Foreword

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According to a recent report issued by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society, an aging society is one in which people over sixty outnumber those under fifteen.¹ The MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society, an interdisciplinary group of experts on longevity, conducts analyses and proposes public policies relevant to the challenges and opportunities of an aging society. The network has pointed out that inevitable demographic shifts mean that our country will become increasingly older in coming decades. We are woefully unprepared to deal with the myriad consequences of this impending reality, nor have we challenged ourselves to imagine the opportunities that an aging America will present.

The aging of our society is not merely a possibility, contingent on future increases in life expectancy. It is a certainty driven by well-defined factors, including the aging of the baby boom generation, dramatic increases in life expectancy that occurred in the twentieth century, and the more recent compression of morbidity.² Compression of morbidity means that many more of us will live disease- and illness-free right up until the end of our lives. These forces, despite sustained fertility rates and continued immigration, will result in an America populated by increasing numbers and percentages of older people.³

As we enter these uncharted waters, the greatest unknowns relate to the future behavior of the baby boom generation. How will they work, save, spend, study, help others, and vote? How and when will they retire? As they withdraw from paid

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employment, how will they cope with their lack of engagement and control? Will the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit that has characterized this generation endure? What new ideas will they pursue? And, as investigated in detail in this volume, where and how will they live?

Considerable analysis and much political discussion have focused on the future of the US health care system, and the solvency and sustainability of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. There has been much less focus on the realities of life in an aging America. We are entering a period of rapid change in many of our society's key institutions, including housing, retirement, labor markets, education, transportation, religious communities, neighborhoods, political parties, national defense, and the family itself. To cope with an aging population, these institutions must adapt to emerging structural and cultural changes. We also need to develop policies and strategies at the local, state, and national levels that will optimize opportunities for all age groups. Our whole society needs to think creatively about how to best support people to a very old age.

The future design, structure, and function of our housing, neighborhoods, and communities are central issues as we try to come to grips with an aging America. One important strategy will be to develop healthy communities that engage all residents and foster intergenerational experiences. Former secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Honorable Henry Cisneros, joined with the Stanford Center on Longevity to produce this volume, *Independent for Life: Homes and Neighborhoods for an Aging America*. The basic premise of this book is that Americans are aging in traditional homes, age-segregated neighborhoods, and communities that are designed for yesterday's demographic realities. Future demographic changes demand transformative efforts for successful aging in place. As Professor Andrew Scharlach says, "The ultimate goal of aging in place is about achieving true choice in housing—the ability to live wherever we want, regardless of age or ability."

This important and timely volume is an edited work from an interdisciplinary group of architects, urban planners, gerontologists, economists, civic leaders, elected officials, developers, and builders. It represents a very important contribution to the national discourse on strategies to assure the emergence of a productive and equitable aging America.

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It is our hope that this book will stimulate thinking about how we can change the culture of our society to support successful aging in place. We are aware that the challenges are great and that the opportunities are real.

Notes

1. John W. Rowe, “Opportunities and Challenges of an Aging Society” (speech to the Institute for Survey Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, September 2007), <http://www.agingsocietynetwork.org/speech>.

2. Sherwin B. Nuland, *The Art of Aging: A Doctor’s Prescription for Well-Being* (New York: Random House, 2007).

3. Adele M. Hayutin, Miranda Dietz, and Lillian Mitchell, “New Realities of an Older America: Challenges, Changes, and Questions” (Stanford Center on Longevity, 2010), <http://longevity.stanford.edu/article/new+realities+of+an+older+america>.