

Aan
World Health Organization

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gouda
25 november 2025

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Dear Sir/ Madam,

Please find enclosed the application letter in which the bench of Mayor and Aldermen of Gouda expresses its intention to join the WHO Age-Friendly Network.

Municipality Information

Gouda is a city and municipality in the province of South Holland, the Netherlands, with 77,348 inhabitants (as of 30 September 2025, source: CBS) and a land area of 16.92 km². This makes Gouda a very compact city with facilities in reach for its inhabitants.

The city is located in the Midden-Holland region and forms part of the Randstad metropolitan area. Gouda serves as a regional hub within the Groene Hart, with close traveling distance to the major cities of Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. The city is renowned for its Gouda cheese and is historically known for the production of beer, candles, clay pipes, Gouds plateel pottery, stroopwafels, and the annual light festival "Gouda by Candlelight." The historic city center features numerous monumental buildings, including the Town Hall and the Sint-Janskerk, which are the most famous landmarks.

Description of Activities for Older Adults in Gouda

Gouda aims to be an inclusive city where older citizens feel recognized, heard, and supported—a city where they can live independently, move safely, maintain meaningful social connections, and access to appropriate care and information.

The municipality faces both a challenge and an opportunity to create a city where older people can live pleasantly, safely, and actively. With a growing population of citizens aged 65 and older, it is essential to implement policies that meet their needs and preferences. Gouda bases its approach on the "positive health" model, focusing on people's ability to cope with physical, emotional, and social challenges and maintain autonomy.

Gouda is developing an integrated vision on aging, addressing dual aging and extended independent living. The goal is that older citizens become aware of what they can do themselves in order to remain living at home as long, as possible in a comfortable, healthy, and safe way.

Objectives:

- Living Comfortably with attention to care
- Ageing together in vitality
- Reaching and engaging elderly of 65 and older

Key initiatives:

- **Guide “Later, When I Am Old” (2024):** A practical guide with information on housing, care, finances, volunteering, and social activities, distributed locally and digitally available.
- **Awareness Campaign “Later, When I Am Old” (2025):** Encouraging elderly of 65 and older adults to plan ahead for their future, focusing on health, housing, mobility, and social connections.
- **Certification as a Dementia-Friendly Municipality:** Gouda has been certified since 2024, offering training, neighborhood actions, Alzheimer Café, and meeting places such as “De Buurvrouw” where people suffering from dementia are welcomed to engage in activities during the day.
- **Senior Information Program:** Volunteer advisors contact citizens turning 70 to provide information on services, activities, and support.
- **Participation through City Dialogues:** Held in November 2024 and August 2025 for citizens aged 65+, aimed at gathering input for policies that better meet their needs.

Gouda was named **Sports Municipality of the Year 2024–2025** for its comprehensive sports and physical activity policy, serving as an inspiration for other municipalities. Gouda promotes a movement-friendly environment through strong partnerships, high-quality facilities, and a widely supported Lifestyle Agreement.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

Like many European cities, Gouda faces the challenge of an aging population. In 2023, 20.4% of the citizens were aged 65 or older. By 2040, the number of citizens aged 65–79 is expected to increase by 22%, and those aged 80+ by 86% (to 6,779). Without promoting healthy aging, demand for long-term care and healthcare costs will rise.

To counter these effects, Gouda focuses on awareness and preventive measures, encouraging citizens to stay active and healthy. According to WHO guidelines, adults aged 65+ should engage in at least 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week. Meeting these recommendations reduces the risk of chronic diseases, falls, depression, and improves quality of life.

Senior Games is a flagship event in Gouda, inspiring seniors to stay active through collaboration with over 20 local organizations. Activities emphasize fall prevention and the benefits of physical activity for physical and mental health.

Sport, culture, and welfare contribute to a healthy lifestyle, supported by Gouda’s Lifestyle Agreement, which unites local organizations around the goal of healthier citizens.

Motivation for Joining WHO Age-Friendly Network

The WHO network for age-friendly cities and communities has existed since 2010, connecting cities worldwide to create environments where people can age well. It was established in response to global trends of population aging and urbanization, focusing on local measures that promote active participation and healthy aging.

Currently, five cities in the Netherlands are included as a member on the network. The network supports cities by sharing best practices, fostering knowledge exchange, and helping identify innovative, evidence-based solutions.

Gouda contributes local expertise, academic insights through partnerships with universities and Campus Gouda, and practical experience with neighborhood-based approaches and citizen participation. Gouda will participate in national interactive group workshops and network meetings.

Membership is not a certification but demonstrates Gouda's commitment to older citizens: listening to their needs, measuring and monitoring age-friendliness, and collaborating to create accessible environments. By joining, Gouda commits to remaining an age-friendly city—a city where people can age healthily and comfortably.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Gouda will prepare annual progress and impact reports. Feedback will be collected through the senior network, city dialogues, and client councils. The city monitor provides insight into citizens' experiences, including their (mental) health. Evaluation will follow the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle.

Conclusion

Gouda has already taken significant steps toward becoming an age-friendly city. By building on existing initiatives, launching new actions, and actively involving older citizens, the municipality can serve as an example for other cities.

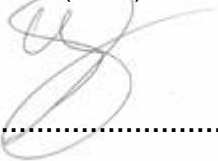
Signature:

Date: 25 November 2025

Place: Gouda

With friendly regards

Alderman for Social Affairs
mr. A.J.S. (Anna) van Popering - Kalkman



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