

Empowering older people could be key to positive change

June 25 2021



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A research team led by Curtin University has demonstrated the potential of older people to play a direct role in tackling community issues affecting them such as food security.

Published in Health Promotion International, the research put study participants aged 51-87 in the role of citizen scientists as they attended subsidized community [market](#) days aimed at improving [food](#) security and reported on ways they thought the initiative could be changed to serve them better.

Lead researcher, Associate Professor Anthony Tuckett from the Curtin School of Nursing, said being able to afford and access food was an increasing problem for older people who were living longer and having to stretch their financial resources further.

"Initiatives such as subsidized community market days are increasingly important to bolster [food security](#) among older citizens yet there have been few attempts to understand these initiatives from the perspective of the community members, which is where our research came in," Associate Professor Tuckett said.

"In the role of citizen scientists, study participants attended the market days, took photos and made voice recordings and written notes documenting the experience and recommending ways to improve the initiative, such as through changes to the process for sourcing and storing food and altering the market layout for better access.

"Together the participants discussed, collated and brought their findings to a public meeting with relevant decision-makers, including the market operators, a local councilor and a FoodBank representative, which resulted in several improvements to the market day being made."

Associate Professor Tuckett said giving older people a voice on issues pertinent to them was important and having them in the role of [citizen](#) scientist was an impactful way of achieving this.

"Citizen science is a useful and feasible approach to engage older people

in capturing data and advocating for change to ensure local initiatives meet the demands of the community they serve," Associate Professor Tuckett said

"Our research demonstrated their ability to bring about real change to the places they frequent and facilities they use, such as theater and shopping precincts, streets, parklands, bikeways, care settings and in this case, a community market day.

"There is potential to implement similar projects that give older people a chance to bring meaningful change to their built environments, thereby tackling issues of concern improving their quality of life."

More information: Anthony G Tuckett et al, Using citizen science to empower older adults to improve a food security initiative in Australia, *Health Promotion International* (2021). [DOI: 10.1093/heapro/daab060](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daab060)

Provided by Curtin University

Citation: Empowering older people could be key to positive change (2021, June 25) retrieved 26 June 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-06-empowering-older-people-key-positive.html>

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