

Fighting 'Invisible Discrimination' Against Age

By Diana Zlomislic, The Star

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Canada

Scientists, designers and policy makers from around the world will gather in Montreal tomorrow to exchange ideas on aging.

For four days, the city will play host to representatives from 40 countries at the ninth annual Global Conference on Ageing with discussion points ranging from building better bathrooms for seniors to trends and developments in international law and aging.

Dr. Jane Barratt is incensed by examples of "invisible discrimination" – the doors on public transit that don't open properly; cross-walk signals that demand an Olympic sprinter's speed, the 90-year-old patient in a waiting room who's kept waiting and waiting.

Barratt, secretary general of the International Federation on Ageing, points out that globally there are a growing number of cities that are becoming age-friendly.

"There are some wonderful examples in Japan where accessibility has been a priority," she says.

A few months ago, the automaker Nissan Motor announced it was using a specialized driver's suit and goggles to simulate poor balance, aching joints and weak eyesight that often accompany aging.

Associate chief designer Etsuhiro Watanabe told Reuters the suit's weight and construction puts young car designers not only in the minds of senior citizens, but also in their bodies.

Barratt's group is urging municipalities worldwide to pledge a portion of their expenditures toward building more accessible communities.

About 40 cities, including Tokyo, Geneva and Melbourne, Australia, have already embraced this massive project. Last month, Halifax, Portage la Prairie, Man., Saanich, B.C., and Sherbrooke, Que., announced plans to implement the "global age-friendly cities" initiative.

The World Health Organization has outlined the characteristics of an age-friendly city in an 82-page guide, highlighting concerns in eight key areas: outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; civic participation and employment; communication and information; and community support and health services.

Though several of the presenters at the conference are from Toronto, organizers said no senior city officials have registered for the event

Courtesy: <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2008/invisible.htm>