Age-Friendly Cities and "Villages" for Older People: Will They Change the Way we Age?

Presenters:

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Workshop:

There has always been speculation that when the large upcoming cohorts of "baby boomers" in industrialized countries will be 65 and older, the experience of "old age" will change forever. Will they, in fact, be more independent, healthier and better able to take care of themselves than previous cohorts? To quote the United Nations – will the predominant trend be to "add life to the years that have been added to life?" Or will larger cohorts of older people require more and more services and take away needed resources from other population groups?

While this is being debated, two converging social movements are getting greater attention and may influence our aging experience in the future. First, many cities have joined WHO's age-friendly cities initiative and committed themselves to listen to the concerns of older persons and make environmental and other changes that make city-living more suitable, age-integrated and comfortable for older people. More and more cities continue to commit resources and join this movement. Second, in the United States and in some European countries, yet another model for older people is getting more attention. The newly emerging "village model" is a self help model which promotes the integration of older people in neighborhoods by voluntarily joining an "aging-in-place village." It brings together older adults living independently in supportive neighborhoods where neighbors and citizens provide needed services and assistance based on an organized volunteer model which both strengthens and lengthens independent living. Examinations are underway by several researchers of savings to governments from neighbor-to-neighbor support and the benefits of mutual support resulting from boosting independent living.

The session will summarize and discuss the experience gained by the village movement to date. It will also reflect on the potential for cooperation and synergy between the age-friendly city and the "village" approach to independent living.