

Creating Welcoming Spaces for All Ages: Why Age-Friendly Businesses Matter

As communities continue to grow and change, local businesses play a vital role in creating welcoming, inclusive spaces for people of all ages and abilities. Becoming an Age-Friendly business is not about costly renovations or complex policies—it is about thoughtful, practical changes that ensure everyone can shop, visit, and access services comfortably and with dignity.

An Age-Friendly business considers the needs of older adults, people living with dementia, individuals with disabilities or injuries, youth and families with young children. At its core, it is about recognizing that customers and staff bring a wide range of abilities and experiences—and that small adjustments can make a big difference.

The benefits of becoming Age-Friendly extend well beyond accessibility. Businesses that identify, promote, and improve Age-Friendly features often attract and retain loyal customers and dedicated employees. These efforts can also create a competitive advantage, enhance reputation, and strengthen connections within the community.

Many Age-Friendly improvements are simple and low-cost. Accessibility and safety measures include keeping entrances, exits, and aisles clear of clutter; ensuring aisles are wide enough for walkers, wheelchairs, and strollers; and securing mats to prevent slips and falls. These changes benefit everyone, from seniors to parents with small children.

Respect is another key element of an Age-Friendly environment. Staff are encouraged to be welcoming and patient, to communicate clearly and at an appropriate pace, and to support customers during moments of stress without being rushed or patronizing.

Comfort and clarity also matter. Providing sturdy seating in waiting areas, offering barrier-free customer washrooms with space for personal belongings, and making amenities such as diaper-change areas and baby-feeding spaces available, all contribute to a more inclusive environment. Clear, high-contrast signage and efforts to reduce noise, strong scents, or visual distractions help customers navigate spaces more easily.

June is Seniors Month and the perfect time for businesses to take action:

- Visit grey.ca/agefriendlybusiness for no or low-cost Age-Friendly strategies.
- Choose one Age-Friendly improvement to try in June.
- Look at your space through the eyes of someone with mobility, vision, or hearing challenges and/or a parent with small children.
- Are you a customer of an Age-Friendly business? Tell them (or show your support) by leaving a positive review.