Research Brief   **September 2020**

GENERATIONAL DISTINCTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY FEATURES BY OLDER AGE GROUPS

Keywords: older adults, community, Baby Boomers, generations, age-friendly environments

Purpose of the Study: To better understand what different generations of older adults (e.g., Baby Boomers, Silent Generation, etc.) value in age-friendly communities.

Key Findings:

- ✓ More than older generations, Baby Boomers valued more aspects of the built environment of a community, such as affordable low-income housing, accessible transportation, and maintained parks.
- ✓ More than older generations, Baby Boomers valued more aspects of the social and service environments of a community, such as intergenerational activities, volunteer opportunities, and feeling heard.

Major Policy/Practice Implication: Policy makers and community stakeholders should incorporate the voices of aging consumers into policies and services that support active aging.

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The need for age-friendly communities continues to increase, considering that 20% of the US population will be 65 or older by 2030. This is a diverse population that consists of many generations (e.g., the Silent Generation and the Baby Boomers) with varying perspectives on what makes a community age-friendly. This research investigates generational perspectives across three domains: built environment (i.e., housing, outdoor spaces, transportation); social environment (i.e., civic participation, social participation, employment); and service environment (i.e., community support, health services, communication and information).

STUDY METHODS

Researchers distributed a survey to suburban residents of the southeastern United States, over age 50, from June to December 2015. The survey asked about three domains of age-friendly communities (built environment, social environment, and service environment), and demographic information (e.g., gender, age, education, etc.). Anonymous respondents included 1,127 people representing the Baby Boom, the Silent, and the General Issues (GI) generations. Researchers analyzed survey data using SPSS software version 23.0, using statistical methods that assessed the association between generational groups and perspectives on age-friendly communities.

KEY FINDINGS

✓ **Built environment:** More than older generations, Baby Boomers valued…

- ○ *Housing:* …affordable, new, well-maintained, and universally designed homes. They also valued safe, affordable low-income housing with seasonal services, co-housing options, and access to reliable and affordable contractors.

- ○ *Transportation:* …affordable public transportation.

- ○ *Outdoor spaces:* …safe, well-maintained parks within walking distance that have exercise equipment and benches.They also valued good sidewalks and maintained, accessible public restrooms.

✓ **Social Environment:** More than older generations, Baby Boomers valued…

- ○ *Employment***:** …disability accommodations/adaptability, new skills training, entrepreneurial assistance, and flexible, well-paying jobs for highly skilled workers.

- ○ *Social participation:* …continuing education, intergenerational activities, and convenient entertainment.

- ○ *Civic participation***:** …volunteer opportunities and volunteer training.

✓ **Service Environment:** More than older generations, Baby Boomers valued…

- ○ *Community support and health services:* …health/wellness classes and age-focused exercises.

- ○ *Communication and information:* …feeling heard in their communities.

PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Overall, Baby Boomer respondents valued different aspects of age-friendly communities than older generations. Across each domain the findings indicated that Baby Boomers were more likely than others in this research to value community aspects that met their need to remain active and engaged in their physical and social environments. For example, they valued increased access to health information, continued employment, and volunteering opportunities. Policy makers and community stakeholders should consider incorporating the voices of aging consumers into policies and services that support active aging, and to consider generational differences.
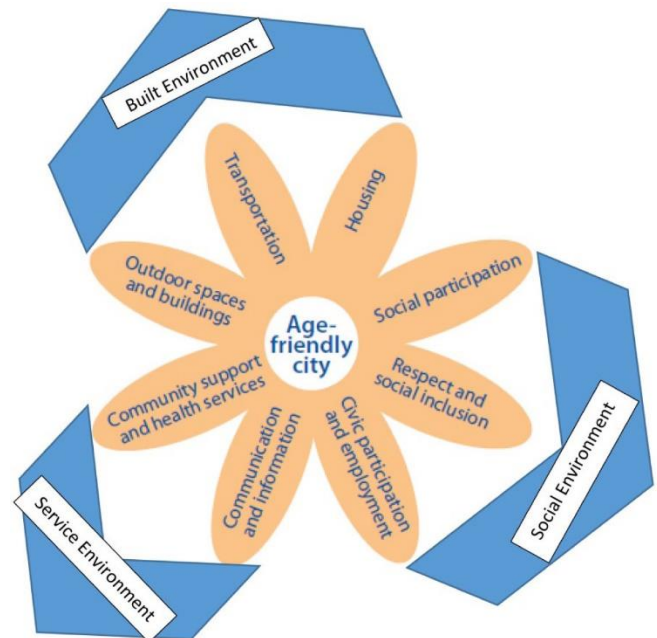
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Black, K., & Hyer, K. (2019). Generational distinctions on the importance of age-friendly community features by older age groups. *Journal of Applied Gerontology, 1(*21), 1-21. Doi:10.1177/0733464819847885

This policy brief was written by Chelsea Goldstein, MGS, Christian Slater, Ph.D., Hillary Rouse, Ph.D., Kathy Black, Ph.D., and Lindsay Peterson, Ph.D. of the University of South Florida, School of Aging Studies and Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging. For further information contact the study author, Kathy Black, at kathy@usf.edu.