

28 February 2022

**Submission to the New South Wales Government's Department of Planning, Industry and Environment regarding the Design and Place State Environmental Planning Policy 2021**

We are an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Western Sydney University and University of Technology Sydney, and community representatives, advocating for the recognition and inclusion of age and dementia-friendly community design principles in the Design and Place State Environmental Planning Policy (DP SEPP) 2021.

Inclusive, enabling, and supportive cities are fundamental to wellbeing, especially in ageing and culturally diverse regions like South Western Sydney. Here, over 16,462 people live with dementia, and this figure will triple to 52,059 within the next 30 years unless there is a medical breakthrough<sup>1</sup>. This region is also expected to have the highest increase in dementia prevalence in all of NSW by 2050<sup>1</sup>. Many of our cities in New South Wales are grappling with an ageing population and a tsunami of dementia cases with it.

Dementia is an incurable and a terminal condition that can affect memory, behaviour, personality, vision, and mobility; disabilities that are exacerbated by socially and physically unsupportive communities<sup>2</sup>. The challenges and needs of older adults, and especially people living with dementia, continue to be inadequately considered in governmental policies. This was evidenced in our recent review of local government policies and plans across the South Western Sydney region (a project funded by Western Sydney University and [Maridulu Budyari Gumal SPHERE](#) Healthy Urban Environments Collaboratory. Our team identified that:

- Strategies for the design of accessible and inclusive indoor and outdoor environments had not been optimised for people with cognitive impairments like dementia
- Physical disabilities continue to drive action on accessibility, navigation, and wayfinding; a prevalent issue in many cities and countries<sup>2</sup>
- State government directives or policies need to lead by example and encourage local governments to effectively implement supportive and enabling initiatives that follow dementia-friendly community design principles

The DP SEPP represents as an opportunity for the state government to implement recommendations that would encourage proactive planning and action from local governments to support their ageing populations. This can be achieved by:

- Referring to, and encouraging the uptake of, the World Health Organization's Age Friendly City toolkit and/or the promotion of their six active ageing domains – namely: outdoor spaces and buildings; transport; social participation; respect and inclusion; community and health services; and housing<sup>3</sup>
- Reflecting on, and adopting, the UK's urban policies for dementia-friendly neighborhood design principles<sup>4</sup>:
  - Familiarity through the maintenance of key landmarks and structures in cities
  - Legibility through clear, appropriately coloured, and placed signage
  - Distinctiveness through varied urban architecture

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- Accessibility by ensuring primary and secondary services are within close proximity of housing
- Comfort by providing adequate seating and shelter in public spaces and transport areas
- Safety by having non-slip paths, pedestrian crossings, and floors inside facilities
- Incorporating appropriate mechanisms for consultation with, and/or representation from the dementia community and organisations that support people with dementia – such as Dementia Australia – in planning/design panels<sup>5</sup>
- Encouraging planners and alike to undertake dementia-related design training and education, as offered through Dementia Training Australia<sup>6</sup>
- Promoting and participating in multisectoral collaboration between planners, academic institutions, health care decision-makers, and advocacy groups

Government-led policy interventions are urgently needed to effectively address the health expenses and morbidity associated with dementia<sup>2</sup>. Designing urban spaces and cities that are optimised for wellbeing, ageing in place, and active living for people with dementia can have beneficial effects on the wider community. This should be a priority for all levels of government in Australia.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry, and Environment to optimise community wellbeing.

Sincerely,

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