

## RECOMMENDATION 4

### Create a Community Culture that Supports Healthy Aging

Individuals' perceptions of aging can impact their health as they age, and people with a positive outlook on aging are generally healthier than those with a negative outlook.<sup>18</sup> In fact, one study suggests that those with positive self-perceptions of aging lived an average of 7.5 years longer than those with negative self-perceptions of aging. There are some actions that individuals can take to promote healthy aging, like staying physically and cognitively active, having regular medical check-ups, minimizing stress, and connecting with family, friends, or neighbors.<sup>19</sup> Community resources and built environments can also facilitate one's ability to take these steps. Policies and interventions that apply an "aging in all policies" framework, develop age-friendly communities, and encourage physical activity can meet the needs of older adults and nurture a culture that improves how aging is perceived and supports healthy aging.

#### AGING IN ALL POLICIES

"Health in all policies" is defined as "a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas."<sup>20</sup> This framework recognizes that only 15-20% of human health and longevity can be attributed to care we receive in a medical setting.<sup>21</sup> Far more of our health and longevity depends on the social, economic, and environmental factors, like safe and affordable housing, access to transportation, and freedom from air and water pollutants.

An "aging in all policies" approach would celebrate aging, recognize older adults as key members of their communities, consider impact of policy on the experiences of older adults, and include their perspectives in decision-making across policy areas. Key components for the implementation of "health in all policies" initiatives that may translate to "aging in all policies" include:

- Promotion of health, equity, and sustainability,
- Collaboration across sectors of society,
- Consideration of benefits for multiple (or all) partners,
- Engagement of those affected by policy, and
- Change to structures or procedures.<sup>22</sup>

It is essential to involve older adults as active participants in policy and decision-making processes and provide authentic opportunities for their voices to be heard.

#### AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

As our global and national population ages, organizations like the World Health Organization and AARP see the need to develop age-friendly countries, states, and communities.<sup>23,24</sup> While these communities are diverse in their populations, needs, and available resources, age-friendly communities share "an expressed desire to create places that support older adults and their families better, and enable older people to remain more active, contributing members of their communities."<sup>25</sup> Age-friendly communities will help more older adults maintain health and well-being to age in place in their homes. The AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities provides their members with these "8 Domains of Livability"—community features whose availability and quality influence the well-being

of older adults and people of all ages:

- Housing
- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Respect and social inclusion
- Social participation
- Health services and community supports<sup>26</sup>

#### OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE ACTIVITY AND STRENGTH

The United States Department of Health and Human Services recommends that older adults complete at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity every week, muscle-strengthening exercises two days a week, and additional activities to improve balance.<sup>27</sup> Regular physical activity is associated with a higher quality of life, improved physical function, and a reduction in falls among older people, especially those with existing health conditions.<sup>28</sup> Despite these benefits, studies suggest that smaller proportions of older adults in the United States meet physical activity guidelines than those who are young and middle-aged.<sup>29,30</sup>

There are many reasons to promote physical activity among older adults. At an individual level, physical inactivity may be associated with low mood and poor physical health.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, men report higher levels of physical activity relative to women, and White older adults report more physical activity than Hispanic and Black adults, with a variety of community, environmental, and social factors contributing to this disparity.<sup>29</sup> Group exercise programs may be particularly motivating for older adults compared to solo activities.<sup>32,33</sup> One's neighborhood and built environment may also facilitate physical activity. One study found that moderate-to-vigorous physical activity among older adults was positively associated with proximity to parks, and reported walking or cycling to errands was positively associated with proximity to private recreation facilities.<sup>34</sup>