

County on age-friendly team so elderly can keep getting around

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Miami-Dade County has been named the fifth-largest community, and one of only a few counties in the US, to be part of the 380-city global Age-Friendly Initiative, according to Miami-Dade's Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), the lead agency in support of the effort.

The initiative considers the transportation, housing and outdoor-space needs of seniors, a county release said. The Alliance for Aging, Health Foundation of South Florida, United Way of Miami-Dade, Urban Health Partnerships and AARP Florida are also involved.

"Transportation is part and parcel of any age-friendly community and it is clearly an issue here," said Linda Schotthoefer, senior director of community initiatives for United Way of Miami-Dade.

"It's mentioned in every focus group. Older adults often have difficulty with getting around, and the transportation options they have frequently don't feel reliable."

Many baby boomers who are entering the senior population prefer ride-sharing services, "but not everyone is trusting of that," Ms. Schotthoefer said.

"We're excited to see the transportation issue being recognized, not just for the aging population, but across the board," she said. "At the same time, we want to make sure all of the leaders who addressing transportation concerns don't leave older adults out of the

equation, which can be easy to do."

"Miami-Dade County is home to the largest population of older adults age 60 and over in Florida, more than half a million, with that number expected to rise to over 800,000 by 2040," the county release said.

"Now that Miami-Dade County has officially been accepted into the network, the initiative will kick off its next phase with a survey that

will inform the expansion and finalization of an action plan for continued age-friendly efforts in the county." The plan is to address seniors' concerns, including how to get around when they can no longer drive.

Among the goals: "Advocate and implement streets that are safe for all modes, users and mobility. Ensure older adults have the opportunity to safely drive as well as

have knowledge of and access to on-demand transportation services and quality transit stops."

The initiative even tiptoes around the delicate issue of taking away the keys. "The percentage of older adults with driver's licenses has remained relatively constant over the past few years. There are currently no standards for determining whether someone is able to continue driving. Assistance with

getting the conversation started in families is needed."

The county's Golden Passport program issues free passes for Metrobus, Metromover and Metrorail to adults 65 and older, but many seniors might prefer Uber-like services, the release said. "Call-up, door-to-door services are often preferred due to convenience. Yet cost and availability can pose challenges."

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