

# Age-Friendly Innovations

## Creating an Age-Friendly City in Toyama, Japan

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Japan is the world's leading ageing society. In 2025, Japan will likely face a super-ageing society with the ratio of people aged over 65 reaching 30%. The number of single-person senior households is also estimated to exceed seven million. This will come with a rapid increase in the need for medical treatment and nursing facilities. This Note reviews the age-friendly development of Toyama City.

Toyoma City has been making the effort to be an age-friendly city at the forefront of Japan, launching their localised "compact city" project in the early 2000s. The key idea was to build an age-ready city with unique efforts for care prevention, helping older adults to extend their "healthy life expectancy" and relieve the caregiving burdens of younger caretakers.

### **TOYAMA CITY, JAPAN**

Toyama City is one of the largest Japanese cities located in Japan's northern Hokuriku region. The Toyama Compact City Strategy has been led by Mayor Masashi Mori since 2002. It prepares for the change in social needs, which come with low birth rates and an ageing population. This strategy follows the idea of revitalising public transportation in the

city centre to enable citizens to lead comfortable daily lives and reduce the reliance on cars and private vehicles (Box 1).

### Box 1: Toyama Compact City Strategy

#### 1. Developing public transport

Light-rail transit system and improved bus routes allows the city to cope with a declining and ageing population by enhancing mobility for seniors and other citizens in the city centre.

#### 2. Age-friendly transport

Lower-floored light rail cabins and barrier-free station platforms with reduced noise supports age-friendly transport while maintaining a peaceful urban environment

#### 3. Concentrating urban functions

Densification of city centre by creating interconnected hubs along main public transport routes

#### 4. Encouraging Senior Activity

Subsidies for public transport for seniors and free admission to public facilities for seniors visiting with their grandchildren encourages an increase in senior activity, reducing the risk of health problems and social isolation.

#### 5. Subsidised housing

Housing construction is subsidised within a 500-metre radius of train stations to encourage densification. This also reduces administrative and

infrastructural costs related to suburbanisation by reducing the need to expand road networks, water, and sewage services.

Source:

Toyama City Works Toward Compact City Utilizing Public Transportation | JFS Japan for Sustainability. (n.d.). JFS Japan for Sustainability. Retrieved 5 July 2022, from [https://www.japanfs.org/en/news/archives/news\\_id034781.html](https://www.japanfs.org/en/news/archives/news_id034781.html)

## Ageing Policies and Framework

Toyama City has implemented various ageing policies and innovations to encourage active, self-reliant, and independent lifestyles of its senior citizens. The goal is to prevent social isolation, inactive lifestyles, and frailty, which decrease overall health, and increase the city's healthcare costs.

- *Local community centres* play a key role in Toyama City's integrated and inclusive elderly care. 32 community support centres and contact points have been set up for older adults with on-site experts such as nurses, certified social workers and welfare caretakers monitor and refer individuals to various senior centres based on their healthcare needs when necessary.
- *Local community networks* involve 36% of senior citizens in the senior voluntary club where members are assigned leadership

roles to promote community-based activities for preventive care and provide community support. This has helped members become more mindful of their health while enhancing self-reliance and promoting mutual help among communities.

- **Improved accessibility** includes discounted fares for seniors using public transport, free admission to public facilities and attractions for seniors visiting with their grandchildren, guided walks for seniors to encourage active mobility.
- **Provisions for senior care** at large malls and convenient stores such as comfortable seating areas, home deliveries, blood pressure monitors and staff trained to recognise and assist individuals with dementia.

In addition, there is also a framework to improving Toyama City with targeted senior-friendly interventions and initiatives, namely:

- The promotion of traditional medicinal food to improve overall nutrition and wellbeing
- Developing age-friendly industries to stimulate local economies and encourage financial independence
- Senior care and risk prevention centres to enhance overall health and mobility

The success of these measures can be seen where participation in senior citizen's clubs stands at 42.5%, much higher than

the national average of 14.4% in Japan. There are also larger positive economic and social impacts. Toyama has seen a decrease in the seniors who require major support from the long-term care insurance system and health insurance system.

### Medicinal Food

Toyama City is known in Japan as the "City of Medicine", acting as the centre for traditional medicine in Japan since the Edo Period (1603-1868), distributing and importing Japanese and Chinese medication. This has led it to develop as a thriving pharmaceutical, biotech, and high-tech city in the modern day. Due to this longstanding history, they have adopted an innovative approach to improving the wellbeing of their citizens through local food stalls advocating for the use of traditional medicinal ingredients in their dishes (Box 2).

**Box 2: Toyama Yakuzen**



Image 1: Ikedaya Yasubei Shoten medicinal dish pharmacy

Source: Foreign Press Centre Japan

Ikedaya Yasubei Shoten is a pharmacy serving medicinal dishes in the city, using locally grown food and other healthy food sources. The shop is one of such approved stalls advocating for

disease prevention through healthy eating. It retains the traditional Edo-era design of a traditional medicine stall, selling natural herbs used in traditional Chinese medicine. The restaurant on the second floor serves medicinal food using ancient strains of rice or herbs such as Korean ginseng.

main industry. As such, they have built a plant factory which makes use of the hot spring heat in the Yamada district. Egoma (*Perilla Frutescens*) is a plant currently attracting attention as a health food. Its leaves are high in antioxidant, while its seeds are rich in alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an essential fatty acid. Its seeds can be extracted to produce oil to be used in cooking.

### *Age-friendly Agricultural Industry*

Toyama City has adopted an initiative to target the problem of both declining and aging population in that district by hiring local seniors for agricultural factories where crops can be cultivated and harvested easily (Box 3). This revitalises the Yamada district through the economy generated from producing, processing, distributing, and selling aspects of Egoma crops in an integrated manner.

### *Senior Care and Risk Prevention*

The Kadokawa Nursing Care and Prevention Centre specialises in preventive healthcare. Located in the city centre to enable safe, secure, and comfortable living for the senior participants by enhancing their accessibility and opportunities for outings and interaction (Box 4).

#### **Box 3: Yamada Agricultural Factory**



Image 2: Yamada Agricultural Factory

Source: Foreign Press Centre Japan

Toyama City plans to develop Egoma as an agricultural specialty and grow the local agricultural industry as its sixth

#### **Box 4: The Kadokawa Nursing Care Prevention Centre**



Image 3: The Kadokawa Nursing Care Prevention Centre, exterior facade

Photo Credit: Panorama Solutions for a Healthy Planet



Image 4: The Kadokawa Nursing Care Prevention Centre, hydrotherapy area

Photo Credit: Panorama Solutions for a Healthy Planet

The Kadokawa Nursing Care Prevention Centre is combined with other nursing and health care services provided by the public service to ensure sustainable long-term care and

maintenance of health. It houses facilities such as hot springs and exercise equipment which are used in health and wellness programmes. These include ground exercise therapy, thermal therapy, and personal care, focusing on aquatic exercise therapy. A preventive care approach improves citizens' well-being while simultaneously reducing the financial burden on individuals and public services. This is achieved by encouraging a self-reliant lifestyle to decrease frailty in senior citizens who need careful long-term care and nursing.

The centre was funded by Toyama City through donations from citizens in combination with the city budget. Its facilities and equipment were donated by

several citizens and integrated into the centre. The building is owned by the city, with its facilities outsourced to a joint venture of different private companies. The Care Prevention Centre has successfully helped senior citizens keep active lifestyles - 141 members over three months showed a positive influence of exercise on their physical and mental conditions while gaining noticeably improved mobility.

## Conclusion: An Innovative Age-Friendly Approach

Catering for an age-friendly city provide opportunities for physical activities, social interaction, healthy nutrition, and healthcare programmes to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. The overall goal is to promote "successful ageing" which comprises the avoidance of disability, maintenance of physical functions and adopting an active engagement with life. Toyama City has enabled this by firstly providing the public transport infrastructure to allow active seniors the freedom and convenience of transport within the city, and innovative solutions and facilities to provide for their wellbeing while simultaneously engaging them in a variety of activities. This manifests as two scales of approaches - one at a policy and urban level, the other in specialised initiatives that focus on senior wellness. Therefore, senior activity centres and policy frameworks go together to provide seniors with the urban framework to enable safe and healthy

## environments for improved wellness and lifestyles.

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