

# Ageing in Place Symposium

Addressing housing challenges for an ageing population

## About the Ageing in Place Symposium

By 2050, Hong Kong is expected to have the oldest population globally, making ageing in place a key focus of the HKSAR Government's elderly policy. The goal is to empower older adults to live independently in their homes and communities for as long as possible. However, with limited affordable housing options and an ageing building stock, addressing the needs of an ageing population is becoming increasingly complex.

The Symposium brought together around 50 experts, thought leaders, and community stakeholders to explore innovative housing solutions for Hong Kong's ageing population. Topics included home modifications, adaptations, retrofitting of existing buildings, senior housing projects, intergenerational living, and retirement communities. Together, we aim to discover how we can create a more age-friendly Hong Kong, meeting the needs of individuals and the wider community.



**Ms. Wendy Chan**

GBA Growth Director of Greater China Value  
and Risk Advisory  
JLL

**Opening Remarks**



**Dr. Tim Li**

Chief Architect  
Hong Kong Housing Authority

**Keynote Speaker**



**Ms. Katherine Rumble**

Director of Partnerships & Development  
Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong

**Speaker**



**Dr. Grace Seo**

Associate Professor  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Speaker**



**Social Workers**

Kowloon City Baptist Church  
Neighbourhood Elderly Centre

**Guest Speaker**



**Isabelle Faith Wei**

President, Habitat School Club  
Canadian International School Hong Kong

**Moderator**



**Dr. Donal Choi, JP**

Convenor of Construction Sub-Committee  
REDA

**Panelist**



**Ms. Grace Cheng**

Founder & CEO  
Agewhale

**Panelist**



**Dr. Calvin Luk**

Project Manager, Spatial Team Leader  
Jockey Club Design Institute for Social Innovation  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Panelist**



**Ms. Jo Hayes**

CEO  
Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong

**Closing Remarks**

# Ageing in Place Symposium

29th October 2021

Venue: JLL, 7/F One T

Time: 14:00 - 19:00



## Opening remarks

JLL has partnered with Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong for over a decade, and we were delighted that they were the venue host and sponsor for the event. **Ms. Wendy Chan, GBA Growth Director of Greater China Value and Risk Advisory, JLL**, opened the event and shared her passion for volunteering for Habitat and supporting vulnerable elderly in need of more adequate housing.

## Keynote

### Well-being Design for Public Housing Development in Hong Kong

We were honoured to be joined by **Dr. Tim Li, Chief Architect, Development and Construction Division, Housing Department** to deliver the keynote speech. Dr. Li shared an overview of the Hong Kong Housing Authority and their approach to Universal Design.

Dr. Li introduced the Well-being Design Guide project. The Housing Bureau and Housing Authority recently assembled a team of architects, designers, scholars, researchers and NGOs (including Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong) to develop a Well-being Design Guide to serve as a reference for the future design of new public housing estates and the improvement works of existing estates. The guide aspires to enhance a sense of well-being of Hong Kong public housing residents.

Through “design-thinking” and a “participatory design” process, the project engaged with and listened to the needs of public housing residents to enhance their well-being in the public estates. Through the lens of living, design, and neighbourhood, they have been working collaboratively with residents to build a well-being community for public housing developments. The goal is to create a more comfortable estate environment, facilities, and public spaces, thereby enhancing the sense of well-being among Hong Kong public housing residents.

More information about the project, and the 8 Well-being Concepts that have been developed, can be found here: **WELL • BEING - Well • Being**



# Ageing in Place

## Improving the quality of life for low-income elderly through retrofitting

In this sharing session, **Ms. Katherine Rumble**, *Director of Partnerships & Development, Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong*, gave a presentation on Habitat's work with the elderly and their **Ageing in Place Phase 2 project**, funded by **ZeShan Foundation, Kerry Group** and the **Yau Family Charitable Foundation**. Katherine explained the challenges that vulnerable elderly people living in public housing face in their daily lives and the types of home modifications and products Habitat is delivering to improve the age-friendliness of their homes.



**Dr. Grace Seo**, *Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Sciences and Director of the Centre for Social Policy and Social Entrepreneurship, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University*, then gave a presentation on the impact of Habitat's Ageing in Place Phase 1 (pilot) phase of the project. Grace shared that **25%** of Hong Kong's older adults experience falls each year, and **42%** of these occur in the home.

She explained the impact evaluation methodology including the importance of pre- and post-surveys, data analysis and focus groups. Grace highlighted the key impacts of home modifications; increased life satisfaction, decreased fear of falling, improved self-efficacy to perform daily activities without falling, enhanced sense of self-care and empowerment, improved sleep quality and improved family relationships. She also noted that the project has increased social workers' awareness of age-friendly environments.



**Ms. Cherry So** and **Ms. Connie Chan**, *social workers from Kowloon City Baptist Church Social Services*, shared information about the work they do in the community and how they have been partnering with Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong. They emphasized the significance of this partnership and expressed their appreciation for how Habitat's services are comprehensive and well-rounded in addressing the needs of elderly beneficiaries in the neighbourhood. Additionally, they invited an **elderly beneficiary, Ms. Li**, to join them on stage for a personal sharing about the challenges she faced during her daily life and how the home modifications and products provided by Habitat, positively impacted her life. These modifications not only helped prevent accidents at home, thereby enhancing her physical safety, but also contributed positively to her mental well-being.

# The future of Senior Housing

## Exploring options for an ageing population

In this panel discussion, expert speakers explored options for the future of senior housing in Hong Kong. The session was moderated by **Isabelle Faith Wei**, *President of the Habitat School Club at Canadian International School Hong Kong*.

Isabelle explained that Hong Kong, like many other geographies, is experiencing a rapid increase in its elderly population and by 2050, the city is projected to have the oldest population in the world. By 2046, it is estimated that 1 in 3 people in Hong Kong will be over the age of 65. To address this rapidly ageing population, the government has recognized the need to embrace the concept of 'ageing in place' as a core policy. The idea is that with adequate community care and support, elderly people can continue living in their own homes rather than moving to a residential care home. By promoting active ageing, ageing in place and inter-generational support, we can enhance the overall livability of Hong Kong.

In his keynote, Dr. Tim Li shared that the Housing Authority is prioritising age-friendliness, intergenerational and inclusive living in the design of new public housing estates. In the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2024, the HKSAR Government put forward that with the expansion of the Northern Metropolis and extra space in the Greater Bay Area, that suggested moving to the Greater Bay Area to retire is an option that some people might want to consider.



Isabelle asked **Dr. Calvin Luk**, *Project Manager, Spatial Team Leader, Jockey Club Design Institute, for Social Innovation at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University*, to share more about the government's plans to create age-friendly housing environments. In view of the latest drive towards providing more subsidized residential care homes for the elderly in the Guangdong Province, she asked how "ageing in place" could be implemented more effectively.

Calvin mentioned that while the government aims to increase welfare services facilities to meet community needs, including for the elderly community, (see the June 2024 Welfare Facilities Projects), many residential care facilities in Hong Kong are inadequate and not ready for the volume of future demand. He mentioned that these facilities often have poor living conditions, rarely allow patients outside, and they suffer from staff shortage and limited opportunities for social connections, suggesting that this situation opens opportunities to explore what the Guangzhou area, (distinct from the Greater Bay Area), can offer to better support the elderly community in the future.

The moderator asked **Ms. Grace Cheng, Founder & CEO of Agewhale**, to share her thoughts on how she thinks the elderly population and their families would respond to relocation. Grace questioned what “Ageing in Place” really means, emphasizing the need for a suitable environment for the elderly community. She mentioned that while her grandparents, who are from mainland China, might be interested in moving to the Guangzhou area, she is unsure about her parents or her own appetite for moving. Grace stressed the importance of social connections and well-being for elderly people, highlighting the need for them to age within their own communities.

From the perspective of a developer, Isabelle asked **Mr. Donald Choi, Convenor of Construction Sub-Committee at The Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong (REDA), and a Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong Board Director**, if this is already being considered by the Real Estate sector and what developers and the private sector are doing to explore housing options for our ageing population.

Donald noted the increasing demand for senior housing in the real estate market. He pointed out that low-income elderly individuals are often disadvantaged and may lack the choice of where they can age. He questioned the need for more investment in this area and the development of more inclusive senior housing in Hong Kong, emphasising the importance of collaboration across sectors in addressing these issues.

Isabelle mentioned that in view of the high cost of housing, many elderly people live with their families, and we are also seeing a lack of affordable student housing in Hong Kong. She asked if intergenerational housing models could be an option and invited Calvin to share his thoughts on intergenerational housing, with specific reference to the new ISO Standard 25553 “Smart Multi Generation Neighbourhood”.



Calvin highlighted the double-ageing phenomenon in Hong Kong, which refers to the simultaneous challenges posed by an ageing population and ageing building stock. He introduced the audience to the Building Design Guide for the elderly, specifically designed for a vertical city like Hong Kong, along with the Elderly-friendly Design guidelines, developed with and by the community. Calvin mentioned four key principles for a more age-friendly design: safe mobility, social connection, wellbeing, and cognitive ability. He explained that these principles need to be adapted in the context of a vertical city.

In Grace’s work with the elderly and their families, Isabelle asked her to tell us about the caregiver experience and what types of new or alternative housing would be best adapted for both the elderly and their caregivers. She also asked what support caregivers need and who is providing it. Grace highlighted that safety is one of the major concerns for caregivers. Whilst she emphasised the importance of renovating spaces, she also pointed out the need to improve community areas to help elderly people maintain their independence in their neighbourhood. She acknowledged the improvements that have already been made and noted that further improvements are still possible.

Isabelle asked Donald to share what he thinks the private sector could do, or do more of, to provide community care for the elderly and help foster a stronger sense of community with caregivers.

Donald emphasized that while human-centric solutions are important, we should not overlook the potential role of technology to improve the well-being of the elderly community. For example, movement detectors can help increase seniors' confidence and independence by providing monitoring that makes them feel safer in case they have a fall. He also noted that the next generation of seniors are healthier, more active and increasingly independent.

Isabelle asked Grace to share examples of how she thinks community care can help elderly people to stay active and live independently in their own flats for longer. Grace agreed with Donald, noting that an increasing number of people are adopting healthy lifestyles to manage chronic conditions and focus on preventive health mindset, aiming for better well-being and muscle maintenance. While individuals can take charge of these changes, the importance of social connections and community activities should not be overlooked, as they contribute to a strong sense of community. She emphasized the importance of both physical and mental health.



The moderator highlighted that one option that could be considered is to create inclusive housing developments which are a mix of social and private housing. This could potentially help to build trust and strengthen social bonds between the elderly and other groups.

She asked Donald for his thoughts on inclusive housing developments and whether he thinks this is something that could be implemented in Northern Metropolis.

Donald encouraged greater collaboration within the housing sector, including with the HKSAR Government, emphasizing the need to think beyond current standards. He referenced the Well-Being Guide, published by the Hong Kong Housing Authority, which serves as a design reference to improve the living environment of both new and existing public housing estates, along with upcoming guidelines to reinforce these recommendations. Donald also discussed the opportunity to create a volunteering system for seniors and highlighted that these new policies could support the private sector to make progress in advancing senior housing initiatives.

After discussing this range of housing options, Isabelle asked all the panellists what they think is the best solution for senior housing in Hong Kong and why.

Calvin emphasized the importance of choice and that the elderly community should be empowered to make decisions about what is best for them. Given the rise in dementia and loneliness, there are opportunities to explore how we can create more adapted living environments, including developing more age-friendly communities that offer more comfortable spaces.

Grace highlighted the opportunity to provide flexible housing options, such as self-seniors units, and more communal centres, while allowing seniors citizens to stay in the neighbourhood they are used to living in.

Donald stressed the importance of providing adequate senior housing to respect the dignity of the elderly community. He also highlighted the need for proper healthcare and support services to ensure their wellbeing. Finally, he called for a mindset shift to recognize the elderly as individuals who have contributed significantly to society, reminding us all that it's time for us to give back.

## Closing remarks

Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong's CEO, Ms. Jo Hayes, thanked the event's **Platinum Sponsor, the Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong (REDA)**, **venue host, JLL** and the speakers who had their dedicated time and expertise to deliver a thought-provoking, and engaging event. She shared some key takeaways from the discussions, including insights from the Ageing in Place pilot phase research shared by Dr. Grace Seo, that demonstrated the positive impact of home modifications, that had transformed the lives of both the elderly and their caregivers. She shared her vision and aspirations for the Habitat Ageing in Place programme to affect systemic change in the elderly welfare sector, and she thanked the project funders for their continued support.



## Youth assembly

### Closed-door roundtable discussion on intergenerational housing

Students from two of Habitat's school clubs were invited to join a networking session to talk to the Symposium participants being joining a closed-door discussion on intergenerational housing solutions. **Canadian International School Hong Kong (CDNIS)** and **Stamford American School Hong Kong (SASHK)** students were guided by facilitators **Ms. Wendy Chan** and **Dr. Thomas Tang, Executive Director at AECOM** to explore different models of intergenerational housing and whether any of these could be an option for Hong Kong.



One group of students discussed the potential benefits of intergenerational housing, including companionship from the elderly and the opportunity to foster friendships between different age groups. In their discussions, they suggested that across generations, leading to stronger community ties. Additionally, there was a consensus that living together could facilitate knowledge exchange, with young people learning empathy and face-to-face interaction, whilst the elderly could gain insights into technology and current trends. Space efficiency was also highlighted, as intergenerational housing could reduce the need for elderly care homes and single-person flats, addressing the significant space challenges faced by in Hong Kong.



At the same time, the group also identified several challenges and constraints associated with intergenerational housing. Conflicting schedules and habits between the elderly and youth were seen as major hurdles. Furthermore, they felt that cultural differences could lead to misunderstandings, potentially resulting in conflict. The students expressed concern that the demanding work culture in Hong Kong, limits the time young people can dedicate to caring for the elderly. Additionally, the different interests and hobbies of the two age groups might hinder the development of meaningful connections.

To address these challenges, students proposed several suggestions for improvement. Community competitions, skill-sharing sessions, and organized social activities such as game nights and movie nights, were recommended as effective ways to strengthen bonds between the elderly and youth. The idea of creating recreational facilities and community spaces to encourage interaction was also discussed, emphasising the importance of fostering connections.

Taking into account the positive impact as well as the projected challenges, the overall takeaway of the discussion revealed that the students believe the concept of intergenerational housing is unlikely to be a feasible choice in Hong Kong. They concluded that the constraints and challenges associated with this model outweigh the potential benefits, leading to a consensus that, whilst intergenerational housing has its merits, practical implementation may be hard to achieve.



Another group of students unanimously agreed that intergenerational living is in fact, already a common practice in Hong Kong. A notable example highlighted was the role of grandparents who often take care of their grandchildren while their parents are at work. This arrangement reflects a cultural norm where familial support systems are essential for managing daily responsibilities.

Several reasons were identified for the prevalence of intergenerational living in Hong Kong. Firstly, the exorbitant cost of living often necessitates that young adults live with their parents to afford housing. Additionally, sharing a household significantly reduces living expenses for all family members. Intergenerational households also allow for reciprocal support, where youngsters can assist with household chores, while the elderly can help prepare meals for busy youth. Moreover, living together fosters communication and companionship between generations, alleviating feelings of loneliness.

However, despite its advantages, the assembly recognised several challenges associated with intergenerational living. One major issue is the limited space in many Hong Kong flats, making it difficult to accommodate a three-generation family. The time commitment required for caring for elderly family members can also impact the busy schedules of younger individuals. Furthermore, differences in lifestyle and values can lead to conflicts, such as varying sleep schedules between night-owl youngsters and early-to-bed seniors. Lastly, young adults often seek independence, which may clash with the realities of shared living arrangements.

The facilitator asked the students to imagine, if they were the Chief Executive, what initiative would they take to foster intergenerational living in a cohesive and a sustainable way. They suggested several key initiatives that included improving accessibility through major development initiatives such as the Northern Metropolis and developing new communities in the New Territories, where there is more space for daily activities that could support intergenerational living. Additionally, promoting intergenerational integration through the creation of recreational spaces designed for activities that bring different generations together would foster interaction and understanding. The students also proposed establishing sustainable incentives, such as a "time-money" reward system for participants engaging in intergenerational activities. For example, teaching elderly individuals how to use mobile phones could earn participants credits redeemable for daily necessities, promoting active participation and cooperation.



The youth assembly provided valuable insights into the views of youth regarding intergenerational housing. While they acknowledged the potential advantages of such arrangements, they noted that intergenerational living already exists in many Hong Kong families. However, they highlighted that scaling this approach more broadly would face significant challenges, making it difficult to implement as a practical solution on a societal level in the current context.