

Designing a seniors-friendly city
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GLOBAL HEALTH REPORTER

Japan is old –and getting older-but its cities aren't built to accommodate the greying population In Toyama, Mayor Masashi Mori is hoping to redesign the coastal city into a place where elderly people can live comfortably. Here are six things that the city of 420,000 is doing to reshape itself into a "future city" - a place that urges its oldest citizens to stay healthy and active.

Beautiful (and lucrative) core

Drawing older residents into the city centre keeps them closer to services and programs, while giving them more opportunities to be social and active. To encourage relocation, Toyama is giving cold hard cash - 500,000 yen, or roughly \$5500 Canadian – to people who buy homes in the core. Mori, a flamboyant ex-lawyer, also believes a prettier downtown will draw people in. Among his quirkier beautification initiatives: free tram rides for anyone carrying a bouquet of flowers

Seniors-friendly Transit

To make Toyama easier to get around, Mori has redrawn the public transit map as a "skewer and dumplings" - major transit arteries (skewers) connecting clusters of pedestrian-friendly communities (dumplings). But the heart of this system is a tram that loops the core, designed with the elderly in mind: car floors and station benches are low and barrier-free. Over-65s are also given 20,000 yen (about \$220 Canadian) in transit tickets when they hand over their driver's licenses.

"Fun-centives"

Toyama's seniors have free entry to public institutions such as museums and zoos - if they come with their grandchildren. "This is to encourage elderly people to go out of the house," Mori says. The scheme has an added benefit of reinforcing cross-generational familial bonds, he adds.

A hub of health

Research shows that physical activity reduces dementia risk To get seniors moving Toyama built a "care prevention centre" in 2011 that resembles a spa: massage beds, lemongrass-scented steam rooms, rehabilitation machines for the frail, and a hot spring pool where pink-cheeked seniors can aqua-cize or soak. Doctors also visit the centre every day for medical checkups.

Getting outside

Studies have shown that older people who live in isolation are at greater risk of dementia. One strategy for encouraging socialization -and outdoor activity – is a community garden in a public park (where, until Mori intervened, it was illegal to grow crops). "I come almost every day," said Kazuo Nagata 75, while tending to eggplants in the garden. "I have an opportunity to teach children how to grow and water plants."

A walker to lean on

The University of Toyama's medical department collaborated with the city to design walking aids, now placed in three sites The red walkers, which are free, have baskets for shopping. "When I imagine a Toyama city in 20 years,' Mori says, "I see a city where there are a lot of elderly people who are fine, strong and energetic. People who work at 80 and people who have hobbies at 90."