For the Ages: How McMaster University is becoming Age-Friendly
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2017, McMaster became the second Canadian University to join the international Age-Friendly University (AFU) network, a global body made up of higher education institutions that are committed to becoming more universally accessible. As a member of the network, McMaster is committed to working towards the 10 guiding principles of an age-friendly university (see “Background” for a list of the 10 principles).

McMaster has a robust history of building strength in aging research and knowledge translation. It currently houses several platforms focused on aging research from multiple disciplines, such as the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging (MIRA), which was established in 2016 as a means to better coordinate, facilitate and amplify research in aging across all faculties at McMaster.

To better understand the university’s current age-friendly status, MIRA research staff surveyed members of McMaster’s community (staff, faculty members, students, alumni and Hamiltonians) through online surveys and targeted focus groups.

Results from the focus groups and surveys confirmed that McMaster University has a well-developed research program focused on improving the lives of older adults and keeping people in good health as they age. Survey and focus group participants were able to identify a broad array of programs and activities at McMaster University that older adults can participate in, as well as programs that can support McMaster employees as they age and progress through their careers.

By 2030, 1 in 4 Canadians will be over 65.
Bringing older adults on campus may have positive long-term impacts on building community and decreasing social isolation.

Older adults are living longer, healthier lives. Many are looking for ways to remain active and engaged.

McMaster University aims to focus its efforts in three key areas to improve its alignment with AFU principles and continue developing the campus into a welcoming and inclusive space for people of all ages:

1. **Communications and Outreach:** McMaster University aims to ensure members of the public are made aware of relevant events on campus, including research on aging and aging-specific programming; online information must be accessible and easy to find and navigate for the public, including older adults.

2. **Accessibility and Inclusion:** McMaster University aims to ensure accessibility features on campus are installed and maintained; continue developing the experience of first-time visitors to campus; communicate the value that older adults can contribute in society and the McMaster community.

3. **Programming and Engagement:** McMaster University aims to develop educational programming that appeals to older adults and allows this group to learn about McMaster’s diverse research strengths; create new opportunities to bring older adults on campus; encourage older adults to become or continue to be part of the McMaster community as a means to support the creation of new social networks and combat social isolation.

**What does this mean for you?** Developing programming, improving access to existing programs and events at McMaster University, and ensuring our campus is a welcoming space that older adults are interested in visiting will allow the university to tap into an engaged and energetic group, as well as ensuring older adults can see themselves in the university and its programming.
BACKGROUND

The Age-Friendly University network is a global body of higher education institutions committed to being more accessible to older adults. It was developed in 2012 by Dublin City University (DCU) in Ireland as a way to address the challenges and opportunities associated with the world’s aging population.

The AFU principles identify the distinctive contributions universities can make in responding to the interests and needs of an aging population.

10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF AN AGE-FRIENDLY UNIVERSITY

1. To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs.
2. To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.
3. To recognize the range of educational needs of older adults.
4. To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
5. To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
6. To ensure that the university’s research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
7. To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.
8. To enhance access for older adults to the university’s range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
9. To engage actively with the university’s own retired community.
10. To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.