Resource Access

Joyce Rautenberg

Seniors identified grocery stores as the most important basic amenity

The World Health Organization puts emphasis on encouraging "opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age" (pg 1). This section directly addresses access to amenities, healthcare services and community resources as a fundamental part of age-friendly design. Access means different things to people in different communities – therefore, it is impossible to come up with a one-size-fits-all solution. Suggestions should be considered in context; is it an urban, suburban or rural community?

Important Services Identified By Seniors

In one study, Zachary Zimmer and Neena Chappell examine amenities and services in a rural and urban context (pg 105). Both communities emphasized their ideal neighbourhood would be in close proximity to basic amenities and facilitate social interaction. In both cases, grocery stores were the most important amenity. Urban residents also ranked financial institutions and post offices as essential. However, rural dwellers placed an emphasis on medical care facilities.

Amenities

Access to amenities can be incorporated into community design. Arizona State University's Livable Communities Guide suggests that mixed use development is the most age-friendly: in high rise buildings, residences above and retail on the lower levels eliminate transit or mobility barriers to amenities (pg.75). Also, the trend should move towards sharing a space with an in-house pharmacy and bank branch. However, the relocation of "major retail establishments to strip and shopping malls" is a barrier seniors in the urban community may face in lieu of high overhead costs to stay downtown (Arizona State University, pg 74). The Livable Communities guide advocates for "replacement of grocery stores and other retail stores by redeveloping vacant properties near clusters of residents of older adults" (pg 81). As well, mixed use developments and attracting specialty or smaller-scale grocery stores are encouraged to meet the needs of seniors in urban communities.

Memory Clinic and SmartCentre. Photo Credits: Google Images/

Pharmacy. Photo Credit: Sang Woo Hong

Deaf Centre. Photo Credit:Joyce Rautenberg

Some communities express that lack of frequent public transit to shopping destinations are not accessible to older adults. As well, residents feel shopping centres are generally "pedestrian unfriendly" (Arizona State University, pg 74) – especially if they are forced to walk across large parking lots from the bus stop. In San Diego, the city initiated the implementation of small neighbourhood shuttles (Design for Health). As well, the city aims to increase the amount of housing units to transit, grocery stores, medical offices, post offices and drugstores (all identified basic amenities).

Rural communities usually more isolated and residents are dependent on cars. There may be infrequent or no transit service available and amenities may not be close to one another, further preventing accessibility (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, pg 11). As a means to alleviate some of the barriers, rural communities in Manitoba like Morden and Winkler have handi-van shuttles and assistance programs with grocery/errand shopping available.

Shopping centres are "pedestrian unfriendly"

Healthcare

Access to healthcare is an important concern, as seniors have the highest rate of hospital admission (Design for Health, pg 3). The Design for Health guide compiled by the University of Minnesota defines access to healthcare as being able to choose the service, doctor and mode of transportation (pg 3).

As noted before, rural communities placed the highest importance on access to healthcare – perhaps because services are not as readily available. The Government of Canada points out that rural seniors are the "largest consumers of healthcare" and more "prone to disability and disease" (Government of Canada). In some areas, older adults may be left alone to manage health issues due to a lack of support and resources. The government document identifies depression as a prevalent concern – lack of resources "impede ability to maintain mental health" (Government of Canada). However, there are challenges that apply to rural and urban settings. Older adults wish to dispel the attitude that they are "dependent" and seen as "patients" (Brown, McWilliam and Mai). If seniors wish to seek

Clinic. Photo Credit: Google

Photo Credit: Joyce Rautenberg

medical attention, there may be restricted hours or types of services available and system rigidity. Long term care facilities are an option when independent living becomes a challenge, but access can be an issue there. According to Brown et al, facilities reject some seniors as their conditions are not "bad" enough (pg 472). But in order to live alone, seniors require support and services – programs such as counseling, health promotion and disease prevention can empower independence.

Community Resources

Seniors indicated that social inclusion and community involvement was important to them. Many communities offer services and resources that make older adults' lives easier. Interestingly, suburban and rural areas offer more services than urban – such as social services including friendly visits and daily phone calls. Other programs such as legal aid, social groups and exercise classes are also offered at most seniors centres.

Seniors feel there is a lack of information on available resources (Brown et al, pg 472). As well, they feel that programs and activity centres are "under-utilized" and there is a "lack of funding for maintenance and staff" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador). Technology is one of the major hurdles seniors face. Many older adults are not computer literate, so information about programs and events is not always accessible. Internet may also not be reliable in a rural setting; this compounds feelings of isolation. Transportation, as always, can be an issue especially if centres and recreation facilities are not located near transit.

Technology is one of the major hurdles seniors face

Municipalities in Australia are working to provide complimentary transport for seniors to various community exercise facilities, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices and opportunities for social interaction (Australian Local Government Association, pg 17). As well, cities in Ontario have community care access centres which address counselling and lifestyle changes for older adults. Some further opportunities in making resources more accessible include involving seniors in community discussions on where services should be located and what should be offered. As well, regular maintenance of senior centres should be encouraged, and efforts should be made to engage older adults with people of all ages within the community.

Concluding Notes

Neighbourhood amenities and resources have a profound influence on seniors, but there is a gap in collaboration (Zimmer and Chappell, pg 122). There is a wide variety of research examining and improving access - with further considerations and consultations with older adults, cities can become more age-friendly.

Sources:

Age and Opportunity. (2011) Retrieved from http://www.ageopportunity. mb.ca/htmlfiles/centre_locations.

Arizona State University, Herberger Centre for Design Excellence. Liveable Communities: An Evaluation Guide. Washington, DC: AARP, 2005.

Australian Local Government Association. Age-Friendly Built Environments: Opportunities for Local Government. (2006). Retrieved from http:// www.alga.asn.au/policy/healthAgeing/ageing/resources

Brown, Judith B., Carol L. McWilliam and Verna Mai. Barriers and Facilitators to Seniors' Independence. (1997). *Canadian Family Physician*, 43:469–475

Community-University Research Alliance, Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba. Age-Friendly Communities in Manitoba. http://www. agefriendlymanitoba.ca/files/extra_resources/11/first_look_4page_ brochure_final_wen.pdf.

Design for Health (collaboration between the University of Minnesota and Blue Cross). (April 2008). Retrieved from http://www.designforhealth. net/resources/seniors/html

The Government of Canada. (2002). Retrieved from http://dsp.psd.pwgsc. gc.ca/collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/prb0245-e/htm.

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2005). Retrieved from http:// www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publications/afrrc_en.pdf.

Ontario Seniors' Secretariat. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.seniors.gov. on.ca/en/seniorsguide/index.php.

Province of Manitoba. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.gov.mb.ca/shas/ resourcesforseniors/organizations/index/html.

Seniors Resource Network. (2011). Retrieved from http://seniors.cimnet.ca/ cim/19.dhtm.

Zimmer, Zachary and Neena Chappell. Rural-Urban Differences in Seniors' Neighbourhood Preferences. (1997). Journal of Housing for the Elderly, 12 (1-2), 104-123.