

AGE- FRIENDLY STARK COUNTY

Assessment
Report 2023



Prepared By:
The Center for
Community Solutions

**Age-Friendly Stark is a
member of the AARP
Network of Age-Friendly
States and Communities**

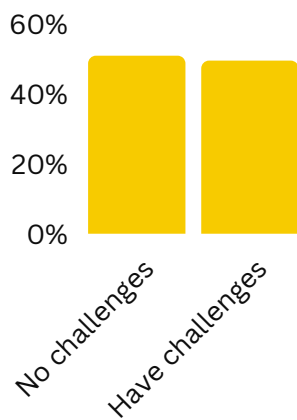


**Thank you the generous funders
of Stark Age-Friendly**



TRANSPORTATION

While 60% of residents are able to find a ride when they need one, many older adults struggle with transportation that consistently and safely connects them to activities, events and appointments within Stark County.



Ability to get around

About half of residents experience challenges when traveling to an appointment, event or community location. Slightly more than 20% of residents indicated they are not always able to find rides when the need one.

Walkability

One in three residents indicated they have difficulties with walking when traveling around the community. Fifteen percent of residents report that they do not feel safe walking. During focus groups, residents shared that walkability is very dependent on what part of the county you live in. Higher income and more dense areas were generally described as more walkable than lower income or sparsely populated communities.



Public Transportation

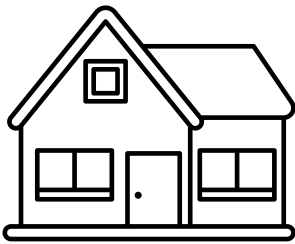
Thirteen percent of residents find public transportation difficult to use or unreliable. Eleven percent of older residents report a lack of public transportation available to take them where they need to go and 5% are unable to afford public transportation.



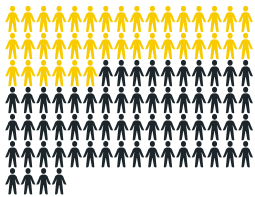
HOUSING

Most Stark County residents wish to remain in their communities and their homes as they age. It is important to 85% of residents to remain in the county and 96% of residents place a high importance on remaining in their homes.

Safe and Affordable Homes



Just over 80% of residents like where they live and find it to be safe and affordable. About 20% of residents report they do not have access to affordable housing options and another 40% are not sure if they have access. Attendees of focus groups noted that affordable single family homes are sold very quickly; these types of sales are often word of mouth. Newer “luxury” homes being built for older adults are financially out of reach for many residents



Accessibility

Over a third of residents currently have housing equipped with accessible features such as no-step entry, wider doorways, first floor bedrooms and bathrooms, and grab bars in bathrooms.



Home Repair

Just 16% of residents have access to a low cost or free home repair service in their community. About 4 in 10 residents report being able to find affordable home repair contractors who are trustworthy and do quality work.



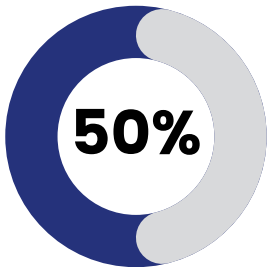
OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILDINGS

Being able to enjoy outdoor spaces and navigate public buildings within a community increases connections to that community. Half of older adults agreed that sidewalks, parks and public buildings in their community are clean, safe and easy to get to.



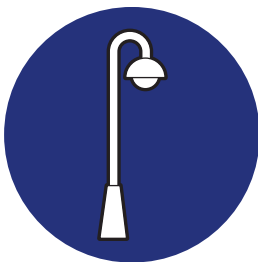
Recreation

About half of residents have access to recreation and wellness activities where they live and nearly 40% live within walking distance of well-maintained and safe parks. Residents who attended focus groups reported enjoying the trails of the Stark Parks and feel safe walking them.



Sidewalks

Half of residents report a lack of sidewalks where they want to walk and 41% find the sidewalks are uneven or unsafe. Sidewalks create connections between homes and the greater community.



Street Safety

Over half of residents indicate they have well-lit public streets and walkways in their communities, while 23% indicate pedestrian crossings are difficult to navigate. Less than 20% have neighborhood safety groups, such as watch programs, block clubs or ward or district meetings.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION & EMPLOYMENT

Less than half of residents believe there are lots of opportunities for people aged 50 years and older to work and volunteer in Stark County.

Retired individuals often have time for volunteering or part-time work and should be considered an asset to the community.



Employment

About 32% of older adults indicated they were either working or seeking work; 45% are retired and not looking for work and 23% are disabled and unable to work. Eighteen percent have access to job training or skills building opportunities and 16% have access to networking events. About a quarter feel there are jobs available that are a good fit for their skills and abilities.



Volunteering

Nearly 30% of residents have access to a range of volunteer opportunities for individuals with a variety of physical abilities and interests. Slightly less than 30% say it is easy to find information about local volunteer opportunities.



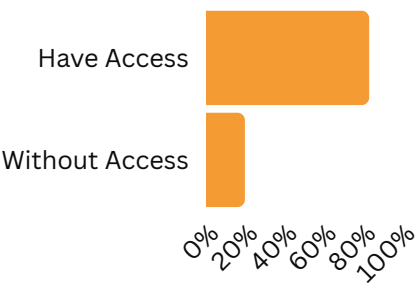
Civic Participation

One in four residents indicated there are opportunities for older adults to participate in decision-making bodies, such as community councils or committees. Slightly more than 15% have a way to discuss issues that impact older adults in their community.



COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

Communicating in an age-friendly way provides older adults with accessible information in a format they are comfortable using. Sixty-eight percent of residents indicated they were able to find information in Stark County when they needed it. About 11% struggle to find needed information.



Digital Connectivity

Eighty-three percent of older residents indicated they had access to internet and computers. While the majority have access, attendees of focus groups pointed out the internet may not always be the preferred method to receive information. Paper newsletters were mentioned as good sources of information for community events and programs.



Communication Platforms

Forty percent of residents indicated they had access to community information by phone through one central source, while 65% were able to access information in printed format. About 30% receive information delivered to them in-person.



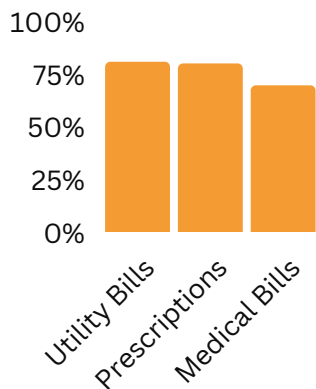
Language Accessibility

Most residents, 80%, have access to information in their language. Ten percent do not have information available in their preferred language and another 10% are not sure if information is available in their language.



HEALTH SERVICES & COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Half of the older adults in Stark County reported that it is *not* easy or affordable to visit a doctor or hospital in Stark County. Just 38% reported they had access to a service provider who would come to their homes.



Financial Security

Eighty percent of residents indicate they are able to afford utility bills and prescription costs without sacrificing other necessities. Medical bills are more challenging, with just 69% able to afford to pay the bills without sacrificing other necessities.

Long Term Care

Residents of long term care facilities reported a number of challenges they face including cost and affordability, loneliness and social isolation, poor quality of care, lack of agency and a loss of independence. They would like to see more opportunities to be involved in the community, improved facilities, more independent housing options and increased transportation options.



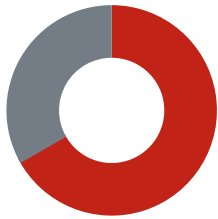
Health Navigation

Multiple focus groups discussed the difficulty many older adults in Stark County have in navigating the health care system including frustrating automated phone systems, difficulty scheduling appointments, physically getting around large medical facilities, communicating with providers, understanding test results and confusing outpatient care instructions.



RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Feeling respected by the community is not a universal feeling shared by older adult residents of Stark County. While 59% do feel respected, 27% are not sure if they are respected and 15% indicate they do not feel respected by members of their community.



Stereotypes

Two-thirds of residents agree that negative stereotypes about older adults exist in Stark County.

Treated with Respect

Just under half of older adults in Stark County feel that they are generally treated with respect, which is higher than the 35% who believe people with disabilities are treated with respect. During focus groups, examples were shared of not having doors opened, being cut off while walking and being ignored.



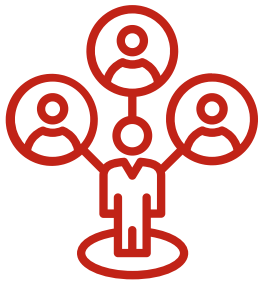
Being Valued

Thirty percent of survey takers do not feel that the community values older adults. About the same percent are not sure if older adults are valued and slightly higher do believe the community values older adults. Residents at focus group shared that you are seen as valuable if you have wealth or social status. One person explained “the older you become the more invisible you become.”



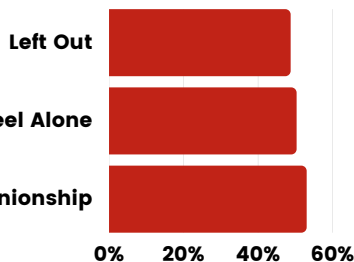
SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Less than half of older adults in Stark County find social events easy to attend. Regularly connecting with other people through social events can be a protective factor to both social isolation and loneliness.



Close Relationships

Forty percent of older adults in Stark County feel that they are no longer close to anyone and over half feel that no one really knows them well. In focus groups, residents shared how challenging it is to develop new relationships later in life. As lifelong relationships end, they are not easily replicated or replaced.



Loneliness

Over half of older adults in Stark County sometimes or always feel alone and slightly more feel they lack companionship. Slightly less than half feel left out some or all of the time.



Social Opportunities

Seventy-two percent of residents reported they do have places in their community where they can socialize or attend programs, including at libraries and community centers. At focus groups recreational programming such as pickle ball and golf outings were mentioned as opportunities to socialize in Stark County.

