



## **SUBSTANTIVE INPUT**

**for the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing  
for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the  
human rights of older persons**

### **FOCUS AREA:**

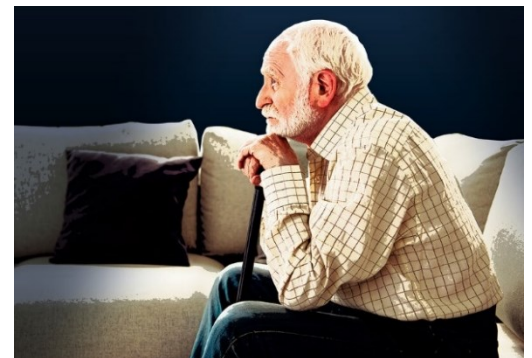
### **SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The United States has always promoted social inclusion by helping overcome physical and social barriers that deny many older people the ability to participate fully in societal structures. Over the years the government has accessed societal resources, and limitations, whether as a result of economic disadvantage, personal limitations, disabling environments, or ageist societal norms and values.

Social inclusion is promoted through formal and informal social structures that offered meaningful social roles for older adults and promoted reciprocal social exchanges that fostered interdependence rather than inequity and disempowerment. It has provided access to resources that promote the personal well-being and fulfillment of older people.

Social inclusion is further promoted through physical infrastructure improvements such as walkable neighborhoods, mobility options, and adequate housing for persons with diverse needs and abilities.

Aging-friendly physical and social community characteristics are associated with salutary personal and communal outcomes, including better physical and mental health, greater life satisfaction, and reduced risk of nursing home placement.



In recent years, local administrations throughout the USA have also adopted initiatives designed to help those communities become more aging-friendly. Some of these initiatives include components that may contribute to the social inclusion of older community members by enhancing social integration, social support, or resource access directly, or by removing physical barriers to social participation. However, these initiatives, while promising, generally reflect isolated efforts by individual communities, developed independently from one another without state or federal involvement.

**Agewell Foundation USA, Inc.**

***(Accredited with The Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing at United Nations since 2019)***

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Poor public involvement and coordination reflect the USA's lingering approach to social welfare, relatively weak norms of equity and inclusiveness, and high levels of social, economic, and cultural diversity. Moreover, because these initiatives typically are administered by non-governmental entities and financed by private foundations and other non-governmental sources, they have little recognition by, or impact on, public policy.

Lack of government involvement has posed one of the greatest obstacles to the implementation of program recommendations of local administrations, and the results of their efforts have not spread widely. Reliance on private funding and lack of public policy support for initiatives such as these also prompt concerns regarding their ability to be sustained once funding ends.

Some current aging-friendly initiatives, for example, primarily include White non-Hispanic individuals who are relatively socially and economically advantaged, raising questions about their ability to meet the needs of elders of color and those with fewer human and economic resources.

Indeed, given the limited amount of government support, a substantial amount of pre-existing social, political, and economic capital may well be a prerequisite for developing aging-friendly initiatives in the USA. The most constructive efforts at aging-friendliness and social inclusion may have a limited impact on populations suffering from social exclusion based on structural disadvantage.



For older persons, social exclusion not only reflects economic disadvantage but also disabling environments and ageist societal norms and values. Increased vulnerability to potentially disabling physical and cognitive conditions, coupled with the inadequacies of the physical and social environment, can limit the full societal participation of older persons.

There is an urgent need to focus on the social inclusion of older people by promoting older persons-friendly initiatives and activities throughout the United States and increasing the participation of older persons.

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