



BEST PRACTICE AND EMERGING GUIDELINES

Practical Action for Aging, Dementia, and Disability Inclusivity



Connecticut
Age Well
Collaborative™

An initiative of Connecticut
Community Care

Collective Impact Partners

Collective impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change. The Connecticut Age Well Collaborative plans and implements its work through a collective impact model. The evolving list below reflects strategically cultivated relationships with governmental, nonprofit and academic organizations who were invited as partners. "Partners" are organizations committed to collaborating to align efforts and shared resources toward fostering Connecticut communities where we all thrive as we grow up and grow older.

Core Partners

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
Connecticut Community Care
Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities
Connecticut State Department of Aging and Disability Services
Point32Health Foundation

Collaborating Partners

AARP Connecticut
AgingCT
Alzheimer's Association CT Chapter
The Arc Connecticut
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Central Connecticut State University
Connecticut Association of Directors of Health
Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness
Connecticut Conference of Municipalities
Connecticut Local Administrators of Social Services
Connecticut Main Street Center
CT Chapter of American Planning Association
CT Council of Small Towns
CTData Collaborative
CT Department of Public Health
CT State Independent Living Council
CT Training and Technical Assistance Center at UCONN
The Housing Collective – Centers for Housing Opportunity
LeadingAge Connecticut
National Conference for Community and Justice
Partnership for Strong Communities
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Municipal governments can move from idea to impact by implementing specific, locally-based best practices to foster more aging, dementia, and disability-inclusive communities.

This fourth in our resource guide series for local governments provides an evolving list of best practices for advancing aging, dementia, and disability inclusivity. Organized around our framework of ten impact areas, this guide integrates suggested actions to improve community livability from international, national, regional, and local thought leaders.

This guide was produced by the Connecticut Age Well Collaborative. Delegated by the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, the Connecticut Age Well Collaborative is leading the state's livable communities initiative (Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 17b-420a).

INTRODUCTION

The Connecticut Age Well Collaborative is a statewide, cross-sector initiative that fosters Connecticut communities where we all thrive as we grow up and grow older.

Delegated by the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, we're leading the state's livable communities initiative (Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 17b-420a). Livable communities are inclusive, vibrant, intergenerational places where we all can thrive across the lifespan.

Originally inspired by the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Age-friendly Cities and Communities initiative, the Collaborative has expanded Connecticut's original focus on age inclusivity to include dementia and disability inclusivity as well. Recognizing that we all have intersecting identities, the Collaborative recognizes that steps to create more thriving communities can help multiple populations.

We also recognize that structural racism and related systems of discrimination follow populations across the lifespan. We celebrate the opportunity to collaborate in collective work on equity, inclusion, and belonging to build a more just society for historically disempowered communities through different ages, stages, and abilities.

Collective impact is a model of alignment across an organizational network to achieve systems change. This guide integrates suggested actions to improve community livability from numerous organizations across wide-ranging topical areas. It synthesizes best practices from aging, dementia, and disability experts, with the hope that by presenting them together, actions intended to improve livability for one population can create benefits across multiple populations—and ultimately the entire community.

We recognize that municipalities across Connecticut are already using best and emerging practices to foster aging, dementia, and disability inclusivity—this resource guide aims to enhance that work. We also invite ongoing conversation on how the practices presented here can grow, evolve, and improve. Please contact us to let us know what your community is doing that can inform and inspire other communities across Connecticut.

Celebrating Thought Leaders in This Work

Though some of the actions in this list were generated through the thought leadership of the Connecticut Age Well Collaborative, many of the ideas are a compilation of best and emerging practices from existing toolkits and guides.

With gratitude, we thank the World Health Organization, the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, Dementia Friendly America, Connecticut's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity, the Age Friendly Institute's Certified Age Friendly Employer program, Sustainable CT, Age-Friendly Boston, and the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey for the various resources from which the suggestions in this guide are drawn.

Many ideas are consolidated, expanded, or rephrased, making it impractical to connect each action with a specific citation. However, a complete resource list is provided at the end of this guide; we invite you to review and celebrate the materials that inspired this integrated list.



OUR FRAMEWORK

We're living longer, healthier lives than ever before. As demographics shift in unprecedented ways, there's a new urgency and opportunity to prioritize aging, dementia, and disability inclusivity in all of our work.

The Connecticut Age Well Collaborative adapted its framework of ten impact areas (see figure above) to help communities think about different dimensions of community livability. We also recognize that each of these impact areas also applies to the families and care partners of affected individuals.

The actions listed in this guide are organized around this framework. For clarity, each action is listed under one impact area. However, we recognize that success in this work necessarily embraces cross-collaboration and the realization of co-benefits. For example, implementing complete streets (an approach to promoting safe roadway access for all users—including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and cars—regardless of age, ability or other identities) has impacts far beyond transportation, even though suggestions regarding complete streets are listed under "transportation."



EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING:

Recognizing the intrinsic value of each community member, acknowledging and addressing that systems do not enable everyone to start from the same place, building community authority for all, and promoting systems and spaces in which everyone belongs.

- + Integrate aging, dementia, and disability into broader diversity, equity, and inclusion work and into plans of conservation and development.
- + Promote coordination among departments and commitment to working with an equity lens.
- + Consider the needs of all members of the community in municipal planning processes. Plan, assess, design, and implement programs and services that value the contributions of all generations, abilities, and community sectors.
- + Include community members with lived experience in municipal planning and policymaking; provide opportunities to hear their stories.
- + Engage in participatory budgeting for more community-based allocation of public funding.
- + Commit to thoughtful, intentional, and positive representation in language and images; ensure that people across the lifespan are depicted positively and without stereotyping.
- + Educate municipal leaders, staff, and the broader community through trainings, community conversations, and local awareness campaigns to disrupt ageism and ableism.
- + Assess home life, mobility, community life, and public safety by gathering data and analyzing findings to understand your community's characteristics—such as the differences between rural and urban areas, ethnic and cultural considerations, and the needs of older adults, people with dementia or disabilities, and their care partners.
- + Go beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act and other thresholds of legal compliance to be intentionally, proactively inclusive.
- + Promote opportunities for connection and engagement across generations and abilities.

*Please see our forthcoming resource guide "Honoring Lived Experience and Creating Community Authority" for a fuller discussion on centering community, sharing power, building trust, and empowering grassroots leadership.

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL SERVICES:

Empowering residents with choice, independence, and dignity, and enabling high-quality lives at home and in the community, regardless of age or ability.

- + Support a robust local social services system that addresses community needs through strategic collaborations among municipal departments and divisions—like parks and recreation, public health, and transportation services—and community leaders, and explore opportunities for regional collaboration.
- + Promote public awareness of and information about existing social and support services available.
- + Leverage the strength of the broader community in providing a support network through community trainings or targeted programs, such as Dementia Friends.
- + Promote opportunities for mutual, intergenerational support, including supporting zoning and housing that enables multigenerational living and developing and enhancing intergenerational shared sites.
- + Participate in Connecticut's LGBTQ+ Moveable Senior Center initiative to share programs and best practices on intentional LGBTQ+ inclusion.
- + Provide information, training, and support for family caregivers across the lifespan, including grandparents raising grandchildren.
- + Promote and support collaboration among social and aging services, adult protective services, and other key partners for safety education and prevention of physical and financial elder abuse and exploitation.
- + Make available advance care, financial, and legal services with specialized knowledge of the circumstances of people with dementia or disabilities.
- + Include public and private agencies, aging and dementia professionals, older adults, people with dementia, people with disabilities, care partners, and the general public in assessments and decision making.
- + Provide information, training, and advocacy for supportive decision making as an alternative for conservatorship or guardianship for people living with developmental disabilities, dementia, or other cognitive changes.



HEALTH, WELL-BEING & FOOD SYSTEMS:

Promoting the physical and behavioral health of all community members through thoughtful community design, just food systems, and other conditions in which people can optimize vitality.

- + Support a robust local public health system to promote programs and policies that improve health outcomes; provide wellness programs and preventive health services, such as screenings and immunizations; provide health education on various health topics; ensure food and environmental safety; and conduct disease surveillance, report analysis, case investigation, and coordination to reduce disease transmission.
- + Formalize partnerships between health care, public health, and social services leaders and professionals to ensure an integrated system that comprehensively meets the needs of all residents, including older adults, people with disabilities, and people with dementia.
- + Support local health departments, senior centers, and other partners in their efforts to prevent falls through various strategies, including home safety assessments, evidence-based fall prevention programs, medication safety reviews, and training for service providers.
- + Formalize partnerships with town planners to maximize opportunities for Smart Growth to promote more active lifestyles.
- + Collaborate with local, state, and regional transit leadership to create a balanced transportation system that connects residents with quality health care services.
- + Conduct health impact assessments to determine the potential health implications of projects, policies, and community design on residents.
- + Prioritize access to healthy and affordable foods and safe opportunities for physical activity for all residents.
- + Provide early access to diagnosis and post-diagnostic supports for residents, including through faith-based and other community-based organizations.
- + Provide meaningful education, counseling, and support for caregivers and their families. Offer caregiver respite by adding specialized programs or adapting existing ones.
- + Offer specialized training to municipal staff, local businesses, and community members on recognizing dementia and other cognitive changes, responding effectively, and when and how to seek help.

**COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY:**

Emphasizing transparency and thoughtful application of an equity, aging, dementia, and disability lens to optimize inclusivity and community connectivity, including thoughtful incorporation of established and emerging technology.

- + Develop and implement an effective communication system to reach community residents of all ages and abilities. Communicate about municipal activities early, clearly, and often to maximize everyone's ability to participate.
- + Share municipal information through multiple communication channels to ensure that all residents feel included.
- + Choose thoughtful, intentional, positive, and inclusive language and images for municipal communications. Promote the dissolution of stigmas associated with aging, dementia, and disability.
- + Train communications staff in accessibility best practices for online content, including using alt text, making text accessible, and providing closed captions and subtitles.
- + Use familiar words in short, straightforward sentences for both written and spoken communications.
- + Choose large lettering and easy-to-read typefaces for printed information—including official forms and text on visual displays. Highlight main ideas with clear headings and bold-face type.
- + Employ large graphics, realistic symbols, and clear, direct language in wayfinding and signage. Ensure high color contrast, preferably dark text on a light background.
- + Ensure that telephone answering systems give instructions slowly and clearly and provide the option to repeat the message at any time.
- + Provide auxiliary aids and services for people with communication disabilities, such as sign language interpreters, closed captioning, live transcription, assistive listening devices, written and large-print materials, audio recordings, and Braille displays.
- + Provide low- or no-cost access to computers and the Internet in public places such as government offices, community centers, and libraries.

* The suggestions for more straightforward, clear, and slow communication is not meant to reinforce negative stereotypes about aging, dementia, and disability, but rather to provide an opportunity for all community members to access information with greater ease.



HOUSING:

Offering a broad range of accessible, affordable, and community-promoting housing options in thoughtful, diverse, connected, intergenerational neighborhoods of opportunity.

- + Ensure that adequate accessible, affordable housing—in walkable, transit-served, mixed use neighborhoods—exists in every community for all residents, including older adults and people with disabilities who want or need to change housing to accommodate evolving needs.
- + Collaborate with affordable and low-income housing developers to generate additional housing options, so that residents are able remain in their community.
- + Complement age- and ability-segregated housing by promoting housing development and arrangements that intentionally mix residents across ages and abilities, such as international homeshare arrangements that offer affordable student housing while helping local homeowners and communities.
- + Adopt policies that encourage incorporation of universal design features into new construction and rehabilitation projects, so that housing can support its residents throughout the lifespan.
- + Through regional cooperation, compile a listing of vetted home repair and home modification contractors and programs to help older adults and persons with disabilities adapt their homes to meet their changing needs.
- + Consider progressive tax code or tax payment system changes to minimize the adverse financial impacts of rising rents or property taxes on financially insecure residents.
- + Ensure that municipal plans of conservation and development include planning for older adults and individuals with disabilities to remain in their homes and communities, pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 8-23(e)(1)(l).
- + Educate home owners on the opportunity to create accessory dwelling units or otherwise rightsize a living space.
- + Promote flexible housing arrangements by allowing unrelated people to live in a single household, as required by the Fair Housing Act but still pursuant to any maximum occupancy limitation required to ensure health and safety.

TRANSPORTATION:

Advancing inclusive and safe mobility and access for all roadway users—including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motor vehicles—regardless of age, ability, income, or ethnicity.

- + Adopt a Complete Streets policy that states an intent to plan, design, build, and maintain all streets to meet the needs of all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and motorists of all ages and abilities.
- + Conduct a walkability audit to assess sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian linkages to essential services.
- + Implement, repair, and maintain specific projects that expand safe, connected, active transportation networks across all neighborhoods, such as crosswalks in sufficient number, with curb cuts, nonslip markings, visual and audio cues, and adequate crossing times.
- + Adopt a "Vision Zero" policy and implement strategies to eliminate traffic-related fatalities and severe injuries, especially involving pedestrians and bicyclists.
- + Promote consistent, reliable, accessible, and affordable transportation options for everyone by considering a range of mobility options.
- + Where possible, engage in transit-oriented development to ensure that compact, walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income communities are located within a half-mile of quality, dependable public transportation.
- + Promote public awareness of existing transportation services, including how to access and navigate transportation options, with the support of regional mobility managers and other resources.
- + Establish alternative transportation options in areas where public transportation is limited, including through volunteers and partnerships with transportation network/ridesharing companies and other transportation providers.
- + Make public transportation costs consistent, clearly displayed, and affordable; offer a payment option that does not require passengers to handle money.
- + Keep transport stops and stations accessible, weather-protective, well-lit, and well-marked, with adequate seating and shelter. Ensure that vehicles are accessible and have priority seating that is respected.
- + Offer specialized training to help transportation drivers understand, interact with, and assist people with dementia.
- + Create a voluntary service with transportation escorts available to help passengers with dementia use public transportation.
- + Maintain your community's ADA transition plan as a living document, with community input and funding for implementation.

PUBLIC SPACES, BUILDINGS & BUSINESSES:

Encompassing safe and accessible places—ranging from green spaces to places of civic engagement to places for commerce—that help foster a sense of community, mutual caring, and engagement of users of all ages and abilities.

- + Encourage diverse use of public spaces and buildings, including intentional space-sharing to foster meaningful relationships across ages and abilities (e.g., using senior center space for school programming and vice versa).
- + Map bench locations throughout your community and collaborate with community members to prioritize additional locations for bench installation, including libraries, main streets, recreational walking spaces, and other centers of community life.
- + Map public restrooms throughout your community, identify areas of additional need, and create additional restrooms through infrastructure investment, portable toilet placement, and incentivizing public access to private restrooms. Ensure the availability of accessible restrooms.
- + Promote intentionally inclusive physical spaces, with features like quieter areas that are less stimulating, signage and symbols that balance artistry with clarity (e.g., someone living with dementia could easily locate the restroom), displays, service counters and product shelving that consider access by individuals using assistive mobility devices, and implementing standards for accessible design, even when not legally required by the Americans with Disabilities Act
- + Promote access to parks and other green spaces, with access for all ages and abilities.
- + Establish inclusive community gardens in strategic locations with accessible pathways, planters at heights that consider gardeners unable to kneel, bend, or sit on the ground, and intentionally inclusive signage and programming.
- + Support businesses and community service providers to ensure that staff learn to recognize signs of dementia and support customers with dementia or other cognitive changes.

**SOCIAL, CULTURAL & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:**

Creating vibrant, intergenerational places where all residents enhance community capacity, lived experience is valued, cultural diversity is celebrated, and opportunities for engagement are available across the lifespan.

- + Host community events and activities that are affordable, accessible, conveniently located, and easily reached by public transport. Provide specific details about accessibility of facilities and transportation options and a clear point of contact for questions. Offer virtual or hybrid options for live events to increase access.
- + Promote awareness of and facilitate opportunities for religious, spiritual, and social connectivity.
- + Mobilize older adults to address community issues through meaningful paid and unpaid opportunities, especially to address workforce shortages, to support community institutions, and to serve on municipal boards and commissions.
- + Include the lived experience of older adults, people with disabilities, and people with dementia in municipal decision-making.
- + Ensure accessible voting options for all residents, including access to an accessible ballot marking device at every polling place, absentee voting, and other reasonable accommodations.
- + Explore how artificial intelligence-powered companion tools can promote social engagement, as a complement to in-person engagement and interaction.
- + Promote lifelong learning opportunities, in collaboration with or interconnected to opportunities offered by the public school system, as appropriate.
- + Conduct targeted outreach to people living with dementia and their caregivers to keep them informed of social opportunities and organize activities that are specific to their needs—such as memory cafes, dementia-friendly choirs, and tailored arts and culture groups and faith communities.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY:

Providing opportunities for economic security, access to commerce, and meaningful employment at all stages of life.

- + Diversify housing types and create more affordable housing options.
- + Conduct a community food assessment to improve food access, including mapping access to healthy, affordable food and identifying strategies to address barriers to access.
- + Connect residents to opportunities to access publicly available services and supports, including support in applying for benefits.
- + Educate residents on financial management strategies to improve economic security.
- + Promote access to workforce development programs and job training partnerships, with intentional inclusion of older adults and people with disabilities.
- + Model inclusive hiring practices as a municipal employer and educate local businesses on best practices and opportunities to be more intentionally inclusive.
- + Maintain and publicize an explicit age diversity policy, and ensure that recruiting and employment policies, practices, and processes are age neutral. Advertise employment opportunities in a range of media to reach all ages, and ensure that online postings are accessible to people with disabilities. Depict people of all ages in employment ads.
- + Maintain ongoing employee surveys that include worker views on issues of age and ability bias and worker inclusion.
- + Provide paid time off on a work schedule neutral basis; provide reasonable paid sick leave and caregiver leave, and affordable short- and long-term disability income protection.
- + Make reasonable adaptations to job content, processes, and work environment to accommodate for age or ability-related limitations, going beyond legal obligation to intentional inclusivity.
- + Ensure that workers across the lifespan have access to appropriate training and development opportunities and resources necessary to maintain satisfactory performance.
- + Encourage reasonable levels of work schedule flexibility. Allow employees to freely seek voluntary reassignment or reduction in responsibilities and duties to accommodate need or preference for diminished workload.
- + Recognize and support worker preferences regarding retirement. Encourage interested workers to remain employed beyond traditional retirement eligibility, as appropriate. Enable phased retirement policies that allow employees to transition gradually from full-time employment to full retirement.
- + Maintain active fitness and wellness programs to promote health and well-being for all employees.

**PUBLIC SAFETY & PREPAREDNESS:**

Integrating thoughtful training and planning into promoting public safety, understanding how to appropriately support all residents in emergency circumstances, and empowering, respecting, and optimizing the dignity and independence of everyone.

- + Integrate all ages and abilities into community emergency and disaster planning, response, and recovery by taking into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of all residents.
- + Facilitate coordination among state and local emergency management offices and the aging and disability services network.
- + Develop special needs registries identifying people with dementia or disabilities who may need extra assistance in the event of a disaster.
- + Offer education on disaster-preparedness to all residents, with specific outreach targeted to more vulnerable residents, as well as their care partners and families.
- + Provide training and resources to municipal staff, especially emergency responders and staff in public health and human services, on serving and communicating with people with dementia, other cognitive changes, and developmental disabilities.
- + Assess climate vulnerability, with special attention to older adults and individuals with disability.
- + Plan and prepare for a municipal or regional heat emergency. Conduct a heat assessment using the Connecticut Institute for Resilience & Climate Adaptation heat vulnerability index or a similar tool and complete a heat emergency plan. Inventory, improve, and create cooling centers.
- + Develop specific safety and response training and processes for lost persons, including people with dementia or developmental disabilities who may be prone to wander.
- + Support collaboration among police, fire, aging services, and adult protective services for safety education and prevention of physical and financial elder abuse.
- + Promote collaboration between law enforcement and community members to identify areas of community concern, improve community safety, and reduce both actual risk and perceived risk of crime.
- + Promote road safety through driver education programming and refresher courses for all drivers.

RESOURCE LIST

AARP Livable Communities Library

(accessed 2023). Available at <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/library/>

AARP Network of Age-Friendly State and Communities.

Better Together: Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly Communities (2016). Available at <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2016/dementia-friendly-communities.html>

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(accessed 2023). Available at <https://www.boston.gov/departments/age-strong-commission/age-friendly-boston>

Age-Friendly Institute (Certified Age Friendly Employer Program) and Encore Network.

Age is Now a Strategic Imperative: An Employers Guide to Engaging Older Workers (2023). Available at <https://institute.agefriendly.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FINAL-Age-Friendly-Employers-Guide-.pdf>

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Local Government Sector Guide (accessed 2023). Available at <https://www.dfamerica.org/s/DFA-SectorGuide-LocalGovt-0810.pdf>

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Sustainable CT (accessed 2023).*

Municipal Action List. Available at <https://sustainablect.org/actions-certifications/actions>

World Health Organization.

Checklist of Essential Feature of Age-friendly Cities (2007). Available at <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/362949>

** Sustainable CT is a voluntary certification program to recognize thriving and resilient Connecticut municipalities. Their action roadmap provides municipalities several opportunities to promote aging, dementia and disability inclusivity. In using Sustainable CT's equity toolkit, we encourage municipalities to contact the Collaborative for resources and support in addressing aging, dementia and disability inclusivity as core considerations in pursuing equity, along with other intersectional identities.*

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