

Willoughby, Adam@CDA

From: Caroline Chen <carolinechen06@berkeley.edu>
Sent: Friday, December 13, 2019 8:52 PM
To: EngAGE@CDA
Subject: Comment letter for healthy aging

Hello,

As a regional planner with L.A. County who did my postdoctoral research at the Helpline at UC San Diego, I see how the layout of car-centric cities in California can lead to isolation among older people who can no longer drive. I also see how increased aging in place can exacerbate the housing crisis that the state is facing while leading to older adults feeling isolated. I wonder if retrofitting the infrastructure of the existing Helpline to serve the needs of older adults can help open up new discussions about how to enhance the quality of life after retirement and where that may best take place.

The number of older adults who choose to age in place is increasing. They prefer to continue living in a neighborhood they are familiar with and in the home rich in memories. Furthermore, with improved health care, the length of time older adults are enjoying life after retirement is also increasing.

One unintended consequence of this new extended period of retirement is the absence of daily contact with coworkers that comes with regular employment. Older adults aging in place may not have as many opportunities to socially engage with others. This could lead to isolation and loneliness.

In the UK, the Ministry of Loneliness devised the Silverline, a phone number that older adults can call if they feel the need to connect with another human being. Such a service may be a useful model to consider in the U.S. where aging in place may be taking place in suburbs and rural areas where older adults who can no longer drive may feel socially disconnected.

In the past two decades, the California Dept of Public Health has a continuous contract with the California Smokers' Helpline, which is managed by the University of California, San Diego. The Helpline is an evidence-based telephone counseling service that smokers can call to talk with trained counselors who encourage and motivate callers to pursue positive behavior change, in this case to quit smoking.

Perhaps this service and its counselors also help older people become more socially engaged and less isolated. Perhaps this service may also help open up the possibility that relocating to more walkable neighborhoods would increase their quality of life. As an aside, I am still in contact with the principal investigator of the UCSD Helpline and have learned that he is interested in the idea of piloting a Silver Helpline in California..

Please also note that these thoughts and reflections are my own, as a private citizen -- I am not writing in an official capacity as a planner on behalf of Los Angeles County.

Thank you,
Caroline Chen