

Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative

By Mariam Omar, Seniors & Healthy Aging Secretariat

Due to the aging of the world population, the development of age-friendly communities is receiving global attention. According to the United Nations, the current world population of older persons (60+) is at 600 million. In direct response to this changing demographic, the World Health Organization (WHO) with participation from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) launched the Global Age-Friendly Cities (GAFC) project. The aim of the project was to create an international age-friendly city guide, which was released October 1, 2007. Thirty-three cities, including Portage la Prairie, Rio de Janeiro, Cancun, Moscow, and Tokyo participated in the research and development of this guide. The purpose of the guide is to assist cities to become more age-friendly.

In a parallel initiative, the Canadian Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Community Initiative (AFRRCI) was developed to create a similar guide, with a focus to assist smaller, rural and remote communities to become more age-friendly. Ten communities across Canada, including Gimli, participated in the development of this guide.

In Manitoba, approximately 158,000 Manitobans are aged 65 years and older, and this total is expected to increase by 43% over the next 20 years. With 93% of Manitoba seniors living in the community, this increase will result in communities facing new opportunities and challenges in responding to this population's needs and desires.

In a continued effort to address and support the changing needs of older Manitobans, the Province has launched the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative. By actively engaging and assisting all municipal corporations, the initiative is designed to make Manitoba the most age-friendly Province in Canada.

In partnership with the AMM, Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Manitoba's Centre on Aging, the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative is designed to facilitate the development of age-friendly communities across Manitoba. It will provide the guides and other resources to assist communities in becoming more age-friendly.

One of the most exciting features of the initiative is its 'do-ability'. Because the implementation process takes place at the local level, the community collectively determines the age-friendliness of its environment, and the issues and concerns that are relevant and specific to it.

An age-friendly community benefits people of all ages. Secure neighbourhoods are safe for children, youth, women and older adults. Families experience less worry and stress when their older relations have the services and supports they need. Barrier-free buildings and streets enhance the

the most age-friendly Province in Canada is achieved.

Making communities age-friendly is one of the most effective policy approaches for responding to an aging demographic. In an age-friendly community, structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to "age actively" – that is, to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in their communities. Public and commercial settings and services are made accessible to accommodate varying levels of ability. \$

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mobility and independence of both younger and older persons with disabilities.

Ten interested communities across Manitoba have been selected to participate in the first round of the initiative. Approximately every six months additional communities will be selected to join the initiative until the vision to make Manitoba

For more information regarding the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative, contact:

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