

Housing as a Prescription for Brain Health: Reimagining Dementia Care Beyond the Clinic— International Models Informing a Canadian Policy Framework

Jeya Thayaparan, MD, FRCPC^{1,2} • Jhon Mark Cana, BSc Candidate¹ • Nirusha Thavarajah, PhD³ •
Dr. Alejandra Villalobos, MD⁴ • Pam Baxter, PhD⁵

Homes • Communities • Brain Health • Healthy Aging • A Stronger Canada

BACKGROUND

- Dementia care has traditionally centred on diagnosis, medication management, specialist services, and crisis-driven healthcare. Yet, cognitive health, independence, and quality of life are also shaped by the physical and social environments in which people live.
- Canada is entering an era of unprecedented population aging. Aging is frequently accompanied by increasing risks of frailty, falls, mobility limitations, cognitive impairment, and dementia, which can contribute to emergency department use, hospitalization, caregiver burden, long-term care needs, and healthcare expenditure.
- Rather than waiting for frailty or cognitive decline to make existing environments unsafe, Canada has an opportunity to prepare homes and communities for aging before crisis occurs. Senior-friendly and dementia-ready housing may provide a population-level platform for brain health promotion, fall prevention, supported independence, aging in place, and potentially reducing avoidable healthcare utilization.

OBJECTIVE

To examine selected international models of senior-friendly and dementia-supportive communities and identify transferable principles for the development of a Canadian Senior-Friendly Dementia-Ready Community Framework.

METHODS

A comparative conceptual and policy analysis using four complementary approaches:

	Canada Age-friendly communities and seniors' campus models		Housing design
	Netherlands Dementia-village approach		Dementia-inclusive design features
	Denmark Senior co-housing model		Health-system integration
	Japan Community-based integrated care system		Social connection
			Caregiver support
			Prevention
			Technology
			Applicability to Canada

INTERNATIONAL MODELS – KEY FEATURES AND LESSONS

Canada Age-friendly communities and seniors' campus models - Integrated housing-health ecosystems - Connection to primary care, recreation, social services and caregiver support - Opportunities to scale senior-friendly standards	Netherlands Dementia-village approach - Dementia-inclusive environments - Familiar neighbourhood design - Meaningful daily routines - Promotes autonomy, identity, dignity and participation	Denmark Senior co-housing model - Social connection by design - Independent living with shared spaces - Community participation - Addresses social isolation	Japan Community-based integrated care system - Integrated community care and technology - Links healthcare, long-term care, prevention and housing - Supports aging within familiar communities
---	--	--	--

PROPOSED CANADIAN BRAIN HEALTH COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK



KEY MESSAGE

Reform housing policy so senior-friendly housing is mandated for all new developments, and provide financial support to renovate existing homes so they become senior-friendly.

CONCLUSION

Housing should be recognized not only as a social determinant of health but also as an important and potentially modifiable platform through which brain health, dementia prevention, supported independence and healthy aging can be advanced at a population level.

AFFILIATIONS

- Bridging Futures Canada Society, Ontario, Canada
- University Health Network and University of Toronto, Canada
- McMaster University, Ontario, Canada
- University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- St. Joseph's Health Care, Ontario, Canada

RESULTS – FOUR COMPLEMENTARY PRINCIPLES

- Integrated housing-health ecosystems**
Connect housing with primary care, recreation, social services, caregiver support and continuing care.
- Dementia-inclusive environments**
Familiar neighbourhood design and supportive environments
Promote autonomy, identity, dignity and participation.
- Social connection by design**
Independent living with shared spaces and community participation addresses social isolation.
- Integrated community care and technology**
Links healthcare, long-term care, prevention, housing and technology to support older adults within familiar communities.

HOUSING BARRIERS: BATHROOM SAFETY



HOUSING BARRIERS: STAIRS



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Develop and evaluate a Canadian Senior-Friendly and Dementia-Ready Housing Standard incorporating:
 - Universal accessibility and dementia-inclusive design
 - Safe mobility and fall prevention
 - Social participation
 - Healthcare access
 - Caregiver support
 - Digital connectivity
- A shift from a reactive to a preventive pathway:
 - Cognitive decline**
 - Diagnosis
 - Crisis
 - Hospitalization
 - Brain-health promotion**
 - Early risk identification
 - Community intervention
 - Supported aging

CONTACT

Corresponding Author:
Jeya Thayaparan, MD, FRCPC
Email: jeya.thayaparan@mackenziehealth.ca or bridgingfuturescanada@gmail.com