



The Case for Age-Friendly Cities

Citizens of all ages have the right to fully engage in the social, economic, and cultural life of their cities. Citizens who cannot navigate the city safely and affordably cannot fully participate in civic life. Approximately 70% of Canadians over 65 years of age live in urban centres and rely on municipal services. Age Friendly Cities (AFCs), 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. Fostering age-friendly cities is critical to enabling older residents to fully and equally participate in urban life.

Age-friendly cities increase social cohesion and participation for everyone.

- Universal and affordable access to community life can increase social cohesion and participation for all people, ensuring that residents of all ages will remain actively engaged in all that their city has to offer.
- Older citizens represent an increasingly significant economic and social resource to cities through continual working, volunteering, caring, and other civic duties. The importance of older citizens in the civic life of a city will become more apparent as younger age groups remain demographically static against the growth of older cohorts. AFCs generate greater social and economic inclusion and participation for older Canadians.

Age-friendly cities instil confidence in navigating public spaces.

- Universal Design - which refers to wide-ranging ideas for producing buildings, products and environments that are accessible to people of all ages with and without disabilities - responds to the needs of the population to the greatest extent possible, focusing on barrier free access and moving to absolute inclusivity.
- 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 allow them to go where they want to go and access the health and social services they need, giving older Canadians more confidence in navigating their cities.

Age-friendly cities allow people to remain in their communities throughout life stages.

- Accessible and affordable environments that support people's needs can allow older people to stay in their own homes without facing challenges of isolation, immobility, and loss of independence. For example, affordable and easily accessible transit to essential services enables people to stay within their communities. Reduced transit times and proper utilization of existing infrastructure and resources can support greater engagement of older citizens.

CARP Recommendations

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. Cities can become age-friendly 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.

Three fundamental principles to make age-friendly cities:

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

CARP recommends that Canada’s Municipal leadership, from councilors to mayors, govern the city with age-mindfulness- viewing all facets of city life from the perspective of citizens spanning the age spectrum. Age-mindfulness must govern how we design our public spaces, the built environment, and transportation throughout the city. This can be achieved through:

- Redefining the city’s values to encourage citizenship, individual responsibility, and age-friendly values
- Shifting urban planning to be more people centered and multidisciplinary so that broader perspectives and cross-sector cooperation takes place
- Expecting more from urban leadership and promoting corporate urban responsibility, where political leaders and businesses partner can partner together to assume responsibility for urban sustainability

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

CARP recommends that 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. Examples include:

- Outdoor seating can be placed at regular intervals and be readily available, particularly in parks, transport stops, and public spaces
- Sufficiently timed pedestrian crossing lights with visual and audio signals can allow pedestrians to cross the street safely
- Pavements must be well-maintained, level, non-slip and wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs with low curbs that taper off to the road

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

CARP recommends that universal mobility is made a reality for all citizens regardless of age, with tools like accessible and affordable public transit and ‘walkable’ neighbourhoods.

Examples of how to ensure universal mobility include:

- Providing consistent and reliable service even in off-peak hours
- Locating affordable senior housing in high-density residential neighbourhoods in close proximity to services and public transportation
- Co-locating services and social outlets to help foster civic inclusion without requiring extensive travel by car or on transit

Age-Friendly cities represent a real and conceptual shift in the relationship and responsibilities that cities have with their older citizens. An age-friendly approach to city planning can give all residents confidence in movement and place and ability to stay fully engaged in every aspect of civic life as they have throughout their lives.