

Building the foundation

for active aging



Is your organization prepared to address the challenges and opportunities of population aging? This comprehensive and integrated model will guide you in creating a firm foundation for your active-aging efforts—whether it's a first foray into this arena or a longtime pursuit

by Colin Milner

Population aging is changing societies on a global level. Our current models have fallen short in addressing both challenges and opportunities presented by this demographic shift. Govern-

ments and organizations need new implementable models to address the accompanying wave of change. Globally, active aging is recognized as part of the solution.¹ Why?

Active aging promotes the vision of all individuals—regardless of age, socioeconomic status or health—fully engaging in life within all seven dimensions of wellness: emotional, environmental, intellectual/cognitive, physical, professional/vocational, social and spiritual.²

Research shows that an active lifestyle can lessen the challenges and increase

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Figure 1. The ICAA Model

the opportunities associated with population aging.³ Active aging provides environments, programs and places that support individuals in living well and taking charge of their health and wellness.

The International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) has created Nine Principles of Active Aging, a model to guide governments, product and service providers, employers, and the health-care industry in how they respond to population aging. By implementing and operating by these guiding principles, organizations and agencies will be able to build a foundation for their efforts and encourage active, engaged living for people of all ages.

It is also essential, when implementing the nine principles, to incorporate the seven dimensions of wellness into each principle. This integration is the “spine,” or support structure, of the ICAA Model (see Figure 1 above), and is crucial to meeting the needs, capabilities, expectations, dreams and desires of the older consumer.

ICAA’s Nine Principles of Active Aging

There were 810 million people over age 60 worldwide in 2012.⁴ Every week *over one million people around the world turn age 65*, according to Harvard Professor David Bloom, PhD, a world-renowned demographer and economist.⁵ Yet, addressing population aging is less about the numbers of older people and more about their diversity. That’s why the first principle of active aging is Populations.

1. Populations: The diverse population of older adults requires diverse solutions

A lifetime of diverse experiences, and the behaviors they have created, makes the 65-and-over age group an extremely unique segment of the population.⁶ These experiences and behaviors impact everything, from where and how people live, to their health status and quality of life. Meeting this group’s expectations and needs requires you to understand who they are. Consider, for example, their physical and cognitive abilities; health; age; work or marital status; sex; sexual orientation; race and culture, as

well as whether or not they have children or grandchildren, access to transportation, and disposable income. This is why the older-adult market will challenge your creativity, strategic thinking, planning and implementation processes, and why one-size-fits-all solutions fail miserably with these individuals. To address this group, you will first need to establish this group’s wants and needs. Once you do so, think about what kinds of products or services you will create and deliver to meet the expectations of this large, diverse market.

A thought to ponder: Is the lack of diversity in your offerings limiting your success?

2. Perceptions: Ageism and negative stereotypes of aging impede an inclusive society

Aging used to be simple: People were born, moved through childhood into adolescence and adulthood, through midlife into old age (if they lived that long), and then died. They often established a home, a family and a vocation, before retiring to live out their “declining” years. Today, with 30-plus years added to the life span,³ a new view of aging has emerged—one filled with anticipation and accomplishment. Standing in the way of optimal aging, however, is that familiar foe: ageism. Whether the older adult is viewed as a burden to family and society⁷ or as a “superhero,” unrealistic perceptions of aging can, and do, have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of this population.⁸ The media and marketers use fear-based communications to sell “anti-aging” products and services, driving home the message that aging, a natural process in life, is negative and should be fought every step of the way.^{6,9} The reality is we are all aging. And we all will experience old age, if we’re lucky enough to live that long.⁹

While negative portrayals and messages of aging are common when marketers



Figure 2. ICAA's Nine Principles of Active Aging

and the media address the older market, most of the time this population is practically invisible to them.¹⁰ Only five percent of marketing dollars are spent on individuals over age 50.^{10,11} Together with the lack of inclusive, appropriate products, this neglect can make older consumers feel irrelevant, even though they have money to spend.¹⁰

What the media and marketers miss in all the above is the reality. By addressing the real challenges that older adults face and fulfilling the opportunities they desire for lifelong experiences, you and your organization can significantly impact the self-perception of these consumers and their quality of life,⁸ as well as the way others perceive them. To do so requires you and your staff, your organization and your suppliers to become advocates for this consumer group. How? Promote the message and language of autonomy, while fostering a "can do" attitude among customers. You will see a return on this investment in many ways, from consumer loyalty, to increased business, to a positive position in the greater community.

Of course, to achieve the above, you may also need to address perceptions within your organization. The International Longevity Center in New York points out four categories of ageism: personal, institutional, intentional and unintentional.¹² Living in an ageist society, we are often unaware of how stereotypes of aging shape our perceptions of older adults. Greater sensitivity begins with increased awareness.

Bottom line, perceptions become reality. The only way to change old perceptions is to create a new reality.

A thought to ponder: What is the societal cost of ageism and exclusion, versus self-empowerment and inclusion?

3. People: Trained and committed individuals are needed to meet the needs of older adults

With fewer people entering the labor force, and the field of aging in particular,¹³ where will your future staff come from? And, how can you ensure they have the expertise needed to meet your consumers' expectations? This challenge exists in large part because of principle number two, Perceptions. Until we change the negative perceptions associated with both aging and working with older adults, we will continue to see a shortage of expertise within our field and within society itself. So how do you implement this principle in your organization? The place to start is with a review of the competency levels of your staff. Keep in mind that people are one of the significant ongoing costs for most organizations. Poor people choices and poor training equal poor results.

Once you have established your staff's current level of expertise, set out to enhance it with additional training and knowledge gathering. Yes, this will cost you money. But incompetent staff will cost you much more over time in terms of lost business, a poor reputation and a disappointing return on investment.

Where should you look for training and knowledge enhancement? Seek out universities, colleges, or certification providers that offer courses geared to working with an older population. Then, make sure these courses focus on active aging and wellness as a way to support independence for older adults. (Training staff with outdated information will do nothing but continue poor results.) You can also partner with associations, governmental groups, and content providers to enhance staff development in areas ranging from communications to programming. In addition, consider seeking out student interns. This may help you build a solid base for future recruitment. No matter which avenues you use, it's vital for your organization to have the right people on staff and the right educational partner.

Still, time waits for no one. Although fewer people in the field of aging presents challenges for organizations that serve this group, it also creates opportunities for those open to exploring alternative solutions. This is highly evident in the field of robotics. From cutting lawns and cleaning pools to building cars and disarming bombs, robots are increasingly used today to perform tasks, even if we do not realize it. Honda's ASIMO, billed as "the world's most advanced humanoid robot," signals what robotics might offer our field.¹⁴ Among its many capabilities, ASIMO can walk, carry things, ascend and descend stairs, and run at speeds of nearly four miles per hour. We can expect to see more of ASIMO in the future, as well as other robotic applications under development to address this shortage of workers. Dare we say it: The rise of the robots has begun.

A thought to ponder: How will this seismic demographic shift impact your organization's staffing, both now and in the future? Are you prepared?

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4. Potential: Population aging is creating new economies

Do you know what an “aged economy” is? According to the United Nations, an aged economy is one in which consumption by older people surpasses that of youth.⁴ Thirty years ago, there were no “aged economies” in the world. In 2010, there were 23 such economies, and by 2040, there will be 89.⁴

Within the next four years, age 50-plus American consumers will control 70% of the disposable income in the United States,¹¹ dominating purchasing decisions for decades to come. For example, in 2010 alone, Boomers and their parents spent over US\$3.4 trillion.¹⁵ With this kind of spending power, this group expects you to meet its needs, wants, dreams and desires, if you intend to gain its business.

How can you and your organization benefit from population aging’s surge? It comes back to focusing on providing a product or service that interests older adults. From housing to travel, career training to wellness programs and services, there is tremendous potential for organizations that become laser-focused on this market.

If you’re wondering if you really need to adopt this focus, ask yourself the following questions:

- *What is the cost of action?* What changes will your organization need to make to maximize this opportunity? What will you need to invest in terms of time, energy and money to ensure your optimal return on investment?
- *What is the cost of inaction?* How much business might you lose if you take a wait-and-see approach? Will your competitor become the top-of-mind brand?
- *What is the cost of reaction?* What will it mean to your organization if you eventually have to make wholesale

changes, instead of incremental ones, to address this group’s needs?

The real question is: How will you respond to this opportunity?

A thought to ponder: An aged economy will be driven by the expectations that older adults have formed from a lifetime of experiences. This will create major opportunities for businesses that can meet these expectations, and significant challenges for those that can’t.

5. Products: Products and services are needed that tailor to older-adult needs

Many organizations today continue to focus their products and services toward youth, even though American adults ages 18–49 have US\$3,000 in their bank accounts, on average.¹⁶ Why? The following three reasons may shed some light:

- Research from the United Nations shows that this lack of interest in the older consumer stems from ageism and a limited understanding of the market.⁴
- Many companies are either unaware of the potential of the changing market and demand for products, or they have failed to respond and adapt.¹⁷
- A widespread lack of thought exists in this area, resulting in limited availability of goods, products and services inclusive of, or appropriate for, people in older age groups.¹⁸

With your competition neglecting this market, where is the opportunity for you? Just look around. Not only is the older-adult population diverse, but so are the opportunities to provide needed solutions and offerings. Virtually every area of business can improve the way they design and deliver products for this market—from more functional furniture to cosmetics and supplements, to wellness (the fifth fastest-growing global segment in the packaged consumer goods

industry¹⁹) and products to improve quality of life. One example: Once seen as a supplement for ailing and frail individuals, one rebranded nutritional drink now promises to help customers maintain bone and muscle. We’re also seeing growth in the creation and recognition of Age-friendly Cities, an initiative that guides cities in shaping more accessible, inclusive urban environments for older citizens.²⁰

Population aging is causing us to rethink the way we design and deliver products and services. How will you adjust your products or services to better meet the market’s expectations?

A thought to ponder: What impact does the current lack of appropriate products and services have on the inclusion of older people in society? As we all grow old, how will this affect you and your family, plus future generations, if left unchanged?

6. Promotions: Older adults are a key market to attract

Despite the immense purchasing power of adults ages 65-plus, most marketers have yet to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by population aging.^{10,11} To gain the business of this group requires first the correct product, then a market effort that can effectively engage it. How can you accomplish this?

Effective promotions and marketing must be rooted in the realities of life for older adults. Messages about anti-aging, the “super senior,” or the frail, ill family matriarch fail to reflect the reality of today’s older population.⁹ As a result, older consumers are turned off by marketers’ messages that target them, and they tune them out completely.²¹

Shifting today’s marketing model to meet your consumer demand can sell product, while inspiring societal change.

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ICAA's Nine Principles of Active Aging

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It is also essential, when implementing the nine principles, to incorporate the seven dimensions of wellness into each principle. This integration is the “spine,” or support structure, of the ICAA Model, and is crucial to meeting the needs, capabilities, expectations, dreams and desires of your older consumer.



For more information on ICAA's Nine Principles of Active Aging, call 866-335-9777, or visit www.icaa.cc/activeagingandwellness/activeaging.htm

1. Populations

The diverse population of older adults requires diverse solutions.

2. Perceptions

Ageism and negative stereotypes of aging impede an inclusive society.

3. People

Trained and committed individuals are needed to meet the needs of older adults.

4. Potential

Population aging is creating new economies.

5. Products

Products and services are needed that tailor to older-adult needs.

6. Promotions

Older adults are a key market to attract.

7. Places

Environments must be constructed to enable multiple functional abilities.

8. Policies

The human rights of older adults should be protected.

9. Programs

The seven dimensions of wellness anchor the principles.



Here is a question to ask yourself: What do you need to create, or offer, to be a real (authentic), ageless and inclusive brand? And how do you need to communicate it? Your answers will dictate how your customers and community see you, as well as how your staff, partners and vendors view, and interact with, your organization.

A thought to ponder: It all starts with your story and those of your customers, so think about how you can tap into this extensive reservoir of life experience to tell it. Real people, real images and a real story, told in appropriate language, equal real results.

7. Places: Environments must be constructed to enable multiple functional abilities

The environment(s) that we build or live in are vital to enhancing our quality of life and our life experiences. Environments can encourage, or discourage, people of all ages to lead an active, engaged life.^{22,23,24} When it comes to creating compelling environments for your older consumer, think about how to design and build them so they are

inclusive of all people and their abilities. Remember principle one: diversity of populations.

One place to start is with a visioning process. Bring together your staff, consumers, vendors and key partners to share their thoughts on your current or proposed settings, and what they feel will make the environment more compelling. Many times it can be the little things that make a difference. From the colors you choose, to ease of use, and creativity to inclusiveness, how you incorporate details matters.

Another strategic approach is to hire a group of older adults to visit your current place of business and those of your competitors. Ask them to write down what they liked and what they did not. Did the lighting make it easy to see? How were the bathrooms and locker rooms? Did the front desk, fitness areas, café, and so on enhance the experience or detract from it, and why? What would they change to make the environment more engaging? Once you have gained this market intelligence, create a large storyboard where recommendations,

pictures and more can be placed in full view of your staff. (A meeting room or office area is the best location.) Start the process of improvement, and don't stop until you have addressed everything on the board. Then ask the same group to walk through your location again. What are their reactions now? This simple method can help you create a compelling, inclusive, and ageless environment for your business.

A thought to ponder: Environments provide experiences, good and bad, and good experiences create memories that bring consumers back. How will you make your environment(s) compelling?

8. Policies: The human rights of older adults should be protected

In late 2001 and 2002 the United Nations, the World Health Organization and ICAA defined the concept of active aging.^{25,26} Since then, there has been a solid stream of research, conferences, and initiatives that have driven policy change around the world pertaining to active aging. A recent example is the 65th World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, where a key resolution was passed. This resolution highlighted "strengthening" noncommunicable disease policies to promote active aging in the effort to ensure optimal health and well-being for older adults worldwide.²⁷

In Europe, the European Commission and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) launched the Active Ageing Index. This new statistical tool is designed to assist European Union member governments with assessing how their active-aging policies are working compared to other nations. By establishing this benchmark, countries can address where they fall short in meeting the needs of their older citizens. This Index is an example of how active aging is impacting all levels of government.²⁸

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The seven dimensions of wellness



Figure 3. The seven dimensions of wellness

Active aging embodies the philosophy that individuals can live as fully as possible within the seven dimensions of wellness. These dimensions overlap and coordinate to provide rich environments for living. Wellness becomes a valuable framework for serving the wants and needs of a person engaged in life.

Emotional

Feelings are the lens through which people view the world, and the ability to be aware of and direct one's feelings helps to create balance in life. Coping with challenges and behaving in trustworthy and respectful ways signal emotional wellness, attributes that can be encouraged through peer counseling, stress management, humor/laughter and personal histories.

Intellectual, cognitive

Engaging in creative pursuits and intellectually stimulating activities is a proven approach to keeping minds alert and interested. There are many ways to stay intellectually active, including taking college courses, journaling, painting or joining a theater company, and challenging oneself with games and puzzles.

Professional, vocational

Work that utilizes a person's skills while providing personal satisfaction is valuable for society as well as the individual. Participating in the paid and unpaid workforce means maintaining or improving skills, and helping others. Older adults contribute to society as experienced professionals, caregivers, mentors, teachers and volunteers. Leisure-time vocations in the arts and through hobbies maintain vocational skills.

Social

Social interactions with family, friends, neighbors and chosen peer groups can be valuable for maintaining health. Personal contact by joining clubs, traveling, visiting friends and family, engaging in intergenerational experiences (like making quilts with elementary school children) is beneficial for everyone involved.

Spiritual

Living with a meaning and purpose in life, guided by personal values, is key to feelings of well-being and connection

to the larger world. Group and individual faith-based activities, personal meditation, mindful exercise (yoga, tai chi) and experiencing nature can create the opportunity for spiritual growth.

Environmental

Surrounded by natural and man-made environments, good stewardship means respecting resources by choosing "green" processes that reuse and recycle goods. It also means looking at ways to bring people into the natural environment and encourage active living through urban and property designs emphasizing walking paths, meditation, vegetable gardens and similar options.

Physical

The goal of living independently is one shared by many people, and physical wellness is necessary to achieve this. Lifestyle choices that can maintain or improve health and functional ability include engaging in physical activity, choosing healthy foods with adequate nutrition, getting adequate sleep, managing stress, limiting alcohol intake, not smoking, making appointments for checkups and following medical recommendations.



In Sao Paulo, Brazil, active aging is at the center of an age-friendly state initiative.²⁹ Many other cities and regions around the world have embraced this kind of effort, joining the World Health Organization's Age-friendly Cities initiative.²⁰ In fact, countries are vying for the privilege of being the first age-friendly country in the world.

Bringing this principle back to you, what policies do you have in your organization to ensure inclusivity and respect for the rights of older adults? This includes policies for staff.

A thought to ponder: What policies can you influence within your organization, city, state or country to make a difference?

9. Programs: The seven dimensions of wellness anchor the principles

Programming possibilities for older adults are limited only by our creativity and our biases—what we believe older adults can (or should) do or not do. The essential elements in programming include the following:

- all of the seven dimensions of wellness
- adaptation for this group's diverse abilities and health issues, using functional levels
- engagement that helps customers find and fulfill their purpose in life

By implementing these three programming elements, you'll keep your customers coming back for more. Let's look at these areas in more detail.

Multidimensional wellness offers you a breadth of programming options to meet the diversity of needs, capabilities and expectations in the older-adult market. ICAA endorses seven wellness dimensions, as outlined on page 51. An overview of each dimension also appears, giving you information to help you implement or augment wellness programming. Keep in mind, though, that wellness is not singular; it is like a good wool suit—best when woven tightly together.

With the seven dimensions of wellness, it's possible to offer a multitude of life-fulfilling opportunities. The benefits can be minimized, however, if your programming does not address consumers' diverse abilities, physical and cognitive, to ensure engagement.

Referring to **ICAA's functional levels** will help you adapt your programming to meet your target group's needs. A sidebar on page 53 describes these functional levels, which are adapted from the work of Waneen Spirduso, EdD.³⁰ It summarizes the five levels of physical function, as well as the specific fitness

abilities and immediate physical needs of older adults. You'll also find programming goals and areas of focus to help you engage customers.

Finally, **engagement** in life is emerging as a critical indicator of healthy aging. Providing a menu of diverse activities for older adults is an appropriate first step in encouraging an active lifestyle. To engage older adults requires knowing each person as an individual. An exploratory process can help your staff uncover each customer's hopes, past successes and personal goals.

In 2011, an ICAA work group wrote a white paper on engagement, providing the following definition:³¹

“Engagement represents a dramatic business shift from traditional programming that is typically rooted in activity theory. Getting to know an individual's life story, desires and dreams requires more time and an additional skill set for staff. For example, an engagement approach positions program and activity directors as personal life coaches. Staff roles would shift from designing and delivering large group programs to the role of ‘engagement coach’ with the purpose of helping each client to live the life that they chose to live. Providing programs and professionals who facilitate engagement is a more complex business model than simply offering older clients things to do.”

A thought to ponder: Would it take you further than you are today if you addressed the diverse abilities of your older consumers, physical and cognitive, through an engagement strategy for the wellness experience? If so, what are you waiting for?

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Functional Levels



Figure 4. ICAA's functional levels

Athlete

Fitness: Exercises or participates in sports activity almost every day or works at a physically demanding job.

Goals: Maintain or improve fitness level.

Needs: Exercise that builds physical reserves and provides conditioning for improving performance in competition or in strenuous vocational and/or recreational activities.

Program: General conditioning in muscular strength, endurance and flexibility; agility; cardiovascular endurance. Sport- or activity-specific conditioning.

Active now

Fitness: Exercises at least twice a week and engages in physical activity most days of the week.

Goals: Maintain or improve fitness level; manage weight; improve conditions such as osteoarthritis or diabetes.

Needs: Exercise that helps build physical reserves and maintains the level of fitness to live an active, independent lifestyle.

Program: Concentrate on muscular strength, endurance and flexibility, joint range of motion, balance, co-

ordination, agility and cardiovascular endurance.

Getting started

Fitness: Engages in physical activity at least three days a week.

Goals: To live independently; manage weight; improve conditions such as arthritis or diabetes.

Needs: Exercise that helps improve physical function and develops fitness and health reserves.

Program: Focus on increasing and building reserve in muscular strength, endurance and flexibility, joint range of motion, balance, coordination and cardiovascular endurance.

Needs a little help

Fitness: Engages in physical activity three or fewer times per week. May have medical conditions and movement limitations.

Goals: Regain strength and balance; improve function and mobility; improve medical conditions.

Needs: Movement that helps maintain or improve physical function for basic self-care (Basic Activities of Daily Living), such as strength, range of motion, balance and coordination.

Program: Improve hand strength and agility, arm strength, shoulder and hip

range of motion, quadriceps and shin muscles strength, and ankle strength and range of motion.

Needs ongoing assistance

Fitness: Does not engage in physical activity.

Goals: Improve ability to perform activities of daily living.

Needs: Movement that helps maintain or improve physical function for basic self-care, including self-feeding, bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring and walking.

Program: Concentrate on activities that improve strength, range of motion, balance and coordination.

Physical activity = daily activities that increase energy expenditure, such as gardening, walking, raking leaves, playing golf, housework, washing car.


Exercise = physical activity with the intention of developing physical fitness, such as strength, cardiovascular or flexibility exercise, challenging walking, pre- or post-rehabilitation exercise.

Adapted from the work of Waneen Spirduso, EdD (Physical Dimensions of Aging, Human Kinetics).

A solid foundation for active aging

We live in a world that is increasingly growing older and more diverse. To address this shift, we too need to become more diverse in the environments we provide, the programs and products we offer, and the way we position and promote these services. We also need to create the policies and hire the staff that will allow customers to feel comfortable in our organizations. By accomplishing this, we will help change perceptions of aging among older adults and within our organizations and communities, enabling us to benefit from the full potential of this market.

The comprehensive, integrated approach described in these pages will help you build a solid foundation for your active-aging efforts, whether it's a first foray into this arena or a longtime pursuit.

The first step is always the hardest. But ICAA's Nine Principles of Active Aging are there to guide you along the way. 

Colin Milner, founder and CEO of the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA), is a leading authority on the health and well-being of the older adult. For the past five years, the World Economic Forum has invited Milner to serve on its Network of Global Agenda Councils, recognizing him as one of "the most innovative and influential minds" in the world on aging-related topics. An award-winning writer, he has authored more than 250 articles. Milner is a contributing blogger to the US Department of Health and Human Services' Be Active Your Way Blog, and has been published in journals such as Global Policy. He also contributed a chapter to the book Global Population Ageing: Peril or Promise, published by the Forum in 2011. Milner's speeches have stimulated thousands of business and governmental leaders, industry professionals and older adults worldwide, and inspired a broad spectrum of leading-edge publications to seek his insights. He hosts the Age-friendly BC Community video series

released in spring 2012 by the British Columbia Ministry of Health.

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International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

ICAA Mature Marketing Network

www.icaa.cc/membership/marketer.htm

ICAA's Changing the Way We Age® Campaign: ICAA Communication Guidelines

www.changingthewayweage.com/Media-and-Marketers-support/guidelines.htm

World Health Organization: WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (includes link to Global Age-friendly Cities and Communities Guide)

www.who.int/ageing/projects/age_friendly_cities_network/en/index.html

Multimedia

Age-friendly British Columbia: Age-friendly BC Community video series (located in "Ideas in action")
www.seniorsbc.ca/agefriendly

ICAA: Nine Principles of Active Aging video series
www.icaa.cc/activeagingandwellness/activeaging.htm

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