



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

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MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Age- and Dementia-Friendly Community Commitments

BEST PRACTICE: Engage in the continuous improvement process of the Age- and Dementia-Friendly Community Movement.

In less than two decades, at least 30 percent of the residents of most cities and towns in Massachusetts will be at least 60 years old. A national demographic trend that will result – for the first time in this country’s history – in a greater number of people over the age of 65 than under 18 by 2030 has already occurred in parts of the Commonwealth. A corresponding development is that there will also be more individuals living with dementia above the current 120,000 Massachusetts citizens with Alzheimer’s, which is the most common type of dementia.

Meanwhile, municipalities are creating master plans or at least eyeing long-range sustainability for housing, infrastructure, local economy and overall growth.

Age- and Dementia-Friendly Community efforts are a means of addressing these and other concerns as they pertain to an aging population and those living with dementia, but they also encompass all ages and ability levels. The World Health Organization began the Age-Friendly Communities movement in 2006, and AARP became the WHO affiliate in the U.S. in 2010. In Massachusetts, Age-Friendly Community initiatives are encouraged to align in an active partnership with dementia-friendly work.

With a wealth of available resources, data and funding opportunities, communities should strongly consider joining this movement. Doing so requires the approval and participation of municipal leadership to ensure that all city or town departments consider the impact of their work on all residents. There are guideposts of livability and public awareness that communities may use as a guide to compartmentalize the work, and the toolkits and resources are fully customizable to allow every municipality to proceed at a pace that works for them.

Most municipalities already engage in some form of age- and dementia-friendly efforts, even if they are not an express motivation behind their policies. Communities that have established Complete Streets policies and projects, are a Mass in Motion Community, operate a farmers market with special allowances for older adults and the disabled, or provide special tax relief for those on a fixed income, have adopted practices that enhance the quality of life for their citizens and address an age- or dementia-related challenge.

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Communities can begin the “assessment” phase by convening a broad-based, community-focused task force to determine the best direction for the municipality and identify local strengths and opportunities. The task force can include older adults, city or town officials and departments, health service providers operating in the community, business groups, faith groups, housing authorities and any others who may be interested or the community deems relevant. The Dementia-Friendly Movement urges communities to include people living with dementia and their care partners in central roles. Aside from available data, the task force can review and disseminate surveys to community residents (focusing on older adults, family caregivers), which will help inform further phases of creating an action plan and implementing that plan.

The goals of this movement broadly include creating a more livable community where there is an awareness of and appreciation for older adults, those living with dementia and the people who care about them, through proper support services and opportunities for engagement, inclusion and contribution back to the municipality.

Resources:

- Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, Data Reports and Toolkits: mahealthyagingcollaborative.org

Contact: James Fuccione at James.Fuccione@mahealthyaging.org

- AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and Toolkits: www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities

Contact: Kara Cohen, Community Outreach Director, at KCohen@aarp.org

- “Better Together” Report for Aligning Age- and Dementia-Friendly Work: www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/documents-2016/Better-Together-Research-Report.pdf

Contact: Kara Cohen, Community Outreach Director, at KCohen@aarp.org

- Dementia Friendly Massachusetts – Toolkit and Resources: www.dfmassachusetts.org

Contact: Emily Kearns, Dementia Friendly Massachusetts Coordinator, at emily@mcoaonline.com