

Is Findlay, Ohio an Age-Friendly Community?

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Abstract

Access to age-friendly environments is a growing concern as the populous Baby Boomer generation reaches retirement age. It is important for all communities to consider the age-friendliness of their environments as people desire preventative care initiatives toward healthy aging while aging in place. The following six criteria are recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as basic constructs of an age-friendly community: housing, outdoor spaces and built environments, transportation, social environments, community support, and health and wellness services. The purpose of this study is to examine my own community, Findlay, Ohio, to determine whether it meets the WHO's definition of age-friendliness. I specifically examined housing options, outdoor environments, social environment and services, and health and wellness services.

Housing

Findlay, Ohio has numerous options concerning housing for the aging community. Options include residential neighborhoods, independent apartment living at Senior Tower Apartments, Apartments specifically for seniors with disabilities at Kiwanis Village, numerous assisted living facilities, multiple nursing and rehabilitations facilities, and facilities specific to memory care. Nursing facilities and assisted living centers provide transportation to seniors to medical appointments and retail shopping. Both options for independent apartment living are affordable options but do not necessarily offer modifications to designs. Apartment options do offer maintenance, safe neighborhoods, and family interaction spaces. Nursing homes, and memory care facilities offer social services on site. Other senior living environments can still access excellent community social services.

Outdoor Spaces & Built Environments

Hancock County Parks Department maintains numerous parks found throughout the city of Findlay, Ohio. Within the parks in the city and the county, one can find activities such as hiking and bicycling trails, paddleboat and kayak rental, cross-country skiing, a public swimming pool, and built-in exercise facilities. In conjunction with activities, parks also include places for

rest and relaxation with benches, picnic facilities, and fishing access. Beyond the area parks, the city of Findlay works to keep sidewalks accessible with appropriate ramps, crosswalks, and audio and visual cross signals. Findlay has a bike path through the city and bike lanes on two North and South bound roads. Throughout the summer months the mayor of Findlay holds events called "Move with the Mayor" to encourage physical activity at various parks. Additional opportunities for physical and mental exercise include the local senior center at 50 North, access to walk laps at the Findlay Village Mall, a local library, Hancock County Historical Museum, several theater venues, art galleries, and numerous retailers.

Transportation

Available transportation options include taxi and limo services, Lyft and Uber options, services for veterans through the Hancock County Veterans Service Office, Hancock Area Transportation Services (HATS), and Gohio service connected through the local Area Agency on Aging 3.

There are restrictions on many services offered through each option. For example, taxi, limo, Lyft, and Uber options may not be able to help those with physical disabilities. Similarly, Gohio is a ride share program for anyone in northwest Ohio and those offering rides may not be equipped to handle the physical needs of a rider. However, Hancock County Veterans Service transportation service can assist those with physical needs. It does not offer transportation options to shopping, socialization, or entertainment. HATS is an inexpensive option that offers access to those with physical handicaps for people of any age. HATS is only available Monday through Friday but will transport a person to any local address whether to a friend's house, a doctor's office, or the grocery store.

Social Environments

Numerous options for positive socialization are available throughout Findlay. A recent addition to Hancock County's senior center, 50 North, has provided more options to the aging population in the county than ever before. Ohio's Area Agency on Aging 3 is the title for the local district with an office in Lima, Ohio.

Christian Clearing House provides a list of local agencies that can help with various needs such as help with utility bills, rent, mental health, vision, dental care, and many other services. The United Way of Hancock County provides a similar service. Various other options for socializing include the local farmer's market available during the summer and fall, the Hancock Historical Museum, numerous theater venues including Marathon Center for the Performing Arts, downtown's shopping and dining district, and local parks.

A unique opportunity available to residents at Birchaven Village provides intergenerational exposure through a daycare established at the nursing home facility. This is beneficial to the children and the older adults living at Birchaven. Intergenerational interactions help bring compassion and connection to children and help older people to find meaning and enjoyment in their later years.

Community Support

Ohio's Area Agency on Aging 3 contains the city of Findlay in its services. The Nationwide Retired Senior Volunteer Program is the largest in the nation and encourages its volunteers to share their gifts with others. Similarly, 50 North, Hancock County's senior center, offers opportunity for those over age 50 to give back to their community through volunteering.

Additionally, Findlay, Hancock County Chamber of Commerce offers support for Leadership programs, entrepreneurship, and job opportunities to benefit the furtherance of the community. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services also supports those who continue to seek employment.

Health & Wellness Services

The city of Findlay offers a wide range of medical care through the medical network of Blanchard Valley Hospital Systems (BVHS). Numerous primary care physicians, hospitalists, specialists, and more connect their services to this network. There are also medical professionals independent of the BVHS network. The local hospital

works as a level three trauma center and any needs beyond level three must be transferred out of the area. Hanco EMS offers ambulance service throughout Findlay with two locations in the city.

Findlay does not have a local Geriatrician. However, there are many other available services such as mental health professionals, chiropractors, naturalists and other wellness providers, and those who provide care in the areas of hearing, vision, and dental services.

There is a wide variety of assisted living and rehabilitation facilities as well as palliative care and comfort care through several local Hospice services.

Conclusion

After the research assessment of Findlay, Ohio's age-friendliness based on the World Health Organizations six recommended guidelines and their detailed lists of inclusions, one can conclude that, while there are a few significant areas which need improvement, overall Findlay is moderately age-friendly. The most important improvement that can be made to increase the age friendliness would be to acquire a Geriatrician. Findlay could also establish multi-generational programs that would allow the older populations and the youngest populations to interact and benefit from each other's gifts. Finally, age specific mental health programs and specialists who focus on the aging population could significantly benefit Findlay, Ohio.

References

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Reference list available upon request