INTERNATIONAL INVITED SYMPOSIUM

AGE-FRIENDLY RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES AND PLACES: SUMMARY REPORT

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March 2013

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How to cite

Hamilton J, Menec V, Bell S. Age-Friendly rural and remote communities and places: Summary report. Winnipeg, MB: Centre on Aging, March 2013.

Background

The University of Manitoba's Centre on Aging and the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat hosted the International Invited Symposium on Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places. Collaborating partners included the International Federation on Ageing, the World Health Organization, the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University. The symposium, held from October 15–17, 2012 in Winnipeg Manitoba, brought together 46 international delegates from 14 countries.

Australia	Japan
Bolivia	Peru
Cameroon	Russia
Canada	Switzerland
Cuba	Trinidad & Tobago
Ghana	Uganda
Ireland	United States

Objectives of the symposium included:

- Sharing promise practices and knowledge from around the world on age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.

- Identifying and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.

- Facilitating on-going knowledge exchange and action by creating a Community of Practice within the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) region and globally.

- Developing a list of key priorities for action.

The objectives were addressed through

- A public forum led by an international panel;

- Reflections from four distinguished seniors;

- Panel presentations;

- Break-out sessions; and

- A pre-symposium survey of delegates.

The following report highlights key findings within each of the themes that guided the Symposium deliberations. Additional information on each theme is contained in a series of theme reports (See *Appendix A*).

View all reports at: www.agefriendlymanitoba.ca

Making rural and remote communities and places more age-friendly: why and how?

Why ...

- It is important to focus on issues of aging in rural communities because issues in rural areas are different than those in urban areas.

- An age-friendly community creates an environment for all people to live life as they should.

- Without rural communities urban centres do not exist.

- Rural and remote communities and places are the backbone, character and history of our countries.

- Rural and remote communities and places are a hub for innovation; innovative models can be developed and shared later for urban centres.

- A high proportion of older people in developing nations live in extreme poverty.

- There is green space and there is peace.

…it may cost a lot initially but it will cost a lot more if we don't do it…

…half of the world's population lives in rural and remote areas…

How ...

- Enable and empower older adults to give voice to their concerns and frustrations and their goals and achievements.

- Define the community we want to change (geographical; political; school based; church-based; workplace).

- Interdependence between the generations; teach that we are part of a greater whole; a broader community.

- Understand community needs; communities are not homogenous.

- Create socially inclusive communities where people can age in place.

- Examine geography and discover ways to help individuals access needed services.

- Share progress and failures between communities.

…we need a process whereby people can discuss their needs with their leaders…
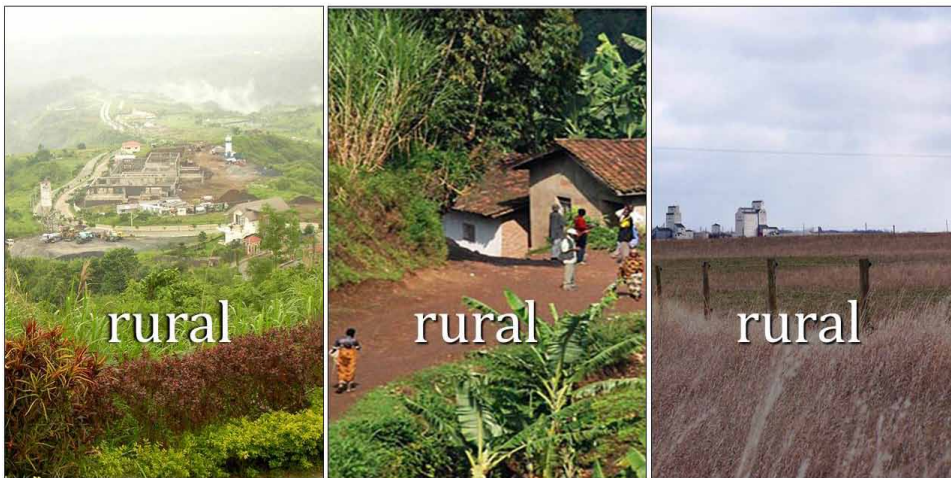
…older people are a resource… not a burden…

What is rural and remote?

Many definitions and perspectives exist of rural and remote around the world ...

- Is rural and remote what is left after we account for cities?
- See different points of value. What's your view? Your value?

Rural and remote is:

… all about perceptions …

… where you feel at rest and have peace and quiet …

… idealized as simple and beautiful …

… where health care is costly …

home home home

* Rural and remote around the world was developed by Bill Ashton, PhD and his team at the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University Brandon, Manitoba Canada. Email: ashtonw@brandonu.ca.

YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AORGWyz-0Oo

Rural and remote is:

… where the basics are luxury …

… where you can be independent and interdependent …

… where some see poverty and others see wealth …

SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

An initial questionnaire asked delegates to list features that contribute to success or a lack of success in developing and sustaining age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.

A second survey allowed delegates to rank, within each of the four thematic areas, the topics they thought were most important.

Finally, during the Symposium, delegates considered how best to capitalize on the strengths and opportunities and how to mitigate the weaknesses and threats.

Utilizing responses to the SWOT exercise, key words were identified to offer perspectives of "what makes us strong or weak" in terms of "place" and "people".

… strengths and weaknesses were defined as internal to the community …

… opportunities and threats come from the external environment …

Strengths …

- Strong social ties; people know each other and take care of each other.
- Sense of place and commitment to community issues.
- Local leaders are easily accessible; easier to engage residents.
- Healthier lifestyle with access to the natural environment.

Strengths … how do we capitalize on them?

- Recognize the community's unique strengths and knowledge capacities to foster partnerships and build a friendlier healthier community for all ages.
- Respect and value individuals' sense of place; promote intergenerational communication.
- Build capacity with global organizations.

Weaknesses …

- Widely dispersed population; geographic distances and isolation.
- Limited physical infrastructure and transportation networks.
- Lack of specialized human resources (e.g. to deal with issues of aging); limited availability of social/health services.
- Difficulties in attracting resources; small communities cannot compete with larger centres.
- Competing demands, small budgets and higher costs.
- Resistance to change, ineffective leadership and "small town politics".
- Poverty, low education levels and limited number of volunteers.

Weaknesses … how do we mitigate them?

- Increase expertise and funding within the community for age-friendly and issues of aging.
- Raise awareness and integrate age-friendly into all areas of the community.
- Share the responsibility for age-friendly between local, municipal, regional, and national sectors.

… in developing countries, many older adults do not have access to services. They live off the land. It is only survival …

… in developed countries there are many older adults on a fixed income with a rising cost of living …

… it is important to remember cultural and religious background because it colours everything in rural and remote areas …

… dignity is an issue. Many older adults are too proud to accept help …

Opportunities ...

- Increased awareness of issues of aging; new research on rural areas.
- Local control; open to collaboration and partnerships as way of doing business.
- Age-friendly programs can generate economic development; attract older adults.
- Innovation; rural communities can serve as test sites.

Opportunities ... how do we capitalize on them?

- Build on existing partnerships; develop new and innovative collaborations.
- Identify and support local champions; use bottom up approaches.
- Pool resources between communities to sustain age-friendly initiatives.
- Engage older adults so that they have roles in power and leadership.
- Attract immigrants and others: communities are culturally rich, quiet and intellectually stimulating.

Threats ...

- Out-migration of younger people; economic downturn; poverty.
- Political will to address issues of aging and issues of rural development.
- Access to technology and communication systems.

Threats... how do we mitigate them?

- Promote, invest and support local initiatives that meet the needs of local people.
- Enhance research funding and student interest in age-friendly issues.
- Celebrate the achievements and develop new social roles for older adults.

… how do we convince governments that age-friendly should be a priority when mortality and morbidity are so high in certain places …

Sustaining Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places: Creating Partnerships and Building a Community of Practice

The Symposium Handbook contains a brief biography of each delegate as well as an outline of their interests and experiences in relation to participating in a community of practice.

Delegates recognized key elements of a Community of Practice:

- It is a dynamic, focused, interdependent group.
- It has a defined membership.
- It has a shared agenda.
- It produces knowledge to share with the larger community.

… buy-in occurs when a shared problem exists, agendas are aligned, and resources are pooled …

Challenges in building a Community of Practice include:

- Developing a shared understanding of the problem and define the scope and agenda of the Community of Practice.
- Committing to a Community of Practice and act—define a task and have success while respecting time and priority constraints for members.
- Determining how to make the agenda accessible to all members of the community of practice.
- Translating the work into other languages and make it understood; create a shared, understandable language around age-friendly.
- Making a Community of Practice work is challenged by the cost of face-to-face meetings; geography and distance; time investment.
- Defining a core group of leaders with a funded administration and coordination to keep the entity together.

… start with something doable …

… keep the dialogue simple but not simplistic …

… use older adults and community champions as a resource …

The Pan American Health Organization: Opportunities for Promoting Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places

(South, Central and North America)

- The age-friendly movement can help to address health and social service challenges in rural and remote communities and places.

- Approximately half of the world's population live in rural and remote places and over 90% live in developing countries. However, only 30% of nursing and 25% of physician's services are found in these areas.

- Almost 40% of Latin America and Caribbean populations do not have access to services to meet their basic health needs. Additionally, 50% do not have pensions or retirement savings. In Ecuador about 20% of the older population lives in extreme poverty. Many of them live in rural areas and are Indigenous people.

- Ninety percent of university programs (medical/health science) in Latin America do not include any knowledge or training in aging or older person's health.

… we owe a debt of gratitude to these rural and remote places… they provide the history and generally were there long before the cities …

… often when older politicians discuss issues of aging they do not talk in the first person …

Moving age-friendly forward within the Pan American Health Organization

- Analyse the common needs of a community, people and place so we are better able to find solutions that work.

- Engage older adults; they are the reason for age-friendly programs but they are also the resource.

- Decentralize the communication process … many areas do not have internet or telephones.

- Cultivate and align interests between the PAHO network and businesses and organizations.

- Have conferences and exchanges where we can share information and develop connections.

- Find resources and demonstrate that it is worth buying into and worth spending the money.

… we need to find shared problems …

Age Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places: Priorities for Action

Delegates worked together in small groups and in a final plenary to consider priorities for action and next steps. Their perspectives are outlined in a theme report found at www.agefriendlymanitoba.ca.

Delegates noted the need to identify actions that are both doable and important. Considerations included:

- Communication …
  - Develop promotional material to address the importance of becoming age-friendly; i.e., its value to business, funders and politicians.
  - Translate key resources to additional languages; e.g., rural and remote communities guide, explore use of social media, address issues of ageism.

- Leadership …
  - Create a group to promote rural and remote places, coordinate actions, and guide resource development including a multi-purpose website.
  - Create a community of practice for various needs; explore promising practices form other relates disciplines.

- Research and program evaluation …
  - Engage communities with active research to understand promising practices, necessary resources, value/impact of tools and resources.
  - Develop performance measures and evaluate projects and communities to create evidence based actions.
  - Address challenges of undertaking research in rural and remote places; e.g., distance, cost, developing longer term relationship; share research.

… the age-friendly movement has the power to create healthier, more sustainable communities where seniors are active decision-makers in the policies that govern their well-being …

… we all have, in our own diverse way, a vision of what rural and remote looks like … we must be open enough to understand diversity …

… a practice that is not shared or communicated globally will die …

Appendix A: Theme Reports

The following is a list of reports that developed out of the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places International Invited Symposium. Theme reports and the full report can be found on these websites:

- Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba:
  http://umanitoba.ca/centres/aging/cura/coa_cura_2012Symposium.html

- Age Friendly Manitoba website:
  http://agefriendlymanitoba.ca/resources.cfm?cat_id=22

Theme reports available

- Making Rural and Remote Communities and Places more Age-Friendly: Why and How?

- What is Rural and Remote?

- Sustaining Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places: Creating Partnerships and Building a Community of Practice

- The Pan American Health Organization: Opportunities for Promoting Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places

- Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places: Priorities for Action

- Important Topics and Challenges to Address in Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places

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