1st Round
Please tell us more about the model of age friendly communities and please share some example of Age friendly communities.

- An age friendly environment is one that fosters healthy and active ageing; it supports people as the age in whatever environment that they may live.
- The concept and approach of Age Friendly Communities was developed by the World Health Organisation in 2007, that saw the release of the Age Friendly Cities Guide. This was following a pilot project that involved over 30 communities from around the globe testing the methodology.
- In 2010 the WHO established the Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities.
- Since this time over 1300 communities from 47 countries have formally joined this Network representing over 298 million people. There are 18 Affiliate Members which includes sub-national, national, regional and International bodies.
- The model identifies 8 domains, or key elements that impact an older person’s life, and include Housing; Transportation; Outdoor spaces and buildings; Community Support and Health Services; Civic Participation and Employment; Communication and Information; Social Participation; and Respect and Social Inclusion.
- Critical to this way of working is the engagement of older people and their views are sought on each of these domains. From this consultation a community can build a plan to identify priorities to respond to the challenges and opportunities identified by the older people.
- The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing also identifies Age Friendly Communities as an Action Area.

Examples:
- In this process it’s important to looks at what are we already doing in communities.
- It is common for municipalities to often have existing plans or approaches to various community issues – for example with Emergency Management – are there already considerations for the needs of older people? With the planning for public spaces is there already good seating provided, and public toilets? Are there good pedestrian paths that older people can use? Is the public transport accessible? These sorts of elements are all age friendly. We also say what benefits older people benefits everyone – path networks help parents get around with prams etc.
- Often older people identify that they want ways to come together to connect through Clubs or activities – these may also be happening in communities. This can give opportunities to provide information to older people or to strengthen these existing networks that older people have.
- In Australia as an example, there is the concept of Men’s Shed’s where older men can gather and repair items, work with wood building objects, and very importantly a place to come and connect – shown to be very beneficial to their mental health.
• Another example is Mall Walking groups – where ever there are large shopping malls this can happen, groups of older people walk early in the morning before most of the shops open, for exercise and for social connection. Sometimes other activities like Tai Chi are also included.

• Telehealth or telemedicine really appeared during COVID and has provided an assessable way for those older people with access to technology a way to connect with medical professionals

• Age Friendly programs or approaches don’t have to be costly – another example is Memory Café’s, that are popular in many places, providing a place for older people with dementia and their carers to meet informally, and to also access information. Generally this may be at an existing café where people who attend purchase their own refreshments.

2nd Round

What process have you been engaged with in the planning of an age friendly community?

• The key part of the process is consultation with older people. It’s helpful to involve their carers where appropriate, and also any service providers. This can be simply meeting with older people, hosting workshops/forums, or surveys can also be used. The aim is to hear the voices of older people and use what ways may work in your place. It’s important to try and include different groups of older people, and not only those that may have resources to attend or participate in the consultation.

• It can be useful to use the resource of existing networks of older people if you have such groups already developed, or use place where older people may gather. Some communities have recruited older people as “Ambassadors” to assist with the consultation and the ongoing AF work.

• The Age Friendly process asks Older people to respond to what is working well with each Domain, and where there may be challenges or opportunities for improvement. Domains include those realms of Housing; Transportation; Outdoor spaces and buildings; Community Support and Health Services; Civic Participation and Employment; Communication and Information; Social Participation; and Respect and Social Inclusion;

• The engagement then informs the planning you may develop for your community and its useful to identify priority Domains and develop actions to respond to the challenges

Where do you start?

• Age Friendly work usually rests with a municipality or local government so it critical to get the support of Mayors or community leaders, and of senior staff in these organisations. NGO’s can also partner with such organisations too.

• There is guidance through the WHO Global Network Age Friendly Cities and Communities, including mentoring programs

What are some of the key takeaways and lessons from it?
If we are serious to address the challenges our aging populations face, then the model of Age Friendly Communities which is evidence based, and already used in over 1400 communities across the world is a good start. Using this model I have noticed that across countries we can share the same language which is very helpful, it manages to unite us and bring us together with this work.

It’s important to look at what is already happening in your cities and communities, look for ways to encourage collaboration between municipalities and NGO’s. Collaboration supports sustainability of any programs that may be instigated as a result of the Age Friendly planning.

It has also been very helpful to develop networks of those communities using Age Friendly Communities practices, where we can support and learn from each other. Networks can be local or regional. The Network I belong to in Western Australia comes together at least 2-3 times a year for Forums or workshops regarding different elements of this work.

The WHO Global Network online includes many examples from very diverse communities of work that they are doing, and contacts that can provide guidance.

We say that Age Friendly Communities not only benefits older people but the whole community.