

# Let's go!

Steps for engaging  
older people and  
improving communities  
for all ages



# Welcome!

All older people have the right to a healthy, dignified and independent life. Yet their reality is often one of daily struggle because infrastructure, including streets and public spaces, is not designed with them in mind. This can leave older people marginalised and isolated, sometimes fearful of going out. It can prevent them from enjoying their older age. We can change this by making cities and communities places where all people thrive – including older people in all their diversity, whatever their age, socio economic status, physical abilities, ethnicity, race, gender or sexual orientation.

Featuring...



**A step-by-step guide to making your city and community a better place to grow older**



**28 bright ideas that are low cost and easy to implement**



**Tools for raising awareness and campaigning for the rights of older people**

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Raise the voices of older people themselves to build momentum around change! Learn how to plan and launch an awareness-raising campaign.

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Ideas and suggestions on how you can build on your gains and access other support and guidance – a collection of additional resources to support your community's journey at every stage.

## What this guide is for

This guide is designed to help you begin your own journey towards making your community more age friendly. It showcases exciting, innovative, small scale and low or no-cost projects that are having a big impact on the lives of older people in communities across the Americas region. We hope you feel inspired to replicate these or develop other projects in your own communities. This guide also provides some simple tools to help make your projects successful, including advice on how to build coalitions, develop clear and shared objectives, campaign to raise awareness of the needs and rights of older people in your community and think about the next steps you can take.

## Who this guide is for

Whether you're a local authority that's not sure where to start, a community organisation wanting to bring about change, or an older activist who can see the potential in your community – every step you take, however small, however simple, can build momentum toward creating truly inclusive communities. So let's go!

## Diversity in older age

All older people have a right to live safe and dignified lives, to live independently and to access public spaces and services. However, older people – like all other age groups – are diverse and have had different experiences. To be truly inclusive, every step on your Let's Go journey must include the perspectives of older people across ages, gender, race, ethnicity, physical abilities, sexual orientation, social and economic status, and other characteristics and identities.

## UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)

The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing brings together governments, civil society, international organisations, academic institutions, the media and the private sector to collaborate in improving the lives of older people, their families, and their communities, with the aim of achieving a world in which all people can live long and healthy lives. Among other aims, the Decade includes ambitions to change how we think about ageing and older people and to create communities that foster and support older people's functional abilities.

The Decade of Healthy Ageing is a great vehicle for communicating to policy makers and decision makers about why taking action on ageing in your city is vital.

# Let's get started

This guide features exciting and innovative ideas that you can replicate or adapt in your community. However, starting your journey to improve your community for older people can seem daunting at first. These four steps will get you on your way and help make sure your initiatives have the greatest impact.

# » Step 1: Ask older people about their daily lives in your community

Listen to the lived experiences of older people as much as possible. A quick and easy participatory assessment of the local circumstances of older people can identify some of the key challenges your action plan should address and provide evidence and data to support your case.

However small your initial engagement, try to include a broad range of older people. The experience of ageing is not “one size fits all.” For example, women, people with disabilities and older people from indigenous communities or different socio-economic backgrounds may have diverse experiences. And someone aged 60 has different experiences to someone aged 90. So, it’s important to ensure a diversity of voices is heard. Remember to collect data on these characteristics and identities in order to fully understand the varying experiences of older people.

**The Washington Group Short Set of Questions** is a standardised and useful way to assess whether a person has a disability and how this impacts their experiences of city life.



## Short guided walks or tours with older people

through their community to gain insights into what they value and the challenges they face, as they point out different barriers and challenges in their local environment. These can be physical, such as places where it's difficult to walk, or psychological, such as places and spaces where they feel unwelcome or vulnerable.



## Simple surveys can be conducted in local parks

and squares to understand what these spaces mean to older people and what they feel is missing or could be improved. Don't forget to reach out to older people who live alone and are often excluded and make sure any written surveys meet accessibility standards.



## Focus groups about city life

with small groups of older people are a good means of gathering diverse viewpoints. It's particularly important to consider the mix of group participants and make sure everyone is comfortable sharing their experiences. It may be preferable, for example, to have both female and male focus group facilitators or focus groups with only women or other marginalised groups.

Open questions can lead to interesting and insightful conversations. These include...

- What do you most value about living in the city?
- How do you feel when you're walking around the city?
- If you could change three things in the city, what would they be?



*Streets are busy, and we have to step into traffic when there is no space. Broken and uneven pavements mean we risk falling and injuring ourselves. There are no toilets for us to use and few places to sit down and have a rest – benches without backrests mean we have to sit back-to-back!*

**Older woman, Mexico City, Mexico**



## Step 2: Build a coalition for change

Building a broad coalition of local stakeholders around older people's issues in the city can really help build momentum around change and make scarce resources go a lot further. Think about the assets that already exist in your community – both people and places – and how you can get them on board to help bring about transformative change in your community.

Prepare a simple written agreement setting out what different stakeholders will do to address ageing-related issues in the city, and when and how they will do it.

### **Your list of local assets might include:**

- local government offices
- transport authorities
- local universities and schools
- faith-based groups
- existing events and festivals
- libraries and museums
- local businesses
- local parks and green spaces
- local media including newspapers, radio and television stations.

## Step 3: Develop a strategy

A simple and clear strategy formulated by older people with other stakeholders and partners can generate commitment to work towards shared objectives, ensure shared activities have maximum impact, and help evaluate effectiveness.

- Identify key decision makers, government departments and organisations that are important to influence. Understand how decisions are taken and who needs to be engaged to bring about change.
- Determine which departments in the local authority need to be involved to provide the relevant permissions and support for your projects, particularly when undertaking physical interventions in public spaces.
- Consider how your objectives for older people can be included in other local government strategies around public spaces, transport networks, etc.
- Design a simple monitoring plan with dates and indicators of success.
- Establish a diverse and inclusive group of older people to participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.



### **Journalism partnership**

In partnership with the journalism faculty at the local university in La Plata, Argentina, the RedMayor (a network of organisations advocating for the rights of older people) effectively highlighted the challenges older people face in accessing public transport in the city through a series of local newspaper articles.



## 5 City declaration

In Guadalajara, Mexico, stakeholders co-created a city declaration on the rights of older people which was used to convince stakeholders to sign up and work together.



## 6 Alliance building

In the Chapinero district of Bogotá, Colombia, an alliance between the Mayor's Office, the older people's council (Consejo Distrital de Sabios y Sabias), HelpAge, and iSalud University (Argentina) assessed how age-friendly the district is for older people.



## 7 Transport protest

In La Plata, Argentina, older people strategically held a visible public protest before meeting with the mayor to discuss their demands for improvements to public transport in the city - read



## 8 Monitoring groups

In Jalisco, Mexico, local older people's groups help monitor and evaluate implementation of the local government's strategic plan and provide feedback from users on what is and isn't working. They also have representation on municipal citizen councils and on the metropolitan council.



*I learned many beautiful lessons from my father about being a leader, serving, and offering that knowledge as a leader to the community, to the people around me, not only the older people, but the entire community. I've always liked participating, guiding, helping my community with all my affection, and putting into practice or at the service of my communities what I was taught about being a leader.*



**Jesus, aged 82, Colombia**

## Step 4: Put your ideas into action!

Small projects and initiatives can have a big impact and can demonstrate the value of engaging with and responding to older people in the city.

The next section of this guide has many examples of low-cost, easy-to-implement ideas that could be replicated in your community. These include ideas for transforming public spaces, combatting loneliness and isolation, improving public transport for older people, and launching public campaigns to build support for addressing older people's challenges.

# About budgets and funding...

Budgets and funding are different in each location and many of the initiatives featured in this guide relied on volunteers to keep costs down. Think creatively about where funding might be available and which local partners and organisations may be interested in supporting your work.

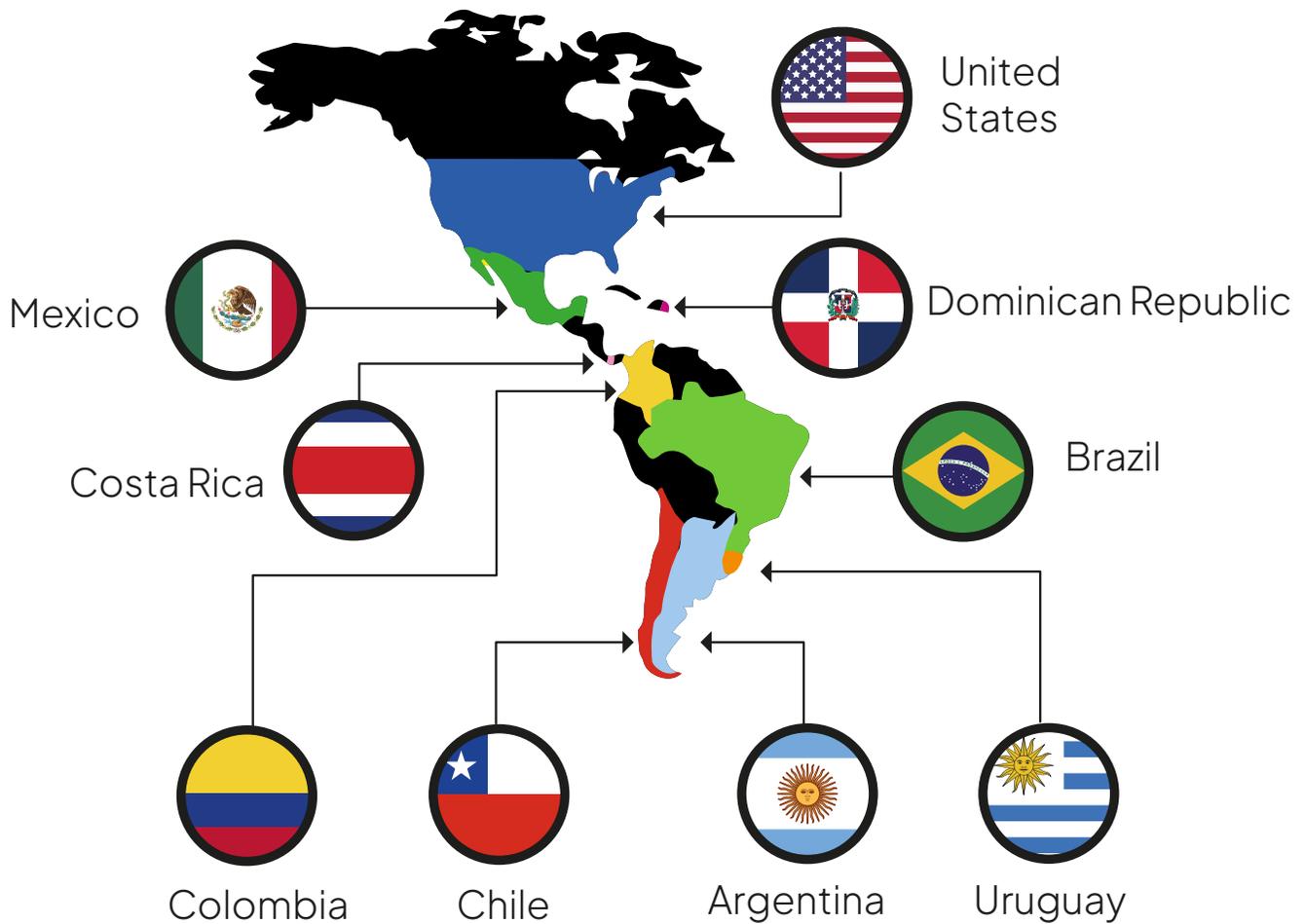
Also, remember to draw on existing assets in your community to minimise costs.

## **Funding options for your activities could include...**

- Government funds and initiatives that support sustainable urban development or investment in public spaces.
- Foundations or faith-based groups that fund non-profit activities to support community development and health outcomes for older people.
- Local companies that want to support and invest in the community, in return for recognition of their generosity.
- Reallocating existing local authority budgets to activities that are more directly beneficial to older people.
- Partnering with other existing community initiatives that could incorporate a focus on older people, such as university research programmes.
- Think about establishing social enterprises that have a source of income to make their activities sustainable while remaining accessible and affordable to all older people.

# Bright ideas

From Mexico, Chile and Brazil, to Argentina, Uruguay, the United States and Colombia, there are many great ideas and projects underway across the Americas. Here we select just a few that could be replicated in your community or simply inspire your own actions and initiatives, alongside some key steps, hints and tips.



To give an estimate of the funding required to replicate each idea, we have included a \$\$\$ indicator.

① = **Low or zero cost**, something you can usually do with just time and effort and little or no funds

②② = **Ideas that require some funding**, up to an estimated US \$2,500 to cover the costs of activities

③③③ = **More ambitious ideas** that would require budgets over \$2,500 to fully implement

To encourage and support new ideas (and to show that a little money can go a long way) we have provided small grants to a few promising innovations and practices as part of this project

These are marked with the  icon

## Public spaces and streets that welcome everyone

Older people we spoke to in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil said they increasingly stay at home because they fear tripping up in the streets, dislike traffic noise and pollution, and worry about their personal safety. Similarly, in Mexico City, older women felt the spaces around them were noisy and intimidating and did not work for older people. Over time, older people can become lonelier and more isolated if the public spaces in their communities are not welcoming and pleasant.

This can limit their physical activity, such as walking or doing outdoor exercise, and present difficulties for everyday tasks such as grocery shopping. Simple improvements to parks and public spaces, such as planting shade trees, installing seating with arm and back rests, closing some streets to vehicles, and providing opportunities for exercise and social interaction, can all encourage older people to be out and about in the city, which is an essential part of healthy ageing.

Here are some of the other exciting and innovative ideas happening in the region to make streets and spaces better for older people.





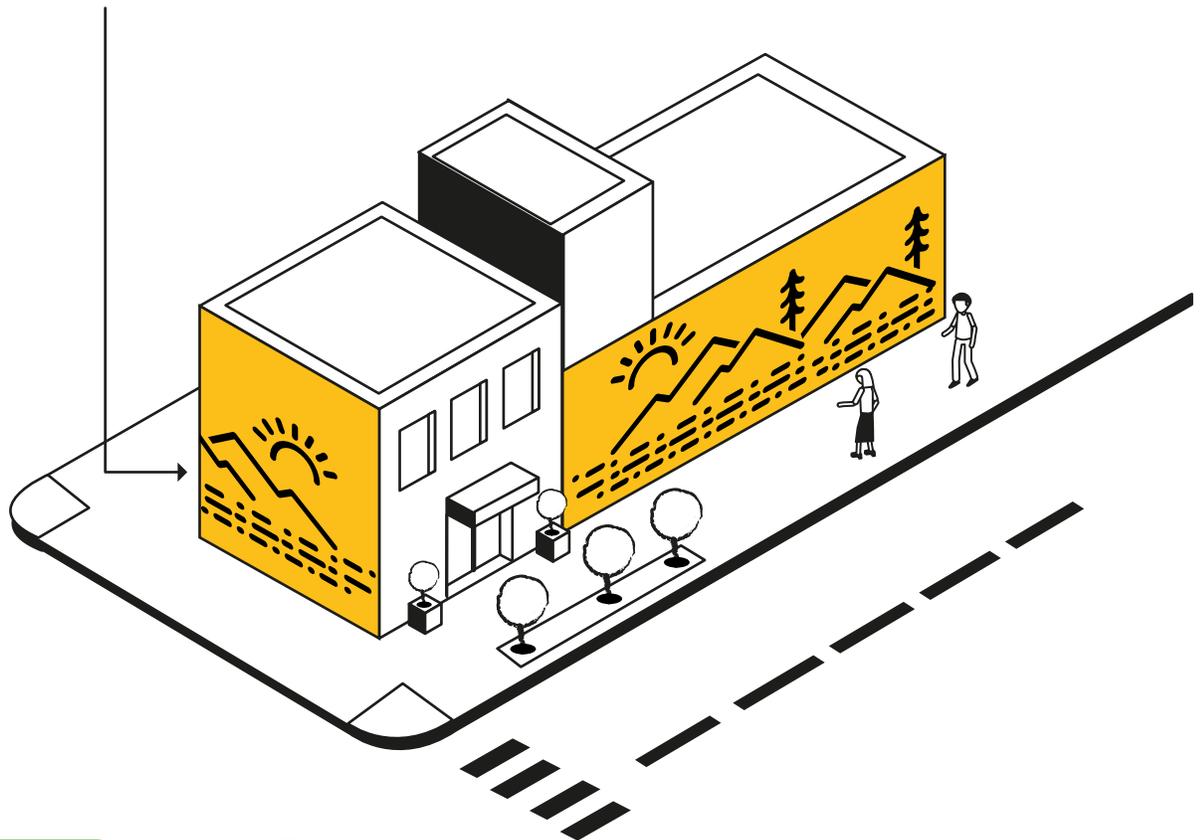
## Community murals



**In Valparaiso, Chile, a community mural was developed by local NGO Valparaiso en Colores in consultation with older people.** Door-to-door interviews and two workshops with a local artist resulted in a new mural that reflected older people's histories in the neighbourhood, reinforcing a sense of belonging and ownership.



**In Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, the local Office of Aging and Accessibility brought together volunteers, students and community groups to create a mural on a busy road junction, slowing down traffic and making a more pleasant environment for older people and everyone in the community.**



## Playground



**A project to improve a playground for children in Hillsboro, North Dakota, USA, included making sure there was an appropriate place for care givers, including grandparents, to sit and be sheltered and shaded from the weather so they could accompany children to the park.**



## Photography



In Quillón, Chile, a pop-up intergenerational photography exhibition in a public space highlighted the existence of, and issues faced by, older people as residents of the city. Working with youth, they learnt about each other's lives and strengthened community cohesion.



Nutrition advice for older people and their carers



Making local streets work for older people



Group physical activity in public spaces



Outdoor games bringing young and old together

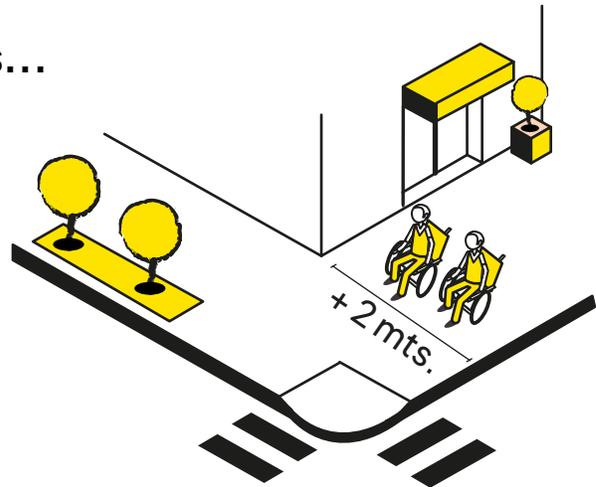


# The Global Street Design Guide

**The Global Street Design Guide** is full of technical advice and guidance on how to make streets and public spaces accessible for all – including older people and people with disabilities.

## The guidance includes ideas such as...

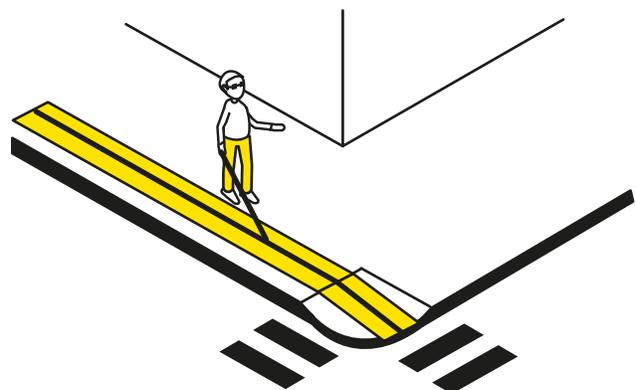
Sidewalks should be wide enough to allow two people in wheelchairs to pass each other (ideally wider than two metres) with smooth surfaces and accessible ramps to make sure older people and other residents with disabilities can move around.



Pedestrian crossing signals should give enough time for older people to comfortably cross the road without feeling rushed or afraid, with countdown timers and refuge islands per every two to three traffic lanes.



Tactile paving strips on pavements, entrances and ramps can help older people with visual impairments to navigate the street safely and independently.





## Making local streets work for older people



**In the municipality of Puente Alto in the Chilean capital Santiago, a public-private partnership established RedActiva – an initiative including several measures that encourage older members to walk around the city and feel comfortable in streets and public spaces.**

Any older person can join the scheme for free and get a RedActiva wristband. With this, older people can access bathroom facilities within participating shops, cafés and local businesses that display a sign outside – making older people feel more confident about moving around the neighbourhood. The RedActiva wristband includes simple contactless technology that means older people can hold the wristband next to pedestrian crossing lights in the neighbourhood to be given additional crossing time.



- Partnerships are vital – this project was delivered through a partnership including a local design university (School of Design of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile), an older persons' foundation, a public innovation laboratory, working with the Municipality of Puente Alto.
- Local businesses benefit from additional potential customers by opening their bathroom facilities to RedActiva members (although importantly, no purchase is necessary for older people to use the facilities).



## Outdoor games bringing young and old together 💰



**In the city of Derry, New Hampshire, USA, a community centre purchased several large-scale outdoor games that are popular in the community including chess, bocce, connect four and cornhole, to be used in the outdoor space surrounding the centre.**

Anti-theft locks, outdoor storage and waste bins were also purchased to make sure the equipment was safe and the space remained clean and tidy. They planned weekly times for older people to play, and the community centre said the games attracted people who had never been to the community centre before, bringing young and old together. Intergenerational activities bringing young and old together can promote social cohesion, challenge ageism and bring about collective action that improves the community for everyone.



## Group physical activity in public spaces 💰💰☆



© Fundacion Rafam



**In Argentina, Fundacion Rafam offers a range of physical activity sessions including stretching, chair-based yoga and dance classes. More recently they started holding sessions outdoors in Chacabuco park and noticed people of all ages passing by and engaging!**

Many community organisations working with older people offer physical activity sessions as a key approach to reinforcing wellbeing, good health and physical mobility as people age. But rather than holding these sessions indoors, why not go outside and reclaim urban spaces as places where older people belong?

A minimum of 30 minutes of aerobic physical activity is recommended for older people eachday, alongside strength and balance activities.



## Nutrition advice for older people and their carers



The communities in which people live have a direct impact on their nutrition and physical activity, which are key to healthy ageing. This includes the availability of healthy and affordable food, opportunities to have active lifestyles, and streets and green spaces that can support older people to walk safely and take part in the community.



### The NTD Foundation in the Dominican Republic carried out physical and nutrition assessments with 130 older people from the community of Los Alcarrizos.

The data collection included calculating body mass index (BMI). They found out that over 75% of older people in the community were classified as overweight to differing degrees.

With this information, they created tailored nutrition and physical activity guidance for older people.

Crucially, the initiative included engaging older people and their caregivers, who play a key role in supporting the nutrition, physical activity, and general wellbeing of older people.





- When asking older people to participate in activities such as data collection, make sure to provide a waiting area where they can sit, and some drinks and snacks
- Involve local stakeholders – in this case, the local government, community organisations and local churches – as stakeholders in the health and wellbeing of older people.
- Conduct activities – measuring, data collection, and nutrition workshops – in locations that are easy for older people to reach.
- Provide simple and clear information about the initiative so that everyone understands what is happening, who is involved, and what the opportunities are for their healthy ageing.

## Reaching isolated older people in the community

Despite living in busy and overcrowded cities, many people still feel lonely, disconnected from others, and lacking opportunities to talk and socialise – including older people. Many features of our cities and communities can help reduce this – from having accessible public and green spaces that encourage social interaction, to affordable and appropriate transport systems that facilitate visiting friends and family.

Here are some simple and low-cost innovations that could help combat social isolation in your community





### Regular contact



During the pandemic, the local government in Guadalajara, Mexico, created a database of older people living by themselves.

Using this, they were able to establish regular contact and updates, share videos of activities and set up a telephone line that older people could call to request psychological and social support or food assistance at home.



### Cinema screenings



In Mexico City, Mexico, some cinemas have agreed to provide free or discounted movie screenings for older people during off-peak times.



## Community gardens



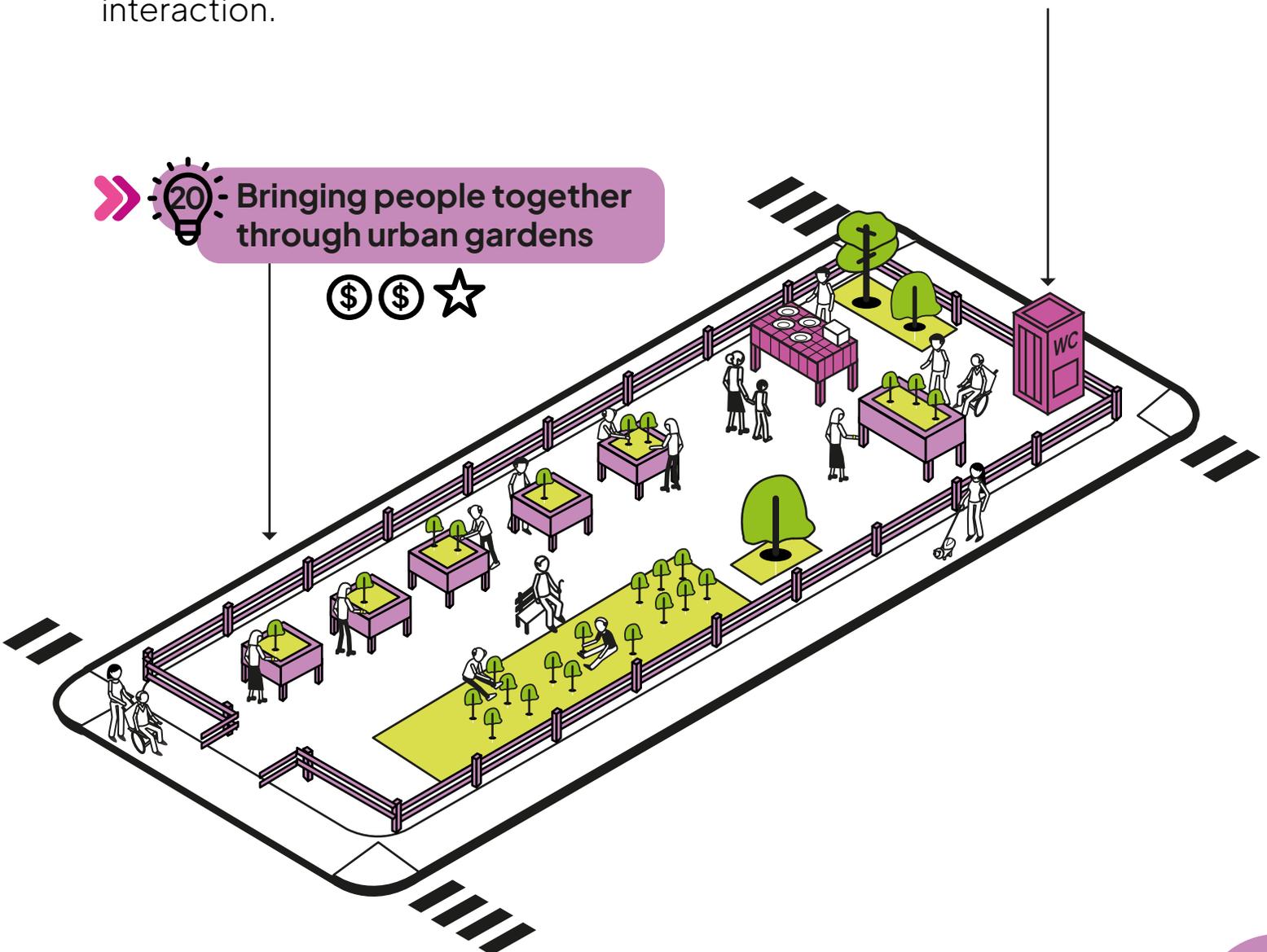
In the city of Roanoke, Virginia, USA, a local organisation enhanced existing community gardens with raised beds that are easier for older people to work with and a picnic table to provide a place for people to gather and socialise.

Crucially, portable toilet facilities were added to the gardens so that older people can comfortably and confidently visit without needing to worry about being far away from a washroom.

Supported by community outreach, including targeting older people in nearby day care centres and events such as planting days and a harvest celebration, the gardens have become a focal point for community interaction.



## Bringing people together through urban gardens





## The gift of storytelling 💰



**In Uruguay, an oral storytelling project recruited volunteer actors to recite stories and plays by telephone as a way for older people to keep in touch while isolating due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

After reading from a selection of nine stories, the volunteers continued to have a conversation with each older person, ensuring each call is a unique and valued experience. Over the course of three weeks, the volunteers spoke to over 300 older people who reported enjoying the experience and valued the gift of a story as bringing a smile to their day.



*I have nothing but words of gratitude for the team because the story took me back to my childhood and to memories of my grandmother and my cousins.*



**Ana María, aged 94, Uruguay**



## Bringing people together through urban gardens



**In a project in Ciudad Bolivar, a low-income community on the outskirts of Bogotá, Colombia, a group of older people formed a grassroots collective to support other older people who are vulnerable to isolation and loneliness.**

To achieve this, they renovated shared gardens and orchards as social hubs to encourage social interaction and physical activity. As part of the project, older people were trained by gardening professionals, made aware of environmental issues, and provided with saplings and basic tools. They built a fence around the plot of land and carefully selected easy-to-maintain plants and crops that were suitable for the different altitudes of the gardens, and aromatic herbs used by older people in home cooking.

The gardens also exist as a venue and platform for events and activities that encourage older people to communicate and participate in community life. So far these activities have included musical performances and workshops on nutrition and rights in older age, as well as painting and decorating plant pots, which gave residents an opportunity to be creative. Some of the events are open to the broader community and are excellent for building connections between older people and residents of all ages.



© HelpAge International

Prior to being turned into a community garden, the land was often a place of crime and violence. Similar urban gardening projects in the USA have been shown to reduce crime in communities by taking empty and unloved spaces and turning them into places where people gather.

With the community in Ciudad Bolivar taking ownership of the site, it became a place that people enjoyed visiting rather than avoided and created a sense of local pride with local politicians and policy makers also visiting.

“ Most of the people from my group, my grandparents, as I call them, come from the countryside. There, they used to have more freedom because they used to sow and cultivate their lands. They came here and often ended up stuck at home, so the orchard gives them back a bit of the freedom and joy they lost. It allows them to remember their past, remember the place where they used to live and the nature they enjoyed when they were children. The orchard has brought about this change and has had a positive influence on our health. ”

**Jesus, aged 82, Colombia**



- Engage with local organisations and stakeholders (including the local authority), older people's groups, cultural and performance groups to involve everyone in the project.
- Involve a gardening expert or agriculture students to advise on the location of the garden, crop selection and maintenance.
- Identify an appropriate and available piece of land in the neighbourhood to use as community gardens. Unloved spaces can be brought back to life!
- Provide necessary tools, saplings, and support for older people to plant and maintain the gardens themselves. Make sure the plants you choose are easy to maintain and appropriate for the climate.

# Older people on the move!

Older people must be able to get around the city, see friends and family, visit the doctor, and access services that are vital to their wellbeing. Older people we spoke to in Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro explained how they rely heavily on public transport to get around, and when this is not possible it often means they stay at home or are confined to their immediate neighbourhood.

Making public transport work well for older people means considering many things beyond physical accessibility – affordability, comfort, safety, and travel information useful for planning the journey. Simple measures like a bus driver waiting longer while older people sit down or get up, dedicated seats near the doors and visible handrails are all important. Many cities also provide subsidised or free public transport for older people.

What are some of the more unique and exciting ideas happening in the region that you might be able to replicate?



 *Buses are very difficult to use. The steps are very high, there is often nowhere to sit or to store the trolley we use to carry our shopping. The bus seats are hard and uncomfortable and cause back pain and discomfort during bumpy journeys. Bus drivers often don't stop to collect us as they know we do not have to pay.* 

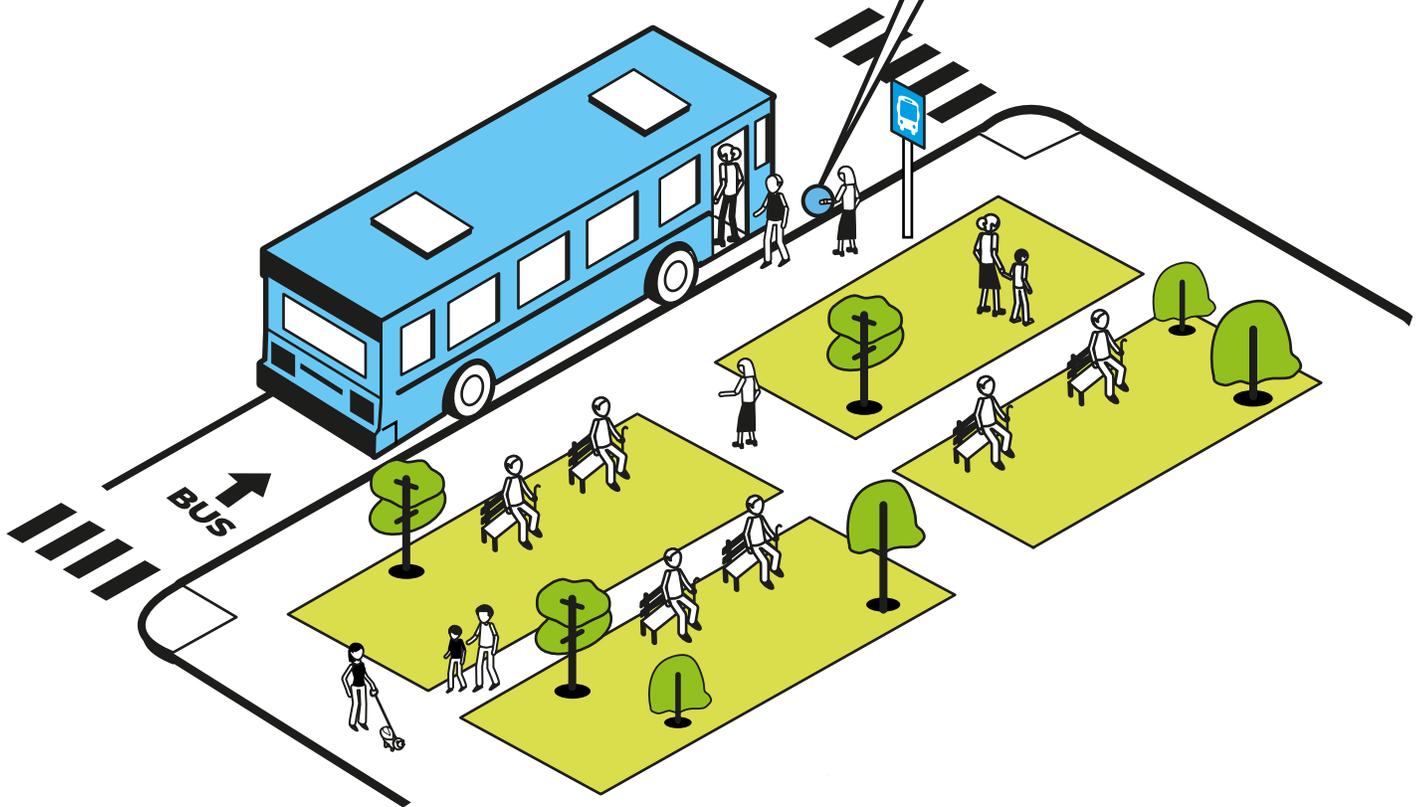
**Older woman, R o de Janeiro, Brasil**



## Priority scheme



The RedActiva scheme in Puente Alto, Chile, worked with transport providers to give older people more time to get safely on and off the bus when they scan their RedActiva wristband to notify the driver.



## Free transport



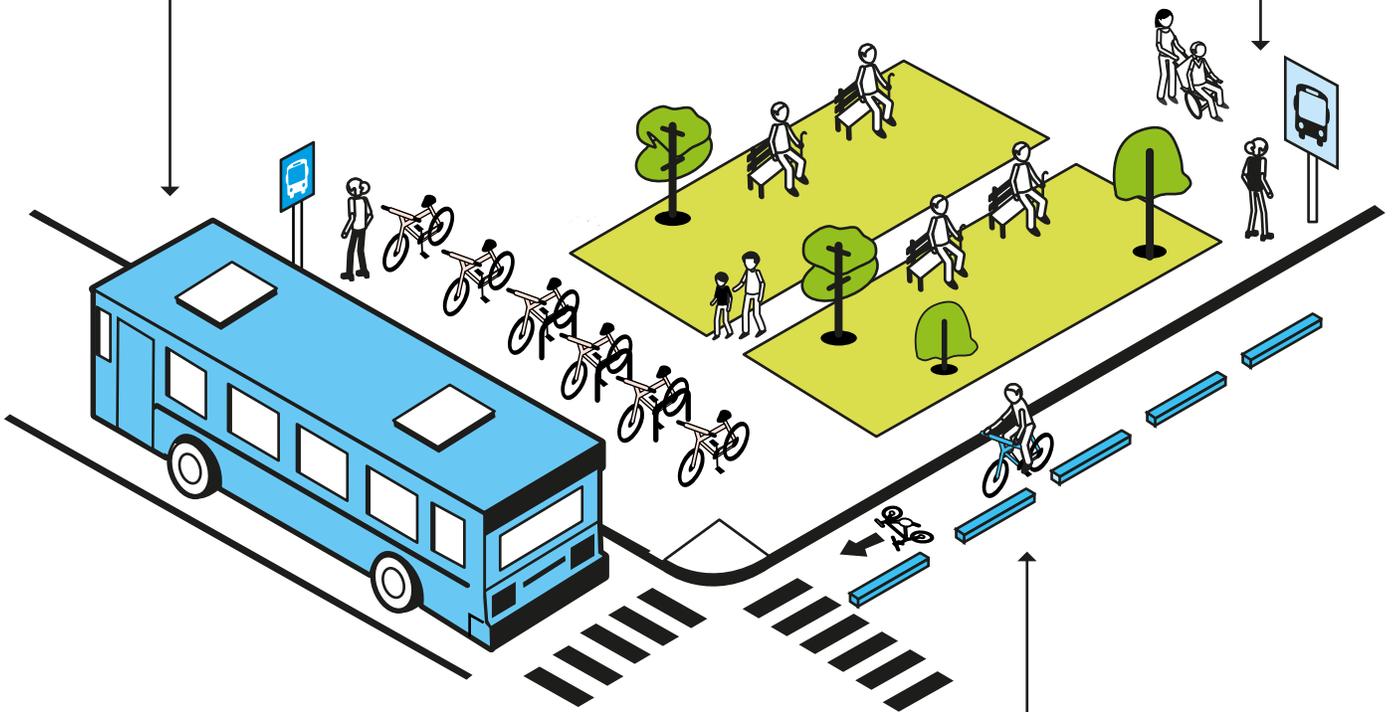
To address the transport needs of older people, the commune of Talagante, in Santiago, Chile, introduced free transport between homes and health service centres that older people can pre-book



23 Helping transport providers better serve older people



24 Pointing the way to walking in older age



25 Enabling older people to cycle





## Helping transport providers better serve older people 💰💰★



**Older people in the city of Cartago, Cost Rica, often expressed disappointment at how they were treated on buses, and the city decided it needed to act.**

Through direct, ongoing engagement with older people to better understand and respond to their lived experiences, the municipal government enlisted 15 transport companies to carry out a variety of activities to improve the quality of services.

It was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic for older people to feel comfortable and confident using transport services.

Bus drivers were invited to day care centres, spoke to older people about the challenges they experience getting on and off the buses, and even helped provide care and support during mealtimes. This enabled the bus drivers to better understand ageing and the needs of older people, and in turn to provide more considerate service when driving their buses.

The busdrivers were given a certificate in recognition of their participation. In addition, the municipality ran a communication campaign on social media and with posters on buses and at bus stations and along the bus route to raise awareness among bus operators, drivers, and the general public about the importance of showing care and respect towards older people.



*Older people have the same rights as any other person who pays for their ticket and they must be given priority – and more time – to get on and be able to sit down so that they can travel freely.*



**Martín, Bus Driver, Chile**



© Municipalidad de Cartago



## Pointing the way to walking in older age 💰💰



**Improved signage can be a great way to encourage residents, including older people, to walk around their community. In the city of Dover, Delaware, USA, signage is used to direct people towards pleasant walking routes and key local amenities such as medical centres and transport hubs.**

Trials by project staff showed that the signs needed to be big enough so that everyone could read them at a distance. Signs were mounted on existing poles and infrastructure to keep costs down and keep the pavement clear of obstacles for pedestrians. A press release by the local city authority generated media coverage in the local newspaper about the launch of the new walking routes.



## Enabling older people to cycle 💰💰★



**As part of a larger project looking at healthy ageing and urban mobility, the Federal University of Santa Catarina in Florianopolis, Brazil, provided tricycles to enable older people to cycle safely along their beautiful seafront – and give other city residents the chance to see older people taking over the bike lanes!**

The initiative provided an opportunity for social interaction and highlighted the health benefits of physical activity and active travel.

During the bike rides, older people wore heart-rate monitors so they could understand the associated health benefits of their physical activity. Some recalled childhood memories of cycling whilst others felt the freedom of cycling for the first time.

Many participants brought their children and grandchildren along for the experience, inspiring conversations about how the city can be improved so that older people can get around more easily. The project will move around various parks in the city, providing additional opportunities for older residents to experience cycling and think about mobility in their city.

The local Department of Mobility said the trial project showed the importance of mobility in older people's lives and would lead to similar initiatives across the city.



- Purchase and adapt tricycles and helmets for older people to cycle safely.
- Choose a safe, traffic-free route for the rides.
- Promote the opportunity via social media and older people's groups in the area.
- Set up a meeting point with health checks and support for participants prior to their cycle rides.
- Encourage participants to bring family members along and invite other members of the community, including policy makers, to see the impact of improved mobility on older people's lives and to foster intergenerational connections and understanding.
- Collect the contact details of participants so they can be included in future initiatives around healthy ageing and mobility in your city.



*Wonderful! The feeling of freedom! Cycling is great! I fell off a bike when I was seven and never cycled again. I always wanted to, but I was afraid to – I spent 60 years without a bike.*

**Wilma, aged 64 , Brasil**



*It's great to cycle along the seashore, and being on a tricycle was yet another experience especially for my wife, who doesn't always have good balance. She always wanted to come along with me when I cycled to work!.*

**Sergio, aged 74, Brasil**



© Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

# Empowering older people as community activists

**Older people have a right to be empowered and informed citizens who can exercise their voices and be heard and responded to by those with power to effect change. Strengthening the voices of older people is essential for active participation in urban planning and decision making.**

Supporting older people's participation and activism can bring positive change in cities and communities and raise awareness and understanding of the challenges older people face. Activism by older people also challenges ageist attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and structures that lead to older people being discriminated against, excluded, and – consciously or unconsciously – routinely denied their rights in the communities where they live.

Here are some examples of how the voice of older people has brought about change on urban issues in their communities



## **The HelpAge Age Demands Action Methodology**

The HelpAge **Age Demands Action methodology** and Voice Framework provide advice and guidance to launch a campaign. More broadly it provides guidance on how to support older people's engagement in decision-making processes, to stay informed, share their experiences, amplify their views and be heard by those in power.

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## Launch a campaign to amplify the voices of older people 💰💰



**In Bogotá, Colombia, HelpAge and the Council of the Wise launched an older-people led campaign to highlight the issues they face in their communities.**

Hearing from older people themselves about both the good and the bad in their community was central to making sure the campaign responded to their views and called for changes that would have a real impact. They conducted two workshop sessions, the first around urban issues in older age, and the second on how to carry out an effective campaign that influences the local authority, using HelpAge's Age Demands Action (ADA) methodology.

The older people that were engaged highlighted how green spaces in the local area were hilly and not accessible to them. They shared photographs showing sidewalks in poor condition and stairs without handrails. They also used photographs to highlight things they liked about the community, including physical activity classes, wide sidewalks, and small parks where they could rest and relax.



*There are only a few green spaces, and most are on hills. For a young and athletic person, they are easy to access, but not for older people.*



**Actor Clave, Colombia**



- Follow the HelpAge Age Demands Action methodology steps to launch your campaign, including assessing the current context, deciding on clear objectives, identifying a target audience, and writing key messages.



## A protest to demand improvements to public transport



**In La Plata, Argentina, the Red Mayor organisation developed an older-people-led campaign to raise awareness of the challenges older people face when accessing public transport, including poor service, impatient drivers, and a lack of wheelchair access.**

With a network of empowered older people in place, they organised a public protest. When the traffic light turned red, older people stepped in front of the buses and held up their signs with slogans such as “Wait before starting off,” “Bring the bus closer to the sidewalk” and “Fix the sidewalks.”

The campaign also engaged with journalists to gain media coverage. The protest was followed by a meeting with the mayor who had been identified as the key decision-maker. As a result, the municipality eventually acquired new buses with additional accessibility features, and driver-training courses included elements on respecting older people. The initiative was replicated in several other municipalities.



## Involving older people in decision-making 💰



**In Jalisco, Mexico, local groups of older people (called Citizens Councils – Consejos Ciudadano) help to monitor and evaluate local government plans and provide feedback from users on what is and isn't working.**

These groups support different government departments and local organisations by reviewing their programmes, policies, and guidance from an ageing perspective. They also provide representation from older people's groups on local government committees and act as a mechanism for older people to report issues with the built environment.

In Jalisco, these groups and representatives worked with the state government to draft and finalise a statement on the rights of older people, and the strategic plans of different departments. In addition, the groups advised and contributed to several communications and public awareness campaigns that sought to address negative, ageist perspectives of older people in their communities.

By embracing and empowering older people and their perspectives, municipal services and decision-making can be more responsive to older people's needs and bring about positive change across multiple sectors.

# What next?

Once you have completed your initial assessment, built a strong coalition, developed a shared strategy, and maybe replicated or adapted some of the great ideas in this guide – what next?

## Celebrate!

Whatever your achievement so far, big or small, give yourself and everyone involved a pat on the back. Throw a party, hold an event, invite the media and local politicians – this is a great opportunity to highlight what you've achieved, solidify your coalition of partners, and motivate everyone to stay engaged as you move forward.

Distribute a newsletter in the community and among partners to highlight achievements to date, plans for the future and how the community can be involved.

## Secure your gains!

Things that can help your initiatives be sustainable include...

- Accessing additional funding from local government or local companies to support the initiative into the future now that you've run a successful pilot and the benefits are clear.
- Ensuring those involved have the tools and processes in place to continue to sustain the project, including support for volunteers who take ownership of the initiative.
- Meet regularly to continue to evaluate and make improvements to projects, respond to changing needs of the community, or to address issues that were not initially identified.

## Build stakeholder and political momentum

Make sure politicians and policy makers are aware of what you have achieved and the impact it's having, so they will feel inspired and motivated to further promote the rights of older people in your city. Bring more partners on board and get them to sign up to shared objectives and new work.

# Join the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities

After you have taken some initial steps along this journey, your city may develop the political will to allocate more resources and join the global network, which provides a comprehensive methodology for making your city more and more “age-friendly”.

The Age Friendly World website and WHO's Platform for the Decade of Healthy Ageing provide a wealth of guidance and toolkits, and a database of best practices where you can share your knowledge and experiences.

## Access additional resources

There is a wealth of information and guidance available to support further work and initiatives around creating a community that works for older people

### Here are some that may be particularly helpful...

- **As several guides to help create liveable communities**, including on public spaces, housing and social participation – many of which are also available in Spanish

[aarp.org/livablelibrary](http://aarp.org/livablelibrary)

[aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/fitlot.org/aarp/](http://aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/fitlot.org/aarp/)

- **The WHO website for Age Friendly Cities and Communities** has lots of resources in English, Spanish and Portuguese

[decadeofhealthyageing.org/home](http://decadeofhealthyageing.org/home)

[paho.org/en/topics/age-friendly-cities-and-communities](http://paho.org/en/topics/age-friendly-cities-and-communities)

- **The CiudadesAmigables.cl website by SENAMA** is full of examples of community projects in Chile and resources and tools you may find useful

[ciudadesamigables.cl](http://ciudadesamigables.cl)

There are many existing frameworks and commitments that highlight the rights of older people and how cities can make improvements for older people. These policies and frameworks can help you explain to policy makers, mayors, and other stakeholders why the rights of older people are important, the actions that need to be taken to realise them, and how any measures they take fit within larger national and international initiatives.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** set shared goals to be achieved by 2030. Goal 11 highlights the need for inclusive cities that provide access to safe and affordable public transport for all, and inclusive green and public spaces – including for older people. All initiatives featured in this guide contribute towards this goal, so your activities can help your city move towards achieving the SDGs.

**The New Urban Agenda (NUA)** was formulated at the Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador. Its aims include improving the participation of older people in local government, providing safe and accessible age-responsive public transport and supporting social and inter-generational interaction in outdoor public spaces. Your city may already have a plan to implement the NUA, and your actions to improve the lives of older people could help to advance this plan.

**The Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons** specifically guarantees that older people enjoy independence and autonomy, accessibility, and personal mobility, among many other fundamental human rights. It also provides an important framework through which to understand and claim the rights of older people in the region.

# Here to guide you...

This guide has been created by three organisations – HelpAge International, AARP (U.S.), and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) – that want to support communities across the Americas to begin or strengthen their journeys towards transforming communities for older people.



**HelpAge International's Global Network** is a diverse group of 158 like-minded organisations in 86 countries that supports millions of older people to live safe, dignified, and healthy lives.



**AARP** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization in the United States that empowers people to choose how they live as they age. Internationally, AARP engages global stakeholders to change how we look at aging and enable people everywhere to pursue their goals and dreams.



**PAHO** works with the countries of the region to improve and protect the health of its population, through technical cooperation on communicable and chronic diseases and their causes. Its objective is to strengthen health systems and respond to emergencies and disasters, so that everyone has access to quality health care without falling into poverty.

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