

Women in Planning APA Session: *Does Gender Matter in Planning for Aging?*

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As part of the Aging in Place track, the Women in Planning division hosted a session “Does Gender Matter in Planning for Aging?” at the National Planning Conference in Chicago this past April. The answer is a resounding “Yes” as the varied panelists used data, theory, and research to explain.

Jana Lynott, AICP, Senior Strategic Policy Advisor for AARP Public Policy Institute, established the foundation by citing key demographic data regarding the substantial growth of the senior population (% of U.S. Population 65+ growing from 12% in 2000 to 20% in 2050), and that women disproportionately carry the burden of aging. How?

- 1) Older women are more likely than older men to live alone
- 2) Older women are more likely to live in poverty due to a) a lifetime of lower earnings, and b) lower SS benefits (and greater dependence on them)
- 3) Women are more likely to provide unpaid informal caregiving for both children and elderly relatives at a value of \$304K in lost wages, SS benefits, pension, and retirement savings typically as a result of 12 fewer years in the workforce

Another specific area where older women struggle is transportation. More older women than older men have never driven and more have ceased driving; and with married couples of all ages, typically the man drives the majority of the time. All of these scenarios result in older women’s dependency on others for transportation and access to community services. Ms. Lynott provided planning solutions such as

- Investing in and coordinating specialized human services transportation
- Complete Streets
- Integrating land use and transportation planning through mixed use development like TOD
- Investing public transportation service and education

in order to address the reality of imbalance of women's needs and informal caregiving burdens.

Laura Keyes, AICP, cited the structure and solutions of the Atlanta Regional Communities Lifelong Communities Aging Services Division, of which she was managing director.

Beginning with three overarching goals from the ARC's Lifelong Communities program:

- *Various housing options:* for different living situations, locations, and budgets
- *Strategies for mobility:* expand current transportation options, utilize existing untapped resources, increase connectivity, create safer roadways
- *Opportunities for healthy lifestyle:* exercise, community gardens, farmer's markets, health services

Ms. Keyes explained that addressing housing, mobility, and health, combined with information on these services, enables the population to make informed and meaningful choices.

The role of housing design as a variable in health and aging was further developed by Esther Greenhouse, M.S., CAPS, an Environmental Gerontologist. Ms. Greenhouse explained how the design of housing and the community can place older individuals at artificially lower levels of functioning, thereby increasing their dependence on informal and formal services. Enabling design which respects age-related needs can reduce environmental stress and raise seniors to greater levels of independence. In order to realize this, planners must be aware of environmental fit and promote enabling design for both new and retrofit construction, as well as eliminating zoning barriers which do not reflect current living situations such as multiple generations under one roof, several unmarried seniors plus a caregiver living together, different generations living in a main house and accessory dwelling unit on the same property. Street design with longer cross signals, crosswalks, and refuge medians, providing seating and shade, are features which enable greater independence and ease access to community services.

Fortuitously, these features raise the functioning all ages and abilities, thereby benefitting the entire community. This signifies a new era in planning where a *multigenerational* approach is key, according to Mildred Warner, Ph.D., Professor of City & Regional Planning, Cornell University. Because gender *does* matter in planning for aging, and it matters not only for older women, but for the younger female caregivers in their lives, it is informative to look from the perspective of the caregiving sandwich generation in the middle. How does community meet her needs for access to work, child care, senior care, and enable those in the generations above and below her to be more independent? Dr. Warner demonstrated the overlap of UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities and WHO's Age-Friendly Cities including civic participation, exploitation/respect, housing, safe streets, outdoor spaces. The three challenges for planners are to 1) foster individual independence (via inclusive design), 2) promote formal services (market and government), and 3) provide supports for informal networks (family, friends, and neighbors). As formal services contract due to budgetary crises, the demand for informal care rises at an unidentified cost to society. Inclusive design of housing and communities can serve as an intermediary. Dr. Warner's framework for planners is to apply a multigenerational lens to both services and inclusive design resulting in an enabling environment where full capacity can be achieved.

For more information and resources in the form of issue briefs, articles, and power point presentations, visit Dr. Warner's [*Planning Across Generations*](#) website.