

SESSION 6155 (SYMPOSIUM)

LEARNING WHILE DOING: COMMUNITY-ENGAGED ACTION RESEARCH WITH AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY LEADERS

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Age-Friendly Community Initiatives (AFCIs) are expanding throughout the United States to make social and built environments within local communities more responsive to population aging. With over 450 initiatives affiliated with the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, Cities, and States (125 of which began in 2019-early 2020), rapid growth on the ground necessitates that theory and research develop alongside practice innovations. This symposium showcases the intersection of cutting-edge scholarship with community-based efforts to generate knowledge of community change processes that is immediately actionable by community leaders. Collectively, these papers emphasize the benefits of action research and developmental evaluation in community gerontology towards building the theories of age-friendly change that will set the stage for outcomes research. The first paper will present on work with 83 AFCIs in rural Maine involving interviews with organizational leaders to inform which types of supports could stimulate age-friendly changes to communities' built and social environments. The second paper will share a mixed-methods approach used to develop a global toolkit for dementia-friendly communities. The third presenter will describe the collaborative development and utilization of social network analysis to help age-friendly leaders plan their work, while simultaneously advancing research on variation in AFCI implementation. The final paper will present an evaluative framework that identifies roles and outcome measures for collective impact at the intersection of public health and age-friendly communities.

UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO DEVELOP A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TOOL TO MEASURE AGE-FRIENDLY COLLABORATION

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Age-friendly community initiatives (AFCIs) are frequently described as community collaborations; the AARP program model encourages diverse stakeholder engagement to achieve its aims of improving the social and built environments for long lives. However, little is known empirically about how AFCIs function as collaborations and how these relationships and activities lead to community changes. This paper presents how we developed a social network analysis tool to measure collaboration in AFCIs, which emerged from multi-year, university-community partnerships on AFCIs in western New York and northern New Jersey. Iterative processes, including inductive analysis of qualitative interviews and facilitated meetings with local AFCI work-groups, provided opportunities to create survey items on collaboration with meaning specific to AFCIs. We describe this tool's application as part of a

survey of AFCI stakeholders, demonstrating how findings contribute both to advancing knowledge on AFCIs in general and directly informing the efforts of AFCI actors on the ground.

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE RURAL AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES: GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVES

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Joining the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities does not make a community age-friendly; the age-friendly team must cultivate community engagement, develop collaborations with diverse stakeholders, mobilize resources, and document achievements. Little research describes the tools age-friendly rural communities use to effect change and develop sustainability. Thematic content analysis of 67 interviews conducted between December 09, 2018 and January 24, 2020 with age-friendly leaders in rural Maine communities suggested that peer-to-peer networking, privileging local knowledge, engaging local and regional partners, technical advice from a trusted source, and fun were among the tools used to move age-friendly rural work forward.

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A WHO DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY GLOBAL TOOLKIT: INPUT FROM MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

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This study examined the process that the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse of WHO used to develop a global toolkit for dementia friendly initiatives (DFI). Data were collected through a mix-method approach consisting of individual interviews of 20 DFI leaders, four focus group interviews of persons living with dementia (PWD), three group interviews of professionals, and an online survey of 129 participants from 46 countries. Data from multiple sources were examined. The meaning of DFIs centered on the needs of PWD, multi-sector collaboration, and physical and social environmental changes. Over 70% participants in the survey reported their DFIs targeted PWD and included PWD as important partners. The EASTT model can be used to summarize DFI strategies including Education, Advocacy, Support, Training and Transforming environment. Countries advanced in DFI tended to focus on enhancing professional capacity and environmental adaptation, while countries launching DFI appeared to prioritize dementia awareness campaigns.

EVALUATING COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR HEALTHY AGING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

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There is mounting interest in promoting - and evaluating efforts that improve healthy aging in age-friendly communities. Additionally, there is increasing recognition that multi-sectoral engagement beyond the aging network is needed to maximize impact and sustainability. Within the context