

Conclusion

From the research findings discussed in this document, one can conclude that there is a gradual movement towards more age-friendly housing. However, universal design standards should become mandatory for all new construction and legislation for disabilities should be created at the federal level for the betterment of all Canadians. Finally, there needs to be more focus on housing for older adults in rural and remote communities.

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Rebecca
Copping

The phrase “home is where the heart is” expresses the sentiments of many older adults when it comes to making choices about where they live as they age. Even though it might seem like there are many attractive housing options for this phase in life, deciding on where to habituate can be influenced by limited mobility, mental illness and finances. The *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* cites that “housing and support that allow older people to age comfortably and safely within the community to which they belong are universally valued” (World Health Organization, 2006, p30). Not only do we need to look at housing in cities, but also in rural and remote areas. The *Age-friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide*, takes into consideration the unique barriers that older adults face in smaller communities which will be addressed. The five main subtopics for discussion are: housing types, location of housing (10), accessibility, housing modifications, and assistive devices & safety (4).



Image 2

Housing Types

Age-friendly housing has become a growing concern as “the number of people aged 60 and over as a proportion of the global population will double from 11% in 2006 to 22% by 2050” (World Health Organization, 2006, p3). One housing option is for inter-generational (2) living (different generations of one family all live under the same roof). This housing option offers “a unique combination of family systems, property rights, investments goals, and tax benefits” (Brown & Zhang, 2006, p75). This form of housing is similar to the ‘shared housing’ concept where older people share their home (2) or share the home of another (Granberry, 2008). A second alternative for older adults is to ‘age in place’ - the act of staying in your current home and making modifications. This form is becoming increasingly popular; 91% of adults between the ages of 65 to 74 years of age said they prefer to age in their current home (Pynoos, Caraviello & Cicero, 2009). A study in Spain also reveals that there is a growing trend for older people to age in place (3) as opposed to moving into a nursing home setting (Costa-Font, Elvira & Mascarilla-Miro, 2009). This study focuses on the determinants that lead older people to prefer to age in place and found that 78% of older Spanish people preferred this alternative. One of the reasons for this dominance is because of the high cost of institutional care. A third type of housing



Image 3: Age-friendly washroom

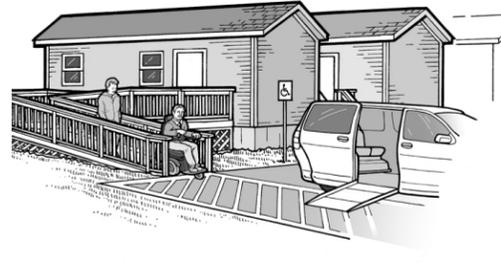


Image 4: Accessible housing for people with disabilities



Image 5: Accessible washrooms can still look stylish



Image 6: Accessible kitchens

is co-housing, “a form of intentional neighbourhood in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own community” (Granberry, 2009, p146).” This offers residents strong social interactions (2) and support that they might not have otherwise if they were living at home alone. In Strathers article on housing, she looks at the problems rural counties have in the Midwest , such as housing assistance due to the demand and lack of resources (Strathers, 2008).

Location

The location of where one chooses to live gives way to unique challenges (1,3,5,6,10). For instance, the *Rural and Remote Age-friendly Communities: A Guide* document, outlines specific barriers to aging in rural and remote areas (1). “Lack of indoor plumbing was an issue raised in one community. In another, the reliance on wood stoves was discussed and the problems that ensued when older persons were less able to chop and carry firewood” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006, p18). An article on the *Housing and the Older Rural Population* quotes that: “Housing for the elderly is most adequate in urban metropolitan areas, less adequate in towns outside metropolitan areas, and least adequate in rural areas” (Folts, Muir & Nash, 2008, p.43). In order to overcome these barriers, more focus needs to be placed on rural and remote housing options for older adults - not only in their current homes, but also in other housing options.

Accessibility

Age-friendly housing needs to be accessible for older adults with physical and mental disabilities (4). One journal looks at the disability legislation in place for both Canada and the United States. Three times as much literature exists on U.S. experiences based on disabilities legislation over the past two decades, which tells us that Canada needs to focus more on disability legislation (Burns & Gordon, 2009). Canada creates their disability policies at the provincial level, which is criticized. The disability policies should be created at a federal level so that there is more cohesiveness across the country. Universal design, the approach used for constructing housing or public buildings for people with and without disabilities, has provoked more interest in accessibility. This leads us into our next topic of discussion; how housing modifications can create more accessible living spaces.

“Persons with disabilities have greater affordability problems and are more likely to be older, to be living in poverty and to have poorer health” (Burns & Gordon, 2009,

“95% of adults 65 years of age or older live at home, with almost 1/3 living alone” (Guerette

Housing Modifications

As people age and decide to age in place, they will most likely need to make modifications to their home. The most common modifications are: handrails or grab bars, elevator or stair lift, special sinks, special faucets, wheelchair accessible washrooms, custom cabinets in kitchens and access to sink and oven, ramps, wider doors, lever handles, and special wall sockets or light switches (4). When there is a lack of housing that *is* modified for older people, they are then forced to live with relatives or in institutional settings (Gilderbloom & Markham, 1996). Even though modifications are highly advisable, “only about 10% of the elderly headed households with at least one member with a mobility problem has made a housing modification to the dwelling” (Gilderbloom & Markham, 1996, p512). The authors conclude that those who do not modify their homes, correlates with increased numbers in institutionalization. In order for older adults to age in place (which has been cited in numerous articles to be the dominant preference), the promotion and implementation of modifications should play a larger role in the creation of age-friendly housing.

Assistive Devices and Safety

Assistive devices enable older adults to age in place more comfortably, it gives them a greater sense of independence and also provides them with a safer environment (3). The issue is that “many older adults are unaware of the types of devices available and/or may have difficulty obtaining these devices due to a lack of knowledge of sources of assistive technology” (Gurette & Anthony, 1999, p17) For a lot of older adults to remain independent, they rely on help from nurses and in-home services such as cleaners, repair persons, gardeners, and from services like Meals on Wheels. As for informal help, they depend on family and friends to check in on them. Although a lot of these services and personal help cannot be replaced by technology, it can be enhanced by assistive devices (Gurette & Anthony, 1999). The difference between assistive devices and housing modifications are that the former are usually more geared towards the person than the built environment (the home). Some examples of devices which would help older adults are: hearing aids, personal alarms, walkers, and canes (8). The use of these devices alongside housing modifications greatly increases the safety of older adults that choose to age in place instead of moving into an assisted living environment.