The Importance of Neighborhoods for Health and Well-Being at Older Ages

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Plan for this talk

- Highlight research on neighborhoods and health
- Describe current efforts to create age-friendly neighborhoods and communities
What factors affect health?
How do neighborhoods affect health?
The places where we live, work, and play affect our health. They provide opportunities for us to make healthy or unhealthy choices. They provide various resources that can promote our health.
The Research: Summary
Poor places create poor health

- Living in a high poverty neighborhood is associated with worse health – and not just for poor people.
- Living in a highly educated neighborhood is good for the health of all residents, not just those with higher education.
Neighborhood Effects on Health

Neighborhood Context (Living in a poor or less educated neighborhood)

Physical Environment

Service Environment

Social and Economic Environment

Individual level Behavior, Income, Assets, Education, Psychosocial Characteristics

Health & Wellbeing
Neighborhood Physical Environment

- Natural Environment
  - Water and air quality

- Built Environment
  - Walkability
  - Sitability
  - Parks and recreational opportunity
  - Lead paint
Neighborhood Service Environment

- Health Care Services
- Social Services
- Transportation
- Education
- Police, sanitation
- Food (markets, fast food), liquor
Neighborhood Social and Economic Environment

- Economic opportunity—availability of jobs, quality of jobs
- Housing opportunities (e.g., mortgage crisis)
- Crime and Safety
- Social Capital – trust and support
- Social Norms – exercise, food, smoking
Neighborhood Context: Particularly Important to Older Adults

- Theory:
  - Person-Environment Fit (Powell Lawton)
    - Adaptation reflects the interaction of personal and environmental characteristics
  - Life Course Approach
    - Cumulative disadvantage
Neighborhood Action
Action on Neighborhoods: Motivation

- Neighborhoods do matter for health
- Our society and neighborhoods are aging
- Our aging neighborhoods are diverse
- Older adults prefer aging in place
- Maintaining or improving the health of our aging society requires attention to neighborhood context
Aging-Friendly Communities

- Promote the physical and psychosocial wellbeing of community members throughout the life cycle.

- Specific to older adults: Does the neighborhood support the five psychosocial developmental tasks of later life: continuity, compensation, connection, contribution, and challenge?
WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities

- Cities conduct comprehensive assessments
- Cities engage neighborhoods in creating a plan of action – engaging all sectors and stakeholders
- NYC was the first participant in the WHO initiative to create a plan of action
Creating an Age-Friendly NYC
One Neighborhood at a Time

A Toolkit for Establishing an Aging Improvement District in Your Community

2012
Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities (WHO)

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health services
Things to think about

- What is your community doing?
- What could it be doing?
- Do all older adults have the same opportunities in their neighborhoods?
- What is the responsibility of government, the private sector, and citizens for promoting age-friendly communities?
What do you need to create an Aging Improvement District?

1. A neighborhood where older adults live and improvements are needed

2. A community organization or entity open to addressing the issues raised by the older adults that also has paid staff available to lead the initiative

3. Support of an elected official or local governmental board or agency

4. Leadership by older adults
What is the process of creating an Aging Improvement District?

- **Community Consultations** - Aging Improvement Districts begin with a community needs assessment from the point of view of the neighborhood’s older adults. This assessment can be intensive or informal depending on the community and the resources available. The only requirement is that older adults feel heard and that leaders are able to identify key, specific, and actionable improvements that will improve the quality of life of older adults in the neighborhood.

- **Building Support From All Sectors** - Aging Improvement Districts build support for the initiative by introducing the concept of “age-friendly” to as many organizations and businesses in a community as possible, always from the point of view of how the aging of the population is an opportunity for each sector, as opposed to a burden. Partners include those who think of themselves as traditionally serving older adults as well as a much larger bank of resources in the community that do not.

- **Strategizing** - Out of the community consultations, several key actionable items are identified and prioritized. These are shared back with the community and presented in a way that people of different education levels and languages can understand and in a way that inspires leaders to take action in their own work.

- **Implementation** - A one-year work plan is developed to address several of the key findings with the help of various sectors of the community. Successes are celebrated and publicized as they occur to build momentum.

- **Refine And Repeat** - Once initial goals are accomplished, several new goals will likely emerge. Community discussions can be held again to confirm or refine these goals. A new annual plan should be developed.
Other Initiatives

- NORC (Nationally Occurring Retirement Communities) (http://www.norcblueprint.org/)
- Aging Improvement District
- Growing Older, Living Healthier (epa.gov/aging/bhc/guide/2009_Aging.pdf)
- AdvantAge Initiative (vnsny.org/advantage/survey.html)
- The Village Movement (vtvnetwork.org)
Some initiatives in Wisconsin

- Milwaukee County: Connecting Caring Communities
  - Started with RWJ funding 2002-2008 to DOA
  - [http://county.milwaukee.gov/Aging7705/ConnectingCaringCommunities/Neighborhoods.htm](http://county.milwaukee.gov/Aging7705/ConnectingCaringCommunities/Neighborhoods.htm)

- Richland County: Making Connections – Asset Based Community Development