

How do we make cities more age friendly?



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[Natasha Boddy, The Canberra Times](#)

Ensuring the places where people want to grow old promote the best quality of life is crucial is to developing age-friendly communities, a leading British expert says.

Governments need to start bringing age-friendly policies into all aspects of decision making and creating communities where older people can fully participate should be seen as an intergenerational issue, according to professor of sociology and social gerontology, Chris Phillipson, from the University of Manchester.



Studies have shown older people want to stay in their homes and communities. *Photo: Glenn Hunt*

Professor Phillipson shared his insights on how to develop age-friendly communities at a Council on The Ageing ACT forum in Canberra this week.

"The key issue here is to view this as an intergenerational issue, bringing current as well as future generations of people into the debate about what type of society we want to build to support ageing populations," he said.

He said Australian cities were not facing a demographic crisis and in most cities, growth in the number of older people had actually been quite modest.

"There is, though, uncertainty about the benefits of an ageing population, of which there are many," he said.

"The debate about age-friendly cities provides a valuable framework for thinking both about the challenge of ageing populations and the advantages which they bring to different types of neighbourhoods and communities."

Professor Phillipson said studies had repeatedly shown people wanted to stay in their homes for as long as possible in later life.

"An attachment to a particular place and neighbourhood, alongside a growing sense of belonging and identity, becomes more and more important as we age," he said.

"For the most vulnerable, often older, people in our society this attachment and access to local support networks becomes even more crucial. Yet it is often these very people who are among the most excluded in our towns and cities today.

"Developing age-friendly communities means ensuring that the places in which people are ageing can indeed promote the best quality of life for all groups of older people."

Canberra was an early member of a World Health Organisation global network of age-friendly cities and has one of the country's longest life expectancies.

Most [recent data indicates the average life expectancy](#) for women in Canberra is 85 years and for men, 81 years.

Governments needed to bring age-friendly policies into all aspects of decision making, Professor Phillipson said.

This included promoting good transportation, accessible buildings, affordable housing and high-quality community health services.

"Securing progress on each of these is essential for achieving security in later life and ensuring that older people are able to participate in the community to the fullest extent," Professor Phillipson said.

A 2011 ANU study about Canberra being age-friendly raised concerns about public transport and barriers affecting mobility, such as uneven pavements and insufficient public seating.

Professor Phillipson said key features of age-friendly communities including recognising diversity among older people, promoting their inclusion in all areas of community life, respecting their decisions and lifestyle choices and providing flexibility to ageing-related needs and preferences.