

Neighbourhood links to health and wellbeing

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(Medical Xpress) -- People who live in safer, cleaner and friendly neighbourhoods experience higher levels of health and wellbeing as they age, a new Flinders University study shows.

Released last month, [*Neighbourhood Characteristics: Shaping the Wellbeing of Older Australians*](#) reveals a direct link between communities and the [physical health](#), mental health and overall quality of life of middle-aged and older [Australians](#).

The survey of 561 people aged between 55 and 94 in the Australian Capital Territory found factors such as [social cohesion](#), including trust

and a sense of belonging, as well as the prevalence of [graffiti](#) and [vandalism](#) in the neighbourhood, impacted on positive ageing.

Flinders academic Dr Tim Windsor, who led the study in collaboration with researchers from the Australian National University, said respondents who “felt the people in their area were friendly and trustworthy” had a more positive outlook on life and were generally healthier than those who experienced negative perceptions of their community.

Neighbourhood belonging was also linked to lower levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness, while a greater sense of “neighbourhood order” – including less instances of vandalism, graffiti, rubbish and crime – were associated with better general health, Dr Windsor said.

“A lot of older Australians are retired or mobility impaired which means they tend to spend more time in and around their homes,” Dr Windsor, a Future Fellow based in the School of Psychology, said.

“Therefore it’s imperative to ensure their neighbourhoods support access to services, opportunities for social interaction and a sense of safety,” he said.

“People who feel safe and comfortable in their environment are more likely to interact with their neighbours, and to get out and walk around, which can lead to better health and overall quality of life.”

Dr Windsor said the research highlighted the need for future planning of new neighbourhoods, or the rejuvenation of existing communities, to consider the health and wellbeing of people of all ages.

“Most of the current research on healthy ageing focuses on the personal characteristics of the individual, such as physical and cognitive health,”

Dr Windsor said.

“While these things are of vital importance, we can gain a more complete picture by considering how health behaviours might be encouraged or discouraged by people’s social and [neighbourhood](#) environment.

“Given Australia’s ageing population it is vital that policymakers appreciate the importance of supportive neighbourhoods in helping older adults retain independence and wellbeing.”

Provided by Flinders University

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