The desire to live safely and comfortably in our own homes and communities as we grow older is shared around the world, but making it happen is not always easy.

Age-friendly housing is accommodation that can expand housing options, make housing more affordable, help with home modifications, use assistive technology to improve safety, promote socialization and inclusion, or facilitate access to transportation, shopping, and health services.

In 2017, Grantmakers In Aging (GIA), the only membership association for philanthropies dedicated to improving the experience of aging, and the WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities launched Innovation@Home—a competition and call for the best age-friendly housing practices around the world.

The contest is part of a larger project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The contest sought the best age-friendly housing innovations that could be implemented in the U.S.

A panel of distinguished judges assessed entries from all over the world and selected three winners and an honorable mention. These programs will be recognized at the 2018 International Technical Meeting on Ageing at Home, in Québec City, Canada.

A forthcoming report from Grantmakers In Aging will examine promising age-friendly housing programs and provide insights from leading authorities and practitioners in the field.

WINNER: Aconchego Program (Porto, Portugal)
Lead Organizations: Porto City Hall and the Academic Federation of Porto

The university town of Porto took on a double mission: to combat loneliness and isolation among older residents and help non-resident students find affordable living arrangements. The Aconchego Program (Programa Aconchego) matches older people (age 60 and older) who have extra room in their homes with students (ages 18-35) who need a place to live.

The seniors report satisfaction with the companionship they receive, and the students (who do not pay for accommodation) report better integration into a new city, a comfortable environment, and reduced housing costs.

Since 2004, 382 people (191 seniors and 191 students) have participated.

To learn more: bit.ly/AF_Portugal
WINNER: No-Cost Building Permits (Sausalito, California, USA)
Lead Organization: Age Friendly Sausalito

Sausalito, California is a seaside town built on a steep hillside with many multi-level houses. To help older residents avoid injuries caused by falls, Age Friendly Sausalito worked with the city’s Community Development department to allow people to obtain free or reduced-cost building permits for projects that improve the safety and accessibility of their homes.

The Age-Friendly Home Adaptation Grant Program launched in 2018, inspired by public comments heard during the city’s age-friendly assessment. Sausalito is now mentoring local age-friendly communities and advocated for a statewide bill just signed into law to authorize all California cities and counties to waive building permit fees for this purpose.

For more information: bit.ly/AF_Sausalito

WINNER: Home Refurbishment Program (Barcelona, Spain)
Lead Organization: La Diputació de Barcelona

Throughout the Barcelona region (except the city itself), the Home Refurbishment Program (Programa d'Arranjament d'Habitatges de la demarcació de Barcelona) provides non-structural home repairs (mainly in bathrooms and kitchens) in the homes of the most vulnerable older people.

The project also improves home energy efficiency and provides technology such as assistive devices for greater independence and quality of life. Public-private cooperation is part of the model, as Barcelona County Council coordinates and finances the project while a private company manages the construction work.

For more information: bit.ly/AF_Barcelona

HONORABLE MENTION: CHORE Volunteer Handyman Service (New Jersey, USA)
Lead Organization: Bergen Volunteers

The CHORE Volunteer Handyman Service helps older residents and people with disabilities live safely in their homes by performing minor home repairs. All CHORE volunteers are retirees.

For more information: bit.ly/AF_BergenNJ

Meet the Innovation@Home Judges

Nathalie Röbbel, Technical Officer, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health, World Health Organization (WHO)
Stephanie Firestone, Senior Strategic Policy Advisor for Health and Age-friendly Communities, AARP International
Vivian Vasallo, Partnerships and Innovation Director, Fannie Mae
Ian Spero, Founder and CEO, Creative Skills for Life; Founder, Agile Ageing Alliance
Betty Lynch, Community Champion, Avondale, Arizona

ABOUT THE WHO GLOBAL NETWORK FOR AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES The WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities was established in 2010 to connect cities, communities and organizations worldwide with the common vision of making their community a great place to grow old in. For more information: www.who.int/ageing/projects/age_friendly_cities_network/en.