



Testimony presented before the
United States Senate Special Committee on Aging

**Aging With Community:
Building Connections that Last a Lifetime Hearing**

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Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Casey, and members of the Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for the work you are doing. My name is Anamarie Garces, and I am a founding member of the Miami-Dade Age-Friendly Initiative and am co-founder and CEO for Urban Health Partnerships, one of the lead partners of the initiative. The Miami-Dade Age-Friendly Initiative is a collective impact effort focused on policy, systems, and environmental changes toward creating a community for all ages and abilities where older adults can stay active, engaged, and healthy with dignity and enjoyment. It is led by a diverse group of partners including AARP Florida, the Alliance for Aging, Health Foundation of South Florida, Miami-Dade County, Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization, United Way of Miami-Dade, and Urban Health Partnerships along with an advisory committee of over 50 key stakeholders and community members.

Miami-Dade is the most populous county in Florida and home to over 2.6 million people. It is also home to the largest population of older adults age 60 and over in Florida, which is more than half a million people. That number is expected to rise by more than 50% to over 800,000, by 2040. Miami-Dade is large and sprawling with a diverse population. 67% of the County identifies as Hispanic and most who are bilingual speak Spanish.

Miami-Dade has identified age-friendly as an important approach to reducing social isolation and addressing how we can build a community that supports the wants and needs of older adults.

It recently joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities, making it the fifth largest community in the country to join the network.

The WHO domains of livability can be broken up into two categories, the built environment, or the environment we can see and touch, such as housing, streets, parks, and infrastructure; and the social environment, such as the opportunities, support and services, that are available. Both are important and interdependent. Miami-Dade has focused on the built environment first recognizing that if services or opportunities for social engagement are available, but residents do not have access or do not feel safe accessing them, it will isolate them from the resources and individuals that they need.

Some of the age-friendly strategies that have been implemented in Miami-Dade include:

AGE-FRIENDLY POLICIES IN TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNITY HEALTHY AND DESIGN AND LAND USE

- Ensuring older adults were included in policies and performance measures by updating Miami-Dade's Comprehensive Development Master Plan and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). For example, the LRTP includes an objective to promote transportation improvements that provide for the needs of the elderly and disabled.

AGE-FRIENDLY PARKS

- As a partner in the initiative, the Parks, Recreation & Open Spaces department helped identify and incorporate age-friendly parks standards in several parks in Miami-Dade.
- In addition to physical amenities and features in the parks, they also provide Active Older Adults programming. These include programs such as Enhance Fitness, the Walk4Life Walking Program, and Thai Chi Classes for older adults.
- A toolkit demonstrating physical amenities to ensure access, safety, and comfort within parks as well as evidence-based programs was produced.

AGE-FRIENDLY AWARENESS

- We hold summits, workshops, and events for community leaders, municipal staff and stakeholders on the importance of respecting and including older adults in planning housing, transportation, and parks projects.

AGE-FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOODS & STREETS

- In 2012, our Safe Routes to Age in Place project was launched to empower older adults in Little Havana to recognize their needs and identify changes to improve safety within their neighborhood. Little Havana, or La Pequeña Habana, was recently named a national treasure. It is a diverse neighborhood in Miami-Dade known for its Cuban-American residents and is home to immigrants from across Central America and the Caribbean. Little Havana was chosen because of these factors and because it has a high proportion of older adults living in the area, a high proportion of households without a car, and a disproportionate number of pedestrian injuries in the area. Participants engaged in educational workshops, led a walking audit, and led a discussion with elected officials and transportation agencies to advocate for the changes they wanted to

see. We also developed an Advisory Committee to provide input to the Florida Department of Transportation Little Havana Pedestrian Safety Study.

- Today, there is a lot happening in Little Havana toward safer, complete streets for everyone on a broader scale.
- There are specific built environment designs that impact the willingness and ability of older adults to get outside, interact with their community, and prevent isolation. Older adults struggle with sharing walkways with bicyclists. On busy corridors such as Calle 8, or 8th street, in Little Havana, seniors expressed their concern with trying to walk or get out of their homes because they fear cyclists on sidewalks, participants said, “Pasan a todo dan sin timbre or corneta.” *English translation: “People pass at high speeds without a bell.”* Another adult added, “De todas formas deben de ponerles a las bicicletas su propia linea porque aqui hay muchas personas que no oyen bien.” *English translation: “By all means bicyclists should have their own lane since older adults have a hard time hearing.”* These features are currently being considered in the redesign of current thoroughfares in their community.
- Another important piece is access to transit. In a recent interview with a community resident, she said the Golden Passport was important to her family. When her elderly father came to the realization that he was no longer able to drive around Miami-Dade, the Golden Passport allowed him to give up his keys. Miami-Dade's Golden Passport program, provides free bus passes for adults 65+. Due to the program, he was able to get out and enjoy the last years of his life with dignity and support.
- Another aspect is shade. Utilizing a Digital Laser Infrared Thermometer Temperature Gun it was determined that shaded bus stops were 10-20 degrees less hot than non-shaded bus stops in Miami-Dade County. The average temperature in Miami is 82 degrees year round. Due to concrete or a heat island effect that is created at bus stops without shades, older adults can experience temperatures of more than 100 degrees, while waiting at their stops.

AGE-FRIENDLY BUSINESS

- The Safe Routes to Age in Place Advisory Committee recommended an Age-Friendly Business District, so we developed one. Older adults told us that once they had safer streets, a financial incentive, and places to go, they would be motivated to walk more. Initially, 25 businesses provided purchasing incentives for older adults to walk every Tuesday to their stores within a quarter-mile of the target location.
- A Toolkit was developed to help other communities and businesses implement age-friendly strategies.

AGE-FRIENDLY SURVEY & ACTION PLAN

- Today, the Initiative is continuing its work by surveying and engaging the community to update its action plan and identify next steps.

An age-friendly community is called age-friendly and not senior-friendly because the strategies used are not only good for older adults, but for everyone, from the very young, to the very old. The same curb cut or ramp that may be added to ensure a wheel chair can get onto a sidewalk, is the same one that can make it easier for me to push my son in his stroller. Extra time added to a crossing signal can help ensure that an older adult, or anyone, won't lose their footing if they try to rush across the street too quickly.

A walkable community with safe streets and places that people want to utilize is good for the economy, encourages active transportation and physical activity, empowers older adults to access resources, and offers more opportunities to socialize and engage with the community. This is a long-term approach to addressing isolation where the community is built or modified to facilitate access, engagement, and opportunity.

We need your continued leadership to ensure age-friendly, livable communities are a priority in cities, to help build infrastructure that works for all ages and connects us to our resources and to our citizens, and to ensure aging continues to be in the conversation in all aspects of decision-making as we build the policies and plans for the future of our country.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and to share some of the strategies Miami-Dade is using to connect the community and to plan for our aging population. I welcome your questions.