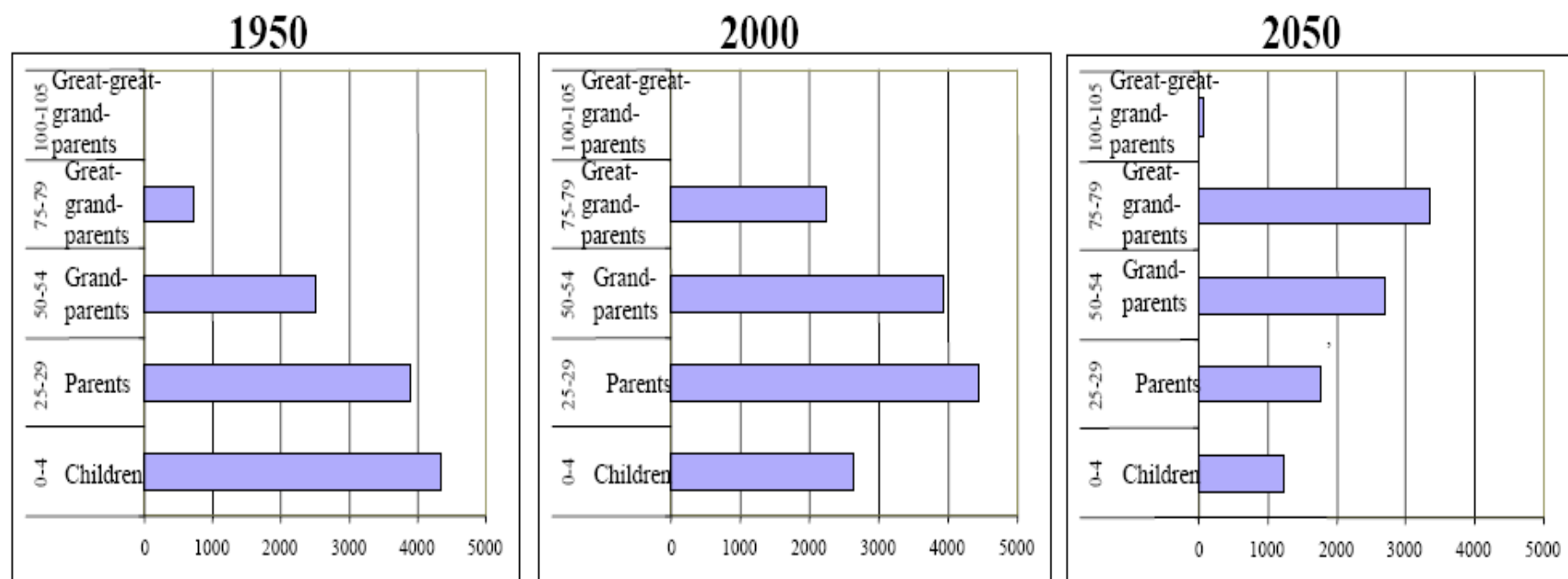# Age-friendly Communities: Does One Size Fit All?

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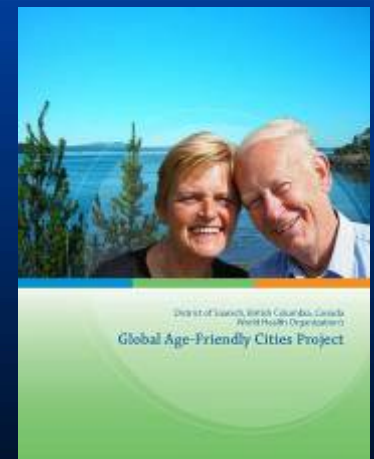
A rough evaluation of the size of 5 coexistent generations (in thousands), Italy 1950, 2000, 2050

Fonte: our elaboration on data UN, *World Population Prospects. The 2002 Revision*, New York, 2003

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings: Common Concerns of Older & Younger Seniors

- Poor pedestrian walkways
- Lack of benches & public toilets
- Heavy traffic poses challenges
- Feeling threatened by youth
- Heavy doors
- "Difficult stairs

Quotes from Older Participants

- *Quote: "I just want to say one thing; those little men don't last long enough to get across. I cross many intersections, wide streets, and I'm in the middle and the little man is gone…I believe everybody has that problem. Get those men going longer!"*

- *"It seems to me that the cubicles are getting smaller and smaller as the years go by and the doors open inward and I actually in a couple of occasions have nearly gone flying back into the toilet…Also, as you get older and your arthritis sets in, the toilet seats seem to be getting lower and lower."*

"Snow removal can be a real headache in winter"

"A lot of sidewalks are broken. They don't fix them"

"Crosswalks need to be aligned with curb cuts"

"Painted surfaces are often slippery when wet"

Transportation: Common Issues

- Transportation, whether provided by the public system or by private vehicle, was the topic which generated the most discussion in both the younger and the older focus groups

- Both groups expressed concerns over connectivity; and accessibility for those with low mobility.

- Both talked about the importance of "handivan" services.

(Y): "I quit going to church years ago when I couldn't get myself there just because of the transportation issue."

(O) "I cannot get on a bus. I can get on the bus but the minute the man takes off and the bus rocks and I'm flat on my face."

Older Senior's Thoughts

- *Quote (O): "It's [the city] good for seniors but then there's 'senior seniors.' For example, transportation – when they take my license which they will some day, I cannot get on a bus."*

Housing: Common Issues

- Both age groups expressed concerns about the lack of transitional housing options that were both affordable and deemed appropriate for their preferences and needs

- Both age groups identified a need for more "intermediate" housing such as one-level townhouses

- Concerns about the lack of available support services (help with housework, maintenance and gardening) dominated discussion in both age groups

Quotes form Participants

- – *"You do wonder about where you're going to go when your mobility becomes an issue."*
- *"What they have is one of those huge soaker tubs that you need a ladder to climb in and out of."*

(Younger participants)

- *"Most of the facilities that are at all desirable are way over $4000.00 a month. How many people can afford to cough up that kind of money to be able to be fed and housed in relatively clean and pleasant surroundings?"*

(Older participant)

Respect and Inclusion: Common Issues

Lack of respect by younger people. Examples include:

- Unfriendly gestures to older drivers in traffic
- Individuals addressing companions or caregivers rather than older person themselves
- Stereotypes of older people "disabled" as a result of their age
- Recreational resources are more directed towards youth rather than older persons

Social Participation: Commonalities

- Affordability and scheduling of programs

"A lot of people who have lived in the area for a long ..they all know each other. So it becomes a bit of a clique and to get through you need a jack hammer and a semi-truck because it just doesn't happen." (Younger senior)

"The pool's schedule is all different and you don't know in advance whether that's when there are going to be a lot of school classes there or not. In which case, you know, you really can't go comfortably swimming there…." (Older senior)

Differences by Age Group

- Inclusion and acceptance seems more of a concern for the younger senior group

- The noise level of the facility or scheduling (e.g. night time programs) seemed more important for the older senior group

Communications

Similarities

Dealing with the complexities of automated phone information services and the size of print related to any communication tools (e.g. medications, phone book, bank statements)-

Differences

The younger senior group was more concerned about society's move to internet based communication and information services which may decrease accessibility to seniors

Quotes

"I spent 20 minutes on the phone just before I came trying to get through to BCAA to membership and do you think I could get through? I was put on five different things and I never did get a membership and I never did talk to a person and that is very frustrating."

(Younger senior)

"I have often wondered if there's any legislation as to the size of the print and how many times do you have to get out a magnifying glass to look at the words? And I wish something could be done about that, especially with medication."

(Older seniors)

Health and Social Services

Similarities

- affordability of medical services

- shortage of practitioners

- Home care support difficulties

Differences

The older senior group was mostly concerned with affordability issues and shortage of practitioners; whereas the younger senior group mentioned a lack of support for those who are caregivers themselves and long waits for medical services

Transportation: Similarities

Driving

- The importance of driving
- Handicapped parking – availability and location

*"**and there really should be a lot more handicapped parking I think and somehow people who don't have a handicapped sticker, they still are using handicapped parking spots. I mean they really shouldn't be, there seems to be no way of patrolling that or enforcing that.**"* (Saanich, BC)

Transportation: Similarities

Handicap transport

- Lack of flexibility
- Lack of evening/weekend access

"*I have no complaints with the handi-van, they treat me wonderful, they know where I live and, what time I travel usually. But, my only complaint that I can put towards the transportation here in Portage, is for somebody like myself in a wheelchair, life stops at five o'clock in the afternoon.*" (Portage la Prairie, MB)

What Have We Learned?

- Need for a 'senior's lens' in all community planning

- Need for local identification of issues and solutions – one size doesn't fit all
  - transportation, services, clubs, facilities

- Maintenance of existing infrastructure and also specific improvements
  - wheelchair ramps, lighting, x-walks, handicapped parking. Not only are people aging, our cities and towns are aging as well.

Next Steps in BC:
BC Age-friendly Implementation Team

On October 1, 2007, the BC Ministry of Health introduced the BC Age-friendly Implementation Team. Goals will be to roll out Age-friendly communities across BC in time for the 2010 Olympics.

Objectives of The BC Age-friendly Implementation Team

To develop plans and work with local governments and communities across BC to:

- build capacity & work with Measuring Up

- assist and enable local governments and communities to implement local age-friendly initiatives,

- to create the conditions in BC to enable older people age 65+ to age actively.

Age-friendly Communities: Steps to Getting Started

Step 1

- Define your community on a map.
- Decide if it involves a neighbourhood, town region or joint efforts of several communities
- Identify what initiatives are already " underway that this one could build on.

Step 2

- Obtain copies of Global Age-friendly Cities guide and Age-friendly Rural and Remote Communities guide.

- Available on our web site at seniorsincommunites.ca/age-friendly

Step 3

- Create an Age-friendly Project Team.
- Who to include:
  - Seniors
  - Business people
  - City planners
  - Parks and recreation people
  - Health care providers
  - Cultural and racial reps of your community
  - Council members
  - Seniors organizations

Step 4

- Get local government buy-in. Pass a resolution to support an age-friendly project.

Step 5

- Appoint an age-friendly Coordinator.

Step 6

- Get wider community buy-in
- Apply for funding to assist

Step 7

- Establish timeline and tasks for completing your assessment

Step 8

- Conduct community assessment using:
  - Focus groups
  - Survey
  - Town Hall Meeting
  - Photography

Step 9

- Prioritize changes needed
- Submit recommendations
- Secure commitment and funding to move forward.

What can the team provide?

- Start-up Guide
- Web Site (www.seniorsincommunities.ca/age-friendly)
- Newsletter
- On-site, telephone and e-mail consultation
- Assistance with data collection, analysis and interpretation
- Assistance in networking with other communities engaged in age-friendly work
- Funding sources and business case development

Age-friendly Communities in BC

- Partner Communities in Age-friendly Guides
- Expressed interest in becoming a Partner Community
- Seniors Housing & Support Initiative Age-friendly Projects

An Age-friendly Community:

- promotes 'active ageing';

- helps prevent and correct the barriers that people encounter as they grow older; and

- ensures policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to age actively – to live in security, enjoy good health and participate fully in their communities.

Thank you