

Implementation Pathways of Elderly Care Services Embedded in Age-Friendly Communities: A Case Study of Yan'an Er Road Community in Qingdao

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of an aging population and increasing demand for elderly care services, as well as the policy initiative of building "elder-friendly communities" through pilot programs, China urgently needs to explore ways to integrate elderly care services into these communities. Taking Qingdao's Yan'an Er Road Community—a national model for elderly-friendly communities—as the research case, this study examines the implementation pathways of embedding elderly care services into such communities from four dimensions: spatial integration, functional integration, actor integration, and emotional integration. The aim is to provide reference for community governance and elderly care services in China, while offering valuable insights and experiences for the development of elderly-friendly communities in the country.

Keywords: Community-based elderly care, elderly care services, senior-friendly communities.

1. Problem posing

Population aging has become one of the fundamental national conditions in China. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, as of the end of 2024, the elderly population aged 60 and above in China has reached 310.31 million, surpassing 300 million for the first time. This has raised higher requirements for the quantity and quality of elderly care services in China. At the same time, the Party and the state attach great importance to the development of the elderly care service system. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposes to implement the national strategy of actively responding to population aging, develop elderly care services and industries, optimize services for elderly people living alone, and promote the realization of basic elderly care services for all elderly people [1]. The national "14th Five Year Plan" proposes to build a coordinated elderly care service system that combines home and community institutions with medical care and health care [2].

Driven by the dual factors of an aging population trend and the increasing demand for elderly care services, China has put forward more contemporary requirements for elderly-friendly community environments. The National Health Commission points out that by the end of 2035, China aims to achieve full coverage of elderly-friendly communities, in order to better meet the needs of the elderly in terms of living environment, daily travel, health services, elderly care services, social participation, and spiritual and cultural life [3]. In this context, China urgently needs to explore ways to embed elderly care services into elderly-friendly communities, in order to promote the construction of such communities and generally improve the quality of life of the elderly population in China.

2. The current situation of embedding elderly care services into elderly friendly communities

Embedding elderly care services into elderly friendly communities means integrating elderly care facilities, resources, subjects, and cultural atmosphere into the internal and surrounding spaces of the community and the daily lives of the elderly population, enabling them to obtain convenient and profitable elderly care support in their familiar living environment. Based on the evolution process of China's elderly care policies and their practice at the grassroots level, we can roughly divide the

process of embedding elderly care services into the community since 2010 into the following three stages.

The first stage (2010-2015) is the initial stage. The "Plan for the Construction of Social Elderly Care Service System (2011-2015)" issued by the State Council clearly proposes to build a social elderly care service system based on home, supported by communities, and supported by institutions. The main feature of this stage is to actively respond to the aging population and ensure and improve people's livelihoods, with government promotion as the leading factor, focusing on filling the gaps in elderly care facilities, and using day care, daycare centers, elderly activity centers and other elderly service carriers as the starting point to serve difficult elderly groups such as the elderly, those living alone, empty nesters, and disabled. At this stage, community elderly care mainly serves as a supplement to the insufficient family elderly care and plays an auxiliary role.

The second stage (2016-2020) is the accelerated development stage. The Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Livable Environment for the Elderly issued by the State Council in 2016 proposed to promote the construction of aging friendly public environment, strengthen community barrier free access, medical support, life service network, and elderly social participation to support environmental construction. During this period, the practice of embedding elderly care services into communities in China began to move towards a dual wheel drive model that integrates environmental improvement and service extension. At this stage, community elderly care has gradually shifted towards the coordinated promotion of multiple elements such as aging friendly transformation, community meal assistance, health management, volunteer service, and mutual assistance for elderly care.

The third stage (2021 present) is the stage of in-depth development. The State Council has issued the "14th Five Year Plan for the Development of National Aging Industry and Elderly Care Service System", which clearly proposes to strengthen the capacity of home-based community elderly care services, promote the construction of a "15 minute" home-based elderly care service circle, and promote the extension of professional institution services to communities and families. At this stage, the focus of embedding elderly care services into communities in China has shifted from "expanding quantity and establishing locations" to "emphasizing quality, strong collaboration, and excellent experience", highlighting the integration of medical care and elderly care, digital empowerment, social participation, and emotional support.

In summary, since 2010, the integration of elderly care services into elderly friendly communities in China has progressed from the initial exploration stage to the stage of deep development. However, in some old communities that have been built for a long time, they still face problems such as weak spatial foundations and scattered service resources. Therefore, we take the elderly friendly community - Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao City as a model, aiming to provide reference for the integration of elderly care services into community governance in China, and provide useful experience and inspiration for the construction of elderly friendly communities in China.

3. Exploration Results of Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao City

3.1. Introduction to Yan'an Second Road Community

Yan'an Second Road Community is under the jurisdiction of Yan'an Road Street, Shibe District, Qingdao City, Shandong Province, with a total area of 0.47 square kilometers. It is adjacent to Juxian Road in the east, Mingxia Road in the west, Yan'an Road in the south, and Biaoshan Road in the north, and is conveniently located near the early market of Yulin Mountain. The total number of households in the community is 2722, with a total of 7377 people and 62 residential buildings and 128 units [4]. In 2023, Yan'an Second Road Community was awarded the title of "National Demonstration Elderly Friendly Community" by the National Health Commission.

3.2. Case Study of Yan'an Second Road Community

3.2.1 Spatial embedding

In recent years, Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao has actively responded to the national call to carry out aging friendly renovation, and has opened up the "hard environment" of inconvenient travel for the elderly in the community through spatial embedding.

One is the renovation of old residential areas. The residential buildings in Yan'an Second Road Community have been built for many years and are relatively old. In order to improve the living comfort of residents in the community, Yan'an Second Road Community has carried out aging friendly renovation practices such as installing elevators, renovating stair handrails, renovating ramps, and separating pedestrians and vehicles in multiple old residential areas within its jurisdiction, all of which have achieved visible results. Not only did it win the support of residents in the community, but it also made the community environment more beautiful and tidy; At the same time, it also facilitates the travel of the elderly population in the community and accommodates their physiological characteristics of inconvenient travel. In old communities such as Zhulinshan, taking the elevator installed outside the building has become a daily routine for residents to travel; At intersections such as Mingxia Road and Yan'an Second Road with high traffic and dense vehicles, measures to separate pedestrians and vehicles and carry out road repairs have effectively ensured the personal safety of residents, especially elderly people with limited mobility.

The second is the improvement of living environment. Yan'an Second Road Community has a superior geographical location, located in the central area of Shibe District with developed transportation and convenient access. For the elderly population, it not only ensures the convenience of daily travel, but also improves the accessibility and timeliness of emergency rescue in emergency situations. From the perspective of infrastructure, it is not only surrounded by medical facilities such as hospitals, community clinics, and pharmacies, but also equipped with living services and leisure facilities such as markets, shopping malls, restaurants, banks, and city parks, which can fully meet the dual needs of health protection and daily leisure for the elderly population. Secondly, from the perspective of transportation, the surrounding public transportation stations are dense, with multiple bus and subway stations. At the same time, urban roads such as expressways and overpasses crisscross, forming a developed road network system around Yan'an Second Road Community. Ambulance vehicles are unobstructed, which is conducive to ensuring the convenience of emergency treatment for the elderly population.

The third is the embedding of elderly care facilities. In response to the large proportion and strong demand of the elderly population in the community, Yan'an Second Road Community has gradually established and improved various types of elderly care facilities within the community, focusing on directly embedding elderly care service places into the daily living space of the elderly population within the community. Yan'an Second Road Community has set up a senior park and a characteristic senior care street on Biaoshan Road. At the same time, there is a home community elderly care service station of more than 300 square meters, providing diversified services for the elderly and enriching the daily life of the elderly population in the community.

3.2.2 Function embedding

If the spatial embedding of elderly care services solves the problem of "accessibility" of elderly care services, then the functional embedding of elderly care services solves the problem of "usability" of elderly care services. The Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao fully utilizes medical and elderly service resources such as the Yan'an Road Street Community Health Service Center, Taitung Hospital, and Julin Elderly Care Home within its jurisdiction to provide diversified health services such as contracted family doctors and on-site medical services for the Yan'an Second Road Community and surrounding elderly groups. By inviting professionals such as doctors and lawyers to provide health education, psychological counseling, anti fraud propaganda, and legal counseling services to the elderly population, we aim to promote the extension of elderly care services in the

community from traditional care to multiple dimensions such as medical treatment, rehabilitation, psychology, and law.

On this basis, Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao further extends its daily care function to the real life problems of the elderly. According to a report by Qingdao Daily, Yan'an Second Road Community has completed the first batch of aging friendly renovations and provided meal delivery services for more than 20 elderly people who are unable to go out. The community's "15 minute elderly care circle" is gradually being improved. Based on the upgraded home-based community elderly care service stations and third-party elderly care service institutions, the community has integrated services such as meal assistance, care, and entertainment. The Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao has established a regular visiting team that includes staff, grid workers, volunteers, and red partners. The team regularly provides home visits, spiritual comfort, and life assistance to elderly people with special difficulties. The specific service content includes basic life support such as home cleaning, living environment maintenance, etc.

3.2.3 Subject embedding

With the continuous increase in the proportion of elderly population in the community and the increasing differentiation of the demand structure of the elderly group, the traditional family elderly care model is no longer able to meet the diversified and multi-level service needs of the elderly. To meet this demand, Yan'an Second Road Community has gradually formed a community elderly care governance pattern with the collaborative participation of multiple subjects. The distinctive feature of Yan'an Second Road Community is that it adheres to the guidance of Party building and promotes elderly care services as an important part of community governance. The community fully utilizes the special funds for party organizations to serve the masses to promote building and courtyard renovation, aging friendly renovation, and public space improvement, reflecting the organizational mobilization and resource coordination capabilities of grassroots party organizations in embedding elderly care services. At the same time, community workers and grid workers undertake basic tasks such as daily visits, regular visits to elderly people with special difficulties, policy promotion, and demand discovery, becoming important execution forces for the implementation of elderly care services.

In addition to community party organizations and neighborhood committees, medical institutions, elderly care institutions, third-party elderly care service organizations, volunteers, and local merchants are also effectively linked in. Yan'an Second Road Community relies on community health service centers, hospitals, and nursing homes to provide professional services, upgrades third-party institutions to build elderly care service stations, and relies on red partners and volunteers to participate in elderly assistance actions, gradually forming a diversified governance structure of "party organization coordination community organization coordination professional institution support social force participation".

3.2.4 Emotional embedding

The construction of elderly friendly communities should not only focus on physical care for the elderly population, but also start from their emotional needs, paying attention to their sense of dignity, belonging, and self-worth realization.

The Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao fully respects the subjectivity of the elderly population within its jurisdiction, actively mobilizes the retired elderly population in the community to regularly participate in resident representative meetings, and actively provides suggestions and recommendations on hot topics related to its own interests such as community construction and building renovation; At the same time, various volunteer service organizations such as the Elderly Cadre Volunteer Service Team and the Bu Lao Song Volunteer Service Team have been established in Yan'an Second Road Community, Qingdao City. While enriching daily life, they provide convenience to others and enhance the daily leisure experience and spiritual and cultural satisfaction of the elderly population in the community.

The Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao not only encourages the elderly to actively participate in various activities, but also supports them to fully utilize their strengths. Elderly people with painting and calligraphy skills participate in drawing cultural themed walls and colorful paintings, elderly people with volunteer service willingness participate in patrol, publicity and other volunteer service activities, and elderly people with literary and artistic skills regularly hold community cultural performances. The elderly in Yan'an Second Road Community are no longer passive recipients of elderly care services, but important participants in community cultural production, public services, and neighborhood mutual assistance. The emotional embedding of community elderly care services can also be achieved as a result: on the one hand, it enhances the sense of belonging, achievement, and happiness of elderly people in the community; On the other hand, it has also formed a more stable and united mutual aid network within the Yan'an Second Road community.

3.3. Inspiration from the Practice of Yan'an Second Road Community

The practice of embedding elderly care services in Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao provides us with the following insights. One is that the construction of elderly friendly communities should not just be based on the slogan of "aging friendly", but should establish a community elderly care demand identification mechanism centered on the real needs of the elderly population. The second is to use the "15 minute elderly care service circle" as a starting point to promote the diversified integration and development of elderly care functions such as meal assistance, medical assistance, care, and entertainment in the community. The third is to take party building as the core, build a long-term mechanism for the coordinated participation of multiple subjects, and effectively organize dispersed resources, subjects, and services. Fourthly, guided by a positive view of aging, promote the deep integration of emotional support and social participation into the community.

4. Conclusion

In summary, embedding elderly care services into elderly friendly communities is not just about adding a few elderly care projects and configuring a few elderly care facilities in the community, but a systematic project that reshapes the community's elderly care service space, optimizes the functions of community elderly care services, integrates the main body of community elderly care governance, and creates an elderly friendly atmosphere around the material and spiritual cultural needs of the elderly population. The practice of Yan'an Second Road Community in Qingdao City shows that in urban old communities with a high proportion of elderly population and a large number of old buildings and courtyards, as long as community elderly care insists on putting the elderly at the center, through spatial transformation, service integration, diversified collaboration, and social participation, it can gradually build the community into an elderly friendly community where the elderly are willing to stay, live, participate, and realize their self-worth. In the future, the construction of elderly friendly communities still needs to be based on the resource endowment and population structure of different regions and communities, promote the transition of elderly care services from "filling the gap supply" to "embedded governance", and realize the transformation from "elderly care" to "enjoying the elderly".

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