

National Council on Disability:

Livable Communities

Livable communities promote adult well-being, independence, and inclusion of people with disabilities and seniors in daily living. Coordinated government planning and funding can be useful to break barriers, establish, and sustain positive changes.

Lead Agency:

National Council on Disability

Agency Mission:

The mission of the National Council on Disability is to promote the full inclusion, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities of all ages and backgrounds by providing advice, analysis, and recommendations on disability policy to the President, Congress, and other federal agencies.

Principal Investigator:

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Partner Agency:

The Center for Home Care Policy and Research

General Description:

NCD began this project with the premise that full community integration recognizes the needs of people with disabilities. Among those needs are safe and affordable housing; access to transportation; access to the political process; and the right to enjoy services, programs, and activities that public and private entities offer to all members of the community

Livable communities enable citizens who choose to reside their homes and communities to do so, regardless of age or disability. However, across American, many communities face difficult choices and decisions about how to grow, plan for change, and improve the quality of life for all citizens. Researchers for this NCD project adapted characteristics of a model or framework originally established to help communities measure and improve their livability by people who are aging. The resulting “livable communities” framework

identifies elements that a number of communities around the country have incorporated in their approaches to inclusion.

NCD's project shines the spotlight on inclusive community practices that are working. Attention to common needs among people who are growing older and other adults with disabilities were not surprising. The project identifies and provides examples of the strategies used to transfer policy into actions. Broadly, the strategies address identifiable elements focused on environmental inclusion, safety and affordability. The project also makes recommendations for consideration by other entities.

Excellence: What makes this project exceptional?

This unique report clearly describes how communities can improve the quality of life for adults with disabilities, as well as for the growing population of seniors who may develop disabilities later in life. The report is organized around six key goals: 1) providing affordable, appropriate, accessible housing; 2) ensuring accessible, affordable, reliable, safe transportation; 3) adjusting the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility; 4) providing work, volunteer, and education opportunities; 5) ensuring access to key health and support services; and 6) encouraging participation in civic, cultural, social, and recreational activities. A number of model programs from around the United States are highlighted. Individual's stories of livability are described. And one community's regional approach to incorporating livability principles for long-term planning and growth is presented.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

This report is based on the research and the community model of livability as constructed by the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP). This research is organized around six key goals necessary for community living for people with disabilities and people who are elderly. The key goals involve : 1) providing affordable, appropriate, accessible housing; 2) ensuring accessible, affordable, reliable, safe transportation; 3) adjusting the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility; 4) providing work, volunteer, and education opportunities; 5) ensuring access to key health and support services; and 6) encouraging participation in civic, cultural, social, and recreational activities.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

Communities across the country are aging. By the year 2030, one out of five people in America will be over 65. Those 85 and older are the fastest-growing segment of the population. As they grow older, the overwhelming majority of Americans will remain in their homes and communities. In fact, contrary to popular perception of older adults relocating to retirement communities, people aged 65 to 85 are the least likely of any age group to move. The active involvement of vital, independent older citizens — those

"aging in place" — can enhance the social and civic life of communities. At the same time, communities will need to provide services to a growing number of their frail and disabled elders. To prepare for this so-called "Age Boom," many communities need help in creating an environment that will support older people's health and well-being as they age.

Comprehensive regional planning approaches such as the one described in *Livable Communities for Adults with Disabilities* address at a macro level what community planners, policy makers, funders, home builders and remodelers, and citizens know at the local level -- i.e., that lifespan planning may not have been a priority for Boomers in their financing of retirement but it has certainly begun to catch on. In many respects, these planning approaches call for new and achievable configurations of services for older adults that imitate what Centers for Independent Living for people with disabilities have refined over decades -- i.e., that the goal of living independently is possible and of the highest priority.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

The discussion of livable community components in this research report includes many examples of communities across the United States that have successfully implemented measures to improve the quality of life for people of all ages and abilities. Communities large and small are increasingly looking toward the livable community concept to help them address some of the most challenging issues that they face today, such as a growing population of older residents, an increasing number of persons with disabilities from diverse cultures, rising housing costs, limited transportation alternatives, lack of coordination among agencies, and limited and "silo" funding. The examples demonstrate what is possible when stakeholders work together and make livability a priority in their community.