

TAKEAWAYS



Designing for

SOCIAL HEALTH AND AGING

An Executive Summary on the Impact of Aging Populations on Healthcare Environments

INSIDE YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

The importance of social health for older adults.

The definitions and characteristics of select social behavior concepts.

Design implications of social concepts.

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Remembering Social Needs

Social needs are focused on relationships with others around us. Older adults living in residential care settings frequently experience disruption in their social networks. This is especially true for new residents, making it vital that the designed environment facilitate supportive social relationships.

Several social concepts and potential design implications are highlighted in the table below. Family relationships, friendship formation, group membership, personal space, territoriality, and communication all contribute to social health among older adults.

Social Needs of Older Adults	Design Implications
Family	
Two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide care, companionship, and financial and emotional support 	1) Seating and sleeping accommodation within resident room 2) Open kitchen 3) Dining space within unit 4) Gathering spaces for large and small groups
Friendship Formation	
The creation of positive, supportive interpersonal relationships. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop based on shared interests and background Strongly influenced by opportunities for contact and proximity 	1) Centrally located common areas, elevator, or stairs provide opportunities for meeting others 2) Paths and corridors that intersect increase interaction 3) Visual access to focal points and activities can facilitate conversation
Group Membership	
Belonging to a social group with shared values or interests. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People have a tendency to affiliate in small groups (2-3 people) It is easier to communicate and understand others in smaller groups 	1) Include flexible seating arrangements in outdoor spaces, gardens, lobbies, and common areas to accommodate small groups 2) Provide small meeting spaces for organized gatherings and unplanned encounters of groups
Communication	
The person-to-person exchange of information through verbal (e.g., writing or speech) or nonverbal systems (e.g., body language or facial expressions).	1) Adequate lighting for accurate interpretation of both verbal and nonverbal communication 2) Minimize background noise and sound distortion to facilitate clear verbal communication 3) Provide seating where conversations occur 4) Signage with appropriate contrasting colors, lettering size, and font type for the aging eye



Social Needs of Older Adults	Design Implications
Territoriality	
A behavior intended to convey ownership of personal property or occupancy/ownership of an area.	1) Provide clearly defined boundaries between public and private spaces
Personal Space/Proxemics	
<p>The spacing or physical distance people choose when interacting with others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is an invisible boundary beyond which others may not come ○ Intrusion into personal space causes feelings of discomfort <p>Distances typical of people in North America when relating to others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intimate: 0-18 inches ○ Personal: 8 inches to 4 feet ○ Social: 4 to 12 feet (most social interaction occurs within this range) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) 4 to 7 feet for people who work together, and social gatherings with casual acquaintances 2) 7 to 12 feet is a more formal social distance likely to be used with strangers ○ Public: 12 to 24 feet 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Side-by-side seating hinders social interaction 2) Arrange seating in public spaces between 4 and 7 feet apart to maximize clear face-to-face communication 3) Shorter benches are used more efficiently than longer benches as people tend to use end seats, not middle seats 4) Entrances 12 feet wide or more allow for comfortable public passage



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