

## **Age-Friendly Communities**

<b>Date:</b>	April 26, 2009
<b>To:</b>	Community Development and Recreation Committee
<b>From:</b>	General Manager, Long-Term Care Homes and Services Division
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

### **SUMMARY**

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Population aging and urbanization are key global trends that shape society and public policy. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that older persons are resources for their families, communities and economies when provided with enabling living environments. WHO also recognizes that active aging is a lifelong process shaped by a number of factors that influence health, participation and security in later life.

At the World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics in 2005, WHO initiated a research project that resulted in the development of a Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide, intended to engage global communities in becoming more age-friendly and tapping the potential that older people represent. Working with groups in thirty-three (33) communities in all WHO regions, WHO asked older people to identify attributes and barriers experienced in day-to-day life. The outcome of the research resulted in an age-friendly communities model based on eight (8) policy domains that are considered necessary to support active aging: (i) outdoor spaces and buildings; (ii) transportation; (iii) housing; (iv) social participation; (v) respect and social inclusion; (vi) civic participation and employment; (vii) communication and information; and (viii) community and health services.

Age-friendly communities benefit people of all ages. They encourage active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, they adapt their structures, policies, processes and services to be accessible and inclusive for older people with varying needs and capacities.

An inter-divisional staff work group has met and has initiated a plan for beginning community engagement about the age-friendly communities' model. This report provides a summary of the model, current City strengths and intended next steps.

## **Financial Impact**

There is no financial impact arising out of this report.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), making communities age-friendly is one of the most effective policy approaches for responding to demographic aging.

Active aging policy is defined as “optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age”. The active-aging approach is grounded in the United Nations (UN) principles of independence, participation, dignity, care and self-fulfilment.

Also, the 2006 Federal/Provincial/Territorial discussion brief, entitled “Healthy Aging – A New Vision, a Vital Investment From Evidence to Action” identifies that a supportive environment is one of the three (3) pillars for healthy aging (the other two being mutual aid and self-care) and it identifies the age-friendly cities model as a strategy that essentially facilitates healthy aging in place.

In 2007, World Health Organization (WHO) published the ‘Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide’ based on results of the 2005 consultation in 33 cities. The Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide identifies the key elements needed for communities to successfully support healthy aging, namely: (i) outdoor spaces and buildings; (ii) transportation; (iii) housing; (iv) social participation; (v) respect and social inclusion; (vi) civic participation and employment; (vii) communication and information; and (viii) community and health services. Each of the eight domains is supported in the Guide by contextual clarification and checklists to guide local community consultation and implementation of age-friendly policies and practice.

Of the original thirty-three (33) cities involved in the initial 2005 WHO project, there were four Canadian cities: Saanich, British Columbia; Portage La Prairie, Manitoba; Sherbrooke, Quebec; and Halifax, Nova Scotia. More recently, other Canadian cities have initiated work. In addition, the Ontario Seniors Secretariat (OSS) has recently appointed a policy analyst to work with Ontario communities in advancing the age-friendly communities’ model.

In researching the benefits of the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide, City staff spoke with representatives at WHO, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) and OSS. Staff also consulted with the national lead for Canadian age-friendly communities’ initiatives and reviewed approaches taken in other Canadian communities. Staff inventoried current work of various City divisions that is aligned with the age-friendly philosophy and met with the Toronto Seniors’ Forum (TSF) to consult and verify their willingness to work collaboratively in engaging communities and in advancing age-friendly work within Toronto’s communities.

Age-friendly communities are based on the principles of active aging throughout the life course. As a result, they benefit everyone: children, the young, adults and older persons.

Age-friendly communities are not developed by governments alone. Rather, they are built through a process of community development and collaboration with governments, businesses, community organizations and individuals working together as full partners. Every community and every person has a role in creating and maintaining age-friendly communities.

Although City Divisions and Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABCs) have a role to play in applying the age-friendly policy lens to internal work, they have an equally important role in acting as a catalyst, inviting and influencing organizations to lead and adapt age-friendly strategies in their own work in a way that supports active aging.

## **COMMENTS**

June 2009 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seniors' Month in Ontario. This year's theme is "Creating Age-Friendly Communities", celebrating seniors and recognizing the tremendous contributions that they have made to their communities. The theme recognizes that teamwork by governments, local business, non-profit groups and individual residents is needed to create age-friendly communities.

The age-friendly communities' model advances the idea of active aging as a lifelong process, in which positive attitudes toward aging encourage healthy aging. Age-friendly communities emphasize that aging is both a personal and a societal issue. They promote individual responsibility while also addressing the broader role that families, communities and governments play in ensuring older persons receive the supports they need to age positively.

Age-friendly communities focus on integration and inclusion, involving older persons in meaningful ways in all aspects of society and eliminating ageist attitudes and barriers. Inter-generational programming and the skills and expertise of older persons are embraced. Negative images of older persons are addressed and older persons are empowered. Businesses, service providers and community groups are made aware and educated about older adults' needs and potentials.

The age-friendly communities' model aligns well with Ontario's Aging at Home strategy and incorporates the range of options needed to ensure older persons maintain personal dignity and functional independence for as long as possible.

Finding new, innovative, and collaborative ways to support active aging requires skilled planning and creative approaches. For example, increased awareness about the benefits of mixed-use, mixed-generation communities is important to assist decision makers in balancing the concerns and needs of the entire community. Age-friendly communities create physical and emotional environments that are supportive, nurture healthy aging, encourage self-care and engage older persons in a variety of activities that contribute to quality of life.

## **The City of Toronto**

The City of Toronto directly delivers a vast array of services that incorporate each of the eight (8) domains in a manner consistent with the principles of the Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide. Overall, ‘Service – Stewardship – Commitment’ and ‘Diversity our Strength’ anchor the work of the Toronto Public Service and include treating older people with respect and sensitivity, while addressing issues related to access and equity. Accessible information about services for older persons is available on the City’s web site and in numerous hard-copy pamphlets and brochures. Many City divisions provide educational material and/or presentations about their services upon request.

City Divisions and Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABCs) embrace multiple strategies related to social inclusion and civic participation. There are well-established diversity practices, working with community organizations and groups to respond to the varying needs of Toronto’s diverse communities. Older persons serve on a large variety of advisory committees within the City and are recognized for past and present contributions through volunteer awards, etc. Inter-generational programming exists in many areas, including but not limited to Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Children’s Services, Long-Term Care Homes and Services, Toronto Community Housing, Toronto Public Library and Toronto Public Health. There are flexible options for older volunteers in many divisions. The Toronto Seniors’ Forum offers a significant opportunity for civic participation through its activities and priorities. City workplaces value older workers and are adapted to meet the needs of older and disabled workers.

Service provision is based on the principles of Service – Stewardship – Commitment and many programs and services are adapted to be accessible for older persons.

In addition to the long-standing programs and services, the City recently expanded and enhanced certain services for older persons under the ‘Your City Can Help’ strategy, intended to help residents and businesses in times of economic uncertainty. In particular, the City’s Your City Can Help program offers information and enhanced services related to supportive housing, homemaking, drop-in services, cafeteria service, adult literacy programs, recreation programs, health information services, assistance for medical and dental care, emergency funds, emergency rental deposit loan program, rent bank, property tax deferrals, social assistance, tenant defence fund, water rebate and museum and art passes.

Notwithstanding the many programs and services provided directly by the City for older persons that are age-friendly, the age-friendly communities’ model is not only about making public services more age-friendly. It is about engaging communities so that business leaders, community organizations and individuals are flexible and adaptive in the way they design their products, programs and services to meet the needs of people as they age.

## **Going Forward**

On June 9, 2009, the Toronto Seniors' Forum will hold an Information Fair at Nathan Phillips Square to profile the contributions, needs and opportunities for older persons. This will provide an opportunity to kick-start community dialogue about age-friendly communities.

On June 16, 2009, staff will host a facilitated community meeting with approximately one hundred invited organizations and individuals, to discuss factors that make an age-friendly community in order to enhance local community responsiveness to aging issues. This will be an important step in generating awareness about the age-friendly communities' model and in encouraging emergence of local leadership to guide further development and support shared leadership by connecting leaders with one another.

Although some steps may be taken by one organization acting alone, some will benefit from combined action. Promoting active aging and creating age-friendly communities requires community-based solutions, innovative approaches and the involvement of older persons in the planning and delivery of policies, programs and services to meet their needs. The Toronto Seniors' Forum has committed to collaborate with staff and community organizations in order to advance age-friendly communities.

Staff will continue to consider the age-friendly lens in designing, enhancing or revising programs and services. Staff will also continue to work with the Toronto Seniors' Forum and neighbourhood action teams in addressing the issues of older persons at the grassroots level. Community-based solutions may require new thinking and successes will lie in organizations' collective creativity.

The eight (8) domains of the WHO age-friendly communities' model provide a proven, researched concept to advance the age-friendly agenda. The model can assist communities to build resilience in meeting the challenges of an aging population and in embracing strategies to support healthy aging.

The age-friendly communities' model is really a call to action, requiring a coordinated community effort. The planned June 16<sup>th</sup> consultation is an initial step in this journey.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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