JANUARY 2023

Climate Resilient Age-Friendly Cities And Communities

Event Brief

Healthy Ageing Challenge

BACKGROUND

In December 2022, 45 policymakers and practitioners came together to discuss the policy challenges of climate change and its impact on healthy ageing and age-friendly cities and communities. Participants represented a range of public, voluntary and community sector organisations covering ageing, health and social care, housing, transport, climate change, and resilience from across the UK.

The aim of the workshop was to identify the priorities and challenges for delivering climate resilient Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (AFCCs). This brief summarises the discussion and key issues raised. The event was part of a UKRI funded project, *Healthy Ageing in Place: Co-Designing Inclusive Climate Resilient Age-Friendly Cities and Communities*, being led by The Urban Institute, Heriot-Watt University and the Stockholm Environment Institute, University of York.

Climate change, together with an ageing population, has implications for cities and communities throughout the UK.

The Met Office confirmed that 2022 was the warmest year on record, with the UK experiencing storms, heatwaves, drought, flooding, and wildfires.

The frequency and intensity of these climate-related extreme weather events is expected to continue and will require interventions to support the health and wellbeing of older people.

This event brief provides a summary of the main priorities that need to be addressed to achieve climate resilient Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in the UK. Workshop participants identified seven key priority areas covering:

- **Housing and home**
- **Social infrastructure**
- **Health and social care**
- **Mobility and outdoor spaces**
- **Civic participation and volunteering**
- **Intergenerational communities**
- **Communication and information**

HERIOT WATT UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY of York

SEI Stockholm Environment Institute

Healthy Ageing, Climate Change and Resilience

- Climate change has led to an increase in the frequency, duration and severity of extreme weather events such as flooding, extreme heat and storms. These extreme weather events disproportionately affect the health and wellbeing of older adults, including excess mortality. They also present wider challenges to mental health and social wellbeing caused by displacement from home and community.
- The concept of healthy ageing is grounded in wider determinants of place and realises the importance of home and community as environments for ageing. Ageing in the right place is critical to healthy ageing and requires access to physical, social, and economic support to age well and build resilience to future climate change.
- Rights of older people are integral to the discussion addressing climate change: to age safely in a place that is right for them; to be included and take part in decision-making processes; to develop personally and professionally; and to contribute to their communities while retaining autonomy, dignity, and health and well-being.
- Older adults are often seen as 'causes' or 'victims' of climate change, rather than as champions and agents of change, with many reporting that they are excluded from planning responses to climate change.
- Urgent interventions are needed at the individual, community and city levels to address ageing, climate change and place and build resilience. Resilience is the sustained ability of a community to use resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations.

Age-Friendly Cities and Communities

- The World Health Organization initiative 'Age-Friendly Cities and Communities' (AFCCs) supports active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Over 1,400 global cities and communities are currently taking part in the AFCC initiative.
- The AFCC initiative frames healthy ageing around eight cross-cutting dimensions: Housing, Transportation, Social Participation, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Community Support and Health Services, Social Participation, Civic Participation and Employment, Communication and Information. The initiative has led to programmes and interventions to support ageing in place across the UK and internationally. Successful examples reflect multi-sectoral partnerships with clear participatory and governance frameworks for including older people.

- AFCCs represent a significant opportunity for delivering responses to climate and ageing populations. Yet, there has been no clear operationalisation of climate resilience in the eight dimensions of AFCCs. Significant work is needed to examine the implications of climate change in developing inclusive and climate resilient AFCCs.
- A UN Decade of Healthy Ageing report identified priorities for AFCCs to respond to climate change, including the need to: 'reimagine urban environments' to deliver 'climate resilient interventions' and achieve 'equitable interventions', aimed at a 'just transition' for older people.

PRIORITIES FOR BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENT AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Housing and Home

Housing interventions should address the psycho-social effects of extreme climate events, which can often be long-term, resulting from displacement and disconnection from community. For example, appropriate and tailored wellbeing support in the event of older people being re-housed or when 'transitioning' between accommodation because of a weather-related event. In recovering from extreme weather events, models of resilience are needed that focus on utilising existing community resources (e.g., using local skills to self-build, and for housing maintenance and repairs).

It is important to consider how climate change will affect the whole housing 'spectrum'. For example, those living in care facilities include those who are most vulnerable to climate change. However, many care facilities lack institutional policies and procedures to respond to extreme weather events.

Planning and urban design interventions are needed to develop care facilities that are both 'climate proof' and environmentally sustainable.

Responsive long-term strategies are needed to ensure housing is fit for purpose, climate resilient and supports the needs of older adults. Adaptation and retrofitting for climate change will be critical to ensure housing is 'climate proof' and energy efficient. Key priority groups include those living in deprived communities and social housing. New house building and construction needs to provide adaptable, lifetime homes for older people; with energy efficiency and sustainable housing design as key principles (e.g., building in existing guidance such as the Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) principles). Housing options should reflect the choice of older people to remain at home and in a community that supports them (with appropriate 'rightsizing' options) and where older people are aware of climate-related housing risks and impacts.

Social Infrastructure

Social capital, such as the networks of social relationships that people can rely on in times of adversity, is critical in building community resilience and providing a sense of place. Building social capital is about being part of a 'connected community' and 'supporting each other' during adverse climatic events.

Successful schemes such as befriending services can provide a social lifeline for older people and enable access to the services and amenities they need, which are particularly important in keeping people connected during extreme heat, floods and storms. Yet too often older adults, particularly those living alone or those who are frail or experiencing cognitive decline, are excluded from social support which is critical in the event of extreme weather. Social infrastructure needs to be embedded as a key part of urban planning interventions to deliver climate resilient places. This should consider how we can use our community spaces as places of refuge and safety and important sources of information dissemination. We need to think much more creatively about the use of community space e.g., integrating intergenerational hubs or climate resilient workspaces for older adults.

Place frameworks such as the Place Standard for Scotland (and updated Place Standard with a Climate Lens) are aimed at creating vibrant social places for older people that account for climate change. Yet there is potential here to integrate these principles more closely with age-friendly guidance to embed climate resilience within place-making practices.

Health and Social Care

Climate change creates challenges around access, continuity and quality of health and social care delivery. A key dimension of responding to climate change and AFCCs is therefore to build climate resilient health and social care systems. For example, how can responsive and flexible care systems be delivered in extreme weather events to ensure positive outcomes for older adults? How can formal and informal carers (many of which are older people) reach the cared for when transport and mobility is compromised? What education and training across health and social care is needed to equip our workforce for climate change and ageing in the community? To create healthy places, health and social care should be seen as an integrated part of the AFCC and climate change agenda.

Health and social care resources need to be available to ensure older people are reached in the right ways. In delivering health and social care, the role of assistive technologies offers potential, yet much of the progress so far has been technology 'push' rather than being shaped around the experiences of older adults. Everyday environments of ageing and climate need to be considered, ensuring 'green technologies' are developed that are usable and acceptable for older adults following good design principles. These interventions should recognise the growing digital divide and the Internet of Things (IoT), which has created inequities in access to health and wellbeing services and supports that are critical during extreme climate-related weather events.

Mobility and Outdoor Spaces

Mobility and 'getting around' is crucial to enabling active ageing, opportunities for social and civic participation, and accessing health and wellbeing services and amenities. Extreme weather events bring about barriers to mobility, as some groups become housebound. For example, floods and storms affect transport systems and physical infrastructure. Extreme heat and cold make it difficult to travel from home to essential services.

Urban planning and design interventions are needed to reduce the impact of climate-related weather events but also to drive positive health behaviour change in terms of how we get around our communities. These should include nature-based interventions such as 'streets with trees', integrating blue and green spaces, alongside physical infrastructure such as protected bus shelters, hydration stations and shaded 'resting points' for older people to navigate around in hot weather. Walkability should be linked to opportunities by providing accessible urban environments that connect to wider communities. Too often, older people are excluded from existing green and blue space because of accessibility issues. Initiatives such as the twenty-minute neighbourhoods and cities initiative offer potential for delivering sustainable communities. However, the perception so far is that this has failed to consider the everyday experiences of older people and is not aligned with the AFCC or climate change agenda.

Civic Participation and Volunteering

Older adults play a critical role in informal work, such as supporting others, and through formal volunteering roles. There is an opportunity for civic participation in building community climate resilient AFCCs with volunteering as a significant 'untapped resource' that can be mobilised around climate action. Older adults have the knowledge and expertise of resilience, having lived through extreme weather events and community change, which are critical to developing community responses now. There is a misperception that older adults do not want to contribute to the climate change debate, yet many are climate change activists and want to play an active role in bringing about change. Reinforcement of negative climate change messaging (often driven by the media) can be 'fear inducing' for older adults and can 'raise anxiety'.

There is a need to explore how climate change can stimulate new opportunities for civic engagement/positive activism involving older adults as agents of change. This should recognise different forms of volunteering and participation, ranging from formal types of participation on boards and committees to more informal networks of participation at a local level (e.g., gardening groups). Empowering older adults to bring about change requires devolved power and to ensure individuals and communities can inform local policy decisions. This requires more participatory forms of decision-making including co-production and 'action planning'.

Intergenerational Communities

Climate change is an intergenerational issue and affects people across all age cohorts. Inclusive climate resilient cities and communities require working collectively towards a common climate justice agenda. In achieving this, intergenerational solidarity through learning and co-design is important in addressing climate change and developing resilient communities (i.e., learning and sharing with one another).

Solutions can be found in enabling creative intergenerational work within communities so they can 'act together'. This needs to be embedded in urban design and planning through the provision of intergenerational and climate resilient outdoor and indoor spaces. Opportunities should be provided to deliver intergenerational programmes and activities (and two-way transfer of knowledge and skills) as part of building adaptation and climate resilience.

Communcation and Information

Communication is key to raising awareness and building a deeper engagement with older adults about the effects of a changing climate. Working with trusted messengers can help – not just one-off campaigns but consistent engagement to promote long-term behaviour change aimed at better enabling communities.

Getting information to older people is critical during extreme climate-related weather events. Technology has a significant role to play, for example, in communicating messages and information about resources in the event of an extreme weather event. A 'digital first' response provides opportunities (e.g., social media) but can exclude digitally unengaged older adults from accessing resources. Other communication channels will need to be used, including community hubs (e.g., libraries) and traditional media (e.g., press and radio). Guidance to support resilient AFCCs is needed that recognises that communities are different, but which provides recommendations on how communities can build climate resilience and ensure healthy ageing in place.

There is a general lack of awareness (and evidence) around extreme weather events and what this means for healthy ageing. For example, the link between extreme heat and underlying health conditions and associated mental and social wellbeing effects is unclear. Work is needed to explore the implications of future interventions, for example, electric vehicles and air source heat pumps and their impact on healthy ageing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions held at the workshop, the following recommendations can be made:

- Ensure climate change cuts across all dimensions of the AFCC agenda with a focus on how we can reduce climate impacts and build resilience at different scales.
- Promote a holistic and place-based approach to delivering climate interventions that address change at the individual, social, community and organisational levels.
- Make multi-sectoral policy and action a key part of delivering climate resilient AFCCs to ensure integrated and collaborative approaches to addressing the diverse needs of older adults.
- Better engage older adults in the climate conversation – provide opportunities for getting involved and utilise the knowledge and expertise of older people to drive forward interventions that address climate change.
- Build on existing community assets and resources as part of climate responses, utilising skills and community spaces to deliver connected communities for older adults.
- Recognise the differential effects of climate change on older adults (older people are 'not a homogenous group'). Need to better understand and map vulnerabilities across place, age and other intersections of healthy ageing (there currently exists a big 'data gap') to determine risk and where to best target support.

Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate project

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 AFCCs to deliver inclusive and climate resilient communities and cities.

For more information visit: www.ageandclimate.com

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