Understanding ageism and age-friendly communities

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The 'burden' of an ageing population

- An ageing population – and older people – are often framed as a 'problem' and 'burden'
  - Helps to fuel *ageist* stereotypes and myths
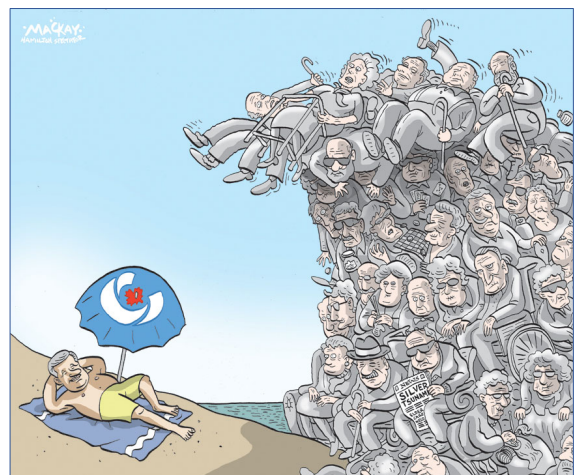 - What about opportunities and potentials?

Image: https://retiredamericans.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Silver-Tsunami.jpg

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What is ageism?

- Ageism is…
  - "… prejudice by one age group against another age group" (Butler 1969: 243)
  - "created and institutionalized by many forces – historical, social, cultural, and psychological" (Hillier & Barrow 2015: 12)
  - mostly directed at younger and older people, and profoundly impacts the lives of older people

- Based on age, ageism includes…
  - How we **think** and **feel** about people (*prejudice;* informed or influenced by stereotypes and myths)
  - How we **act** towards and **treat** people (*discrimination*)

The World Health Organization (2021) reports that globally, one in two people hold ageist attitudes

- Butler, R. N. (1969). Age-ism: Another form of bigotry. *The Gerontologist,* 9(4): 243–246.
- Butler R.N. (1975) *Why survive? Being old in America,* New York: Harper & Row.
- Hillier, S.M. & Barrow, G.M. (2015) *Aging, the individual and society,* 10th edition, Stamford, USA: Cengage Learning.
- World Health Organization (2021) Global report on ageism, Geneva: World Health Organization, https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combatting-ageism/global-report-on-ageism

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Intergenerational contact and interaction

- Breaking down structures and norms that can hinder and prevent intergenerational relations
- Promotes "the development of social cohesion, shared meaning, and cultural continuity and . . . cultural awareness" (Fletcher 2007: 11)
  - Examples: physical fitness/activity, recreational pursuits, visual and performing arts, education and training (including professional development), volunteer work, adult and child day care, visits to age-cared facilities/retirement villages, gardening, etc.

- Longer term programs work better than short term programs, but restructuring our social structures is vital

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Age friendly cities and communities (AFCCs)

- "… an inclusive and accessible community environment that optimizes opportunities for health, participation and security for all people, in order that quality of life and dignity are ensured as people age" (World Health Organization 2015: 3).

- WHO identifies eight domains for an AFCC

- World Health Organization (2007) *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide,* Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization (2015) Measuring the age-friendliness of cities: A guide to using the core indicators. Kobe: WHO Centre for Health Development. http://www.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/203830/1/9789241509695_eng.pdf?ua=1

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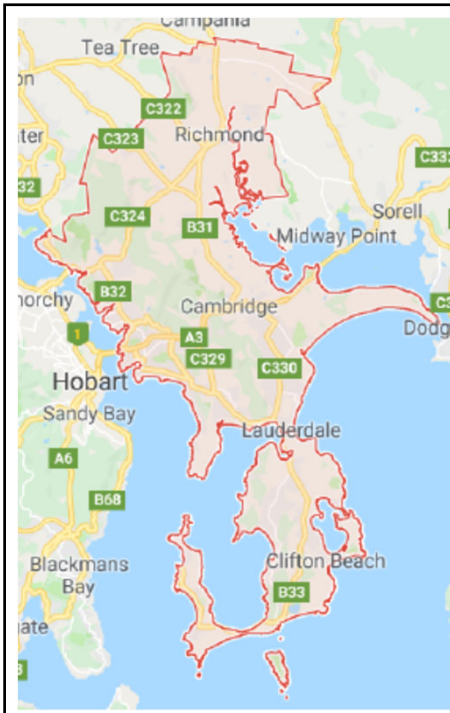Contact: Peta.Cook@utas.edu.au

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Creating AFCCs

- AFCCs should not just about 'old age', but producing environments that cater for all ages and abilities (Biggs and Carr 2015; Kendig et al. 2014)
- A top-down approach marginalises and stigmatises citizens; making them feel less valued
- Designing and implementing AFCCs needs to involve active collaboration; a 'bottom up' approach
- The WHO's eight domains should be seen as a starting point only – what is considered important by community members might be different

"The dangers of urban living are often the most salient aspects affecting the 'invisibility' of children and older adults. Historically, the planning and development of modern cities functioned largely to support productive capacities and overlooked the needs of young and old" (Biggs and Carr 2015: 102)

- Biggs, S. and Carr, A. (2015) Age- and Child-Friendly Cities and the Promise of Intergenerational Space, *Journal of Social Work Practice,* 29 (1): 99-112
- Cook, P.S. (2019) *Examining community needs and wants for an age-friendly, intergenerational city: A report for the City of Clarence,* https://www.tascomfund.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/201328/Age-Friendly-Clarence-Report-FINAL.pdf
- Kendig, H., Elias, A-M., Matwijiw, P. and Anstey, K. (2014) Developing Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in Australia, *Journal of Aging and Health,* 26 (8): 1390-1414
- World Health Organization (2007) *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide,* Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization (2015) Measuring the age-friendliness of cities: A guide to using the core indicators. Kobe: WHO Centre for Health Development. http://www.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/203830/1/9789241509695_eng.pdf?ua=1

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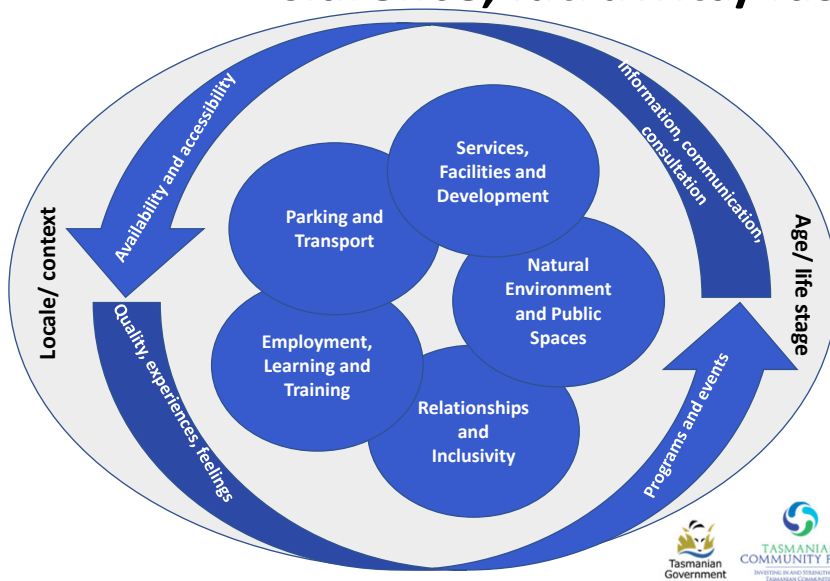# AFCC - City of Clarence, lutruwita/Tasmania

- Covers 386km^2
  - More than thirty suburbs
- 191km of coastline
  - Over twenty beaches
- Over one third is natural bushland
- Urban/residential, peri-urban, rural

- Cook, P.S. (2019) *Examining community needs and wants for an age-friendly, intergenerational city: A report for the City of Clarence*, https://www.tascomfund.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/201328/Age-Friendly-Clarence-Report-FINAL.pdf

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Intergenerational bottom up approach – City of Clarence, lutruwita/Tasmania

- Cook, P.S. (2019) *Examining community needs and wants for an age-friendly, intergenerational city: A report for the City of Clarence*, https://www.tascomfund.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/201328/Age-Friendly-Clarence-Report-FINAL.pdf

Final thoughts...

- The WHO domains of AFCCs are a starting/ thinking point only
  - Domains might be irrelevant or missing
- AFCC frameworks need to be responsive, contextualised, specific, intergenerational and inclusive
- AFCCs can help to address ageism; they are a large piece of a puzzle
  - Age friendly universities are also an important part of this puzzle

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