

Urgent action needed to develop climate interventions that support healthy aging

November 28 2023, by Alistair Keely



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A new UK-wide research project has found a 'critical' need for urban interventions that mitigate the negative impact of extreme weather on the health and well-being of older people.

Academics from the Urban Institute at Heriot-Watt University and the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York say [climate](#) change is impacting the physical, social, and mental well-being of aging populations and warned there is now a pressing public health issue.

In their report, titled Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate, researchers identify a need for 'actionable' interventions to better support the delivery of inclusive, climate-resilient age-friendly cities and communities.

Creative thinking

Professor Ryan Woolrych is director of the Urban Institute at Heriot-Watt University and led the research. He said, "Climate change is having a profound impact on our aging population, who are often the most at risk from extreme weather."

"We urgently need to think creatively about developing interventions to support older people before, during, and after extreme weather events. Failing to act now risks further negative impacts on older people, including increased mortality."

The UK is home to over 11 million people aged 65 and over, constituting almost 19% of the population.

This demographic is expected to grow to 13 million people by 2030, accounting for 22% of the population.

Vulnerable locations

At the same time, climate change is increasing the severity and frequency of extreme weather events. This poses a significant challenge

to the health and well-being of older people, particularly those who live in vulnerable locations or lack the physical, mental, social, and [financial resources](#) needed to avoid or minimize the effects of extreme weather.

Dr. Gary Haq, a senior researcher from the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York, who collaborated on the project, said, "Our research has found there is a need for society to take a [holistic approach](#) to this issue to protect older people and ensure they can enjoy a better quality of life."

"We have an aging population that brings with it certain [health needs](#), and what we know is that climate change is going to negatively impact this further unless we address these issues."

Six key areas

Academics gathered opinions of more than 140 older adults, policymakers, and practitioners across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in 2022/23. They explored the factors that contribute to the resilience of older people to [climate change](#), including heat waves, flooding, and storms.

The report highlights six areas for intervention; these are:

- Empowering [older people](#) towards climate action
- Mobilizing community and social infrastructure
- Enhancing mobility and transport for healthy aging
- Climate resilient housing for aging-in-place
- Health care and well-being for [older adults](#) in extreme weather
- Intergenerational communities and climate resilience

Joined-up approach

Professor Woolrych added, "We are now calling for a joined-up approach including local and national governments, to consider the physical, social and community aspects of aging well in communities and how we can integrate this in a way that will provide the resources, amenities and supports for people."

More information: Report: [PDF](#)

Provided by University of York

Citation: Urgent action needed to develop climate interventions that support healthy aging (2023, November 28) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-urgent-action-climate-interventions-healthy.html>

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