

Why It's Time to Reframe the Design Conversation Around Senior Living



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Abstract

The conversation around rapid demographic ageing is heating up between governments and economists around the world. We conducted a series of roundtables with senior living providers, owners, operators, and developers to understand how we might reframe some common misconceptions and barriers to create opportunities for an active, inclusive community living for people of all ages.

Keywords: Senior Living; Demographics; Senior Living Design; Innovation; Physical Infrastructure

Introduction

The conversation around rapid demographic ageing is heating up between governments and economists around the world. Every day in the United States, 10,000 people turn 65, according to the UN Population Division. The number of older adults will more than double over the next 30 years to represent over 20% of the national population by 2050. Policy makers in high income countries with large and fast-growing older populations are worried that ageing will lead to lower productivity, economic stagnation, fiscal deficits, and debt. But the reality is that many older adults are still active contributors to the economy with adults over the age of 60 generating more than half of all urban consumption growth in developed countries between 2015 and 2030, according to the Center for the Future of Ageing. Why then, do we continue to develop infrastructure and social standards that alienate older adults from their community and prevent them from making a meaningful contribution to the economy and society? It's time to reframe conversation around older adults.

Currently, global healthcare, financial, and housing infrastructure is failing to serve the older population. New research by Gensler serves to demystify some of the myths around what ageing in society means today, and how we can put forward momentous and creative solutions to solve for communities that are currently not built to support older people. We conducted a series of roundtables with senior living providers, owners, operators, and developers to understand how we might

reframe some common misconceptions and barriers to create opportunities for an active, inclusive community living for people of all ages.

Discussion

Demographic shifts require a change of mindset. Too often senior living developments consist of siloed, single-use spaces that are physically and societally cut off from the community. This moment in time offers big opportunities for developers and senior living providers. As retirement ages and lifespans are extending in tandem, older adults are often the demographic with the highest spending capital. This lifestyle shift requires a simultaneous mindset shift-particularly for those designing, investing, and providing places for older people to live. Amid rising construction costs, increasingly tight jurisdiction for sustainability, and changing market demands, new and experimental business models are emerging for senior living developments. The success of these models will rely on the diversification of offerings, experiences, building strategic partnerships and redefining ways to live. There is a significant opportunity for change. Re-engineering U.S. infrastructure in preparation for longer human lives will require a flexible, resilient approach. There are key opportunities which are ripe for senior living providers to seize to stay ahead of the curve.

Firstly, providers need to move away from the idea of legacy developments and optimize design to promote intergenerational,

multi-use spaces that are inclusive, accessible, affordable, and desirable for people of all ages. The second opportunity is to design spaces that are centered around experience alongside functionality. Differentiated experiences are highly valued by people of all ages. There is an opportunity to build an experience model into the foundation of all residential developments. Thirdly, the priorities of care for older adults vary significantly. There is an opportunity to offer a diverse range of in-house, local and digital services to allow residents to take control of their own well-being. Providers should consider a diverse set of care-related services and programming beyond the building to support a wide range of needs. The fourth opportunity for providers that we defined in our research focuses on the benefits of partnering and networking with local neighborhood amenities and service offerings. Not only will this make the strategy more integrated into the community, but it will also bring overall cost of a service model down. The wider the network of services in the neighborhood, the less providers need to offer in the building complex [1].

Conclusion

What's next?

Providers are under increasing pressure to provide accommodation for older adults that respond to their lifestyles. This means offering more accessible food amenities, transit, green spaces, learning centers, entertainment, and health services. It's time to look beyond the building and foster intergenerational connections in the neighborhood. While a new approach to building developments for older residents requires substantial investment in digital and physical infrastructure, it is important to assess potential value through the lens of longevity.

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References

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