



## Unedited Transcript

### Mpact Podcast Episode 73 **Older Adults and Climate Emergencies**

#### **With Danielle Arigoni,**

Managing Director for Policy and Solutions at the National Housing Trust, and author of the new book, *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation*.

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Tamar Shapiro (0s): Welcome to the Mpact Podcast. This is Tamar Shapiro, CEO of Mpact, formerly known as Rail~Volution. We are excited to have recently announced both our new name and tagline, Mpact: Mobility Community Possibility. We're a national organization working at the intersection of transit, related mobility options and community development. The podcast is a chance to hear from a range of voices as we go deeper into how to leverage transit to make communities better for people.

Jeff Wood (43s): Hey there. I'm Jeff Wood, principal of The Overhead Wire and your host. This month on the Mpact Podcast, we're joined by Danielle Arigoni, Managing Director for Policy and Solutions at the National Housing Trust. We chat about Danielle's new book, *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation* and housing policy that benefits everyone. Stay with us.

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Danielle Arigoni, welcome to the podcast.

Danielle Arigoni (1m 37s): Thanks so much.

Jeff Wood (1m 39s): Well Thanks for being here and great to see you again. Before, we get started. For, those who might not be familiar with your work, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Danielle Arigoni (1m 46s): Absolutely. My name is Danielle Arigoni and my current position, I am managing director for policy and solutions at National Housing Trust and also the author of a book called *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation*.

Jeff Wood (1m 57s): Awesome. So you've lived on the east coast for a while, but you consider yourself a Californian. I'm wondering, as a Texas born Californian myself, I'm wondering what does that mean to be a Californian?

Danielle Arigoni (2m 7s): You know, for me, I can't separate myself from being a Californian. It's so much a part of who I am. I come from a multi-generational line of Californians and I'm the first one to have raised their kids on the east coast. So the real identity crisis comes to, who are my kids? Are they Californians or are they Virginians? And I maintain that they're all Californians who just happen to be living in Virginia. So that's how I hold onto that thread.

Jeff Wood (2m 32s): That makes sense, that makes sense. I feel weird about it too. My family came here a fair amount of time ago to California, and then my parents moved to Texas and I was born there and I grew up there. And so I feel like maybe I have the same experience as your kids might and maybe they'll move back at some point and be like, okay, I'm a Californian.

Danielle Arigoni (2m 47s): Exactly. We go back once a year and I made sure at least a couple of my kids were born in California. So those roots are there. Yeah.

Jeff Wood (2m 53s): Well, let's chat about your book *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation*. The book is about older adults. When did you first dive into this topic about age?

Danielle Arigoni (3m 1s): So, you know, I'm a planner. I came up through the planning profession. I'm very proud of that and I've always kind of thought of myself as a pretty open-minded and inclusive planner. But when I took the job at AARP about six years ago now, where I was director of livable communities, I realized how much of a blind spot I had with regards to aging. You know, for many years I sort of trumpeted the value of housing options and transportation choices and the like, but I didn't really, I think, hone in on what that meant for particularly increasingly large segment of our population, which are older adults until I started working at AARP.

And I think that as you see climate change begin to sort of wreak havoc over communities and and really have effect in every manner of our lives. Once again, I think there's this very clear disproportionate impact that is happening on older adults that I began to see and began to notice and really was always shocked that every story about climate Resilience that would come out, it would almost always fail to acknowledge older adults. And it, it felt increasingly like this was something that needed to be explored a little bit more.

Jeff Wood (4m 3s): And in the book you say that older adults are a little bit hard to characterize. I'm wondering why that is?

Danielle Arigoni (4m 10s): Yeah, you know, unlike youth, which clearly ends at age 18, when you become a legal adult, no one's really clear on when one begins to be an older adult. Is it 50 when you get your AARP membership card, is it 55 when you're eligible to live in the retirement community? Is it 62 or 67 when you're able to get Social security or Medicare, is it something else? Because all of those ages trigger notions of what it means to be an older adult, but there really isn't a fixed and definite answer on, on what that means. And I think part of the consequence of that is that it has lent itself to kind of a poor understanding of who older adults are as a cohort.

But I maintain that that's a real oversight in the field of planning. And among those of us who, who plan for the housing and transportation and infrastructure that makes communities what they are, because that segment, however we define it, is in an increasingly large share of our communities.

Jeff Wood (5m 4s): Another thing is like, are are we uncomfortable with age? And how should we think about that specifically, like the discussions between the two groups, the younger and older, or discomfort talking about older Americans?

Danielle Arigoni (5m 16s): Yeah, I think a lot of our inability to plan for the needs of older adults does stem from both a poor understanding of who older adults are, and frankly, a discomfort around Aging. I think, you know, the only time you really hear Aging talked about these days is in two contexts. One is, is someone too old to serve in elected office? That's a big topic these days. And then the only other time you hear about Aging is when it has the word anti in front of it. How can we prevent Aging? How can we, you know, stop the tide of Aging? So it, it is not a, I would say, a healthy part of our American discourse on the life that we all lead.

And I think that that lends itself to really poor understanding of who older adults are and what their needs are in communities.

Jeff Wood (5m 55s): Are there any misconceptions people have about older adults?

Danielle Arigoni (5m 59s): I think there are. I think, you know, on the one hand, one of the amazing and wonderful things is that as our life expectancy increases, we see everyday examples of people who just shatter the images of what it means to age. We had, you know, an 88 year old run the New York marathon this year. We had Martha Stewart grace the cover of Sports Illustrated. So they're really shattering these notions of what it means to age. But I think that some of the misconceptions that are embedded within that then is, is maybe a failure to understand that we have a really significant portion of our older adults who live at or below the poverty line, something like 15% of older adults live at or below the poverty line.

One in nine older adults lives with dementia or cognitive decline. You know, almost 30% of older adults live alone. 20% of older adults don't drive. So I think when you start to kind of tease out what it means for older adults to age in our communities and how our communities are or are not serving them, I think it's, it's a little bit of a wake up call. Even when you think about things as basic as what they describe as activities of daily living, these are the things that we all take for granted. Our vision, our hearing, our ability to be mobile, 20% of older adults need help with those.

And so when you really crosswalk those against how a person functions in a, in a community on a day-to-day basis, much less how a person functions in a community that's under extreme duress in a climate fueled crisis, it causes a little bit of a reset in terms of what's, what's possible and what we need to do.

Jeff Wood (7m 24s): One of the stats that was really interesting to me was how few people, older adults live in nursing homes and assisted living settings. And I think that's interesting because of the way pop culture maybe portrays older adults in movies and other things like that.

Danielle Arigoni (7m 39s): Exactly. I think even, and frankly even in the planning community, when we think about planning for older adults, we're thinking about planning for the assisted living facility or planning for the nursing home or planning for the senior center. But yeah, the reality is something like 4% of people live in congregate facilities like that. 96% of old adults live independently in the community with a spouse, with family or often alone.

Jeff Wood (8m 0s): Do we know how many people live in like retirement communities like, you know, Dell Webbs retirement community in Florida or California or wherever else?

Danielle Arigoni (8m 9s): I don't have that number off the top of my head. I do think that that represents, you know, one choice that some people choose to make. And I think what we do see is that the sort of growth rate for older adults in some of those warm weather environment places is putting people right in the sort of cross hairs of where climate change is having the most extreme impact. So that's kind of the downside of some of these larger communities that are built around their retirement lifestyle.

Jeff Wood (8m 33s): Yeah. Well it seems now that no one can really avoid talking about climate change because of the range of disasters that have been happening to us this summer and before heatwaves, flooding, hurricanes, drought. But they, they seem to take on a different meaning through the lens of older adults. I'm wondering why are older adults important to consider when it comes to climate change and disaster Resilience?

Danielle Arigoni (8m 54s): I think the, the first thing that that jumps to mind is just the sort of shocking statistics when you look at disaster after disaster, who bears the brunt of those who is dying in those disasters. In almost all cases, going back as far as hurricane Katrina, nearly 20 years ago, and as recently as the wildfires in Lena this summer, the vast majority of people who

are dying are older adults, often as much as 50%, two thirds, 80%, even a hundred percent of people who died, for example, in Puerto Rico, what they call the excess deaths associated with Hurricane Maria.

There were all older adults and you know, I think there's this, there's again, we have kind of a blind spot with regards to this. I was looking at some of the media reports around the wildfires from Hawaii this summer and initial reports talked about, you know, the, the early indicators are that some of the people who died were older adults, but we expect that that age is going to be more evenly distributed across age groups. When the final tally comes in, as of this week, which is mid-October now, I looked at the names and the ages of peoples who have been identified by the police department there as having died.

And it was something like 73% of people were older adults. So again, we, we seem to not want to see the reality and the trend and the pattern, which is that time and time again, older adults are the, the majority of deaths in disasters. And in the 20 years since Hurricane Katrina, we have seen no real change in that pattern. It is predictable, it is tragic, frankly, it's immoral, but it's not just around disasters, although that is an incredibly important part of the equation. I think it's also about what it means for older adults from a health perspective and a from a financial perspective when they're dealing with new climate conditions that we all are encountering, even outside of disasters.

We're all dealing with hotter summers and longer summers. We're all dealing with more extreme rainfall. We're all dealing with higher costs of utilities and insurance, but those really land differently and land in a more difficult way often on older adults, particularly those who are income restricted, income strained.

Jeff Wood (10m 55s): And what about like equity considerations? I mean, it it seems like from the book that there's even more impact for older adults that are people of color. So, you know, what does that mean for the discussion related to these issues?

Danielle Arigoni (11m 7s): Absolutely. It, it kind of crosses over into the work that I do In my day job here at National Housing Trust was just where we're looking at affordable housing, which, you know, does largely serve communities of color, not exclusively, but but certainly people of color are more likely to be in subsidized housing than our other communities. When you look at where subsidized housing developments are, they are more likely to be in areas of risk from damage from climate disasters. And certainly among those, there are older adults in those same populations, in that same cohort of people being impacted just this week that we were inquiring National Housing Trust and leading age, which is a, a large advocacy organization advocating for section 202 properties.

So these are the subsidized housing developments that, that serve older adults, low-income, older adults. We were asking HUD had they mapped the sort of intersection of where section 202 properties are and climate risk sad answers that they hadn't yet. And I think that's kind of yet another illustration of just a failure to take that next step looking even beyond the racial

equity implications, which are hugely important and saying let's go beyond that to see what that really means from an age perspective. 'cause when you hone in on, on that specific intersection, it, it kind of illuminates solutions and strategies that are going to better serve older adults.

Jeff Wood (12m 25s): This is a long question, comment, so bear with me. I'm going to kind of go through a few things here, but I, I want to point out a line in the book that I thought was really important and I also want to tie it to a recent report related to California homelessness. So I want to read it so listeners can know what I'm referring to specifically. Increasingly disasters are recognized not as one-time events, but as cascading events in which people are tasked with both weathering the proverbial storm and dealing with what happens afterwards. So that quote for me ties into a recent report on homelessness in California, which found that half of homeless population in California is 50 or above, but what led many to homelessness specifically wasn't drugs or mental health specifically, but rather a single life event that pushed them over the edge of poverty to lose their home.

You know, it can be an unforeseen medical bill, it can be an unexpected job loss, it can be things like that. But I think that's an important point to make regarding how disasters specifically can impact people. And you know, one day everything is fine and, and happy and going well. And then the next is a cascading series of failures that knocks people down and perhaps not even their own failures if systems let them down and don't set them up for positive results. And so I'm curious your thoughts on that idea of the cascading failure of the impact of this one-time event. It doesn't even have to be a disaster. It could be a medical event, it could be, you know, anything that leads people to lose housing, but it feels all tied together.

Danielle Arigoni (13m 43s): It really is, and I think it kind of goes back to our inadequate housing supply. I think there have been other reports in, in recent months and years that really tie the growth in the unhoused population to a lack of housing supply in those markets and housing supply. Not just in terms of do we have the number of units, but do we also have the right kind of units? Are they accessible for people who need home modifications to be able to get up into their units? If they all require stairs for example, that's going to be a problem for someone who uses a wheelchair. But with regards to the cascading effects, absolutely.

One of the statistics that I think about often is Louisiana Housing Corporation, which is the State Housing Finance Agency for the state of Louisiana, said that they lost 20% of their affordable housing stock in 10 years due to climate fuel disasters. And when you think about what that means at the household level, you know, again, Matthew Desmond, I think made the case very eloquently that poverty doesn't cause eviction, eviction causes poverty, so too does displacement. And that displacement can come from evictions, but it can come from, frankly, a unit that is now endured such significant damage from a storm or from repeat flooding that it's inhospitable that has become obsolete.

And whether you're a homeowner who is kind of enduring housing conditions that are substandard because you simply can't afford to fix those or move or get the health that you



need, that means you are going to endure those compounding effects of what it means for your health and wellbeing to live in a home that is substandard. Not to mention the sort of loneliness and isolation that comes from that as a result. So in older adults, I think the other compounding effect is really around health. That you have older adults who already have preexisting sometimes chronic medical conditions, whether it's respiratory challenges or heart disease.

And when you layer on top of that, the air quality impacts of wildfire smoke or frankly the, the effects of black mold that come in a home that has repeat flooding and folk, those folks don't have the financial abilities not to mention the, the capacity to manage those risks that accelerates the kind of decline that, that we know makes life very untenable for older adults. And fundamentally what this is, is about like, are we allowing people, are we equipping people to be able to age in place and to manage those climate related risks that are coming their way?

And I think in many cases we're not, and frankly we're not even, we don't even have our eyes on those problems. We don't even have our eyes on the problems of the older adult who lives in a home where the home is in physically deteriorating condition as a result of, you know, whether it's flooding or whether it's extreme heat that is warping systems and causing systems to fail. We just don't have our eyes on that set of problems because they occur outside of large disasters, but they nevertheless really mean there's a very significant risk being put upon older adults to manage themselves.

Jeff Wood (16m 33s): I always say that all these things are tied together and, and so, you know, there's an issue of, of factoring in age and planning that maybe we don't talk about enough planning for climate change and disasters is one thing, but planning generally, I feel like you could probably connect all those dots together.

Danielle Arigoni (16m 46s): Totally, yeah. And, and I'll give a lot of credit to a r p, the former organization I work for and the leadership that a r p has shown around age-friendly planning. And I think there's something like 700 communities now across the US that have sort of signed onto this age-friendly planning framework, which is really meant to center the needs of older adults in decisions about housing and transportation in public space. And that's a really important step forward. I think it brings together a diverse set of stakeholders that are needed to solve these problems.

And there's an opportunity to go further, to really further center that in the climate related risks that older adults face because that does represent a very real threat to their ability to age in place.

Jeff Wood (17m 28s): Is there a specific disaster or climate impact that might have more effect than others, like extreme heat or flooding or anything along those lines? What's the most impactful for older adults?

Danielle Arigoni (17m 38s): I would say extreme heat is by far, and it is actually the weather related illness that is the most deadly compared to all other weather related illnesses. It costs

the, of heat related deaths result in 12,000 people dying per year. Heat related illnesses do, of those 80% are older adults. So again, we are all enduring warmer days. But the reality is that that lands very differently on an older adult because frankly the, the body doesn't process heat in the same way as younger bodies do.

Not to mention interference that that might occur with medications that people are on or preexisting health conditions they may have. So extreme heat is problematic for older adults. Certainly very closely related to that is the cost of utilities that it requires to manage extreme heat. So particularly for older adults who, who may own their own home or who live in properties that haven't been properly weatherized or don't have the resources to weatherize their home, they're having to make very real trade-offs about how much they can afford to turn that air conditioning on during extreme heat and how much discomfort they can withstand.

And that decision, again, is layered on top of health conditions that they're already wrestling with that they may already be medicated for that make it that much more difficult to endure. So I would say by far, extreme heat is probably the most dangerous climate related condition that is confronting old adults.

Jeff Wood (19m 1s): How much was Katrina in 2005 a watershed moment for this whole discussion?

Danielle Arigoni (19m 8s): It, it was in some ways I'll, I'll point to a couple different things that came out of that. One is that congress took note, you know, we all remember those really tragic pictures of older adults in nursing homes sitting submerged in water because there were not effective emergency plans in place. So Congress took action as a result of that in 2017, passed the Emergency Preparedness Act, emergency preparedness rule, which requires any facility that receives Medicare or Medicaid funding to have an emergency plan in place. So that's a good step forward. It's acknowledging that you have responsibility as a congregate facility where there are older adults living to have a plan in place.

The downside of that is that, first of all, there were efforts during the Trump administration to roll that back. So it was a reporting burden that many facilities pointed to that caused some of those to be rolled back. Secondly, there's not a lot of clear enforcement about how to ensure that that is being implemented well. So back to New Orleans, there was a case a couple years ago of a nursing home owner named Bob Dean who implemented in his emergency plan when a nursing home that he owned was threatened by a disaster, implemented that plan, moved his residence to a warehouse where upon 15 of them died because the conditions were so abysmal, So, that was a plan that met the letter of the law, but nevertheless failed to protect older adults So.

that that's a, that is one outcome of Katrina, I think in some ways that has some hope attached to it, although it still needs a lot of refinement and strengthening Related to that, I think, again, you know, they're kind of in the hotspot of climate here, but New Orleans recognized that after the most recent events, there were locations where older adults tended to live so kind of



naturally occurring affordable housing for older adults. They're not facilities that receive public funding, but there are preponderance of old adults who live in multifamily apartment buildings, for example.

There were no requirements or regulations on buildings like that to have backup power. So when the power went out for, in some cases, days, or even weeks, that really had a pretty dangerous effect for the older adults who lived in those apartments who couldn't use, there was no elevator to use if they couldn't use the stairs, they were trapped and they had very little ability to access power to keep things running if they had in-home medical equipment. That power breakdown was a real case of life or death for many people. And so New Orleans has taken some steps to require owners of multifamily buildings, even if they are not subsidized, to have some emergency plans in place, have some backup power in place.

So I would say communities are learning from what has failed in the past and trying to do better. But I, I still go back to the fact that when we talk about effects of climate change, when we talk about the effects of disasters, the effects on older adults are not the top line. It's, it's often buried in an article kind of way down. And to date, no one has really pointed out or seen that this pattern has been allowed to persist for 20 years. And we haven't, frankly, as a country committed to reversing that trend.

Jeff Wood (22m 3s): What are some of the positives that came out of that? I mean, I'm seeing lighthouse locations, certain other models that might be followed in other places. I'm curious some of those outcomes that we're seeing happening now.

Danielle Arigoni (22m 14s): Yeah, there's, there's a lot of great stuff that's happening. The example that you mentioned, these community lighthouses that came out of, again in New Orleans was when members of the community, in this case it was houses of worship, the faith community recognized that for the older adults who live in these neighborhoods in New Orleans that go without power, that that has real negative effects for them. They can't necessarily pick up and move to another town for a few, you know, days or weeks. They can't necessarily buy an expensive generator for their home. So what they set about to do was to create these community lighthouses that would serve as Resilience hub scattered throughout the community, often co housed in a house of worship, a place of worship where that was not just the physical structure that was designed to offer power and cooling and water and food to older adults in the vicinity.

But it was also coupled with really a network of volunteers who walked out of the Resilience hub to get to know the older adults in their community well before the disaster happened. So they had those relationships already in place. They knew who needed what kind of help and to ensure that they were going to be able to make it to the, the lighthouse when disaster occurred. Some of the other examples that you see out there are, are places that have really embraced this special needs registry, which is a voluntary way for old adults or people with disabilities to kind of put themselves on the list for emergency management officials and for Aging advocates to say, you know, I'm going to need some additional help.

I cannot walk to a bus stop. I cannot drive myself. I'm going to need help of this particular nature when disaster comes. Or frankly, I just, I live alone and there's no one around to check on me. Can you ensure that someone's coming by and knocking on my door to make sure that I'm doing okay. So those special needs registries are important parts of the puzzle that a lot of communities have begun to embrace.

Jeff Wood (24m 4s): New York state changed policies also after, you know, hurricane Sandy and, and Buffalo, some winter storms there. One of the things you mentioned, for example, is, is the change in the built environment in small towns across the state. I'm wondering how, how much like a state policy differs maybe from city policies or, or those things like related.

Danielle Arigoni (24m 19s): They're very much related. I, I really think that in the case of New York, it's from the state level pushing down and it's from the community level pushing up. So the things that come to mind outta the state of New York and I'll, I'll credit them for being the first age friendly state in the country back in 2018. They committed to being a place where older New Yorkers will thrive and have healthy lives. And what that has meant is that the state has committed to sort of cultivating this network of age-friendly communities throughout the state. So they're equipping them with both guidance and resources to say, it's time for you to center the needs of older adults in your planning and we're going to help you get there.

At the same time, communities have really taken up the charge on that and sought to implement some pretty creative solutions to do just that. I just was in Tompkins County last week as a matter of fact and was talking with their Tompkins County age-friendly group and you know, in some cases they're making great strides. They have some really good volunteer programs that provide driving assistance to communities. There's a program called Get About where older adults who don't drive can call up volunteer drivers and get their needs met to get to places. But they also, in the course of our discussion on this issue, recognize that there were some real shortcomings in that community.

In particular, they had just identified that the new FEMA flood maps that have come out for the town placed a good number of old adults in flood zones where they had not traditionally been. And what that means is that there's this whole new challenge that they now need to tackle of how do you support older adults who live in homes where they've lived maybe for decades to make the difficult choice. Do they elevate their home? Do they find resources to get additional flood insurance? Do they sell their home and relocate? These are some pretty slow learning problems that that community's going to need to deal with that sit right at that intersection of climate Resilience and old adults.

And I don't think it's anything that anybody envisioned when they set about to do age-friendly work in New York, but the reality is that their attention to focusing on the needs of older adults coupled with what they're hearing from their community members in terms of the needs they're facing now, is the thing that points the way for their future action. And just to put one more, you know, sort of cherry on top there is the state is in the process of developing what's

called a master plan for Aging, which is meant to really create the framework for multiple state agencies to do this work and to center the needs of old adults.

There's a huge opportunity in that to connect that with the real leadership that that state has shown on climate change So, that those two things are working in tandem

Jeff Wood (26m 45s): When they're putting together these policies and things. How well do the agencies actually communicate with older adults?

Danielle Arigoni (26m 51s): Not as well as you might imagine. I was just looking at the, the New York State scoping plan, which is their climate action plan. And they articulate a lot of, you know, very noble and much needed goals for renewable energy and decarbonizing housing and the like. But there is virtually no mention of how old adults fit into that or how old adults are disproportionately impacted by that. At the same time, you've got a wonderful, you know, New York state age-friendly approach that really isn't necessarily thinking about energy or Resilience or any of the sort of renewable investments that need to occur to bring down energy costs for old adults and that also achieve their climate goals.

So there's a real opportunity For those agencies to work better together. These industries are traditionally very siloed. Aging tends to be a pretty siloed industry, so too does at utilities and energy. And so two frankly does, you know, sort of economic development and all the affiliated infrastructure decisions that go with that. There's a real need to bring those disciplines together around this issue.

Jeff Wood (27m 51s): From a communication standpoint, is it a technology thing that keeps folks from being reached out to, or is it a just a, a generational thing? Like I know there's a lot of folks who still have like a o l addresses and things like that. How is that part of the communication discussion, you know, dealt with? I guess

Danielle Arigoni (28m 6s): I think communication is in some ways a symptom of the larger problem, which is a, again, it goes back to kind of a poor understanding of who older adults are and and what their needs are. A lot of old adults still do not have in-home internet do not use smartphones. So if you're expecting that every older adult is going to be able to fill out that online application for fema, flood insurance help guess again, they might not actually be able to do that at all. And when it comes to sort of notifying and, and communicating people around disaster specific events, similarly, you kind of need an all hands on deck approach.

You need to obviously utilize the technological resources that we have and texts and, and alerts and the like. But you have to remember that there's a lot of people who still use landlines or people who don't speak English as a first language and that's not going to serve them either way, even if they do have a sort of in-home technological capacity. So it just goes back to that sort of making sure that the community as a whole is engaged in this conversation that you're utilizing all of these diverse community-based entities to, to lean into the solutions.

So I think frankly, one of the really underutilized avenues to to support this work is through home health aids. These are folks who, who are there to support older adults in their home to allow them and enable them to live in a more safe way, often to provide some medical care or light assistance with the activities of daily living in the home. These are folks who are in direct contact with older adults or delivering Meals on Wheels. That's another avenue. These are folks who could also be tasked to have those conversations with older adults about, you know, what happens with your air conditioning?

How much do you keep it on during the day? What do you need in order to keep it on longer? Because we're really seeing that your home is too warm and we know that that presents risks from you from a medical perspective So, that that's kind of an underutilized, I think, communications channel to get information to older adults and to engage them in the conversation about solutions too.

Jeff Wood (30m 3s): That was always an interesting discussion with my grandmother was, was like how warm her home was. 'cause she wanted it to be warm. 'cause you know, she lived to 109, she had thin skin and, and it didn't move around a lot. And so you'd walk in the house and it felt like really hot, but for her it was like, oh, this is beautiful weather. And I'm like, oh my gosh, I'm going to die.

Danielle Arigoni (30m 19s): Right? And, and thankfully, you know, it sounds like utility costs were not an issue, but in a colder environment. Yeah. And we're in a home that's not very well weatherized. I guarantee you there are older adults out there every day who are sacrificing warmth in order to conserve on utility costs and who are putting themselves at greater risk. And similarly in, in hot conditions, people who are just not cooling or not getting to cooling centers because they lack transportation or because they're caregiving for a spouse in the home or an adult child, they can't just easily relocate to a cooling center on extremely hot days.

Yeah.

Jeff Wood (30m 53s): I want to kind of change gears a little bit, but stay on the same topic to a certain extent. You, you're part of a session focused on missing middle housing here at the Impact Conference in Phoenix coming up here in November. I'm curious, you know, is this a good lead in to ask about specific housing mechanisms for older adults?

Danielle Arigoni (31m 9s): Absolutely.

Jeff Wood (31m 10s): Obviously that's something that we're talking about a lot around the country.

Danielle Arigoni (31m 13s): Yeah. You know, for better for worse, a lot of the solutions are the same for a range of challenges. So particularly around the session around missing middle zoning, what we're doing is really talking about some of the hurdles to ensuring that zoning reform can actually deliver affordable units at levels that really meet our affordability challenge.

I think there's a risk right now of zoning reform that delivers very nice, well-designed, missing middle forms without actually filling the affordability gap that we are struggling with in communities.

And I think when done well and when coupled with public incentives and resources that can actually generate exactly the kind of communities that are going to make older adults and younger adults and families and people of all ages more climate resilient, but particularly for older adults, when you think about a community that's comprised of single family detached homes, you know, separated from one another by, by large parcels, and you compare the sort of Resilience of a person who lives in a home like that by themselves to that of one who lives in a more densely developed, densely designed, missing middle complex, whether it's a clustered neighborhood or a cottage, you know, small home cottage development, that's a very different kind of set of conditions to work within when disasters strike.

So we know that isolation and loneliness are precursors to them, they make people more at risk, they put people more at risk in, in terms of climate. And when we're creating communities that cultivate that sense of social cohesion where people are going to walk into each other or be able to talk to each other from the front step or see the comings of, of goings of, of your neighbors in a more easy way, that's exactly the kind of solution that's going to mitigate some of the risks that confronts older adults who do live on their own. So it's not to say that missing middle is the, is the silver bullet and going to fix everything.

It's not, but it's developing more inclusive, cohesive, kind of connected communities of the kind that missing middle can create very much are a part of how we deliver more climate resilient communities for older adults.

Jeff Wood (33m 17s): Are there good examples of these types of communities?

Danielle Arigoni (33m 19s): Yeah, I'm thinking of a place actually that I visited in Portland by a developer named Eli Beba, who we work closely with on accessory dwelling unit work at. He developed this really beautiful sort of cottage development there that was a mix of housing types. There's another one that I'm thinking of in Georgia that was small homes all clustered around a central courtyard where again, a mix of ages of people who could live in them. You know, with some cases it was young professionals and that was their first home that they could purchase. But in other cases it was older adults who wanted to live on their own but connected to people.

So I think increasingly more of those developments are occurring, there's a real market for them, and the more that we unlock the potential of the market to create those developments, I think the more we're going to see coming online.

Jeff Wood (34m 5s): In the book, you talk about Babcock Ranch and my French is just going to really be bad here, but Les Maisons de Bayou La Fourche. You know, I'm wondering what, what

makes these developments different maybe than some others that and might be helpful from a, from a climate and a housing perspective?

Danielle Arigoni (34m 22s): Yeah, so those are, those are two great examples. One is purely market rates. So Babcock Ranch is a, is a fully privately developed, very large community that is designed with Resilience at its core. And, and by Resilience at its core, I mean specifically building construction, building standards, how they developed a community room that can also serve as a shelter and how they have all renewable energy and a grid that can withstand extreme conditions. It was very thoughtfully designed to be able to withstand the increasing effects of climate in that part of the world.

Similarly, on the affordable housing side, the Louisiana Housing Corporation, the same one that I mentioned before that had seen this, this loss of affordable housing, they really committed to rebuilding some of that lost housing stock by doing so with fortified building standards at their core. So when they developed the, the Maison, the Baula force, I think is the name, they did so with, with a higher building standard than was being required of market rate housing. And it was attached and there were duplexes included in that. And what they saw was good performance when a disaster, when a, a hurricane moved through the region, that development hadn't yet come fully online, but it emerged virtually unscathed.

Whereas the market rate, apartment building comp townhouse complex, not so far away was knocked offline. So all of which is to say, you know, it comes down to certainly stronger building codes and, and stronger building standards that are designed in response to the risks that are being faced. And that that's those same solutions can be deployed at both market rate housing developments and in affordable housing. And I think particularly these days with the resources that are available through the Inflation Reduction Act, it's kind of a golden era potentially for affordable housing to really absorb some of these climate resilient strategies and get them incorporated in, in developments for people who are going to be otherwise most impacted by climate change.

Jeff Wood (36m 18s): Let's talk a little bit about transportation. You discussed in the book that there are some programs out there for introducing older adults to bicycling and walking to get activity and to build knowledge of evacuation options. But what about transit? What would, what would that type of training look like?

Danielle Arigoni (36m 33s): Absolutely. I think, you know, there's so much to be said for just taking the time to educate people about how to use the bus system or the metro system or you know, the light Rail system, whatever it happens to be in your community. I think for many people, I just read something recently that So that the last time people, many people live or the only time in their lived, they live in their life, that they live in a walkable communities when they're at university. That's the only time where they're taking the bus regularly, they're walking to their destinations, you know, they're living without a car. So if that's the last time you lived in a walkable community and now you're finding yourself at 67 and your driver's



license is no longer available to you, you need a little bit of reacquainting and a reeducation about what it means to, to make public transit a part of your daily life.

So there definitely are programs, whether it's through navigators, that that could help escort older adults and, and provide training on how to use the bus system comes down to good signage and good notifications. When is the bus coming So that you minimize that amount of time that people have to wait? And then when you think about the built environment that would really support older adults to use transit more often, it's not just ensuring that transit lines are getting to the destinations that they need, whether it's shopping or medical care or, or social activities, but it's also designing transit stations and stops So that people can rest.

They have shade, they may have even like misting to, to combat some of the heat effects. If you cannot guarantee people those conditions, they're not necessarily going to take the risk on their wellbeing and their safety to go out and experiment with transit. So you really have to think about the sort of whole user experience for older adults and invite people into the world of using public transit on a more regular basis, So that if it comes time to access public transit to, to evacuate or to get to a cooling center, people already have that muscle memory in them.

It's

Jeff Wood (38m 22s): Really interesting because there was an article recently in Grist, and we talked about it on our, one of my shows that, you know, cooling centers sometimes are underutilized and part of the reason why is getting there and if it's super hot out that day, it might be more risk to actually walk on a hot street or wait at a hot bus stop. Exactly. It's, you know, to stay in your house versus going to that cooling center. And so that's really an interesting kind of dynamic related to, you know, setting up this infrastructure, but understanding how it gets used or how it gets accessed. I

Danielle Arigoni (38m 51s): Heard the exact same thing from the emergency management professional last week in New York who said they started these cooling centers, but they had one person come because people couldn't get there. And I think that was, that was a huge part of the realization that they had, you know, there are great examples of communities, I want to, I want to say it's Philadelphia and maybe Tempe who turned their bus systems into mobile cooling centers. So again, that investment in public transit, not just to provide transportation for people from point A to point B, but let's bring the cooling to them. Let's bring the healthcare even to them. Let's bring the services to them by repurposing this transit investment that we've made in the form of, of buses.

And, and like

Jeff Wood (39m 28s): A lot of disaster preparedness focuses on individual actions. I'm wondering how you hope people might see and seize the advantages of a more coordinated and communal response.

Danielle Arigoni (39m 39s): Yeah, I I really, in the course of writing this book, I I think it kind of hit me square in the face that there are real limitations to what we can expect in terms of both individual and institutional preparedness. By all means there's a role for individual preparedness, but there, there are some very real limitations. I think about, again, you know, think about that one in nine people who lives with dementia. If they live on their own, that that means that their ability to both assess and plan for risk is going to be compromised. And we saw that, there's an instance in the book that I featured of a woman who was living with dementia in the face of Superstorm Sandy and was, you know, made to leave her home in the face of that a disaster, but ended up re returning because she had cats there.

And that was sort of her priority was to be in her home. She didn't fully understand the nature of the risks that she was confronting in her own home. Similarly, for older little two or lower income, 15% live out or below the poverty line, it's not going to be very easy for them to stockpile food or prescriptions or medications. Certainly it's not going to be easy for them to decamp to a hotel for a few days in the face of a, of a coming disaster. So preparedness really has its limits. And then I think when you think about, you know, caregivers and people who are caring for a maybe a spouse or an adult child with a disability or caring for an older parent, when you think about what it means to be prepared, not just for yourself but for that person as well, that's an incredibly complex set of decisions that need to get made.

Both to be able to sort of withstand the conditions that you might be asked to experience, but then not knowing what level of services you can call on to support you. Unfortunately, a lot of the instances that we saw in Hurricane Ida in particular as it swept through the southeast, was that people thought they were in good stead, they thought they were prepared, but then conditions quickly overwhelmed even what they had done to make preparation steps. So there are real limitations, I think, to individual and institutional preparedness that therefore require that we think about what community Resilience would look like and what it means and how you kind of use that to fill in the gaps of what people are going to be able to do on their own.

Jeff Wood (41m 43s): What do you hope people take away from the book?

Danielle Arigoni (41m 46s): I really hope that people's eyes are open to the intersection of climate change and Aging. I think, you know, I'm not sure that I shared the statistic, but I shared often, which is by 2034, we'll have more people in our country that are over 65 than under 18 for the first time ever. And I think that alone requires that we think differently about how we design our communities. So when you intersect that, again with, with the increasingly frequent and devastating disasters that are coming our way and the increasingly challenging environment that we live within on a daily basis, you have to put those two things at the heart really of the decisions that we make about our community.

So I really hope that people walk away with a, a sort of a renewed curiosity maybe about who are the older adults in their community, what are their needs in a very specific way, whether it's transportation needs or housing needs, or what are the sort of utility needs that people are bearing? What, how much, how much are they paying for utilities? And how much can people

withstand? And then reach out to some of those more diverse partnerships that you might not typically work with, whether it's the area agency on Aging or whether it's, if you're an Aging advocate, maybe it's the emergency management or the climate Resilience folks that you can partner with to identify some shared solutions.

So I'm hoping that it's an awareness that people walk away with greater awareness, but I'm also hoping they walk away with a real sense of urgency to tackle this devastating trendline that we see and begin to turn the tide So that older adults are not bearing the brunt in the way that we've seen them do. So for the last 20 or more years. Well,

Jeff Wood (43m 21s): The book is *Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation*. Where can folks find it if they want to get a copy?

Danielle Arigoni (43m 26s): I encourage people to buy it directly through Island Press, which is a nonprofit publisher, but it is also available on Amazon.

Jeff Wood (43m 31s): Awesome. And we always tell people to go to their local bookstores as well.

Danielle Arigoni (43m 36s): Absolutely.

Jeff Wood (43m 37s): Well, Danielle, thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate your time. Thank

Danielle Arigoni (43m 40s): You, Jeff. Thanks for having me.

Tamar Shapiro (43m 58s): Thanks for listening. Find out more about our work by visiting our website, [mpactmobility.org](http://mpactmobility.org). That's M as in Mobility and Pact as in [agreement.org](http://agreement.org). [mpactmobility.org](http://mpactmobility.org).