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Understanding Age Friendly Communities in B.C.

February 2020

Many adults living and managing daily with complex chronic medical conditions, or experiencing frailty, may be increasingly dependent on others to maintain their health and well-being and want to be more fully supported within their communities. People want to be able to access their communities and services without feeling inhibited by medical conditions, disability or frailty.

Age-Friendly Communities in B.C. are about “helping at at that community level for older adults to be able to stay at home longer”

Part of this commitment is B.C.'s Age-Friendly Community designation and associated Age-Friendly Grant Program. The designation and program are designed to recognize achievement and encourage and motivate communities to become age-friendly. But what is an Age-Friendly Community?

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a report, Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide, outlining the importance of creating age-friendly communities all over the world – communities that could support their older citizens in a meaningful

way. This would lead to the more significant WHO global Age-Friendly Cities Project, which B.C. has been a part of since the beginning, along with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).



The Age-Friendly Community digital seal granted by the Ministry to communities that they have been officially recognized by the province as an Age-Friendly Community.

Out of that work came the global definition of what an Age-Friendly Community is, and it was determined that these communities would be built on a foundation of eight essential pillars.

The pillars (available on page 9 of the WHO Guide), modified to reflect B.C.'s cultural inclusivity, are:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings
2. Transportation (including road safety)
3. Housing
4. Respect, social inclusion, or cultural safety



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5. Social well-being and participation
6. Communications and information
7. Community engagement and employment
8. Community support and health and wellness

In an Age-Friendly Community, the policies, services, and built environments are designed to help older adults live safe and independent lives, enjoy good health, and stay involved in the community. Once a community in B.C. decides it wants to apply for the Age-Friendly designation, they must follow four steps before they can be considered:

1. Put together a committee / working group that includes older adults
2. Pass a local council or district board resolution committing to the designation
3. Conduct an age-friendly assessment (which looks at those 8 pillars)
4. Create an action plan, including distinct items outlining how they are going to satisfy the pillars

Once they've completed those steps, they can apply for Age-Friendly Recognition from B.C., including a digital seal for their online presence. Once they are recognized by the province, their information is sent on to PHAC, where the community is recognized at a federal level, and then via the WHO, on a global scale. There were 10 B.C. communities recognized in 2019 as Age-Friendly, meaning they are taking those steps to ensure older adults in the province can live active, socially engaged, and independent lives for as long as possible. Currently in the province the total number

of officially recognized Age-Friendly communities is 57.

Supporting Age-Friendly Communities in achieving their individual action plans is the Age-Friendly Grant Program, which is a partnership between the province and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. Local governments can apply for up to \$25,000 to support age-friendly assessments and action plans, and up to \$15,000 to support age-friendly projects. Some examples of projects include housing and transportation strategies, programs to support social connectedness and mental health, and strategies around healthy eating and physical activity. "It is a really fantastic program," notes Danielle Berg, policy analyst for Injury Prevention and Healthy Settings at the Ministry of Health. "It is helping at that community level for older adults to be able to stay at home longer by being able to live in these age-friendly communities."

A total of \$729,500 in Age-Friendly Grants was provided to B.C. communities in 2019, including four First Nations communities. Since 2007, over \$7 million in grants have been given to support over 317 plans, programs, and projects across B.C.

More information about Age-Friendly Communities in B.C. and how to apply for Age-Friendly Grants, can be found at <http://www.gov.bc.ca/agefriendly>.

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