

Design for an ageing society

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J. Barratt. Design for an ageing society. Gerontechnology 2007; 6(4):188-189. The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) has been representing the needs of millions of older persons for almost 35 years. Designing for an ageing society will be the focus of its 2008 world event in Montréal, Canada.

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No time is more urgent than now, to improve the quality of life of people as they age. The United Nations together with the World Health Organization are demanding that governments, the private sector and civil society respond to the call for action to design environments that 'enable and support' all ages but specifically those who are vulnerable and disempowered through poor physical, social, economic, personal, behavioural and service environments. Never before in the history of the world is the connection between design and ageing more important and relevant to us as individuals and the global community.

The IFA (International Federation on Ageing) is an international non-governmental organisation founded in 1973, with its headquarters in Montréal, Québec. The Federation represents the needs of over 45 million older people in 62 countries around the world, through its membership base of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the corporate sector, government and individuals¹. The Federation has been a strong advocate for older people during its 34-year history. At the First and Second World Assemblies on Ageing in Vienna (1992) and Madrid (2002), IFA called on governments to address global ageing issues including poverty, health and well-being, abuse and neglect, discrimination

and ageism, and gender. Social research provides the Federation with relevant, up to date information on the situation of older people, and works with all sectors responding to the voices of older people.

In this respect, gerontechnology has a significant role to play in the development of age-related policy, supporting and encouraging individual and community vitality and independence. The IFA believes that everyone deserves a good quality of life as they age. With this in mind, IFA has identified three key policy areas, where governments can act to provide positive environments that enable older people to live with dignity and fulfillment: (i) age discrimination, (ii) supporting older people through engagement, and (iii) social and financial protection.

Age discrimination can be seen in all aspects of society; there is age discrimination within government, within the private sector, and within the community. Some age differentiation can be useful and is generally accepted, such as primary education for the 'young' and pensions for the 'old'. However, many forms of age discrimination are harmful and counterproductive. 'Casual ageism' is among the most common and glaring examples of age discrimination. This refers to the general negative perception of older people and their posi-

tion in society; key examples are ignoring older people, dismissing their needs, or stereotyping.

The IFA recognises that health and activity are life-long commitments, and should be as much a priority for older people as they are for the younger generation. The average lifespan around the world is rising, resulting from general improvements in health and quality of life; this is a tremendous achievement. Having a positive quality of life requires secure living environments, social connectedness, access to the necessities of life including health and social care, and information about healthy lifestyles and activity. Governments can support productive lifestyles for people as they age through policy initiatives that facilitate healthy, active and involved lifestyles and promote a positive vision of older people as productive members of society.

References

1. www.ifa-fiv.org/en/accueil.aspx; retrieved September 20, 2007
2. www.expoageing.com/2/home.html; retrieved September 20, 2007

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is proud to treat these and other issues at the IFAs 9th Global Conference which has special emphasis of the impact of design on ageing in Montréal, Canada in September 2008², scheduled shortly after the International Conference of the ISG in Pisa, Italy³. The aim of this event is to bring together leading designers, manufacturers, academics, service providers, planners, developers, and governments from all parts of the world to showcase their products and innovative policies.

In future events it could also be a venue for corporate, government and civil society to foster partnerships, discuss licensing and trade agreements, and develop export opportunities that respond to generational and cultural nuances of communities around the world.

3. <http://www.isg08.org/>; retrieved September 20, 2007