



The Case for an Age-Friendly Toronto



Executive Summary

The Case for an Age-Friendly Toronto

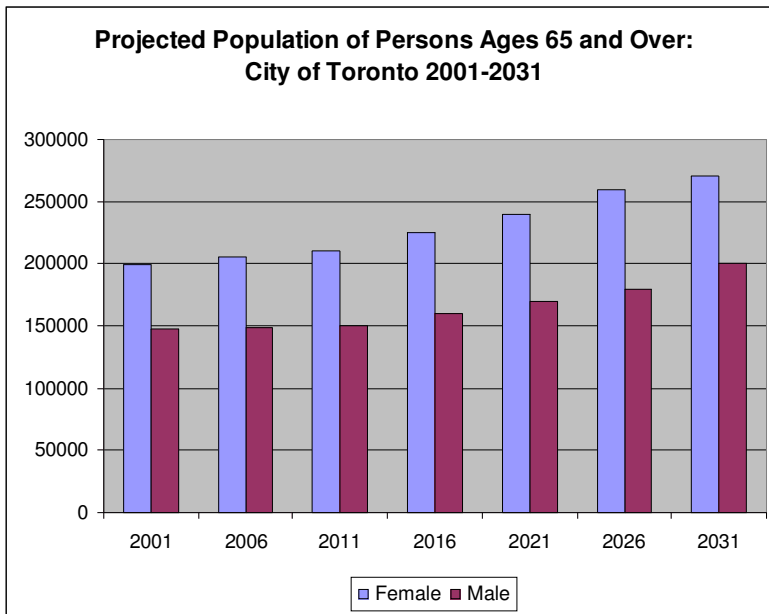
Citizens of all ages have the right to fully engage in the social, economic, and cultural life of Toronto. Age Friendly Cities, as conceived by the World Health organization (WHO), have services, policies, structures and environments that enhance the quality of life for people as they age by addressing their needs and ensuring that they remain engaged in every aspect of civic life.

Age-mindfulness – viewing all facets of city life from the perspective of citizens spanning the age spectrum - must govern how we design our public spaces, the built environment, and transportation throughout the city. Age-mindfulness is the channel through which to create an Age Friendly Toronto.

Through universal and affordable access, Toronto can increase social cohesion and participation across all age groups. Citizens who cannot navigate the city safely and affordably cannot fully participate in civic life. With an age-friendly approach to urban issues, Toronto can ensure that residents of all ages will remain actively engaged in all that the City has to offer.

Key Demographic Facts

Toronto, like the rest of Canada, is aging. The number of people over 45 years of age is growing in absolute numbers as well as in proportion to the total population. And increased urbanization of older Canadians throughout Canada means that Toronto has a greater share of people over 65 years of age living within the municipal boundaries compared to the surrounding region.ⁱ



Source: City of Toronto, Demographics

- **People over 65 are projected to comprise 17% of the City of Toronto population by 2031.**
- **Among seniors, women outnumber men at all age categories and the disparity increases with age.**
- **By 2031 the number of people ages 85 and over is projected to be 85% larger than in 2001.**

CARP Recommendations

Three fundamental principles to make Toronto the model Age-Friendly City:

1. Age-mindful Governance (political will and civic values)

Toronto's leadership, from its councilors to the mayor, must govern the city with age-mindfulness- viewing all facets of city life from the perspective of citizens spanning the age spectrum.

2. Universally Accessible Built Form (public spaces and buildings)

Every aspect of the built environment, from streets and walkways, parks and buildings, to neighbourhoods and communities must be made universally accessible to all citizens, regardless of age.

3. Universal Mobility in the Public Space (transit, co-located services, and community hubs)

An Age-Friendly Toronto will ensure that there is universal mobility for all citizens regardless of age, with tools like accessible and affordable public transit and 'walkable' neighbourhoods.

Toronto's mayor and council have an opportunity to make Toronto the model age-friendly city that responds to the reality of changing demographics while also recognizing the universal benefits of a better built environment and urban circulation.

Who We Are

CARP is a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization committed to advocating for social change that will bring financial security, equitable access to health care, and freedom from discrimination for all Canadians as we age.

CARP has over 300,000 members across Canada with two-thirds of our members living in Ontario. We have over 50 chapters across the country. There are approximately 15.1 million Canadians 45 years of age or older.ⁱⁱ This demographic is the most politically active - 70 percent vote regularly and consistently represent about 60 percent of all votes cast.

The Case for an Age-Friendly Toronto

Increased Social Cohesion and Participation

Citizens of all ages have the right to full engagement in the social, economic, and cultural life of Toronto. Older citizens represent an increasingly significant economic and social resource through continual working, volunteering, caring, and other civic duties. The importance of older Torontonians in the civic life of the city will become more apparent as younger age groups remain demographically static against the growth of older cohorts.ⁱⁱⁱ

Age-mindfulness must govern how we design our public spaces and the built environment, and how we enable movement throughout the city. With that perspective, Toronto can lead the world in addressing the realities of an aging population.

Through universal and affordable access, Toronto can increase social cohesion and participation across all age groups. Citizens who cannot navigate the city safely and affordably cannot fully participate in civic life. With an age-friendly approach to urban issues, Toronto can ensure that residents of all ages will remain actively engaged in all that the City has to offer.

Confidence in Movement and Place

Roughly 70% of Canadians over 65 years of age live in urban centres and rely on municipal services that touch the most immediate and tangible facets of their everyday lives. Nonetheless, Canadian municipalities, including Toronto, have yet to realize the potential of creating environments that enable older residents full and equal participation in urban life.

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) released an Age-friendly Cities guide with a broad framework for the development of substantial strategies for age-friendly cities in the Canadian context.

The rationale for age-friendly communities extends far beyond improving the daily living conditions for older populations since age-friendly spaces benefit all urban citizens. Barrier-free

buildings and streets enhance the mobility and independence of people with disabilities, for the young as well as the old. Ensuring affordable and accessible public transit as well as social and community supports for older people will ease the stress of families caring for their older relatives and allow for the kind of work and volunteering on the part of older people that helps build strong communities.

Within the Age-friendly Cities framework, *active ageing* is,

“the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age [...]determined by material conditions as well as social factors that affect individual types of behaviors and feelings”.^{iv}

All citizens want to remain active in the social and economic functions of their local communities regardless of their age.^v All levels of government have a role in removing barriers and expanding opportunities, but the urbanization of Canadians over 65 years of age and the close proximity of municipal services and other such “determinants” of active ageing means that local governments must take the lead in making the ideal of “active ageing” a reality for older Canadians.

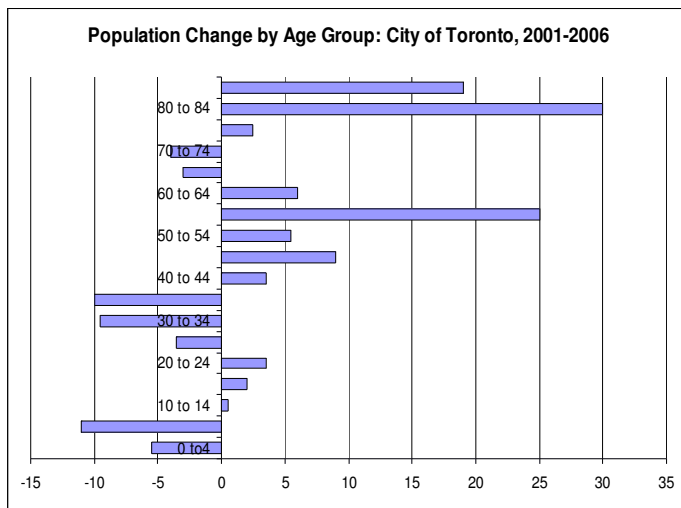
Why Toronto? Why Now? - Demographic Realities

Toronto is growing in size and its population is aging, a feature shared by many cities in Canada and the rest of the world. As the City becomes more densely populated and its population ages, a number of challenges will arise that will test the City’s political, social, and economic will. Making Toronto an age-friendly city is a necessity for its aging population, but the features of a city that recognizes the needs of older citizens will be universally beneficial.

As one of the fastest growing cities and regions in Canada, Toronto has managed to stay relatively young. While Canada’s population increased and

grew older since 1996, large urban areas, including Toronto, grew the most and had lower median ages than the rest of the country.^{vi} Relative youthfulness, however, does not mean that Toronto is not getting older, nor does it mean that the challenges faced by its older citizens can be ignored. In fact, between 2006 and 2011, the number of Toronto seniors grew by 57,595 persons to 377,440 persons.^{vii viii} The aging trend promises to continue over the coming decades.

Over the same period, the fastest growing age groups in the city were persons ages 60-64 and 85+, representing increases of 28.8% and 27.5% respectively.^{ix} Toronto is also home to the largest share of people over 65 years of age in the GTA, with 49 percent of all people over 65 years of age in the GTA living in Toronto.^x With Baby Boomers aging and natural population growth diminishing, Toronto's population is projected to continue aging.



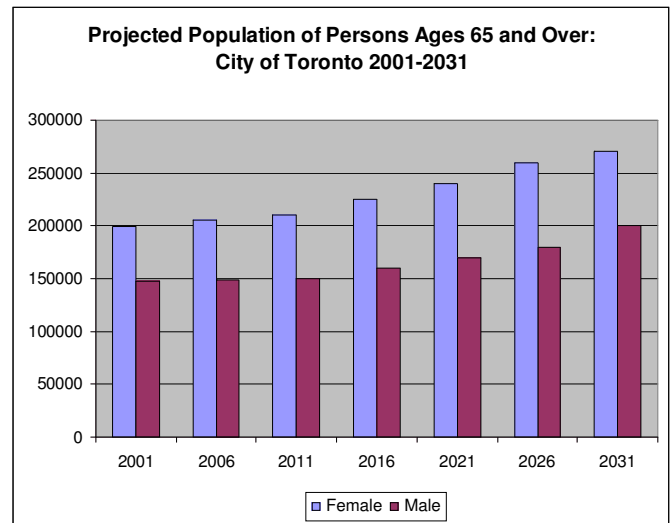
Source: City of Toronto, Demographic

Between 2006 and 2011, the largest percentage growth by age group occurred among the 60-64 and 85 and older age categories.

At the same time, there was a general decline in growth among the age categories below 40 years of age.

People over 65 years of age are projected to comprise 17% of the City of Toronto population by 2031. Among seniors, women outnumber men across all age categories, where the disparity increases with age.

By 2031 the number of people ages 85 and over is projected to be 85% larger than in 2001. This represents an additional 13,400 men and 17,500 women.^{xi}



Source: City of Toronto, Demographics

The majority of Toronto seniors are immigrants, 30 percent of whom are recent immigrants to Canada who arrived after 1990. Settling in Toronto poses a number of challenges to recent older immigrants, who may struggle with learning English and adapting to our local culture and customs. Although many older immigrants have family and community support, isolation can still be a real problem.^{xii}

The Making of an Age-Friendly Toronto

Age-Friendly Cities are urban centres that encourage active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.^{xiii} Toronto can become the model age-friendly city by adopting three guiding principles that together encapsulate the dimensions of an age-friendly city and lead to increased confidence in movement and place, social cohesion and participation.

The three guiding principles of an Age-friendly Toronto are:

1. **Age-mindful Governance**
(political will and civic values)
2. **Universally Accessible Built Form**
(public spaces and buildings)
3. **Universal Mobility in the Public Space**
(transit, co-located services, community hubs)

1. Age-mindful Governance (political will and civic values)

CARP recommends that Toronto's leadership, from its councilors to the mayor, govern the city with age-mindfulness, which means viewing all facets of city life from the perspective of citizens spanning the age spectrum.

There is a great advantage to concretely addressing barriers in Toronto's built environment and its transit and mobility functions. Age-mindfulness, however, is the approach city leaders must take in creating an environment where citizens of all ages can thrive equally.

Age-mindfulness is a perspective on governance that actively recognizes the challenges many citizens have in living and thriving in a city as they age. An age-mindful perspective on governing Toronto requires that the needs of all citizens

across the age spectrum be duly considered in all facets of civic and urban life.

Age-mindful governance will give Toronto a core identity that encompasses the needs and shared values of all citizens of all ages.

In 2007, fifty of the world's foremost urban experts were asked to comment on what it will take to create sustainable cities that meet the challenges of the future. The experts, representing cities from around the

world, highlighted three areas of urban affairs that must be changed for sustainable, citizen-oriented cities to thrive: adopt a new mindset, set new strategies, and establish new governance models to "support development and foster a new generation of urban leadership."^{xiv} These three principles, which can inform an age-mindful approach to cities, can be further distilled into five specific elements:^{xv}

- **"Redefine City Values"**: An Age-Friendly Toronto will depend on the attitude and behaviour of each urban individual and user. We must encourage a sense of citizenship and individual responsibility towards age-friendly values rather than passive citizenship.
- **"Break Down Silos"**: Age-friendly city planning is inherently multidisciplinary. Therefore, old administrative structures should be abandoned in favour of innovative, cross-sector cooperation, from urban design to service delivery.
- **"De-design Urban Planning"**: City planning should be people centred, rather than design centred. A city is a constantly evolving organism, and city planning must take a broader perspective than the design of individual buildings.
- **"Promote Corporate Urban Responsibility"**: Age-friendly cities and successful commerce are interdependent. Businesses must be considered stakeholders and invited to participate in city planning and assume responsibility for urban sustainability.

- **“Expect More from Urban Leadership”:**
City leaders must be able to manage the complex interconnection of new institutions, partnerships, demographic changes and increasing multiculturalism. A mix of business management, political leadership and creativity is demanded from the future generation of urban leaders.

An age-mindful approach to governing Toronto will produce a city with a core identity that encompasses the needs and shared values of all citizens of all ages.

2. Universally Accessible Built Environment (Public Spaces & Buildings)

CARP recommends that every aspect of the built environment, from streets and walkways, parks and buildings, to neighbourhoods and communities be made universally accessible to all citizens, regardless of age.

Quality of life, access, and safety were the three themes most commonly cited in relation to built environments during the WHO’s worldwide consultations on age-friendly cities. These themes are central to the universal design approach to city planning. By concentrating on quality of life, safety, and accessibility, *Universal Design* creates environments that respond to the needs of the population to the greatest extent possible, focusing on barrier free access and moving to absolute inclusivity. While barrier-free design refers to specific solutions for specific disabilities, *Universal Design* accommodates the variety of challenges and needs found in Toronto’s urban population.^{xvi}

The goal of *Universal Design* is to instil confidence in all citizens as they navigate city streets, walkways, buildings, and spaces. An Age-Friendly Toronto will ensure that citizens have charge of their urban environment rather than being daunted by its overwhelming speed and inaccessibility.

Municipalities can create age-friendly public spaces by establishing policy initiatives and supporting administrative structures that promote accessibility through *Universal Design* from the beginning of the development process for public spaces and buildings through to the final product. For example,

major public projects to widen thoroughfares should budget for pedestrian bridges. Beautification projects can ensure accessibility - outdoor seating can be placed at regular intervals and be readily available, particularly in parks, transport stops, and public spaces.

Several official guides for age-friendly urban infrastructure

Everyone benefits from safe, accessible environments that inspire confidence in navigating the public spaces and buildings and allow people to remain in their communities throughout their life stages.

development have been developed by Canadian governments and international organizations and are listed in Appendix A of this paper. The guides describe how local planners and other municipal departments can improve the overall level of accessibility in

municipalities so that urban infrastructure is responsive to the needs of all citizens.

Size and complexity of a city is no excuse. New York City, for example, recently slowed down the speed at which pedestrians must cross a street. If a city the size and intensity of New York can accomplish such age-friendly reform, so can Toronto.

The built environment can complement the life cycle of urban citizens. As people age, their homes and neighbourhoods are singularly valuable possessions. Where one lives and has lived with family and friends is an expression of one’s personality and sense of belonging. Services that help people retrofit their homes can enable more people to stay in their homes as long as they want despite mobility or medical challenges. Providing neighbourhood services and integrated affordable housing can also lead to greater social integration among residents of all ages.

Age-friendly built environments are founded on the principle that all citizens have the right to age in place and remain active participants in community life. The benefits to aging in place and integrated communities are not exclusive to the elderly; there is a significant social value to communities where

younger individuals, families with children, and older residents mix.^{xvii}

An Age-Friendly Toronto will ensure that public spaces, neighbourhoods, and buildings are informed by universal design principles, made safe and accessible, and flow with the rhythm of all residents, young and old.^{xviii}

For example, urban planning could ensure:

- Clean environment with regulated noise levels.
- Pavements are well-maintained, level, non-slip and wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs with low curbs that taper off to the road.
- Roads with adequate non-slip, regularly spaced pedestrian crossings, well designed and appropriately placed physical structures, such as traffic islands, overpasses or underpasses to assist pedestrians to cross busy roads, sufficiently timed pedestrian crossing lights with visual and audio signals.
- Traffic regulations are strictly enforced and favour pedestrian safety (e.g. prohibition of right-hand turns on red lights)
- Affordable senior housing is located in high-density residential neighbourhoods in close proximity to services.
- Buildings are accessible and safe for everyone^{xix}

The goal is not just to list specific design features but also to ensure that all urban design decisions are viewed through the Age-Friendly lens. Everyone benefits from safe, accessible environments that inspire confidence in navigating public spaces and buildings that people need to remain in their communities throughout their life stages.

3. Universal Mobility in the Public Space (transit, co-located services, community hubs)

CARP recommends an Age-Friendly Toronto that will ensure universal mobility for all citizens regardless of age, with tools like accessible and affordable public transit to 'walkable' neighbourhoods.

To be integrated into the civic life of Toronto requires being able to attend community events, seek social services, meet with friends and fellow

residents alike – it means being a part of the social and economic fabric of civic life. Being integrated, therefore, requires safe, affordable access to public transit, but it also means building community hubs around the needs of all citizens.

As people age, they tend to move from family to non-family situations. This transition can be accompanied by a loss of income, social isolation and a growing need for a variety of supports to help them to maintain their independence, not the least of which is the ability to navigate the city safely and effectively.^{xx}

Navigating the city can be challenging for many residents, including seniors. Immigrants, however, face additional challenges settling and adapting to life in Toronto. For older citizens who may not speak English or be familiar with the city's customs and speed of movement, isolation and immobility can be a serious challenge.^{xxi}

Mobility is the key factor in allowing older people to stay in their own homes and ensuring that they have access to health and social services. Transportation is one element of mobility; the other is urban design that allows people to walk to the places they want to go. Inaccessible and expensive transit options are a major contributor to sedentary living and social isolation amongst the ageing population.^{xxii} Affordability and accessibility are the two cornerstones of transportation in an age-friendly city. Municipalities must ensure that transit is responsive to the varying physical capabilities and financial needs of people of all ages.

Moving around - While many cities provide accessible public transportation to get people with mobility challenges to medical appointments, these "para-transit" services often present barriers that compromise their utility for the very people they serve. For example, some services prohibit caregivers from accompanying older clients to their appointments. In some cases, accessible transportation is only available for medical appointments and therefore prevents people from accessing other community supports and activities.^{xxiii}

At the same time, the physical requirements of taking public transit (such as walking long distances

between transit stops) may limit the accessibility of public transit for people with mobility challenges. Improvements to transit accessibility can be accomplished by applying an age-friendly accessibility approach to all aspects of public transit.

For example, the public transit system could:

- Provide consistent and reliable service even in off-peak hours
- Establish a stop request program that allows seniors travelling alone during non-rush hour times to be dropped off in between official transit stops, provided it is safe to do so.^{xxiv}
- Establish a transit information line that provides up to the minute information on service delivery.
- Review accessible transit protocols to eliminate barriers that compromise the utility of transit services for older users and incorporate outcome-based policies for accessible transit.
- Establish a citizens' accessibility audit program to report publicly on deficiencies and achievements
- Establish national transit forums whereby local transit authorities share accessibility best practices.

Staying put - Social inclusion and increased civic participation can also be achieved by fostering and creating neighbourhoods centred on community hubs that reduce the need for travelling around the city.

Start by locating recreational and social services within communities where people live rather than in commercial cluster accessible only by car or transit.

Transportation is one element of mobility; the other is urban design that allows people to walk to the places they want to go.

Rethinking the way the city uses existing spaces, such as schools and community centers, for example, can spur creation of new

community hubs. Co-locating services and social outlets could help foster civic inclusion without requiring extensive travel by car or on transit. For many times of the day and year, public schools remain unused. Such existing infrastructure can be used for community events, at once maximizing capacity use while reducing the distance citizens must travel to remain engaged in civic life.

Making Toronto age-friendly requires rethinking the way we use our existing resources as much as it does the way we design our communities.

Affordability - Regardless of how many options the city provides for transit, older citizens will not benefit if affordability is not addressed.

In 2006, Toronto was home to 12% of low-income people over 65 in Canada, 39% of low-income Ontario seniors and 68% of low-income seniors in the Greater Toronto Area. Transit policies must address the financial limitations of older people on fixed income and can mitigate financial barriers for older citizens by adopting the measures such as:

- Senior bus pass program such as the BC/Calgary income tested bus pass programs that provide *yearly* passes for under \$100 whereas a Toronto Seniors' Metropass costs \$104 a *month*.
- Issue taxi vouchers to low income seniors.
- Free shuttle buses

Fostering the creation of community hubs that minimize the need to travel at all can also make participating in civic life more affordable. If transit times and needs are reduced and existing infrastructure and resources are properly utilized, the cost of remaining engaged will decrease. Access and affordability are essential features of an Age-Friendly Toronto; older citizens, both long-time residents and newcomers, must be able to navigate the city with ease and confidence while also being an integral part of their local community.

Now is the Time to Act

Toronto's mayor and council have the opportunity to make Toronto the model Age-Friendly City that responds to the reality of changing demographics and recognizes the universal benefits of better built environments and urban mobility.

The key is an age-mindful approach to urban governance and design. The incorporation of these principles and concrete recommendations should form a cornerstone of Toronto's ongoing agenda.

CARP's recommendations address the reality that many older residents in Toronto already face and

that many more will encounter as the population continues to age.

The time is right for an Age-Friendly Toronto that will benefit all citizens of Toronto, young and old alike.

An Age-Friendly Toronto represents a conceptual shift in the relationship and responsibilities that the City has with its older citizens and will transform Toronto into a city in which all residents have confidence in movement and place and stay fully engaged in every aspect of civic life as they have throughout their lives.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Universal Design and Urban Planning Resources

- Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing *Planning for Barrier-Free Municipalities*, <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca>
- City of Winnipeg, *Report of the Executive Policy Committee : 2001 Universal Design Policy*, December 5 2001, available at: http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/universal_design.stm
- Canadian Human Rights Commission, *International Best Practices in Universal Design: A Global Review*, March 2006 http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/bestpractices_en.pdf
- Victoria Visitability Project, Special Senate Committee on Ageing, *Canada's Ageing Population: Seizing the Opportunity*, p.88 (Case Study)

Appendix B: Affordable and Accessible Transit Resources & Case Studies

- **Calgary Senior Pass:** The Calgary Transit Senior Citizen's Transit Pass provides unlimited access to transit services for persons 65 years and over for \$55 per year. Low-income seniors can get a Transit Pass for \$15 per year. http://www.calgarytransit.com/html/senior_yearly_passes.html
- **BC Bus Pass Program:** The BC Bus Pass Program provides affordable transportation to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities in 44 communities in British Columbia and benefits more than 60,000 persons per year. To be eligible for the yearly \$49.3 pass, a senior must be receiving Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. <http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/programs/other.htm>

- **British Columbia Taxi program:** In BC, people with a permanent physical or cognitive disability are eligible for discounted transit cards (Handy Card) and Taxi Saver coupons. Handy cardholders can purchase discounted taxi vouchers known as "taxi savers." A booklet of tax vouchers worth \$50.00 is sold for \$25.00
- **Vancouver Shuttle Program:** In suburban Vancouver, the regional transportation authority in recent years has had great success operating small buses, known as "community shuttles," that run through neighbourhoods and deliver passengers to transit hubs (bus stations, Skytrain stops, etc.). The convenience brings in customers and the service provides options to two mobility-challenged groups in society: seniors who have given up driving, and teenagers who have yet to learn.
- **New York Age-friendly City Plan:** Two years ago, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg launched an ambitious Big Apple version of Hamilton's council, trying to weave the eight WHO principles into the work of local government. In the fall of 2008, the New York Academy of Medicine, one of the movers behind the plan, put out a 76-page study http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2009/pr386-09_report.pdf on how to address the aging of a city as complex as New York.

This past August, Bloomberg picked up the Academy's gauntlet: he unveiled a program of 59 initiatives, designed to achieve what the WHO officials envision. The list includes concrete proposals such as grants for seniors' centres, a taxi voucher program, and free buses to supermarkets and discounted gym memberships for retirees

References

- ⁱ http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/seniors_pres_2006_census_nov08.pdf
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo10a-eng.htm>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Towards Lifetime neighbourhoods: Designing Sustainable Communities for All. Accessed at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/lifetimeneighbourhoods>
- ^{iv} World Health Organization, *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*, 2007. Accessed at http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf
- ^v Hall, Michael, Larry McKeown and Karen Roberts. 2001. *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*. Catalogue no. 71-542-XIE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- ^{vi} http://torontohousing.com/webfm_send/5302/1
- ^{vii} www.toronto.ca/.../censusbackgrounder_ageandsex_2011.pdf
- ^{viii} <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3520005&Geo2=CD&Code2=3520&Data=Count&SearchText=Toronto&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>
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- ^{xiii} World Health Organization, *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*, 2007.
- ^{xiv} <http://www.ifhp2007copenhagen.dk/Components/GetMedia.aspx?id=d020e16a-dec1-4ca7-9c8e-bfd9e68589e9>
- ^{xv} <http://www.ifhp2007copenhagen.dk/Components/GetMedia.aspx?id=d020e16a-dec1-4ca7-9c8e-bfd9e68589e9>
- ^{xvi} City of Winnipeg, *Universal Design Policy*, October 2001
- ^{xvii} <http://www.epa.gov/aging/ia/benefits.htm>
- ^{xviii} http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/19/nyregion/19aging.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1&hp
- ^{xix} Safe and accessible buildings have the following features: Elevators, Ramps, Adequate signage, Railings on stairs, Stairs that are not too high or too steep, Non-slip flooring, Rest areas with comfortable chairs
- ^{xx} http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/seniors_pres_2006_census_nov08.pdf
- ^{xxi} http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/seniors_pres_2006_census_nov08.pdf
- ^{xxii} Special Senate Committee on Ageing, *Canada's Ageing Population: Seizing the Opportunity*, p.75, 79
- ^{xxiii} British Columbia, Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues, *Aging Well in British Columbia: Report on Progress*, July 2007
- ^{xxiv} Note: Currently the Toronto Transit Commission provides this service to women travelling alone between 9pm and 5am.