Urban programming case study: Hong Kong

Aging in Place
Model of intervention: Addressing Urban Inequality Through Targeted Housing

Country Overview of Urban Housing

Hong Kong is the most expensive property market in the world, with 25% of the population living below the poverty line. Around 220,000 people live in cramped and unhygienic subdivided housing, many waiting years for public housing. Like other developed economies, the population is aging and by 2050, Hong Kong will have the oldest population in the world. The city will also face the challenge of aging housing stock, compounded by deteriorating conditions of residential buildings in a sub-tropical climate.

Following the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines on age-friendly cities, embracing age-friendly communities would create active aging opportunities for older adults through health, participation, and security, enhancing their quality of life as they age. The WHO has identified housing as one of the eight domains necessary to provide a comprehensive view of the age-friendliness of a community.

Detailed Overview of Project Area/Problem

Habitat innovated the **Housing Plus model,** a range of person-centered, holistic approaches that starts with the older adult's needs, then builds out a solution that incorporates not only home repairs and modifications, but community resources as well. By looking at a full network of resources in addition to offering repairs and modifications, Habitat helps tailor a holistic approach for each homeowner so they can safely and securely remain in their homes as they age.

Project Intervention

In partnership with ZeShan Foundation, in June 2022, Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong launched the pilot phase of our 'Project Home Works: Aging-in-Place' programme. We worked with a local university to field test a new assessment tool to identify the needs of under-privileged elderly people living in public rental housing. We worked with a network of community-based organizations, home repair experts and local NGOs to provide appropriate home modifications to 60 grassroots households, enabling vulnerable elderly people to live in age-friendly homes through installations of handrails, bed rails, anti-slip floor treatments, flooring repairs, lighting improvements, flashing doorbells and other relevant modifications.

We subsequently launched Phase 2 of the programme in January 2024 with funding from ZeShan Foundation, Kerry Group and the Yau Family Charitable Foundation, which aims to deliver home modifications to a further 350 elderly households (benefitting around 525 elderly beneficiaries and caregivers), develop an online resource platform and campaign to raise public awareness and adoption of home modifications, and increase engagement with stakeholders in the private and social welfare sectors. Leveraging our experience as Aging in Place practitioners, we can make an impact on the NGO sector, service provision and elderly welfare policy. We can also influence the private sector to explore more inclusive senior housing solutions that cater to marginalized populations and improve accessibility in the city.

Effect on Target Groups/Communities

The age-friendliness and safety of the home environment is essential for older adults to continue to age in their home. Each year in Hong Kong, one in five individuals aged 65 or above suffers from falls, and 75% of those individuals sustain an injury, including head trauma and bone fracture. Fear of falling, declining mobility and sustained injuries can reduce their confidence, impact their mental health and overall quality of life, as well as increase the burden on caregivers, the welfare sector and public healthcare system.

This project aims to provide crucial support, helping them become more self-reliant and resilient while ensuring greater safety and comfort. The installation of features like grab bars allows older adults to feel confident, content, and cared

for. Additionally, the project positively impacts their mental well-being by reducing depressive symptoms and empowering them to thrive in the communities of their choice.

Project Innovation

Our Project Home Works programme fills a critical service and resource gap by providing cleaning, repair, renovation and modification services for vulnerable elderly people living in public rental housing. Through this programme, safe and accessible housing reflects a key social determinant of health. It increases independent living, reduces symptoms of depression and improves motivation — leading to reduced medical costs while also lessening the burden on caretakers and families. In age-friendly communities, working at the intersection of housing, with limited resources in the community, social workers, caregivers, adults with elderly parents and elderly persons with financial capacity must play a more significant role in home upgrades. They will be a key stakeholder group in Phase 2 of the Aging in Place programme. In the pilot phase, we observed a need to enhance general understanding and knowledge of the types of Aging in Place modifications and their benefits. In Phase 2, we will roll out a digital assessment tool and service model in sharing sessions with social workers from various NGO centres. The digital assessment tool will be available for anyone to complete a home assessment and receive recommendations. It will also become a versatile tool for Habitat to speak to various stakeholders about Aging in Place and present a uniform and proven workflow for social workers and volunteers to carry out Aging in Place fieldwork. We will launch an awareness-raising campaign and deliver workshops for caregivers, adults with elderly parents, and elderly persons to promote the importance of age-friendly home readiness. Our Aging in Place work in Hong Kong advances the footprints in both housing and health equity for elderly people in the Hong Kong context.

Global relevance of community-level impact

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being – By eradicating risks and discomfort of elderly people and improving home décor by renovation and modification, this project has directly contributed to ensure risk free, safe healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages reducing health risks and improving safety. The improvement in public health standards supports SDG 3, which aims for good health and well-being for all.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – The project directly contributes to SDG 11 by making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Upgrading housing and infrastructure to make them safe and sustainable is a core part of this goal.

SDG 17: Partnership: Through collaboration with different partner networks for having project implementation support, the Project Home Works: Aging-in-Place is contributing to enhance the technical skill and knowledge to strengthen capacity and revitalize partnership for sustainable development.

By addressing critical issues such as health, sustainable urban development, and partnerships, these initiatives not only improve the quality of life for vulnerable populations but also foster broader systemic change. Such programming is essential in building a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable world, ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of global progress.

Moving Forward

Target similar programmes to enhance coverage of older adults: Replicating this model more for the low-income older adults in their communities and provide personalized home repair and social services by providing comprehensive guides, strategies and data for other housing organizations to learn about and implement this evidence-based solutions that integrate housing and health support.

Promote Collaboration: To help older adults with home repairs and modifications to ensuring their safe and secure home, partner with local community services so older adults can get the holistic care they need to stay in the homes and communities they care about. Partner with community-based social organizations to include helping older adults with grocery shopping, bringing prepared meals, providing transportation for doctor visits etc.

Assessment for advancement of the programme: Develop evidence-based strategies and home repair evaluation to make specific modification features to help housing organizations, pair their home repair work with the expertise and

assistance of healthcare professionals, connecting clients with health care services and community resources, providing older adults with holistic, integrated health and housing support.

Expand Programme Coverage: Replicate the model to reach more low-income older adults in their communities by offering personalized home repair and social services. Provide comprehensive guides, strategies, and data to other housing organizations, enabling them to implement evidence-based solutions that integrate housing and health support.

Promote Collaboration: Partner with local health-care professionals and community services to ensure holistic care, enabling them to age in place in their homes and communities. Collaborate with community-based social organizations to assist with grocery shopping, meal delivery, transportation for doctor visits, and other essential services.

Advancement and Evaluation: Develop evidence-based strategies for home repair and modification assessments. Equip housing organizations with the tools to pair their work with the expertise of healthcare professionals, connecting clients to health services and community resources, and providing older adults with integrated health and housing support.

Policy and Advocacy: Advocate for the integration of housing and health policies at the local and national levels to ensure that older adults have access to safe, secure, and supportive living environments. Promote policies that encourage collaboration between housing organizations, healthcare providers, and community services to create a comprehensive, integrated approach to aging in place. Support initiatives that prioritize funding for home modifications and repairs for low-income older adults, emphasizing the importance of safe and healthy housing as a public health issue. Advocate for the development and implementation of guidelines and best practices that other organizations can adopt to replicate successful models and expand their impact.

Visual Documentation