

A guide to community liveability for older residents

Executive Summary

Regardless of the type of community in which older Australians reside (urban, regional or rural) important aspects fundamental to the liveability of different communities are currently absent or lacking in some way. The results of the research in this guide show key issues that impact liveability for older people include: a very high level of car dependence; public transport that does not meet the needs or personal preferences of older adults; barriers to physical health; the built environment they live in (distance, topography, weather, etc.) means walking is not an option for many older adults; and there is a significant lack of choice in amenities.

If action is not taken by policymakers older adults who can no longer drive will be severely affected and their capacity to live in their chosen communities is likely to dramatically decrease increasing risk of social isolation. Additionally, if older adults are no longer able to drive they will have diminished access to services and amenities. Attention needs to be given to all of the factors that contribute to liveability as they are reliant on each other i.e. take away accessibility and social support will be diminished.

The Community Liveability Guide is designed to assist policy and planning for local and state government to create, maintain, and sustain liveable communities for older people. This guide is informed by research by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) as part of an Australian Research Council funded project. This project investigated the liveability of urban, regional and rural localities across southern Queensland. Based on residents' experiences, five key factors have been identified as important for enhancing the liveability of these areas: mobility, safety, accessibility, social support, affordability.

These aspects of life appear to be influenced by seven key individual factors: sense of place, health, independence, social participation, communication, income and personal preferences. Specific investigation into these individual factors was beyond the scope of this study. Although findings from this study relate to specific characteristics of southern Queensland, many of the results can be applied to a broad range of urban, regional and rural contexts; thus the Liveability Guide is designed for the benefit of all local and state governments across Australia. Using the guide will highlight liveability characteristics now and in the future.

Policymakers, local councils and government representatives can apply the findings from this study to their respective communities. to mitigate and help avoid social isolation (see link to List of Considerations under "How to apply to your community").

Importantly, educating the public about the services and amenities that are available for older community members is key to them experiencing their respective communities as being highly liveable across all of the five domains identified by this study. The first step for councils is to determine which mechanisms are already in place and whether or not they are being utilised. Community engagement in this process is required to establish the local community's level of understanding of the options available to them.