

# Walkability's Impact on Senior Health (WISH)

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The primary aim of this 24 month exploratory study funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research of the NIH is to test the two following hypotheses whose implications could have a profound effect on designing healthier urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The project team includes staff from Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA), the Asociación de Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM), the School of Public Health at Drexel University, Azavea (a company that specializes in geospatial analysis and web-based services), ThirdAge, a division of LarsonAllen, and a statistical consultant.

- 1) In a walkable neighborhood, residents will exercise more, eat healthier, and suffer from less obesity. A neighborhood is walkable when a person in reasonably good health can walk to neighborhood amenities such as a grocery store, senior center, or park, and take public transportation.
- 2) The relation between walkable neighborhoods and health outcomes will be stronger for persons age 60 and older than for younger persons. We expect this result because older persons are more likely to spend the majority of their day in the neighborhood in which they reside and therefore they will shop for food as well as engage in recreational activities in close proximity to their homes.

The hypotheses will be tested by matching geospatial information with data on health outcomes and behaviors from a representative sample of Philadelphians ages 18-100. The primary source of health-related data will be the Public Health Management Corporation Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey.

## ADDITIONAL GOALS

- 1) Walkable neighborhoods are integral to a larger agenda lead by Philadelphia Corporation for Aging called *Age-friendly Philadelphia*. The model, based on the Environmental Protection Agency's *Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging* initiative, will be tested with the same data files used to test the hypotheses.
- 2) An "Age-friendly Neighborhood" scoring system will be created using a variety of geospatial variables particular to each of the city's neighborhoods and their relation to health outcomes. The score will be used as a planning and policy tool for community planning initiatives and future research projects.
- 3) The Senior Walking Environmental Assessment Tool-Revised (SWEAT-R) protocol measures micro-level neighborhood design elements and evaluates neighborhood walkability. It will be tested in the APM community development corporation service area by older adults, who are trained to use this tool.
- 4) A design charette at APM will be conducted and will include community members of all ages and appropriate experts in a variety of fields. The results from the data analyses and SWEAT-R will be used by the attendees to recommend planning goals and to discuss possible future research collaborations.
- 5) Sharing findings with other stakeholders involved in environmental change in Philadelphia such as planning organizations, environmental advocates and government agencies is key to this project. Planning documents will be written and outreach presentations will be realized so that the findings can have the maximum impact on local efforts to improve the health of all Philadelphians.
- 6) Scientific and policy papers will be written based on the results of the hypotheses tests, the SWEAT-R data collection, and the *Age-friendly Philadelphia* analysis to share findings that may benefit other communities.
- 7) Other types of planning projects and research studies designed to enhance our understanding of the impact of the physical and social environments on the health of older adults will be developed.

## RESEARCH TEAM

The entire research team will be involved with the hypotheses tests, which rely especially on PCA's Chris Hoffman and consultant Mort Kleban's expertise in data analysis. PCA's Lauren Ring and Azavea's Tamara Manik-Perlman and Robert Cheetham will lead the GIS portion. The test of the Age-friendly model will be conducted by the PCA team. As part of the *Age-friendly Philadelphia* agenda, Kate Clark (Co-Investigator) will work with organizations city-wide to facilitate the translation of this information into policy and planning objectives. Drexel's Yvonne Michael (Co-Investigator) will direct the use of SWEAT-R. The design charette will be developed by Rachel B. Cohen of Third Age, and Rose Grey and Cheryl Pope of APM. Glicksman will lead the reporting of overall findings, Michael will publish the results of SWEAT-R, and Clark will publish the policy and planning implication findings.