

Part 2 overview

Canada is a suburban nation, and the chapters and vignettes in Part 2 of the book have shown that the older adults that live within these suburban areas have diverse histories and experiences of place. While the suburbs are increasingly diverse and variegated spaces, they are often characterized by reliance on the car for mobility, land use separation, a lack of accessible public transportation, and fewer social infrastructures. These characteristics can make it more difficult to age in place, especially when it is no longer feasible to drive.

Takeaways for practice

- Transportation concerns are of great importance to older adults living in the suburbs. A context-specific approach that plans with diverse older adults in mind is needed to build age-friendly public transport.
- E-bikes encourage active transportation and independence, and older adults are willing to consider using them. Practitioners need to consider how to accommodate e-bikes in the right of way and how to protect these users from cars. Potential programming could include e-bike sharing in suburban neighbourhoods.
- When planning for housing, it must be accessible (including home modifications), and financially affordable (many cannot afford retirement or nursing home fees). Consider specialized housing for marginalized groups, like members of the LGBTQ2+ communities, and more frail older adults, which make them feel safer, included, accepted, and builds social capital.
- Winter poses heightened risks for older adult social isolation and physical health due to a lack of maintenance of public transportation (eg snow piled in front of bus stops) and active transportation infrastructure (eg uncleared sidewalks).
- The social isolation produced by distance may be reduced with technology and pre-arranged gatherings by non-profits.
- A successful age-friendly plan is one that considers the diversity of neighbourhoods within a municipality (instead of treating it as a homogeneous whole), has continued political support, stable funding, dedicated non-governmental groups and agencies, a governance structure that reports to council directly, and a dedicated staff co-ordinator.
- There is a need to address the homophobia, disableism, sexism, racism, and ageism structurally inherent within current healthcare services, congregate living facilities, and social/recreational services. Canada is home to people from many diverse backgrounds and contexts and practitioners should be considering targeted services to ensure that people feel safe, included, and understood, and have access to culturally appropriate supports. Practitioners must become educated in these realms to be able to provide support to all Canadians.

Questions to consider

- How does the municipality you live in officially understand the needs of older adults, and who has power to make decisions?
 - 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?
 - What is your municipality doing when it comes to public transportation, and affordable housing for older adults?
 - Is maintenance a part of your municipality's age-friendly plans? How do they prioritize maintenance of sidewalks, clearing of snow?
 - How are the non-profit organizations supported by the municipality?
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