

Elder Friendly Communities

Every year, tens of thousands of elderly Americans are abused in their own homes, in relatives' homes and even in facilities responsible for their care. More than half a million reports of abuse against elderly Americans reach authorities every year, but millions of cases of elder abuse go unreported. The 500,000 to 1,000,000 reports of elder abuse recorded by authorities every year (the vast majority of which are proven to be true) are only the tip of the iceberg; according to data from different states, for every case of elder abuse reported, another 12 or 13 are not.

Over the next fifteen years the elderly population in the United States will realize double-digit increases in many states. For example, the Michigan demographer projects that in the next fifteen years there will be a 40.8% increase in the number of Michigan residents age 65 and over. In real numbers this means that there will be over half a million more people age 65 and over.

The aforementioned and startling elder abuse data coupled with the estimated population increases expected among elderly citizens present real challenges and real opportunities for persons who work to improve the quality of life for seniors. One of the challenges and opportunities that local communities will encounter is the creation of physical and social environments that are Elder Friendly enough to decrease the incidence of elder abuse.

Imagine a State in which Every Community is *Elder Friendly*:

Being Elder Friendly means that the community has a set of assets in place that has been shown to improve the lives of seniors. An Elder Friendly community is a livable community. A livable community is defined as one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life.

Moreover, a livable community is also a walkable community. Walkable communities are those that have taken the needs of pedestrians into consideration by creating sidewalks, shopping areas and an environment that makes it easy for pedestrians of all ages to move around their neighborhood and community. The ideal "walkable community" allows people access to shops and services without using automobiles. Whether communities combine walkability with a range of public transportation, the key factor is access for non-drivers.

In addition to walkable communities, five interdependent characteristics also create an "elder friendly" community. These characteristics are valid in rural, suburban and urban settings. They are:

- Supportive community systems
- Access to health care
- Safety and security
- Housing
- Transportation