

## Reflecting on the 'aging at home' discourse

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**Introduction:** In almost every country, the proportion of people over 65 years of age is growing faster than any other age group. A key response to population aging in Canada has been the implementation of various 'aging at home' strategies which aim to provide necessary support services in the home to decrease the probability of institutionalized care. However, the 'aging at home' discourse and these strategies often fail to recognize that for many seniors, living in their current circumstances poses financial and psychosocial difficulties, requiring formal or informal supports to perform occupations required to remain in their own homes, yet not acknowledging the need to support other meaningful occupations.

**Objectives:** This presentation will address the meaning of home and place versus the objective home environment, which may help to expand the discourse to considerations of 'aging in place' that address the ability to perform meaningful occupations and acceptance of aging in a relocated environment.

**Description:** There is an underlying assumption that aging at home is equated with successful, healthy aging, defined by independence in daily activities rather than health and well-being. From an occupational therapy and occupational science perspective, health is more broadly considered to include having the opportunities to engage in occupations essential for well-being, rather than just self-care and mobility independence.

**Discussion:** Housing that is supportive of the performance of meaningful everyday occupations is likely to support health and social participation of seniors, yet current budget restrictions and limited resources for aging at home strategies put elderly individuals at risk for negative outcomes, such as informal caregiver burden, financial and psychosocial stress and diminished quality of life.

**Conclusion:** Reframing "aging at home" to a model that focuses on place versus the objective home environment considers adaptiveness, gains, maintenance and prevention of losses which supports meaningful occupations that can enhance quality of life for seniors.

**Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy:** There is an increasing recognition for the need to enrich occupational therapy perspectives on independence and function as the primary determinants of well-being, by highlighting the meaning of housing, home and place to support meaningful occupation.