Normative Input
For 14th session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Focus Area
SOCIAL INCLUSION

Promoting social inclusion for older individuals has long been a priority in the United States, aiming to break down physical and social barriers that hinder their full participation in society. Over the years, the government has recognized various societal resources and limitations, including economic disadvantages, personal constraints, disabling environments, and ageist societal norms.

Social inclusion efforts encompass both formal and informal structures that offer meaningful roles for older adults and foster reciprocal social exchanges, promoting interdependence rather than inequity and disempowerment. Access to resources that enhance personal well-being and fulfillment is key to these efforts.

Physical infrastructure improvements, such as walkable neighborhoods, accessible mobility options, and suitable housing for individuals with diverse needs, further promote social inclusion. Communities with aging-friendly characteristics experience positive outcomes, including improved physical and mental health, greater life satisfaction, and decreased risk of nursing home placement.

In recent years, local administrations across the USA have initiated aging-friendly initiatives to enhance community inclusivity for older residents. These initiatives aim to enhance social integration, provide social support, and improve resource access while eliminating physical barriers to social participation. However, these efforts typically remain isolated and lack state or federal involvement.

Limited public involvement and coordination reflect the USA's historical approach to social welfare, characterized by weak norms of equity and inclusiveness, and high levels of social, economic, and cultural diversity. Additionally, reliance on non-governmental entities for administration and funding raises concerns about sustainability once initial funding ends.

The lack of government support presents a significant obstacle to implementing program recommendations from local administrations, hindering widespread dissemination of their efforts. Furthermore, current initiatives predominantly benefit socially and economically advantaged White non-Hispanic individuals, raising concerns about inclusivity for elders of color and those with fewer resources.

Developing aging-friendly initiatives often requires substantial pre-existing social, political, and economic capital, potentially excluding populations facing structural disadvantages. Efforts to promote aging-friendliness and social inclusion may have a limited impact on these marginalized groups without adequate government support.

For older individuals, social exclusion encompasses not only economic disadvantages but also disabling environments and ageist societal norms. Addressing these barriers is essential to facilitating full societal participation for older adults.

There is an urgent need to prioritize the social inclusion of older individuals by promoting aging-friendly initiatives and activities nationwide. Increasing older persons' participation and ensuring inclusivity across diverse demographics are critical steps toward building a more inclusive society for all.