5 Ways Information Powers
Age-Friendly Cities

Contents

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More than half the planet is online. And almost nine per cent of the world's population is 65 or older. People the world over – young and old, are looking to the Internet to help them find information and navigate their way to the services (health, social and community) they need.

97% of Canadians are online
68% of Canadians 65+ are online

Supporting the Essential Features of Age-Friendly Communities

The World Health Organization (WHO) looked at 33 cities in 22 countries to create a tool for not only assessing a community's strength as an age-friendly community but also to act as a map for charting progress. The resulting Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities aligns actions across eight dimensions – outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community and health services.

Effective communication and information provision enables success in all eight dimensions. Looking more closely at the WHO's specific recommendations for each aspect of an effective age-friendly community, we can see how online information can meet the needs and preferences of seniors and amplify reach.

Community & Health Services

1. "Clear and accessible information is provided about health and social services for older people."

Information needs to be written in plain language, presented in a way that aligns with user behaviour and preferences and capture the essential details being sought. Thehealthline.ca is a trusted and comprehensive source of information that spans the province and contains plain language details about 47,000 health and social services, from home care to hospitals. Additional custom data collection enables documentation of local services.

Communications & Information

2. "A basic, effective communication system reaches residents of all ages."

3. "Regular and widespread distribution of information is assured and a coordinated, centralized access is provided."

To be effective, information needs to be presented in a clear and simple way, supported by standards that ensure coordination, lack of duplication and quality. And online resources need to be easily found and viewed on desktop and mobile devices. Thehealthline.ca is the most used online service directory in Ontario (receiving more than 8.5 million visits a year). Underpinning its usefulness is robust information management standards that ensure quality.

Social Participation

4. "Good information about activities and events is provided, including details about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for older people."

5. "Regular information and broadcasts of interest to older people are offered."

An online resource is an opportunity not only to meet the need for service information but also to connect with people and share timely information about events and social opportunities. Thehealthline.ca builds tools that do this by incorporating events listing features and through custom data collection to capture services, including social clubs and recreation opportunities.

3 Factors Influencing Effectiveness

The Internet can be a confusing place with competing information, wildly varying levels of reliability and poorly structured, inaccessible websites. There are three factors that directly influence use of online resources by seniors.

1. Trust

Unbiased, impartial information that is validated and standardized tends to be viewed as more reliable.

2. Simplicity

Good information organization and presentation, grounded in user experience testing and principles of accessible design, facilitates use of an online resource.

3. Equity

Not all users have the same level of literacy, Internet familiarity or access to the Internet. Online resources should be designed for this; in addition, offline tools may complement online resources.

Learn More

- The World Health Organization is an essential source of information about building age-friendly communities. Their *Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities* is available online, as is their *Global Age-friendly Cities Guide.*

- Thehealthline.ca's white paper, *Helping Patients and Families Connect with the Right Services*, details the essential requirements for an effective online service directory. It's available free on request.

- Statistics Canada continues to research Internet use by older Canadians. Their most recent publication is *Evolving Internet Use Among Canadian Seniors.*

- The US National Library of Medicine has published an interesting discussion of credibility of online health resources – *Trust and Credibility in Web-Based Health Information: a Review and Agenda for Future Research.*