

# What factors make 'age-friendly environments' effective?

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A new study, published in the journal *Systematic Reviews*, conducted by researchers at the University of Liverpool and Newcastle University has identified the most effective initiatives for promoting respect and social inclusion for older people living in the community.

The study, funded by the National Institute for Health Research School for Public Health Research, aimed to establish what is known about the impacts of initiatives designed to promote respect and [social inclusion](#) in later life.

Social inclusion refers to the opportunities for individuals to cultivate social relationships, have access to resources and feel part of the community they live in. Respect in relation to [older people](#), meanwhile, refers to positive attitudes and behaviours towards the elderly, so that they may feel accepted, valued, and appreciated by the community regardless of age.

Such initiatives have been promoted by the World Health Organisation as part of its drive to encourage 'age-friendly environments', which support older people to live independently and in good [health](#) for longer, but also optimise health and wellbeing for the wider community.

Age-friendly environments are seen as an important way in which societies can address the combined challenges of population ageing and urbanisation - two trends that place significant pressure on health and social care services and have the potential to threaten the sustainability

of welfare systems worldwide.

The study team systematically reviewed 25 years' worth of international research papers, to identify the range of initiatives promoting respect and social inclusion evaluated to date. The focus of the review was on initiatives that target community-residing older people (aged 60+ years) living in high and upper-middle income countries. Information from both quantitative and qualitative studies published in English was compared across studies.

The researchers found that music and singing, intergenerational initiatives, art and culture, and multi-activity interventions (e.g. health promotion) promoted the wellbeing, subjective health, quality of life, and physical and mental health of older people. Qualitative studies suggested that these initiatives benefitted older people's health in a variety of ways, such as by making them feel valued and fostering meaningful relationships with others.

Dr Sara Ronzi, said: "In current efforts to promote age-friendly environments, we hope that these findings will support local public health practitioners, policy makers, charities, and researchers to carry out and evaluate initiatives promoting respect and social inclusion that are likely to improve older people's health and wellbeing."

Dr Nicole Valtorta, Research Associate at Newcastle University's Institute of Health and Society, co-author of the study, said: "Initiatives that promote social inclusion and respect for older people have the potential to significantly improve people's health and wellbeing.

"This review highlights some of the benefits we know about, but also invites the research, policy and practice communities to think about ways of strengthening the evidence base in areas where there is still quite a bit of uncertainty."

**More information:** S. Ronzi et al, What is the impact on health and wellbeing of interventions that foster respect and social inclusion in community-residing older adults? A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies, *Systematic Reviews* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s13643-018-0680-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-018-0680-2)

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