

Age-Friendly University Project Grants Program

The **Age-Friendly University (AFU) Project Grants Program** aims to make UCalgary more age-friendly by supporting faculty and staff in developing and launching their own AFU initiatives.

Why Age-Friendly Universities Matter

Our world is aging—and higher education needs to catch up.

By 2030, 1 in 6 people globally will be 60 years or older. Yet many post-secondary institutions still reflect outdated, age-segregated models that do not meet the needs of an aging society. Despite shifting demographics, most students graduate with little understanding of aging and rarely interact with older adults during their studies. This lack of aging literacy affects their ability to navigate a world where age diversity is increasingly the norm—in workplaces and communities.

At the same time, more adults are working later in life and seeking opportunities to upgrade their skills or change careers. Others are turning to post-secondary institutions for personal growth, lifelong learning, and community engagement in retirement. Higher education is becoming a destination not just for younger adults, but for people across the lifespan.

Age-friendly universities recognize this reality. They:

- Prepare students to understand aging and work across generations
- Create programs that support learning and career development at any age
- Foster intergenerational connection and collaboration
- Challenge ageism by promoting inclusive, age-diverse campus environments

As the world continues to age, institutions have a powerful role to play in creating campuses that are more inclusive, innovative, and future-focused.

What Is the Age-Friendly University Movement?

The AFU movement is a global initiative that calls on post-secondary institutions to respond to the opportunities and challenges of an aging world.

The movement began in 2012 when Dublin City University, in collaboration with the University of Strathclyde and Arizona State University, brought together an interdisciplinary team to explore how higher education could better support older adults. This work led to the development of the 10 principles of an AFU—a framework that guides institutions in becoming more inclusive of older adults and more engaged with aging-related issues. These principles complement the World Health Organization’s [Age-Friendly Cities Framework](#) and are now part of a broader [Age-Friendly Ecosystem](#).

At its core, the movement is about rethinking how aging is understood and valued. Historically, higher education has largely overlooked aging in its teaching, research, and campus life. This lack of attention has reinforced negative assumptions about older adults and limited opportunities for intergenerational learning. Colleges and universities, however, can lead meaningful change.

By adopting age-friendly principles, institutions can:

- Promote education and research that addresses the needs of an aging society
- Expand access to learning opportunities across the lifespan
- Support older adults who want to stay engaged in work and community life
- Create intergenerational spaces that challenge stereotypes and foster solidarity

To support the continued growth and coordination of the movement, the three founding universities established the AFU Global Network—a coalition of institutions dedicated to advancing age-friendliness and age-inclusivity in higher education.

In November 2018, UCalgary became one of the first Canadian institutions to join the AFU Global Network. Led by the Centre on Aging, UCalgary is actively working to build a more inclusive campus where individuals of all ages can learn, contribute, and thrive.

The Ten Principles of an Age-Friendly University

Post-secondary institutions in the AFU Global Network commit to the following principles as a framework for action:

1. To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs.
2. To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.
3. To recognize the range of educational needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or PhD qualifications).
4. To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
5. To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
6. To ensure that the university's research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
7. To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.
8. To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
9. To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
10. To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.

UCalgary's Age-Friendly University Action Plan

In 2022–23, the Centre on Aging conducted a [baseline assessment of age-friendliness at UCalgary](#). The findings revealed that while the university is moderately age-friendly, many students, faculty, and staff do not perceive it that way. Work is needed to create a truly inclusive environment where people of all ages can learn, work, and thrive.

To guide this progress, the Centre developed an action plan with 10 goals. These goals address the gaps identified in the assessment and focus on raising awareness about aging and age-inclusivity, improving programs and services for age-diverse campus community members, and fostering a multigenerational campus culture.

Ten Goals

1. The campus and broader community have an increased awareness and understanding of an AFU.
2. Age (social identity) and ageism (bias) are acknowledged in the institution's equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility plans and activities.
3. Students have greater opportunities to learn about topics related to aging and older adults.
4. Students experience more positive interactions with older persons through their education.
5. Aging research is prioritized and supported at an institutional level.
6. Aging research is prioritized and supported within relevant faculties and departments.
7. Aging education and research are informed by the needs and interests of seniors-serving organizations and older adults.
8. Recruitment and orientation practices for adult students (age 21+) and older students (age 50+) are improved.
9. Older employees are valued and treated equitably.
10. Employees and students who are caregivers of aging parents or family members, or the primary caregiver or guardian for children, are supported.