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UN launches new scheme to make cities friendlier to elderly people



An elderly couple walks arm-in-arm in Bolivia

29 June 2010 – Elderly people have an ally in the United Nations World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), which today [launched](#) a new scheme to ensure that they can remain active and healthy in the world's cities.

The Global Network of Age-friendly Cities is part of the agency's broader response to rapidly greying populations. The greatest changes are taking place in less-developed countries, and it is estimated that 80 per cent of the expected 2 billion people over the age of 60 will be living in low- or middle-income countries.

"Older people are a vital, and often overlooked, resource for families and for society," said John Beard, Director of WHO's Department of Ageing and Life Course.

"Their contribution will only be fully realized if they maintain their health and if the barriers that prevent them engaging in family and community life are broken down," he added.

While government responses have been focused on the implications of ageing populations on increasing demand for pensions and health care, WHO hopes to highlight the positive contributions older people make to society.

The agency first started identifying the key elements in cities that support active and healthy ageing, looking into 33 urban areas. The research confirms the importance for older people of access to public transport and outdoor spaces, as well as appropriate housing, community support and health services.

WHO has also stressed the need to foster connections allowing older people to take part in society, overcome ageism and access civic participation and employment.

The new Global Network builds on these principles, [calling](#) on participating cities to continuously assess and implement steps to improve the environment for their older residents.

WHO said that it has been inundated by responses since sending out invitations to cities, both large and small, to join the network last December.

New York has become the first city to sign up, with Mayor Michael Bloomberg being presented with the first certificate of membership today.

So far, WHO has also set up formal agreements with the French Government, the Irish Ageing Well Network and the Slovenian Network of Age-friendly Cities.

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