



Senior's Housing

Holly
Ervick-Knote

**"Almost 9 out of
10 adults aged
50 years and over
would prefer to
remain in their homes
indefinitely"**

- American Association of
Retired Persons

The aging population represents a diverse and growing group with many different preferences and needs for services, care and lifestyle choices. As the number of older adults continues to increase, considerations begin to arise about the changing needs of this group. In 2007, the *World Health Organization* released *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*, which presents eight domains making up the framework for age friendly communities. This document focuses on the Guide's housing domain by outlining a selection of housing options for seniors that have been implemented in communities throughout North America.

Aging in Place

It has been shown that most older adults prefer to continue living in their homes as long as is possible (American Association of Retired Persons, 2003). Ageing in place can have psychological as well as economic benefits. When appropriate, it is often beneficial for older adults to remain in familiar locations and receive assistance from friends and neighbours (Taylor and Buys, 2012). However, certain challenges remain for older adults who choose to age in place. Informal assistance is not always available, and dwelling design can present barriers to people experiencing functional disabilities. The following presents examples of how some of these challenges have been addressed.

Home modifications

Modifications to the home environment can enable older adults to continue living independently for longer by removing functional barriers. Many modifications can be made to increase accessibility within the home at minor costs. The Home Adaptions for Seniors Independence Program (HASI) offered through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) assists low-income seniors in paying for minor home adaptations. The program provides forgivable loans of up to \$3500 for minor adaptations including handrails, lever handles on doors, walk-in showers, seats, and grab bars (CMHC, n.d.). The CMHCs Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program for Persons with Disabilities provides funding for people who require more extensive modifications, such as increasing space for wheelchair maneuvering.



Figure #2: Modifications in and around the home
as these small ramps can help people with lim-
mobility to live more easily in their home



Image 3: Seniors who live in rural communities face additional challenges resulting from low-densities



Image 4: Bathtub modifications can help make it easier to age in place

Considerations for rural seniors

Ageing in place presents additional challenges for people in rural communities. Greater isolation of houses and a lack of service and amenity clusters make it more difficult for rural seniors to access the services they need while remaining at home (Dye, Willoughby, & Battisto, 2010; Keating et. al, 2013). It is useful to think of small towns as being part of a larger regional fabric. As Keating et. al. point out, because rural communities have fewer economic and infrastructure resources, it is important to recognize that they “do not exist in isolation but are part of a wider geographical milieu, connected to other communities in a hierarchy of service centres and catchment areas where transport networks provide or constrain opportunities for social, cultural, economic, and political participation” (2013, 329).

Aging in place can be especially challenging for people living in rural communities

- Keating et. al.

The Decision to Relocate

Ageing in place is not always possible or desirable for all older adults. The decision to relocate is influenced by factors such as income, age, the availability of helping networks, and housing and neighbourhood satisfaction (Oswald and Rowles, 2006; Day, Carreon and Stump, 2000). While some older adults choose to relocate early on, others are forced relocate when living independently is no longer a viable option. In the past there have been few options for senior housing in between living independently and nursing homes. In recent years, however, there has been significant exploration of senior specific dwelling and community models that provide a variety of housing and community layouts, as well as levels of service and tenure types. The following provides a brief overview of some examples that have been largely successful, and others that are still evolving.



Image 5: Multi-unit housing can provide various levels of service and care, or be used for independent living

Cohousing

Cohousing refers to a small community centered around resident management and participation. Houses are either attached units or single family homes with some common facilities and outdoor space. Some uses of shared space may include spaces for community meals and other social events, library space, exercise rooms, and gardens. Most cohousing communities have a common



Image 6: Cohousing offers a more communal option



Image 7: Oakcreek Senior Cohousing residents tending to their garden

“If somebody just wants a place to live and doesn’t want to commune with their neighbors, this is not for them”

**- Annie Russell,
senior cohousing resident**

house with kitchen and dining area, a sitting area, laundry and a play area for children. As well, neighbourhood design is an important consideration. As Siegel and Rinsky state, “Ideally, cohousing communities are designed and developed with the communal aspect in mind, as the neighborhood layout can be a key factor in the model” (2013, 230). However, communities can also retrofit existing housing. Cohousing has not generally been a senior specific housing option, although such examples have begun to appear.

Oakcreek Senior Cohousing is made up of 24 single storey, single-family attached homes in groups of four. Each house has its own kitchen, living room and bathroom, and all incorporate universal design features. A common house is centrally located and contains a shared kitchen and dining area, craft rooms, guest bedrooms and bathrooms.



Image 8: UBRCs allow people to maintain a connection to the University as they age

Supportive Housing and Assisted Living

These housing options have evolved more recently, in order to fill the gap between senior housing with minimal support and dependent living options. These options provide varying levels of service and can address the diverse needs of seniors, and respond to the increasing demand resulting from demographic changes. Although some organizations have differentiated between the two housing types, there is no clear consensus in the literature (Golant, 2001).

Supported housing and assisted living options can include meals, emergency response systems, housekeeping, social and recreational opportunities, and additional assistance with personal activities (such as bathing or taking medication).

University-based retirement communities

University-based retirement communities (UBRCs) are an emerging alternative place type that shows promise as a way for older adults, especially those with a preexisting connection to the institution, to enable an active and stimulating environment for those living there. Carle (2006) presents five criteria in creating successful UBRCs: proximity to campus, two-directional programming, continuing care component, financial link between the university and the UBRC, and an alumni connection.

Final Thoughts

Older adults represent a diverse group with a variety of housing preferences based on lifestyle choices, social networks, family support, income, and level of care required. Some older adults prefer to age in place while others are drawn to more communal retirement neighbourhoods or cohousing. The selection of housing options for seniors is increasing, however many of these options do not exist in all towns and cities. Expanding the housing options that are available to older people is a crucial component in creating a more age-friendly place.

Sources:

- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). (2003). Understanding senior housing into the next century. Washington, DC.
- Baldwin, C. (2013). The Village Movement: Creating solutions to support ageing in place. *Bifocal*, 35(1), 14-16.
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Home adaptations for seniors independence program (HASI). Webpage. http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/ab/onre/onre_006.cfm
- Day, K., Carreon, D., & Stump, C. (2000). The therapeutic design of environments for people with dementia: A review of the empirical research. *The Gerontologist*, 40, 397-416.
- Dye, C. J., Willoughby, D. F., & Battisto, D. G. (2010). Advice from rural elders: What it takes to age in place. *Educational Gerontology*, 37(1), 74-93. doi:10.1080/03601277.2010.515889
- Golant, S.M. (2001). Assistive living: A potential solution to Canada's long-term care crisis. Vancouver: Gerontology Research Centre, Simon Fraser University.
- Gonyea, J. G., & Burnes, K. (2013). Aging Well at Home: Evaluation of a Neighborhood-based Pilot Project to "Put Connection Back into Community." *Journal of Housing For the Elderly*, 27(4), 333-347. doi:10.1080/02763893.2013.813425
- Keating, N., Eales, J., & Phillips, J. (2013). Age-friendly rural communities: Conceptualizing 'Best-Fit'. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 32(4), 319-332. doi:10.1017/S0714980813000408
- Lawhon, Larry. (2013). Senior cohousing: An option for boomers. *Planning*, American Planning Association.
- Oswald, F., & Rowles, G. D. (2006). Beyond the relocation trauma in old age: New trends in today's elders' residential decisions. In H. W. Wahl, C. Tesch-Romer, & A. Hoff (Eds.), *New dynamics in old age: Individual, environmental and societal perspectives*. 127-152. Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- Taylor, M., & Buys, L. (2014). Ageing in suburbia: Designing for demographic change in Australia and New Zealand. *Architectural Design*, 84(2), 54-59.
- Transportation for America. (2011). Aging in place, stuck without options: Fixing the mobility crisis threatening the baby boomer generation.

Photo Credits:

- Cover images: <http://owcs.ca/aging-in-place/>
<http://www.seniorsforliving.com/community/Merrill-Gardens-at-West-Seattle-RP/>
<http://www.care2.com/greenliving/creating-cohousing-book-giveaway.html>
- Image 2: <http://101mobility.com/blog/tag/modular-ramps/>
- Image 3: <http://www.housingwire.com/articles/26134-rural-communities-struggle-to-find-affordable-rentals>
- Image 4: <http://info.bathfitter.com/>
- Image 5: Senior's housing 2011. *Alberta Views*.
- Image 6: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/seniors-reinvent-aging-through-cohousing-senior-villages>
- Image 7: Lawhon, Larry. (2013). Senior cohousing: An option for boomers. *Planning*, American Planning Association.
- Image 8: <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/should-you-retire-to-college-2014-02-10>