

CARP's Vision for Age-Friendly Cities & Communities



“Will I have to move?”

Citizens of all ages have the right to fully engage in the social, economic, and cultural life of their cities and communities. Citizens who cannot navigate their community safely and affordably cannot fully participate in civic life. Age Friendly Cities/Communities (AFC), as conceived by the World Health Organization (WHO), have services, policies, structures and environments that enhance the quality of life for people of all ages and abilities, allowing them to remain engaged in every aspect of civic life.

Most older Canadians live in urban centres - approximately 80% of Canadians over 55 years of ageⁱ, approximately 8 millionⁱⁱ, live in urban centres and rely on municipal services. Urban centres can help Canadians remain independent and active as possible by providing more opportunities for work, volunteerism, recreation, and overall engagement. However, with age, many are facing declining mobility, diminishing cognitive function, and various other health and financial challenges. Daily activities, such as cooking, bathing and maintaining the home become a challenge, leading to the question “Will I have to move?” In a truly AFC, the answer is “no” because an AFC is designed and built on principles of universal access, universal mobility and age-mindfulness. AFCs allow people of all ages and abilities to meet their daily living and health care needs, remain physically active and engaged in their communities and contribute to civic life without making drastic changes in their living arrangements.

Universal access for all ages and abilities

People can age in place in AFCs because the built environment is accessible for people of all ages. AFCs are built pursuant to Universal Design principles, producing buildings, products and environments that are accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Universal Design ideas can range from wider doorways and barrier-free entrances, more level and wider sidewalks to having evenly spaced out public benches in parks and on streets to allow people to rest while walking.

AFCs respond to people’s needs to the greatest extent possible, by enhancing the mobility and independence for people of all ages. Everyone, from young mothers with strollers, older people with walkers, people with disabilities and children, can confidently and safely navigate sidewalks, public spaces, parks and buildings.

Universal access also means adapting homes so that people can stay in their homes and maintain their independence for as long as possible. Other levels of government currently provide home renovation tax credits for seniors but stair lifts and walk-in bathtubs often do not go far enough. Municipalities have an important role in supporting and allowing for different types of housing concepts, such as granny flats and co-housing models. As people age and ask, “Will I have to move?”, the answer remains “no”.

Universal mobility: Getting to where you need to go

The ability to get to work, get groceries, visit family and friends, visit the doctor and other essential services is a critical part of living an engaged and independent life. AFCs ensure universal mobility in that people of all ages and abilities can easily get to where they need to go, safely and affordably.

Universal mobility goes beyond discount transit passes but rather, it ensures that the bus comes right to your street corner and takes you to your desired location. It also means that buses have lower floors and automatic ramps and metro stations are accessible with elevators for those with strollers, wheelchairs, and everyone else when tired or not physically well.

Universal mobility also means urban planning that lets people walk to get what they need. Community hubs with public health and social services can be created in under-used schools or recreation centres. People who used to walk their children or grandchildren to school can now walk there for some advice, to volunteer, or to see their friends.

Universal mobility enables people to remain in their communities so that the answer to “Will I have to move?” remains “no”. As people age and face challenges such as diminished mobility, isolation, and loss of independence, AFCs have an important role in ensuring universal mobility so that people can remain in their communities, navigating, participating and remaining fully engaged in all aspect of civic life.

“An age-friendly approach to city planning can give all residents confidence in navigating, participating and remaining fully engaged in every aspect of civic life as they have throughout their lives.”

Age-Mindfulness: Urban Design with Age in Mind

AFCs need leaders and decision makers to view all facets of city planning through the prism of its citizens spanning the entire age spectrum. The needs of citizens of all ages and abilities are accommodated in the planning and governance of city by-laws, public transit systems, emergency services, recreation spaces and services, and urban design and planning. A city that is designed with people of all ages in mind fosters greater social cohesion, engagement, and participation for everyone.

Older citizens make an increasingly significant economic and social contribution to cities and communities through continued engagement in the workforce, volunteering, caregiving, and other civic duties. Furthermore, 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.

Several cities are already taking the lead in transforming their cities and communities to be age-friendly. The new Official Plan for the City of London, Ontario, released in May 2015 commits to fostering a prosperous city, which they describe as a city that is built “for everyone.” It commits to being an Age-Friendly City, in which “people can choose to “age in place”- where services and programs are readily available and universally accessible... providing more opportunities for Londoners to live healthy, active lives.ⁱⁱⁱ London also created an Age-Friendly London Task Force in 2011, bringing together older adults, service providers, caregivers and other community members to provide input into improving the quality of life for older adults in London.^{iv}

CARP Recommendations

CARP calls on cities and communities across Canada to become model Age-Friendly cities. There is a need for a real and conceptual shift in the relationship that civic leaders have with their older citizens so that no one has to move when they age but rather continue to participate and stay fully engaged in every aspect of civic life as they have throughout their lives.

All levels of government have a role in removing barriers and expanding opportunities to ensure that residents of all ages and abilities can confidently navigate, participate and remain fully engaged in every aspect of civic life. Local governments must take the lead in making the ideal of “aging at home” a reality for older Canadians.

Three fundamental principles to make age-friendly cities:

1. Age-mindfulness in Governance

CARP recommends that Canada’s municipal leadership, from councillors to mayors, govern the city with age-mindfulness - viewing all facets of city life from the perspective of citizens spanning the age spectrum thereby governing the design of our public spaces, the built environment, and transportation throughout the city and encouraging full participation of ages in civic life.

This means:

- Committing to the value of age-inclusiveness in aspects of civic life
- Ensuring that urban planning is inclusive of all ages, removing barriers and encouraging engagement
- Partnering with the private sector to ensure an age friendly commercial environment

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

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.

Examples include:

- Outdoor seating can be placed at regular intervals, particularly in parks, transport stops, sidewalks, and public spaces
- Sufficiently timed pedestrian crossing lights with visual and audio signals to allow pedestrians to cross the street safely
- Well-maintained, level, non-slip and wide enough paved sidewalks to accommodate all users, including wheelchairs and strollers
- By-laws and city supports for new housing concepts such as granny flats and co-housing

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, co-located services, community hubs and ‘walkable’ neighbourhoods.

Examples include:

- Public transportation that is accessible and affordable to all neighbourhoods; with consistent and reliable services even in off-peak hours
- Co-locating services and social outlets in residential community hubs to provide needed services and to help foster civic inclusion without requiring extensive travel by car or on transit

References

ⁱ http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/inpr/bude/hoolca/hoolca_vol_001/hoolca_vol_001_009.cfm

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 051-000, <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.london.ca/business/Planning-Development/Official-Plan/Documents/RethinkLondon/2%20Fostering%20a%20Prosperous%20City.pdf>

^{iv} <http://www.london.ca/business/Planning-Development/Official-Plan/Documents/RethinkLondon/8%20Building%20Strong%20and%20Attractive%20Neighbourhoods.pdf>