Implementing and Evaluating Aging-Friendly Communities: Conceptual and Empirical Challenges

Resilient Places for an Aging Society: Adaptive Capacity Promotion for Healthy Living

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What is an Aging-Friendly Community?

A city, town, or neighborhood where older adults are actively involved, valued, and supported in a way that reflects their needs and priorities, including:

- Continuity
- Compensation
- Control
- Connection
- Contribution
- Challenge

Scharlach & Lehning, 2016
Aging-Friendly Community Change
Mobility and the Built Environment

- Affordable and accessible housing
- Walkable neighborhoods with proximity to stores, services, and amenities
- Available, acceptable, accessible, adaptable, and affordable transportation options
Mobility and the Built Environment

### Strengths
- Aligns with principles of New Urbanism
- Potential environmental and economic benefits
- Potential health benefit for all ages

### Challenges
- Limitations of existing studies
- Personal preferences/market forces (NIMBY, BANANA)
- Adapting to unique community needs
Social Engagement

- Opportunities for social participation/civic engagement
- Social cohesion
- Neighborhood safety
Social Engagement

**Strengths**

- Substantial evidence linking to health and well-being
- Potential for both individual and community-wide benefits

**Challenges**

- Ageism
- Limited policies, programs, or financial incentives
Health and Social Supports

- Health and wellness
- Social services and supports
- Supports for informal caregivers
Health and Social Supports

Strengths

- Potential to prevent or delay institutionalization
- Aligns with shift to prevention, wellness, and integrated health

Challenges

- Restrictions in use and access
- LTSS are fragmented, expensive, and characterized by unmet need
- Workforce shortage
Aging-Friendly Community Initiatives
Types of AFCIs

Community Planning

Cross-Sector Collaborations

Community Development

- NORCS: An Aging in Place Initiative
- Village Network
- Age-Friendly Portland
- United Hospital Fund
- Beacon Hill Village
Context of Community Change

- Commitment
- Capacity
- Collaboration
- Consumer Involvement
- Comprehensiveness
Challenges and Next Steps
• Fuzzy conceptualization and definitions

• Concerns about allocating financial and human resources in a time of fiscal constraint

• Concerns about equity and the potential to exacerbate disparities

• Barriers to the meaningful participation of older adults

• Older adults continue to be a low priority at federal, state, and local levels
Research Challenges

- Lack of methodologically rigorous evaluations
- Much scholarship focuses on what aging-friendliness is and what AFCIs are
- Absence of a clear theory of change linking this intervention to outcomes
Neighborhood Environments & Risk of Cardiovascular Disease in Baltimore City
Thank you!

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