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In Aotearoa New Zealand, the ageing population shows notable regional variations, with Auckland having a substantial proportion of older people. Mobility disability represents the most common disability among older people in New Zealand, affecting 13% of this population, with a similar prevalence reported in Auckland (10.7%). As mobility declines, remaining in a familiar community becomes important. Ageing in place has therefore become a policy response aimed at helping older people stay in their familiar communities. However, achieving this outcome requires that environmental demands align with functional abilities (Napier et al., 2024). In practice, inadequate micro-scale-built environment features can hinder older people with reduced mobility from accessing essential services and social interactions, preventing person-environment congruence (Van Cauwenberg et al., 2016). Although most existing research on ageing in place has focused on urban or rural communities, suburbs, where many older people reside, have received comparatively little attention (Zhao et al., 2022). This is despite their car dependence and poor micro-scale built-environment features, which may pose challenges to the mobility of older people with reduced mobility. To address this gap, this research will identify micro-scale built environmental barriers in a selected suburban neighbourhood in Auckland to better align the built environment with the mobility needs of older people with reduced mobility.

To achieve this aim, the study employs a mixed-methods approach: (1) walking interviews with older people with reduced mobility followed by questionnaires to validate the barriers identified during the walking interviews; (2) interviews with professionals involved in designing walking environments; and (3) the development of potential retrofit designs informed by insights from older people with reduced mobility and built-environment experts.

In this presentation, I will explain the rationale for focusing on suburbs, outline the mixed-methods approach used to identify micro-scale walking barriers, and discuss how the findings will inform contextually relevant retrofit designs to support ageing in place. Attendees will gain insight into how integrating the perspectives of older people with reduced mobility and built-environment professionals can contribute to more inclusive suburban walking environments.

Keywords

ageing in place, person–environment fit, walking, older people with reduced mobility, micro-scale environment

References

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