

londonage

Age UK London Magazine Spring 2019



Making London an Age-friendly City

Learn all about our brand new campaign

PAGE 3
Our Age
Friendly City

PAGE 5
Active Ageing
in London

PAGE 14
Safer Ageing in
London

PAGE 19
In the Hotseat
Interview

Comment

Paul Goulden
CEO
Age UK London



Welcome to the latest edition of **London Age** – and one that marks a new direction for Age UK London!

June 2018 saw the huge announcement that the Mayor had agreed to sign London up to the World Health Organisation’s Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

The WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities improves the exchange of experience and learning within the age sector between cities and communities worldwide. Cities and communities of all different sizes from across the world make up the network, united by their desire and commitment to promote healthy and active ageing and a good quality of life for their older residents.

To achieve these aims, the WHO has outlined eight key domains that cities and communities can use to meet the needs of older citizens. These eight strands often overlap and mutually reinforce each other to help older people to participate in all aspects of city life.

I am pleased to say that Age UK London’s campaigning activity in the coming months and years will now be guided by the WHO’s definition of an Age-friendly City and will closely follow the eight domains.

Contents

Making London an Age-friendly City
Our CEO Paul Goulden outlines Age UK London’s new direction. **3**

Active Ageing in London
A quick tour of the first five domains of a WHO Age-friendly City, which focus upon “Active Ageing”. **5**

Safer Ageing in London
We explore how an Age-friendly City can help older citizens to feel confident, safe, and respected. **14**

In the Hotseat
Meet our brand new Campaigns Officer John McGeachy and learn why he has come to join Age UK London. **19**

With that in mind, we have dedicated this entire edition of *London Age* to exploring each of the eight domains of an Age-friendly City in further detail. This should provide a handy guide to the reasoning behind our future campaigning work. After a brief outline of the Age-friendly Cities programme, we will explore the eight domains in two main categories: Active Ageing in London and Safer Ageing in London.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of *London Age* and learning about the Age-friendly Cities Network. We’re very excited to take the first steps towards building an Age-friendly London to ensure that everyone in the capital can love later life.

Making London an Age-friendly City

The UK population is ageing. As the number of older people living in cities increases, there is a growing recognition that these cities need to become “age-friendly”, with the needs of older residents playing an increasingly important part in the shaping their surroundings. Our CEO Paul Goulden provides a quick introduction to the WHO’s Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

At our “Tackling Loneliness” conference last June we were delighted that **Matthew Ryder (then Deputy Mayor for Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion) announced that the Mayor had agreed to sign London up to the World Health Organisation’s Age Friendly Community.**

This was one of Age UK London’s asks of the mayoral candidates in 2016, and marks a commitment by City Hall to the welfare of older people.

The concept of the WHO Age Friendly Community came out of the 2005 World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics, and in 2007 the “Global Age Friendly Communities Guide” was published. Since then, 24 towns and cities in the UK have signed up to the community and a further 9 are working towards it. Across the world, the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities currently includes 833 cities and communities in 41 countries, covering over 229 million people worldwide.

“The WHO has outlined 8 areas of life where changes can be made to improve the lives of older people.”

What makes an age friendly community?

The WHO has outlined 8 areas of life where changes can be made to improve the lives of older people. They are outlined briefly here before we explore them in further detail later in the magazine:

Outdoor spaces and buildings

Emphasizing the importance of green spaces, clean air, places to rest and adequate public toilets, safe and accessible communities, and safe pedestrian crossings and pavements.

Transport

Transportation should be reliable and frequent, safe and comfortable, affordable, accessible, with specialist services tailored to the needs of older people.

Housing

Housing should be affordable, and designed to cope with both the current and future needs of older residents, including the need to add adaptations when required. It also stresses a sense of community around housing design and the need for services to be close by.

Social Participation

There should be a range of affordable and accessible opportunities for older people to participate in or visit cultural, sporting and social activities, including the opportunity for intergenerational connections. This area is all about addressing social isolation and loneliness.

“The adoption of the WHO Age Friendly Communities guidelines marks a change in direction for Age UK London.”

Respect and Social Inclusion

Older people should be valued in their community, and not subject to negative images or discrimination on the basis of their age.

Civic Participation and Employment

The contribution of older people to the workforce and volunteer base should be recognized and celebrated, and there should be opportunities for training to ensure that their skills continue to give them access to work. There should be flexibility for older workers, especially around caring responsibilities, and older people should be able to play a full part in civic life.

Communication and Information

Older people need the right information at the right time, and in a format that is appropriate to them and any medical conditions they have.

It must be acknowledged that whilst online communication and information is now the norm, older people value face to face contact.

Community Support and Health Services

Health and social care needs to be easily accessible at all stages, from booking to attending. Older people should be encouraged to “age well”, and supported in remaining independent at home and within the community. Where residential care is needed, it should continue to link older people to the community.

One of the strengths of the age-friendly communities approach is that not only older people will benefit – many of the measures, such as clean air and quality transport, will enhance the lives of all age groups, and communities as a whole.

The adoption of the WHO Age Friendly Communities guidelines marks a change in direction for Age UK London – it provides a framework for all our activity, and a globally recognized standard against which to measure our impact.

Over the coming months and editions of London Age we’ll be outlining our agenda for each of the Age-friendly London strands, and we look forward to working with you and partners across London to make our capital truly age-friendly.

To find out more about our plans for an Age-friendly London, please visit: www.agefriendlylondon.org.uk

Active Ageing in London

Five of the eight domains of a WHO Age-friendly City are grouped under the term “Active Ageing”. The WHO defines Active Ageing as optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. We explore what this means for an Age-friendly London.



1. Transport

Without an accessible and affordable transport network, citizens’ access to community and health services is vastly reduced. In addition, older Londoners’ social and civic participation relies on a fully-accessible transport network. Considering that 18% of London’s economy is contributed by older people and 39% of older Londoners volunteer, a transport network that suits all ages is of huge importance to London’s economy.

There are several main factors that determine an age-friendly transport network, which are explored here.

Accessibility

Accessible transport links play a huge role in making a city age-friendly. Transport in an Age-friendly London should allow older Londoners to access their city in a variety of different ways and with a sense of freedom and confidence. Currently, only 27% of the Tube network is step-free, however a recent £200m investment will see many more Tube stations become step-free by 2022. Whilst this will represent a welcome rise to 40% step-free coverage, there will still be a significant portion of the Tube network that is inaccessible for many Londoners.

Access charity Transport for All states that all 9,000 London buses are accessible to all disabled people, with the only restrictions for travellers using large electric wheelchairs or mobility scooters. That said, the charity notes that “using buses in London can be challenging for Disabled and older people.” Particular concerns include; ensuring disabled people get priority in the wheelchair space; training drivers to avoid pulling away before every passenger is seated; and guaranteeing that audio-visual announcements are in place on every bus and at every bus stop.

Transport for London’s website notes that all 22,000 of London’s taxis are fitted with wheelchair ramps and TfL has begun work to enhance access at taxi ranks.

Affordability

The World Health Organisation notes that cost is a “significant factor affecting older people’s use of public transport.” In comparison to many cities, London has put steps in place to subsidise cost of travel for its older citizens. Older Londoners that meet the age requirements are eligible for an Older Persons Freedom Pass that allows free travel across the capital. This is a vitally important resource for older Londoners that must be protected in the face of future cuts. Age UK London is committed to defending the Freedom Pass in future.

Reliability and Frequency

Having a frequent and reliable public transport network is a hugely important feature of an Age-friendly City. London is fortunate to have a reliable underground

network, with TfL successfully operating an average of 97% of its Tube services since 2011. Furthermore, certain Tube lines run a 24-hour service at the weekend which has been complimented by an increase in night bus services to help passengers start or finish their Night Tube journeys. However, this does not result in a 24/7 network for use across London. Frequent buses and trams are also required, especially towards the edges of the city.

Travel Destinations

A successful transport network is dependent on the ability of the public to access the areas of the city that they need to. An age-friendly transport network requires an appropriate number of routes to cover the entire city, and carefully-considered transport links to allow for easy changes between routes and transport types.

Whilst central London is well-covered by various forms of transport, this decreases somewhat towards the outskirts of the city. The recent addition of the “Hopper” Fare has mitigated this to a degree, by allowing for unlimited bus and tram journeys in one hour for the price of one. It also requires stating that in comparison with many other cities in the UK, London’s transport network provides an impressive amount of coverage.

Age-friendly Vehicles

The ability to safely board and disembark public transport is a vital feature of an Age-friendly City. This feeds into a wider need to design vehicles with the views and requirements of older people in mind.

Equally important are adaptations and adequate space for wheelchair users to use, as well as priority seating areas for those less able to stand. Passenger courtesy is an issue here, with Transport for London highlighting that customers with impairments, conditions, or illnesses, (both short and long term) often struggle to get a seat on public transport when they need one. TfL’s “Please Offer me a Seat” badge has been a welcome attempt to change passenger behaviour, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that citizens are able to access seats when they require them.

Driver training is a key facet of an age-friendly transport network, particularly in terms of respect and concern for passengers. We have heard older people raise concerns around drivers who stop too far from the kerb, as well as those who are unable or unwilling to help customers in wheelchairs. Transport for London is committed to providing awareness training to its drivers and has previously campaigned to inform private hire drivers of their responsibilities towards passengers with assistance dogs.

Safety is also a key concern for older passengers, both in terms of avoiding crime and protecting their own health. In a city as large as London, overcrowding on transport can negatively affect the health and wellbeing of older citizens. Such large numbers of people in an enclosed space can make it difficult to breathe – a problem exacerbated by poor air quality in the capital. Furthermore, commuters often push and shove their way onto crowded vehicles, placing more vulnerable members of society at risk.

2. Social and Community Participation

Social participation and social support are strongly connected to good health and well-being throughout life. By participating in leisure, social, cultural, and spiritual activities, older people are able to enjoy respect and esteem; remain informed; and maintain or establish supportive and caring relationships. Such activities protect older people from the harmful effects of isolation as well as providing the physical health benefits of leaving the house.

The ability to participate in such social groups is dependent on the variety of activities available, discovering information about them, as well as access to the correct facilities and transport to attend.

A Range of Accessible and Affordable Opportunities

Older people are often referred to as a homogenous group and identified by broad stereotypes. In reality, older people are at least as diverse as every other age group. We become more individual as we age, not less so. Older citizens hold a vast array of untapped interests, skills and experience, so they deserve a broad range of social activities to partake in. Large cities like London tend to have a good range of opportunities in the centre areas, but fewer activities on the outskirts. Equally, some activity schedules are rigid, leaving older people to make choices between attending meetings and managing their personal needs.



The WHO has found that cost of activities is a frequently mentioned problem for older citizens and recommends that an Age-friendly City should host events that are either free or affordable. Similarly, events and activities cannot be considered age-friendly if they are not accessible, so host buildings must have adequate facilities including accessible entrances, adequate numbers of toilets, and appropriate seating. It's also important to note that older Londoners cannot attend social gatherings if they are not informed of their existence! So regular communications of local events in suitable formats are a key feature of an Age-friendly City.

Fighting Isolation

Most people will feel lonely at some point in their lives. It's a deeply personal experience that - in most cases - will thankfully pass. But for a growing number of people, particularly those in later life, loneliness can define their lives and have a significant impact on their wellbeing.

198,000 older people in London can go for a month without meeting up with a friend, an especially concerning statistic when you consider that loneliness can be as harmful for our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Concerted efforts to encourage and motivate older people to participate can sometimes make the difference between participation and isolation. In particular it's important to understand why older people may be reluctant to take part in social activities. The WHO suggests that some may fear joining a group where they don't know anyone, whilst others may simply not find any of the activities on offer to be particularly appealing.

The chances of being lonely do not differ because of age - loneliness is similarly common at all ages. However, the circumstances that increase the risk of loneliness do differ by age. Loneliness often begins when people lose significant relationships or the opportunities to engage in ways they find meaningful.

People aged 50 and over are more likely to be lonely if they do not have someone to open up to, are widowed, are in poor health, are unable to do the things they want, feel that they do not belong in their neighbourhood or live alone. Caregivers, many of whom are older people themselves, are particularly vulnerable to feeling isolated because their world is so centred on the person for whom they care.

Connecting the Generations

In the wake of the EU Referendum, there has been a marked rise in tension between the generations. A recent report from the Royal Society for Public Health found that - for many Britons - an ageing society is viewed as a challenge rather than an opportunity. In addition, negative portrayals of older people in the media can present a "us vs them" narrative, particularly on matters of finance and housing. Intergenerational activities are a useful way to bridge this divide.

3. Community Support and Health Services

Comprehensive health and support services are vital to maintaining the health and independence of older Londoners. An Age-friendly City must provide sufficient, good quality, appropriate, and accessible care for people of all ages.

The recent NHS Ten Year Plan aims to improve provision of health services, with particular emphasis placed on ensuring that health and social care complement each other. Prevention is key theme

of the Plan, with particular focus on 5 areas - smoking, obesity, alcohol, air pollution and anti-microbial resistance. The Ten Year Plan suggests that much of this will be achieved through better use of technology, which - if introduced correctly with good support for older users - will be a positive step forward.

Yet despite such changes, Age UK has been warning of a "Care Crisis", with underfunding and a "postcode lottery" leaving many without the care support they need, especially as cuts to local authority care services continue. Back in the March 2017 Budget, help appeared to be at hand when the Government said it would publish a Green Paper on social care - making a manifesto commitment to it in that year's subsequent General Election. However over 700 days later the Green Paper has yet to see the light of day.

There are a number of ways to ensure proper community support and health services in an Age-friendly City:

Accessible Care

All health services in an Age-friendly City must be well located and easily accessible. It is possible to overcome geographical barriers through a properly maintained and well-planned transport network. Meanwhile, the buildings that house healthcare must be safe and accessible, with well-maintained elevators and ramps where necessary. Local health services must be well advertised and there should also be easy access to education on health, either through advertisements or provision of local information services.

Staff attitudes play a key role in creating age-friendly health services, helping to put older patients at ease through polite and friendly behaviour, as well as in-depth knowledge of their access requirements. Staff must also be trained to keep older patients well-informed about their treatment and the options available, by using clear and simple language without falling into the trap of patronising their clients.

A Wide Range of Services

The medical needs of every older Londoner are unique and the range of healthcare available must reflect this. Mental health services, rehabilitation centres, and palliative care provision are just some examples of the different forms of care that must be made available. The correct equipment should also be tested and supplied, from wheel-chairs and walking frames, through to hearing aids and personal alarms.

Healthcare providers must also reflect a growing need for preventative services. This can include direct medical services (such as precautionary screening and mental health support) as well as more protracted programmes, including nutritional guidance and education around injury prevention. Age-friendly Cities should make sure that there are opportunities for older citizens to protect their wellbeing by partaking in sports activities and attending regular health checks.

There is also a growing need for a wide range of home support and care services – from help with shopping or providing

meals to home visits from doctors and other service providers.

Affordable Care Facilities

A common concern in the WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide is the lack of adequate and affordable care options for older people who are no longer able to live in their own homes. Accordingly, an Age-friendly London must ensure that care homes provide safe and accessible care to a high standard. This includes hiring sufficient numbers of trained staff to avoid the mistakes and negligence that can occur through overwork.

4. Civic Participation and Employment

Older people do not stop contributing to their communities once they reach a certain age. In fact, the paid work of older Londoners contributes £47 billion to the capital's economy each year. Furthermore, many older people play an active community role in retirement, providing voluntary work for their families and communities. By engaging in paid and voluntary work, older Londoners contribute 18% of their city's total economy each year, with 39% of older volunteers taking part in regular volunteer work. Volunteering and employment can be incredibly beneficial for older people's mental and physical wellbeing, helping them to keep active and to meet new people.

An Age-friendly City must provide options for older people to continue to contribute to their communities, through paid

employment or voluntary work if they so choose. An Age-friendly City will also enable its older residents to be engaged in the political process, whether by voting, protesting, or attending meetings and focus groups.

Volunteering and Employment Opportunities

Despite the importance of volunteering and paid work, there can be many barriers for older people, ranging from finding out about vacancies, to being able to make the requested time of day, to discovering a role that suits their skills. In the latter instance, an Age-friendly City should hold many opportunities for older citizens to be trained in relevant skills.

To guarantee that older people are able to take part in voluntary activities, cities must ensure that they have well-developed volunteer infrastructure, such as volunteer resource centres or well-established voluntary organizations.

Another suggestion from the WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide is to make sure that older people are able to access entrepreneurial and self-employment opportunities, ranging from daily work such as running shops to more ad hoc tasks such as handicrafts and gardening.

An additional barrier comes from the challenges faced when travelling to and from voluntary and paid jobs, as well as the physical difficulty in completing certain tasks assigned to them. Volunteers must have their expenses covered when fulfilling their roles, including travel and food costs. London's

Freedom Pass scheme puts the city ahead of many other communities when it comes to helping older volunteers and workers to travel to their organisations.

Encouraging Civic Participation

While many older people are interested and willing to engage in civic functions, there can be barriers that stop them from attending. Suggestions for improving civic engagement include: improving accessibility at events; reserving seats for older people; and making sure that information about civic activities is released in a format that can be accessed by people of all ages.

It is also important that older people are not continually separated out into specific "older people's groups" and are still able to make their voices heard at intergenerational forums.

Valuing Older Londoners' Contributions

Reports of age discrimination in the workplace are widespread in Britain even though older workers are not necessarily less healthy, less educated, less skilful or productive than their younger counterparts. This can result in disrespect to current employees or even a flat refusal to hire older workers.

In addition, the Women and Equalities Committee have argued that the talents of more than a million people aged over 50 are being wasted because of discrimination, bias and outdated employment practices.

A key part of an Age-friendly London will be to ensure the city understands and appreciates the valuable contributions older Londoners make in all forms of life.

5. Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings

Public spaces directly affect older Londoners' mobility, independence, and quality of life. Without safe and easily accessible outdoor spaces, older people can be discouraged from leaving the house, which can cause both their mental and physical health to deteriorate. The WHO states that cities around the world should make adjustments to improve the quality of life, access, and safety of its citizens.

Pleasant Environment and Green Spaces

A truly Age-friendly City should have clean and tidy streets with low levels of air and noise pollution. In a city as large as London, this can often be difficult to achieve, with overcrowding and substantial vehicle use contributing to an unwelcoming environment in parts of the capital.

Well-maintained green spaces are a must, allowing for older Londoners to be more active in a social setting whilst also appreciating the natural beauty of their city. The WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide suggests creating several small, quieter, and contained green spaces to reduce the number of hazards faced in large busy parks, such as cyclists, skateboarders, and dogs.

In addition to well-maintained greenery, public spaces must provide seating areas to allow older people to rest when out-and-about. Free drinking fountains should also be installed where appropriate. Such spaces should be frequently placed along popular walking and shopping routes to allow older Londoners to feel confident when travelling around their city.

Similarly, public toilets are a vital facility, allowing Londoners to spend more time in the city without needing to head home at short notice. There must also be a good number of Changing Places Toilets, which are designed to be suitable for people with profound and multiple impairments, as well as those who require the assistance of a carer.

Our CEO Paul Goulden commented on the Mayor's plans for more public toilets in November 2017:

“It is reassuring to see that the Mayor's London Plan has committed to building more accessible public toilets across the capital. We want as many older Londoners as possible to be able to move confidently around their city without restriction and this pledge should go a long way to improving their experiences when out and about in London.

The commitment to build more Changing Places toilets is especially encouraging, as many older people live with limited mobility or require the support of a carer. We look forward to the provision of the new free publicly accessible toilets across the city.”

Age-friendly Pavements and Accessibility

The condition of pavements and footways has a clear impact on the quality of life for older Londoners. Pavements that are narrow, uneven, cracked, or congested present real risks to the wellbeing of older people, both through the physical dangers they pose and the effect they have on older Londoners' confidence to move around their own city. The WHO reports that problems with pavements are a near universal problem, affecting many cities around the world.

In addition to these structural problems, bad weather can also make the city difficult to move through, so councils must be ready to clear and grit icy pavements in winter.

Dangerous paving is a particular issue for older people who: are living with dementia; have a mobility-related or visual disability; are at risk of falls. As with many elements of an Age-friendly City, safe paving can help to reduce medical costs for the NHS, both by helping older people to remain active, and by reducing their risk of falling.

“Without safe and easily accessible outdoor spaces, older people can be discouraged from leaving the house, which can cause both their mental and physical health to deteriorate.”

The WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide lists several ways to make sure that pavements and footways are as age-friendly as possible:

- A smooth, level, non-slip surface
- Sufficient width to accommodate wheelchairs
- Dropped curbs that taper off to be level with the road
- Clearance from obstructions such as street vendors, parked cars and trees
- Priority of access for pedestrians.

One key concern is making sure that the commitment to creating pleasant environments and green spaces does not clash with the aim for safe pavements, i.e. by planting trees or building seating areas that clutter footways.

Road Safety

The ability to cross the road safely is, naturally, a concern for many older people. This is especially true in a city as busy as London, where volume and speed of traffic can be overwhelming.

Age UK London frequently attends accessibility meetings and focus groups where the issue of shared space is raised. Shared space is a design concept that removes the barriers between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists encouraging everybody to share the same road space. Unfortunately, such spaces can be dangerous and intimidating for partially-sighted citizens who need clear delineation between roads, cycle lanes, and footways.

Safer Ageing in London

The final three domains that make up a WHO Age-friendly City cover the process of ageing safely. A truly Age-friendly London will allow all older citizens to feel confident, safe, and respected in their city. Here are some of the ways to help older Londoners to age safely.



6. Housing

All Londoners should live safely and securely in a property that suits their needs. This is an essential quality of an Age-friendly City. Appropriate housing is a huge factor in determining the independence and quality of life for older citizens, by keeping them safe and warm and by helping them to access community and social services.

Affordability

Cost of housing is a huge issue across the United Kingdom and nowhere more so than London, where house prices and rent costs outstrip the rest of the country. Affordability of housing has a massive

bearing on an individual's quality of life, restricting spending in key areas, most notably utilities and food. This in turn has a large knock-on effect on health and wellbeing, which can lead to increased pressure on the NHS.

High property costs affect older Londoners in particular, as they have less capacity for increasing their earnings in response to rent increases. Those on a pension or approaching retirement are particularly at risk of rental increases gradually eating away at finances. Older people are also more likely to look to remain in a "home for life" and find it especially difficult to move if their living costs become unaffordable. The cost and hassle of the moving process can often see older people stuck in houses that are

too big for them or lack the adaptations needed to suit their current needs. Older people are also more likely to cut down on working hours than their younger counterparts, either for their own health reasons or to care for significant others. This again has a knock on effect on their ability to afford housing.

With an absence of genuinely affordable housing in London, the likely impact of not addressing the needs of older people who are struggling financially could be to force them out of areas where they want to live and may have lived for a very long time. In the worst-case scenarios, this could even lead to homelessness. This is especially concerning as the number of rough sleepers aged 56+ in London has increased by 105% between 2006 and 2015.

Design and Services

Housing design has a large impact on the ability of older people to live comfortably at home. The WHO's guide to an Age-friendly City states that older people should live in accommodation that is:

"...built from adequate materials and structurally sound; has even surfaces; has an elevator if it is multi-level accommodation; has appropriate bathroom and kitchen facilities; is large enough to move about in; has adequate storage space; has passages and doorways large enough to accommodate a wheelchair; and is appropriately equipped to meet the ambient environmental conditions."

Furthermore, essential services such as gas, electricity, and water supply must be

satisfactory and affordable for all citizens. This is especially important for older people who are often less able to increase their earnings in line with rises in utility bills.

Modifications and Maintenance

The opportunity to modify one's house or flat affects the ability of older people to continue living comfortably at home. Therefore, it is important to keep older Londoners aware of possible options for adapting their homes and the ways to go about this. However, retrofitting a home in London can often be complex and costly, suggesting a requirement to build specialist housing with the needs older people in mind.

The ability to have maintenance and repair work performed on one's property is also a key aspect of age-friendly living. It is important that such changes are made in a timely and proficient manner. Furthermore, older Londoners should be kept informed of the rights and responsibilities – both of themselves and their landlords – to repair work.

Options

A range of housing options that can accommodate changing needs is an important feature of an Age-friendly City. The opportunity to downsize, to move to a care home, or simply to relocate to a quieter part of town should be available to all citizens as they age. Pivotal to this is the ability of older Londoners to know what housing options are available and to be able to locate such accommodation easily.

7. Communication and Information

The ability to receive timely and practical information to help manage life and meet personal needs is vital for active ageing. In addition, it's important that older citizens are able to stay connected with people and events to avoid the difficulties posed by social isolation.

Nowadays our world is characterised by rapid dissemination of information from a variety of sources. Meanwhile in a city as large as London, it can be hard to keep track of the myriad services, events, and groups that occur across the capital. Yet regardless of the variety of communication choices and the volume of information available, a central feature of an Age-friendly City should be to have relevant information that is readily accessible to older people with varying capacities and resources.

Widespread Distribution of Information

London has a whole host of different media from which to receive information, whether through generalist communications channels such as press and broadcasters right through to targeted information online. Of particular value is non-partisan information that reaches older people in their daily lives and activities, through direct personal delivery, telephone, and distribution in key locations, for example: community centres, stores, and public services.

Yet the ability to access large amounts of information is only worthwhile if the

material is relevant and timely. In a city the size of London, information overload can lead to citizens missing out on important details about local services and events. A frequent barrier stems from lack of awareness of available information as well as not knowing how to locate such information. This often means that older people may miss out on benefits and services for which they are entitled, or learn about them too late to apply.

One suggestion to make communication more age-friendly is to provide more information specifically focussed upon the interests of older people through both print and broadcast media. Another idea is to broaden the scope of programming to make sure that older people's interests are included.

Spoken Word

The WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide states that: "no matter how developed the city, word of mouth is the principal and preferred means of communication for older people". Accordingly, many older people value the interpersonal aspects of communication, which can often be overlooked in an increasingly "digital-by-default" world. Oral communication is especially important for those who are visually impaired or illiterate and has the added benefit of making the person in question feel valued.

Age-friendly communication recognises the importance of informal channels to deliver information to older citizens, a goal best achieved by encouraging an active lifestyle with lots of community involvement. This raises the issue of contacting those who are social isolated



and therefore less likely to attend community events. The internet has often been suggested as a possible solution, but should not be seen as the only way to solve the problem – projects such as Age UK's befriending scheme can also play an important role here. Similarly, using locations such as health centres to disseminate information is a useful way to contact people who are less likely to engage with community groups and projects.

Age-friendly Formats and Design

Perhaps the most important element of communication is the manner in which the information is presented. Font size and type must be large enough to read and on a background that accommodates for those who are visually impaired. This is especially important for product labels on items such as medication which can often be hard to decipher. Official forms, which are vital for receiving services and benefits, can be especially difficult to understand, which is especially

concerning as many older people are found to be missing out on benefits due to a lack of information.

Auditory information must be spoken at a moderate pace, especially on transport, but also during radio and television announcements. Automated answering services are also a struggle, often providing information too quickly, with too many options, and without the chance to speak to a real person. Service automation is an increasing problem in a "digital-by-default" world, with a shift towards electronic visual displays and automated banking, postal, and parking machines. Some of these automated systems are too high for people to reach, especially if they are in a wheelchair.

8. Respect and Social Inclusion

Britain is an ageist society characterised by intergenerational disputes. Despite "Age" featuring as one of the nine

protected characteristic outlined by the Equalities Act of 2010, ageism is prevalent across the country. According to a recent RSPH report, negative attitudes towards age are prevalent across all age groups in Britain and these views start from a young age. Such viewpoints stem from negative portals in the media, a lack of regular contact between the generations, and age-based prejudice in the workplace.

Behaviour and Respect

An Age-friendly City will see all older citizens treated with respect and courtesy by a society that is aware and considerate of their needs. Currently, this is not the case, with many reports of disrespectful behaviour logged throughout the UK. People are seen to be impatient with older people who are slower at performing tasks, for example at the supermarket, or when driving. On the other hand, some older people report frustration with the patronising tone-of-voice used by service providers. This suggests that a fine line exists between benevolent and hostile ageism that Age-friendly Cities must help their citizens to navigate. This can occur through education on the topic of ageing as well as by ensuring that depictions of older people in the media are accurate and respectful.

Ageism and Ignorance

British society tends to glorify youth within popular imagery, which causes age and ageing to be portrayed in a negative light. This leads to ageist biases forming within citizens' minds, creating

the farcical idea that older people are useless, stingy, and a burden. A frequent stereotype implies that older people hoard wealth and housing stock, whilst also accusing them of "bed blocking". The WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide suggests that such attitudes stem from a lack of interaction between the generations in big cities, as well as a general lack of public knowledge around ageing and ageism. In addition, the impersonal nature of large and growing cities can often lead to a lack of empathy, which reinforces discriminatory attitudes such as ageism.

An Age-friendly City must, therefore, organise and facilitate encounters between the generations, from employment opportunities, to events, to co-housing schemes. As public awareness about the ageing process is so lacking, education around ageing should feature within schools. Meanwhile, older people's organisations have a responsibility to inform all sections of society about the myriad opportunities available in later life as well as the important contributions that older citizens make.

As social engagement positively contributes to the perception of older people in society, we must also ensure that older Londoners are able to access employment and voluntary opportunities.

Thank you for reading our summary of the eight domains of a WHO Age-friendly City.

To learn more about our plans for an Age-friendly London, please visit: www.agefriendlylondon.org.uk

In the hotseat...

Our new Campaigns Officer **John McGeachy** tells us how he can help to deliver an Age-friendly London.

Why are older people's issues important to you?

Three of my grandparents passed away when I was young and I always regretted that I never got to know them well enough.

I was fortunate that I got to know my grandfather well and he had a very happy later life; something everyone should be able to have. There is a desperate need to change public narratives about ageing which are all too often removed from realities and can pit younger people against older people.

What projects are you involved in?

As Campaigns Officer I'm looking forward to working on campaigns that have a very real impact on the lives of older people in London. It's fantastic to see genuine commitments to making London a truly Age-friendly City and we now have an opportunity that must be taken to turn

commitments into tangible change that improves people's lives.

Age UK London should be at the forefront of this, which is why I'm so excited to be joining the team.

What has been your best experience in working with older people?

From working alongside older volunteers supporting refugees to access local services, to working with older campaigners raising awareness about the victims of war, I have been fortunate to work with so many brilliant older people.

During my time at the charity HelpAge International I was often in awe of older campaigners across the world, many of whom had grown up under authoritarian regimes, but showed enormous passion and most of all bravery to stand up for their rights and the rights of others.

Editor

George Harvey

Contributors

Paul Goulden
George Harvey
John McGeachy

London Age highlights issues which affect older people in the capital. It is produced to support Age UK London's mission to improve the quality of life for older Londoners and to enhance their status and influence.

t 020 7820 6770
general@ageuklondon.org.uk
www.ageuk.org.uk/london
[@ageuklondon](https://twitter.com/ageuklondon)

Age UK London works across the capital to improve the quality of life for older people and to enhance their status and influence.

If you have any comment on the magazine content or ideas for the next issue, we'd love to hear from you: gharvey@ageuklondon.org.uk

Charity registration number 1092198
Company registration number 4407861



Connecting you with businesses you can trust!

Looking for a reliable and trusted business? Then use the Age UK London Business Directory, we have an extensive list of businesses that have all been checked and vetted.

Call us free on

0800 334 5056

or go online at
www.trustedtraders.london
to find your nearest service today!



www.trustedtraders.london



Registered charity number: 1092198