

2022 Older Adults Needs Assessment

PORTAGE, STARK, SUMMIT AND WAYNE COUNTIES

Prepared for Direction Home Akron Canton Agency on Aging &
Disabilities by The Center for Community Solutions

Introduction

Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities provides services and supports to older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers in Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne counties to achieve the highest quality of life through informed long-term care choices and consumer protection. Direction Home aims to be the central access point and preferred long-term care management organization for all people with disabilities. They help older adult and people with disabilities thrive in the place they want to call home.

Direction Home is committed to compassionate care while offering comprehensive care services. They are focused on meeting the needs of older adults and people with disabilities in their four-county service area. In order to understand the needs of the community, Direction Home partnered with The Center for Community Solutions to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. The following report details the findings from primary data collection and secondary data analyses.

The first section provides a detailed demographic profile that pulls from multiple secondary data sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). The assessment uses the most recent reliable data from the ACS, the 2020 5-year estimates. Additional sources are noted within the profile. The second section includes primary data source analysis of the survey developed specifically for this assessment. Surveys were completed by older adults throughout the region as demonstrate in the map below. The third section summarizes qualitative data collected through focus groups with residents throughout the region.

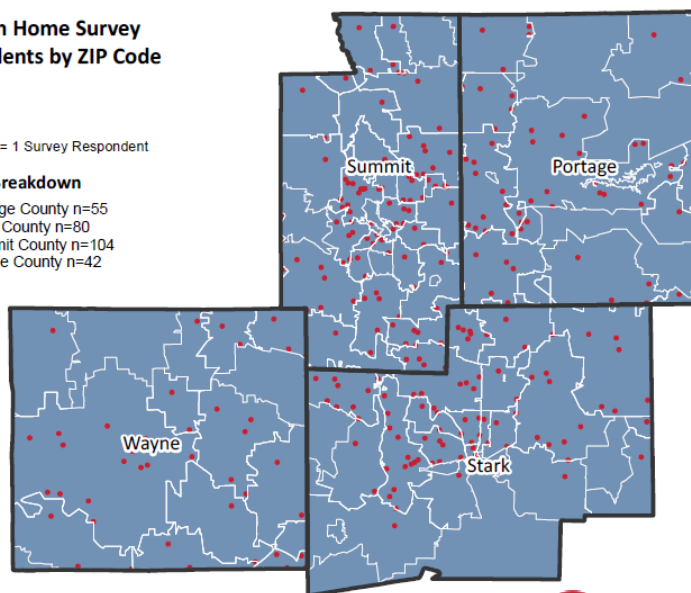
Direction Home Survey Respondents by ZIP Code

Legend

- 1 Dot = 1 Survey Respondent

County Breakdown

- Portage County n=55
- Stark County n=80
- Summit County n=104
- Wayne County n=42



Note: Responses are mapped by ZIP code and do not represent exact locations. Of the 293 responses, 281 had complete ZIP codes that could be mapped.



While the report provides detailed analyses, the following points provide a brief synopsis of the key findings.

Key Findings

Aging Services

- 71% of older adults in the region believe more funding is needed for aging services. Caregivers, low-income older adults and people with disabilities were the groups identified as being most likely to benefit from additional funding.
- “Direction Home” is not widely recognized outside of those already connected to the organization. The rate of survey response and focus group feedback indicates low name recognition among the general public. Over half of those who did respond to the survey were not familiar with Direction Home.
- One in four residents do not plan to do any research on aging services, including when a need for those services arises
- Residents are highly concerned about being placed in a long-term care facility; 95% prefer to remain in their homes as they age and 79% wish to remain within their neighborhoods.

Affordability

- Middle income residents worry about affording services; they are often over income limits but unable to afford to pay for services out of pocket. Sliding scale programs that replicate income-based programs could fill this need
- One in four residents are not able to afford the care they need and 38% said they would not be able to afford any long-term care, not even for a month.

Demographics

- Poverty rates in the region are lower than the state average of 8.2% and 19% of residents live near poverty.
- 12.4% of older adults in the region live in rural areas, primarily in Wayne and Stark counties.
- Within the region, a higher percentage of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) live in Summit (13%) compared to other counties in the region Stark (7%), Portage (4%) and Wayne (2%).
- Black and Hispanic/Latino residents are more likely to live in poverty than their white peers.

Social Connectedness

- In all four counties, over a quarter of older adults live alone.
- 36% of residents lack companionship and 32% feel alone
- Older adults in the region are eager to return to the activities and programs they enjoyed prior to the pandemic. While some activities have returned, many have not leaving older adults with fewer options to connect with each other and their communities

Housing

- Home modification is a growing concern among residents who wish to remain in their homes as they age. This includes both homeowners and those who live in senior apartments. Residents of senior apartment buildings would welcome renovations and increased accessibility to on-property amenities.
- Over half of older adults in the region do not feel confident they could find alternative housing to meet mobility needs and just under half have or intend to make modifications to their homes.
- 63% of older adults said they would not be able to afford modifications.
- 62% of renters aged 65+ in Portage County are cost burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs.

Communication and Information

- When used, information and referral through the ADRC was found to be valuable. There are opportunities to expand awareness of I&R services as many residents were unaware of the availability of the service to them.
- Local newspapers are trusted source of information and are often accessed online, though not necessarily by preference.
- 70% of Wayne County residents have access to the internet, which is lower than Portage (77%), Summit (75%) and Stark (74%).

Nutrition

- An estimated 21,500 older adults in the region are food insecure; groceries was among the top monthly costs that would be reduced by older adults if medical costs rose.
- Innovations in nutrition assistance during the pandemic including grocery deliver and drive thru meal programs were well received and there is interest in seeing those continue to be supported.

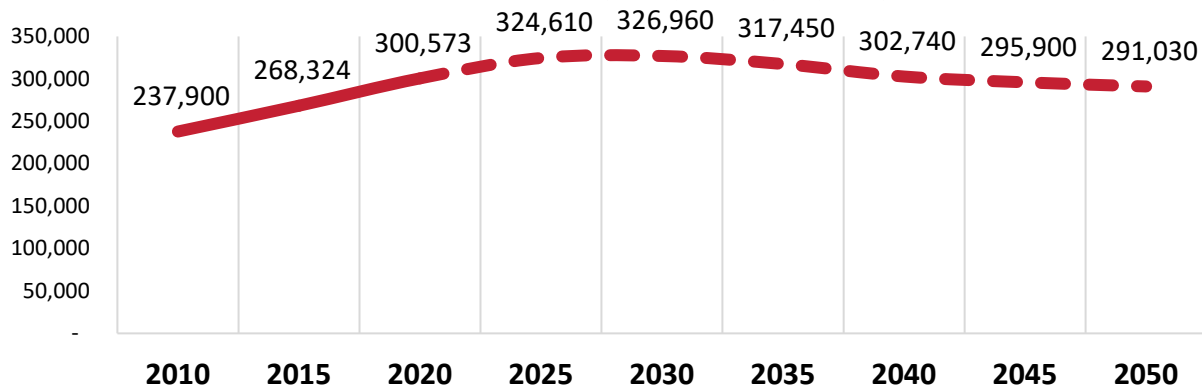
Transportation

- While available to many, older adults in the region find medical transportation difficult to use. When relying on medical transportation services a half hour doctor's appointment requires being available for an entire day to account for transportation wait times.
- About a third of residents do not have access to affordable, reliable and consistent public transportation.

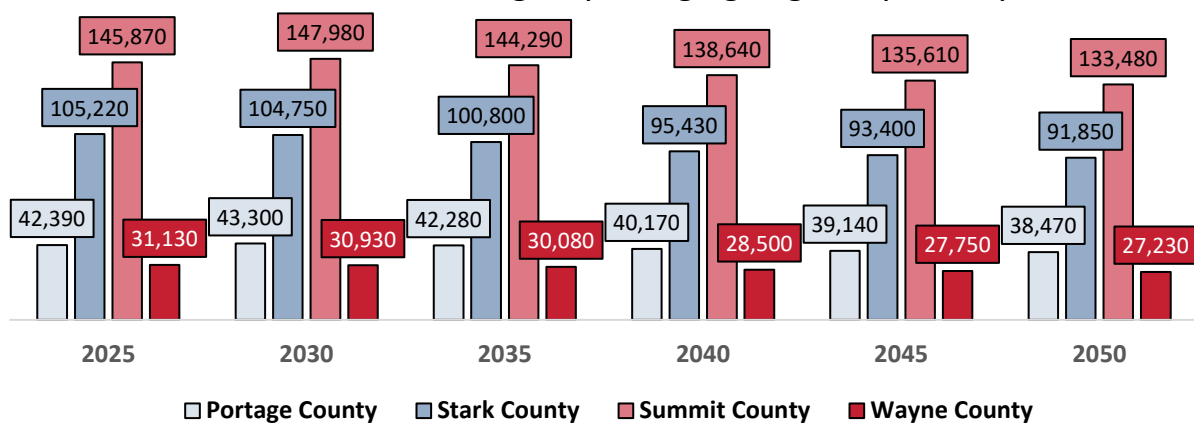
Demographic profile

Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging (Ohio Area Agency on Aging Region 10B) covers a region encompassing four counties in Ohio: Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne. The area is home to 300,573 older adults over the age of 60, accounting for 25.2 percent of the total population of the four counties, specifically 38,216 (23.5 percent) older adults in Portage County, 98,730 (26.6 percent) in Stark County, 135,206 (25.0 percent) in Summit County, and 28,511 (24.6 percent) in Wayne County. Following state and national trends, the number and share of older adults has been growing in the region and is expected to continue to increase for the next several decades. This increase is the result of generational demographics and the fact that people are living longer lives and remaining in their homes and communities as they age. The growth is particular pronounced among the population ages 85 and above. Increasing numbers of the oldest residents is expected to increase demand for supportive services including home-delivered meals, housekeeping, home modification, in-home care, and social connectedness. Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging and the entire community will need to adapt to these changes.

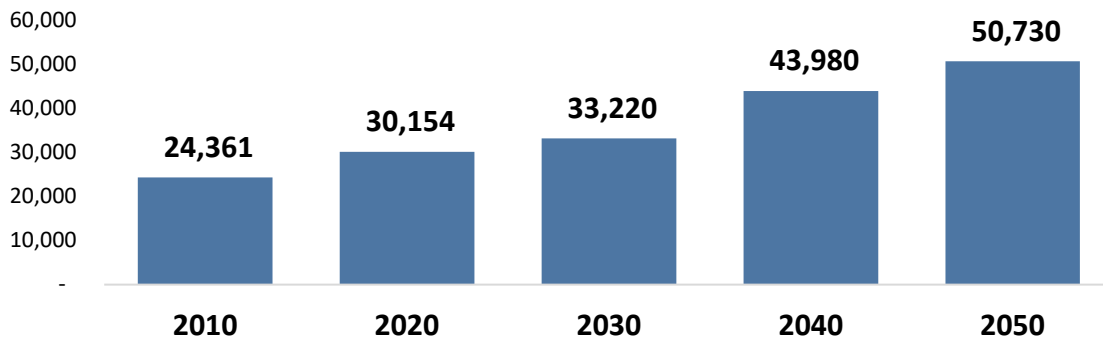
Population Projection, Population Ages 60+, Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region



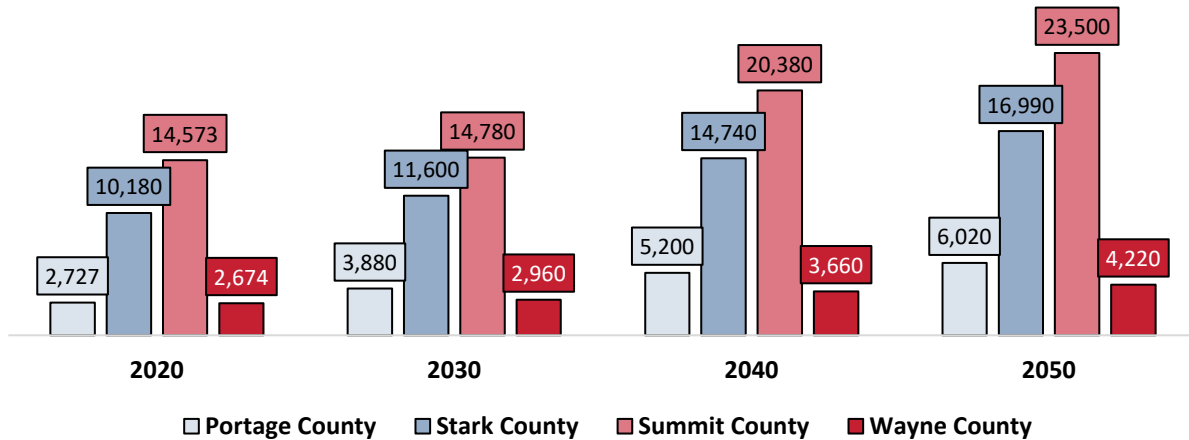
Population Projection, Population Ages 60+, Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region by County



Population Projection, Population Ages 85+, Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region



Population Projection, Population Ages 85+, Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region by County



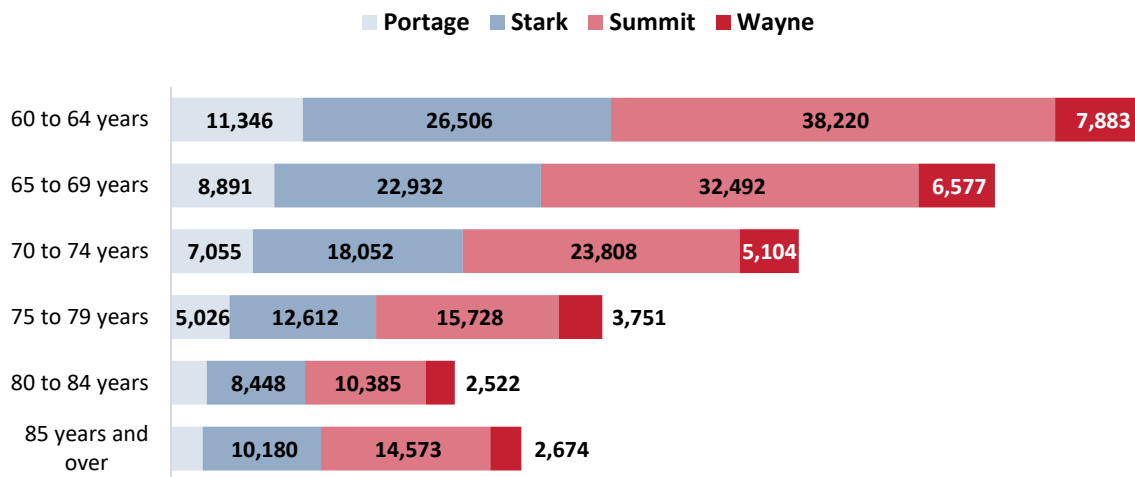
Secondary data analysis for this assessment was compiled by The Center for Community Solutions on behalf of Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging. We relied on the latest available data for the civilian, non-institutionalized population. Unless otherwise noted, the data source is the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 2020 5-Year estimates. Data was compiled for each county within the region, then aggregated for the region as a whole. Percentages were calculated using weighted averages to reflect the share of the entire population of the region who might be experiencing certain community conditions. Where ever possible, data is reported for ages 60 and older. However, due to data availability, many indicators are for the population ages 65 and older. All the data carry margins of error. For smaller geographies and subpopulations, margins of error can be substantial and differences should be interpreted with caution.

The indicators selected for examination provide an overview of the social, economic, and demographic characteristics of the older adult population in the region with special emphasis on older individuals with greatest economic need, greatest social need, low-income minority older individuals, those with limited English proficiency, and/or those living in rural areas.

Profile of Older Adults in the Region

Over 300,573 adults age 60 and over live in the four-county area. This includes 30,154 people who are 85 and older (2,727 in Portage, 10,180 in Stark, 14,573 in Summit, and 2,674 in Wayne), accounting for 10.0 percent of older adults in the region. Around 55 percent of residents over the age of 60 are female.

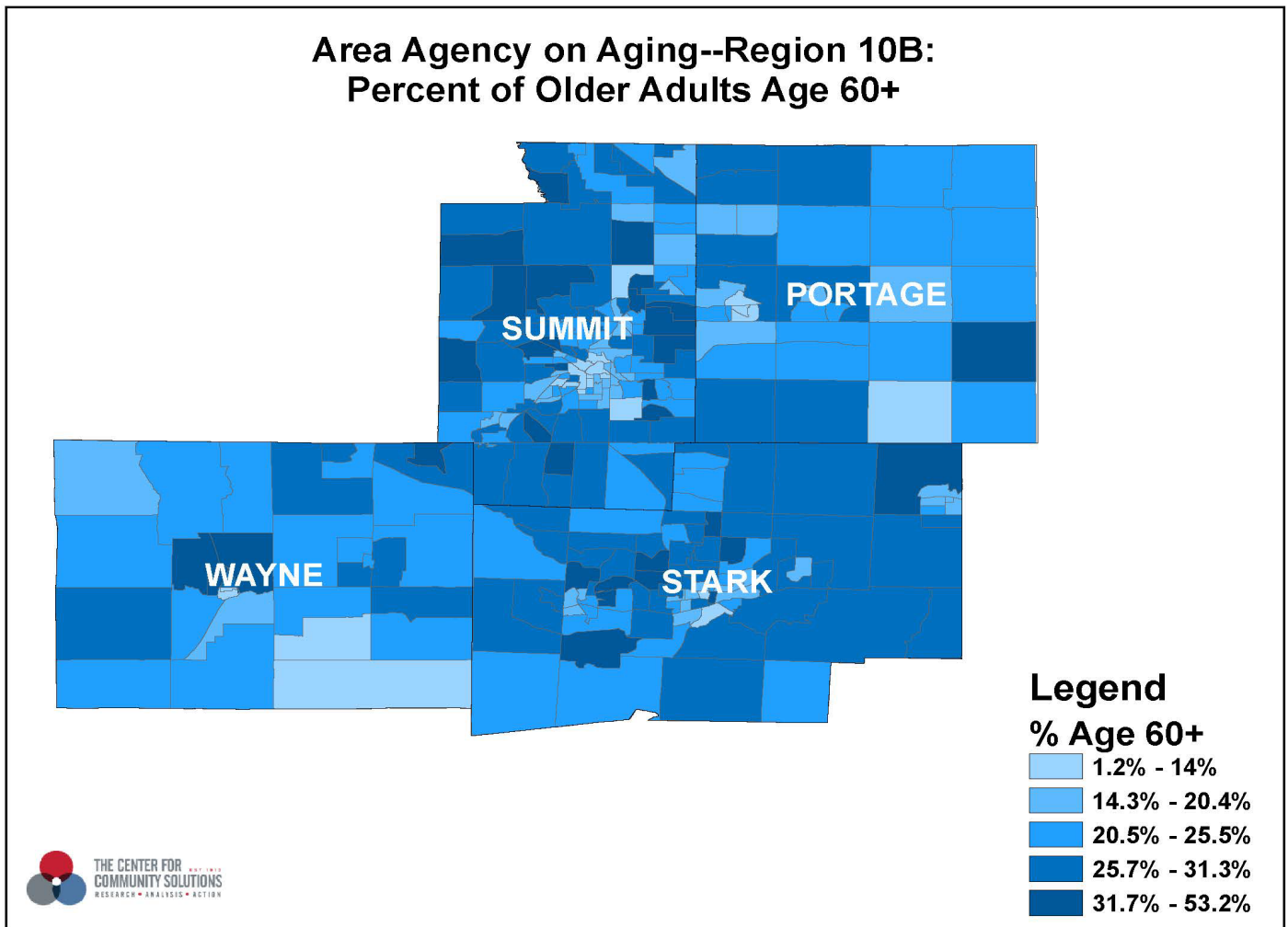
Older Adults by Age, By County



Of all people in the Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging region, 37,465 individuals ages 60 and older live in rural areas within the region, accounting for 12.4 percent of the older adult population. The population living in rural areas was calculated by The Center for Community Solutions based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and includes the entire population of counties outside Ohio’s Metropolitan areas and some individual rural Census Tracts within Metro counties.¹ For this region, rural areas include all of Wayne County (28,511 older adults) and a few Census Tracts in Stark County (8,954 older adults).

¹ See “Defining Rural Population”, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Service Administration. <https://www.hrsa.gov/rural-health/about-us/definition/index.html>. Census Tracts in Metro counties were included if they had a rural-urban community area (RUCA) code of 4-10. RUCA codes have not been updated for 2020, so calculations are based on the 2010 RUCA codes. Visit <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes/> for more information.

+The map below shows the percent of the population who are over the age of 60.



Race and Ethnicity

The Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging region has pockets that are more racially and ethnically diverse, and 9.5 percent of the population over age 65 are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). More detailed breakdowns of racial and ethnic makeup of the population is provided in the table below.

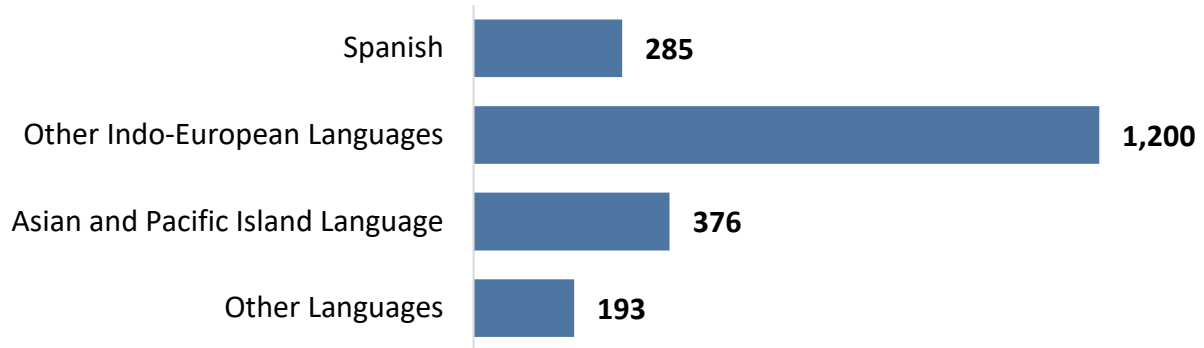
	Region		Ohio
Total Number of Older Adults (Age 65+)	216,618		1,990,621
Race/Ethnicity	Number	%	%
<i>White</i>	197,131	91.0%	88.2%
<i>Black/ African American</i>	14,842	6.9%	8.9%
<i>American Indian and Alaskan Native</i>	411	0.2%	0.1%
<i>Asian/ Asian American</i>	2,232	1.0%	1.2%
<i>Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander</i>	17	-	0.0%
<i>Other Race</i>	518	0.2%	0.7%
<i>More than One Race</i>	1,467	0.7%	0.9%
<i>Hispanic/Latinx Ethnicity</i>	1,586	7.3%	1.4%

	Region							
Total Number of Older Adults (Age 65+)	Portage County		Stark County		Summit County		Wayne County	
Race/Ethnicity	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>White</i>	25,625	96%	67,283	93%	84,046	87%	20,177	98%
<i>Black/ African American</i>	636	2%	3762	5%	10,328	11%	116	1%
<i>American Indian and Alaskan Native</i>	42	0.2%	118	0.2%	170	0.2%	81	0.4%
<i>Asian/ Asian American</i>	253	1%	397	1%	1485	2%	97	0.5%
<i>Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander</i>	0	0%	0	0%	6	0.01%	11	0.1%
<i>Other Race</i>	65	0.2%	164	0.2%	211	0.2%	78	0.4%
<i>More than One Race</i>	159	1%	500	1%	740	1%	68	0.3%
<i>Hispanic/Latinx Ethnicity</i>	143	1%	579	1%	733	1%	131	1%

Limited English Proficiency

While most older adults over age 65 in the region speak only English (96.2 percent), there are 2,054 individuals over age 65 in the region who do not speak English at all or do not speak it well. As shown in the chart below, the most common languages spoken by people who have limited English proficiency are Indo-European Languages, Asian and Pacific Island Languages, and Spanish.

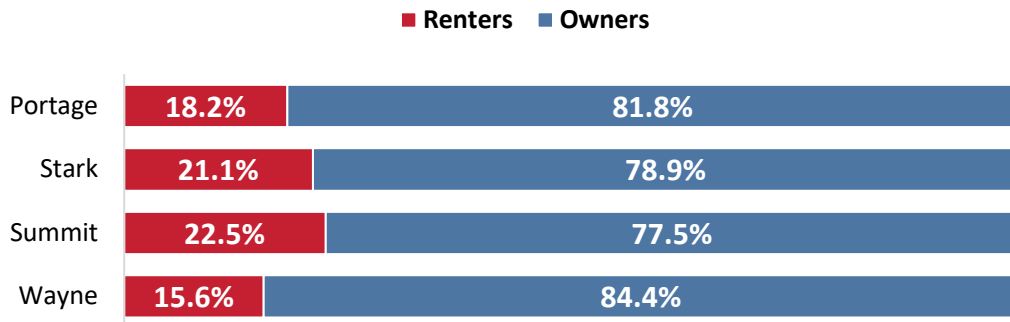
Language Spoken, Older Adults who Speak English Not Well or Not At All, Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region



Housing Tenure and Family Structure

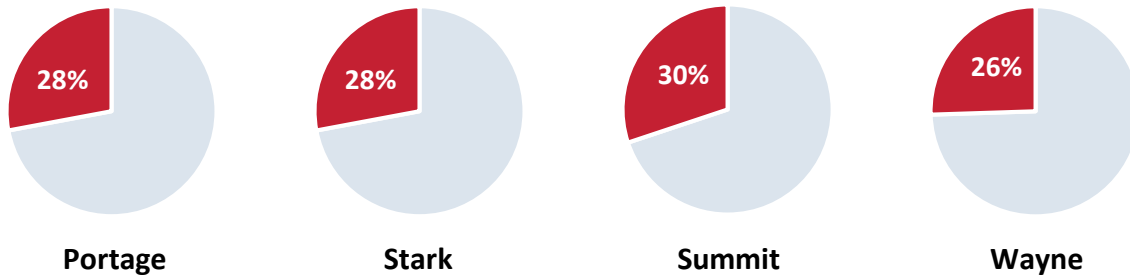
According to data from the 2020 Decennial Census, there were 8,865 people in the region of all ages living in nursing facilities or skilled nursing facilities; 732 in Portage County, 3,148 in Stark County, 4,021 in Summit County, and 964 in Wayne County. Among older adults living in the community, most own their homes. Around 80 percent are owners and 21 percent are renters. In fact, although people ages 60 and above make up only 25 percent of the population, 45 percent of all people who own their homes in the four-county area are older adults.

Housing Situation Among Older Adults 60+ by County



In the Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging region, 62,173 people (28.7 percent) over the age of 65 live alone. Living alone can contribute to social isolation and vulnerability.

Percent of Adults 65 and Older who Live Alone by County



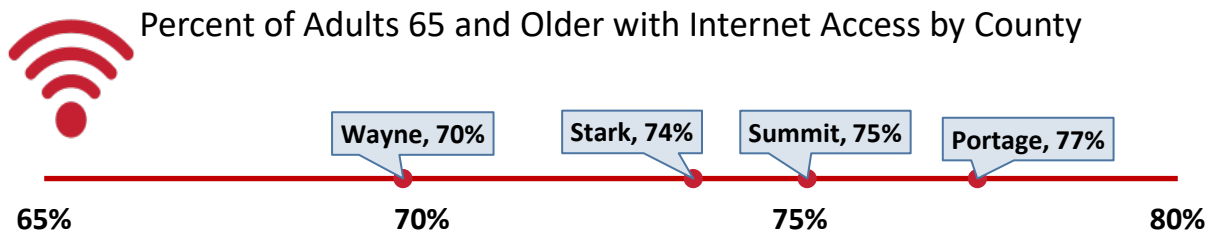
In the region as a whole, there are 6,891 grandparents who are responsible for their own grandchildren under 18 years. However, fewer than half (42.1 percent) of the grandparents raising grandchildren are older adults ages 65 and above, a total of 2,902 individuals.

Other Demographic Indicators

One out of every six people over the age of 65 in the region are veterans, accounting for 17.4 percent of the total. Men are much more likely to report having served in the military than women.

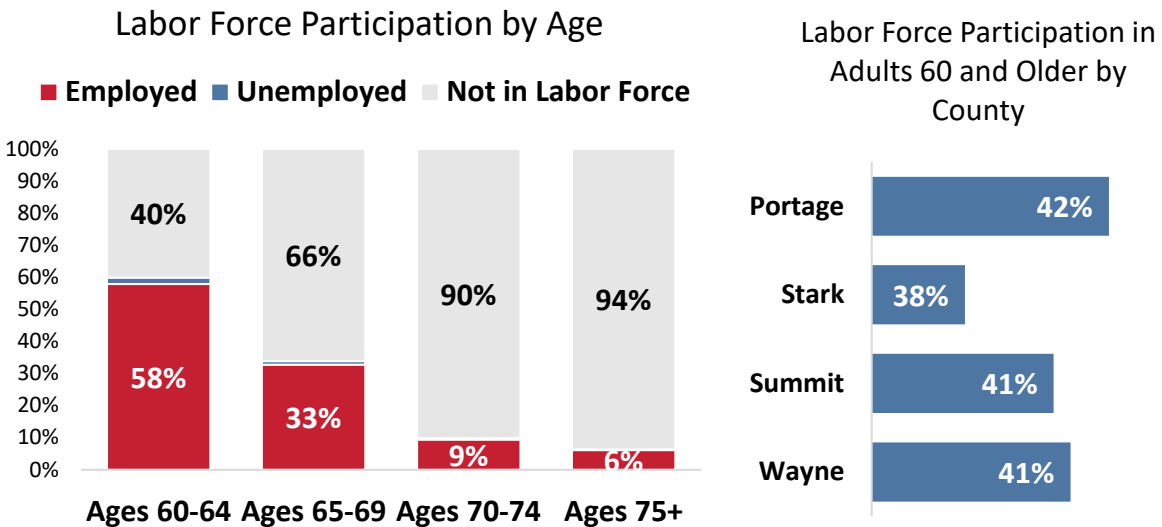


In recent years, the number of older adults who have access to the internet has increased. Close to 75 percent of people over the age of 65 report that they have a broadband subscription. On the other hand, 38,058 older adult households have no computer at all.



Economic and Social Needs in the Region

Nationwide trends show that people are delaying retirement and remaining in the workforce longer than in previous generations. Over 88,335 people over the age of 60 are in the labor force, including 85,383 who are employed and 2,952 who are unemployed by actively looking for work. According to this data, the unemployment rate for older adults in the region overall was 3.3 percent. As shown in the chart below, labor force participation drops substantially after age 70, as people retire either by choice or by necessity.



In the Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging region, most older adult households receive Social Security, and many have income from earnings or retirement. Retirement income is also common. Public benefits programs such as SSI, cash assistance and SNAP provide fewer resources on average than private retirement funds and earnings.

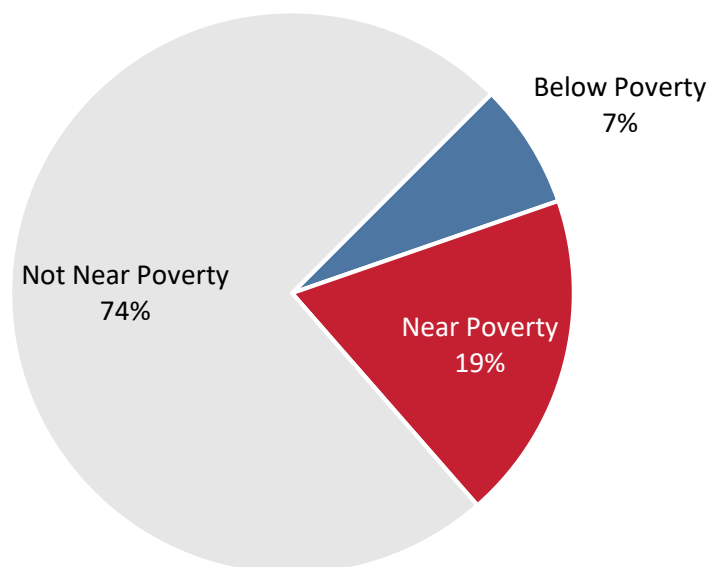
Income Source	Older Adult (60+) Households	
	Share of Households	Regional Average, Annual Income
Social Security	75.0%	\$20,526
Retirement	53.5%	\$26,196
Earnings	47.5%	\$57,506
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	9.0%	<i>Not Applicable</i>
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	5.5%	\$10,287
Cash Public Assistance	3.3%	\$2,624

Income Source	Older Adult (60+) Households			
	Portage	Stark	Summit	Wayne
Social Security	75%	76%	74%	78%
Retirement	56%	53%	53%	52%
Earnings	50%	46%	47%	49%
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	9%	8%	10%	7%
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	4%	6%	6%	6%
Cash Public Assistance	2%	4%	4%	2%

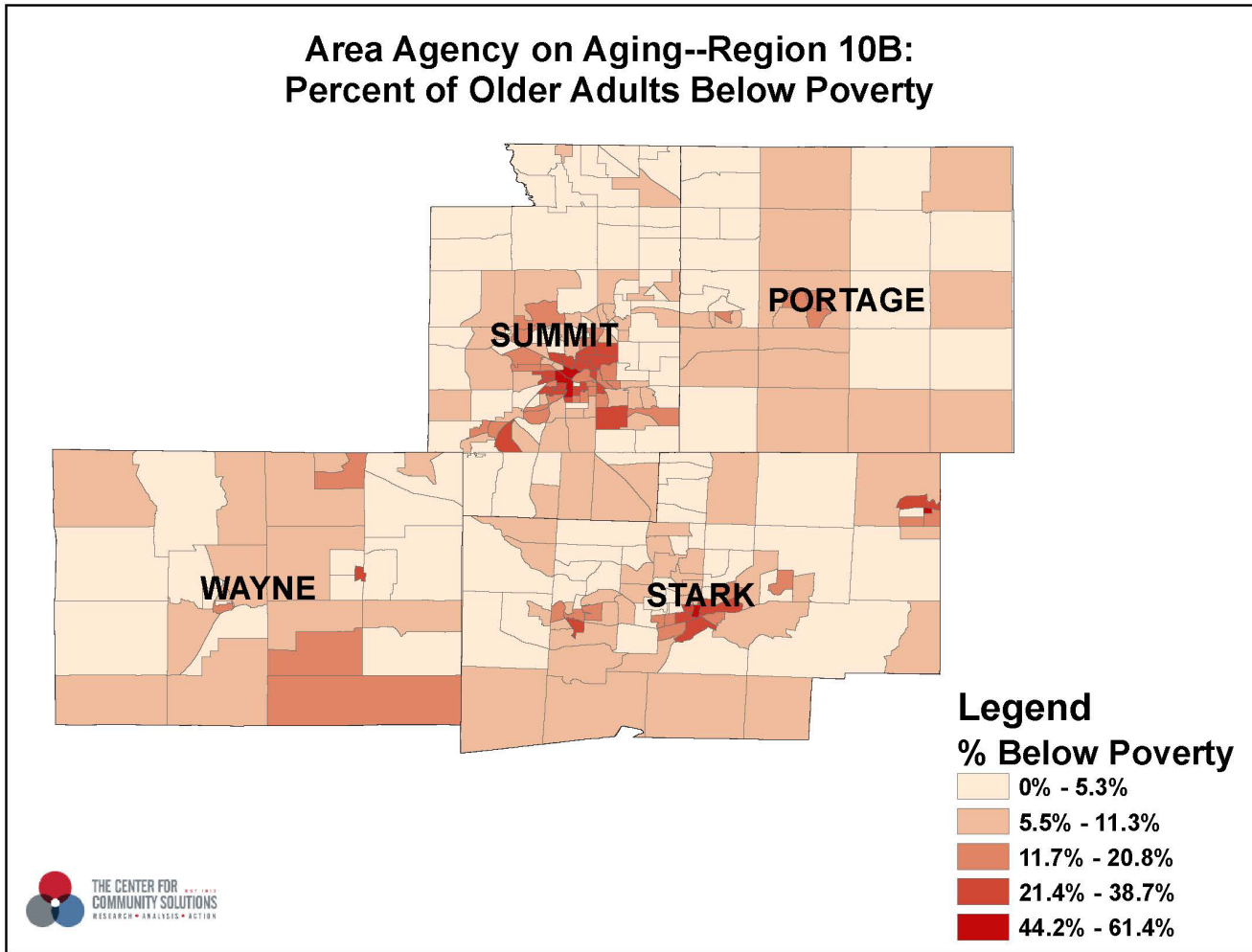
Poverty

Even with the increases in labor force participation, many older adults in the region still struggle to make ends meet. At 7.2 percent, the poverty rate for adults over the age of 65 in the region is lower than the state average of 8.2 percent. The poverty rate by county is 5.7 percent for Portage County; 7.4 and 7.3 percent for Stark and Summit Counties respectively, and 8.0 percent for Wayne County. Over 15,085 people over age 65 are living in poverty, including 4,973 people who are in deep poverty, defined as having total household income that is less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold. An even greater number of older adults are considered “near poor” with incomes between 100 and 199 percent of poverty.

Older Adults (65+) at Specified Levels of Poverty Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region

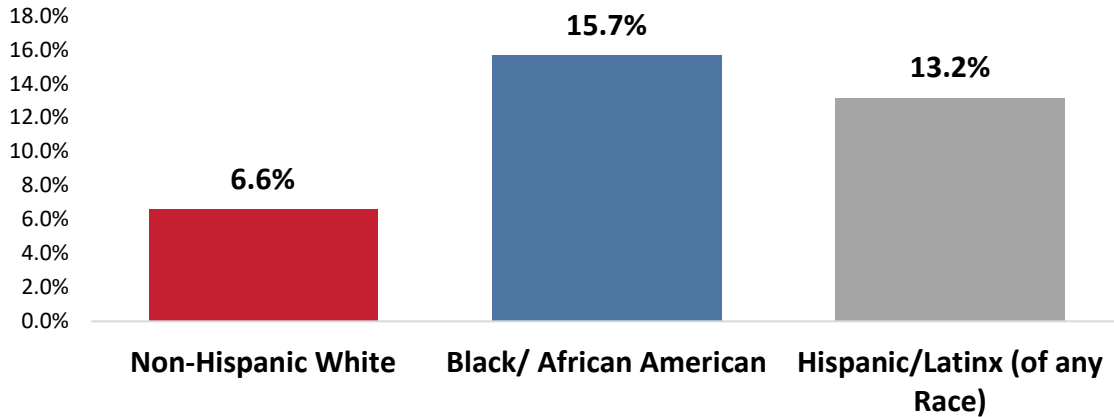


Poverty is not spread evenly throughout the region. The map below shows the concentration of older adults living in poverty in various parts of the region.

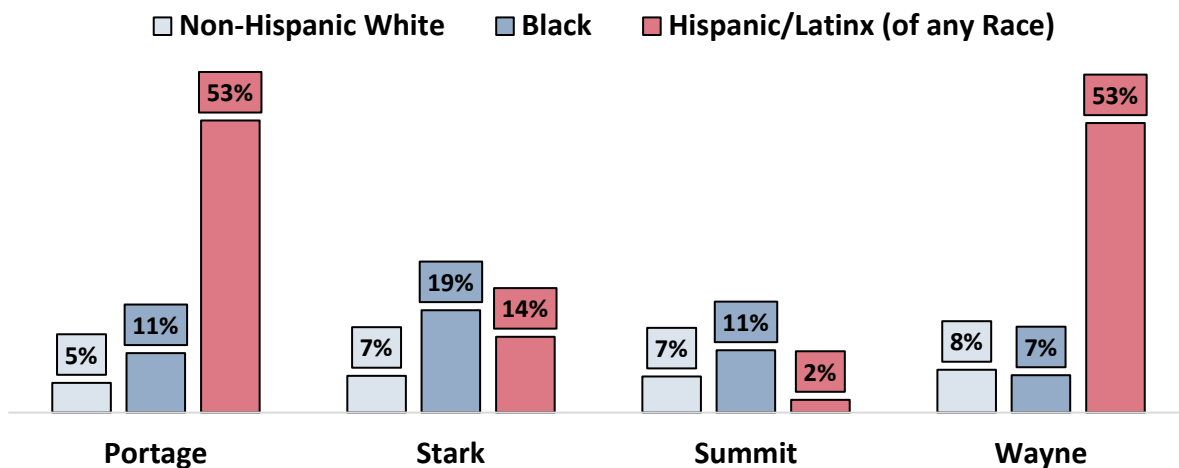


There are also racial disparities in poverty. As shown in the chart below, people over age 65 who are Black or African American were three times more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic White older adults, and the poverty rate for Hispanic or Latinx people over age 65 was nearly twice the poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites. Across the region, there are 2,544 BIPOC older adults whose household income is below poverty.

Poverty Rate, Ages 65+, By Race/Ethnicity, Direction Home
Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region

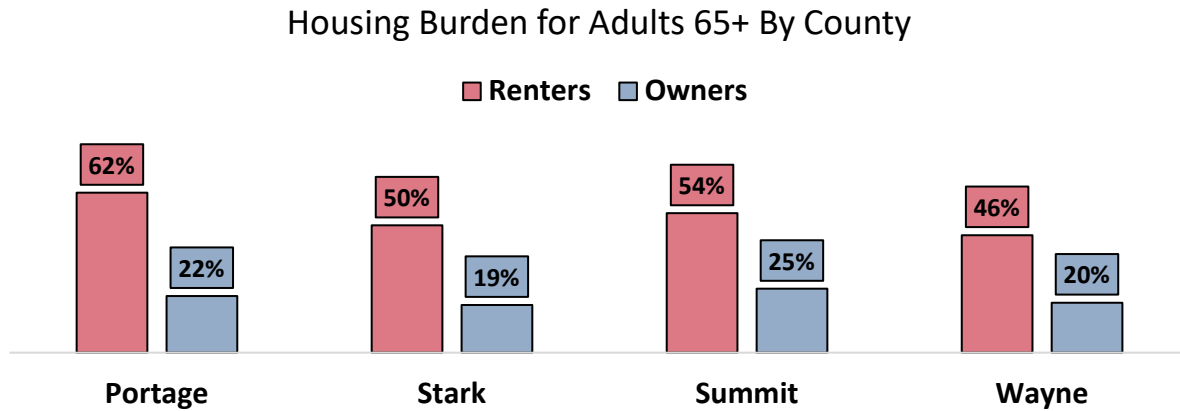


Poverty Rate, Ages 65+, By Race/Ethnicity by County



Basic Needs: Food and Shelter

Although they are fewer in number, older adults who rent are more likely to struggle to affording their housing. Over 53 percent of renters over age 65 pay 30 percent or more of their total income for housing costs, compared to 22.0 percent of owners. In total, 39,209 older adults are in unaffordable housing situations. When housing costs account for a large portion of a household’s total income, it is more difficult for them to afford other necessities.



Many older adults experience food insecurity, the condition that leads to hunger. Across Ohio, 7.2 percent of older adults are food insecure and 2.0 percent have very low food security, according to the latest data from Feeding America². Applying the state average to the population of the region, The Center for Community Solutions estimates that 21,500 older adults are food insecure, defined as having “a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy lifestyle.”³ Some of these individuals struggle even more with hunger, including 6,000 older adults who have very low food security. As defined by the US Department of Agriculture, individuals with very low food security report “multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.”⁴ Many older adults rely on benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to meet their basic needs. Over 19,634 households with at least one older adult in the region reported receiving SNAP.

² Ziliak, James P. and Craig Gunderson, “The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019”, *Feeding America*, August 2021. Available at <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/2021%20-%20State%20of%20Senior%20Hunger%20in%202019.pdf>

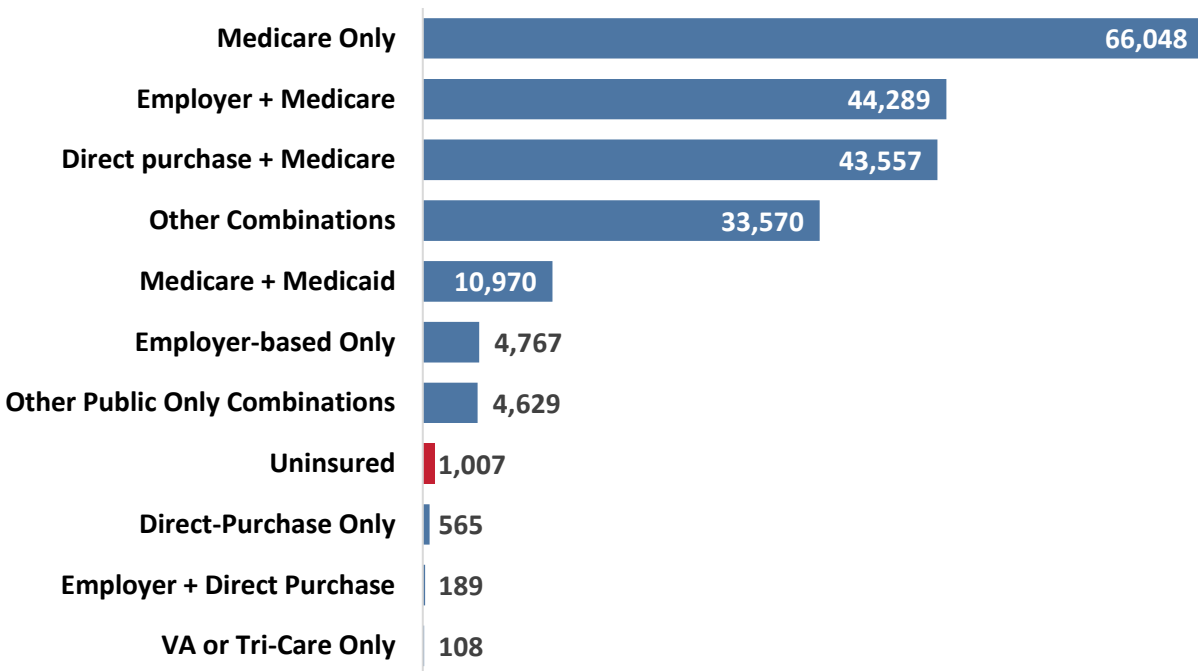
³ “Hunger and Food Insecurity”, Feeding America, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>

⁴ “Definitions of Food Security”, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>

Health Coverage and Disability

The vast majority of adults over the age of 65 in the region have at least some health insurance coverage, but 1,007 older adults are uninsured. Over 96 percent of non-institutionalized insured older adults have at least some public coverage. As shown below, Medicare is the most common source, either alone or in combination with other types of insurance. Most people covered by Medicare supplement it with private coverage, either purchased directly or through their employer. There are also 10,970 dually enrolled individuals who are covered by both Medicare and Medicaid.

Type of Health Insurance Coverage, Ages 65+, Direction Home
Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging Region



Just over 32 percent of all non-institutionalized older adults over age 65, or 67,275 people, had one or more disabilities. This includes 22.1 percent of those ages 65-74 and 46.4 percent who are 75 and older. As shown below, ambulatory difficulties, defined as having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs, were most common, followed by independent living difficulties, where a person has difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, and hearing difficulties.⁵

⁵ “How Disability Data are Collected from The American Community Survey”, U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance/data-collection-ac.html>

Older Adults 65+ With One or More Disabilities	Total	Portage County	Stark County	Summit County	Wayne County
Total Count	67,275	8,955	21,239	31,029	6,052
With a Hearing Difficulty <i>Having serious difficulty hearing</i>	27,015	3903	8453	12148	2511
With a Vision Difficulty <i>Blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses</i>	10,797	1529	3073	5362	833
With a Cognitive Difficulty <i>Because of a physical mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions</i>	15,632	2309	4424	7612	1287
With an Ambulatory Difficulty <i>Having serious difficult walking or climbing stairs</i>	41,975	5499	13110	19682	3684
With a self-care difficulty <i>Having difficult bathing or dressing</i>	13,912	1501	3871	7538	1002
With an Independent Living Difficulty <i>Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping</i>	27,504	2952	7987	13964	2601

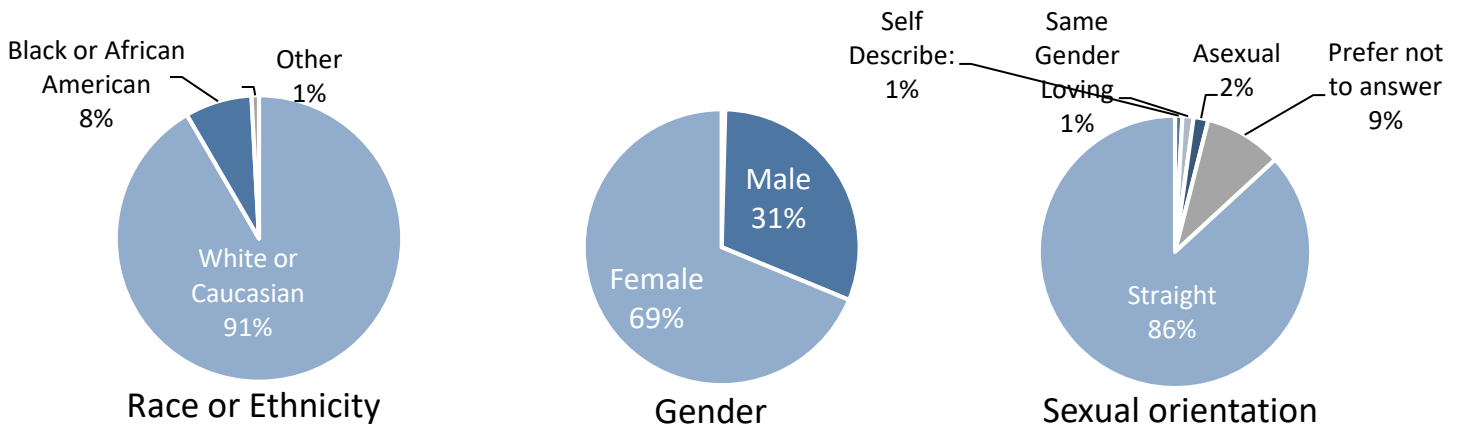
Census data shows that 15,632 older adults in the region have a cognitive difficulty or face challenges remembering, concentrating, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem. Dementia is one type of cognitive difficulty. Research by the Alzheimer's Association shows that the share of people with Alzheimer's dementia increases with age, from 5.0 percent among people ages 65 to 74, to 13.1 percent of people ages 75 to 84, rising to around one third (33.2 percent) among people age 85 and older. Utilizing these statistics, The Center for Community Solutions estimates that as many as 27,500 people ages 65 and older in the region may be living with Alzheimer's dementia. As the population ages, these numbers are growing rapidly. Across Ohio, the number of people over age 65 who have Alzheimer's is projected to increase 13.6 percent between 2020 and 2025.

Data indicates that there are thousands of older adults in the region served by Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging who have great economic and social needs. It is these individuals, as well as low-income minority older adults and those with limited English proficiency that Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging seeks to serve.

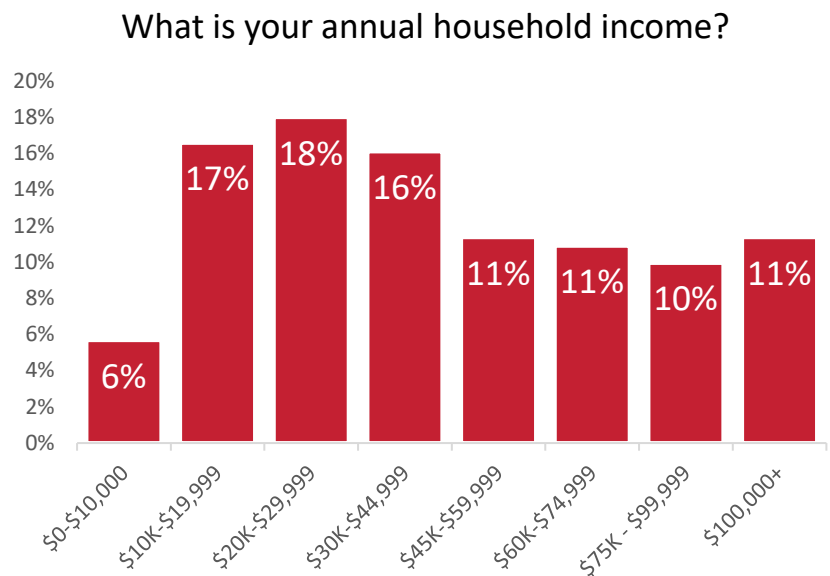
Survey Results

Demographics

Two hundred ninety-three people completed Direction Homes' survey. The majority of respondents were female (69%) compared to male (31%). Most survey respondents were also White/Caucasian (91%) or Black/African American (8%). No survey respondents selected the option for Hispanic/Latino or Asian/Pacific Islander. Eighty-six percent of survey takers identified as straight, and another nine percent preferred not to provide their sexual orientation. Two percent identified as asexual and one percent identified as same gender loving.

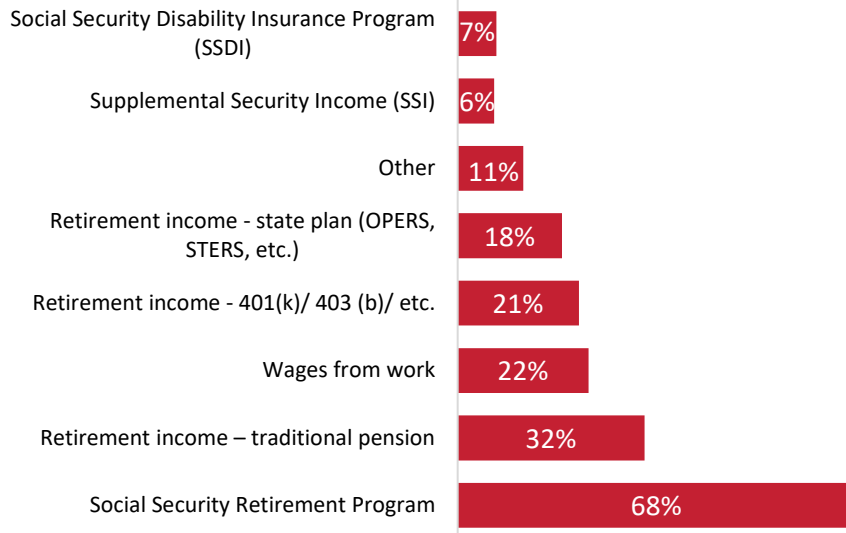


Survey respondents were fairly evenly split across annual household income categories. Six percent had annual income of \$10,000 or less, seventeen percent had income between \$10-19,000, eighteen percent had income between \$20-29,000, sixteen percent had income between \$30-44,999, eleven percent had income between \$45,000-59,999, eleven percent had income between \$60-74,999, ten percent had income between \$75-99,999, and eleven percent had annual household incomes greater than \$100,000.



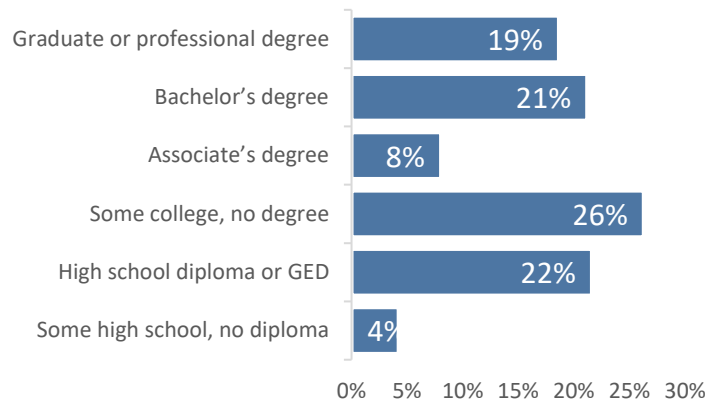
Most reported receiving income from Social Security Retirement Program (68%). Thirty-two percent of respondents reported income from a traditional pension, twenty-two reported income from wages, and twenty-one percent reported income from a 401(k)/403(b)/etc. Eighteen percent of respondents receive income from a state retirement plan such as OPERS or STERS, seven percent receive Social Security Disability Insurance, six percent receive Supplemental Security Income, and eleven percent reported other sources of income.

Main source of income



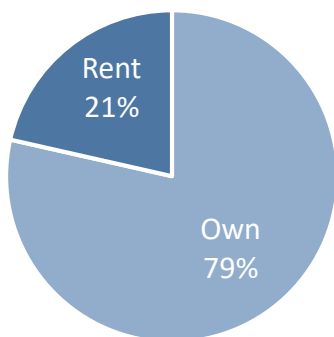
A wide range of educational backgrounds were represented by survey respondents. Four percent had some high school education, but no diploma. Twenty-two percent had a high school diploma or GED, and twenty-six percent had some college but no degree. Eight percent of respondents had an associate's degree, twenty-one percent had a bachelor's degree, and nineteen percent had a graduate or professional degree.

Highest level of education completed



Over half (55%), of respondents live with a spouse or partner and thirty-four percent live alone. Thirteen percent live in a household with their children and six percent live in a household with their grandchildren. Six percent live in a household with other relatives and one percent live in a household with nonrelatives.

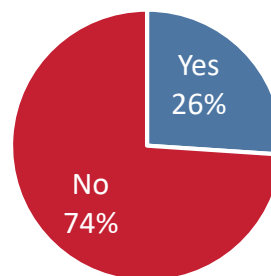
Do you own or rent your home?



Seventy-nine percent of respondents own their home, whereas twenty-one percent rent their home. The majority of respondents live in single-family homes (75%). Ten percent live in multi-family homes, nine percent live in apartments, four percent live in senior apartment buildings, one percent live in a townhome, and one percent live in another type of home.

Almost all respondents speak English as home, with two speaking German and one speaking Greek. Ninety-seven percent of the surveys were completed by individuals responding for themselves, and three percent were completed by someone responding for another person. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents are currently a caregiver for a friend or family member who is over age 60.

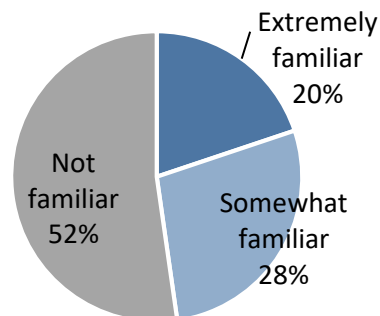
Are you currently a caregiver for a friend or family member who is over age 60?



Aging Services

Slightly more older adults in the region were not familiar with Direction Home (52%) compared to those with some level of familiarity (48%).

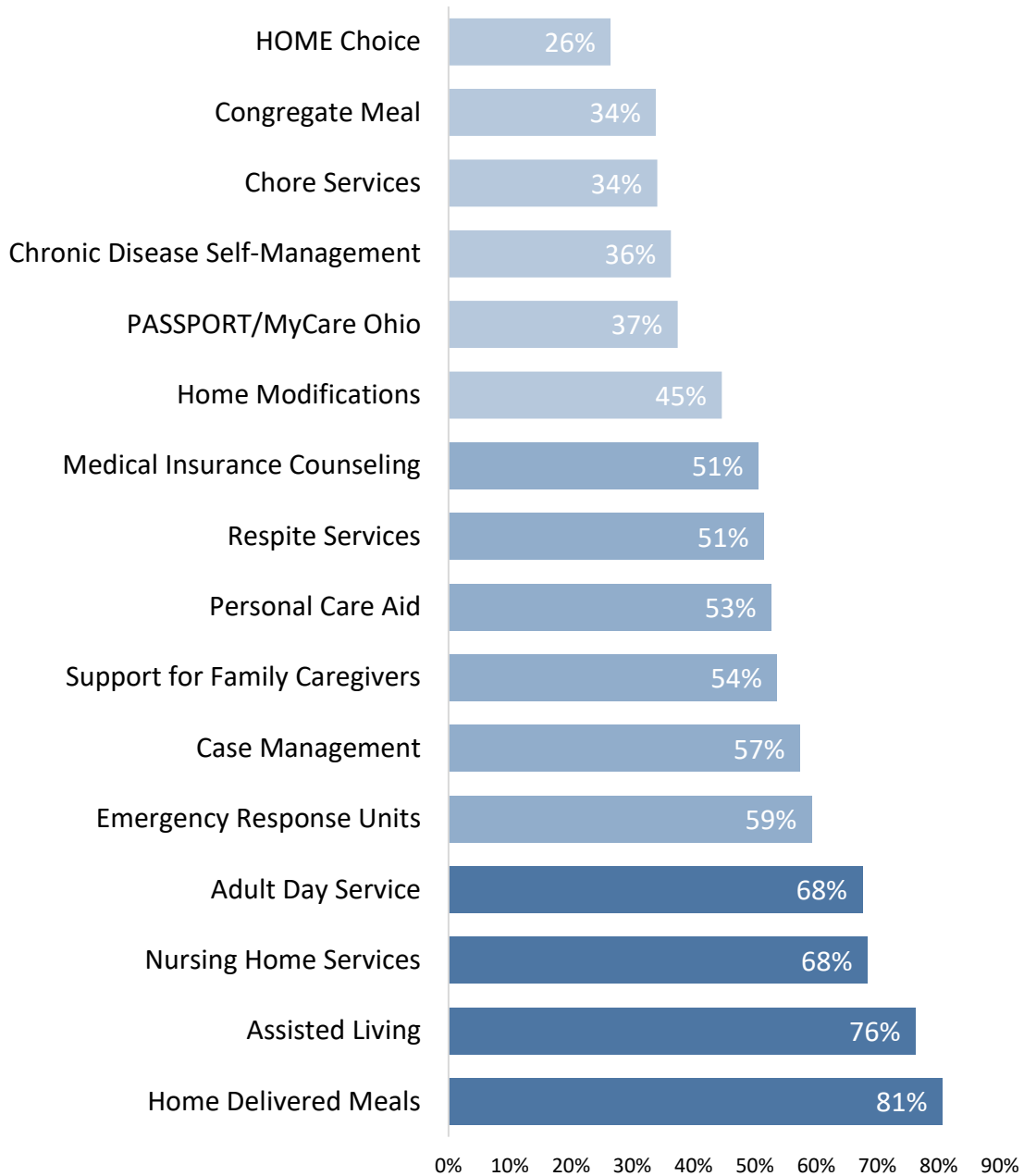
Familiar with Direction Home



Older adults' awareness of aging services ranged from high familiarity with home delivered meals (81%) to a low familiarity with HOME Choice (26%). In addition to home delivered meals, more than half of respondents were aware of or had personally used assisted living, nursing home services, adult day service, emergency response units, case management, support for family caregivers, personal care aid, respite services and medical insurance counseling. In

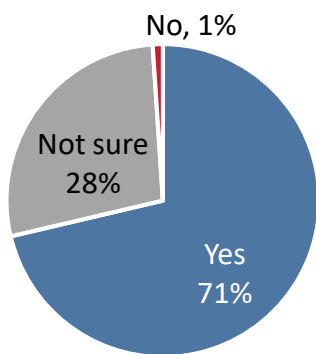
addition to HOME Choice, less than half of respondents were aware of or had personally used home modifications, PASSPORT/MyCare Ohio, chronic disease self-management, chore services and congregate meal.

Familiarity With Aging Services

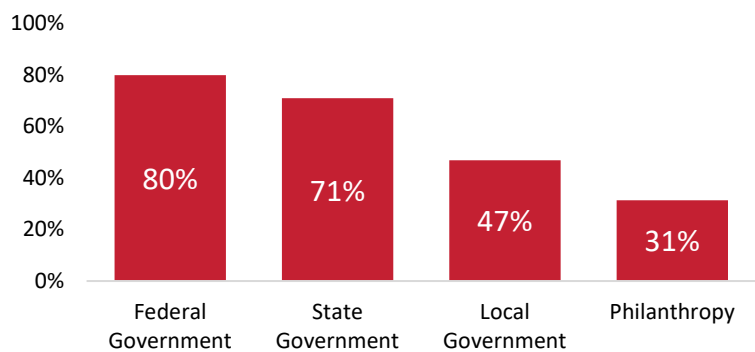


Just one percent of older adults do not think additional funding is needed for aging services. Seventy-one percent of older adults report that more funding is needed for aging services and twenty-eight percent are unsure. Eighty percent of older adults think increased funding should come from the federal government and seventy-one percent of older adults think increased funding should come from the state government. Forty-seven percent of older adults think increased funding should come from local government and thirty-one percent think increased funding should come from philanthropy.

Is more funding needed for aging services?

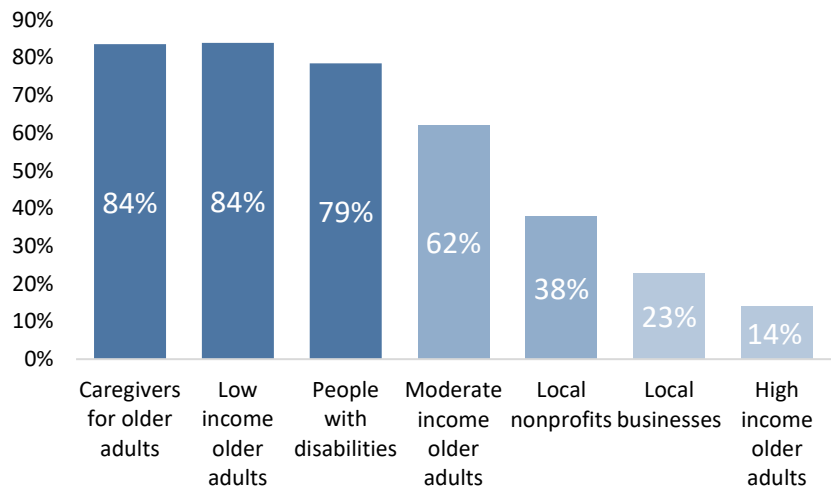


Where do you think increased funding for aging services should come from?



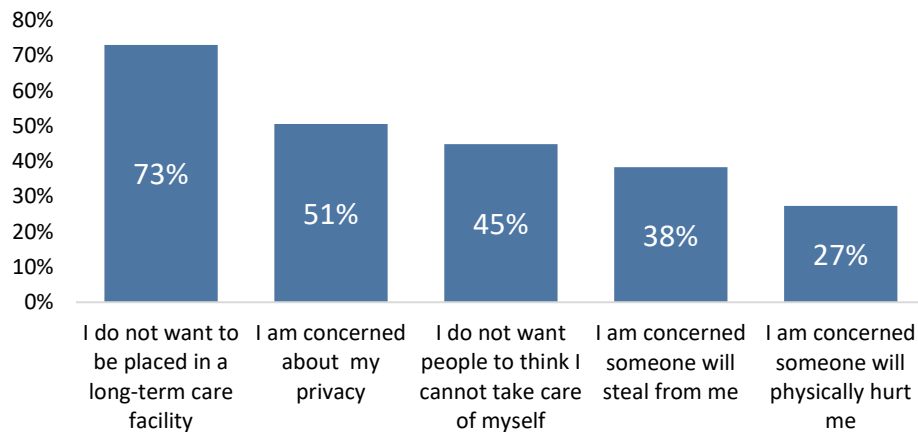
Older adults report several groups that would benefit from increased funding for aging services. Eighty-four percent report caregivers for older adults and low-income older adults would benefit. Seventy-nine percent report that people with disabilities would benefit, and sixty-two percent report that moderate income older adults would benefit. Less than half of older adults thought that local nonprofits (38%), local businesses (23%), or high income older adults (14%) would benefit from increased funding for aging services.

Who would benefit from increased funding for aging services?



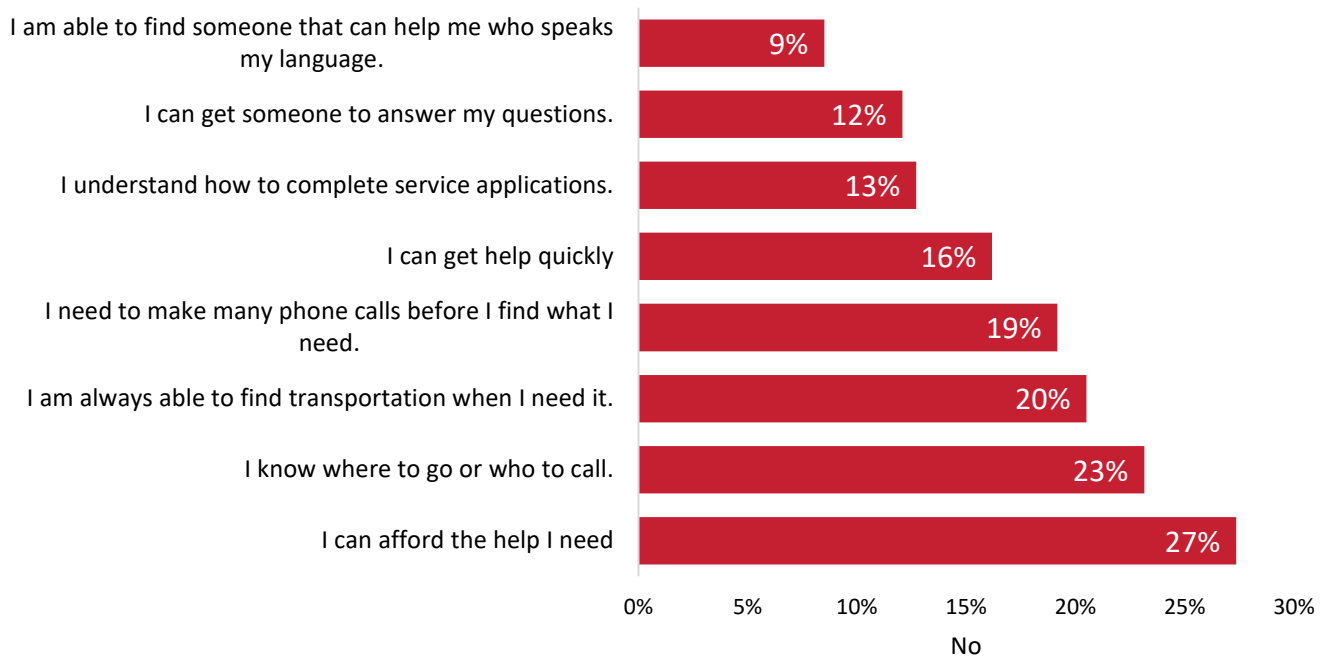
The largest concern for older adults accessing support services as they age is that most do not want to be placed in a long-term care facility (73%). Fifty-one percent are concerned about their privacy, forty-five percent do not want people to think they cannot take care

What concerns do you have about accessing support services as you age?

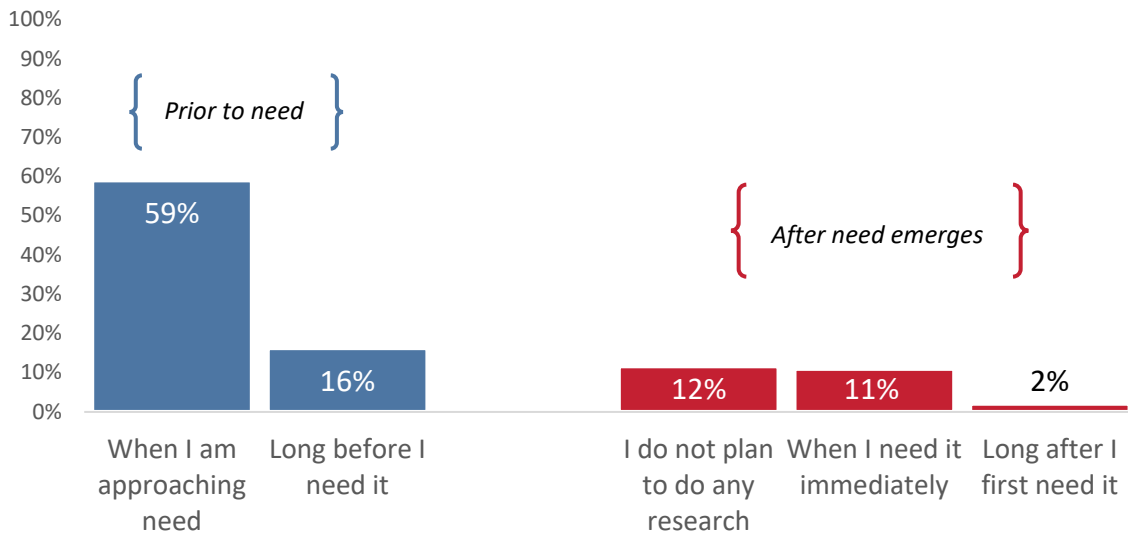


themselves, thirty-eight percent are concerned someone will steal from them, and twenty-seven are concerned someone will physically hurt them. When they do seek help meeting their needs, thirty-six percent of older adults generally do not qualify for the services and twenty-seven percent cannot afford the help they need. Twenty-three percent do not know where to go or who to call. Twenty percent are not always able to find transportation when they need it. Sixteen percent cannot get help quickly, thirteen percent do not understand how to complete service applications, twelve percent cannot get someone to answer their questions, and nine percent are not able to find someone that can help them who speaks their language.

Inability to meet needs when seeking help for aging needs



When do you plan to research options for aging services?



When it comes to options for aging services, older adults vary as to when they plan to research those options. The majority plan to research options for aging services when they are approaching a need (59%) or long before they need it (16%), whereas eleven percent plan to research when they need it immediately and two percent plan to research long after they first need it. Twelve percent of older adults do not plan to do any research for aging services.

Aging and health topped the list of what prompts older adults to start planning for aging services. Health includes illnesses, chronic diseases, and health emergencies. Aging encompasses realizing they cannot do as much as their own and need services. Loss of a loved one or lack of family support also prompts older adults to start planning for aging services, as well as life changes, such as retirement or a change in benefits. Some older adults start planning as they see friends not receiving the services they need.

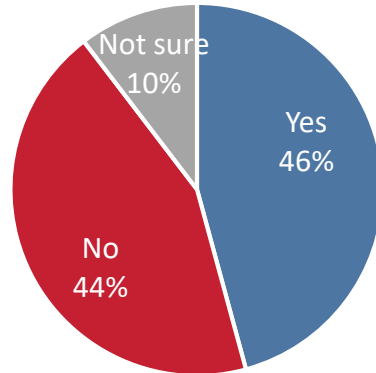
When asked about needs related to growing older that are not being met, many respondents reported none. One respondent reported too many to name. Of those responding, affordable resources was most common, and related financial needs. For some this was affordable home care, for others affordable health insurance, and for others affordable housing. Many respondents listed help with cleaning, yard work, chores, or groceries. Several older adults listed transportation needs. A few mentioned eye and dental care.

Housing

Older adults were split on their ability to find alternative housing if they should need to due to health or mobility issues, with forty-six percent responding that they could and forty-four percent responding that they could not. Ten percent of respondents were unsure. The

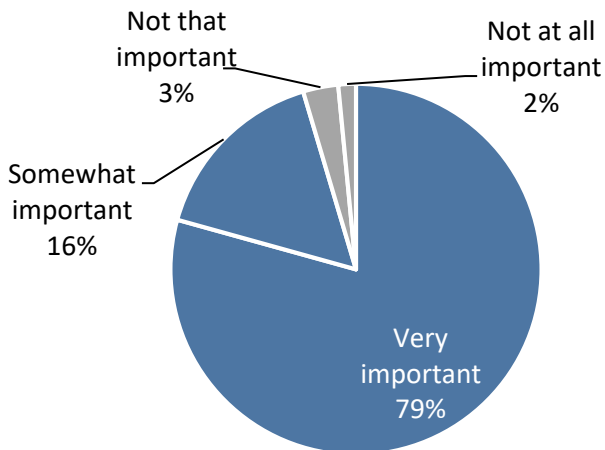
combined unsure and no responses point to either a lack of housing to meet aging adults' needs, or a lack of awareness of these options.

If you had to leave your home due to health or mobility issues, do you feel confident that you could find alternative housing to meet your needs?

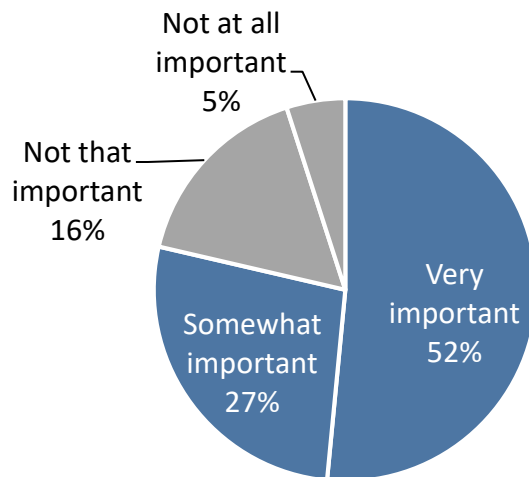


Ninety-five percent of respondents feel it is very important or somewhat important to be able to remain in their home as they age, and seventy-nine percent reported that it is very important or somewhat important to be able to remain in their neighborhood as they age.

How important is it for you to be able to **remain in your home** as you age?

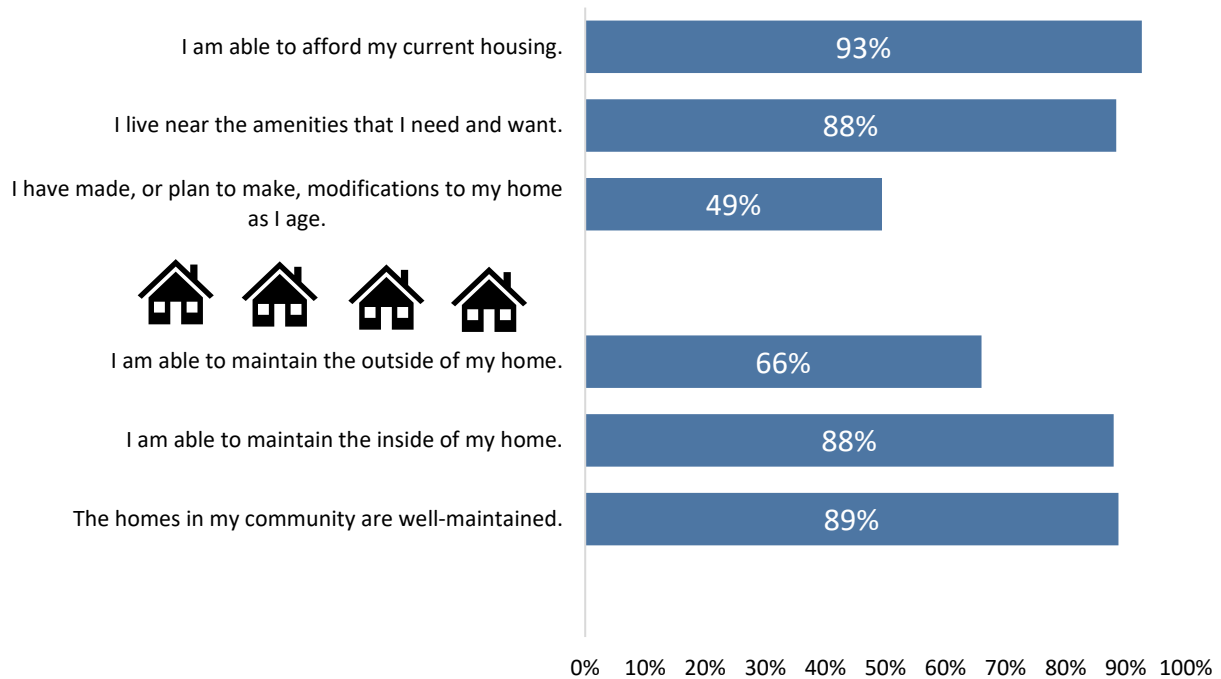


How important is it for you to be able to **remain in your neighborhood** as you age?



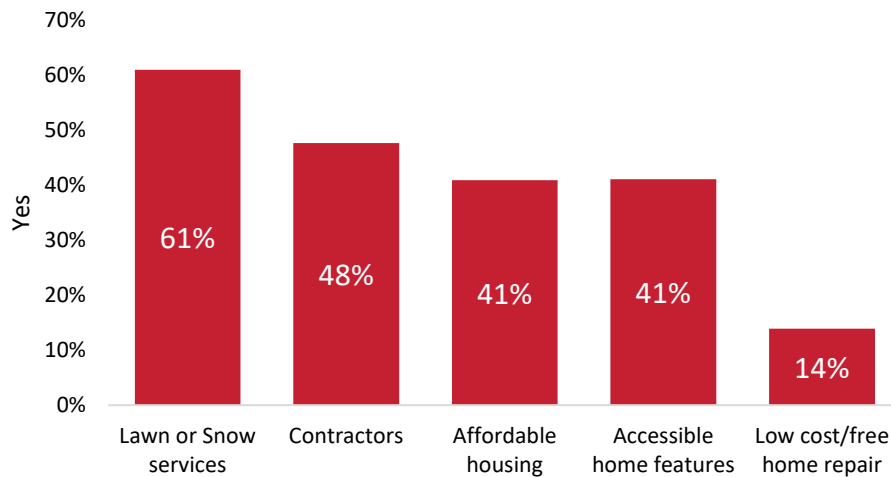
The majority of respondents are able to afford their current housing (93%), report that the homes in their community are well-maintained (89%), and live near the amenities they need and want (88%). However, while eighty-eight percent of older adults are able to maintain the inside of their home, only sixty-six percent are able to maintain the outside of their home. Moreover, only forty-nine percent of older adults reported that they have made, or plan to make, modifications to their home as they age.

Home Maintenance, Affordability and Modifications



Only fourteen percent of older adults said that there was a low-cost or free home repair service available in their community. Less than half of older adults reported that affordable home repair contractors who are trustworthy and do quality work; affordable housing options (such as active adult communities, assisted living and communities with shared facilities and outdoor spaces); or homes that are equipped with features such as no-step entry, wide doorways, first floor bedroom and bath, and grab bars in the bathroom were available. Sixty-one percent responded that seasonal services such as lawn work or snow removal which are affordable were available.

Home Maintenance Service Availability



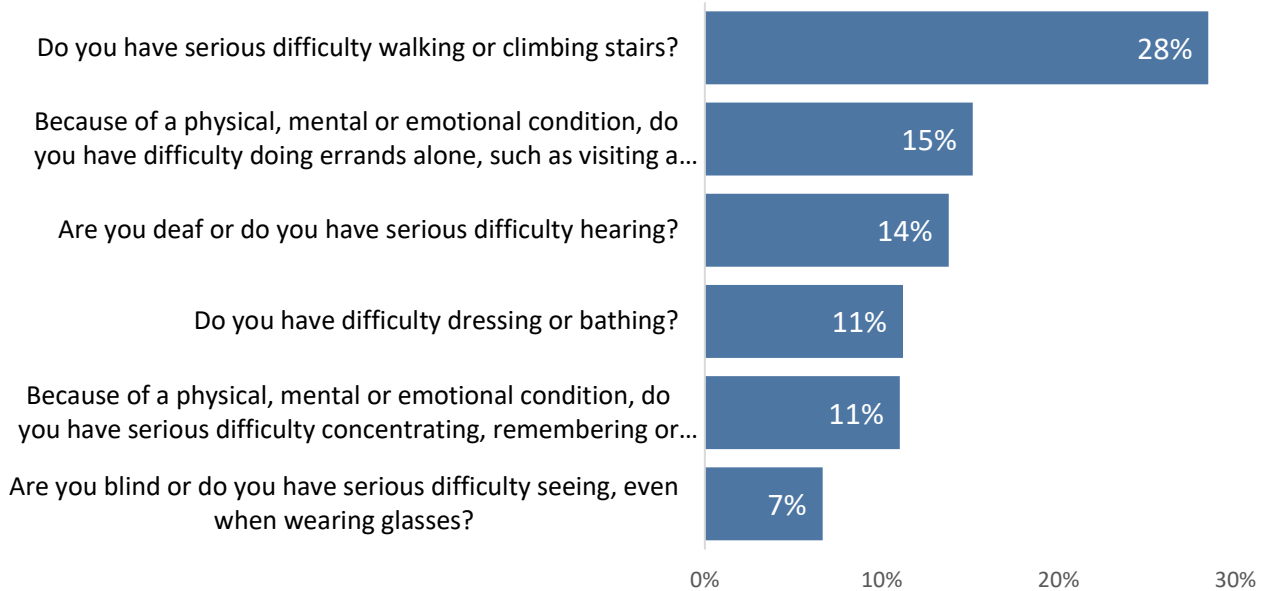
Health

When looking at resources to support the health and well-being of older adults, responses were mixed regarding availability in the community. Eighty-nine percent of older adults report that respectful and helpful hospital, clinic, or doctor’s office staff are available, whereas only thirty-two percent of older adults report that affordable, well-trained, certified home health care providers are available. Other home care options also had low responses, with only thirty-nine percent of respondents reporting home care services including personal care and housekeeping are available, and thirty-eight percent reporting service providers who will come to your home are available.

Respectful and helpful hospital, clinic, or doctor's office staff	89%
Conveniently located urgent care or emergency rooms	87%
Places where you can socialize or attend programs	82%
Health care professionals who speak your language	78%
Fitness activities geared to older adults such as Silver Sneakers	76%
Places to get health and affordable food	74%
Sufficient, accessible and affordable cemeteries/burial sites	64%
Meals and/or food delivered to your home	56%
Medical equipment (walker, wheel chair, hospital bed) that is affordable	54%
Health and wellness programs and classes in areas such as nutrition, smoking cessation, and weight control	53%
Places to call to get information about health, housing, and other services	48%
Home care services including personal care and housekeeping	39%
Service provider who will come to your home	38%
Easy to find information on aging services	36%
Affordable, well-trained, certified home health care providers	32%

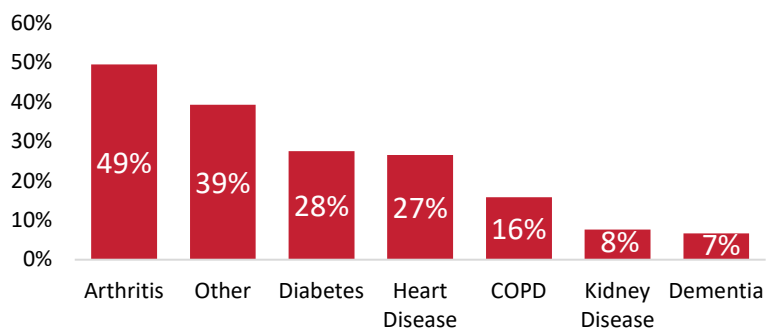
Twenty-eight percent of older adults reported serious difficulty walking or climbing the stairs and fifteen percent have difficulty doing errands alone. Fourteen percent are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing. Eleven percent have difficulty dressing or bathing and remembering or making decisions. Seven percent are blind or have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses.

Disability Status: Mobility, Cognitive, Hearing, Self-Care, Independent Living, Vision

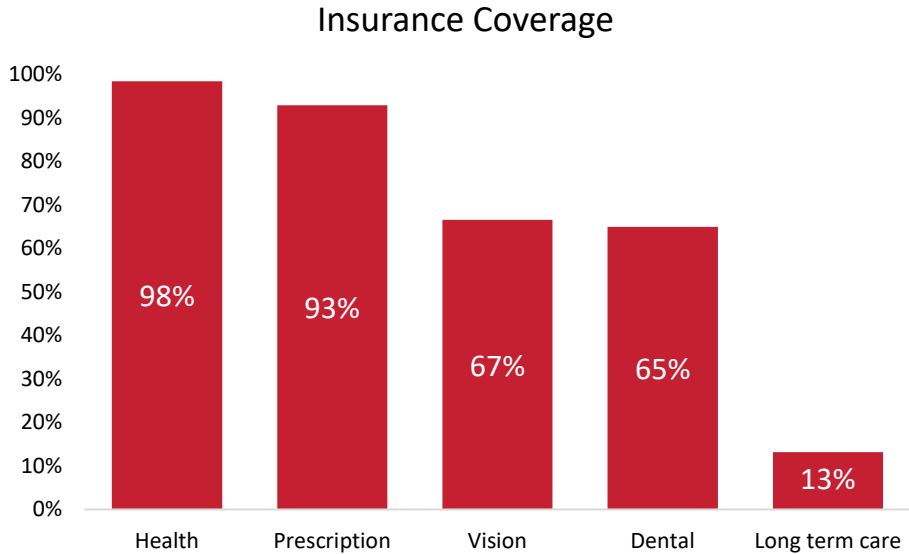


Of 293 respondents, 193 (67%) reported a chronic disease of some kind. Almost half of those with a chronic disease have been diagnosed with arthritis (49%). Twenty-eight percent have diabetes and twenty-seven percent have heart disease. Sixteen percent have COPD, eight percent have kidney disease, and seven percent have dementia. Thirty-nine percent reported another chronic illness.

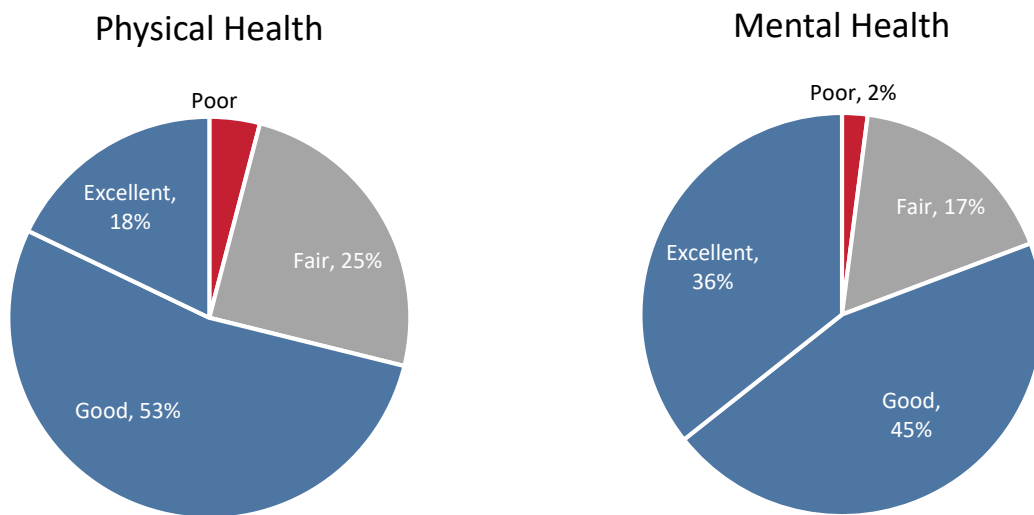
Chronic Conditions



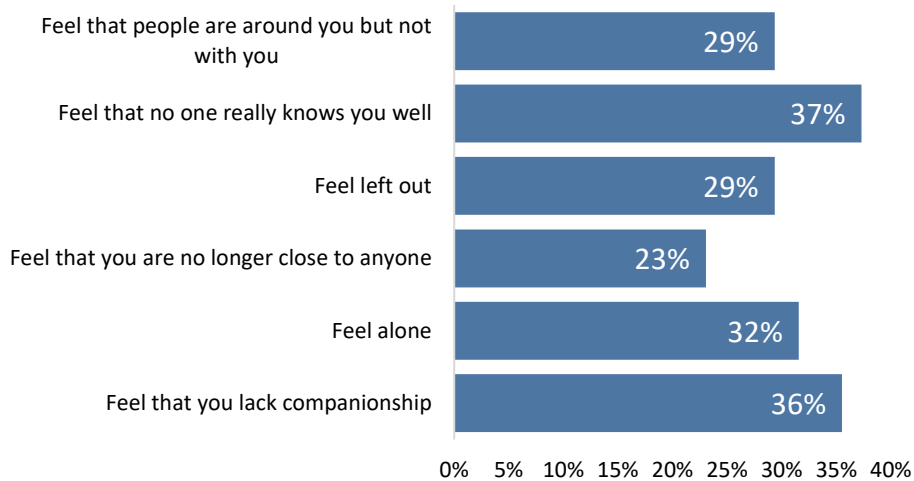
A large majority of older adults have health insurance (98%) and prescription insurance (93%). Roughly two-thirds of older adults have vision insurance (67%) or dental insurance (65%). Only thirteen percent of older adults have long term care insurance.



Survey respondents struggle slightly more with physical health than mental health, with twenty-nine percent of respondents reporting fair or poor physical health and nineteen percent of respondents reporting fair or poor mental health. However, a third of respondents reported sometimes or always feeling alone, lacking companionship, and that no one really know them well.

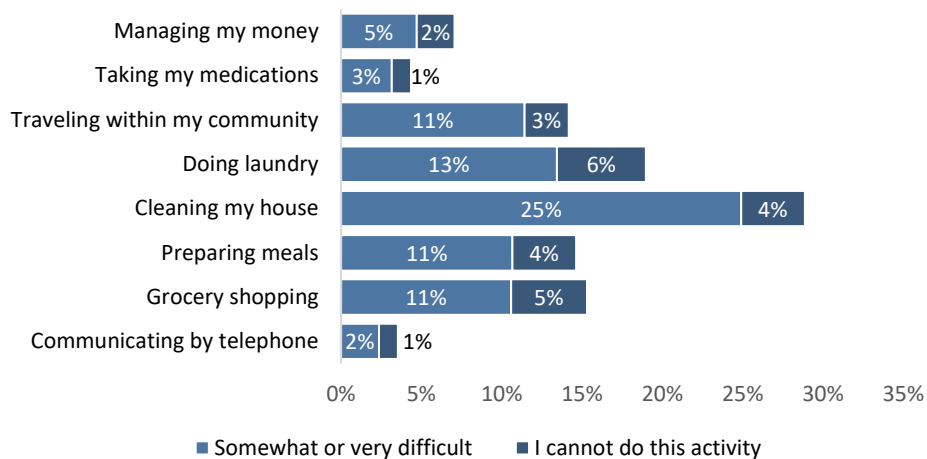


Sometimes or Always Feel Isolated



Cleaning their home and doing laundry are the most difficult activities for older adults. Twenty-nine percent of older adults find cleaning their home difficult or cannot clean their home at all. Nineteen percent of older adults find doing laundry difficult or cannot do laundry at all. Fifteen percent of older adults find grocery shopping and preparing meals difficult or cannot shop or prepare meals at all. Fourteen percent report that traveling within their community is difficult, or they cannot travel at all. Seven percent report that managing their money is difficult or they cannot manage money at all. Four percent report that taking medication or communicating by phone is difficult or they cannot take medication or communicate by phone at all.

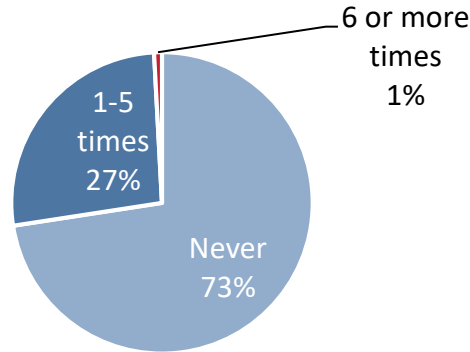
Difficulty with daily activities



Safety

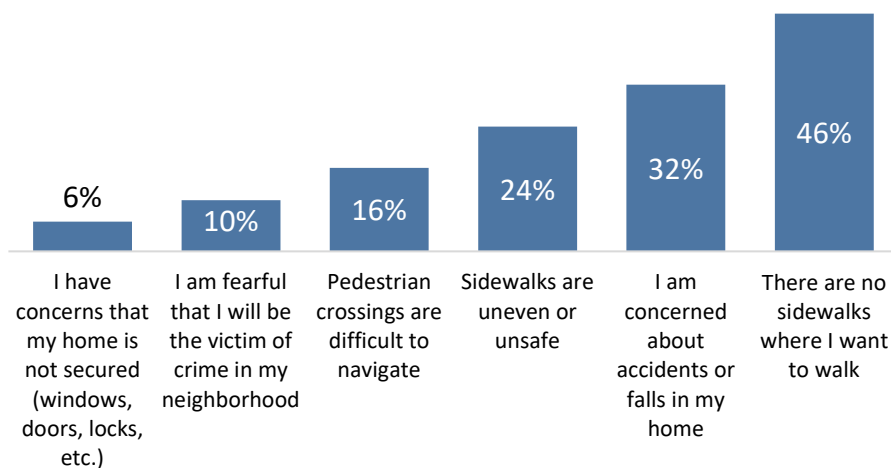
Over a quarter of older adults have fallen at home in the last twelve months. Twenty-seven percent fell one to five times, and one percent fell six or more times in the last twelve months.

In the past 12 months, how many times have you fallen in your home?



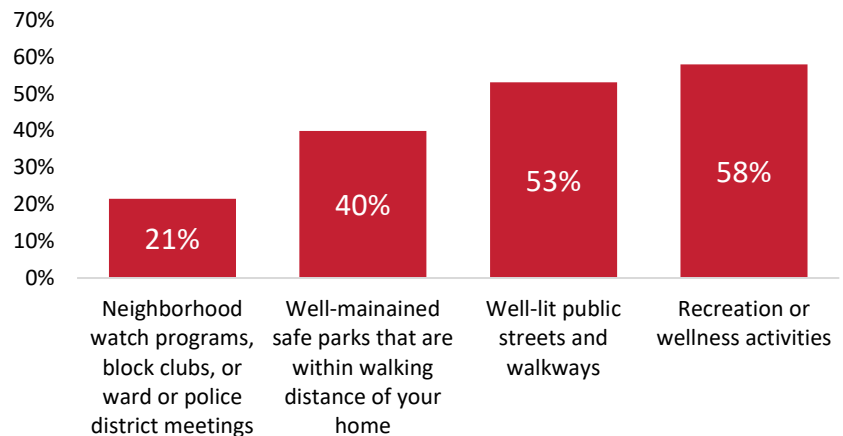
This lines up with thirty-two percent of older adults who are concerned about accidents or falls in their homes. Forty-six percent of older adults report that there are no sidewalks where they want to walk and twenty-four percent report that the sidewalks are uneven or unsafe. Sixteen percent report that pedestrian crossings are difficult to navigate. Ten percent of older adults are fearful that they will be the victim of crime in their neighborhood and six percent have concerns that their home is not secured. Twelve percent of older adults responded that their neighbors or neighborhood do not make them feel safe and protected and one percent do not feel safe in their home.

Safety Related Concerns

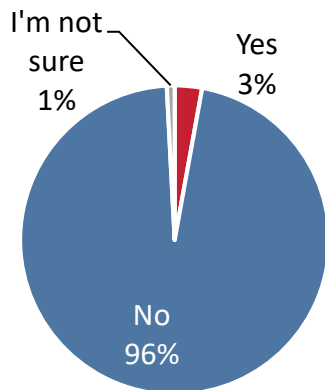


Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported that they have access to recreation or wellness activities, and fifty-three percent reported access to well-lit public streets and walkways. However, only forty percent of older adults said they had access to well-maintained safe parks that are within walking distance of their home. Only twenty-one percent of older adults responded that they had access to neighborhood watch programs, block clubs, or ward or police district meetings.

Where you live, do you have access to the following?



Have you been abused or neglected by a family member, caregiver, or someone else you trust?



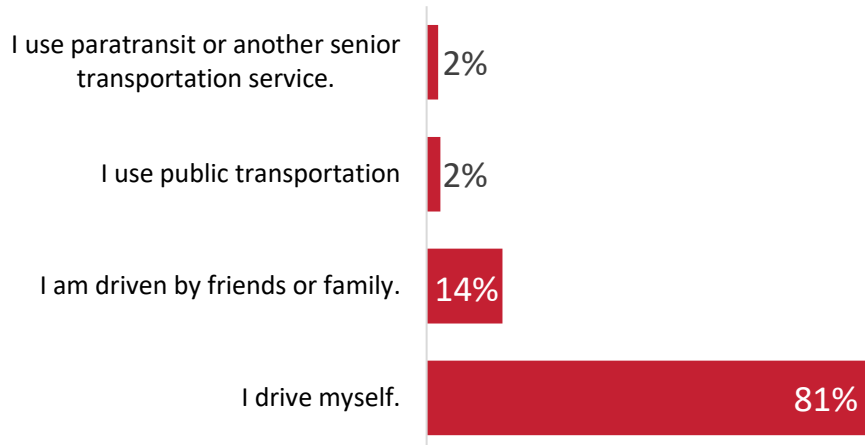
Three percent of older adults reported that since they turned sixty, they have been abused or neglected by a family member, caregiver, or someone else they trust. Four respondents reported that someone took my money or property without my permission, or tricked me into spending money I didn't want to spend. Four older adults responded that someone who was supposed to be helping me with my needs did not help. One older adult reported that someone has tried to control, threaten, humiliate, or isolate me from others.

Transportation

Just over half (53 percent) of older adults in the region report they have no problems getting around. The most commonly cited challenges to getting around were difficulties walking or not feeling safe walking, not driving themselves and difficulty using senior or public transportation. When running errands, over 80 percent of survey respondents drive themselves. About a third

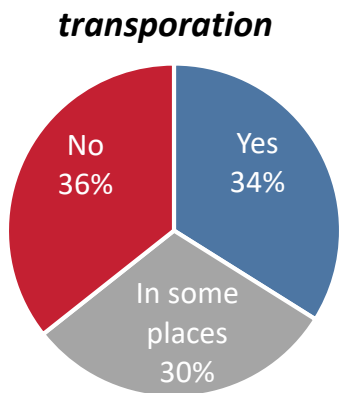
of survey respondents indicate they have access to a drivers education or refresh course. These types of courses provide an opportunity for drivers to hone their driving skills as they experience changes in their functionality. Fourteen percent of individuals report being driving by friends and family two percent use public transportation and the same percent use paratransit or other senior transportation services.

What is your usual way of running errands?

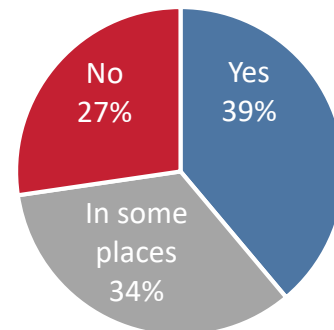


When asked about public transportation being affordable, reliable and convenient, answers were nearly evenly split between yes, no and in some places. Over a third of respondents indicate they have no access to public transportation. Slightly less, 27 percent, indicate they do not have access to special transportation for seniors or individuals with disabilities and another 34 percent only have access in some places.

Affordable, reliable and convenient public transportation



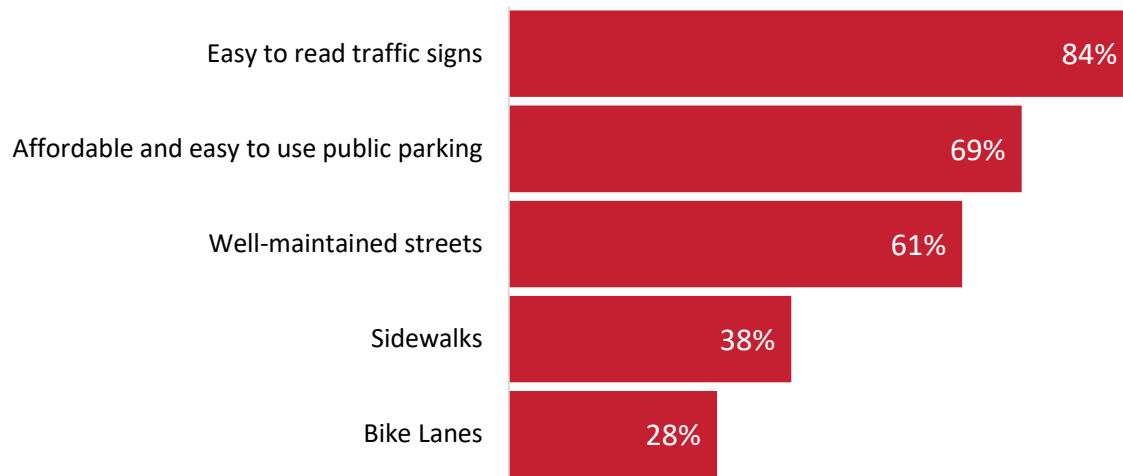
Special transportation for seniors or individuals with disabilities





Getting around a community is easier, safer and more pleasant when the built environment includes easy to read traffic signs, public parking, well-maintained streets, sidewalks and bike lanes. While most residents indicate having access to signs, parking and well-maintained streets, fewer had consistent access to sidewalks and bike lanes. For those who do not drive themselves or do not have a car, sidewalks and bike lanes are important transportation features that have direct impact on a person's ability to stay connected to their communities.

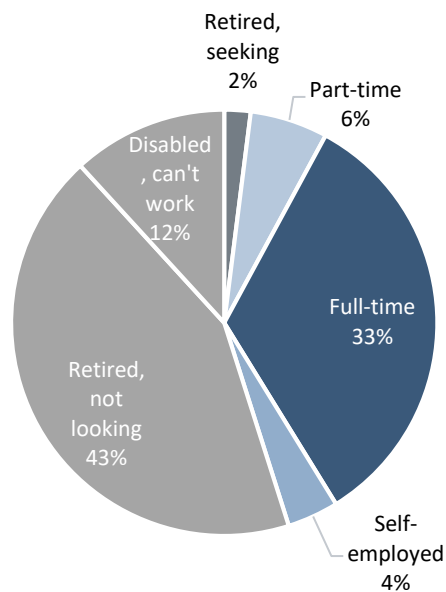
Consistent access to street amenities



Employment

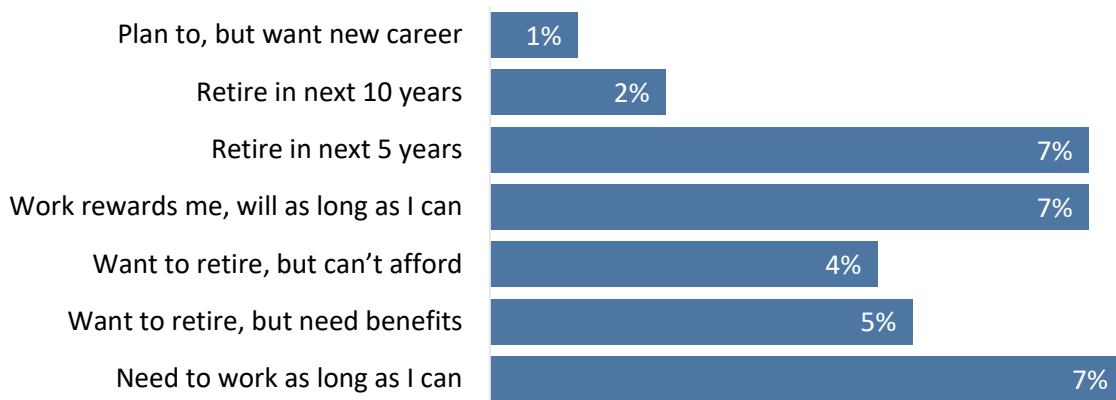
A little less than half of older adults (45%) are retired, with 43 percent not looking for work and two percent seeking employment. Another 43 percent are employed, with one-third of participants working full-time, six percent working part-time, and four percent being self-employed. Twelve percent of survey takers live with a disability and are unable to work.

What is your employment status?



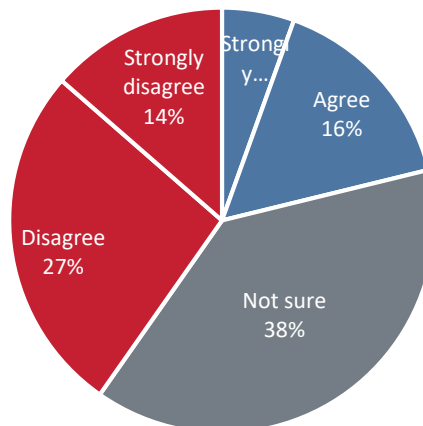
Of the survey takers who were employed, some were holding off on retirement plans. Seven percent said they needed to work as long as they could for financial reasons. Similarly, many wanted to retire, but said they could not afford to (four percent) or needed benefits (five percent). Some (7 percent) found work rewarding and said they would work as long as they could, while others (1 percent) said they planned to retire, but either wanted or were planning to start a new career. Close to 10 percent planned to retire soon, either in the next five years (seven percent) or the next 10 years (two percent).

If you are employed, what are your plans for retirement?



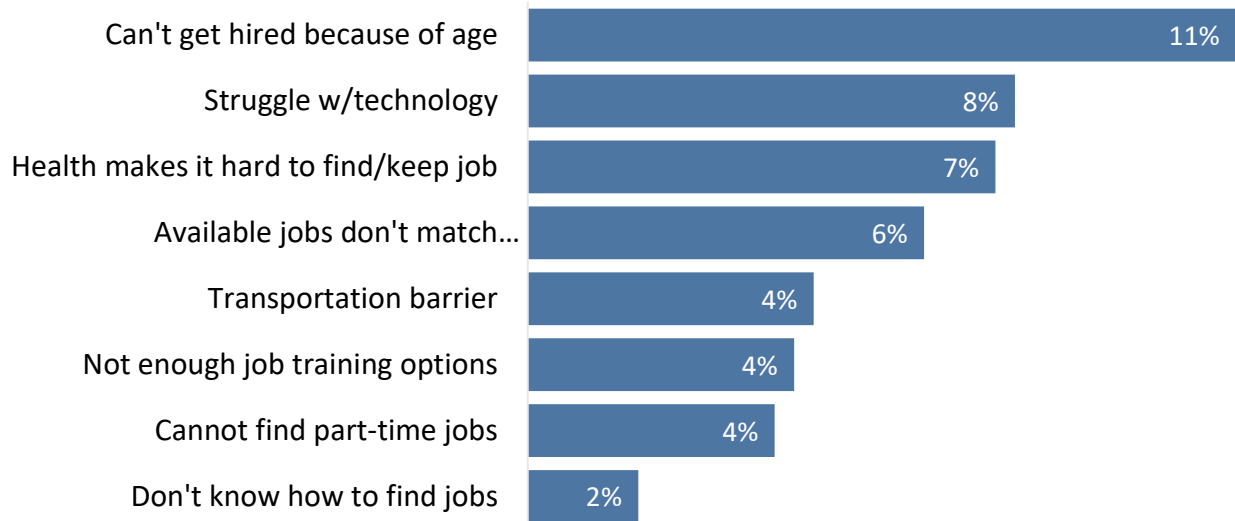
When asked if jobs are available for older adults to the same extent as younger people, participants had mixed responses. Most respondents were either unsure (38 percent) or felt that they were not, with 27 percent disagreeing and 14 percent strongly disagreeing. Less than a quarter of older adults agreed that they were, with five percent saying they strongly agreed and 16 percent saying they agreed.

Do you agree that jobs are available for older adults to the same extent that they are for younger people?



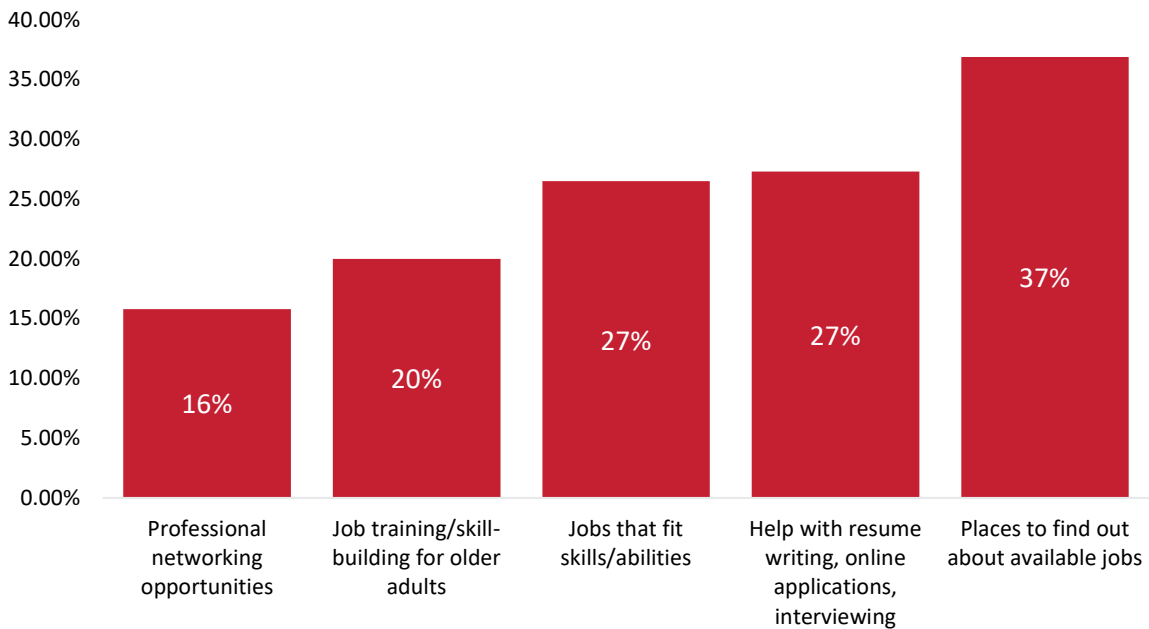
When asked about their experiences when seeking employment, some older adults had obstacles that made job searching difficult, such as, health (7%), transportation barriers (4%), and a lack of adequate job training options (4%). Others faced challenges in trying to secure a job, such as, not being able to find part-time positions (4%) or jobs that matched their skills or experience (6%), as well as not knowing how to find current jobs (2%) or how to use technology on the job (8%). Many found that employers would not hire them due to their age (11%). The majority of survey takers, however, said that these challenges did not apply to them when seeking employment (41%).

If you have sought employment as an older adult, have you experienced any of the following?



Participants were also asked about what was available in their community to support them in job searching. Over a third of older adults (37%) had access to places where they could find out about available jobs. Over a quarter of survey takers (27%) also said they have access to jobs that fit their skills and abilities, and help with resume writing, online applications, and interview practice. Others also had access to opportunities for job training or skill building (20%) and professional networking (16%).

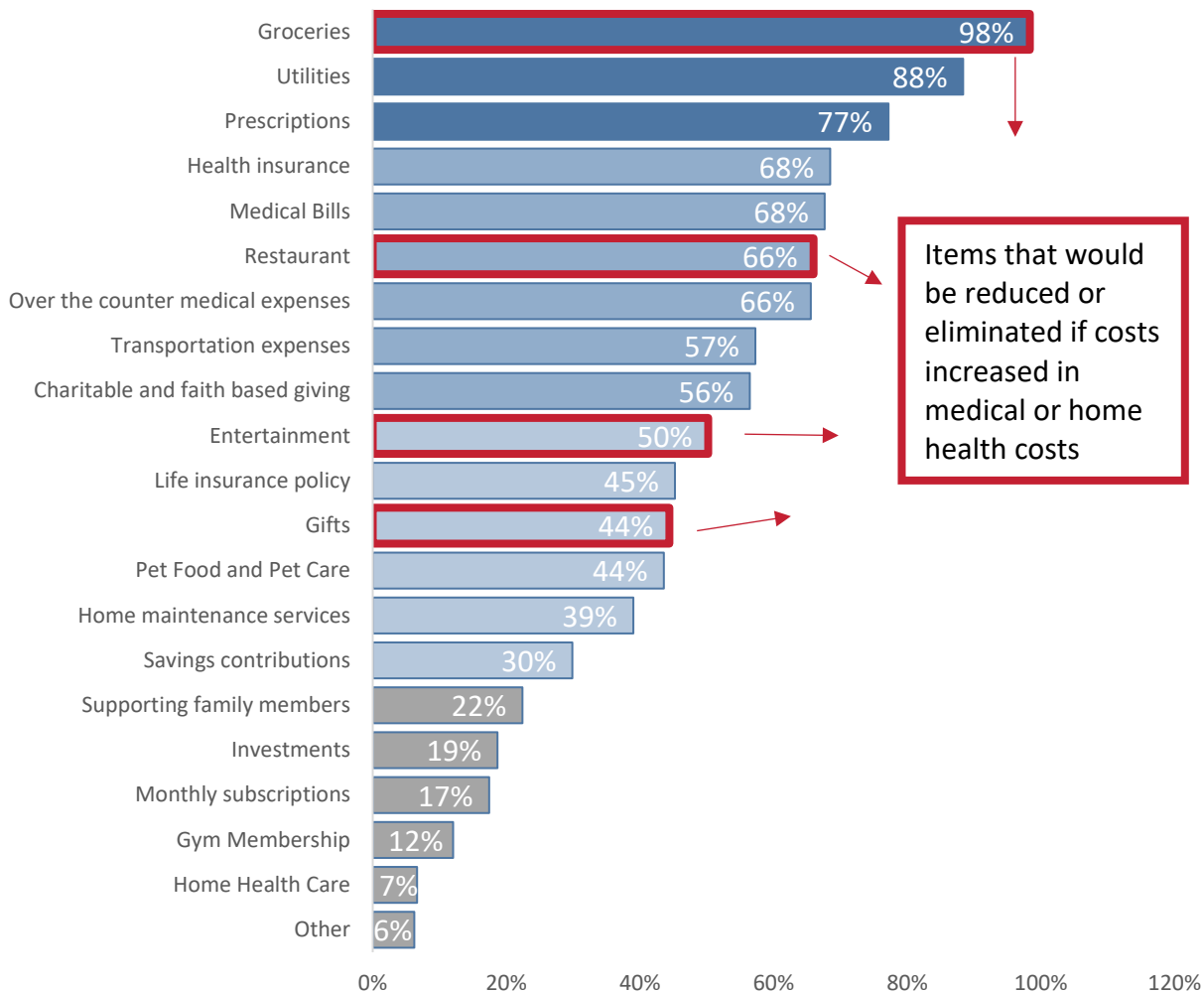
Where you live, do you have access to the following?



Economic Security

The majority of older adults have monthly expenses for groceries (98%) and utilities (88%). Medical expenses comprise the next highest responses of expenses. Older adults have monthly expenses for prescriptions (77%), health insurance (68%), medical bills (68%), and over the counter medical expenses (66%). Sixty-six percent of older adults spend money at restaurants, fifty-seven percent have monthly transportation expenses, fifty-six percent contribute to charitable or faith-based giving, and fifty percent spend money on entertainment. Less than half of older adults spend money monthly on life insurance policy (45%), pet food and pet care (44%), gifts (44%), home maintenance services (39%), savings contributions (30%), supporting family members (22%), investments (19%), monthly subscriptions (17%), gym memberships (12%), and home health care (7%).

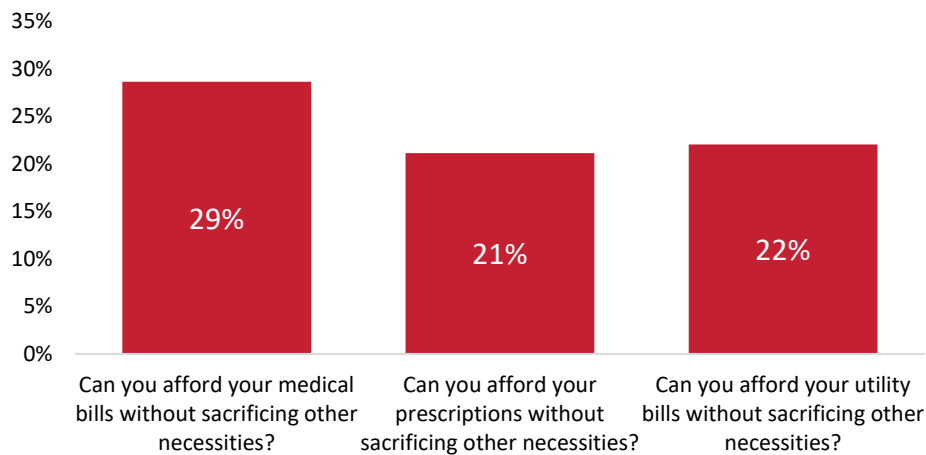
Included in monthly spending



If older adults had to decrease their monthly spending due to an increase in medical or home health costs, the majority would decrease their spending on restaurants (61%). Older adults would also cut back on spending for entertainment (49%), groceries (47%), and gifts (43%) if needed. Fifteen percent of respondents reported that they would not need to make any changes.

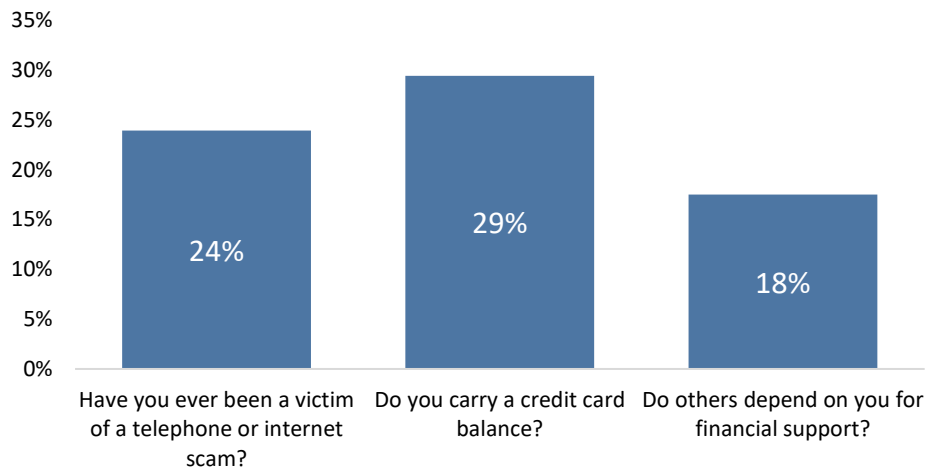
Forty-six percent of older adults do not have someone who could lend them money if they were to experience a financial crisis. Eleven percent cannot afford their medical bills without sacrificing other necessities. Ten percent cannot afford their prescriptions without sacrificing other necessities, and nine percent cannot afford their utility bills without sacrificing other necessities.

Percent of older adults who must make choices between bills and necessities

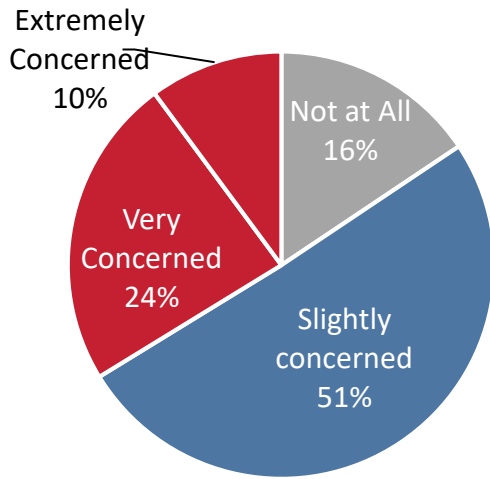


Nearly a quarter of older adults have been the victim of a telephone or internet scam. Twenty-nine percent of older adults carry a credit card balance, and eighteen percent of older adults have others who depend on them for financial support.

Financial Vulnerability



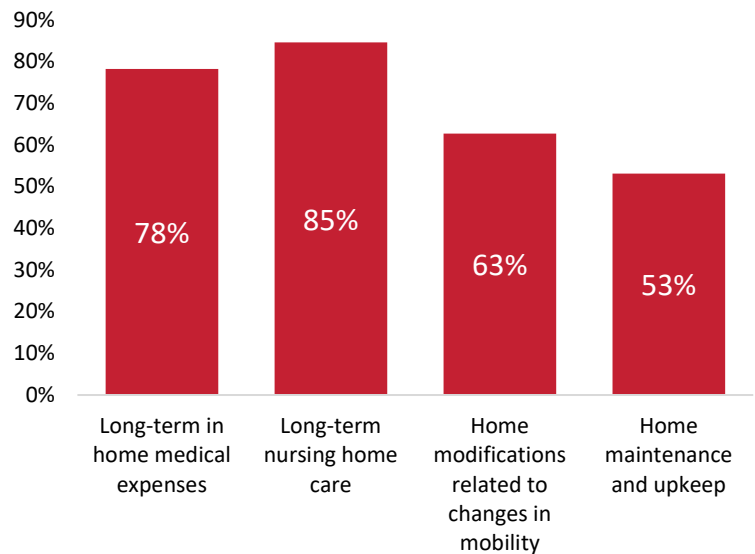
How concerned are you about being able to afford the services you may need as you age?



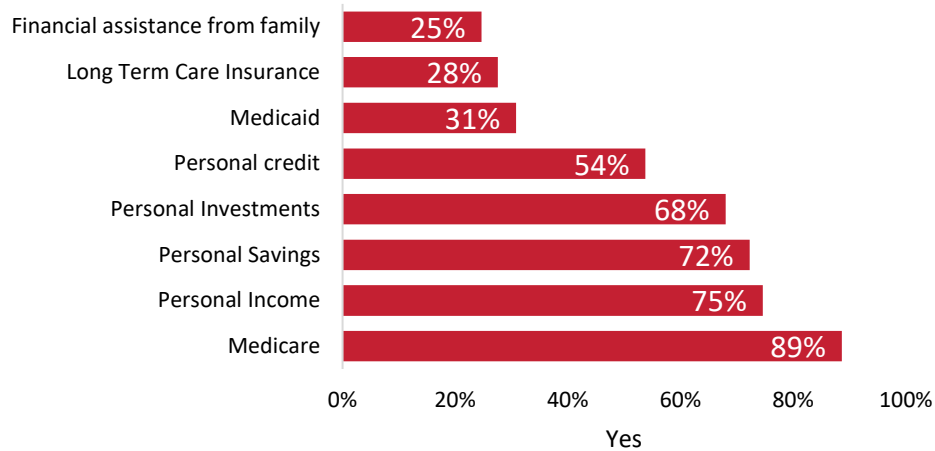
There is widespread concern among older adults in the region about their ability to afford services as they age. Eighty four percent of survey takers indicated some level of concern with 35 percent either very or extremely concerned. Method of pay for aging services varies based on an individual's income, eligibility for assistance programs and type of insurance.

The majority of older adults are not able to pay for long term care, or not sure if they can pay for long term care. Eighty-five percent of older adults are not sure or not able to pay for long-term nursing home care. Seventy-eight percent of older adults are not sure or not able to pay for long-term in home medical expenses. Sixty-three percent of older adults are not sure or not able to pay for home modifications related to changes in mobility. Fifty-three percent of older adults are not sure or not able to pay for home maintenance and upkeep.

Not sure or not able to pay for long term care



Which of the following will you have access to help pay for services as you age?

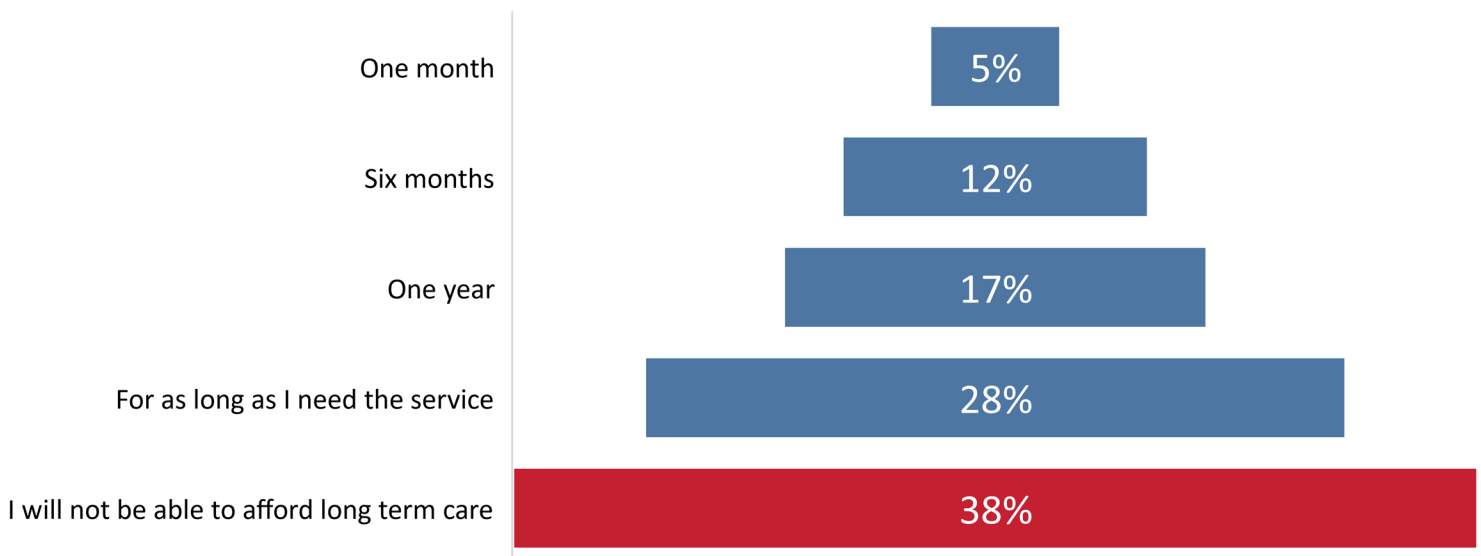


Eighty-nine percent of older adults will have access to Medicare to help pay for expenses as they age. Three-quarters of older adults will have access to personal income (75%) and/or personal savings (72%). Sixty-eight percent of older adults will have access to personal investments and

fifty-four percent will have access to personal credit. Far fewer older adults will have access to Medicaid (31%), long term care insurance (28%), or financial assistance from family (25%).

Older adults are very divided as to how long they could afford to pay for long term care expenses. Twenty-eight percent report they could pay for as long as they need the service, whereas thirty-eight percent report they will not be able to afford long term care. Five percent could afford one month, twelve percent could afford six months, and seventeen percent could afford one year.

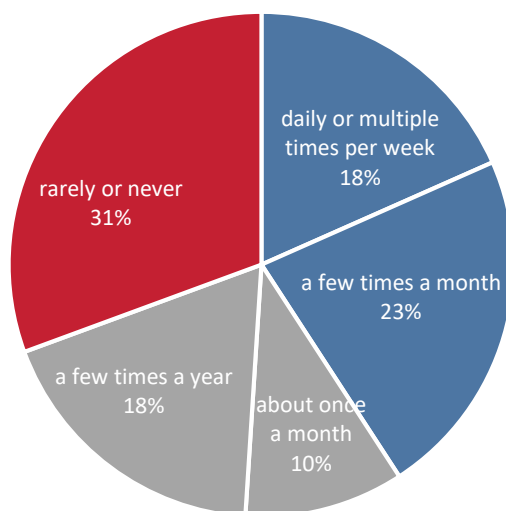
How long could you afford to pay for long term care expenses?



Community Connections

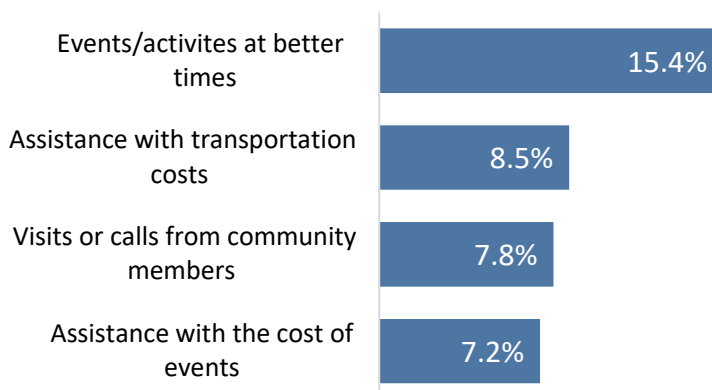
Feeling connected to one's community helps reduce social isolation and loneliness. Just 18 percent of older adults indicated having opportunities to participate in decision make bodies like community councils or committees. Increasing access to civic engagement in ways that allow older adults to plan events, activities, programs and services will improve the accessibility of these events to both older adults and adults with disabilities. Currently forty one percent of older adults participate in a community events on a regular basis, twenty eight percent participate occasionally and thirty one percent participate rarely or not at all.

How often do you participate in community events and activities?



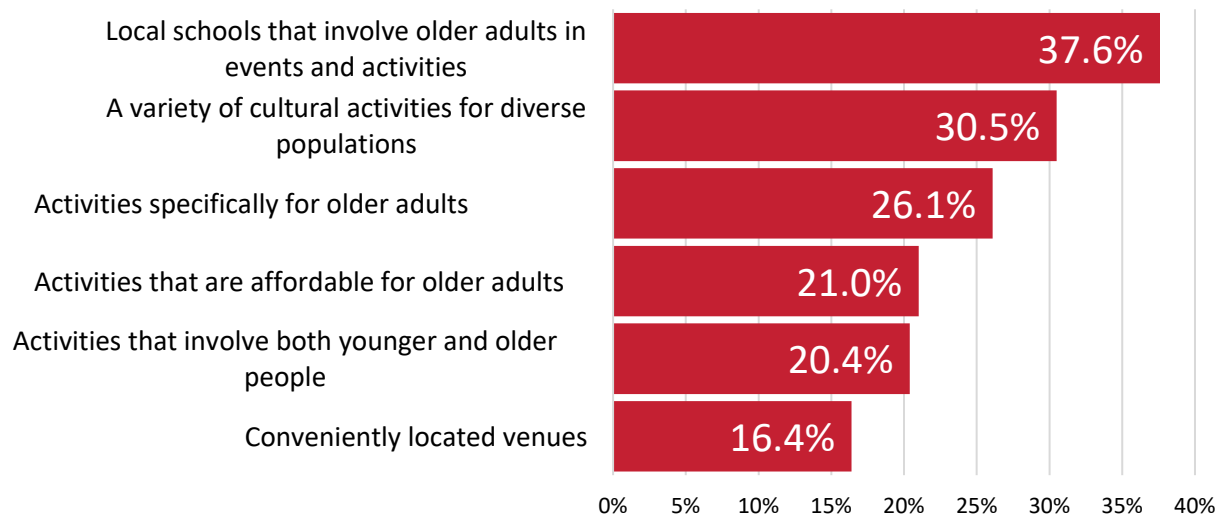
Having access to and feeling comfortable at community events and activities is a way to stay engaged in the community. Survey takers were asked what would make them feel more connected to their communities. Forty-five percent of survey takers already feel connected to their community. Events and activities being held at better times was the most popular response, followed by assistance with transportation costs.

What would make you feel more connected to community events?

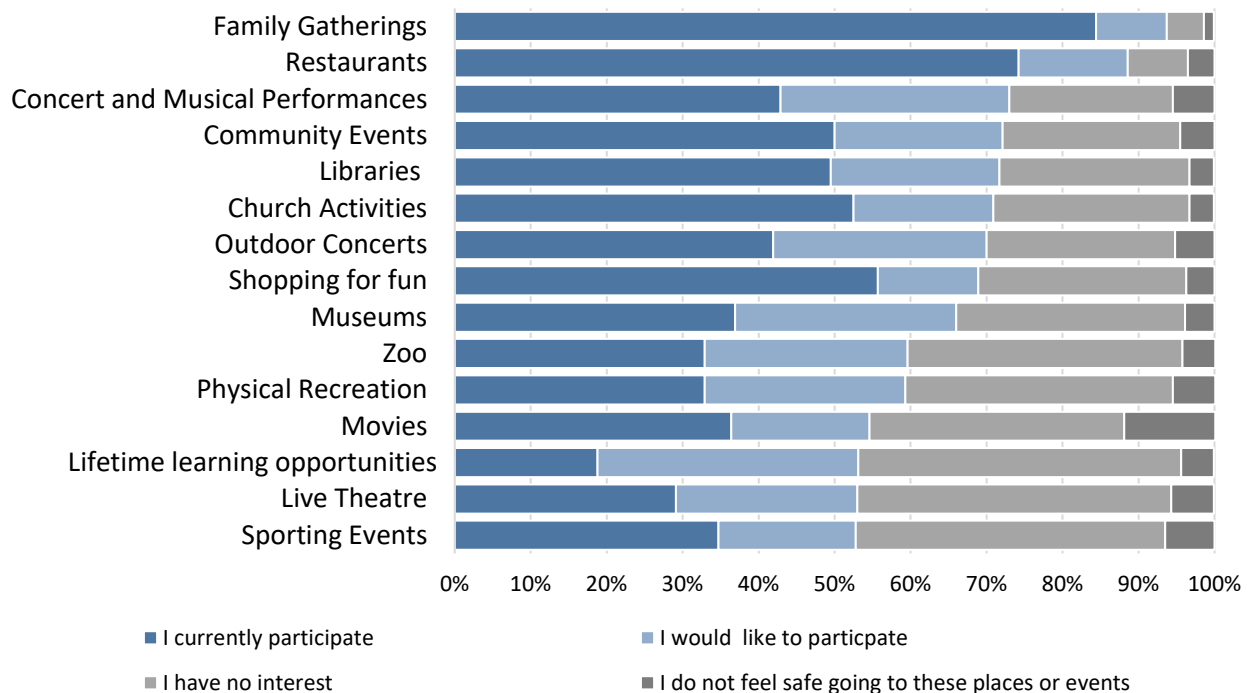


Activities and events appear to be largely accessible to residents of the region with just 16 percent indicating venues are not conveniently located. Slightly over twenty percent of older adults lacked access to multigenerational events and as many felt that events were not affordable. A quarter of residents do not have access to activities specifically for older adults and thirty percent indicate a lack of culturally diverse activities. Thirty seven percent indicated schools do not involve older adults in events and activities.

Percent of older adults who say they lack access



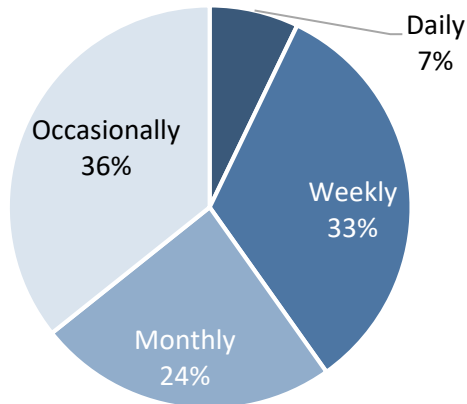
Participation Preferences of Older Adults



When asked what types of events, activities and programs older adults like to participate in, family gatherings and restaurants were the two most popular choices. Going to the movies was selected most often as an activity that people did not feel safe going followed by sporting events. Older adults were least interested in lifetime learning opportunities and live theater.

Volunteering strengthens connections to individuals and communities and provides purpose for the volunteers. Forty percent of older adults in the region volunteer on a regular basis. There appears to be high access to volunteer opportunities with sixty percent of respondents indicating they would be able to find a place to volunteer if they were interested in doing so however about half of as many people indicate it is easy to find information on local volunteer opportunities.

How often do you volunteer?



If you were interested in volunteering, do you feel confident that you could find a suitable place to do so?	60%
Easy to find information about local volunteer opportunities	31%
A range of volunteer options for individuals with a variety of physical abilities and interests	24%
Transportation to/from volunteer activities for those who need it	11%

Focus Group Analysis

Direction Home Akron Canton provides information, assistance and referrals to long-term care options to older adults and individuals of all ages with disabilities in its four-county region. Direction Home's Aging and Disability Resource Center completes free assessments and consultations with individuals to identify needs and connect them to programs that can enable them to have the highest quality of life and remain independent at home. Close to 200 older adults participated in 13 focus groups across Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne to discuss the needs of older adults in their community in the summer months of 2022.

It is important to note that feedback from residents represents their impression of the needs of older adults in their county or community, and that some groups were held at senior apartment buildings where certain impressions may only be representative of conditions or needs in or near that part of the community. In some cases, services or assets may exist, but older adults are not aware of them or do not use them, and in other cases, they may have access to programs and services offered where they live that are not offered to the broader community. When using this report, improving Direction Home services for older adults may require further development of programming in some instances, while improving communication or raising awareness about available services may be more appropriate in other instances.

Getting Connected to Aging Services

While there was some discussion of specific organizations in the community to help with services, residents in all groups rely heavily on their personal networks of family, friends, and churches to meet their needs. A majority of participants across all four counties shared that they were unaware of available services or did not know who to call when they needed help.

For those living in senior apartment buildings, on-site service coordinators and programs were a trusted and highly utilized resource to provide knowledge and assistance with getting any necessary services. Other sources mentioned in most or all groups for services included: transportation services offered through a Provide-A-Ride program or local Regional Transit Authorities, 2-1-1, Meals on Wheels programs, and health insurance or social workers connected to their primary care provider. Additional options shared included, the Veteran's Administration, an ombudsman offered through nursing homes, or a local community center.

Only a handful of participants said that they had heard about Direction Home and even fewer said that they had utilized their services. Most who had received assistance through Direction Home shared that their experiences had been positive and encouraged other participants to get connected. There was some frustration among the group with long wait times on the phone, and a select few who mentioned that having an unsuccessful experience with receiving help may have depended on who their caseworker was. However, most felt that staff were friendly, patient, knowledgeable and understanding. One participant even said that Direction Home had "saved her life" by helping her to get out of a nursing home after only 18 months, and

connecting her to other reputable services to help her remain independent at home. Other residents had been connected to Passport, home health aides, and services for housing issues.

One group suggested that the organization's name change in recent years caused confusion in the community about who Direction Home was. It was certainly clear that some residents were aware of the Aging and Disability Resource Center, but not that it was part of Direction Home. Individuals in other groups recommended the creation of welcome packets to distribute to senior apartment buildings, real estate brokers, and offering more presentations in the community to do outreach and create awareness of its services.

After receiving a brief explanation on what Direction Home could offer, residents felt more able to discuss what services they would want to call for. Transportation, home maintenance, repair, and modifications and yardwork, and home health care services were the most cited services across groups. Participants also mentioned wanting to call for help with finding a doctor, navigating Medicare and other insurance options, as well as entertainment, fitness, or recreation.

Residents in each county shared various things that are working well for their community.

Portage

In Portage County, both focus groups were held at senior apartment buildings in the community. Older adults liked the convenience of having services offered in their buildings, such as a free lunch program, and stores and hospitals close by to them. They especially appreciated the ability to have prescriptions delivered through a local Marc's nearby, and feeling safe in their building.

Stark

Stark County older adults who were connected to a local senior center like that it offered trips, activities, and a place to meet people. Others felt that the senior housing apartment they lived in was well-tailored to residents living there.

Summit

Residents in Summit County find the programming and trails at Summit Metroparks and some of the senior centers to be working well. They also had an appreciation for other programs offered in the community such as the Dementia-Inclusive library, and transportation services offered to older adults through the school system, risk prevention offered by the Department of Health, and Silver Sneakers. Residents expressed that there were also food services that worked well in the community, such as Meals on Wheels, fresh food vouchers, the Healthy Groceries card offered through Anthem health insurance, and the ability to have grocery delivery from local stores for those who can afford it.

Wayne

In Wayne County, older adults shared that senior center offerings like bingo and a community bulletin board, Lunch 'n Learn events at the library, and congregate meals, breakfasts, and food

giveaway programs at local churches were working well. Other things included, volunteer programs, a local newspaper, and how well-manicured the city keeps the community in Wooster.

Affordability and accessibility to more service options to meet older adults' needs were an overarching theme for all counties.

There was a general consensus that there is no central place for community members to call to access needed services for groups. Residents want to see more inclusive programming for community members of all socioeconomic backgrounds, especially due to many experiencing a service gap where they cannot afford some needs, but do not qualify for programs offered to those with low income. In addition, older adults felt more options for senior discounts should be available in their communities, and some mentioned that businesses do not seem to accept the Golden Buckeye Card discount card.

Multiple groups mentioned the need for access to mental health services as individuals age, and some shared seeing a prevalence in depression and other mental health issues in their peers. A majority of older adults in all groups expressed needing more affordable and accessible food and grocery, housing and transportation options for older adults and those living with disabilities. These were of high concern as some individuals did not have family who were in the area or were able to help. Concerns about a lack of access to internet or a computer, as well as becoming victims of scams were also prevalent among most of the groups.

Food

With many focus group participants already enrolled in SNAP, additional costs for hot food, grocery delivery, toiletry or other non-food items were a source of frustration and financial struggle. While groups shared that having an option to have food delivered by stores was helpful, especially during the pandemic, having to find additional funds to pay for it meant that many could not use it as often as they wanted. Those with mobility issues found this especially hard, and there was also discussion about wanting drive thru options for meal programs that arose as a result of the pandemic to remain. Some groups also mentioned a general need for more grocery stores in their community, as they were often far or hard to get to.

Housing

Groups shared a myriad of concerns with housing in their counties. Availability of affordable options and accessibility for those with mobility issues or living with a disability, especially those with a wheelchair, were a primary concern. Additional obstacles to finding options included, long waiting lists at two years or longer for affordable HUD public housing, being offered options that did not meet individual needs, senior apartments accepting tenants that did not qualify as older adults, and not knowing what options were available for senior housing. Many also worried about being able to afford assisted living or home health care services in the future, as insurance is not always comprehensive enough to cover these needs, leaving individuals to have to pay out-of-pocket costs.

Other prevalent issues expressed included needing modifications or updates to units for those living in senior apartment buildings, and issues with absentee landlords allowing housing repairs and maintenance to go unaddressed. One particular change that residents in senior apartments wanted to see was improvements in on-site laundry facilities. Facilities were often only offered in one building with a small number of machines for residents who lived in multiple buildings, causing an inconvenience for those with mobility issues or chronic pain. Mechanical issues with some machines due to needs for updates also caused some residents to waste their already limited funds.

Many older adults had concerns about being able to maintain home repairs, and completing daily chores, yard work, or snow removal without help and not having access to affordable options. Issues with mobility, chronic pain, and falling were some reasons cited for needing modifications and help with maintenance and chores. Safety came up as a growing concern for older adults in all counties, with changing neighborhoods, conflict between neighbors, and negative interactions with university students in the past being sources.

Housing Concerns in Stark County

Stark County residents in particular expressed needs for more affordability and rehabilitation of homes. Concerns arose about older adults having to stay in older housing in need of repair in neighborhoods that have become less safe for communities due to the lack of affordable options. They felt that the lack of repairs to homes then negatively affects the property values in those neighborhoods.

Transportation

All counties shared a deep need for more transportation options that are affordable for all older adults and accessible for those living with a physical challenge or disability. Residents shared that driving or being driven by friends or family, taking public transportation, or using paratransit services like Provide-a-Ride and others provided at hospitals or through health insurance coverage are the main ways that older adults get around.

It was stated that many stores, hospitals, and other businesses or places that residents needed to go are generally spread out and not close by. Overall, communities are not generally walkable, especially for those with mobility issues, for several other reasons including, sidewalks being uneven or non-existent some areas, having to cross busy intersections with multiple lanes, and feeling unsafe walking alone. Lack of adequate parking for those living with a disability seemed to be a prevalent issue across counties.

There were concerns about gas costs and, for those who cannot drive, not being able to get to some places due to bus routes being cut, buses no longer running on some days, or buses not crossing county lines for needs like doctor's appointments. Even with the discount that is offered for seniors and those living with disabilities on public transportation, residents still struggle to pay. Additionally, many residents expressed that the various transportation options available focus on medical appointments, and that they often need help getting to other places like grocery shopping, local recreation or senior centers, and entertainment. Many also do not

use ridesharing options like Uber or Lyft, due to cost, having trouble navigating technology, concerns with feeling worried about COVID, or feeling uncomfortable or unsafe with someone they do not know.

Medical Transportation

Residents in all counties held similar concerns about medical transportation. It was stated that better oversight was needed for programs offered through providers or health insurance that contract with rideshare programs in order to provide medical transportation to adults. There were complaints of older adults being left by drivers and not making it to appointments and the need for a better communication system between drivers, providers, and residents. One older adult described how a miscommunication with an appointment caused it to be cancelled without their knowledge, and how their driver was unwilling to take them to the appointment without additional payment. Without a way to connect to whomever established the ride through the current communication system, this resident felt forced to pay the driver out of their own pocket in order to make it to their appointment, and had no way to make a complaint or be reimbursed. Other residents shared that riders can be late to appointments because other riders may be placed in the same vehicle for a ride to various places for appointments.

Other options for medical transportation can present some inconveniences. Residents who have several appointments a month can easily run out of rides provided through insurance. When using services, older adults have to call days in advance to request a ride, but this can cause problems as they do not always know of appointments in enough time to call. Riders also have to be prepared to leave hours before their appointment and are frequently late because transporters have to complete drop-offs for multiple individuals. There can be long wait times after appointments as they wait to be picked up and taken home. In addition, providers can be unreliable in picking riders up and other times do not wait for those who may have trouble with mobility and that are not be ready to leave right away. Some residents shared that some services only pick up older adults from the curb of a street, but that those who cannot get to one due to physical limitations are excluded and cannot use these services. Similar to public transportation, services do not cross county lines for those who have appointments with specialists in other counties.

Internet

While internet usage among older adults was varied across the groups, a majority of participants shared that access to the internet was limited for some in their communities. Almost all groups also expressed fear and frustration of the increase of scams since the beginning of the pandemic and several individuals had experienced one or had loved ones who did. Groups shared questions about how to tell if a website was fake, wanted help with understanding how to avoid becoming a victim of scams, and felt there should be more protections for older adults.

Some showed no interest in using the internet, but many stated that their usage increased during the pandemic. Uses for internet included, paying bills, making appointments, connecting with loved ones on social media platforms like Facebook, planning vacations, and finding

recipes. Internet was also a source for local news and events among several others including word-of-mouth, tv, radio, email, newsletters from senior centers, and local newspapers. Local newspapers were one of the most preferred sources of news among residents, but many shared that they had to turn to internet and other sources for news more recently because they were no longer being printed, delivery routes and days had been cut, and the quality and amount of information shared in them had changed drastically since the pandemic. Overall, older adults felt comfortable with their internet usage at all levels and only a select few felt that they would like help with learning more about how to use a smartphone or computer.

Older adults are ready for activities and programming to restart

Older adults in multiple counties want to see programming that has been paused since the start of COVID return to their apartment buildings, senior centers, and churches. Examples included congregate or hot meals and social events that allowed residents who do not or could not cook or drive to have a meal, and to meet new people and gather with friends at buildings and in the community. One group also mentioned voting registration having stopped at a local church. Older adults also wanted to see the addition of other needed or helpful services to previous programming. Examples that were shared included, salon services, fitness equipment, and health screenings or assistance with getting access to other health services.

Overall, residents across all counties did not feel that there was a central place for older adults to gather or get to know new people in their communities. Some attended church, but stated that buildings were often not accessible for those who may have a wheelchair, and that it also may not be a place that everyone would want to go to get to know new people. Others shared that there were senior centers in some parts of their community, but that they were often too far for residents living outside of them, especially without transportation options. There was a heavy interest in having more entertainment opportunities offered in their community or at their senior apartment building, especially organized trips to local places like the zoo, casino, botanical gardens or lunch.

Groups had other additional concerns unique to their counties.

Portage

Portage County older adults would like to see more available discounts at the local fitness center for swimming and other low impact exercise classes, for older adults who are younger than 65. Those 65 and older are able to access free classes, but residents shared that older adults under 65 can have difficulty affording classes. One suggestion offered was to have a program where older adults could have a discounted pass to classes and programs offered at the local recreation center and other amenities at Kent State University, like the theater. Silver Sneakers is an available option for older adults who are in a broader age range, and many residents expressed positive opinions about it. However, many would like to see transportation offered for those with no car or other means to get to classes and who want to participate.

Stark

Residents in Stark County shared that they wanted to see an increase in cultural awareness when visiting their doctors. They suggested that having providers take classes and the availability of translators in offices could help to resolve issues when communicating with patients. Groups also mentioned that the closing of multiple senior centers has created a need for more of them throughout cities in the county and for better upkeep of facilities.

Summit

Summit County older adults would like to have a farmer's market offered in the community. Residents liked that there is a bus that can take older adults grocery shopping, but mentioned that they would like to see the fare decrease to its original cost of \$1 from the current \$4, because this was too expensive for some. They also mentioned wanting to have the return of lunch and bingo programming that used to be offered to the wider community by a nursing home in Stow, and a "senior prom" event for older adults that was once offered at a local high school.

Wayne

In Wayne County, groups shared that they wanted to see the return of a multi-cultural fair that was once offered in the community. They felt that older adults could benefit from the availability of more social workers to help them navigate finding needed programs and services, as well as a directory of what is available in communities. Residents also mentioned an interest in seeing more part-time jobs being offered for seniors.

Across all counties, groups had mixed responses about whether older adults were respected in their communities.

There were multiple groups that shared feeling respected among the peers in the smaller communities they were part of, such as apartment buildings and churches, but not in the broader community. It was expressed that having access to programs and services that catered to their needs and interests, friendly neighbors, interactions with young people who were considerate and helpful, and providers who listen and show that they care were all things that made them feel respected. Conversely, those who did not feel respected in their communities often attributed it to negative interactions with younger generations and encounters where medical providers gave poor service, did not listen to their concerns, or did not complete follow ups. Some also mentioned that aging generally made them feel more vulnerable and made it difficult to ask for help.

Residents in the region are looking for ways to get connected and stay connected with others

Overall, there were also mixed responses regarding whether older adults feel that people are connected in their communities. Again, many felt connected within the smaller communities they had in senior apartment buildings and churches, while others felt that their neighbors were friendly, but not connected. It was mentioned that the onset of COVID has left many in "pandemic mode" and feeling worried about staying safe, which has dampened efforts to

gather with others and left many feeling depressed and isolated. Some expressed that losing loved ones who had passed away as they aged has also contributed to these feelings. Additionally, groups discussed how being able to talk or FaceTime with someone on the phone during the pandemic helped to alleviate these feelings, but that those who did not have access to a phone or who had discomfort with using smartphones may not have had this benefit. Many talked about how social connectedness with others is important because it makes them feel valued, curbs loneliness, helps them to make friends, and to know they have someone who can help them when they need it. This was especially important for those without family who could assist them.

There were some comments shared on the topic of connectedness that were unique to specific counties.

Summit

In Summit County, groups mentioned that African American older adults experience a disconnect in some communities because of a lack of social activities and program offerings. Residents attributed this to disinvestment and inequities creating a gap in access for these communities. They shared, for instance, that there was no local YMCA for them to enjoy. Some also shared that in one building in the community, African American older adults experienced racism from other tenants, and that people did not get along.

Wayne

Older adults in Wayne County were particularly concerned about the divide between long-time and newer residents in communities, especially in the city of Wooster. They reported that while neighbors are friendly, residents who move into neighborhoods can feel isolated when everyone comes together because there are no concerted efforts to help them integrate into the community.

Summary of focus group findings

Generally, older adults across Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne counties could benefit from increased outreach efforts from Direction Home to connect them to services and educate them on what is available to them. While some are familiar with certain offerings in their community, many want and need more information, and have a desire to be connected to an advocate who can help them navigate community resources.

Many are struggling financially and some worry that they cannot get help because they do not meet low income eligibility requirements for government programs. There are various unmet needs for services that offer help with food, housing, transportation, mental health, and internet access that are affordable and accessible for those with limitations and disabilities that cause mobility issues. Older adults need options that are convenient in location or that can offer transportation to access them. They also desire more opportunities that are free or low cost that allow them to connect and socialize with other people in their community and stay active.