Age-friendly research publications

Listed are abstracts of age-friendly research conducted by researchers at the University of Manitoba.

Making rural and remote communities more age-friendly: experts’ perspectives on issues, challenges, and priorities.

Menec V, Bell S, Novek S, Minnigaleeva GA, Morales E, Ouma T, Parodi JF, Winterton R.


Abstract

With the growing interest worldwide in making communities more age-friendly, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the factors that help or hinder communities in attaining this goal. In this article, we focus on rural and remote communities and present perspectives of 42 experts in the areas of aging, rural and remote issues, and policy who participated in a consensus conference on age-friendly rural and remote communities. Discussions highlighted that strengths in rural and remote communities, such as easy access to local leaders and existing partnerships, can help to further age-friendly goals; however, addressing major challenges, such as lack of infrastructure and limited availability of social and health services, requires regional or national government buy-in and funding opportunities. Age-friendly work in rural and remote communities is, therefore, ideally embedded in larger age-friendly initiatives and supported by regional or national policies, programs, and funding sources.
Assessing Communities’ Age-Friendliness: How Congruent Are Subjective Versus Objective Assessments?

Menec VH, Newall NE, Nowicki S.

Abstract

The notion of age-friendliness is gaining increasing attention from policy makers and researchers. In this study, we examine the congruence between two types of age-friendly surveys: subjective assessments by community residents versus objective assessments by municipal officials. The study was based on data from 39 mostly rural communities in Manitoba, Canada, in which a municipal official and residents (M = 25 residents per community) completed a survey to assess age-friendly features in a range of domains, such as transportation and housing. Congruence between the two surveys was generally good, although the municipal official survey consistently overestimated communities’ age-friendliness, relative to residents’ ratings. The findings suggest that a survey completed by municipal officials can provide a reasonable assessment of age-friendliness that may be useful for certain purposes, such as cross-community comparisons. However, some caution is warranted when using only these surveys for community development, as they may not adequately reflect residents’ views.
What community characteristics help or hinder rural communities in becoming age-friendly? Perspectives from a Canadian prairie province.

Spina J, Menec VH.

Abstract

Age-friendly initiatives are increasingly promoted as a policy solution to healthy aging. The primary objective of this article was to examine older adults’ and key stakeholders’ perceptions of the factors that either help or hinder a community from becoming age-friendly in the context of rural Manitoba, a Canadian prairie province. Twenty-four older adults and 17 key informants completed a qualitative interview. The findings show that contextual factors including size, location, demographic composition, ability to secure investments, and leadership influence rural communities’ ability to become age-friendly. Government must consider the challenges these communities face in becoming more age-friendly and develop strategies to support communities.

Examining the relationship between communities’ ‘age-friendliness’ and life satisfaction and self-perceived health in rural Manitoba, Canada.

Menec VH, Nowicki S.

Abstract

Introduction: Population aging is a worldwide phenomenon. As a response, the World Health Organization (WHO) introduced the concept of ‘age-friendliness’ in 2006. Age-friendliness is defined in terms of a range of domains, such as housing, opportunities for participation, and transportation. Communities that accommodate the needs of older adults in these domains will, it is thought, promote healthy, active aging. The purpose of the present study was to examine communities’ age-friendliness and its relationship to health-related outcomes in a rural context.
Methods: The study included 29 communities located in Manitoba, a mid-Western Canadian province, that are part of the Province of Manitoba’s Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative. As part of a needs assessment process in these communities, 593 individuals, including seniors and younger adults, completed an Age-Friendly Survey. The survey was designed to measure a variety of features in seven domains (the physical environment, housing options, the social environment, opportunities for participation, community supports and healthcare services, transportation options, and communication and information), as well as containing measures of life satisfaction and self-perceived health. Community characteristics were derived from census data. Moreover, communities were categorized on a rural-urban continuum.

Results: Multi-level regressions indicated that an overall Age-Friendly Index was positively related to both life satisfaction (b=0.019, p<0.0001) and self-perceived health (b=0.013, p<0.01). When examining more specifically each of the seven age-friendly domains, all but housing was positively related to life satisfaction. Results were not as consistent for self-perceived health, with significant relationships emerging only for the physical environment, social environment, opportunities for participation, and transportation options. A subsequent analysis for seniors versus younger participants, respectively, indicated that significant relationships between age-friendly domains and life satisfaction and self-perceived health were restricted primarily to seniors. None of the community characteristics were related to life satisfaction and self-perceived health, nor was degree of rurality.

Conclusions: The concept of age-friendliness has been garnering considerable attention from policy-makers as a way to promote healthy aging. For example, in Canada, several provinces have launched age-friendly initiatives. Although causality cannot be inferred from the present, cross-sectional study, the findings are encouraging as they show that age-friendliness is associated with enhanced life satisfaction and self-perceived health in a rural context. The study further supports the notion that a wide range of domains within the community environment are important in older adults’ lives and need to be considered. Public policy initiatives, such as the Province of Manitoba’s Age-Friendly Initiative, may thus be one approach to enhancing healthy aging in rural settings.
Lessons learned from a Canadian province-wide age-friendly initiative: the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative.

Menec VH, Novek S, Veselyuk D, McArthur J.

Abstract

The Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative was launched in 2008. A formative evaluation we conducted in 2011 with 44 participating rural and urban communities demonstrates considerable progress, with virtually all communities having formed an Age-Friendly Committee and conducting a community assessment to identify priorities for action. The majority of communities implemented one or more age-friendly projects. Major barriers to becoming age-friendly identified by participants included lack of funding; lack of capacity, particularly in small communities; and lack of leadership or direction. The study highlights the importance of strong leadership at all levels of government (municipal, provincial, federal); the need to support communities, particularly rural ones, as they try to become more age-friendly; and the importance of ongoing promotion of age-friendliness locally and more broadly (e.g., provincially).

“You don’t want to ask for the help” the imperative of independence: is it related to social exclusion?

Bell S, Menec V.

Abstract

Independence is highly valued in Western society. The emphasis on independence and consequent fear of dependence may, however, have a downside, potentially leading to social exclusion. Through photovoice methodology, we explored what older adults say about the importance of independence in their lives and how independence may relate to social exclusion. Data consisted of photographs, journals, interviews, and focus group transcripts from 30 participants residing in Manitoba, Canada, collected as part of a larger program of research on “age-friendly” communities. Findings highlighted the importance of resources and supports to help older adults remain independent and feel included and that fear of dependence and being perceived as “old” can lead to social
exclusion. Policy initiatives designed to make communities more age-friendly are one way to enhance older adults’ independence and, ultimately, quality of life. It is equally important, however, that such initiatives go hand-in-hand with reimagining aging and old age.

**Conceptualizing age-friendly communities**

Menec VH, Means R, Keating N, Parkhurst G, Eales J.

**Abstract**

On the political and policy front, interest has increased in making communities more “age-friendly”, an ongoing trend since the World Health Organization launched its global Age-Friendly Cities project. We conceptualize age-friendly communities by building on the WHO framework and applying an ecological perspective. We thereby aim to make explicit key assumptions of the interplay between the person and the environment to advance research or policy decisions in this area. Ecological premises (e.g., there must be a fit between the older adult and environmental conditions) suggest the need for a holistic and interdisciplinary research approach. Such an approach is needed because age-friendly domains (the physical environment, housing, the social environment, opportunities for participation, informal and formal community supports and health services, transportation, communication, and information) cannot be treated in isolation from intrapersonal factors, such as age, gender, income, and functional status, and other levels of influence, including the policy environment.