

WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Initiative

Melbourne Report

Older people are a significant and growing part of local communities. According to United Nations, the number of older persons (60+) will double from the current 600 million to 1.2 billion by 2025, and again, to 2 billion by 2050. The vast majority of older people live in homes and communities that have not been built with their needs in mind.

To support Governments, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a Policy Framework on Active Ageing in 2002. This document shows what needs to be done to help older persons.

What is active ageing?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines active ageing as the 'process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.' This means all older people must be able to do the things they think are important for them, their families and their community. However, to be able to live well in a busy city, the people who live and work there must think about the needs of older people. The WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Initiative aims to help all of us be more aware of older people.

The Age-Friendly Cities Project

Melbourne was one of 33 cities around the world who took part in the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Initiative. The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) with the Council On The Ageing (COTA) Victoria secured funds from the Office for Senior Victorians and formed a partnership with Maribyrnong City Council and the McCaughey Centre at the University of Melbourne to do the study.

The City of Maribyrnong

- is Melbourne's smallest and most densely populated local council;
- has many people who were born in countries all over the world;
- has more people over 65 years old than the rest of Victoria;
- has twice as many people over seventy five years old living on their own than the rest of Melbourne.

What we did

To find out what makes a city a good place to live in, this study asked groups of older persons to talk about what was good and what was not so good about living in the city of Maribyrnong. We also asked people who were caring for older people at home. We then asked people who provide services to older persons to tell us what they thought it was like to grow old in the City of Maribyrnong. The University of Melbourne gave us ethical approval to ask these questions.

What we found out

The people we spoke to had different ideas about what was good and bad about growing old in the city of Maribyrnong. Most of the people, however, agreed that the City of Maribyrnong was a good place to live. They liked the shops. They felt that the people were friendly and, if they needed help, someone would help them.

The older people we spoke to also told us some of the problems of growing old in the city of Maribyrnong. The most important and common things we found out were:

- In parts of the city there is very little regular, reliable public transport.
- Getting on and off the buses is difficult for many older people. Some people said the buses could be dangerous and they were scared of falling over in the bus.
- Many footpaths are not looked after and trees and shrubs grow out over the paths making walking along the street very difficult.
- There are very few choices about what sort of house to live in as people get older. There are no retirement villages and the new flats are not built for older people. Many older persons can not afford major improvements to their homes.
- The home-based support services provided by the Council are terrific. They help people stay at home. Such supports including home maintenance services, meals on wheels, nursing care and community transport.

However, people who are caring for older people at home found growing old in Maribyrnong much more difficult.

- They felt alone.
- It was difficult to get transport to go to the doctors, visit the shops, or go out with friends.
- Often their house was not suitable for the equipment they needed and they did not have the money to make changes.