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NEW JERSEY ADVOCATES
FOR AGING WELL

# Primer
## for
## Building Age-Friendly
## Towns and Communities

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## I. Introduction—Why Age-Friendly Communities Matter

The older adult population is rapidly increasing worldwide while fertility rates decline around the globe. Through medical advances and technology, older Americans are living longer and US life expectancy continues to increase. In the US, it is anticipated that 8,000 members of the Baby Boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) will turn 65 every day for the rest of this decade. By 2030, one in five citizens will be 65 or older. [1] According to the US Census Bureau, by 2034, the nation will have more people 65 or older than under 18.

As of the latest data, New Jersey has a population of approximately 9,290,841 residents. Of this population, approximately 22. 7% (about 2,115,000 people) are aged 60 or over. The U. S. Census Bureau projects that by 2030, 24. 5% of New Jersey's population will be 60 and older. [2]

With advancing age comes changing needs—not just for an increasing risk of disability and disease, but housing, transportation, affordability, and connectivity. As the population ages, it is crucial to consider the ramifications of these statistics for our state and adapt our environments to support the changing needs of residents. Collaboration among cities, towns, counties, and the state is necessary to develop and implement well-thought-out plans to meet these needs and address the changing demographics of every community. Age-friendly communities are essential for promoting the health, well-being, and social inclusion of older adults. These communities enhance the quality of life for all ages by creating inclusive, supportive, and engaging environments.

## II. Goals of the Primer

This Primer aims to share general information about the broader age-friendly movement and provide a comprehensive guide for towns and communities looking to develop and sustain age-friendly initiatives. It outlines the benefits, roles of municipal leaders and departments, real-life case studies, and resources necessary for creating successful age-friendly communities here in New Jersey.

The purpose of the Primer is to aid individuals and groups seeking to begin, advance, or enhance age-friendly initiatives within their communities. It offers practical suggestions and best practices for communities to meet the significant challenges of an aging society head-on and provide opportunities for seniors to age in place. We hope to bring awareness to the WHO/AARP 8 Domains of Livability and encourage municipal leaders to value the importance of age-friendly strategies. We want to empower towns and communities to meet the imminent demographic shifts by creating responsive policies, initiatives, and programs that advance age-friendly communities and offer a guidepost to help older residents age in place.

Through collaboration with the Age-Friendly New Jersey Alliance (AFNJ), New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well seeks to create a more strategic alliance with age-friendly partners and work to build an age-friendly New Jersey, one that is a great place to live, work, play and age for all residents. Importantly, collaboration among cities, towns, counties, and the state is necessary to meet these needs and address the changing demographics.

## III. The 8 Domains of Livability: Key Concepts and Principles

Research and the 2024 NJAAW Survey of Older Adults confirms that most older adults in NJ want to remain in their own homes and communities, in familiar surroundings, for as long as possible.[3] Age-friendly communities are designed to support healthy and active aging by enhancing the quality of life for residents of all ages.

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Age-Friendly movement, and it continues to gain momentum across the globe.[4] The premise of the age-friendly concept is to develop effective solutions to the challenges posed by an aging population by adapting structures and services to make communities supportive and inclusive of their older residents. Age-friendly communities are not only beneficial for aging adults but are also more livable, equitable, and inclusive for people at every stage of life.

AARP, in conjunction with WHO, developed an age-friendly framework of 8 interlocking essential needs for promoting healthy aging and creating communities where older adults can age in place.[5] This framework is known as the 8 Domains of Livability which cross all sectors of a community. The 8 domains include:

- Housing: Safe and affordable housing options that allow older adults to age in place.
- Transportation: Accessible and reliable transportation options.
- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings: Safe and accessible public spaces.
- Social Participation: Opportunities for social, cultural, and leisure activities that offer interaction and engagement in the community.
- Respect and Social Inclusion: Inclusive practices and attitudes towards older adults.
- Civic Participation and Employment: Opportunities for older adults to work and volunteer.
- Communication and Information: Accessible and clear communication channels in a variety of formats.
- Community Support and Health Services: Access to local health and support services.
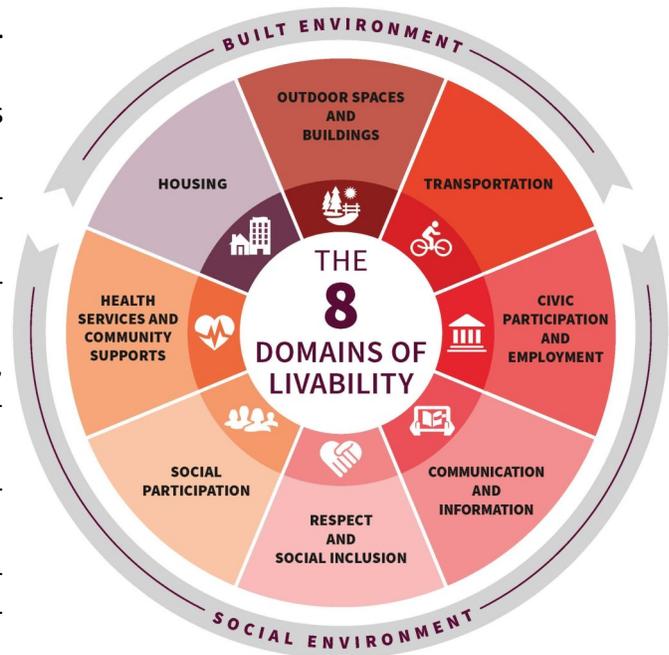
## IV. Benefits of an Age-Friendly Community

Age-friendly communities create environments where everyone can thrive and contribute to the well-being of the community.

### Promotes Health and Well-being

Age-friendly communities provide accessible healthcare services, wellness programs, and safe environments that support the health of older adults. Initiatives such as fitness classes, health screenings, and nutrition workshops promote physical health and mental well-being.[6]

### Fosters Social Inclusion

It is well-established that social relationships affect our health and well-being. In 2023, the US Surgeon General released a report, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, which found that 50% of US adults feel lonely and that people of every age are spending less time with others. [7]

As we age and experience declining mobility and loss, many older adults experience isolation and loneliness. Inclusive programs and intergenerational activities help reduce social isolation and foster a sense of community. Social events, volunteer programs, and community gatherings encourage interaction and engagement among residents of all ages.

### Economic Benefits

Older adults contribute to the local economy through spending, volunteering, and participation in community activities. Age-friendly communities attract and retain older residents, boosting economic growth and vitality.[8] Also, age-friendly communities can positively impact real estate prices. When a community is designed to be accessible and inclusive, it becomes more attractive to a broader range of potential buyers and renters. This increased demand can increase property values. Additionally, age-friendly features such as improved public transportation, walkability, and access to healthcare and social services can make a community more desirable, further boosting real estate prices.[8]

### Enhances Quality of Life

Accessible housing, transportation, and recreational facilities are linked to the overall quality of life for all residents. These comforts allow older residents to live independently, participate in community and social services, and enjoy a higher standard of living.

### Builds Intergenerational Solidarity

Creating spaces for interaction between generations strengthens community bonds and mutual support. Intergenerational programs, such as mentoring, technology instruction and assistance, and community projects, foster understanding and collaboration across age groups and add to the diversity of perspectives through lived experience.

### How Age-Friendly Communities Benefit All

Below are some specific examples of how age-friendly communities benefit everyone:

- Improved Accessibility: Age-friendly communities often feature accessible infrastructure, such as ramps, elevators, and wider sidewalks. This benefits people with disabilities, parents with strollers, and anyone with temporary or long-term mobility issues. Public buildings utilize universal design principles to meet the needs of all residents, instead of separate or workarounds for the differently abled.[6]
- Enhanced Public Spaces: Parks, community gardens, and public seating areas are designed to be welcoming and usable by all ages. These spaces encourage outdoor activities, social interaction, community events, and intergenerational gathering places.
- Safe Transportation Options: Age-friendly communities prioritize safe and reliable transportation options, including public transit, bike lanes, and pedestrian-friendly streets. This benefits commuters, cyclists, families with children, and older adults who are no longer driving.

- Social Inclusion: Programs and activities that promote social participation and intergenerational interaction help build a sense of community and reduce isolation. This fosters stronger social bonds and mutual support among residents of all ages. Social inclusion is particularly needed in the post-COVID pandemic era and recognizes the impact on mental health for people of all age groups.[7]

- Health and Wellness Programs: Access to health and wellness programs, such as fitness classes, health screenings, and nutrition workshops, benefits everyone by promoting a healthier lifestyle and preventing chronic diseases.

- Economic Opportunities: Age-friendly communities often support local businesses and create job opportunities. This can lead to a more vibrant local economy, provide employment options for people of all ages, and have a positive impact on real estate prices. Older residents tend to spend more dollars in their local communities.

- Environmental Sustainability: Initiatives to create green spaces and promote sustainable practices benefit the environment and improve the overall quality of life for all residents.

- Lifelong Learning: Opportunities for lifelong learning, such as adult education programs (e.g., introduction to technology, health, and nutrition) and community workshops can encourage personal growth and skill development for people of all ages.

- Improved Communications: Improved age-friendly communication can occur through several channels. Based on the demographics of a community, it may be necessary to include flyers, notices, and communications in various languages, such as Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Creole, Russian, etc.

## V. How Municipal Leaders & Departments Can Build Age-Friendly Communities

Building a successful age-friendly community requires a coordinated, cross-sector approach. Municipal leaders—including mayors, council members, and department heads—must adopt an age-friendly lens across all areas of governance and view the scope of their responsibilities through it.

Health Department

Benefits: Promoting health and well-being.

Recommended Actions:

- Programs: Establish wellness programs, regular health screenings, and vaccination drives aimed at older adults.

- Mental health: Consider bringing a "Senior Social Worker," or social worker specializing in the needs of older adults.

- Education: Provide health education sessions on managing chronic diseases, nutrition, and mental health.

- Accessibility: Ensure health services are easily accessible to older residents, improving their overall health outcomes.

- Adopt the framework for Age-Friendly Public Health Systems to help Health Departments and Community Health Workers elevate healthy aging as a core public health function.[10]

**Municipal Toolkit**

Age-Friendly Ridgewood developed a Municipal Toolkit for be used by a municipal managers, governing bodies, municipal department heads, staff and related entities to explore and implement age-friendly practices. A separate section is included for each department so that they can focus on steps that can be taken to make their town a great place to grow up AND grow old.
Click **here** to read the Toolkit

MUNICIPAL TOOLKIT

BUILDING AN AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

AGE FRIENDLY
RIDGEWOOD
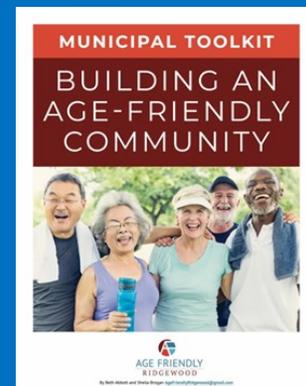
## Police Department

Benefits: Fostering security and safety.

Recommended Actions:

- Community Outreach: Implement community policing/outreach strategies that focus on building trust and communication with older adults. For example, *Coffee with a Cop.*

- Training: Train officers to recognize and address the unique needs of older residents, including issues related to elder abuse, dementia, fraud, and scams.

- Programs: Develop programs that promote safety and social interaction, like neighborhood watch groups that include older adults, *Operation Blue Angel*, a *Take Me Home Registry*, safety seminars, etc.

### Operation Blue Angel

Montclair is one of 60 NJ towns offering "Operation Blue Angel, a lockbox program designed to assist older residents who might not be able to get to the door in the event of an emergency. The program allows Fire, EMS and Police to gain entry into a home when someone is unable to answer the door. Participants are provided with a free and secured Lock Box. The confidential access code is placed on file with the fire or police department. In the event of an emergency, first responders can access the code and use the key to quickly enter the home.

## Fire Department

Benefits: Enhancing quality of life and safety.

Recommended Actions:

- Fire Safety Education: Offer fire safety education tailored to older adults, including the installation of smoke detectors, carbon monoxide alarms (and changing batteries) and fire extinguishers.

- Emergency Response: Develop specialized response plans for older residents, particularly those with mobility issues.

- Community Programs: Engage in community programs that encourage older adults to participate in fire prevention, safety drills and emergency preparedness.

## Social Services

Benefits: Providing support and resources.

Recommended Actions:

- Resource Coordination: Provide resources and services for older adults, such as meal delivery, home care, long-term planning and financial assistance.

- Support Groups: Establish support groups for older adults dealing with grief, loneliness, or chronic illness. Include support for caregivers.

- Counseling Services: Provide mental health and counseling services to address the unique emotional needs of older residents.

- Develop a local Resource Guide for older adults with a range of services provided by non-profits as well as municipal, county and state services.

### Resource Guide for Older Adults

Englewood is one of several AFNJ Alliance members that developed a resource guide for older residents, covering a range of service and programs. See the "flipbook" **here**

Transportation Department

Benefits: Improving mobility, accessibility and connection to the community.

Recommended Actions:

- Accessible Transport: Develop accessible transportation options, including shuttle services, to help older adults get to medical appointments, grocery stores, libraries and social activities.
- Safe Infrastructure: Ensure sidewalks, crosswalks, and public transport facilities are safe and accessible for all ages.
- Driver Assistance Programs: Offer programs that help older adults maintain their driving skills, like *Car Fit* $^{TM}$, or transition to alternative transportation options if needed.

Recreation Department

Benefits: Enhancing quality of life and social inclusion.

Recommended Actions:

- Age-Friendly Programs: Develop age-friendly recreational programs, such as low-impact fitness classes, art workshops, and social events tailored to older adults.
- Offer free seating, tents, and transportation to community events.
- Provide age-friendly guides to event organizers.
- Inclusive Facilities: Ensure recreational facilities are accessible and welcoming to all ages, with features like easy entry pools, well-lit pathways, and seating areas.
- Technology Training: Offer training programs to help older adults become comfortable with using technology and accessing online resources.

**"Senior Tent"**

SOMA Two Towns for All Ages provides a "Senior Tent" at outdoor community events such as concerts and street fairs. In addition to making it easier for older residents to physically attend events – removing the need to carry chairs and negotiate space - having a dedicated seating area makes it more inviting for people who are attending alone.



Zoning Department

Benefits: Improving housing and neighborhood livability.

Recommended Actions:

- Inclusive Housing Policies: Implement zoning policies that encourage the development of accessible housing that is affordable housing options for older adults, such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and mixed-use developments.
- Walkable Neighborhoods: Promote zoning regulations that support walkable neighborhoods with proximity to essential services like grocery stores, healthcare facilities, and parks.
- Universal Design Standards: Advocate for building codes and design standards that incorporate universal design principles, ensuring new constructions and renovations are accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

Public Works

Benefits: Enhancing infrastructure and mobility.

Recommended Actions:

- Mobility Support: Implement infrastructure improvements that support mobility aids, such as wider sidewalks, smooth surfaces, and adequate resting spots.

- Safe and Accessible Streets: Maintain and improve streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks to ensure they are safe and accessible for older adults. This includes features like curb cuts, pedestrian signals, and proper lighting.
- Public Spaces: Develop and maintain public spaces such as parks, community gardens, and plazas that are accessible and inviting to older adults.

## VI. Implementing Age-Friendly Initiatives

Implementing age-friendly features in a community fosters an inclusive and accessible environment for all residents. By focusing on select, key areas, communities can create environments that support the well-being of all residents, making them more attractive and livable for everyone. Many towns and municipalities are already conducting age-friendly work in their communities, although it may not be labeled as such. Often this work falls under the auspices of adult recreational programming, senior events, and other programming events, such as field trips, events at local libraries, etc.

Philanthropic organizations have funded initial age-friendly efforts, or advanced funds to lay the groundwork for creating age-friendly communities. Recently, the state of NJ awarded multiple grants to fund select community age-friendly initiatives and projects. However, to create the sustainability required for age-friendly initiatives to take root and flourish across NJ, it is necessary to present a compelling business case to municipal leadership for sustained funding for age-friendly policies and practices.

As NJ's population rapidly ages, it is important to educate town planners and administrators to help prepare for associated changes on the needs for housing, transportation and supports. Below are some key steps and examples:

Assessment and Planning
- Conduct Surveys: Gather input from residents of all ages to understand their needs and preferences.
- Form a Task Force: Create a diverse group of stakeholders, including older adults, community leaders, and service providers to assist the planning process.

Infrastructure Improvements
- Accessible Public Spaces: Ensure parks, sidewalks, and public buildings are accessible to people of all ages with varying mobility levels.
- Safe Transportation: Develop and maintain safe pedestrian crossings, bike lanes, and reliable public transportation options. Review and analyze data on car/pedestrian crashes and implement appropriate solutions, such as longer light crossings, additional crosswalk signage, marked crossways, etc.

Housing Options
- Affordable Housing: Provide a range of housing options, including senior housing that is affordable and intergenerational living arrangements.
- Adopt policies that encourage new housing options like Accessory Dwelling Units, and home sharing.

- Home Modifications: Offer programs and solicit grants and discounts to help residents modify their homes to accommodate changing needs, such as installing easy-to-use handles, grab bars, and ramps.

## Health and Wellness Programs

- Fitness and Recreation: Establish community centers and fitness programs that cater to all ages, promoting physical activity and social interaction.
- Health Services: Ensure access to healthcare services, including preventive care, health screenings, mental health support, and chronic disease management.

## Social and Civic Engagement

- Volunteer Opportunities: Create programs that encourage residents of all ages to volunteer and engage in community service.
- Intergenerational Activities: Organize events and activities that bring together people of different ages, fostering social connections and mutual support.

## Economic Opportunities

- Local Business Support: Encourage the development of local businesses that cater to the needs of older adults, such as healthcare services, home care, and "senior-friendly" products.
- Encourage local businesses to offer discounts for older adult at local businesses, and provide guidance for practices benefitting older customers, such as large-print menus, lighting, seating with arm rests, etc.
- Workforce Development: Offer training and educational programs through libraries, senior centers and "adult schools" to help residents of all ages stay competitive in the job market and transition to new careers.

**Discount Cards**

SOMA Two Towns for All Ages' (South Orange and Maplewood) "Age Advantage Discount Card" offers exclusive savings for community members aged 62+. The card is free to residents and supports local businesses.



## Communication and Information

- Clear Signage: Ensure that public spaces and buildings have clear and easy-to-read signage.
- Accessible Information: Provide information about community services and resources in multiple formats, such as print, online, and audio.
- Offer information in English and other languages prevalent in the community.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- Regular Reviews: Continuously assess the effectiveness of age-friendly initiatives and adjust as needed.
- Feedback Mechanisms: Establish channels for residents to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement.

## VII.  Best Practices: Creating Age-Friendly Towns and Communities

Best Practices in age-friendly efforts involve awareness, engagement with all stakeholders, and providing enhanced communication. Neighboring communities continue to develop and share local age-friendly initiatives. Opportunities abound to brainstorm with colleagues, learn from others, and identify challenges to age-friendly programs and initiatives.[11] AFNJ group leaders, supporters, and colleagues attend regularly scheduled virtual and in-person meetings to share best practices and support the ongoing advance age-friendly work of communities, and share examples and resources through the Age Friendly NJ Alliance website,  www.agefriendlynj.org.[12]

By implementing best practices through the framework of the 8 Domains of Livability, towns and communities can create environments that support well-being and participation, thereby making the community more inclusive and livable for everyone.[6] It is not necessary for towns to address every domain simultaneously. Instead, a survey can be undertaken to identify and prioritize the most critical areas according to the community's needs, circumstances, and available resources.[13]

Focus on a few key domains and identify obstacles preventing older adults from accessing these programs and services, such as lack of awareness, inadequate transportation, or accessibility issues. Based on older adult survey responses and the 8 Domains of Livability, organizers can rank the domains in order of importance, evaluate current policies, programs, and services supporting each domain.[5] In some cases, it might be beneficial first to tackle low-hanging fruit to kick-start the age-friendly initiative with a few quick wins, thereby creating momentum.

Best Practices by Domain

1.  Community and Health Care
- Age-Friendly Public Health Systems: Adopt the "6 Cs Framework" and become certified as an Age-Friendly Public Heath System to increase the knowledge needed to expand public health's role in improving and supporting older adult health and well-being at all levels. [14]
- Integrated Health Programs: Develop programs that address the holistic health needs of older adults, including mental health and preventive care. [15]

2.  Transportation
- Public Transport: Provide public transportation options that are safe, reliable, affordable and accessible to people of all ages. [16]
- Walkable Streets: Design streets with sufficiently wide sidewalks, adequate pedestrian crossings, and, where applicable, benches to encourage walking. Focus on solutions that can reduce the risk of pedestrian-car crashes and falls. [17]

3.  Housing
- Affordable Housing: Offer a range of housing options that are both affordable and suitable for older adults, including accessible and adaptable homes.[18]
- Home Modifications: Provide support for home modifications, such as handrails, grab bars, universal door handles, etc., to make living spaces safer and more comfortable for older residents. [19]
- Accessory Dwelling Units: Explore ADUs as a solution for expanding the affordable housing stock and fostering synergy between homeowners and ADU tenants.[20]

4. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Green Spaces: Create and maintain parks and green spaces that are accessible and enjoyable for people of all ages.[21]
- Barrier-Free Access: Ensure that public buildings and spaces are barrier-free, with handicapped parking, ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. [22]
- Maintain walkways and lighting to prevent falls and ensure safety. [23]

5. Social Participation

- Community Programs: Organize social activities and programs that encourage participation from residents of all ages, fostering intergenerational connections. [24]
- Volunteer Opportunities: Provide opportunities for older adults to volunteer and contribute to the community. Host community-wide volunteer fairs to showcase options. [25]
- Flexible Scheduling: Offer activities at various times of day to accommodate caregivers, working individuals, and retirees. Provide transportation to reduce barriers to participation. [26]

**Volunteer Fair**

SOMA Two Towns for All Ages held community-wide volunteer fairs, inviting local non-profits and advertised widely to attract teens, retirees and residents of all ages. Instead of focusing on volunteering to help older adults, the event highlights the volunteer power of older residents. Over 300 people attended.



6. Respect and Social Inclusion

- Anti-Discrimination Policies: Implement policies that promote respect and social inclusion, ensuring that all older adults are treated with dignity and respect. [27]
- Awareness Campaigns: Conduct awareness campaigns to combat ageism and promote positive attitudes towards aging through the principles of Reframing Aging.[28]

7. Civic Participation and Employment

- Engagement in Decision-Making: Encourage older adults to participate in local decision-making processes, committees and civic activities.
- Flexible Work Options: Offer flexible work arrangements and opportunities for older adults, including part-time and job sharing.

8. Communication and Information

- Clear Information: Provide clear and accessible information about community services, events, and resources. Ensure information is accessible in the languages prevalent in the community.
- Communication channels: Share information through a range of channels, including digital, printed/flyers, municipal eblasts and local newspapers.[29]

## IX. Case Study: West Orange, NJ

West Orange is a suburb 17 miles west of New York City with a population of approximately 48,000. Over 30% of the residents are aged 55+, and residents aged 65+ make up 18. 2% of the population, a figure that continues to increase. The township earned its WHO/AARP Age-Friendly certification in 2020. In response to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, West Orange saw an opportunity to improve the lives of older adults and vulnerable populations, while simultaneously advancing the town's age-

friendly initiatives. This brief case study showcases a remarkable example of turning a crisis into an opportunity for community growth and resilience.

A pivotal part of West Orange's response to the pandemic was the formation of the COVID Community Coalition (CCC), a collaborative effort of like-minded committed professionals from 7 neighboring towns who joined forces to coordinate resources and services to ensure the well-being of older adults. The CCC initiative not only provided immediate relief for vulnerable populations during the pandemic, but also laid the foundation for long-term improvements in community support. West Orange's proactive approach set a benchmark for other communities striving to become more inclusive and supportive. Its successful adaptation and ongoing commitment to age-friendly principles continue to inspire similar initiatives.

West Orange's Key Actions and Partnerships

1. Stakeholder Engagement:
- Engaged various stakeholders, including municipal leadership, healthcare providers, social services, and community organizations. [30]
- Presented a public awareness and education program on Age-Friendly and the 8 Domains of Livability at mayor's staff meetings and public town council meeting to inform municipal leaders and the broader community about age-friendly principles, the benefits to the community, and how to get involved.
- Conducted regular meetings with stakeholders, including Library, Health Center, Dept. of Senior Services, Recreation Department, and a local Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) to discuss the changing needs of older adults and develop collaborative strategies.

2. Community Surveys:
- Worked with Montclair State University to conduct a comprehensive survey to understand the needs, preferences, and challenges older adults face.
- Used survey data to inform municipal leaders and serve as the basis for development of an action plan. [31]

3. Action Plan Development:
- Working with municipality and stakeholders to develop a detailed action plan with clear, measurable goals.[30]
- Selected key areas and domains to focus on (e. g. , communication, health, social engagement, and transportation).

4. Partnerships and Collaborations:
- Partnered with local civic organizations, faith-based groups, and academic institutions to leverage resources and expertise.
- Established a network of community champions to advocate for age-friendly initiatives. Assisted in the development of the town's Senior Advisory Council.

5. Implementation of Programs:

- Through a partnership with Montclair University School of Nursing, launched community health and wellness programs, including fitness, stress relief, and diet and nutrition workshops. Engaged in health screenings to check for potential health issues, provided as part of age-friendly initiatives to ensure the well-being of older adults.

- In collaboration with West Orange High School, developed 1:1 Technology Training Workshops for older adults, including the use of virtual platforms such as Zoom and FaceTime, to facilitate communication and engagement, especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Developed an inspirational booklet of touching letters, *Legacy of Love: Words of Wisdom from One Generation to Another*, penned by the West Orange's older adult community, to help adolescents and high school students dealing with the pandemic, isolation, and hybrid learning through sharing personal stories of adversity and triumph in overcoming life's challenges.

- Intergenerational programming with local High Schools to engage with older adults and participate in Older Adult Senior Proms, Community Gardens, and Gen-Lit Connect, an intergenerational reading program.

- Created numerous social engagement opportunities, such as community events, volunteer programs, and intergenerational activities.

> **Intergenerational Connections**
>
> West Orange's Senior Services Program Coordinator asked older residents to share stories that could encourage West Orange Youth to see optimism and hope through challenges and hard times. Residents shared how they managed through difficult times that felt nearly insurmountable and important pieces of advice they would have offered their teenage self. The result was a virtual booklet called "Legacy of Love." To see the Legacy of Love project, click **here**

6. Communication and Awareness:

- Developed a communication strategy to raise awareness of age-friendly principles and initiatives.

- Hired a Senior Livability Coordinator responsible for developing, implementing, and overseeing age-friendly initiatives within the township.

- Used multiple channels, including social media, local newspapers, local cable TV stations and community bulletin boards, to disseminate information in various languages.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Regularly reviewed age-friendly progress and informed the action plan based on feedback and changing needs of the community. Shared findings and feedback with the Municipality, Mayor, Health Department, and Social Services.

- Conducted annual evaluations to measure the impact of age-friendly programs.

8. Pandemic Response:

- Borne out of the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, West Orange developed the COVID-19 Community Coalition: A Senior Services Initiative (CCC). The CCC is a coalition of 7 local towns – South Orange, Maplewood, Montclair, Livingston, Short Hills/Milburn, West Orange, and JCC MetroWest.

- This CCC assisted residents with vaccine registration, transportation to vaccine sites, contactless food delivery, masks, prescription delivery online, essential materials, and provided critical professional support amongst neighboring colleagues to highlight the benefits of forming these relationships.
- The CCC continues to work together to build connections and provide resources and support to its communities. CCC efforts enhanced social engagement, reduced isolation, and increased access to health and wellness resources for older adults. Further, CCC strengthened collaborative partnerships by building a network of colleagues who collaborate on age-friendly initiatives.
- CCC efforts demonstrate the importance of community support and adaptability, particularly during crises like the pandemic.

West Orange's initiatives improved the quality of life for older adults and strengthened community partnerships. Key lessons learned include the importance of stakeholder engagement, the need for flexible and adaptable programs, and the value of partnering with neighboring communities and joining forces with the likes of Age-Friendly New Jersey and New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well.

## X. Acknowledgments

This Primer was prepared in coordination with a grant from The Grotta Fund for Older Adults.

New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well thanks the Grotta Fund, along with the members of the AFNJ communities for their exemplary work to help make NJ more livable for people of all ages. In addition to interviewing AFNJ members, we consulted with older adults and age-friendly colleagues and participated in webinars and research to provide actionable insight and best practices for a robust age-friendly program adaptable to various communities.

Working together, AFNJ, the Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration and NJAAW continue to support age-friendly leaders throughout New Jersey who are building and strengthening age-friendly collaborations for meaningful and sustainable community impact. The continued evolution of New Jersey's age-friendly movement includes ongoing collaboration with policymakers, local government, community partners, private entities, businesses, academia, not-for-profit sponsors,  and older adults.  Additionally, AFNJ and NJAAW encourage and participate in research that will inform and support age-friendly efforts and help communities arrive at best practices for substantive and sustainable innovation.

We continue to expand the reach of the age-friendly movement in NJ and collaborate with diverse groups intent on making NJ a better place to live for all ages. Working together, we include government, academia, and the private sector to create sustainable efforts well into the future.

This document may be freely accessed and shared, with proper citation of New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well as applicable.

If you have questions or want additional information, reach out to dsanders@njaaw.org.

Visit www.AgefriendlyNJ.org or www. NJAAW.org to learn more about age-friendly initiatives in New Jersey.

## Endnotes

1. Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States – Population Reference Bureau
2. New Jersey Profile – U.S. Census Bureau
3. 2024 NJAAW Statewide Survey of Older Adults – Full Report
4. WHO Age-Friendly Environments Overview
5. The 8 Domains of Livability: An Introduction – AARP
6. AARP Network of Age-friendly States and Communities
7. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation – U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory (2023)
8. Benefits of Intergenerational Programs – Generations United
9. Age-Diverse Communities and Economic Opportunity – AARP Public Policy Institute
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11. Age-Friendly Communities: Best Practices – Grantmakers In Aging
12. Age-Friendly NJ Alliance
13. Community Assessment Tools – AARP Livable Communities
14. Age-Friendly Public Health Systems – Trust for America's Health
15. Integrated Care for Older Adults – World Health Organization
16. Transportation and Aging – National Aging and Disability Transportation Center
17. Designing Walkable Communities – Smart Growth America
18. Affordable Housing and Aging – AARP Public Policy Institute
19. Home Modification Resources – National Council on Aging
20. Accessory Dwelling Units – HUD User
21. Parks and Aging – National Recreation and Park Association
22. ADA Standards for Accessible Design – U.S. Department of Justice
23. Fall Prevention in Public Spaces – CDC
24. Intergenerational Programming – Generations United
25. Senior Centers and Volunteerism – National Council on Aging
26. Transportation Barriers and Social Participation – NADTC
27. Age Discrimination Still Thrives in America – AARP
28. Reframing Aging – FrameWorks Institute
29. Effective Communication Strategies for Aging Populations – NCOA
30. Aging Well West Orange Presentation – NJAAW
31. Sample Projects – CREEHS, Montclair State University
32. West Orange Survey of Older Adults: A Summary of Findings February 2018

# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Resources

Age-Friendly Initiatives and Information:
- AARP Livable Communities: https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/
- Age-Friendly New Jersey Alliance:  https://agefriendlynj.org/
- World Health Organization (WHO) - Age-Friendly Cities: WHO
- Reframing Aging: https://www.reframingaging.org/

Surveys and Data Sources:
- US Census Bureau: https://www.census.gov/data.html
- American Community Survey: https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/

Educational and Training Resources:
- Rutgers University Hub for Aging Collaboration: https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/hub-aging-collaboration
- Montclair State University: https://www.montclair.edu/
- Natural Center to Reframe Aging  www.reframingaging.org
- NJ Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW):  https://www.njaaw.org/

Financial Assistance Programs:
- NJ Division of Aging Services: https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/doas/
- NJ Save: https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/doas/services/l-p/njsave/

Health and Wellness:
- CDC Older Adult Health Data: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/olderamericanhealth.htm
- Age Friendly Health Systems:  https://www.ihi.org/partner/initiatives/age-friendly-health-systems
- Age Friendly Public Health: https://afphs.org/

Legal and Advocacy Resources:
- Justice in Aging: https://justiceinaging.org/
- NJ Division of Consumer Affairs: https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/

## APPENDIX B:  Age-Friendly Towns and Communities in NJ

**New Jersey** is a state member of AARP Age Friendly network (Joined in 2021).

**Age Friendly Counties**

The following counties in New Jesey have joined the AARP Network:

Bergen County (2022)

Camden County (2024)

Middlesex County (2024)

Ocean County (2023)

Somerset (2020)

**Towns and Communities**

Philanthropic organizations in NJ have supported the fledgling age-friendly movement in NJ as the number of age-friendly towns and communities continues to grow. Organizations such as the Grotta Fund for Older Adults, Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, and Partners for Health each played a key role in helping these age-friendly communities take off. AFNJ and NJAAW are pillars of support for current and future age-friendly communities.

NJ towns and communities that received the AARP designation as age-friendly are listed below with their date of acceptance into the AARP Network. The non-profit organizations that funded various communities are also listed.

Age-Friendly Communities Supported by the Grotta Fund for Older Adults  (Essex & Union Counties)

Lifelong Elizabeth (2018)

Livingston for All Ages 2022)

New Providence, NJ (2021)

SOMA Two Towns for All Ages (South Orange and Maplewood) (2018)

Tri-Town (Madison, Chatham, and Chatham Borough)

 Aging Well West Orange (2020)

Age-Friendly Communities  Supported by The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation (Bergen County)

Age-Friendly Englewood (2018)

Fairlawn for All Ages

Generations for Garfield (2018)

Age-Friendly Ridgewood (2019)

Age-Friendly Teaneck (2018)

Westwood for All Ages  (2019)

Age-Friendly Communities Supported by Partners for Health (Essex County)

Lifelong Montclair (2015)

Aging Well West Orange (2020)

<u>Other Age—Friendly Communities:</u>
Berkeley Heights (2025)
Bernards (2025)
Frenchtown (2025)
Glen Rock (2024)
Highland Park (2024)
Hillsborough (2024)
Leonia (2024)
Newton (2023)
Princeton (2014)
Summit (2021)
Tenafly (2023)
Washington Township (2021)
Wayne (2020)

<u>NJ Department of Human Services Age-Friendly Grants</u>
The following communities received funding through the NJ Department of Human Services Age-Friendly grant program in 2025:

<u>Communities:</u>
Cliffside Park Borough
Edison Township
Frenchtown Borough
Hillside Township
Lakewood Township
Leonia Borough
Mahwah Township
Montgomery Township
Orange City Township
Princeton
Rocky Hill Borough
Verona Township

<u>Counties:</u>
Middlesex County
Ocean County
Salem County
Sussex County

## APPENDIX C: Directory of Partners

Numerous organizations continue to collaborate to assist in the pursuit of age-friendly initiatives. It is important to develop partners, allies, and champions to assist in building age-friendly towns and communities. Common partners aligned with age-friendly principles include the following—visit their websites, Facebook, and Instagram to learn more.

**New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW**)

[www.njaaw.org](www.njaaw.org)

A non-profit dedicated to promoting policy and services that serve New Jersey's older adults and enable them to live in the community of their choice with independence and dignity.

**Grotta Fund for Older Adults**

[www.GrottaFund.org](www.GrottaFund.org)

A philanthropic fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater MetroWest NJ, with a focus in Essex, Morris, Union, Sussex, and the eastern parts of Somerset counties. In addition to making grants, the Fund takes pride in strengthening organizational capacity, fostering collaborations, and promoting collective impact among its grantees.

**The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation**

[https://taubfoundation.org](https://taubfoundation.org)

The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation supported several early age-friendly communities and continues to expand this initiative and build partnerships on the local level that address both the challenges and opportunities of our aging population.

**Rutgers University School of Social Work – Hub for Aging Collaboration**

[https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/hub-aging-collaboration#HUBnetwork2](https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/hub-aging-collaboration#HUBnetwork2)

Contact: [agingcollab@ssw.rutgers.edu](agingcollab@ssw.rutgers.edu)

The Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration at the School of Social Work advances excellence in collaborative research, teaching, and engagement to improve social contexts for aging and health equity. The Hub serves as a nexus to strengthen networks among community leaders, researchers, service providers, policymakers, and others toward innovation and leadership for aging in community.

**AARP**

[https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendlycommunities/](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendlycommunities/)

The AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities supports the work of local, regional, and state governments as they prepare for the nation's changing demographics. Established in 2012, the Network includes towns, cities, counties, and states that have committed to being more livable for people of all ages, especially older adults. To learn more, visit www.AARP.org/Age-Friendly or follow @AARPLivable on social media.

**Age-Friendly New Jersey Alliance (AFNJ)**

[www.agefriendlynj.org](www.agefriendlynj.org)

The Age-Friendly New Jersey Alliance (AFNJ), led by NJAAW, the Grotta Fund, the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, and the Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration, is a growing network of age-friendly community leaders and partners within the broader age-friendly movement dedicated to making the communities where we live, work, and play better for longer, healthier and more equitable lives for all residents.

**COVID-19 Community Coalition: A Senior Services Initiative**
Contact: **lvandyke@westorange.org**
CCC is a collaboration of 7 towns and communities that joined together during the COVID pandemic to care for older adults through transportation services, vaccine shots, masks, grocery shopping, food delivery, and social events to prevent loneliness and isolation.

**NJ Department of Human Services/Division on Aging Services**
**https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/doas/resources/age-friendly/**
In addition to its regular programs and services, The Division of Aging Services has developed the Age Friendly Blueprint and multiple resources.

**County Offices on Aging**
**https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/doas/assistance/countyoffices/index.shtml** T here are 21 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) designated in each New Jersey county to serve as the primary entity responsible for developing comprehensive, coordinated systems of community-based services for older adults. AAAs also serve as Aging & Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) and lead agencies in their county, ensuring seniors, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers have easy access to information and long-term services and support.

**New Jersey Travel Independence Program  - NJTIP**
https://vtc.rutgers.edu/njtip/
The New Jersey Travel Independence Program at Rutgers University offers individual travel in-struction and group training to people with disabilities, older adults, caregivers, and other pro-fessionals.

**NJ Future**
https://www.njfuture.org/
 New Jersey Future is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes sensible and equitable growth, redevelopment, and infrastructure investments to foster healthy, strong, resilient commu-nities; protect natural lands and waterways; increase transportation choices beyond cars; provide access to safe, affordable, and aging-friendly neighborhoods; and fuel a strong economy for every-one.