adult communities, smaller universally designed multi-unit dwellings, assisted living facilities and shared housing options (i.e. independent housing units within existing single-family homes or an attached or separate cottage on the lot of an existing home). Encourage multi-generational and mixed use type homes.
- * Locate housing as close as possible to transportation links and/or walkable distance from daily needs like medical services or shopping.
- * Incorporate concepts of “universal design” – houses with 4-ft wide hallways, a master bedroom and bath on the first floor, door handles rather than knobs, easily reached light switches and entry into the house with no stair – into building codes to meet the changing needs of residents regardless of age, level or mobility or health.
- * Provide assistance to help older adults make well informed decisions about suitable housing accommodations as they grow older.



Quality of Life and Civic Engagement

The rising population of older adults is expected to create a boom in civic engagement and volunteerism. As older adults either retire or move to part-time employment, studies indicate they hope to have more time to “give back” to their communities or become involved in meaningful and purposeful activities. With their wealth of knowledge and life experience, they constitute an important social and economic resource for communities needing assistance in carrying out programs and services.

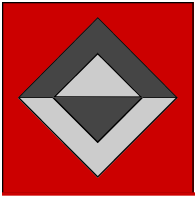
Engaging in civic activities provides an opportunity for older adults to remain socially active and intellectually stimulated, enhancing their own health and well being. Older adults who stay engaged in community life differ from those who do not in several important ways. Involved seniors are more likely to perceive themselves as being in good to excellent health, to have a large social network with many friends nearby, to engage in social, religious and cultural activities and to perceive a sense of being connected to their communities.

However, as daily interactions begin to decline with age, many older adults don’t make the effort to find alternative sources of social interaction. Studies have shown that people who experience social isolation have been linked to declining physical and mental well-being. It is important for all sectors of a community to help foster a social network for older adults within the community.

Many older adults want or need to remain in the labor force, but may require training or re-training to meet job market needs. Others may want or need to work modified schedules, while others may want to return to school to explore lifetime learning options. Science has demonstrated that intellectually challenging work boosts cognitive skills in older adults even more than in younger people. Mental workouts can stimulate brain cells and reduce cognitive loss. Reading, classes, jobs, travel and social networks nourish the brains of older adults. Communities that support employment and educational opportunities for older adults help enhance quality of life as well as mental and physical well-being.

Community recommendations:

- * Create and expand opportunities for effective and purposeful participation of older adults on community boards and commissions.
- * Create and expand meaningful volunteer opportunities in local government and other organizations (i.e. libraries, school reading programs, assistance with home delivered meals, etc.).
- * Partner with programs offering lifelong learning opportunities and opportunities for job re-training.
- * Promote employment options (including part-time and flex-time work options) to attract and retain an aging workforce.
- * Create intergenerational volunteer opportunities.



Health, Wellness and Supportive Services

For most people, health is the single most important factor in leading a full, productive and independent life. Yet according to the CDC, at least 80% of older Americans live with at least one chronic condition and half have at least two. Healthier lifestyles, preventive care and periodic screening can help prevent or delay some chronic conditions or catch them before they cause much damage.

Current research shows that the benefits of physical activity extend over the lifespan and can improve both the physical and cognitive health of individuals even into advanced age. Exercise, even by individuals in their mid-90's, can greatly increase overall muscle strength and bone density while improving balance and maintaining the ability to walk. This can maximize independence and reduce the incidence of falls.

As people age, they may need a range of supports to assist them in aging successfully in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Often these supports are provided by family, friends, volunteers and other caregivers. But sometimes outside supports are needed. These can include friendly visiting, care/case management, home health care, meal delivery, homemaker and home chore services and other assistance.

One of the difficulties that older adults and their caregivers face is navigating a maze of fragmented systems to access services. Since older adults and caregivers typically don't seek out these services until they are in or near a crisis situation, it is important that they can readily access the information they need in a "one-stop shop" manner.

Community recommendations:

- * Promote the development of a single point of entry for information and/or access to aging services. This may be the Senior LinkAge Line® (1-800-333-2433), MinnesotaHelp.info, 211 or another local resource or agency.
- * Expand support for the broad range of supportive services that older adults need to remain living independently, from fitness and socialization opportunities for younger, healthy older adults to more intensive supportive care for frail seniors.
- * Provide a range of fitness/wellness programs to assist older adults to safely and effectively exercise to improve their overall health and wellbeing.
- * Ensure that parks and recreational facilities include walking trails, benches and fitness facilities that can accommodate older adults or those with limited mobility.
- * Coordinate existing supportive services (both paid and volunteer-based) to maximize utilization and avoid duplication of services.
- * Offer preventive screenings and access to wellness programs tailored to specific health concerns, such as diabetes, heart disease or falls prevention
- * Develop or promote caregiver support services to enable family and friends to support frail older adults to safely age in place for as long as possible.



Resources

AARP's Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide (community evaluation tools, resources, tips and innovative ideas)

http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311_communities.pdf

Aging in Place Initiative – Developing Livable Communities for All Ages
(click on Resources page)

www.aginginplaceinitiative.org

Aging In Place Technical Assistance Guide

http://www.livable.com/publications/Aging_in_place_technical_assistance_final.pdf

Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging

www.arrowheadaging.org/

Civic Ventures

http://www.civicventures.org/the_facts.cfm

Elderberry Institute –Community Assessment tools for Elder Friendly Communities

www.elderberry.org/content/Documents/ElderFriendlyCommunitySurvey081605.doc

MetLife Foundation Maturing of America

www.n4a.org/programs/livable-communities/

Partners for Livable Communities

www.livable.com

The AdvantAge Initiative

www.vnsny.org/advantage/communities.html

Transform 2010 – Minnesota Department of Human Services

(click on Aging, then Transformation for Transform 2010 information)

www.dhs.state.mn.us

Vital Aging Network (click on Vital Communities Tool Kit)

www.vital-aging-network.org

For technical assistance regarding Communities for a Lifetime, contact;

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