

Part 1 overview

Urban Canada generally offers older adults more services and opportunities in closer proximity compared to other places in Canada. This concentration of services, destinations, and supports are integral to the quality of life of older adults. However, the chapters and vignettes from this part have shown that when elements of infrastructures are inaccessible, many of the benefits of density are negated (eg poorly maintained sidewalks, overwhelming number of services, long waiting times at the medical facilities). In an urban setting, it is necessary to think at both the macro and micro scale – macro for overarching city-wide services like public transport and micro for individual neighbourhoods and improving the direct contexts that older adults live in each day.

Takeaways for practice

- In large urban areas, there is often a disconnect between city-level statements and what is happening on the ground. There is a need for neighbourhood-level planning with context-informed interventions that older adults are directly involved in.
- There needs to be more municipal investment in critical infrastructures that influence mobility and quality of life, such as: maintenance of sidewalks throughout the seasons, accessible public transit, and affordable, appropriate, and accessible housing.
- Ageism is still pervasive in all aspects of the urban milieu, including in services and programs that are supposed to be age-friendly. Many services still act in a paternalistic manner and could be improved through education campaigns and targeted legislation.
- There is a need to enforce accessibility requirements on business owners, transitions to the public realm, and the public realm itself.
- Planning with older adults (not for older adults) about their communities is critical. The question of how to engage should include a combination of tools. For instance, older adults could lead audits or examine personal experiences through innovative methods such as photovoice and go-along interviews.
- Urban areas are often assumed to be walkable by virtue of the (general) mix of land uses and proximity to destinations. However, walkability is much more than distance. It is about how particular places make people feel (eg taking a longer route to avoid crowds) and personally experience the area. There is a need to understand the socio-spatial relationality of walking when developing interventions.

Questions to consider

- How does the city officially understand the needs of older adults, and who has power to make decisions?

Aging People, Aging Places

- How does your city engage the older adults in your community? Who is left out from those conversations?
 - If your city is committed to being age-friendly, what measures are they taking? How are they ensuring that all neighbourhoods in the area are treated in context?
 - Try it yourself – how difficult is it to find senior-focused services?
 - Is maintenance a part of the city's age-friendly plans? How do they prioritize maintenance of sidewalks, clearing of snow and other debris?
 - How are the non-profit organizations supported by the city?
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