

*Design for the young and you exclude the old;  
design for the old and you include the young.'*

BERNARD ISAACS, FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE  
BIRMINGHAM CENTRE FOR APPLIED GERONTOLOGY



# Age-friendly built environments

OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT


AUSTRALIAN LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION 

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

3	Ageing and the built environment
4	Role of local government
5	Benefits for local government
5	About this paper
7	Strategies for designing age-friendly built environments
8	1. Promote age-friendly built environments
10	2. Create a safe and secure pedestrian environment
12	3. Foster age-friendly community planning and design
14	4. Improve transportation options for seniors
16	5. Support recreation facilities, parks and tracks
18	6. Encourage housing choices
20	Resources

## KEY POINTS

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- the number of people aged over 65 will grow from 2.5 million as at June 2002, to 7.1 million by 2051.
  - the proportion of people over 65 years will grow from 13% as at June 2002, to one quarter of the population by 2051.
  - the proportion of people over 85 years is expected to grow from 1.4% as at June 2002, to around 6% by 2051.
  - the proportion of the population aged between 15-64 years (labour force age) will fall from 67% as at June 2002, to around 59% by 2051.

Source: Population Projections, Australia, 2002-2101 (ABS Cat No.3222.0).



# Ageing and the built environment

The ageing of Australia's population, attributable to increased longevity, falls in fertility and the maturing of the baby boomer generation, will present significant challenges in relation to the built environment—the buildings, structures and spaces in which we live, work and play.

In Australia, low density urban development, a characteristic of many communities, is not particularly age-friendly. Features, such as rapid suburbanisation, dispersed development patterns, the lack of footpaths, separation of land uses and automobile dependency all present significant obstacles to the independence of seniors.

Nevertheless, good urban design can play a major role in allowing seniors to age in place and remain active - both physically active and active in their local communities. A safe pedestrian environment, easy access to shopping centres, a mix of housing choices, nearby health centres and recreational facilities are all important elements that can positively affect the ageing experience.

In its submission to the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, the World Health Organisation observed that age-friendly built environments can make the:

*“...difference between independence and dependence for all individuals but are of particular importance for those growing older. For example, older people who live in an unsafe environment or areas with multiple physical barriers are less likely to get out and therefore more prone to isolation, depression, reduced fitness and increased mobility problems<sup>1</sup>”.*

Further, a recent report to the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council argued that:

*Consideration of the built environment is essential to the achievement of the vision of increased healthy life expectancy. The built environment has a powerful impact on mobility, independence, autonomy and quality of life in old age and can also facilitate or impede the quest for a healthy lifestyle at all ages<sup>2</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> WHO, Active Ageing: A Policy Framework, 2002, page 27

<sup>2</sup> Promoting Healthy Ageing in Australia, 2003, page 47



# Role of local government

Local government has long been involved in shaping built environment outcomes through its land use strategic planning, development assessment and building approval responsibilities.

However, beyond that, there is a wide range of additional roles which individual councils can (and do) adopt, depending upon their capacity and resources and the needs and priorities of the local community. These include:

- addressing the housing needs of disadvantaged Australians and those facing short term crisis. Local councils do this in a variety of ways, including the development of local housing policies, codes and regulations, monitoring the quality of design and construction of housing, expanding the availability of land, controlling the density of housing and undertaking joint ventures to build housing and managing housing stock.
- developing public open space to enhance the overall urban landscape and contribute to the health and wellbeing of the community in the form of parks, gardens, squares and plazas, ecological and conservation zones, linear reserves, walkways and promenades, sporting and recreation facilities and water areas.
- planning, coordination, policy development and in many cases direct service provision of community and human services to their local communities—particularly those aimed to promote healthy environments and control the causes of disease, illness and injury.

## **BENEFITS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

There are substantial benefits for local government to improve efficiencies in the built environment.

In designing age-friendly built environments, local government can benefit individuals through improved health and overall wellbeing, increase independence and greater social interaction. Local government can also benefit the entire community. Age-friendly built environments can make neighbourhoods more liveable for all ages, reduce costs associated with health and aged care and yield a range of social and economic benefits by extending and expanding seniors' contribution to community life.

To achieve these outcomes, informed action is required by a range of key stakeholders within local government such as town planning, engineering, parks and gardens, sport and recreation and also aged and disability services. In addition, local government will need to continue to build partnerships with other spheres of government, the private sector and community organisations.

## **ABOUT THIS PAPER**

In this paper you'll find six fact sheets which cover a range of age-friendly built environment issues, which are relevant to local councils including case studies.

Each fact sheet includes a list of initiatives local councils can use to support age-friendly built environments. While not exhaustive, the initiatives below are not random ideas. Many are grounded in research findings or have already been implemented by local councils. The list includes approaches that vary in nature. Some are short-term, while others are long term. Some initiatives are costly, while others are relatively inexpensive. Some are comprehensive and others more targeted.

For information on the challenges local government face in relation to town planning, housing and transportation read Cr Geoff Lake's speech to the National Speakers Series *A community for all ages: building the future—a local government perspective*.

> <http://www.alga.asn.au/newsroom/speeches/2005/20050927.php>



# Strategies for designing age-friendly built environments



- 1 PROMOTE AGE-FRIENDLY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS
- 2 CREATE SAFE AND SECURE PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENTS
- 3 FOSTER AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DESIGN
- 4 IMPROVE MOBILITY OPTIONS FOR SENIORS
- 5 SUPPORT RECREATION FACILITIES, PARKS AND TRAILS
- 6 ENCOURAGE HOUSING CHOICES



## 1 PROMOTE AGE-FRIENDLY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

Local government is uniquely positioned to support age-friendly built environments by: coordinating decision making within their local community, by promoting awareness of age-friendly built environments and by developing and implementing community design plans, strategies and policies that support age-friendly built environments.

### INITIATIVES

#### *Raise community awareness*

- Raise public awareness of age-friendly built environment issues through forums, workshops and seminars.
- Encourage local media to write feature stories on age-friendly built environment issues.
- Support promotional activities and media events that encourage age-friendly built environments.
- Champion a range of housing and transport options, active lifestyles and community design that supports age-friendly built environments.

#### *Support age-friendly built environment programs*

- Offer and promote awards for planning, designing and building age-friendly built environments
- Sponsor incentive programs that encourage the planning, designing and building sectors to develop age-friendly homes and neighbourhoods.
- Appoint or designate an officer with responsibility for ageing, including the provision of a support framework to ensure the achievement of Council's local ageing strategy and objectives.
- Provide training for council employees on issues associated with an age-friendly built environment.





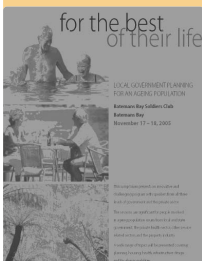
### *Foster collaboration and information sharing*

- Convene a whole-of-council roundtable to discuss age-friendly built environment issues.
- Inform the planning, design and building sectors about the benefits of an age-friendly built environment
- Establish a mechanism that will give seniors the opportunity to provide input on community design issues.
- Work in partnership with community agencies, residents and the private sector to achieve locally appropriate age-friendly built environment outcomes.
- Seek to be involved in relevant local/regional/State and national built environment forums which determine directions and resource allocations in relation to ageing.

## COUNCIL ACTION ON AGEING

### *Local Government Planning for an Ageing Population Conference*

**Eurobodalla Shire Council, NSW**



Eurobodalla Shire Council on the south coast of New South Wales hosted the Local Government Planning for an Ageing Population Conference in November 2005. The symposium presented an innovative program with speakers from all three spheres of government and the private sector. A wide range of issues related to the built environment were presented covering community planning and design, transport, housing and infrastructure.



# 2

## 2 CREATE SAFE AND SECURE PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENTS

Walking, the oldest mode of transportation is heavily influenced by the built environment, specifically streetscape design. Attention to streets and streetscape amenities can foster the mobility of older people and their participation in community life. Moreover, walking helps seniors maintain healthy lifestyles, notably physical activity which is essential for preventative health.

### INITIATIVES

#### *Improve and maintain the road and footpath network*

- Conduct a ‘walkability’ audit to identify gaps and places for improvement in the road and footpath network.
- Develop a road and footpath inspection program.
- Encourage pedestrian friendly design including narrower streets, double sided footpaths and use of non-slip semiporous footpath materials.

#### *Boost visual appeal*

- Provide adequate street and park furniture: benches, resting places and awnings for shade
- Plant and nurture trees
- Signage for streets and businesses should be legible for both drivers and pedestrians.
- Remove graffiti and rubbish.
- Improve orientation and navigation by incorporating lighting into design features—stairs, walls and walkways.

#### *Address safety concerns*

- Employ strategies for enhancing security through urban design techniques such as crime prevention through environment design (CPTED).
- Provide sufficient lighting.



- Clean up and patrol vacant properties.
- Provide shading along footpaths and repair cracks in pavements.
- Ensure appropriate landscaping.

### *Construct safer street crossings*

- Replace existing street signage with larger lettering, colour contrast, plain fonts and non reflective surfaces.
- Ensure the design of roads and intersections take account of the mobility, visual and hearing capacity of all community members, not just the young and the agile.
- Implement safety measures such as adequately timed lights, disability access compliance, clearly marked crosswalks at intersections and traffic-calming devices.

## COUNCIL ACTION ON AGEING

### *Walk with Care*

#### **Cities of Unley, West Torrens, Holdfast Bay and Prospect, SA**

‘Walk with Care’ is an older pedestrian safety program that aims to reduce the incidence and severity of crashes involving pedestrians aged 60 and over by addressing pedestrian mobility, access and the safety needs most relevant to older people.

The ‘Walk with Care’ program gives older pedestrians and community groups the opportunity to discuss local road safety issues and concerns. The information gathered from a ‘Walk with Care’ survey and discussion groups help the Council provide advice regarding existing facilities and develop solutions to safety concerns raised by older pedestrians.

The ‘Walk with Care’ program was first piloted in the City of Unley in 2000 and was subsequently adopted by the cities of West Torrens, Holdfast Bay and Prospect.

> [http://www.transport.sa.gov.au/safety/road/initiatives/walk\\_care.asp](http://www.transport.sa.gov.au/safety/road/initiatives/walk_care.asp)



# 3

## 3 FOSTER AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DESIGN

The way communities are designed and built can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of seniors and their quality of life. Many seniors spend a great deal of time in their local neighbourhood. They tend to shop locally, regularly use public facilities such as libraries and parks and participate in local social and recreation activities. Consideration in planning, designing and building environments that are safe and accessible to seniors is vital in supporting their desire to live in their own homes and local communities.

### INITIATIVES

#### *Update planning and development processes*

- Create a social impact assessment framework for addressing age-friendly issues within the planning process.
- Disseminate a brochure outlining age-friendly principles and requirements to builders and developers.
- Offer information sessions to local design professionals, builders and developers to highlight seniors' needs and requirements.
- Access professional advice to assist and up skill Council staff.

#### *Enhance urban and community design strategies*

- Integrate the needs of seniors in urban and community planning, particularly housing, transport, health and social services.
- Stimulate development of mixed-use projects that encourages an environment built to the human scale—interconnected streets and paths.
- Implement a community renewal program, incorporating age-friendly principles to revitalise and improve areas of disadvantage.



- Employ GIS technology to determine land-use trends and predict future growth—such as walkability, mixed use and street connectivity.
- Establish appropriate mechanisms that will give seniors the opportunity to provide input into community design issues.

## COUNCIL ACTION ON AGEING

### *Better Living in Dallas & Broadmeadows—Urban Renewal Plan*

#### Hume City Council

Hume City Council in Melbourne’s north won the 2004 Australian Government’s Planning for an Ageing Community award for its innovative Better Living in Broadmeadows and Dallas Urban Renewal Plan.

The plan covers an area containing over 5,000 homes, most of which were constructed by the Housing Commission, but only a portion remain in public ownership. This is not a two-dimensional ‘town plan’. The urban renewal plan is multi-faceted and involves local community and economic development, cultural enrichment, strengthening of the social fabric, as well as the more obvious physical aspects of infrastructure renewal, improved community facilities, upgrading of the public realm and property redevelopment.



Dallas-Broadmeadows is geographically located in a key strategic metropolitan location and is on the cusp of change. This plan is about providing some intervention and leadership to ensure the future of Dallas and Broadmeadows.

- > <http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Page/Download.asp?name=dallassummaryversion.pdf&size=1515466&link=../Files/dallassummaryversion.pdf>



# 4

## 4 IMPROVE MOBILITY OPTIONS FOR SENIORS

Mobility is critical to the well-being of Australia's older population. Affordable, easy-to-use and flexible mobility options are essential for accessing community services, especially medical services, obtaining necessary goods which require personal selection and maintaining important social linkages, such as participation in employment, recreation and learning. But, the mobility of seniors is hampered by community design features that can leave those ageing in place completely auto-dependent and stranded when they can no longer drive.

### INITIATIVES

#### *Encourage the use of alternative transport options*

- Evaluate existing transportation options in meeting the future needs of your ageing municipality.
- Publish and maintain a local transport information directory.
- Work with public transport operators to educate seniors about using public transport services.
- Explore the feasibility of introducing alternative transportation modes - ride sharing and taxis.
- Investigate the expansion of Council's community transport service.
- Encourage the development of a volunteer transport scheme.
- Further develop collaborative links with community agencies responsible for planning the complex mix of local transport services.
- Encourage local businesses to sponsor community shuttles to shopping and other commercial centres.

#### *Support old drivers*

- Hold educational workshops for older drivers.
- Participate in police and community groups activities related to older drivers.
- Raise awareness within the seniors' community of Council's road safety objectives through signage, publicity and education.



### *Enhance the road environment*

- Conduct a road safety inventory to check road safety features, reflecting age-friendly principles.
- Appoint a seniors representative to Council's Road Safety Advisory Committee.
- Maintain roads in good condition - repaint edge lines and reduce visual clutter.
- Enhance the design of roads - dedicated left-turn lanes and signals, large, easy-to-read road signs, regularly placed streetlights, central medians and raised reflectors.

## COUNCIL ACTION ON AGEING

### *Council Cab Shared Transport Service (Council Cabs)*

#### **Brisbane City Council**

In September 2001, Brisbane City Council launched Council Cab Shared Transport Service (Council Cabs) to provide subsidised taxi transport to Brisbane residents who have difficulty accessing public transport. The service currently operates scheduled door-to-door share taxis to local shopping precincts in more than 140 suburbs, at a cost to the passenger of between \$1.00 to \$2.50 per trip. Research demonstrates that Council Cabs experience superior rates of satisfaction among users, gaining high approval for destinations, frequency and the overall service. In addition, the operating cost of Council Cabs indicate that the service is comparatively an efficient method of transporting people who are transport disadvantaged. Council Cabs has proven itself to be a highly-valued mode of service delivery that complements existing infrastructure, supports citizenship and fosters healthy ageing.



> [http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/:STANDARD::pc=PC\\_1229](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/:STANDARD::pc=PC_1229)



# 5

## 5 SUPPORT RECREATION FACILITIES, PARKS AND TRACKS

Neighbourhood parks that are within walking and biking distance of a person's home or work can encourage greater physical activity. Trails that link homes, work, commercial centres, public transport and community facilities provide safe and attractive thoroughfares for pedestrians. These facilities, combined with educational programs about health and active living, can create opportunities for residents of all ages to be healthier.

### INITIATIVES

#### *Develop a cohesive system of parks and tracks*

- Review the existing system of parks and tracks and identify ways to expand and improve connections.
- Create corridors of open space that can be used as recreational parkland and movement systems.
- Build pathways through neighbourhoods to connect homes with destinations.

#### *Ensure that physical activity facilities are accessible and affordable*

- Construct new facilities along tracks or public transport routes to make them more accessible.
- Ensure that residents have access to walking and cycling tracks and community fitness centres.
- Maintain and create neighbourhood parks.

#### *Support programs that promotes active living*

- Encourage and support physical activity programs for seniors—fitness, strength, flexibility and balancing activities.
- Support walking and cycling clubs.
- Promote special events that support active living.





## COUNCIL ACTION ON AGEING

### *Growing Old Living Dangerously (GOLD) Program*

City of Joondalup, WA

In May 2003, Craigie Leisure Centre's Aquatic facilities were closed temporarily as part of the City of Joondalup's commitment to redevelopment. Seniors were faced with the prospect of not being able to continue their regular fitness classes, which were run by the Joondalup Leisure Centre GOLD Program.

The GOLD Program ensured that participants were able to keep their regular instructors, by providing transport to alternative venues where additional classes and programs were being offered. The program included aquarobics, gym circuit classes, modified pump classes, aerobics classes, fitball classes and special events every month.

The GOLD Program has enabled seniors to continue participating as a group in a range of activities, providing enormous social benefits as well as an opportunity to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. In recognition of the program's innovation and excellence, the Council was awarded the Western Australian Heart Foundation/Kellogg's Local Government Award.



> [http://www.joondalup.wa.gov.au/cms/templates/coj2\\_lifestyle\\_grp.asp?id=21](http://www.joondalup.wa.gov.au/cms/templates/coj2_lifestyle_grp.asp?id=21)



# 6

## 6 ENCOURAGE HOUSING CHOICES

The availability of affordable, accessible and suitable housing options is particularly important for older people, and will be a priority as the Australian population ages. The changing age profile, along with lifestyle and work pattern changes, will impact on future housing arrangements. It will therefore be important to provide flexible models of accommodation, encompassing a wide range of settings, while at the same time fostering supportive environments and independence.

### INITIATIVES

#### *Increase housing options*

- Develop a community information strategy to promote housing options for seniors.
- Support and/or resource demonstration projects that encourage innovation in design and diversity of housing choice for seniors.
- Identify and explore opportunities for aged care accommodation.

#### *Ensure essential infrastructure provision and service delivery*

- Promote ageing-in-place as a preference for seniors with services such as home modification and maintenance program.
- Ensure the provision of adequate urban infrastructure to support ageing-in-place.
- Sponsor workshops that concern seniors—safety in the home, prevention of falls and injury prevention, care issues and home security.

#### *Enhance planning and development processes*

- Streamline approval processes to facilitate the production of seniors' housing developments, in particular residential aged care facilities.
- Develop an age friendly assessment procedure for housing development applications.



- Ensure seniors are consulted in the planning and location of aged housing developments.
- Promote universal design and ‘smart housing’ principles in housing developments.
- Establish mechanisms to encourage suitable housing outcomes for seniors such as developer contributions, inclusionary zoning and betterment levies.

## COUNCIL ACTION ON AGEING

### *Homewise Kit*

#### **Nillumbik Shire Council—VIC**

Nillumbik Shire Council won the inaugural Australian Government’s Planning for an Ageing Community award—for its Homewise Kit.

The Kit, part of Nillumbik’s older persons health promotion program: ageing in your home project, provides a range of helpful hints and considerations for builders and residents to make their home design more age-friendly and enhance the ability of older people to live independently, in their place of choice, for longer.

The project raises the awareness of professionals such as architects, draughtsmen, builders and landscapers to the importance of designing for ageing in the planning process, and should help older residents by removing barriers of poor housing and landscape design. It acknowledges that safe, accessible housing design impacts on falls prevention, and that falls prevention in the home is extremely important for older people at home.

> [http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page\\_Id=206&h=0](http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page_Id=206&h=0)





## RESOURCES

### **City of Victor Harbour A Better Practice for the Development of Retirement Villages on the Southern Fleurieu | 2004**

> [http://www.victor.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Retirement\\_Villages1.pdf](http://www.victor.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Retirement_Villages1.pdf)

This report aims to respond to the rapid growth of retirement villages and concerns over the ability of the existing services to meet growing needs.

### **Department of Health and Ageing National Speakers Series: A Community for all Ages – Building the Future | 2005**

> <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/communityforallages-1-lp>

The Speaker Series aims to increase awareness of the need to design the built environment to sustain health and well-being for an ageing population. The website provides transcripts of all presentation and workshop discussions.

### **Department of Health and Ageing Built Environment Paper | 2004**

> <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-agefriendlybuilt-afbe.htm>

Background Paper presented to the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference on 28 July 2004.

### **Heart Foundation Healthy by Design: A planners' guide to environments for active living | 2004**

> <http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/index.cfm?page=422>

Healthy by Design has been developed by the Heart Foundation (Victorian Division) in response to local government requests for practical guidance in designing walkable, and ultimately more liveable, communities.

### **Hume City Council Older Persons Accommodation Strategy | 2002**

> <http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Page/Download.asp?name=OlderPersonsAccommodationStrategy.pdf&size=254676&link=../Files/OlderPersonsAccommodationStrategy.pdf>

The strategy seeks to inform Council's role in planning and advocating for the development of a range of accommodation options to meet the current and future needs of older residents in the municipality and provides a contest for further action in this area.

### **NSW Department of Planning NSW Environmental Planning Policy (Senior Living) | 2004**

> <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/settingthedirection/housing.asp>

The NSW planning policy that deals with housing for older people and people with disabilities.

### **Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council Promoting Healthy Ageing in Australia | 2003**

> <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-agefriendlybuilt-phaia.htm>

The 'Promoting Healthy Ageing in Australia' report presented to the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council in June 2003.

### **Redland Shire Council**

#### **Aged Persons Housing Strategy | 2004**

> [http://www.redland.qld.gov.au/rscweb/emplibrary/Aged\\_Persons\\_Housing\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.redland.qld.gov.au/rscweb/emplibrary/Aged_Persons_Housing_Strategy.pdf)

The primary focus of the strategy is aged persons housing, particular in relation to choice, affordability, location and design. However the strategy also incorporates a range of other issues that assist older people to age in place, such as access to service and education.

### **Victorian Department of Human Services Environments for Health | 2004**

> <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/localgov/index.htm>

Environments for Health provides a framework for planning that considers the impact on health and wellbeing of factors originating across any or all of the built, social, economic, and natural environments.

#### PUBLISHED BY:



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ALGA gratefully acknowledges the generous financial support of the Australian Government in the development of this paper.