How to build livable communities for older people: report

By Fredrick Kunkle
May 6, 2015

A new report on livable communities for older people provides an overview of ways to help the elderly remain independent and engaged, and serves as a guide for activists and local governments to transform their communities for aging in place.

The report by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging gives an overview of what makes communities livable. The report offers a range of strategies that have been tried and tested around the country, from breaking down cultural barriers that tend to isolate older people to improving transportation for older adults, such as through ride-sharing and other programs.

The report comes as the United States undergoes a demographic shift toward an older society. By 2030, nearly one in five people will be 65 or older. Surveys consistently show that seniors would prefer to grow older in the communities where they have resided for many years. To address the changes, there has been heightened emphasis on finding or transforming communities to accommodate older people.

Among the qualities that make a community livable are its walkability (56 percent of millennials and 46 percent of Baby Boomers say they prefer getting around on foot to using a car in the suburbs, the report says), its housing affordability, and civic engagement and social life.

The report highlights several communities that have sought to improve the prospects for older people to age in place, such as efforts in Monroe County, N.Y., to enhance the mobility of its older residents. A consortium of agencies that work with people with disabilities and older adults collaborated on ride-sharing and other strategies to make it easier for older residents to get around. The Monroe County Collaborative also set up a program at the Rochester Institute of Technology that rewarded students with college credits for learning about issues related to aging and volunteering to serve as drivers for older people.

Area Agencies on Aging are part of a nationwide network of providers set up by the Older Americans Act, a landmark law enacted in 1965 to provide financing for a range of services for the elderly.