

AGE-FRIENDLY BOSTON ACHIEVEMENTS

Year 1



Mayor Martin J. Walsh
Commission on Affairs of the Elderly

CITY of BOSTON

“We are committed to making Boston the best place to live and age well.”

-MAYOR MARTIN J. WALSH

For more info, visit: [Boston.gov/age-friendly](https://www.boston.gov/age-friendly)

INTRODUCTION

The Age-Friendly Boston initiative was launched in 2014 when Mayor Walsh joined the network of the [World Health Organization](#) age-friendly cities through AARP, the United States affiliate. The Age-Friendly framework focuses on eight domains: Civic Engagement and Employment, Communication and Information, Community Support and Health Services, Housing, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Respect and Social Inclusion, Transportation, and Social Participation.

In May of 2017, the City of Boston's [Commission on Affairs of the Elderly \(the Elderly Commission\)](#) released the Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan to address some of the issues expressed during the community listening sessions held throughout Boston. In addition to the domains, we are shining a spotlight on the increasingly pressing issues of dementia, economic security, and social isolation.

Here is the work accomplished during the first year, in partnership with city departments, nonprofit organizations, community members, and local advocates.

KEYWORDS:

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) developed the Age-Friendly City Framework in 2005, identifying the development of age-friendly communities as a key goal worldwide. Since then, 380 cities and towns across 37 countries have joined the WHO in their efforts towards creating an age-friendly world.¹ In the United States, AARP functions as the affiliate organization to facilitate age-friendly efforts.

THE COMMISSION ON AFFAIRS OF THE ELDERLY (referred to as the Elderly Commission) is a city department charged with connecting Boston's older residents to resources and information about government benefits and programs, housing, transportation, advocacy, volunteer opportunities and social engagement. In addition, the Commission administers and monitors grant funding to Boston nonprofit organizations that support older residents and those who care for them.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- In collaboration with the UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging, Operation A.B.L.E. and the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, we examined the barriers to employment for older workers, and created an Employment Guide detailing the current workforce training programs and career development opportunities for older workers.
- Some people told us they do not always know how to engage with elected leaders to influence change. In response, we launched the Age-Friendly Boston "Civic Academy," a five session course where residents of diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods of the city came together to learn about municipal, state, and federal policy and how to become effective advocates for issues that affect them.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- As the face of communication in the digital age is rapidly changing, we have developed our first strategic Communications Plan to serve as a roadmap for messaging across all channels, including traditional and new media. We are paying particular attention to strengthening audience engagement and lifting up Boston's rich diversity of cultures and languages and the unique character of each neighborhood.
- To leverage data to advance equity within Boston, the City has implemented the use of simultaneous interpretation service (language line) within the 311 constituent center. From March 2017 to April 2018 there has been 125% growth in the number of calls and a 375% increase in the number of minutes.



+ COMMUNITY SUPPORTS AND HEALTH SERVICES

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Dementia:

- Over the last year, we reached 2,000 residents with resources about dementia and Alzheimer's disease through collaborative events such as the Meeting of the Minds, Dementia Friends training, Conversations on Dementia, Memory Screenings, and the Longest Day. Mayor Walsh has served as the Honorary Chair of the Walk to End Alzheimer's for the past three years and will be the chair again in 2018. We have reached our goal of co-hosting three memory cafes around the city, where participants enjoy activities such as art classes, tracing family trees, film screenings, etc.

Social Isolation:

- Since we know the vast majority of older residents belong to faith-based organizations, we are building relationships with churches, mosques, and synagogues with the goal of supporting isolated seniors. The first step has been to include Elderly Commission programs and services in printed bulletins of over 80 different faith-based organizations.
- We know 38% of older residents live alone and social isolation brings many additional

health risks. We have formed a social isolation coalition with city departments and community organizations in order to identify ways to intervene earlier before a resident is in crisis. We have created an online referral form to be used by the coalition and a database for tracking and targeted assistance.

Food Access:

- The Office of Food Access created a food resource map with farmers market, meal sites, food pantries, senior meal sites, SNAP Application Assistance, and affordable fruit and vegetable sources. We are promoting these maps widely through our senior partners, direct engagement, and at events. When people see them, they often say, "Wow, I didn't know that resource was right down the street!"
- In a series called "Eat to Be Well," we conducted 15 nutrition education classes in five neighborhoods, reaching 120 older adults. The March 2018 issue of *Boston Seniority* magazine highlighted nutrition resources.
- We assessed current grocery store runs provided by the Senior Shuttle and are expanding access, focusing on areas of the city where fresh fruit and vegetables are less accessible or less affordable.



HOUSING

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- The Mayor proposed and the City Council approved an increase for the work-off credit maximum for the City's Senior Property Tax Work-Off Program from \$1000 to \$1500 for 2018.
- In collaboration with the Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab and Nesterly, we launched the "Homeshare" pilot program, matching older homeowners with rooms to rent with people who need an affordable room to rent such as graduate students or other older adults. The goal is to triple the number of matches made during the pilot by September 2018.
- As part of the City's continued effort to prevent displacement, we are working with the Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab in the promotion of the Accessory Dwelling Unit pilot program.
- We launched a campaign to increase the use of the underutilized state program the Senior Circuit Breaker Tax Credit.
- We convened a workshop in Dorchester to share information about the "Village" model, an organization of residents who help one another with resources and community support so people can age in place.

OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- In partnership with the Boston Society of Landscape Architects and Design for Aging, we have developed a set of Age- and Dementia-Friendly design recommendations for new or renovated city parks and green space. In partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation, we increased coordination between the Elderly Commission and Boston Parks to bring more older adults into the community outreach process.
- We created a calendar promoting 311 that went out to 15,500 people across the City and distributed 311 information cards at community events and meetings.
- Working with the City's IT team, DoIT, we created an interactive map of current public restrooms operated by the City of Boston. For residents without a smartphone, call takers at 311 will be able to use the map to locate the closest public restroom for the caller.



WE HEARD:

“Thank you for making us feel important.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“I am delighted about this restroom map. It will allow us seniors to navigate the city more freely without fear!”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“I am very hopeful as a senior living in Boston about the direction of the Age-Friendly Action Plan.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“The Civic Academy has made me believe that my participation is valuable.”

-BOSTON RESIDENT

RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We developed a front-facing City staff training to educate employees on the unique needs of older adults, including those with dementia. The training will help empower City employees in their interactions with older adults, and help older adults receive improved service at City Hall. Training will begin in June 2018.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- An Age-Friendly walking group was added to Boston Public Health Commission's Summer Fitness Series. A total of four classes in the series are focused on senior health.
- Boston Artists-in-Residents documented oral histories of residents and taught Japanese culture at Grove Hall Senior Center and BCYF Curtis Hall.

TRANSPORTATION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- To help older adults learn ways to access public and private transportation options, we have launched "Bus Buddies," a volunteer program to help residents navigate transportation options. Each bus buddy and older adult will ride the transit system together and afterwards, discuss the trip.
- The Elderly Commission launched a partnership with the MBTA to expand access to the Senior CharlieCard.
- We are modernizing the Senior Shuttle, which includes the purchase of four new accessible vehicles. 66% of our fleet is now wheelchair accessible. We also secured funding from the city and the state for new scheduling software.
- We expanded the use of audible crosswalk signals and longer walk times, particularly in senior-dense neighborhoods. Between March 2017 and March 2018, 48 crosswalks have been made audible.
- In partnership with WalkBoston and many other city departments, we completed "walk audits" in Mattapan Square, East Boston and the South End. Older adults were involved in all of the walks, assessing quality of sidewalks, length of crosswalk time, safety, and availability of benches.
- As part of the Vision Zero task force, we elevated senior safety concerns with the Transportation Department.
- The purchase of additional benches has been earmarked in the Mayor's recommended 2019 budget. We will work to determine the best locations for these benches within the two pilot neighborhoods and beyond while paying close attention to bench equity across the city.

IN CONCLUSION:

Boston is a vibrant city because of the diversity of cultures, perspectives and ages. We will continue to lift up the needs of the older community in the years to come, recognizing that when we do, people of every age benefit and are lifted up too. And we will continue to grow and benefit from the experience and knowledge of our older residents. Their contributions strengthen our neighborhoods and add value to residents of all ages.

We look forward to continuing our work with our partner agencies as we focus on year 2 of our action plan implementation.

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