

“Forum on Age-friendly Housing and Health Promotion” in Taiwan brought leaders of different sectors and more than 200 attendees together for a healthy housing future for all

Housing is an important aspect that influences physical, mental and social health. Population ageing brings about new needs in housing design to support ageing in place and holistic well-being for older persons. The “2020 Forum on Age-friendly Housing and Health Promotion- Towards Healthy Residential Environments for All”, co-organized by the Health & Sustainable Development Foundation founded by professor Shu-Ti Chiou and the Foundation of Universal Design Education, in collaboration with the International Union for Health Promotion & Education (IUHPE), the Task Force on Health Promoting Hospitals & Age-Friendly Health Care, and the New Taipei City Government, aimed to review progresses and obstacles in age-friendly housing in Taiwan and to speed up policy adaptation by learning from international experiences.

This Forum was postponed from February to July 19 due to COVID-19 pandemic. After more than 90 days without any locally acquired case in Taiwan, it was held smoothly in New Taipei City Hall and successfully gathered a total of about 200 attendees. The Forum was opened by honorary remarks from Professor Chih-Liang Yang (former Minister of Health, Taiwan), President Kuo-Long Liu of Taiwan Association of Architects, Professor Shu-Ti Chiou (on behalf of IUHPE), President Feng-Cheng Tang of Foundation of Universal Design Education, and Commissioner Ran-Chou Chen of Department of Health, New Taipei City Government. Many other leaders, such as the former Deputy Health Minister Lee, the Health Commissioner of Yi-lan County, the President of Architectural Institute of Taiwan, the President of Chinese Society of Interior Designers, The President of Taiwan Long-term Care Professional Association, the Secretary General of the (Taiwan) Federation for the Welfare of the Elderly, and the President of Taiwan Hospital Association, have also joined as moderators or speakers. Most of them have stayed throughout the program and participated in the discussions. The attendees came from diverse backgrounds, too, making this event a truly inclusive multi-disciplinary one with enriched policy dialogues.

Professor Shu-Ti Chiou, the Global Vice President for Capacity Building, Training and Education of IUHPE, is the principle organizer of this Age-friendly Housing Forum. She has led the initiative that disseminated WHO’s age-friendly city model to all the counties and cities in Taiwan during 2010-2016, and she believes it’s time to review the progresses and obstacles in depth in different domains. Housing is at the top of the list to review. People in average spent 70% of their time at home, and for older persons, it might be 80% or more. Cost of housing is often the top item of spending for young people and many retirees. Adequate housing is part of the basic human needs but is often unmet especially for disabled older persons living in deprived communities or of low socioeconomic status. Housing is a pre-requisite to health, yet the policy designs of housing have too often neglected the needs to support health promotion, social participation and health equity even though there is growing interest and investment into new constructions and renovation in response to population ageing.

To shape a common ground on what matters in healthy aging and what to consider in developing age-friendly housing initiatives, Professor Chiou gave a comprehensive introduction on the global policy development of

healthy ageing and age-friendly housing, including the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, WHO’s Guide on Global Age-friendly Cities, Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030, WHO Housing and Health Guidelines, and practice examples for housing domain in WHO-Europe’s handbook on Age-friendly Environments, coupled with needs assessment on older persons’ living arrangements in Taiwan to examine how those policy recommendations might help address local needs. Susan Wright, representative of the American Institute of Architects, New York Chapter, Design for Aging (DFA) Committee, provided examples of projects in New York City, including construction of new “seniors only” apartment buildings with social services, construction of intergenerational projects with seniors and families, renovation of existing apartments to facilitate aging and the NYC’s Aging in Place Guide for Building Owners, illustrating how policy support, architectural design and public-private partnerships might work together to facilitate age-friendly housing and living, especially for low income seniors.

There were four presentations on policy development of age-friendly housing in Taiwan, one on the national level initiatives, one on new projects in New Taipei City, one on universal design, and one on assistive technology and smart housing, followed by presentations on value chain approach to support aging in place, community participation in renovation of housing and social services in a most remote county, age-friendly design for long-term care facilities, and design example for a geriatric hospital, concluded by a panel discussion on the way forward.

The participants were most interested in examining current obstacles in adaptations of building regulations, adaptation of government subsidy principles, financing and maintenance of new projects (including their attached services), inter-department dialogue and collaboration, and the role of health professionals in advocacy, referrals and service integration in pursuit of age-friendly housing for all.

Participants expressed their satisfaction with this forum and look forward to future efforts to speed up policy adaptation.

