

# Your thoughts about climate change and healthy ageing in Belfast

July 2023

On 16th June 2023, the [Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate](#) project team brought people aged 60+ together at the Europa Hotel in Belfast to discuss:

- what climate change means to you
- what impact extreme weather events have on you and your community
- what exists & what is needed in your community to respond to extreme weather

We have summarised the discussions below. On behalf of the project team, we would like to thank everybody for their participation in this event.

**Next steps:** This event is part of a larger project looking at the implications of climate change on healthy ageing. Over the summer we will host a follow-up event with the local community and key organisations responsible for supporting climate change interventions. This will feed into a set of recommendations and resources to support the design of climate resilient Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (AFCCs).



## Impacts of Extreme Weather on Healthy Ageing

Extreme weather e.g. increased temperatures, heatwaves, extreme cold, wildfires, storms, coastal erosion and localised flooding are impacting on people's ability to age well. These can worsen isolation for many ('if it's too hot to go out, you just don't get out'), exacerbate existing health conditions, and cause anxiety and stress when planning for and responding to extreme weather events. Climate change will not impact on all older people in the same way – there is a need to identify areas of vulnerability, better understand the impact on specific groups e.g. those with disabilities, and put preventative measures in place that mitigate climate impacts.

## Social Connectedness and Community Spirit

Many talked about the importance of social connectivity in developing resilience to climate change e.g. access to social networks and in helping spread information and awareness. People had diverse experiences about their communities, with some feeling levels of community spirit had eroded and others feeling a strong sense of belonging and attachment. All felt that social supports and knowing each other was crucial in times of adversity. Some reflected on the benefits of the pandemic in terms of stimulating local community responses and bringing people together – and a strong feeling this learning can be used to support climate interventions. Formal volunteering could support this, e.g. distributing food, checking in on people - ‘don’t underestimate the power and adaptability of people and communities’.

## Integrated Climate Resilience Responses

Cross-sector support is needed. For active travel, encouragement is needed to adopt greener modes of transport and joined up open spaces and formal programming e.g. walking networks. Climate resilient housing is needed for an ageing population that is flexible and adaptable. For health and social care, how can people still receive the supports and quality of care they need during extreme weather? Information and awareness need to be stronger, e.g. ‘many don’t know who or where to turn to’. Education and learning are also critical, e.g. how to support intergenerational learning and sharing to support climate responsible behaviours and initiatives.

## Planning for Climate Resilient AFCCs

More advanced planning and prioritisation is critical for building climate resilience at a local level. There was a strong feeling that people needed to ‘think outside of the box’ and be more ‘imaginative’ and ‘creative’ in responding to climate change. Urban planning is important in developing physical infrastructure e.g. more shaded benches and creating/preserving green space. When bringing in policy interventions e.g. discussions on lowering the age range for a free bus pass, should consider climate impacts e.g. people moving back to car travel. In facilitating coordinated policy responses, there is a need to bring people together, e.g. city council, statutory and non-statutory services, alongside the voluntary sector and older people.

The aim of the UKRI-funded Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate project is to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the resilience of older people to climate change in the UK. It explores how we can build on existing dimensions of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (AFCCs) to deliver inclusive and climate resilient communities and cities.

**For more information visit:**  
[www.ageandclimate.com](http://www.ageandclimate.com)

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