

# ADULTS AGING WITH LONG-TERM PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

## IDENTIFYING BUILT ENVIRONMENT FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

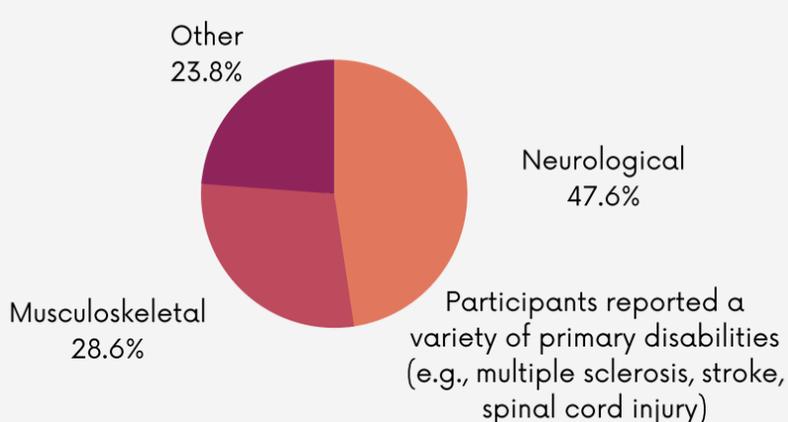
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### OVERVIEW

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 adults aging with long-term physical disabilities (AAwPD) to explore their perceptions of how the built environment influences their ability to participate in meaningful and intrinsically social activities outside the home.

### PARTICIPANTS

Our sample was comprised of a diverse group of participants based on race, primary disability, and socioeconomic status.



43% of the sample identified as Black/African American, and 90% lived in an urban area

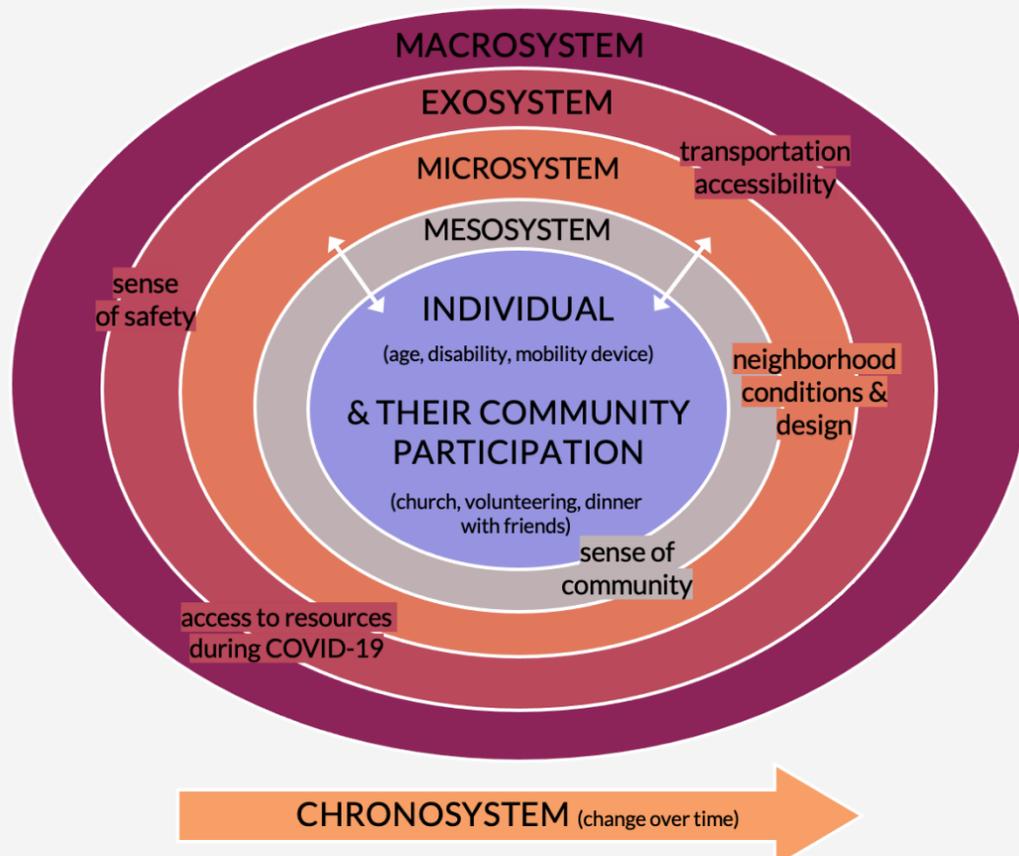


### THEMES

Participants described sense of **safety**, accessibility of **transportation**, **neighborhood conditions** and **design**, sense of **community**, and **access to resources**, **spaces**, and **support** during COVID-19 as influential to their community participation.

### GUIDED BY BRONFENBRENNER

The five themes can be mapped onto an adapted version of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



### REFERENCES

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

# THEMES & QUOTES

PARTICIPANTS' THOUGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES WERE CATEGORIZED INTO FIVE THEMES\*:

## SENSE OF SAFETY



**Definition:** anticipating physical or emotional harm when leaving one's home

"Just like any other parts in the city. Here we go, drugs and guns. That's one of the main reasons why I don't really get out."



## TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY

**Definition:** access and usability of public or private transportation

"I can't go someplace 'cause I can't lift the scooter out, so I can't just go shopping with my sister or hang out with friends. You know, I'm limited to everything"

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS & DESIGN



**Definition:** integrity and maintenance of streets and sidewalks, land use mix, physical or social disorder, etc.

"We have no sidewalks for disabled people. There's nothing here for disabled people. The sidewalks are bumpy, there's cracks in them. It's hard—a lot of times I have to ride in the street, which is dangerous for me."



## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

**Definition:** experience of neighborhood or community belongingness

"Everyone does their own thing. I don't feel a sense of community because we are not in the country, but we are not in the city."

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES, SPACES, & SUPPORT DURING COVID-19



**Definition:** restricted access to resources and environments as a result of COVID-19 and associated public health response measures

"I can't do much of anything 'cause of Covid, so once it should be opening up it should be better for us. Volunteering, being at church, seeing other people..."

\*Themes were iteratively developed with the research team based on open coding methods and standard qualitative text analysis

# IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PROVIDERS & ORGANIZATIONS

Consider the following steps you can take to contribute to more inclusive built environments and ensure equitable community participation for adults aging with long-term physical disabilities

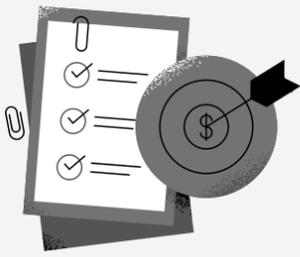
## EVALUATION

When screening or evaluating for participation restrictions, it is important to evaluate how an individual's surrounding physical and social environments may be restrictive. Ask open-ended questions that elicit detail or use established instruments such as the Craig Hospital Inventory for Environmental Factors (CHIEF) that can serve as a starting point for further conversation.



## INTERVENTIONS

Individuals aging with long-term physical disabilities may benefit from interventions targeting the built environment to facilitate their community participation. The themes identified in this study pinpoint areas for intervention:



### Sense of safety:

- Prioritize pedestrian safety, walkways, and signage

### Accessibility of transportation:

- Report ADA violations to the Federal Transit Authority
- Improve reach and timing

### Neighborhood design and conditions:

- Keep sidewalks free of debris, cracks, or overgrowth
- Remove graffiti, trash, signs of vandalism

### Access to resources, spaces, and support during COVID-19:

- Develop contingency plans for future public health emergencies
- Provide remote/online resource options

### Sense of community:

- Foster neighbor interactions and relationships through community spaces, events, and online forums

## RESOURCES

STLOUIS-MO.GOV published a [list of accessible transportation options](#) for people with disabilities in the St. Louis area

The University of Washington developed an online crowdsourcing tool called [Project Sidewalk](#) to map accessibility of cities using Google Street View

ADA.gov published a [guide](#) on regulations for [accessibility of spaces for mobility device users](#)

## ADVOCACY

Our findings suggest multiple aspects of the built environment act as barriers to community participation for adults aging with long-term physical disabilities. Advocacy for inclusive design and environmental accessibility of neighborhood and community built environments may benefit this population and others with physical disabilities. Inclusion of people with physical disabilities and built environment-related disciplines in planning and development processes can also lead to more effective solutions.



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