

# Local shops vital for age-friendly communities, researchers find

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(Medical Xpress)—Local shops play an important role in older people's daily lives and, for many, are an integral part of their social network, new research shows.

Joan Stewart, a PhD student in the Monash University Healthy Ageing

Research Unit, investigated the nature and purpose of older people's social interactions with shopkeepers and other shoppers in their [neighbourhood](#).

"We know very little about this form of social interaction, especially about the [reciprocity](#) involved," Ms Stewart said.

"We studied older shoppers, aged between 67 and 88 years old, and developed a theory from the study, which we've called 'Civic Socialising'."

Civic Socialising brings a new perspective to current understandings of older people's social networks. It contradicts the notion that older people are exclusively reliant on family, friends or [neighbours](#) for their social interaction.

"When older people shop locally, they establish important relationships with their shopkeepers. Both are aware they need each other, for the shopkeeper to stay in business, and for the older shopper to have local services," Ms Stewart said.

The study found smaller shopping strips provided an opportunity for the older people to remain involved in their community and for residents to become more active in local issues. The relationship enabled the older [shoppers](#) to demonstrate their competence and having local shops helped them to take control and remain independent.

Ms Stewart said shopkeepers also looked out for some of the more vulnerable older people and saw it as part of their service to the community.

Civil Socialising has significant implications for research, and for policy and planning. It involves a complex interplay of factors associated with

concepts such as trust, identity, surveillance, status, [censorship](#) and choice.

"Governments should be working to support local shops, as elderly people often find larger centres alienating, impersonal and not conducive to their shopping needs," Ms Stewart said.

Ensuring that local neighbourhood shopping centres remain open will enable older people to look after themselves longer, to continue their normal everyday life, and benefit from the [social interaction](#). This could be a vital component of initiatives associated with ageing.

"Such an approach could save money and ensure that older people remain independent, and age actively within their communities," Ms Stewart said.

Provided by Monash University

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