



## On the Road to Age-Friendly Communities



Canada

In Canada today, people are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. Cities, towns and villages—communities of all sizes—strive to meet the needs of their residents, including older adults. These communities recognize that seniors, and the community as a whole, benefit when healthy aging and “age-friendly” features become one of their trademarks.

**Healthy aging is a lifelong process of optimizing opportunities for improving and preserving all aspects of health, promoting quality of life and enhancing successful life-course transitions.**

—*Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment*

### Age-friendly . . . a win-win formula

By creating environments that support healthy aging, seniors, elected officials, business leaders, service providers and community residents improve peoples’ lives and the quality of community life. This is in keeping with the World Health Organization (WHO) goal of active aging: “optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.”

There are good reasons why communities across Canada are going “age-friendly.” Such communities support better health, improved safety and greater participation of all members of the community. For older adults, it may make the difference between their social

isolation or their continued contributions to family, friends, neighbours and the economy well into old age. Age-friendly communities support seniors as community investors. On the face of it, the investment is in seniors. Look more closely, and see the benefits to the wider community.

### Age-friendly policies and practices . . . a smart move

The evidence is in: health promotion and disease prevention strategies help seniors age well. Moreover, promoting healthy aging is part of a life-course approach aimed at reducing inequalities and supporting vulnerable people to improve well-being at all ages. Many of the policies and actions that promote an age-friendly community usually benefit both older and younger citizens at the same time. As our population ages, it makes more sense to create physical and social environments that support all citizens to be active and productive members of the community.

### Canadians and aging

- As of 2006, seniors number over four million—that means that one in seven Canadians is age 65 or older. By 2036, seniors will account for one in four Canadians.
- Almost 75% of seniors live in Canada’s urban areas, while the remaining 25% reside in rural and remote areas.

# Milestones on the Road to Age-Friendly

## From Canada's new vision

The 2006 document *Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment* describes a strong new vision for healthy aging in Canada. It sets out the “what,” the “why” and the “how” governments, communities and civil society can bring healthy aging to the forefront of Canada’s social policy agenda. Canada’s Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors endorsed the report which drew on initiatives underway in many jurisdictions and propelled the development of age-friendly initiatives across the country.

## From cities around the world

To engage cities in developed and developing countries to become more age-friendly and to tap into the vast potential of older people, the WHO, in tandem with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and other partners, produced the publication *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*. The Guide was developed through an extensive series of focus groups carried out in 33 cities of varying sizes. The research included four Canadian sites—Halifax (NS), Portage la Prairie (MB), Saanich (BC) and Sherbrooke (QC).

The initiative captured the views of people aged 60 and older who live in lower and middle-income areas, and the observations of caregivers and of service providers from public, voluntary and private sectors. Topics covered included: outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; civic participation and employment; communication and information; community support and health services. Besides successes, barriers, gaps and proposed solutions, the Guide provides a checklist of age-friendly features as a reference model for communities making the transition towards “age-friendly.”

## From rural and remote Canada

In September 2007, Canadian Ministers Responsible for Seniors released the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities Initiative (AFRRCI). While AFRRCI was based on the model and research framework of the WHO, it focused on Canada’s rural and remote communities. The initiative included 10 communities, ranging in size from fewer than 600 to 5,000 residents. *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* presents tips and checklists that reflect Canadian views and circumstances. It provides a starting point to identify common barriers to and assets for age-friendly rural and remote areas.

## Growing evidence

**There is a growing body of research and “how-to” information available to support policy and action at the local and individual levels.**

- The report *Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment* is the backbone for the development of healthy aging initiatives in this country. Read the *Discussion Brief* and the *Background Paper* online: [www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors)
- The report *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* is a WHO guide to improving cities for older people. Useful *Checklists* are also available: [www.who.int/ageing/en](http://www.who.int/ageing/en)
- The report *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* looks at how non-urban communities can be age-friendly. Visit: [www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors)



## What Does Age-Friendly Look Like?

Age-friendly communities adapt, create and put in place policies, services, settings and structures that support and enable people to age actively by:

- recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older adults
- anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences
- respecting the decisions and lifestyle choices of older adults
- protecting those older adults who are more vulnerable
- promoting the inclusion of older adults in, and valuing their contribution to, all areas of community life

Communities large and small, as well as a wide range of stakeholders, can all take part in building better age-friendly communities. To promote the concept and engage partners, PHAC's Division of Aging and Seniors works with the provinces and territories, sharing experience and lending support to community agencies and other interested groups and individuals interested in becoming more age-friendly.

## How “age-friendly” can your community become?

Interested in making your community more age-friendly? The best approach to creating a groundswell of interest is to engage collaboratively with seniors, elected officials,

### Key features of an age-friendly community

- pleasant, secure and physically accessible outdoor spaces and public buildings
- well-designed, affordable and secure housing choices
- well-maintained and accessible roads and walkways
- affordable and accessible public transportation
- secure neighbourhoods
- respectful relationships
- supportive health and community services
- opportunities to be socially active
- opportunities to participate in suitable volunteer, civic and employment positions
- information that is easy to access and understand

municipal and business leaders, local experts, community partners, key service providers and residents of all ages.

Take advantage of the international and Canadian work and resources that tell you what seniors and those who work with seniors want and need in an age-friendly community. Use the findings—including the checklists of barriers, needs and ideas—as a model for research and action in your community.



## For More Information

**For more information on making your community age-friendly, contact:**

- your provincial/territorial Seniors Ministry
- the Division of Aging and Seniors, Public Health Agency of Canada:  
[www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors)  
For publications, call 613-952-7606, or e-mail [seniors-aines@phac-aspc.gc.ca](mailto:seniors-aines@phac-aspc.gc.ca)
- the World Health Organization:  
[www.who.int/ageing/en/](http://www.who.int/ageing/en/)
- the International Federation on Ageing:  
[www.ifa-fiv.org](http://www.ifa-fiv.org)