

AGE-FRIENDLY BOSTON ACHIEVEMENTS

Year 2



AGE+

City of Boston
Age Strong Commission
Mayor Martin J. Walsh

***“We are making Boston
the best place to live and
age well.”***

-MAYOR MARTIN J. WALSH

For more info, visit: [Boston.gov/age-friendly](https://www.boston.gov/age-friendly)

INTRODUCTION

Our Age-Friendly Boston initiative launched in 2014 when Mayor Martin J. Walsh joined the network of World Health Organization age-friendly cities through AARP, the United States partner. This City initiative is led by the Age Strong Commission (formerly the Commission on Affairs of the Elderly), with research support from UMass Boston's Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging. Our age-friendly work focuses on eight domains: Civic Engagement and Employment, Communication and Information, Community Support and Health Services, Housing, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Respect and Social Inclusion, Transportation, and Social Participation.

In May of 2017, we released the Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan to address some of the issues identified in our comprehensive needs assessments of older adults in Boston. All of these different domains shape health. In addition to the domains, our work shines a spotlight on the increasingly pressing issues of dementia, economic security, and social isolation.

In Greek, the word "health" means whole. This year we continued our work to strengthen the health of older residents, inside and out: from adding more opportunities for social engagement through Memory Cafés, exercise and cooking classes, to making a powerful affirmation to embrace aging by changing our name to the Age Strong Commission.

At the Commission, we have increased our outreach to ensure older people know what programs are available to save money; opportunities for volunteering and employment, and housing resources for renters and homeowners.

As a city, we are committed to encouraging independence and activity by installing more benches across the city, making sidewalk improvements and longer crosswalk times to ensure people can get across the street safely whether pushing a stroller, or walking with a cane. Integral to being an Age-Friendly city is being treated as an equal by customer service staff in City Hall and at the counters of neighborhood businesses. We have trained nearly 500 city staff who interact regularly with constituents on tips for effective communication with older residents, including those with dementia.

In partnership with the Main Streets organizations, we are piloting an Age and Dementia-Friendly business initiative in West Roxbury and Hyde Jackson Square in Jamaica Plain. Twenty-four businesses have been certified and the UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging will be evaluating this pilot to bring it city-wide.

This year, we hosted the City of Boston's second Civic Academy and engaged students 55+ from all over the city in a stimulating curriculum focusing on federal, state and local issues as well as advocacy and skill-building such as an "elevator pitch" to be more effective advocates.

In our communications channels, we are continuing to represent the older population with respect and dignity. For example, in *Boston Seniority* magazine, we have included stories of people who have overcome personal challenges such as substance misuse and mental health issues to combat stigma and raise awareness.

The City of Boston's second year of age-friendly achievements has contributed to making our city a place where people can live well and age strong together.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We launched our second Civic Academy, a six-week course emphasizing advocacy skill development, as well as enhanced the curriculum and experience based on the first cohort's feedback. Students engage with municipal department representatives, as well as State and Federal Agencies to learn about aging-related policies and how best to interact with elected officials and representatives to impact positive change. Content is rich and informative, and students learn how to be advocates for issues that affect them.

“I can’t say enough about how rewarding it has been to participate in the Civic Academy.”

– BOSTON RESIDENT

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- In January 2019, Mayor Walsh announced the Commission's new name, Age Strong, at the State of the City address. The Commission re-branded itself in response to the changing aging landscape in Boston and in an effort to continue to connect and engage with older adults in the city. The re-brand included: a name change, updated website content and navigation, a new mission and vision statement, and a set of values we assert in our work, including respect, inclusivity, and joy. Feedback from the community was requested at multiple stages of the process.

“I love the new name, Age Strong. When I heard it, I thought, that’s me!”

– BOSTON RESIDENT



+ COMMUNITY SUPPORTS AND HEALTH SERVICES

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We launched “What Unites Us”, a cooking series that celebrates the immigrant experience and healthy aging through culture and food. In partnership with the Office of Food Access, Office of Immigrant Advancement, the Kitchen at the Boston Public Market, and Armenian Heritage Park, the ongoing series has covered cuisine and culture from places like Cape Verde, East Asia, Haiti, and West Africa.
- We are strengthening our work with communities of faith, including posting notices of Age Strong Commission programs and services in 80+ faith-based organization church bulletins. We are partnering with local churches, Brigham & Women’s Hospital, Elder Affairs and the Alzheimer’s Association on a national Memory Sunday event to raise awareness about Alzheimer’s, and training Senior Ministries on resources available when members visit homebound older adults.
- We created an Elder Abuse Prevention Task Force, bringing together community partners and city departments to identify strategies for educating older adults about protecting themselves against scams, fraud, financial exploitation, and other forms of elder abuse.
- The Commission created and executed a door-knocking, informational campaign called “Connect the Knocks” by identifying an area of the city between Mattapan and Hyde Park where there was a high percentage of older residents and a low number of calls to 311. We knocked on 1,500 households to share resources on economic security and to prevent social isolation. We recruited 78 volunteers from City Hall and the community and were able to connect hundreds of people with resources about events, cost-saving opportunities, volunteer programs, and more.
- We are training volunteers to provide respite services and matching them with care partners who have loved ones with dementia. Through this program, care partners are able to get a much needed break while knowing that their loved ones are safe with our trained volunteers.

“With everything I learn from the What Unites Us series, every bite tastes better.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT



HOUSING

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Over the past year, we have been working with older adults and community partners to raise awareness about home ownership and housing-loss prevention. Presentations have been made at multiple venues to educate homeowners and renters about tenant rights and responsibilities to help prevent conflicts and evictions. This effort is enhanced by ongoing work and commitment by the Department of Neighborhood Development.
- We are providing ongoing support to a resident group in Dorchester to start a “Village,” called “Dorchester Neighbors.”
- Mayor Walsh’s legislative agenda includes bills that benefit older adults, specifically in terms of housing and health care costs. For example, “An Act Relative to the Just Cause Eviction of Elderly Lessees” proposes a rent cap at 5% increase per year for renters 75 and older, and “An Act Regarding Medicare Savings Program Eligibility” would expand healthcare access for older adults by lowering premium and prescription expenses for eligible seniors.

- We created an outreach strategy for sharing tax-relief opportunities with older adults, like the Senior Circuit Breaker tax credit, senior abatements, and the Property Tax Work-off Program. We have expanded our reach through deepening connections in the community. We will continue to share these resources with partners and attend senior groups and neighborhood associations to discuss ways older adults can save on their taxes.

“Because I found out about the Senior Circuit Breaker tax credit, I was able to get money back that I didn’t expect.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We expanded the Public Bathrooms Map to include locations on the Boston Harborwalk and Downtown Boston Business Improvement District. Boston Harbor Now partnered with us to integrate their data into the map for a total of 133 locations.
- Mayor Walsh committed \$90,000 in the budget to purchase City benches that can be helpful places for rest. Working with

WalkBoston we identified four initial neighborhoods, conducting walk audits with older residents to ensure that bench placement meets the needs of the community. The Public Works Department has also been awarded a \$20,000 grant from Boston College Neighborhood Improvement Fund for the Age-Friendly Bench Program. The first set of benches were installed in the Spring 2019.



WE HEARD:

“I used to just come to Boston City Hall to get a birth certificate or other essentials. Now, I’m learning all these things and want to bring people here to show them all the resources the City has to offer.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“This Civic Academy program is spectacular. Thank you for the opportunity to attend.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

“Thank you for educating me and my fellow seniors. I really want to help shape the future for our grandchildren and help them with the aging process.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

♥ RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We've trained nearly 500 City Hall staff on best practices when communicating with older adults, including those with dementia. Boston EMS, Fire & Police and BHA personnel have also been trained in communication techniques for those with cognitive decline.
- We launched our Age and Dementia-Friendly Business pilot program in West Roxbury and Hyde Jackson Square. We certified 24 businesses in these neighborhoods in addition to the Providence House in Brighton.

🗨️ SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We have expanded our Age Strong programming to include three additional Memory Cafés (including one in Spanish), Say Your Age: An Anti-Ageism Program utilizing taiko (Japanese drums) in four locations, and more fitness classes including yogalates on the Greenway. The expanded programming is being sited in locations that are underserved and are gap areas for senior programming in Boston.

“I am participating in many activities that keep life interesting.”

- BOSTON RESIDENT

🚗 TRANSPORTATION

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We have invested in technology for our shuttle system so that we can better meet the needs of riders. We are making the fleet more accessible, with more wheelchair-friendly vehicles. The shuttles were renamed the Age Strong Shuttles.
- In the Summer of 2018, older residents from the Grove Hall Senior Center in Dorchester joined with the Artist-in-Residence to have street demonstration for safer street crossing. This demonstration coupled with ongoing advocacy from other older adults led to crosswalk improvements and changes to the parking rules.
- The Department of Transportation and the Vision Zero initiative have implemented traffic calming measures, longer crosswalk times and improved crosswalk conditions all across the city, including Walter Street in Roslindale,

Roslindale Square, River Street in Mattapan, Walnut Avenue near the Ellis School, Talbot and Nightingale Streets, and in front of Almont Park in Mattapan. Sixteen speed feedback signs have been installed throughout the city, which are effective as ways to slow traffic and a road reconfiguration on Beacon Street in order to reduce speeds and increase pedestrian safety.

- We are building a partnership with the MBTA to connect residents with transportation information. Residents learn about the new fare collection system, Better Buses campaign, and how to access to Senior CharlieCards easily. MBTA staff presented to seniors in churches, advisory council meeting, and coffee hours.
- During the most recent MBTA rate proposal, the City advocated against raising rates for older adults in order to maintain the RIDE and Senior CharlieCard affordability and coverage.

IN CONCLUSION:

Thank you to all of our partners for sharing your expertise, wisdom, and time to help make Boston an inclusive, welcoming city for all residents. Boston is a vibrant and interesting city because of the diversity of cultures, perspectives, and ages. We will continue to lift up the needs of the older community in the years to come, recognizing that when we do, people of every age benefit and are lifted up too. We look forward to continuing our work with our partner agencies as we focus on Year 3 of our action plan implementation.

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Thank you to our Age-Friendly Boston Advisory Council members:

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