

WHO launches Global Network of Age-friendly Cities Urban environments that allow older people to remain active and healthy

29 JUNE 2010 | GENEVA -- Today, WHO launches the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities as part of a broader response to the rapid ageing of populations. Populations in almost every corner of the world are growing older. The greatest changes are occurring in less-developed countries. By 2050, it is estimated that 80% of the expected 2 billion people aged 60 years or over will live in low or middle income countries. The Network aims to help cities create urban environments that allow older people to remain active and healthy participants in society.

Positive contribution of older people

While the response to population ageing has often focussed on the implications for governments of increasing demand for pensions and health care, WHO tries to place more emphasis on the positive contributions older people make to society. "Older people are a vital, and often overlooked, resource for families and for society," said Dr John Beard, Director of the Department of Ageing and Life Course at WHO " Their contribution will only be fully realised if they maintain their health and if the barriers that prevent them engaging in family and community life are broken down".

Supporting active and healthy ageing

The WHO Age-friendly Cities initiative began in 2006 by identifying the key elements of the urban environment that support active and healthy ageing. Research from 33 cities, confirmed the importance for older people of access to public transport, outdoor spaces and buildings, as well as the need for appropriate housing, community support and health services. But it also highlighted the need to foster the connections that allow older people to be active participants in society, to overcome ageism and to provide greater opportunities for civic participation and employment.

Cities wishing to join the global network

The Global Network builds on these principles but takes them a significant step further by requiring participating cities to commence an ongoing process of assessment and implementation. Network members are committed to taking active steps to creating a better environment for their older residents.

Since invitations to join the Network were sent out last December, WHO has been swamped by responses. Many individual cities, both large and small have formally applied to join the Network. WHO has also established formal agreements with the French government, the Irish Ageing Well Network and the Slovenian Network of Age-friendly Cities to develop affiliated national programmes. The China National Committee on Ageing has also indicated interest in developing a national programme, and 5 Canadian Provinces are running complementary initiatives.

New York is the first city to join the network and today, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg will be presented with the first certificate of membership.

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