

Transport and Mobility

Prioritising independence

In research released by the Commissioner for Senior Victorians in 2020, nearly 5000 seniors identified eight attributes of ageing well including attitude, respect, social engagement, financial and personal security, health, autonomy and mobility. Not surprisingly, these attributes align with each of the World Health Organisation's domains that are predictors of an age-friendly environment.

The same respondents went on to explicitly identify the following barriers to ageing well:

1. Unprepared for life changing events
2. Isolation and loneliness
3. The significance of the digital divide
4. Lack of opportunities to meet their interests
5. Feeling unsafe when out in the community
6. Practical problems such as inadequate parking facilities, inadequate community transport, loss of mobility, difficulty navigating service systems to find support.

As part of Clunes Neighbourhood House's (CNH) role in the Living and Ageing Well in Hepburn project, we committed to exploring these barriers further locally. Utilising community development theories such as asset-based community development, a strengths (rather than deficit) approach and collective impact, we sought to see what issues existed and whether there was/is capacity for community-wide change. **In particular, one of the barriers we sought to explore in detail was access to transport. This is what we discovered.**

Importance of mobility access

At the commencement of the project, we anticipated that a transport service was needed to bring people to activities in the community, but we soon realised this was not the case. In a town-wide Transport Survey (with 75 respondents) more than two-thirds of the respondents said their lives would be improved if they could get around better. **Not on a bus, but independently.**

People indicated that getting around wasn't about cars, buses or trains; it was also about the location of footpaths, the quality of footpaths and even access to mobility scooter repairs. Furthermore, they stated clearly that improving local mobility – particularly for those using scooters – was their first priority.

Community members worked to better understand what change in this space might look like. This involved working with the local shire council to contribute to prioritisation of infrastructure works such as footpaths through their annual budget process. Twelve months on, many new footpaths, particularly centrally, are visible throughout the town and community members view this as a good beginning.

A detailed Transport Matters report (www.clunesnh.org/about) has been drafted identifying ongoing priorities and steps forward. These include mapping additional critical pathways that are essential links for people with mobility scooters; as well as use of public seating, water stations and shade to assist people use these paths, irrespective of their mobility or the weather. The intention is to do this in a way that allows us to work with the local council (where they can influence outcomes), as well as other development bodies such as state or federal government. The belief is that together we have the potential to build (one footpath at a time if necessary) an age-friendly environment.





Moving forward

In tackling this barrier to living and ageing well, the approach taken drew on many of the attributes of ageing well identified in the Victorian Senior Commissioner's *Ageing Well in a Changing World (2020)* report. It was an example, in action, of having the respect and being respectful, being civic minded, preserving agency and utilising connections to unpack a huge problem that significantly impacts people's lives.

The process of doing this built capacity, leaving people feeling more optimistic about their ability to achieve community-wide change. In fact, because of this work the community are already in talks with Clunes Neighbourhood House about nurturing a social enterprise to ensure better access to local mobility scooter repairs.

An exciting possibility not even considered before undertaking this project!

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