
Age-friendly Communities: a handbook of principles to guide local policy and action

February 2025



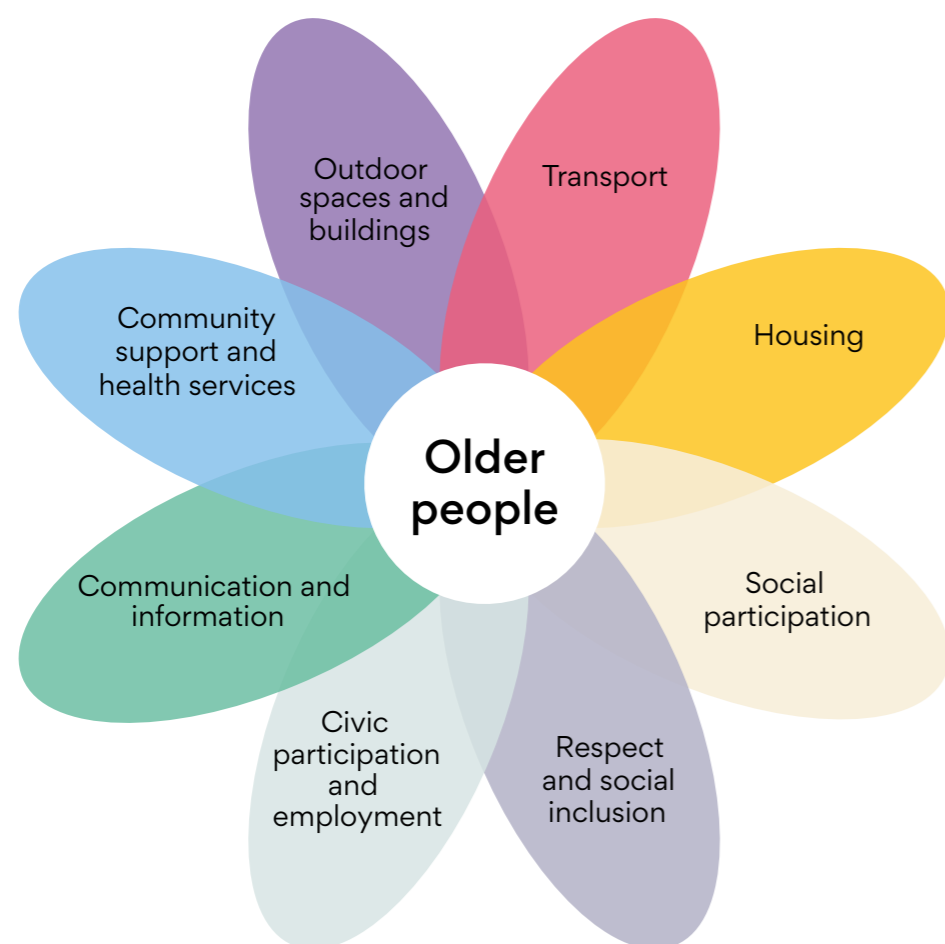
About this handbook

This handbook has been designed for people working in or with local authorities in the UK to help them to identify ways to make their towns, cities, counties and regions better places to age.

The handbook is structured according to the World Health Organisation's Eight Domains of Age-friendly Communities. These domains are part of a [framework](#) first published in 2007, which cover the key components of places that impact on how well people age.

For each domain, we have provided a **summary** of its influence on people's lives; an explanation of the **need** for it to be addressed; and some **key stats** to illustrate the challenges and opportunities within the domain. This is followed by the core **principles** that we advise considering any policy, intervention or approach within this domain.

To illustrate what kinds of actions can be taken, we have included **examples** of practices that are already making a difference across a range of types of communities, at different price points. Simply put, we believe if all these principles were acted upon, a community would be truly age-friendly.



How was this handbook developed?

Internal expertise at the Centre for Ageing Better helped to identify a number of handbooks that used these domains to promote the development of age-friendly communities. Further resources were added using an iterative approach based on sources cited in different handbooks, interviews with handbook creators, and other experts.

Ten documents were reviewed that varied in length, organisational affiliation, and geography. The review found common themes that formed the basis for a first draft of this document. This process is in line with the methodologies used to create other age-friendly handbooks. It has been created in partnership with professionals in local government, academia, policy experts, and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations with experience and expertise in ageing and older people.

The guide has also been informed by conversations with Ageing Better's Experts by Experience Network, a group of people aged 50 and over with lived experience of the issues Ageing Better seeks to address. The handbook is endorsed by the Local Government Association.

Why be age-friendly?

The UK population is ageing. In the last 40 years, the number of people aged 50 and over has increased by 47% and nearly one in five of us are now aged 65 or over.¹ Over the next 20 years that will become one in four. Meanwhile, the number of people aged 80 and over – the fastest growing segment of the population – is set to more than double to over 6 million.²

The fact that many of us are living longer is to be celebrated, but this huge shift requires system-wide and nationwide action, affecting infrastructure, economies, and services.

Local authorities have a key role to play

Local government's role as place makers and conveners, as well as service providers make them well placed to act far beyond social care and for the long-term benefit of current residents and future generations.

We recognise that all use of capacity and budgets involves tough choices, and that no locality will be able to implement all the recommendations presented. However, where improvements can be made, this handbook can help to ensure they make a real difference to the age-friendliness of your community.

When inequalities in how people age are addressed, all of society benefits. Many of the changes that can make a difference to people's independence, inclusion and wellbeing in later life benefit other groups. This includes children and young people, parents, disabled people, and people of all ages experiencing structural and place-based inequalities.

Many older people face barriers in accessing community spaces, employment and volunteering opportunities, and local business. But when these restrictions are removed, it benefits the economy. Likewise, the same benefits are seen when older people can access support to improve their health and financial security.

Foundations for meaningful change

This handbook is intended to help you understand the primary principles to consider when making changes in a place to benefit older people. How those principles relate to the priorities of your residents and the abilities and constraints of your local authority will be unique. To ensure you are applying the principles in an effective, long-sighted way, we believe there are four things that need to be in place:

Data

An understanding of local demographics and other evidence on how well people are ageing in your place: This can help provide a broad view on how different ages are experiencing your community, and how a range of factors, like gender, ethnicity, disability and health can influence individual experiences of mid and later life.

You can gather this data through local surveys or dashboards, or profiles such as a joint strategic needs assessment, and population projections for your area. You could also create a new report specific to ageing - see our [Local State of Ageing Guide](#) more information on this.

Voice

Mechanisms for involving older people in your decision-making: People with lived experience that are representative of the community need to be central to shaping plans and delivery.

This should be as representative and inclusive as possible, enabling those with access needs and those who are not online to take part, as well as considering barriers that may deter people from engaging with local government.

This might look like an equality panel or sounding board, an ambassador scheme, or using co-production methods for strategies and activities.

Leadership

Political and strategic commitment: Delivering and sustaining the changes illustrated in this handbook requires an understanding of ageing among senior leaders and elected officials. This might look like assigning a team or department at your local authority to lead age-friendly work, and appointing councillors as age-friendly champions.

Stakeholders

Partnerships and collaboration across the public, private and voluntary sectors: No single sector, agency, organisation or department can achieve this alone. The principles and examples in this handbook require people to work together on a range of topics and issues, bringing together the public, voluntary, and private sector.

Almost 100 local authorities in the UK are already seeing benefits from adopting age-friendly approaches as part of the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities. To find out more about joining the network contact AFC.Network@ageing-better.org.uk

Whether this handbook is a first step into using the age-friendly framework or a way to consider more that can be done as part of an existing plan, you will find something in these pages that resonates with a concern affecting your local area.



Domain 1: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

The one public toilet in the village I live in closed this last month, and I know a couple of friends who are a little older than me who now don't access the town centre.

Summary:

The physical environment, or public realm, is a significant driver of our mobility, independence, and quality of life as we age. Outdoor spaces and public buildings in an age-friendly community help us to enjoy where we live, participate in community life, and stay healthy and connected.

Need:

While improvements in the physical environment are good for everybody, deficits can have a particular impact on people in later life. Poorly maintained and inaccessible streets and public spaces can increase the risk of falling, leading to injury and reducing people's confidence to go out.³

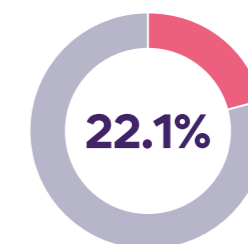
A lack of proximity to green space, facilities such as toilets and seating, and spaces which meet a variety of needs can prevent older people from accessing the services they need, living active lives and being socially connected, in turn contributing to worse health outcomes. Experiences of crime and poor perceptions of personal safety can discourage many older people from moving freely and confidently round their neighbourhood.⁴

Older people are also among the groups most affected by air pollution in urban areas.

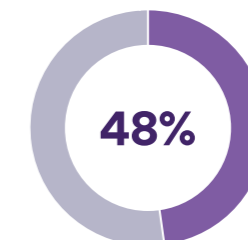
Key Stats:



Around **50%** of those aged 65+ face problems getting outdoors (largely due to environmental barriers)⁵



22.1% of non-disabled people aged 75 and older report difficulties accessing services in their community. For older adults living with a disability, this number jumps to **58.8%**⁶



48% of people aged 80 and over in England find it difficult to travel to their nearest supermarket⁷

Principles:

Policies and investments relating to the physical environment and public realm need to promote physical activity, social connection and community participation. This can be through a focus on inclusive design, removing barriers to usage and promoting access to diverse groups of people. Public spaces and buildings that support people to gather and spend time with others are beneficial to an age-friendly environment. Actions taken in this domain also address safety, air quality, and desirability.

1. Public realm supports people to get out and about

- Walkable neighbourhoods that encourage more active journeys.
- Sufficient and suitable toilets, seating, and shelter.
- Pavements are well-maintained, well-lit, and free from obstructions.
- Access to nearby green and public space.

2. Public Buildings and Spaces Are Accessible and Welcoming

- People have access to spaces which are attractive, welcoming, free, and sheltered from the elements (heat, cold, rain).
- Information about public spaces is widely available and accessible, including offline.
- Public spaces and buildings are accessible and inclusive of disabled people including those with motor, visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments.
- Spaces are safe and improve people's perceptions of personal safety.

3. Public Realm Meets Everyone's Needs

- Access to flexible spaces that accommodate a variety of uses and promote cross-community and multi-generational interaction.
- The public realm feels inclusive and welcoming to all members of the community, including those from different backgrounds and cultures, and neurodiverse people.

Practice examples:

Take a Seat - Barnsley

Metropolitan Low cost

A partnership between Barnsley council, businesses and community groups has been providing public seating to make sure people are able to rest when out and about. Seating has been placed in key indoor and outside locations across the borough, such as high streets and community gardens, and at regular intervals on a recently upgraded section of the Trans Pennine Trail. A directory of seating helps people to plan ahead. If people know that they will be able to take a rest when needed, they can stay active and social, which has benefits for health and wellbeing.

Local Toilets Strategy - Cardiff

Unitary

Cardiff Council's Local Toilets Strategy incorporates input from public bodies, community groups, businesses and individuals. Aligning with the Age-friendly Cardiff Strategy, it aims to improve access to the city. To assist people living with dementia, 160 colour-contrasting toilet seats have been installed in council-run facilities, to make them easier to identify. Changing Places toilets and hands-free toilets in Cardiff hubs are providing greater dignity for people with a range of physiological and cultural needs. Businesses in a community toilet scheme allow free use of toilet facilities, with good publicity in return. Accessible signage plus online and printed toilet maps help people to go out with confidence.

Walking audits of public spaces - various locations

Older people-led

During public-space redevelopment, conducting or commissioning walking audits early in the planning stage can lead to improvements for older people.

For example, while planning changes to Leeds train station, Network Rail invited Leeds Age-friendly Steering Group to consult on usability and provide recommendations from an age and dementia-friendly perspective, covering physical, inclusion and communication aspects. A walking audit in Flintshire gathered experiences of navigating between care homes and community amenities. The results of a walking audit during planning for redeveloping Bolton town centre included changes to dropped kerb locations and increases in pedestrian crossing timings.

Age-friendly multipurpose community hub - Manchester

Metropolitan Major change

The Gorton Hub in Manchester provides learning, health and community services in a single accessible building, improving social and cultural participation and access to support for people in mid and later life. Manchester City Council led the governance and funding aspects and engaged with partners. The hub now houses a GP practice, pharmacy, integrated community health and social care team, housing association, Jobcentre Plus, library, café and space for adult education. The library, like all libraries in Manchester, has adopted age-friendly standards, including a weekly age-friendly hour with priority support for older customers. Such hubs support active ageing.



Domain 2: Transport

We have our bus passes, but it's only from 9:30 and sometimes we need to go to an appointment in the hospital earlier than that. I would love it if they changed that – we are not going to use the buses all the time when the schoolchildren are there, but sometimes we need it.

Summary:

Transport is key to being able to get out and about and continue to do the things that matter to us as we age. Transport in an age-friendly community helps us to get where we need to go, whether for work, shopping, socialising, attending a health appointment, or just being out in the world.

Need:

Transport and mobility are essential for everyone, but there are specific considerations in an ageing society. For many older people, a lack of access to transport leaves them unable to access the services and amenities they need to age well, including health services.

Rural areas, which tend to have older populations, also have more limited public transport, leaving many older people in those areas relying on more expensive cars or taxis. This can also present issues or risks when parking is unavailable, or there is a desire or need to give up driving, for example due to a health condition.⁸

There is an increasing body of evidence suggesting that walking, cycling⁹ and the use of public transport¹⁰ all contribute to better health outcomes as well as reducing air pollution and negative environmental impacts.

Older drivers do not pose a significant risk to other road users,¹¹ though are themselves more vulnerable to serious injury and death whether walking, cycling or driving.¹² Health is the most common cause of age-related driving risk in later life, yet there is often insufficient support to help people continue to drive safely or transition to alternatives if needed or desired.¹³

Key Stats:

32%



Of people aged 65 and over, **32%** never use public transport. Those aged 80+ are the least likely to use public transport.¹⁴



People in mid and later life are less likely to participate in active travel than younger age groups.¹⁵

Older people with the worst health and lowest incomes experience the greatest difficulty traveling to health services.¹⁶

People aged 70 and over are as likely to be concerned about climate change as young adults under 30.¹⁷

Principles:

Policies and investments relating to transport need to prioritise keeping people independent, healthy, socially connected, and physically active at all ages, as well as able to enjoy what their community has to offer.

Transport services, from scheduling to staff and vehicles, should be designed with the needs of all ages in mind, involving older adults in the development of new or alternative options. Policies and strategies affecting drivers should avoid exacerbating inequalities, including for those with mobility issues or on low incomes, especially in rural areas where transport networks are less extensive, and populations tend to be older.

1. Transport options are affordable, reliable and convenient

- Routes are available across a range of locations and times, not just for 'in and out' commuting.
- Journeys, including interchanges, are connected and simple to navigate.
- Public parking is affordable and located close to key amenities.
- Transport is accessible to low-income older people.
- Non-digital forms of payment, including cash, are available (including ticketing and parking).

2. Journeys are welcoming, safe and accessible

- Information about timetables and routes is accessible and up to date (including real-time data, in vehicles and at stops).
- Accessible and supportive vehicles and infrastructure (including interchanges, stations, stops, parking, electric charging).
- Transport staff understand and meet the needs of older customers.
- Door-to-door community transport is available for those that need it.

3. Transport promotes health and independence

- Programmes and infrastructure promote and support active travel.
- Transport systems and vehicles reduce air pollution.
- Support is available for older drivers to continue or transition from driving.
- Older people are involved in transport planning and consultations.

Practice examples:

Accessible train fleet – Merseyside, Liverpool City Region

Combined authority | Older people-led

Liverpool City Region engaged with older people, including those living with dementia and reduced mobility, in planning and implementing accessible trains and stations. After wide consultation, workshops and user testing, it introduced publicly owned trains that provide audiovisual announcements, level boarding, wide aisles and security features.

Work underway to add lifts at more stations will create step-free access at 80% of the region's stations by 2030. To assist those on low incomes, Merseytravel offers free bus, train and ferry travel to residents over 60 at weekends and bank holidays and after 9:30am on weekdays. These changes are promoting greater independence.

Safer driving for longer – Cambridgeshire

County

Cambridgeshire provides older driver workshops through its Fire and Rescue Service. These free sessions are available in person at various locations or online and help people over 65 to keep driving safely for longer. Participants cover topics such as age-related changes when driving, conducting a vehicle check, license renewal and alternatives to driving.

Training for bus drivers – Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

Unitary

Morebus works as a partner in delivering BCP's Age-friendly Community action plan. All bus drivers are trained as Dementia Friends, so they can assist passengers living with dementia, and are trained to wait until older passengers are seated before pulling away and to lower the ramp to help those with accessibility needs.

This complements other age-friendly provision by Morebus, such as bus flooring designed to be dementia-friendly and buses taking wheelchairs and walking aids. Consequently, older adults and those with additional needs can travel with confidence, dignity and ease. BCP Age Friendly network provides training every three months for businesses and organisations.

Nidderdale Plus - North Yorkshire

Unitary

Nidderdale Plus Community Hub is a charity providing various services to the Nidderdale and Washburn Valley areas of North Yorkshire, including a Community Transport service for residents who have no other means of transport.

The hub has its own electric car plus 28 volunteer drivers who use their private cars. It also uses the hub's minibus to transport people with wheelchairs and to provide group outings. The service provides a lifeline, with over 80% of journeys being health-related and many users needing door-to-door assistance. A 'befriending through transport' pilot scheme now aims to reduce loneliness.



Domain 3: Housing

If you own your home, you pay for all the maintenance. And the longer you're retired the more those repairs cost you, because what might have been a beautifully maintained house when you retired will slide backwards.

Summary:

The opportunity to live in a decent home is currently a challenge for people of all ages. The right housing enables us to stay living comfortably and safely in our communities as we age. Housing in an age-friendly community can help to maintain or even improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as support independence well into later life.

Need:

There are nearly 2.5 million older people living in a home that do not meet government minimum standards for decency. These are homes with hazards or that can't be heated to a comfortable temperature resulting in a risk to people's health, wellbeing, financial security and, in some cases, death. Enabling more older people to live in suitable housing would also save the NHS and social care up to £1.5 billion per year.¹⁸

Older people who are disabled, from a minority ethnic group, or on low income, are more likely to be living in homes that harm their quality of life and increase risk of injury. There are an estimated 1.8 million people with accessibility needs that are living in unsuitable homes.

When it comes to new build housing, local housing plans can also sometimes reflect the one-size-fits-all stereotypes of older people that fails to meet the range of local housing needs and budgets older people have. Without a sufficient and suitable range of local housing, support and information to access repairs or adaptations, or to understand their options, older people may end up leaving their existing communities and support networks to find somewhere suitable to live.

Key Stats:



49% of the homes that don't meet the government criteria for decency are headed by someone 55 and older (2.6 million people)¹⁹



60% of homes defined as excessively cold are currently occupied by at least one person over the age of 55²⁰

£595m

£595 million per year is spent by the NHS to treat ailments caused by poor-quality housing for those 55 and over²¹



Only **9%** of homes have all four accessibility features (a WC at entrance level; flush threshold; sufficiently wide doorways and circulation space; and level access to the main entrance) that make a home visitable²²



52% of older people live alone. Wellbeing is higher among those who live with others²³



The number of people aged 50 and over living in privately rented homes doubled between 2001 and 2021. More than one in three (**37%**) people of pension age in the private rented sector are living in relative poverty²⁴

Principles:

Age awareness in policies and investments can improve the number of new and existing homes which are accessible and safe for older people and allow people to age in their own homes and communities for as long as they want and are able to. Part of this is about ensuring that support and information is available for people to stay in their homes or identify and find new housing options, including for people on low and changing incomes, and the growing numbers of older people in private rented accommodation. Wherever possible, new housing should be designed to a 'lifetime' standard, and new models of housing trialed with the input of older adults and communities to meet the needs of local ageing populations.

1. Housing is safe, accessible, and affordable

- Affordable housing options or financial support for those on low income.
- Accessibility adaptations are readily available.
- All new homes are built to be accessible and adaptable.
- Information, advice and support is available for people of all tenures and incomes to maintain, repair or adapt their home.
- Residential building entrances and hallways and the immediate area are secure and accessible.

2. Housing choices reflect the diversity of needs and desires of older people

- People have access to a range of housing sizes and types in their community that support changing needs at different life stages.
- Local housing strategies promote innovation to meet the varied needs of older people, including through alternative housing models (co-housing, intergenerational housing, and so on).
- Information and advice on local housing options is available and easily accessible, maximising personal choice.
- Older people are involved in housing planning co-design and consultation.

Practice examples:

Creating age-friendly developments – Greater Manchester

Combined authority Older people-led

The cross-sectoral Greater Manchester Housing Planning and Ageing Group has produced a guide for developers, planners, policymakers and architects.

It sets out factors to consider when planning, designing and developing homes and neighbourhoods to make them age-friendly, such as how and why to engage with older people, and how to incorporate design features in communal and private living spaces that support independent and fulfilling lives. The guide is successfully being used for a new 250-apartment age-inclusive development in Stockport.

Staying Put Agency – Middlesbrough

Unitary Major change

The Staying Put Agency, part of Middlesbrough Independent Living Services (MILS), supports age-friendly practices by providing essential home adaptations and minor repairs to help older adults live safely and independently. Services include installing grab rails, ramps, and personal alarms, as well as offering winter warmth support. These efforts enhance accessibility, safety, and comfort in the home, promoting the wellbeing and independence of older residents.

The agency's private works offer supports individuals by liaising with builders, involving family members in decisions if desired, and ensuring high-quality work. They also collaborate with Cleveland Police and Trading Standards to stop rogue traders.

LGBT+ affirmative retirement housing – London Borough of Lambeth

London borough Major change

Tonic Housing has created an LGBTQ+ affirming retirement community in Lambeth, where older LGBTQ+ people are supported, gain life-affirming social connections and access culturally appropriate services. With GLA Community Housing Fund support, Tonic purchased 19 of 84 apartments in a new retirement development at Bankhouse, Vauxhall, which they provide via shared-ownership or rent.

A community panel, comprising people aged over 50 who identified as LGBTQ+ and were potential future residents, helped shape the specification, design and operation of the scheme. Tonic co-creates events and activities with its residents and with other LGBTQ+ organisations.

Housing Options for Older People – Newcastle (Metro)

Metropolitan

Newcastle City Council's home improvement agency, Care and Repair Newcastle, has partnered with the Elderly Accommodation Council (EAC) to help older people and their families make informed choices about housing and care.

EAC has developed the online tool Housing Options for Older People (HOOP), which assesses whether a person's current housing provision remains fit for purpose, with questions about size, condition, location, costs and so on. It identifies needs and provides information about possible solutions or alternatives. By linking with Care and Repair, HOOP connects residents to the services and accommodation local to them. This supports independent and safer living.



Domain 4: Social Participation

I actually love my life, and I get stuck in with various groups, not just in the village but beyond, and that gives me huge fulfilment.

The growing diversity in the older population, including in ethnicity, sexuality and those living alone²⁶, can affect the appropriateness and accessibility of social opportunities for older people from minoritised groups.

Key Stats: 1.4m

1.4 million older people in the UK are often lonely²⁷



Spending on community centres and public halls is **30%** lower in 2022/23 than in 2010/11²⁸



Spending on community development and library services is down **55%** from what it was in 2010/11²⁹

Summary:

Participating in leisure, cultural, and social activities in the community is important for health and wellbeing, a sense of belonging and good relationships. An age-friendly community has a range of social activities and opportunities to get involved which are appealing and accessible at every age.

Need:

Social participation supports mental and physical health, as well as contributing to a sense of belonging and purpose. Although younger people are more likely to self-report loneliness, physical health and significant life transitions such as bereavement are key age-related risk factors for loneliness in later life, which combine to make it particularly hard to shift²⁵. Many older adults are significant contributors to and organisers of social activities in their communities, but barriers such as underfunded or inaccessible venues, or activities that rely on stereotypes about older people can increase the difficulty in building or maintaining social connections.

Principles:

Policies and investments in social participation are more effective when they acknowledge the huge diversity that exists among older age groups. Seemingly small barriers such as price, time, and location can affect the accessibility of activities. Your residents' social wellbeing can also be enhanced by recognising the value of opportunities for everyday interactions, such as those in leisure, retail and hospitality businesses, in local initiatives and design.

1. Opportunities (for example, activities and events) appeal to a range of older people

- Opportunities cater to a variety of interests and avoids stereotyping based on age.
- Opportunities exist that are age specific, or 'for' older people.
- Opportunities foster multi-generational interactions.
- Opportunities are culturally sensitive and cater to older adults from different backgrounds and communities.
- Opportunities are offered at a variety of price points.

2. Opportunities are accessible

- Venues and opportunities are physically accessible and easy to find.
- There are opportunities at a variety of times and locations, including mobile and remote options for people unable to travel.
- Information about social participation is available in a variety of languages, and in digital and non-digital formats.

3. Infrastructure supports participation and reflects the diversity of the community

- Community spaces where people can easily interact and gather with others.
- Everyday services create opportunities for social interaction where possible.
- Communities are given the resources and support to self-organise.

Practice examples:

Ageing Well Festival – Newham

London borough Older people led

Newham's Ageing Well Festival has become an annual event, coinciding with the International Day of Older People. It supports Newham's Ageing Well Strategy, which aims to improve the health and wellbeing of residents aged over 50 and to reduce health inequalities. The event, open to all residents, celebrates older members of the community, connects people, and provides information about activities and services in the borough. Activities available on the day include dancing, glass painting, archery and exercise tasters, plus health checks. Attendees can enjoy free food and make new friends in an international food court.

Neighbourhood Networks – Leeds

Metropolitan Older people led Major change

Leeds Council commissions and part-funds 34 Neighbourhood Networks across the city. Each network is a community-based scheme, offering activities and services to older people that aim to reduce loneliness, increase community involvement, increase choice and control, and enhance health and wellbeing.

These include things like information and advice, advocacy, social opportunities and physical activities. All networks are run with the involvement of people in later life and are members of Leeds Older People's Forum. Each one is based on what is important to older people in their local community, for example, Leeds Black Elders Association serves older African-Caribbean people, with tailored services and support including a community garden and a men's group.

Men's Sheds – South Lanarkshire, Scotland

Unitary Older people led

Men's Sheds exist across the UK as places for men, particularly older men, to work on practical projects, share skills and socialise. This is widely recognised to have positive effects on mental and physical health. South Lanarkshire Council, through its Senior Together project, has enabled men in rural districts to benefit from this movement by refurbishing an old mobile library as a Men's Shed and hiring a part-time worker to run it (This was funded on a 3 year temporary basis by the National Lottery fund). This connects older men living in remote areas, reducing digital exclusion and inequality, and has helped the local authority to gain insights into their needs.. Through this focused work many static sheds have been developed in the areas covered because of this project.

Microgrants for Positive Ageing Month – Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland HSC

The Positive Ageing Small Grants Programme, administered by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and funded by the Public Health Agency, supports activities and programmes for people aged over 60, particularly to improve physical activity and provide opportunities for social connection.

Community and voluntary groups within the Trust's area can apply for grants of up to £500. Previous activities benefiting from grants have included art, chair aerobics and swimming, and they have had a positive impact on the number of participants feeling connected to the community, on mental health and on physical health.



Domain 5:

Respect & Social Inclusion

[When I first went out in my mobility scooter] I was shopping in Lidl when a woman walked by and patted me on the head. I didn't know her from Eve. It was so surprising. I felt bemused.

Summary:

Being treated with dignity and respect is important at every age. An age-friendly community tackles ageism and age discrimination and promotes the inclusion of all older adults in public and community life.

Need:

Ageism is the one of the most widespread forms of discrimination in the UK, and is even more likely to be experienced by people who already face discrimination based on other characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.³⁰ Evidence shows that institutional, interpersonal and self-directed ageism can lead to social exclusion and damage health and wellbeing³¹. Local businesses and community settings can overlook or fail to consider older customers in their activities, products, and services. Elder abuse and neglect, and fraud and scams targeting older adults are other major contributors to loss of dignity and respect in later life.³²

Key Stats:

55%

55% of adults in the UK believe the UK is ageist³³

46%

Nearly Half (46%) of people over 50 experienced age discrimination in the last year³⁴

Age discrimination is even more common amongst those who are struggling financially (63%), people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (58%), and especially Disabled people (up to 73%)³⁵

Financially struggling

63%

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background

58%

Disabled

73%

Principles:

Policies and investments in respect and social inclusion are most effective when they reflect the value of older people to communities and recognise and preserve their basic rights. Taking steps to avoid perpetuating negative narratives of ageing and older people will benefit your residents, as will raising awareness of how ageism can intersect and even amplify other forms of discrimination.

1. Ageing is portrayed in a way that is positive and realistic

- Efforts are made to raise awareness of ageism and the harms of ageism.
- Communications avoid negative stereotypes and portray ageing and older people in a more positive and realistic way.
- Age-friendly terminology is used in written and verbal communications to and about older people.
- Older adults from a range of backgrounds and cultures are visible and represented in visual and written communications.

2. Older people are valued

- Older adults can share their knowledge and skills with others, and vice versa.
- The diversity of older adults is recognised in the design and delivery of services.
- Businesses and community settings consider and cater to older customers.

3. Basic rights are ensured

- Age is fully considered in Disability, Equality and Inclusion policy and practices.
- There are effective routes to make complaints or to report discrimination based on age.
- Programmes are in place that prevent and respond to elder abuse and fraud and scams targeted at older adults.

Practice examples:

Equalities Impact Assessment guidance for age – Manchester

Metropolitan Low cost

Age-friendly Manchester, within Manchester City Council, together with the AFM Older People's Board co-produced guidance to help council officers completing Equality Impact Assessments who must consider the protected characteristic of age and ageing. A thematic list of issues sets out how people in later life are affected and how people can be supported to age well. For example, the theme of physical environment includes statistics on the time spent by older people in their home or immediate area, suggests features that help or hinder people to get outdoors and stay active, and describes subsequent impacts on health and wellbeing. It also addresses intersectionality with other characteristics.

Age friendly Business Framework – Banbury

District VCSE

Age-friendly Banbury encourages business, groups and organisations in the town to become more age-friendly by inviting them to adopt a pledge. The pledge comes with a checklist of actions that businesses and others can take to make their premises and services more welcoming and accessible. These actions are not expensive or intrusive, and those who sign up to the pledge gain access to resources and training. In one initiative, Age-friendly Banbury has provided businesses with doorbells at wheelchair height, which is promoting better access for residents to older buildings where assistance might be needed.

Wise Up to Ageism training – Leeds

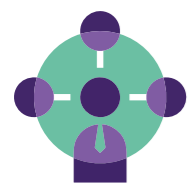
Metropolitan Older people led

Leeds Older People's Forum provides an awareness-raising session, Wise Up to Ageism, which was established as part of the Age Proud Leeds Campaign (2019-2022). It is offered to organisations who sign up as Age and Dementia Friendly and aims to change negative attitudes about ageing and older people. The training is available in person or online and covers the prevalence of ageism, the impact of discrimination, the ways ageism impacts different groups of older people differently, and a celebration of the contributions of older people.

Culturally appropriate reminiscence boxes – West Sussex

County

West Sussex Libraries has created a Reminiscence Collection to help reawaken people's memories, which is especially helpful for older people and those living with dementia. The collection consists of a series of packs that can be borrowed, each of which covers a particular theme and typically includes original or replica objects, books and music. They cater to different experiences and backgrounds; for example, a South Asian Heritage pack contains a bindi set, clay pipe, garland, jewellery set, peacock feathers, sari (two-piece), South Asian art book, and information sheets on Bollywood stars, flags, and Hindu, Muslim and Sikh weddings.

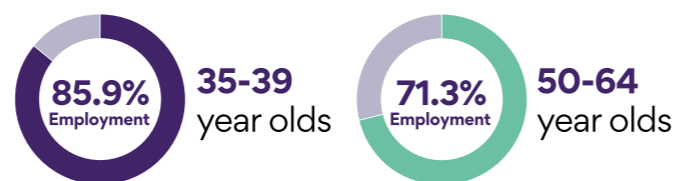


Domain 6: Civic Participation and Employment

This ageist treatment in recruitment makes me worry what the future holds. My wife has had very similar experiences to mine and as we've both worked in slightly precarious careers, we're just not in a position financially to retire. I don't want to retire either, I enjoy mixing with people in a workplace and I really enjoy my work. But unless someone is prepared to welcome you as a valid part of the team at 60, we're in a financially challenging situation and it's very hard to catch-up on reserves as there isn't so much time.

This can deprive older people of the financial and social benefits of being in work and have a negative impact on businesses as well as harming local economic growth. People over 65 are consistently the most likely to volunteer, but people who are less financially secure, in poorer health or from a BAME background can face barriers which make them less likely to do so formally. These barriers can worsen as personal circumstances change – for example developing a health condition or taking on caring responsibilities.³⁷ A challenging financial environment impacts on voluntary and community groups³⁸ and the funding of mechanisms to include diverse groups of older people in decision making.

Key Stats:



There's a **15 percentage point gap** between the employment rate of 35-49 year olds (85.9%) and 50-64-year-olds (71.3%)³⁹

Older workers are the least likely to receive on-the-job training⁴⁰

A quarter of people aged 75 and older have been involved in civic activities at least once in the last 12 months⁴¹

People aged 50 and over are the **most likely to volunteer and vote**⁴²

Women aged 45-60 are **seven times** as likely as men of this age group to have left or have considered leaving work before reaching pension age to care for children or grandchildren⁴³

Summary:

Good quality work and opportunities to contribute to our communities are important for financial security, social connection, and a sense of purpose as we age. An Age-friendly Community enables people to contribute through paid work, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement for as long.

Need:

The employment rate of people in their 50s and 60s lags well behind workers under 50,³⁶ and older workers find it much harder to re-enter work when they fall out of it. For those in work, a lack of reasonable adjustments (for example, flexible working), age-biased recruitment, and ageist workplace attitudes can keep them from fully participating in the workplace and local labour market.

Principles:

Investments and policies in this domain aim to realise the economic, social and political contributions that people continue to make to local economies and communities as they age. In turn recognising the role that work, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement play in helping people to maintain financial security, social connection and a sense of purpose in older age. A key way to do this is through age-inclusive support for people to find good quality, flexible work and volunteering opportunities that meet their needs and to be able to develop skills and plan for the future.

1. Older people can access quality jobs

- Employers follow age-friendly recruitment practices.
- People in mid-life are supported to plan for their future career and retirement.
- Health support and good-quality flexible work is available.
- Ageism in the workplace is recognised and combatted.

2. Tailored employment and skills support available for those in and out of work

- Opportunities to train and develop new skills are inclusive and promoted to older workers.
- Tailored employment support and retraining opportunities for older jobseekers.
- Employers encourage cross-generational teams which encourage mutual skills-building.

3. Volunteering in later life is promoted

- The individual benefits of volunteering in later life are promoted.
- Local volunteering opportunities reflect the capacity and variety of skills of older people.
- Volunteering opportunities are available that are flexible, including at different times and levels of commitment.
- The valuable role that older people play through formal and informal volunteering is recognised and celebrated.

4. Civic engagement is supported

- Older people's voices are incorporated in decision-making bodies.
- Public decisions and consultations involve different groups of older adults and provide transparent feedback mechanisms.
- Groups and spaces led by older adults are funded and supported, particularly those led by older people from marginalised groups.

Practice examples:

Signing the Age-friendly Employer Pledge – Lincolnshire

County Low Cost

Ageing Better's Age-friendly Employer Pledge is a programme for UK employers who recognise the value of older workers and who commit to taking action to ensure workers in their 50s and 60s can flourish.

Local government is one of the most active sectors in signing the pledge and is also often one of the biggest employers in an area. When local authorities demonstrate best practice, they can be a positive influence and inspiration for others in their localities. Within a year of Lincolnshire County Council signing the pledge, five more employers in Lincolnshire joined, benefiting older workers in the county.

Jobs fair – Birmingham

Metropolitan

On Ageing Better's Age Without Limits Action Day, a job, career and skills event was held in Birmingham for people in their 50s and above. The fair was organised in partnership with DWP, Phoenix Group and their longevity thinktank Phoenix Insights, whose research has revealed limited awareness of career options as a key factor holding back mid-life career changes.

More than 400 people attended and were able to learn about job openings and join skills workshops. A range of employers took part, including the Civil Service, Amazon and BT, while sessions covered topics like recruitment systems and how to recognise and discuss transferable skills.

Age-friendly Awards – Belfast

District Low Cost

Age-friendly Belfast's annual Older Volunteer Awards were launched in 2011 so Belfast-based community and voluntary organisations could recognise their volunteers aged 60 and over.

Award categories have included the Inter-generational Team Award, recognising a team or group of volunteers who supported or delivered an inter-generational project, and Digital Champion/Advocate, for someone whose role involved supporting others to make the most of digital technology or who delivered their role online.

While volunteering itself helps older people to feel part of the community, formal recognition of their positive impact increases the sense of community participation and value and encourages others to volunteer.

Intergenerational learning activities – South Tyneside

Metropolitan

Older and younger generations can learn a lot from each other. The South Tyneside Youth Council comes together with older members of the public to take part in lively and passionate intergenerational debates.

The conversations cover topical issues and have included 'mental health is worse than ever', 'graffiti has a negative impact on society' and 'gangs are not dangerous, just a group of friends'. South Tyneside Family Hubs have hosted further intergenerational activities as part of Global Intergeneration Week. There is also work taking place with young people supporting older people with their digital skills.



Domain 7: Communication and Information

I think one of the things is finding out what the volunteering opportunities are. When I asked about it at one point, I was given a link to a website and all I could find in the area was volunteering to do counselling and there wasn't anything within 20 miles of where I live. I'm sure there are opportunities, but how do you find out about them?

Summary:

Timely, practical information is important for all of us at every age. This domain underpins the success of all the other domains of community life, including transportation, housing, and more - all of which rely on effective communication to succeed. An age-friendly approach considers the ways that we access and use information as we age.

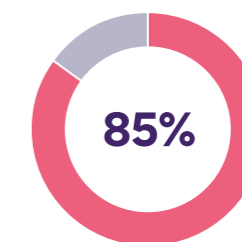
Need:

The way information is communicated can be a barrier or enabler for older people, particularly those in the oldest age groups where age-related impairments become more common and make accessing information both more crucial and more difficult. Those in and approaching later life rely on a range of communications to stay informed about key community services and opportunities, as well as to maintain good health or to manage long term conditions.

Where communications don't follow basic accessibility guidance, for example, large print for those who are visually impaired, many people miss out or rely on others to find out what they need to know. Age is one of the strongest common denominators for digital exclusion⁴⁴, but it also reflects social, economic and regional inequalities. An increasing reliance on the internet for communication and service delivery, including by local authorities risks widening this age and equity gap.

This, coupled with a rise in online fraud, can prevent many older people from engaging with all their community has to offer as well as access basic consumer, health and financial services. Digital exclusion in particular will become an increasingly relevant issue as technology plays a larger role not only in communications, but in all aspects of public and personal life.

Key Stats:



85% of those offline in the UK are aged 50+⁴⁵



50% of newspaper subscribers are age 55 and older⁴⁶



Only **half** of people aged 75 and over have all the basic digital skills needed to operate online, compared to an average for all adults of 84%⁴⁷

Principles:

Policies and investments in communication and information ensures that people are able to access information that supports healthy ageing and community participation as they age, including key services, social opportunities, and health information. Communications must be reliable, understandable, timely and relevant, in a range of formats to overcome barriers including word of mouth, in hard copy and online.

1. Community information is reliable and accessible

- Typefaces, colours, and formatting meet universal accessibility standards.
- Language used in communications is clear and concise.
- Communications are consistent, regular and timely.
- Information can be easily accessed both on and offline, including in-person.

2. Digital exclusion is minimised

- Internet infrastructure reaches everyone, including rural and remote areas.
- Accessing the internet, including data, owning or borrowing a device, is simple and affordable.
- Digital skills development is available for those that need it.
- Support to be online focuses on the internet as a tool for people to do things that are important to them, as well as to support the use of key services.

3. Information meets the needs of ageing populations

- Information is available to promote healthy ageing including financial security, physical health and social connection.
- Single points of access to information in community locations as well as online.
- Opportunities available to learn about and try services that target or support older adults locally.

Practice examples:

The Pension Top Up campaign – Greater Manchester

Combined authority

The Pension Top Up campaign aims to encourage and help residents of state pension age to access Pension Credit and other benefits that they are eligible for but not claiming. Greater Manchester began its campaign in January 2021, primarily through housing providers writing to and phoning their older residents and offering support with the claims process. The initial campaign led to at least £3 million of additional income for pensioners. The Greater Manchester Ageing Hub has driven several additional phases of the campaign, including one following the Government's decision to limit the Winter Fuel Payment to those in receipt of Pension Credit. Receiving all they are entitled to can be life changing for many residents, meaning they can afford to pay for the heating, food and other items they need to live well.

Tea and Tech – Stoke-on-Trent

Unitary VCSE

The Beth Johnson Foundation, a charity dedicated to improving later life, runs monthly Tea and Tech sessions at its accessible community room in Stoke-on-Trent. These free drop-in sessions, led by volunteer Digital Friends, are for people aged over 50. Attendees can take their own devices or try the tablets and laptops provided, with the chance to build digital skills and confidence alongside a cup of tea and a chat. Some months have a particular focus, like using apps and trusted websites that can enhance mental health and wellbeing. These skills help people access the services they need and retain control.

Embedding age-friendly imagery – North Norfolk

Metropolitan Low cost

North Norfolk District Council, with the North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership, has run an age-positive imagery photography competition. The competition invited photographs of older residents enjoying an active life or making a contribution to the community, for example when taking part in hobbies or community events. This celebrated North Norfolk having the highest proportion of older residents in the UK and the 2021 Census finding that nearly two-thirds of people aged over 65 years are in good health. The winning entries were displayed at Sheringham library and council partners can now use the photos to improve their communications.

Ageing Well Ambassadors – Sunderland

Metropolitan Older people led

Sunderland City Council appoints Ageing Well Ambassadors to help develop age-friendly neighbourhoods and services, promote age equality and empower older residents to have a say. Ambassadors are volunteers, aged over 50 years, who help in whatever ways suit their skills, knowledge, networks and interests. Examples include spreading age-positive messages to the community (including in workplaces), seeking improvements in accessibility, encouraging others to contribute to consultations and co-designing with partners age-friendly initiatives and developments across the city. In return, volunteers receive training and support, meet other ambassadors and are involved in projects as a valued peer.

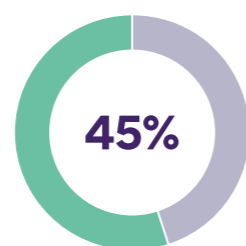


Domain 8: Community Support & Health Services

It looks ages to get the doctor to take me seriously [about my thyroid], because of my age. It was like 'oh well, we do put on weight when we get older'. It drove me crazy, and I actually ended up changing doctors before I was taken seriously.

This can be particularly damaging for older individuals, who are more likely to have multiple long-term conditions that require care and support. The range of care and support services needed to help older people live their lives and stay in their homes is often difficult to access, and the work done unpaid by carers and family members can go unrecognised or unsupported.

Key Stats:



45% of older people surveyed in the UK are concerned about their ability to access a GP⁴⁹



One in five women aged 55-59 in England are unpaid carers⁵⁰

1.6m

1.6 million people aged 65+ have unmet needs for care and support⁵¹



More than **4 in 10** adults struggle with health content for the public⁵²

Summary:

Good health and wellbeing throughout life is strongly connected to being able to look after our own health, and access the care and support we need, when we need it. An age-friendly community works to prevent ill-health and provides health and community services that meet our needs as we age, including at home.

Need:

Older people can face barriers when accessing health and social care, such as a lack of awareness of or access to affordable and appropriate options available in their communities, and ageism. These barriers are often greater for older people with lower incomes, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Nearly half of adults are unable to understand written health information⁴⁸, leaving them less able to exercise autonomy in their healthcare decisions. Digital-first approaches to healthcare, including shifts to telehealth or scheduling GP appointments online, excludes those who lack digital skills or who don't have access to the internet.

Principles:

Policies and investments in this domain aim to ensure that health and social care services are affordable and accessible, and meet the specific needs and preferences of an increasingly diverse older population, being careful to avoid stereotypes. Communities, including families and carers, must also have access to easy-to-understand information about the care and resources that are available, and support given to navigate decisions and promoting independence in health and care decisions.

1. Health services are affordable, available and accessible

- Community health and social care services are provided at an accessible distance for all patients.
- Options provided for both remote and in-person healthcare.
- All health and social care services, including preventative care, mental healthcare and sexual healthcare consider older adults.
- Health and care provision is delivered in a coordinated way that supports older people to easily navigate and advocate for what they need.
- Awareness of ageism and its harms amongst healthcare professionals is increased.

2. Support and care promote dignity and independence

- Support and assistance are available for carers and families, including respite care and support.
- A range of care options and support available at home.
- Integration of residential care with the surrounding community, including opportunities for intergenerational contact.

3. Information promotes and supports good health and wellbeing

- Information is provided in a way that supports older adults to make decisions about their health.
- Access to information and support for patients and carers is provided both online and in-person.
- End-of-life planning is accessible for people of all ages.
- Disease prevention and health improvement programmes and information is accessible for people of all ages.
- Emergency planning and disaster preparedness is accessible for people of all ages and is inclusive of older people's needs and capacities.

Practice examples:

Sexual Rights Charter – Sheffield

Metropolitan

The Sexual Rights Charter, created by University of Sheffield researchers and Age-friendly Sheffield, helps tackle the silence and discrimination around the sex lives of older adults, whose problems are not always taken seriously. It comprises a suite of materials that help health and social care professionals, service providers and the wider community develop inclusive practices and policies, so people are treated with dignity and respect. Sheffield City Council and partners are using it to co-design and provide training to over 60 care homes in the region, and it has informed training for primary-care nurses across South Yorkshire.

Supporting people living with dementia: Handy Help Kits – East Lindsey

District VCSE Older people led

Bob's Brainwaves is a support project in East Lindsey for carers of people starting their journey of living with dementia. Initiated by a carer, it has been accelerated through the support of Age-friendly East Lindsey. Its Handy Help Kit, designed to complement dementia services in Lincolnshire, contains forms relating to support available nationally and locally, plus other useful information. The project also provides printable widgets, designed by an education specialist with input from carers, to use around the house and in everyday conversations, routines and activities. With these prompts, people can live more independently and remain independent for longer.

Health information sessions with translators – Camden

London borough VCSE

Third Age Project (TAP) is a multicultural community resource centre supporting older people to deal with barriers in accessing facilities and services (such as poverty, disability, language or culture). In 2023, using Camden Council's Resilience Funding, visitors and volunteers received a health-themed programme of lunch-time information sessions and accredited training workshops, with volunteer interpreters in Spanish, Chinese and Sylheti. A second course helped speakers of languages besides English to develop English language skills and gain confidence to speak about health and wellbeing, including making appointments, explaining health concerns and understanding medical instruction.

Nutrition and Hydration Programme - Salford

Combined authority Major change

The Nutrition and Hydration Programme is a part of Age UK Salford's offer. It raises awareness about the risks and signs of malnutrition and dehydration in older people, targeting individuals, carers and non-clinically trained practitioners who have routine contact with people aged 65 plus. Information is disseminated through local organisations, stakeholders and partners. By encouraging early and proactive intervention, the programme has made a positive difference to people in maintaining or gaining weight, in turn reducing illness and emergency care needs.

Endnote

We want to see more places in the UK and beyond making the kinds of changes set out in this handbook and developing new and innovative practice. The age-friendly approach works best as part of a comprehensive strategic plan to identify and address local priorities. Our website contains [resources](#) explaining in more detail the four-step programme cycle - a process places can use in the development of age-friendly policies and practices by cycling through steps to engage and understand; plan strategically; act and implement; and monitor and evaluate. You can also [read more](#) about how to document this in order to work towards joining the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities as well as the World Health Organisation Global Network.

If you'd like to get in touch with us for a conversation, email localities@ageing-better.org.uk

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If we get success, we are making the world better for everybody. Every mum with a buggy. Every person with a toddler that needs a toilet. Every person that thinks twice about going to visit someone because the bus service is rubbish and they can't get home safely with or without peace of mind. What we are doing is for the benefit of everybody, not just us.

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