



The New York Academy of Medicine

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**Mayor Bloomberg, Speaker Quinn and NYAM President Dr. Jo Ivey Boufford Announce
Plans to Make New York an Age-friendly City**

August 25, 2009

Remarks of Dr. Jo Ivey Boufford

President of The New York Academy of Medicine

Thank you, Mayor Bloomberg, Speaker Quinn, members of the City Council, and our hosts at Mark Morris. I am honored to be here on behalf of The New York Academy of Medicine.

This project is a direct outgrowth of the work of the World Health Organization's Ageing and Life Course Program, which is supporting the creation of a global network of Age Friendly Cities. As part of that project, 35 cities from 22 countries on every continent embarked on a remarkable journey to learn from older people themselves what they want and need to age happily and healthfully in urban environments -- cities that will promote a different vision of aging -- a new paradigm that asks citizens and policy makers: "how can we transform the environment to insure that everyone can stay active, healthy, and engaged for as long as possible?"

This is about viewing all of urban life through the lens of aging -- transportation, housing, communication and information, social inclusion, civic participation and employment, outdoor spaces, and health. How can these things be improved and services designed to maximize the health and happiness of older people and ensure that they are able to continue to contribute their time, talents, and expertise to our communities?

Importantly, this project is part of international movement of age-friendly cities. Beginning in 2007, NYAM -- a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Ageing, Urbanization, and Globalization -- began working with the WHO on its Global Age-friendly Cities project. Since then, New York has continued to play a pivotal role in this international movement. Through this project and the leadership shown by the Mayor and Speaker Quinn, New York is demonstrating to the international community that even a large and complex global city can look to the future to create a better environment for its older residents. Meeting this challenge will take all of us working across every sector of society. In fact, the public-private partnership modeled by New York City has become part of the international WHO Age-friendly City guidelines.

Indeed, the age-friendly New York City project has been a true public-private partnership from its inception. The Mayor and the Speaker made a strong commitment to this work from the very start. They and the City Council were instrumental in helping NYAM conduct its yearlong assessment. With them, we listened to the voices of seniors from all over the City in community forums and conducted special focus groups with hard to reach seniors—immigrants who do not speak English, people with chronic health conditions, formerly homeless -- who could not attend the hearings. We

tapped into the wide and deep expertise around this City to get their views both on the needs of older persons and what they can do to contribute to an Age-Friendly New York. In all, we heard from more than 1500 New Yorkers. They told us what they love about growing older in New York and gave us their suggestions for making this an even better City in which to age. It is their voices that have and will continue to guide this project.

As we have seen today, our government leaders are prepared to move forward on many of the issues that were identified by older New Yorkers in our findings report. Identifying age-friendly parks, providing discounts to health clubs, improving access to our cultural institutions, and working to create permanent affordable housing for older adults are exactly the kind of initiatives that will improve New York's age-friendliness.

We have set ourselves a high bar -- a city that fosters independence, participation, dignity, and health among *all* its older residents - regardless of their race or class or the neighborhood in which they live. Government cannot do this alone.

While the City has been hard at work thinking through government's response to the demographic challenge before us, NYAM has been working with the private sector. We have met with businesses, academic institutions, health care organizations, social service providers, architects, religious and civic institutions, and many others and asked them to commit to making New York more age-friendly. They have generated many exciting ideas and recommendations that will complement the government-led initiatives we have heard about today.

For example, we will be working with Business Improvement Districts to create an "age-friendly business guide" to help retail establishments be more welcoming to older people by making simple changes such as improving signage, creating seating areas, and keeping sidewalks clear. We will be working with our partners in academia to develop a model for an "age-friendly university" where information about aging is incorporated across the curriculum, and universities offer more classes, services, and opportunities for older adults to be involved with their campuses. These are just a few of the many things the private sector is planning.

The Age-friendly New York City Commission, announced here today, will work to strengthen the role of the private sector and insure that government and the private sector continue to work hand in hand on this initiative. NYAM is honored to be staffing this Commission.

Working together across sectors, New York can lead the world in building a model age-friendly city where New Yorkers of all ages can stay active, participate fully, and take advantage of all this City has to offer.

I want to conclude by thanking our supporters without whom this work would not be possible. Our thanks go to the New York Community Trust, the Samuels Foundation, the Mayor's Office, and the Speakers' Office.

For more information, please contact:

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