Aging in Place

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Enabling Aging in Place

Aging in place is identified as making the option available to older adults to remain in their home as they age for as long as they are comfortable and feel confident with their living situations. There are many components to making this option a reality. Staying in the home as one ages is a personal decision, and preferences do vary. However, the literature suggests that the majority of adults do desire aging in place. There are different subcategories of this research area, many falling into 'hard' or 'soft' approaches. In providing seniors with the option of aging in place, certain 'hard' or design strategies often involve modifications within the home. Likewise, 'soft' or social support services are needed as well. Home modifications and support can be expensive and demanding for older adults and carers. As a result, financial security and affordability influence one's decision to age in place. The stress or fear of moving can result in individuals staying in their homes long past the point of needing more care. In order to enable aging in place, multiple players, including planners, architects, builders and community resource providers need to work together to provide options for safe and suitable housing options for our aging population.

Staying in the home for seniors is important because it allows them to maintain the connections they have built within their communities over the years. Knowing the community and being a part of it can be an important incentive for staying in the home and can contribute to overall quality of life. Chui notes, "older people normally prefer to live in their familiar residence, their home in particular, where they have memories and special meanings attached to it." (2008, p. 165). Staying within the home can also be empowering for older adults as it allows them to maintain control over their own care options.

Mobility and Accessibility at Different Scales

For many seniors, the decision to stay in one's home can be influenced by the style of residence they currently occupy and the degree to which it allows for varying mobilities. This is an issue that requires consideration at multiple scales. The location of one's home in proximity to resources, family and/or public transit has the potential to influence aging in place decisions. Living in an age-friendly neighbourhood allows seniors to maintain their independence, even when
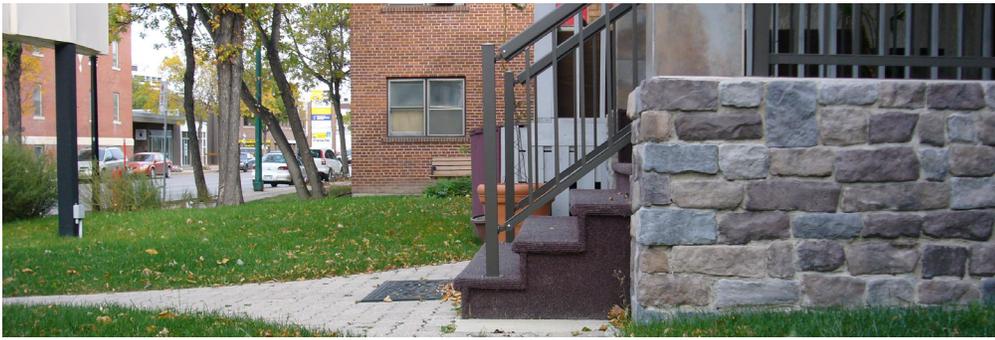
driving a personal automobile is no longer an option. Living in a rural or urban community plays an impact as well. Within the home, specific design principles can make daily life within the home more manageable. Universal design is an approach to creating everyday environments and products that are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, regardless of age or ability. This can include small changes such as lever handles for opening doors rather than twisting knobs, ramp access into and within the home, and larger doorways to accommodate wheelchair or walkers. As Hueman and Boldy state, "interpreted correctly, ageing in place has the potential to provide more appropriate care at less cost than a move to a more specialized and sheltered facility" (1993, p. 47). However, having access to capital to make these alterations can be a barrier. Within the context of aging in place, the decision making process is often enabled or mitigated by economics.

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Supportive Services

But not all resources that contribute to aging in place are so tangible. As self-sufficiency changes with age, seniors require more support (services). These can be met by professionals and support workers, or needs can be met by family-members or loved-ones who act as caregivers. However there are implications for care-givers. Horner and Boldy (2008) warn, "there is a risk in being judge unfairly" on the decisions that are made about aging in place or moving into more supportive housing. This can result in making the wrong decision about leaving one's home for institutional accommodations. Either leaving one's home too early or staying in one's home too long, which can make the transition to supportive housing more difficult. Having support in the home can enable seniors to stay in the home longer. This can be meet by occupational therapists, nurses, cleaners, and meal service providers. Some of these needs can be met by loved-ones, however Costa-Font (2009) finds that this can this can result in strains on family relationships.

A 'Need-based' Approach to Aging in Place

Most seniors wish to stay within the home.

As the demographic shift towards a greater cohort of elderly people in Canada occurs, new attitudes towards seniors' accommodation must evolve. Nursing homes or institutionalization is not a desirable option for most seniors. Were seniors to have the resources needed to remain in their homes for a longer period of time, most would do so. However, the means through which quality of life is ensured and care is provided must be considered. Considering each individual's need is paramount in ensuring good quality of life and meeting this need does not necessarily need to occur in an institutionalized setting. Horner and Boldy (2008) confirm:

> The lines of demarcation between low and high care accommodation, and between independent living and low care . . . are not well defined and becoming increasingly blurred… An emphasis on 'need' rather than accommodation classification may encourage a more timely progression through the care system" (2008, p. 359).

The authors emphasize that flexibility is the key to meeting this objective. A case-by-case approach needs to be applied by professions who are working to enable aging in place. Though this presents challenges for wide-spread policy making, it does have the potential to ensure the best care possible for seniors in a tailor-made approach.

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