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The Life Planning Network is the leading association supporting professionals who assist people at this life stage. We intend to bring into everyday use proactive and purposeful planning for the second half of life. Learn more at lifeplanningnetwork.org.

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A Call to U.S. Mayors: Take the Pledge to Help Cities' Older Residents

Cities are the front lines, with 80 percent of Americans 65-plus

Paul Irving

As the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging prepares to release the latest version of its widely followed “Best Cities for Successful Aging” rankings index, our Advisory Board is once again calling on U.S. mayors to sign the Center for the Future of Aging Mayor’s Pledge. The upcoming “Best Cities” report will publicly recognize mayors who join their colleagues across the country to promote purpose and well-being in their communities.

The stakes are clear. With a federal government hamstrung by partisanship and politics, the time is now for mayors to demonstrate their commitment to better lives by signing the Pledge. Their leadership is critical as the aging population grows at an unprecedented rate across the United States and the world.

By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 and over. Worldwide, this age group will outnumber children under 14 by midcentury, due in large measure to declining birthrates and increasing longevity thanks to advances in science and public health.

Cities are on the front lines, with more than 80 percent of Americans age 65-plus living in metropolitan areas. Nearly 90 percent of older adults in the U.S. want to age in their homes and communities, according to AARP research. Enabling these residents to age with dignity, opportunity and access to services and supports is a central issue for the future of urban environments. The Pledge unites forward-thinking leaders around a commitment to enhance life for the largest-ever population of older adults, and for generations to come.

From the first signatory in late 2014, 140 mayors of cities large and small have signed the Pledge. And they are taking action. At the 2015 White House Conference on Aging, then-Iowa City Mayor Matt Hayek told policy and business leaders about the programs and services that make his heartland city such a vibrant place for mature residents. With his colleagues on the Los Angeles County

Board of Supervisors, Eric Garcetti, the mayor of L.A. and the first to sign the Pledge, announced Purposeful Aging Los Angeles, a multisector initiative to improve lives in this massive and diverse region. We look forward to many more mayors signing the Pledge and to the reports of their plans and progress.



LA Mayor, Eric Garcetti

As the Pledge recognizes, mayors can ensure that their evolving cities include welcoming neighborhoods that are physically, economically and socially attuned to the well-being of mature residents. These centers of population, culture and commerce must optimize health and security as well as engagement and productivity, offer housing and transit options, social services and opportunities for education, work and social interaction.

They can provide innovative technology and communications solutions that allow people to age independently in their homes. Mayors who take the lead in developing these attributes will profoundly influence older residents' ability to age well and enjoy healthy and fulfilling lives.

But mayors can do more. Cities are economic engines and enablers of purpose. Mayors can ensure that older residents contribute to the economy and strengthen society, applying their abilities and knowledge to keep their cities vibrant. Rather than focusing on the stereotypes of decline and disengagement, mayors can recognize the potential of older adults as assets rather than burdens.

The Pledge acknowledges that elders have much to offer people of all ages. Their wisdom and experience enriches their families as well as business, educational and social institutions. They offer mentoring and training in workplaces and perspectives that enhance intergenerational connection. As entrepreneurs, they boost economic growth. In encore careers, teaching and volunteer activities, they contribute to society's well-being.

The Pledge calls on mayors to promote the involvement of older residents in volunteer and paid roles that serve others, to help them train for and transition to those roles and to recognize this growing age group for the value and potential it represents.

The goals of the Pledge promise vast opportunity for our cities, and an increasing number of mayors are demonstrating vision as they build coalitions and plan for a

new demographic future. Their ground-level experience opens the door to solutions that can be replicated at the state, national and global levels.

This is a unique opportunity for mayors themselves, as well as their cities. We call on them to join together in civic leadership by signing the Pledge, and we look forward to celebrating their efforts to create a better future of aging for all.

Editor's Note: This column first appeared October 19, 2016 in the Huffington Post.



Paul H. Irving is chairman of the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging and distinguished scholar in residence at the University of Southern California Davis School of Gerontology. Irving previously served as the Institute's president, an advanced leadership fellow at Harvard University and chairman and CEO of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, a law and consulting firm. He is the author of *The Upside of Aging: How Long Life Is Changing the World of Health, Work, Innovation, Policy, and Purpose*. He is a director of the American Society on Aging and Encore.org, where he serves as vice chair.

In 2014, Irving was honored with the Janet L. Witkin Humanitarian Award by Affordable Living for the Aging.