Becoming an Age-friendly Community: Local Government Guide

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Contents

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 About this Guide

This guide has been created to help communities in British Columbia continue or initiate work on becoming age-friendly. It is primarily aimed at local governments but provides guidance to individuals, community and voluntary organizations, or anyone interested in championing the age-friendly initiative in their community. The guide draws on the experiences and recommendations from age-friendly initiatives since 2007, including the Age-friendly British Columbia (AFBC) implementation initiative, Canadian Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors' rural and remote communities project and the World Health Organization global age-friendly cities project.

Section 2.0 sets out a six-step process that can be followed to become an age-friendly community. Section 3.0 describes how local governments can be recognized for their efforts in becoming age-friendly through the AFBC recognition program.

The Province of B.C. has an AFBC coordinator to help communities and local governments in their efforts to become age-friendly. The coordinator can assist local age-friendly champions to:

- Promote awareness about the needs, benefits and actions needed to become age-friendly.
- Organize evaluations to learn about existing age-friendly features and barriers in their community.
- Discover age-friendly solutions that have worked in other areas.
- Find out about funding opportunities.
- Develop a system to monitor progress and benefits from age-friendly initiatives.

Contact AgefriendlyBC@gov.bc.ca for assistance.

1.2   Background: What is an Age-friendly Community?

The numbers and proportions of older people in cities, towns and rural communities are increasing. In 2013, just over 16 per cent of B.C.'s population was 65 or older and by 2036 this proportion is projected to be over 24 per cent.[1] Older people contribute significantly to their communities, their families, the economy and society in general.

The age-friendly initiative was created to make it easier for older people to age actively, to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to fully participate in society. Local governments that plan and take action to accommodate the changing needs of older residents can ensure that their communities remain attractive places to live with features that not only benefit seniors, but support the health, safety and participation of residents of all ages.

Supporting communities to become age-friendly is one of the ways the Province is working to ensure B.C. communities are healthy, thriving places for families to live, work, learn and play. In an age-friendly community, policies, services, settings and structures enable older people to age actively by:

- recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older persons;
- anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences;
- respecting decisions and lifestyle choices;
- protecting those who are most vulnerable; and
- promoting inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life.[2]

The age-friendly community initiative started with the World Health Organization in 2006, and involved 33 cities of varying sizes throughout the world. Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide, contains the lessons, strategies and information learned through discussions in these cities. Meanwhile, Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide, was developed to complement the WHO age-friendly project by assessing the unique needs of rural and remote communities in Canada. Building on these national and international initiatives, the Province has supported the development of age-friendly communities since 2007. Many local governments have taken steps to make their communities more age-friendly, with support from the Province and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

Making communities age-friendly is one of the most effective strategies to promote healthy and active aging, and contributes to the creation of sustainable, healthy communities which benefit all British Columbians.

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1.   BCStats, British Columbia Population Projections: 2013 to 2036, August 2013.
2.   World Health Organization, Global Age-Friendly Cities Project, brochure published by the Public Health Agency of Canada, May 2006.

Eight key features of an age-friendly community:

1.   Outdoor spaces and public buildings are pleasant, clean, secure and physically accessible.

2.   Public transportation is accessible and affordable.

3.   Housing is affordable, appropriately located, well built, well designed and secure.

4.   Opportunities exist for social participation in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with people of all ages and cultures.

5.   Older people are treated with respect and are included in civic life.

6.   Opportunities for employment and volunteerism cater to older persons' interests and abilities.

7.   Age-friendly communication and information is available.

8.   Community support and health services are tailored to older persons' needs.

Adapted from WHO, Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide

1.3   How to Use this Guide

This guide is intended to be a comprehensive resource to encourage age-friendly initiatives in your community and provides key resources, including samples, templates and guidelines. Each community will have different requirements, unique processes and resources for undertaking age-friendly work, and can tailor the steps and resources to best meet local needs.

2.0 Becoming an Age-friendly B.C. Community

2.1 Before you Begin: Lessons from Previous Age-friendly Initiatives

From October 2007 to September 2010, a provincial team supported 30 communities with their age-friendly projects. The outcomes provided valuable data about barriers to active aging in both rural and urban communities in the province. This experience also provided lessons about the key factors that led to success in creating a more age-friendly community. Before beginning the step-by-step process, it may be helpful to consider the following eight key factors that contributed to success in other communities.[3]

Communities who began age-friendly initiatives were more successful if they:

1. Had the strong support of local government.

Local government support was secured in a variety of ways. A number of communities asked the local government council or district board to pass a resolution endorsing the age-friendly initiative. Many of the local steering committees also presented findings from their age-friendly assessments and recommended actions to their local governments.

2. Had an age-friendly "champion" in the community.

The age-friendly project made better progress if there was at least one individual in the community who had a vision that this was an exciting, manageable and worthwhile project. These champions were from a range of backgrounds, and they helped gather momentum in the community because of their passion.

3. Appointed a dedicated staff person to work on the initiative.

The most successful communities had a dedicated staff person assigned to see the age-friendly project through to completion. These people were most often local government employees and it was clearly evident that this work was given a high priority as part of their role.

"It was critical to our success in Saanich to have a part of my job dedicated to following up on the plan that was established in Saanich. With so many competing priorities, it would be easy for a program like this to get lost in the shuffle."

Steve Meikle, Manager, Community Services, District of Saanich

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3.   From Gerotech Research Associates, Age-friendly British Columbia: Lessons Learned from October 1,2007 – September 30, 2010, (www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/topic/ AE132538BBF7FAA2EF5129B860EFAA4E/afbc/ afbc_evaluation_report.pdf).

4. **Had strong local partnerships that were inclusive of seniors and other stakeholders.**

Successful communities had steering committees made up of a wide range of stakeholders, which first and foremost included seniors. They also included representatives of local non-profit groups, businesses, law enforcement, ambulance, health care, public works, recreation centres and multicultural organizations. Some communities partnered with neighbouring First Nations. Many committees included people who had visual impairments, used wheelchairs or scooters, or had other physical disabilities. Inclusion of members from the latter group proved to be extremely valuable, since many people with disabilities face accessibility challenges that are similar to seniors' experiences. Several committees also included youth stakeholders because it was felt that seniors' issues impacted on people across the life span.

5. **Obtained a small grant to get started and used that to leverage additional money and resources.**

All of the communities obtained grant funding available from the Union of B.C. Municipalities or other sources to get the age-friendly project off the ground. Successful communities also used this grant to leverage additional funds and created innovative partnerships to enhance their work on projects such as trail enhancement and accessibility initiatives.

6. **Introduced small changes at the outset of the project.**

One strategy used by successful communities was to select "low hanging fruit" to demonstrate that some worthwhile changes could take place quickly and with limited resources. Examples of such projects included production of a guide to local seniors' services, installation of seating along a public walkway, and posting of signs to a public washroom. These small projects instilled confidence in the community's age-friendly initiative as a whole, did not require much cost or time, and also inspired people to tackle more complex issues.

7. **Cultivated a good relationship with the local media.**

An additional strategy used by several communities was the development of a strong relationship with local media. This served to obtain coverage of events and project activities, thereby raising awareness of the initiative, as well as engaging the public by keeping them informed.

8. **Took full advantage of the support services offered by the provincial government.**

Having provincial consultants available to assist community groups and local government staff was a valuable feature, as they served as a catalyst to guide the local initiative at the outset and provided ongoing support.

2.2   Step-by-Step Guide

This guide is primarily aimed at local governments but can also be used by individuals, community and voluntary organizations, or anyone interested in championing the age-friendly initiative in their community.

Tip: Consider applying for funding before you begin your planning or project work. See the **Funding Opportunities** insert.

The following steps are based on research and practice undertaken at the provincial, national and international levels.[4] Your process should be community-led and will undoubtedly reflect your community's character and composition, but use these steps and practical ideas to get started or to intensify your efforts. For assistance with this process, contact the AFBC coordinator at the Seniors' Healthy Living Secretariat at AgefriendlyBC@gov.bc.ca.

Step 1: Establish an Age-friendly Committee

One of the most effective ways to begin the process of making your community more age-friendly is to form a committee dedicated to this initiative, or to use an existing committee with a mandate that aligns with the age-friendly initiative, and preferably a reporting relationship to the local council or district board.

Purpose
Establishing an age-friendly committee at the outset will:

The District of Sechelt began its age-friendly project based on the success of a committee established to examine accessibility issues. The District combined its efforts to address the needs of both seniors and those with disabilities.

- Promote collaboration and involvement by key stakeholders who can offer ideas and innovative solutions from their unique perspective.
- Develop a coordinated approach between local government, citizens, service providers and community organizations.
- Raise public awareness and interest in planning for an age-friendly community.

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4.   These steps have been adapted from the following sources: Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide; the Centre on Aging (University of Manitoba) Age-Friendly Communities project; and the Public Health Agency of Canada's Pan-Canadian Age-friendly Communities Recognition Initiative.

Who Should Be Involved?

Do your best to establish a well-rounded group with representation from the following stakeholders:

- Senior residents: As seniors are not a homogeneous group, include older people of varying ages, gender, cultures and abilities to ensure a broad and inclusive perspective of their needs, views and suggestions.
- Elected officials and senior local government staff: Ensure you have a key staff contact in the local government and that the mayor/council or chair/district board is supportive.
- The community: Representatives from the private, business, health, and volunteer sectors will bring a variety of perspectives.
- Seniors' organizations: Speak with leaders at your local seniors' centre to see whether they are aware of, or want to be involved, in age-friendly activity in your community.

The goal is to have the committee in place for a long enough period to assist the local government through all the steps in becoming an age-friendly community. A sample of an age-friendly committee terms-of-reference is included in the key resources.

Key Resources
- Age-friendly Reading and Resources
- Age-friendly Committee Terms-of-Reference
- Funding Opportunities

Step 2: Pass a Local Council or District Board Resolution

An excellent way of formalizing your community's commitment to becoming more age-friendly is to pass a local council or district board resolution that indicates your community's support for the initiative. Having agreed to the initiative in principle, councils or district boards will then be more committed to taking action on recommendations which may arise. While a resolution does not guarantee that your local government will commit financial and human resources to the project, it is a good beginning and will help increase community awareness and gain formal recognition for the initiative. An alternative or additional approach for some communities to strengthen their formal commitment is to include specific age-friendly goals, objectives and policies in the official community plan or strategic plan.

Anyone can initiate the resolution process, though the steps followed will depend on whether you are within or outside of local government. If you are an individual, community organization or age-friendly committee, contact your local government for advice on how to proceed.

As part of the public consultation on their Official Community Plan (OCP) update, the Town of Comox commissioned a focused age-friendly consultation. This lead to a section on age-friendly planning in the new OCP approved in July 2011 with the following objectives:

1. To create a desirable location for people of all ages to live, work and retire.
2. To ensure Comox provides a safe, accessible community with a variety of services available.
3. To ensure the needs of seniors are considered in the context of new developments proposed for Comox.

These objectives are supported by policies for outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing and civic participation.

Key Resources
- Age-friendly Council / District Board Resolutions
- How to Pass a Local Council / District Board Resolution: Guidelines for Community Members

Step 3: Conduct an Age-friendly Assessment

Conducting an age-friendly assessment is a critical step in determining what types of age-friendly projects are needed. The assessment provides an opportunity for your community to:

- Highlight and celebrate existing age-friendly features and assets.
- Identify age-friendly barriers and needs.
- Determine priorities for meaningful change.
- Engage diverse members of the community, including but not limited to: seniors; family caregivers; people with disabilities; employers and business organizations; religious, Aboriginal and multicultural groups; community foundations; non-profit organizations; and education and health services providers.

The District of Logan Lake decided to approach this as a "people-friendly" initiative. It included school children and wheelchair users in its consultations. The Village of Pemberton partnered with the Lil'wat First Nation community from nearby Mount Currie in an age-friendly initiative.

The following are key steps to consider when you are ready to conduct an age-friendly assessment of your community:

1. Prepare and conduct the age-friendly assessment.

The assessment can be conducted using one or both of the following methods:

- Distribute a survey to residents in your community.
- Organize focus groups or a community consultation. Refer to Conducting a Focus Group Community Assessment for detailed guidelines, including a list of discussion questions that covers all eight age-friendly features.

When conducting your age-friendly assessment, keep in mind that it is just as important to gather information regarding what people consider to be the community's assets as it is to identify what they perceive to be barriers to age-friendliness. This will help identify what your community is already doing well, including how existing initiatives and programs support an age-friendly community.

2. Create an age-friendly inventory and baseline.

An age-friendly assessment can provide an inventory of the services, programs and initiatives that already exist in the community, as well as a baseline for measuring progress and setting priorities for action. It also presents an opportunity to consider how existing assets can be expanded or modified.

3. Present your findings.

Present your community's findings to the local council/ district board and the local agencies or organizations that will be in a position to implement the priority actions and get their input. This is also a good time to review resource or capacity constraints, identify potential partnerships and gain endorsement from community organizations.

4. Publish the age-friendly assessment report.

The age-friendly assessment report summarizes the results and main priorities, which can in turn be used to form an action plan. Publishing your findings will raise awareness about the challenges faced by seniors in your community, and may also lead to partnerships.

Key Resources
- Conducting a Focus Group Community Assessment
- Community Coordinator Guidelines
- Age-friendly Consultation Poster Template

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Step 4: Develop and Publish an Action Plan

Upon completion of the assessment, your community will have a clear understanding of its age-friendly assets, barriers and strengths. This should lead to the identification of key priorities and outcomes that your community can tackle and develop into an action plan. Be sure to include seniors in this process.

Developing an action plan will help identify ways to:

- Build on strengths and opportunities.
- Prioritize the issues identified.
- Generate an inventory of resources in the community that could be used to address the priorities identified.
- Clarify who will be involved and what is required to complete each action, potential funding sources and timing.

> Interested in being formally recognized as an AFBC community? If you have completed Steps 1-4 in this step-by-step guide, you may be eligible. See section 3.0 for details.

Involve local stakeholders and highlight the roles each will play. Obtain formal endorsement of the plan from your local council or district board and any organizations that will be responsible for the actions, and then publish the plan to encourage discussion.

Key Resources
- Sample Action Plan and Template

Step 5: Implement the Action Plan

Once you have developed an action plan, you can move ahead on your community's established priorities. Implementation will vary in each community and depend on the scope of the projects selected, available financial and human resources, and the level of input and contribution from stakeholders. Some actions may successfully be implemented through small steps undertaken by local community members, while more major initiatives may require collaboration between several groups.

Consider the following questions before implementing your plan, provided they have not already been reflected in your action plan:

- What can be accomplished now or at least started?
- Who will be your age-friendly champion?
- Is the age-friendly committee in place and are they able to oversee implementation?
- What partnerships can be started and sustained?
- What other projects or plans are underway that can be leveraged to complete age-friendly actions?

Step 6: Monitor Age-friendly Progress

Ongoing measurement of age-friendly activities allows a community to see how far it has come in becoming age-friendly, and build awareness and publicize successes to community members. This can be achieved by reviewing and reporting publicly on the action plan outcomes. Including clear and measurable goals and targets in the action plans will make the monitoring phase much easier. Monitoring will help in re-evaluating plans and adjusting priorities and targets in order to ensure continued age-friendly success.

Once you have implemented some age-friendly actions in your community, the Seniors' Healthy Living Secretariat will develop a one-page age-friendly action summary on your community and feature it on the AFBC section of the SeniorsBC.ca website.

Key Resources
- Sample Age-friendly Community Action Summary (Sechelt)

3.0 Age-friendly British Columbia Recognition Program

Purpose

The AFBC recognition program encourages and motivates communities to take action by recognizing local governments that complete key steps to become age-friendly: establishing an age-friendly committee; formally endorsing the initiative; completing an assessment; and, planning for action.

The AFBC recognition program provides local governments with the tools, resources and support to keep older residents active, independent and healthy. The program:

- Formally recognizes and rewards communities in B.C. that have completed age-friendly work.
- Supports and guides additional communities in B.C. in attaining formal age-friendly recognition.
- Builds upon the momentum generated in B.C.'s communities about the importance of age-friendly concepts and continues to promote these across the province.
- Raises awareness in communities about the needs of older residents and how changes can be implemented to support seniors' independence and healthy, active aging.

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3.1   Achieving Age-friendly British Columbia Recognition: Criteria

A community will be recognized as being age-friendly once it has completed basic steps which demonstrate its commitment to age-friendly principles through community engagement, commitment, assessment and action. The steps are also designed to help communities increase awareness, and garner support and commitment from key partners (e.g., local agencies, non-governmental organizations, etc.).

To achieve AFBC status a local government must complete the following four steps:

1. Establish an age-friendly advisory or steering committee that includes the active participation of older adults. An existing committee with a mandate that aligns with the age-friendly initiative and includes older adult representatives can serve this purpose.

2. Pass a council or district board resolution to actively support, promote and work towards becoming an age-friendly community. As an alternative, or in addition, local governments may choose to strengthen a commitment to being age-friendly through specific goals, objectives or policies in an official community plan or strategic plan.

3. Conduct an age-friendly assessment in consultation with older adults.

4. Develop and publicize an action plan.

Upon completion of these four steps, local governments can apply for AFBC status.

To ensure continued age-friendly success and maintain recognition status, local governments will want to take the following steps:

5. Implement the action plan.

6. Monitor age-friendly progress by measuring and reviewing activities, and report publicly on action plan outcomes.

AFBC recognition will provide local governments:

- an AFBC recognition poster;
- a recognition reward to help the community provide an age-friendly community legacy or celebration;
- a one-page action summary highlighting age-friendly achievements, to be posted on the AFBC section of SeniorsBC.ca website;
- promotion of your community's activities in the SeniorsBC e-newsletter;
- support and referral to promote the community's age-friendly achievements at the national and international level through the Public Health Agency of Canada and the World Health Organization respectively; and
- access to a cohesive network of age-friendly organizations (provincial, national and international).

Some local governments may not have the capacity to begin age-friendly work in their communities. If that is the case, consider partnering with a neighbouring community in order to share resources, ideas and workload. In order to retain AFBC recognition, local governments will be asked to provide published age-friendly assessments, action plans and regular performance reports and will be evaluated on their outcomes tri-annually.

Key Resources
- Age-friendly British Columbia Application Form

For more information on Age-friendly British Columbia (AFBC), contact the AFBC coordinator by:

Email: AgefriendlyBC@gov.bc.ca
Phone: 250 387-4493
Website: www.gov.bc.ca/agefriendly

For more information about seniors programs and services, visit www.SeniorsBC.ca