Executive Summary

Populations around the world are aging   fast. People are living longer now than at any other point in history, and more often than not they are living in cities (UN, 2020). This unprecedented shift has led many to question whether cities are ready to meet the needs of an aging population. Aging often results in shrinking social, physical, and cognitive life spaces (Greenfield et al., 2012). This makes older adults as a demographic more vulnerable to experiences of loneliness and social isolation. While many planners and academics are focused on the ways in which older adults can age-in-place, being confined to the four walls of home does little to address the issue of isolation. Rather it is the surrounding physical environment that plays a defining role in determining older adult health and wellbeing (Black and Jester, 2020). Because older adults are more likely to spend time in their homes and immediate neighbourhood than other age groups, they are particularly vulnerable to experiencing barriers that limit their participation in the physical environment.

One overlooked approach to improving older adult wellbeing is play. Play improves community relations, mental wellbeing, and physical health (Kerr and Apter, 1991). As a result, play is well-suited to address older adult loneliness and isolation. Yet, common societal

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older adulthood (Donoff and Bridgman, 2017). Play has only recently been recognized as an urban design consideration capable of shaping and improving daily interactions and experiences (Donoff and Bridgman, 2017). But it has yet to be considered as an age-friendly planning intervention. Built environments designed for play can go beyond narrowly designated structures and age-compartmentalized activities. There is an opportunity to instead conceptualize and actualize play

as an important addition to the built form that can inspire happiness and playfulness (Donoff and Bridgman, 2017).

The overarching questions behind this report are: How do older adults view play in public spaces? What kind of environments cultivate play? And what kind of environments suppress it? Three research objectives were designed to address these overarching questions: (1) Determine older adult perceptions of play in public spaces through a participatory photovoice process; (2)

and design, and; (3) Develop recommendations to design public play spaces so as to enable older adult play.

The report is based around the single case study of older adult play in Victoria, BC. Victoria

f 65 in 2021   considerably higher than the national average of 19% (Statistics Canada 2022a; 2022b). The study employs the participatory research method of photovoice to get a look into the world of an older adult to examine the environments which they find to be limiting or enabling of play. F

Findings were grouped into three distinct categories: conceptions of play, themes relating to enabling play environments, and themes tied to limiting play environments. Participant conceptions of play were grouped into four unique themes: *play as an activity of youth, play as a state-of-being, play as open and closed, and play as freedom*. A total of six themes were identified with regard to enabling play environments, and are as follows: *social play, intergenerational play, interactive play, nostalgia, natural, and accessible and inclusive design.* Lastly four themes emerged from limiting play environments, that they are: *noisy, dangerous, have restrictive design, and are inaccessible and exclusionary*. Limiting environments were described in term of their physical features, while enabling environments were described by how they made the participant

It is important to note that additional research is needed in order to more fully understand older