



AgeGuide Needs Assessment Findings Report

April 27, 2021

www.AgeGuide.org

In preparing for a new Area Plan three-year cycle, AgeGuide hosted a series of stakeholder listening sessions and distributed a needs assessment survey throughout its planning and service area. The intent was also to ensure that AgeGuide and its funded partners were meeting the needs of older adults and their caregivers as well as to explore whether programs and services were addressing the diverse needs and challenges in the eight-county region. In particular, AgeGuide sought to evaluate its service delivery design to ensure it was targeting programs to those in greatest social and economic need.

In its Needs Assessment activities, AgeGuide took into consideration older adults in greatest economic and social need with particular attention to low-income minority older adults and those with limited English proficiency. In addition, AgeGuide prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion to examine the ease at which diverse older adults can access services. To apply this inclusive lens, AgeGuide researched existing assessment tools and selected an award-winning model to best capture the input of communities of color, non-English speakers, and LGBT communities. The assessment tool with its diversity methodology was then applied to the chosen implementation tools of both a survey and listening session format.

The listening session and survey questions were organized around service categories based on Older Americans Act and other federally funded programs. The service categories included:

- Information/Referral & Outreach Services
- Nutritional Services
- Healthy Aging Services
- Caregiver Support & Education
- Counseling & Mental Health
- Transportation
- Legal Services
- Veterans Services
- Housing Services
- Abuse Prevention Services

Listening Sessions

The listening sessions offered people from all backgrounds an opportunity to express their views about key issues concerning aging services and to provide input. Our listening sessions were open to all older adults and their caregivers, community and funded partners, aging network professionals, faith-based organizations and elected officials in the communities we serve. The goal of these listening sessions was to gather information from participants regarding their experience accessing services, learn about any potential barriers and discover what services may be needed that are not currently being offered.

AgeGuide held 25 community listening sessions which included over 250 participants. Overall, AgeGuide spent a total of 36 hours listening to the community. The sessions were held virtually due to state health department guidelines around COVID-19. Listening sessions were held for each of the eight counties served by AgeGuide with two sessions for the more populous counties. Knowing that the virtual platform was not conducive to full participation by those without internet connection or comfort with technology, AgeGuide made an extra effort to engage older adult participants in the listening sessions by partnering with senior centers and other programs already engaging with participants online. This was very successful and resulted in extensive feedback from older adults. In addition, AgeGuide held one listening session to specifically capture input about non-English speaking older adults from diverse backgrounds to determine identified needs for this underserved group. This listening session gathered input from caregivers who work directly with this population.

Planning Process

AgeGuide is now in the process of creating a new Area Plan three-year cycle that follows an OAA guiding principle which is that *preventive and supportive services that help older adults to maintain their independence should be available to all older people and their families*. The AgeGuide philosophy is that policies, programs, and services are established in response to the needs and expectations of participants, so they are participant-driven and participant-centered. To ensure delivery of quality services for older individuals and their families, services must provide meaningful results. One way to ensure these principles are successful is to listen to participant feedback.

Guiding Principles

- Preventive and supportive services are available to all
- Policies, programs and services are responsive to needs
- Services are participant-centered and -driven.
- Services are high quality and produce meaningful results

One of the Activities that Area Agencies are required to accomplish is to plan for service design and delivery as it relates either to the establishment of a new service or the improvement, expansion, or integration of an existing service within a fiscal year utilizing a five (5) step planning process. Agencies on Aging also assess the needs of older adults and coordinate the activities conducted toward the development of a comprehensive and integrated service delivery system through the establishment of working relationships with other funding agencies and service providers. AgeGuide seeks input from the community through our Advisory Council, our participation in community-based organization meetings as well as through our funded partners who provide input on services and gaps in the service delivery system. We also conduct community needs assessment activities.

Five Step Planning Process

Step 1: Assess needs of older persons, family caregivers & older relative caregivers

Step 2: Evaluate existing service system

Step 3: Determine availability of resources and alternative approaches to meet needs

Step 4: Establish priorities

Step 5: Service modification and refinement

AgeGuide's service delivery system is the result of community planning outlined in the priorities defined in the Area Plan. An Area Plan is submitted to the Illinois Department on Aging (IDOA) every three years. In subsequent years Area Plan Amendments are submitted to IDOA which highlight changes, additions, or exceptions made to the plan. Our current service delivery system includes funded providers in each of our eight counties that serve as the community focal point for aging services in that specific geographic area and provide a required mix of services. In addition, we fund partners who help us enhance equity and inclusion and focus on the needs of underserved populations in the region to provide services chosen from a menu of possibilities, based on community need and organizational capacity.

Purpose of the Community Needs Assessment

- Ensure services are based on community needs
- Target services to meet needs specific to community and location
- Enhance equity and improve outcomes
- Allow focus on the needs of underserved populations including LGBTQ, limited English speakers, and racial and ethnic minorities

It was a priority for AgeGuide to solicit feedback on the Older Americans Act services from older adults and especially those underserved populations including racial, ethnic and cultural minorities, LGBTQ+ community, and people with limited English proficiency. These public meetings offered people from diverse backgrounds a chance to express their views about key issues of concern around aging services and provide input. The goal of these listening sessions was to hear what people have to say about their experiences in locating and accessing services in the community.

Structure and Format

Listening Sessions

The AgeGuide Listening Sessions were structured to begin with a welcome and introduction from the Chief Executive Officer to provide the context for the importance of these sessions and how the feedback provided by participants would contribute to any adjustments or changes in service design and delivery of Older Americans Act services for the upcoming Area Plan cycle within our region.

The listening sessions included an introduction of AgeGuide, the aging network, The Older Americans Act and the planning process. Larger groups of participants (more than 10) were divided into virtual breakout rooms to facilitate participation and discussion. The following questions were asked one at a time with several minutes for responses from the group for each of the nine service categories.

1. Where do you go for help caring for an older adult in your county?
2. What is important to you about this service area?
3. What is working well for you in this service area?
4. What is missing in this service area?

Surveys

AgeGuide also designed and distributed a survey to gain input from those who were not comfortable participating online or who needed the survey translated into a different language. Surveys covered the same four questions and the same nine service categories as the listening sessions.

The survey, like the listening sessions, was also designed to be inclusive and equitable to capture results from a wide range of stakeholders representing the diverse region served by AgeGuide. The survey was translated into the six most common languages besides English, in our region. Paper copies of the survey were also provided upon request for those with limited access to technology. AgeGuide partnered with diverse community leaders and with the Coalition for Limited English-Speaking Elderly (CLESE) to distribute surveys to their clients. Overall, the survey captured input from over 460 Participants.

Participant demographics were as follows:

Survey Respondents Characteristics	
80% Over 60	25% Non-White (11% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 7% Black, 3% Hispanic/Latino)
27% Live Alone	19% Speak a Language Other Than English
19% Veterans	4% LGBT
11% Caregivers	82% Female

Also of note, 90% of the survey respondents had not participated in a listening session. Between the listening sessions and the survey, AgeGuide received over 700 participant responses.

Findings

The top identified challenges that came up in the listening sessions, across all service categories were technology, need for cultural support and services in a language other than English, and the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Technology challenges mentioned included:

- Comfort level with technology
- Virtual participation is lower than live
- Need for technology support
- Need for broadband and internet access

With regard to COVID-19, participants said their biggest challenges to service access were figuring out how to navigate restrictions, navigating changes to services due to the pandemic and dealing with the many obstacles presented by the health crisis.

Transportation was the most discussed service category in the listening sessions. Within this category, participants indicated a need for increased availability, flexibility, and affordability. Nutrition was the second most common service need mentioned. Participants indicated the need for more home delivered meals, congregate dining sites, and more nutritious meals.

More details on individual service category findings are detailed below.

Other Feedback and Input

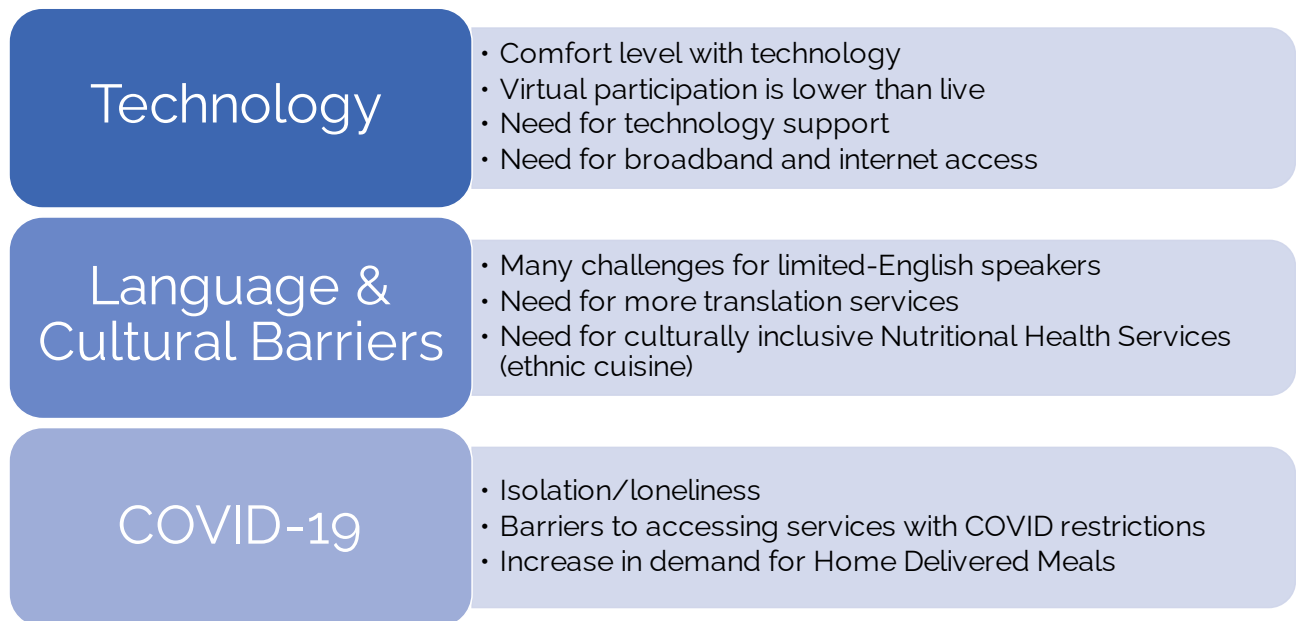
In addition to the needs assessment, AgeGuide gathered input and feedback from the community, funded partners and stakeholders through the following:

- Hosted a planning retreat (January 2021) with AgeGuide’s Board of Directors, Advisory Council, and staff.
- Presented a Grantee Diversity Equity and Inclusion Training (January 2021) to explore diversity, equity and inclusion in the service delivery system.

- Convened local, state and federal legislators and community participants at Advocacy Collaboratives across the region.
- Examined various informational sources including census data, service provider reports and program performance, 2020 County Health Rankings Report, the AARP Disrupt Disparities Report, research and reports from academic journals, local, state and national organizations and initiatives.
- Collected input from Information and Assistance calls to determine community needs.
- Reviewed data from the National Aging Program Services Information System (NAPIS) to gauge trends in service provision.
- Tracked federal and state resources and legislation such as the Older Americans Act, Federal COVID-19 Relief legislation, and the proposed Illinois Family Caregiver Support Act Legislation (HB 293 and SB 1766).

Identified Needs

Listening Session Data – Top Three Identified Needs



The figure below shows listening session discussions in a Word Cloud. This graphic was generated based on the codes created for the listening session data analysis. The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned.

Listening Session Discussion Analysis:



Demographics of Survey Respondents

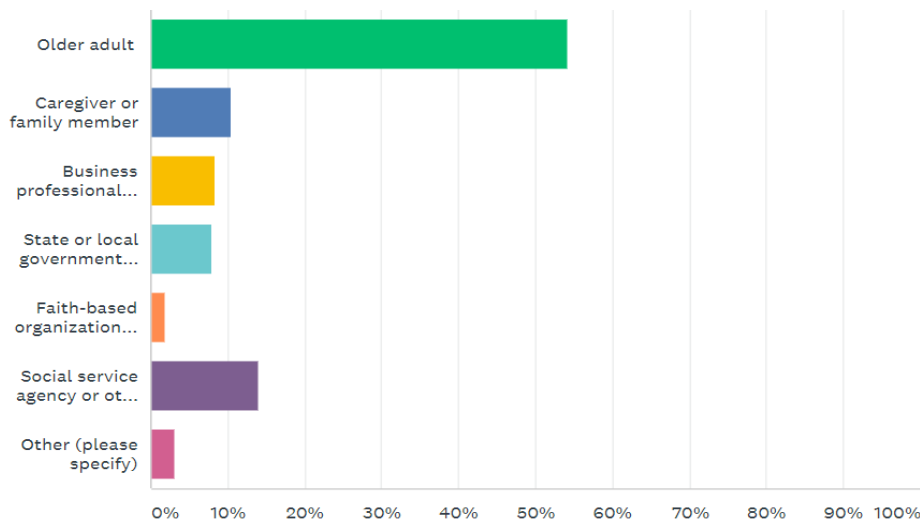
Survey Respondents were largely older adults over the age of 65. Of these, 88% had not participated in the listening sessions, while about 12% reported that they had participated.

Top 3 counties with highest percentage of respondents:

- 25% - DuPage
- 21% - Will
- 17% - Lake

Which category BEST describes you? (Please select one)

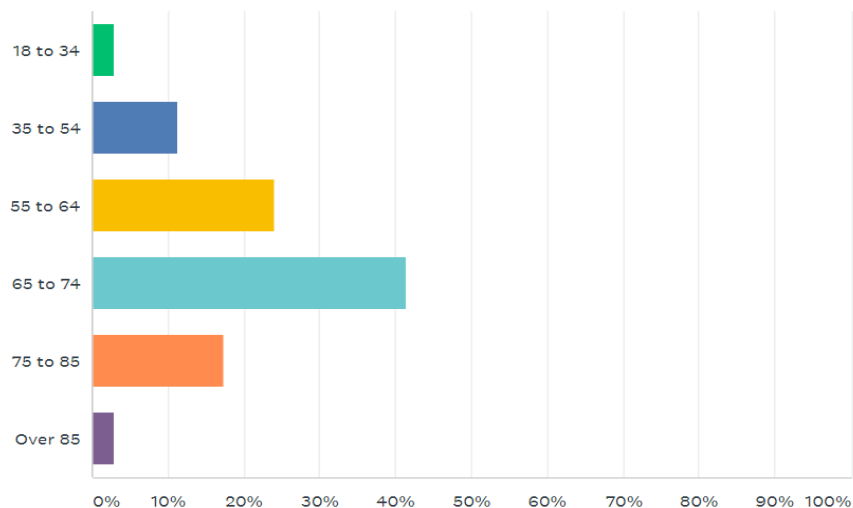
Answered: 457 Skipped: 3



Survey results show that AgeGuide successfully captured input from older adults who are the targeted demographic for services. Despite participation from community members, funded partners and service providers, most respondents to the survey were over 65. Participant ages ranged in age from 18 to over 85. The largest age category of participants were in the 65-74 year old age range.

What is your age?

Answered: 453 Skipped: 7

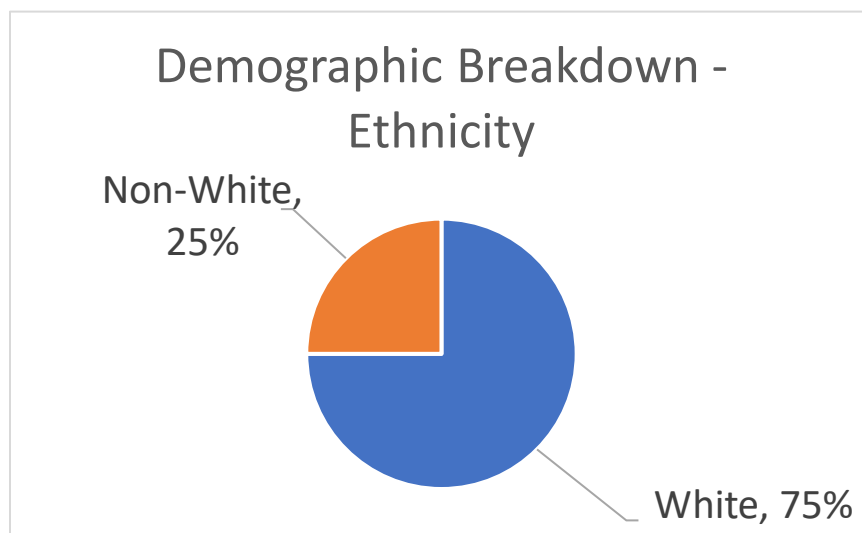


The survey demographic data indicates that results capture a wide and representative segment of the larger eight-county region.

Out of a total of 466 responses:

- 19% had a military background
- 19% spoke a language other than English at home (9.2% Limited English-speaking (LES) older adults age 65+ reside in the eight-county service area of Northeastern Illinois)*
- 75% were White
- 25% were Non-White (largest groups: 11% Asian/PI, 7% Black, 3% Hispanic/Latino)
- 82% female
- 4% reported being a gender identity other than male or female
- 27% lived alone (risk factor for social isolation)
- 11% were caregivers of an older adult

*Data from the 2013-2017 American Community Survey



25% Non-White

- 11% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 7% Black
- 3% Hispanic/Latino

Largest Groups of non-white participants

Across all service categories, non-white participants reported that they did not use available services more often than white participants. This may be connected to the language and cultural barriers that were a consistent response mentioned in both the listening session and the survey.

The theme of language and cultural barriers was persistent especially within the transportation, nutritional health, and mental health service categories. Both qualitative data from the listening sessions and quantitative data from the survey responses supports this.

Language barriers were noted most often in relation to transportation services. Non-English speakers reported having difficulty communicating with English-speaking drivers. Cultural barriers were also a common challenge mentioned, particularly in relation to nutrition services. Several comments were made regarding the importance of catering to diverse food tastes and preferences. Non-white participants also indicated more reluctance to reach out and share personal information or to receive help, especially in terms of receiving mental health services.

Service Categories

1. Information and Referral / Outreach services were defined as those that connect people with resources that can help them such as accessing transportation, benefits, utility assistance, homemaker services, etc. These services also link people to counselors who can help them with questions about health care and coverage (SHIP).

More than half of the survey participants reported that they know where to locate Information Referral & Outreach services. More than 50% of participants also reported that Information/Referral & Outreach services are “very important” or “extremely important” to them. Accuracy of the information provided was rated as the most important with 64% rating this as ‘extremely important’ to them. Out of the participants who reported having used services within this category, most of them specified that their needs were met. However, the option of ‘needs somewhat met’ was a close second, which could flag this as an area to keep an eye on.

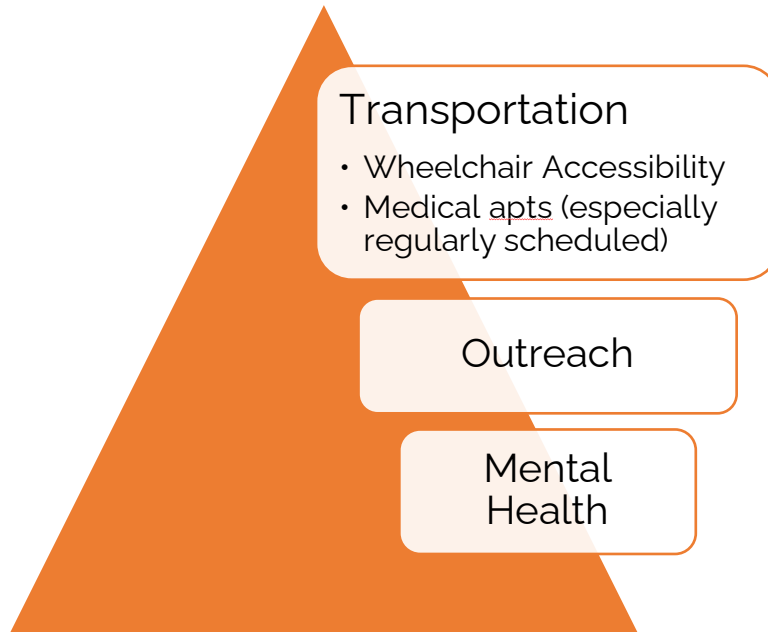
Top Identified Needs:

- Transportation – the need for more information and available referral options for this service.
- Outreach – many people are still not aware of all the services and resources available to them or do not know what they are qualified to receive.
- Mental health services – responses indicated a need for more of this service for older adults and caregivers.

Participant Access Breakdown

- 55% - know where to get information and referral / outreach service
- 28% - do not know where to get this service
- 17% - have not needed/used this service

Missing or Needed Transportation Services



2. Nutrition Services include community dining or Home Delivered Meal services. The two most important nutritional health services identified by participants were:

- Meals delivered to home (27%)
- Well-being checks with meals (26%)

The chart below details some specific needs identified in the listening sessions.

Nutritional Health & Meals

NEEDS RELATED TO SOCIAL ASPECT OF DINING



- community dining
- "providing congregate meals" (DuPage Listening Session)
- "socialization usually provided by community dining" (DuPage Listening Session)

NEEDS RELATED TO ETHNIC & CULTURAL MEALS



- "more diverse meals to accommodate ethnic populations" (CLESE Listening Session)
- ethnic-based community centers for meals (DuPage Listening Session)
- "cultural sensitivity" (Lake Listening Session)

NEEDS RELATED TO SPECIALIZED MEALS



- "special needs diets, such as diabetes" (DuPage Listening Session)
- "meals for high blood pressure populations" (Faith Based Listening Session)

NEEDS RELATED TO COVID CONCERNS



- "wait lists are a concern" (Will Listening Session)
- "how to navigate COVID restrictions and changes" (McHenry Listening Session)
- "meals are in high demand due to COVID" (Kendall Listening Session)

In terms of specific nutritional health services, a large portion of survey respondents reported that they had not used the services. The reason for this is not provided by the survey, but it is possible that the survey response sample included more healthy, mobile people who did not have a need for these services. However, it is also possible that people are not aware of services to take advantage of them.

	EXTREMELY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT SO IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL	HAVE NOT USED THIS SERVICE	TOTAL
Meals delivered to home	27.03% 90	16.82% 56	7.81% 26	6.01% 20	1.80% 6	40.54% 135	333
Well-being check with meals	26.20% 87	17.47% 58	6.02% 20	6.33% 21	2.41% 8	41.57% 138	332
Meal meets my dietary and cultural needs	23.42% 78	25.83% 86	9.91% 33	2.70% 9	2.10% 7	36.04% 120	333
Choice of menu	23.19% 77	26.20% 87	11.75% 39	2.71% 9	1.20% 4	34.94% 116	332
Nutrition education	20.36% 67	24.62% 81	16.11% 53	3.95% 13	2.13% 7	32.83% 108	329
Social interaction through meals	18.37% 61	26.51% 88	13.86% 46	4.82% 16	2.71% 9	33.73% 112	332
Community Dining	15.32% 51	19.52% 65	15.92% 53	7.81% 26	3.90% 13	37.54% 125	333

Participant Access Breakdown

- 48% – do know where to locate nutrition services
- 17% - do not know where to get this service
- 35% - have not needed/used this service

3. *Healthy Aging Services* include the following:

Education – Develops skills, knowledge, and interests through talks, presentations and evidence-based workshops. This includes preventative health programs that lead to healthy aging as well as education on how to use technology.

Health Screenings and Evaluations – This might include hearing and vision tests; podiatry exams; and flu and pneumonia vaccines.

Recreational Activities and Events - Promote socialization and reduce isolation through group exercise, arts and crafts, hobbies, ongoing group games, social events, dances, day trips and other outings. Services usually take place at a senior center or community location.

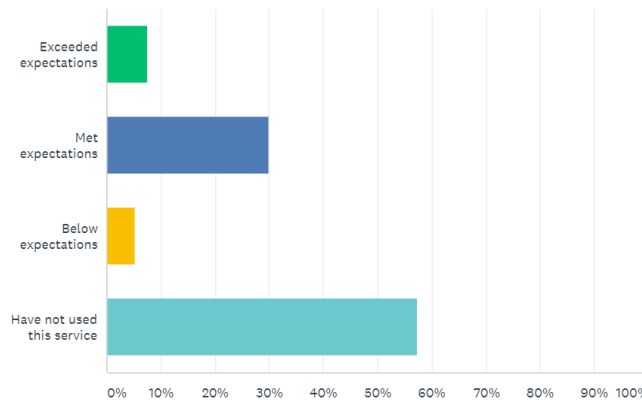
Participant Access Breakdown

- 43% - know where to find healthy aging services
- 29% - do not know where to find this service
- 28% - have not needed/used this service

Under the specific health aging services listed within the survey, ease of access/availability was rated the most important (35%). Of those who used healthy aging services, most reported that their expectations were met, but not exceeded.

How well did Healthy Aging services work for you?

Answered: 307 Skipped: 154



4. Caregiver Support and Education helps people caring for a relative or loved-one in the community. These services include respite care or support groups for caregivers. 63% of participants indicated that caregiver support and education services are ‘very important.’

Top Identified Needs:

- Respite caregiver services
- Adult day services (such as adult day care)
- Caregiver support groups to build personal connections and converse with other caregivers
- Resources for taking care of family

Participant Access Breakdown

- 46% - know where to find caregiver support service
- 20% - do not know where to get service
- 34% - have not needed/used this service

5. Counseling & Mental Health services include individual and family counseling.

The largest portion of respondents (34%) rated counseling & mental health services as ‘extremely important.’ However, when asked how well this service met their needs, 75% of participants reported that they had not used any counseling & mental health services. This very high statistic is rather alarming if not surprising. It is likely due to the stigma that remains around mental health services, especially for a population that values independence and self-sufficiency.

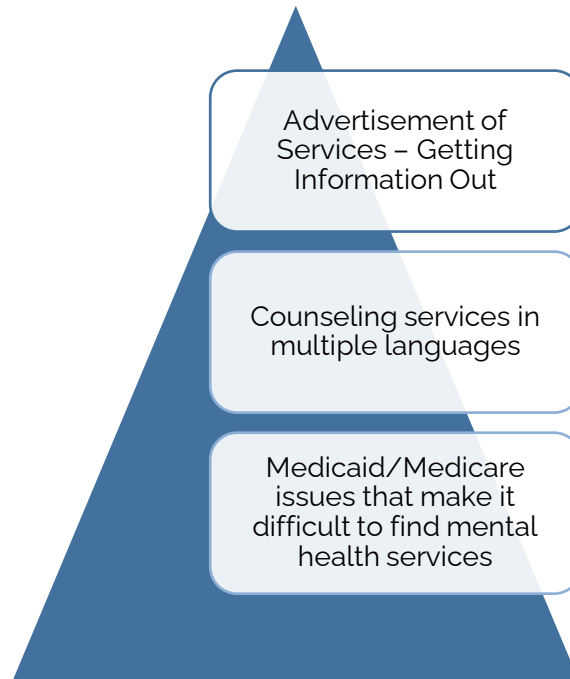
Top Identified Needs:

- Outreach of services – getting more information out, advertisement, awareness of what is available
- Counseling in multiple different languages – points back to cultural & language barriers also mentioned within the listening sessions
- Finding mental health services that are applicable despite restrictions of Medicare/Medicaid – what providers are available to them? What do they qualify for in terms of low-cost counseling & mental health services?

Participant Access Breakdown

- 41% - know where to get counseling and mental health service
- 25% - do not know where to get this service
- 34% - have not needed/used this service

Missing or Needed Mental Health Services



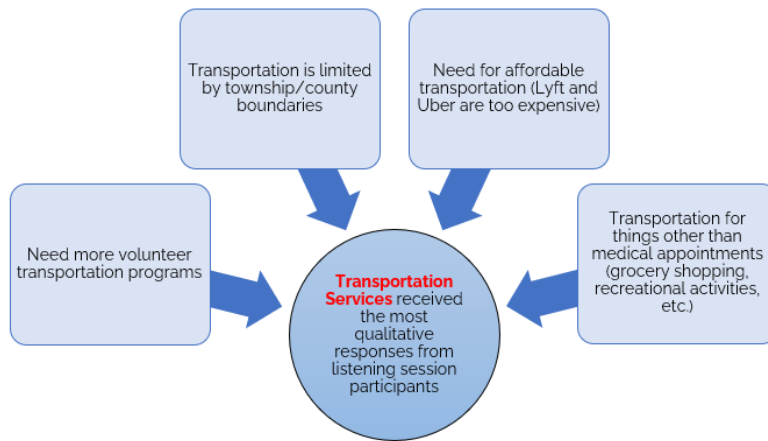
6. Transportation services include curb-to-curb or door-to-door assisted service or volunteer transportation programs.

Transportation services received the largest volume of feedback from both the surveys and the listening sessions.

Transportation topics were also mentioned under other service categories (such as aging services, information referral & outreach, and health & wellness services).

Identified areas for improvement:

- Accessibility for people with disabilities and those who do not speak English well
- Long wait times and/or the need to schedule rides well ahead of time, which is not always feasible
- Affordability (public transit, Lyft, and Uber are too expensive)
- Limitations of township boundaries – need rides that go greater distances (such as to a doctor's office outside of a resident's county)
- Low availability of rides due to COVID



Respondents from three counties, Will, DuPage, and Kane, identified an especially strong need for increased transportation services. However, all counties identified this as the top need.

Participant Access Breakdown

- 46% - know where to get transportation service
- 26% - do not know where to get this service
- 28% - have not needed/used this service

7. **Legal Services** includes arranging for and providing assistance in resolving civil legal matters. 72% of participants specified that they have not used any legal services before. This could indicate a need for more outreach as legal services are not something that people necessarily expect aging services to cover. Also, people may not realize the range of supports legal services can provide including:

- Homeless services
- Estate planning, wills, advanced directives
- Involuntary hospital or long-term care discharge
- Legal advice
- Medicare/Medicaid or SSI denial assistance

	EXTREMELY IMPORTANT
Homelessness	31.28% 76
Estate planning/wills/advanced directives	31.71% 78
Involuntary hospital or long-term care discharge	32.39% 80
Ease of access/availability	34.80% 87
Legal advice	35.08% 87
Medicare, Medicaid or SSI denial assistance	40.56% 101

Respondents identified legal advice, Medicare/Medicaid or SSI denial assistance as the most important legal services.

Participant Access Breakdown

- 39% - know where to get Legal service
- 32% - do not know where to get this service
- 28% - have not needed/used this service

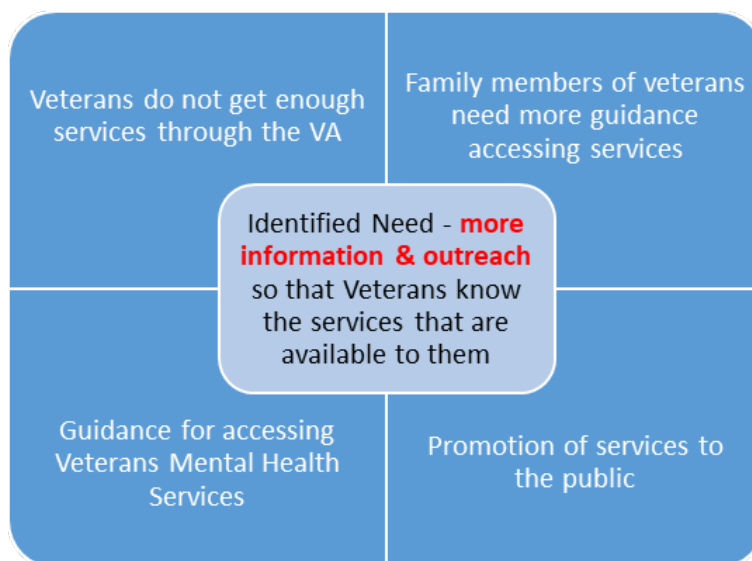
8. Veterans Services include information and resources on Veteran benefits as well as the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) which provides in-home healthcare, homemaker services and resources to help Veterans at risk of nursing home placement to remain in their homes.

As mentioned earlier in the demographics section, about 19% of survey respondents had a military background. Within this service category, the top two services rated as the most important were:

- Benefits
- Healthcare for Veterans

Top Identified Needs:

- More services from Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Guidance for family members to access services
- Mental Health access and service
- Information about available services



Participant Access Breakdown

- 32% - know where to get Veteran services
- 19% - do not know where to get services
- 49% - have not needed/used services

9. Housing Services

AgeGuide does not receive funding for housing but it does advocate for affordable housing and resources for older adults. AgeGuide advocates for housing that is suitable for the needs of an aging population with an emphasis on safety, accessibility, adaptability, and longevity.



The percentage of participants who reported that they know where to get housing services is one of the lowest percentages when compared across all service categories.

Affordability, community, and safety were identified as the most important aspects of housing services.

Top Identified Needs:

- Affordable housing – more Section 8 housing
- Housing that is accessible for disabled older adults (such as those with wheelchairs and/or those who cannot walk up too many stairs)
- Long wait lists for affordable housing needs to be addressed

Participant Access Breakdown

- 34% - know where to get housing service
- 29% - do not know where to get service
- 37% - have not needed/used services

10. Abuse Prevention Services

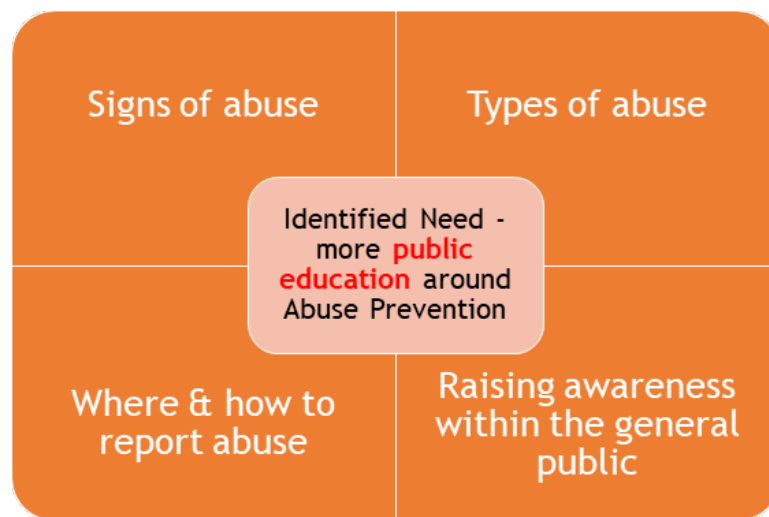
Limited flexibility is allowed for Abuse Prevention because of the way it is funded and administered. AgeGuide's role is to advocate to ensure an optimal quality of life for older adults. These services include Ombudsman service for those in a long-term care facility, and Adult Protective Services are for those living in the community. Abuse prevention includes investigation, intervention, and support for older adults experiencing any form of abuse or neglect.

Abuse Prevention Services Include:

- Advocating for older adults to ensure an optimal quality of life
- Ombudsman long-term care facility services
- Adult Protective Services
- Abuse prevention – investigation, intervention, and support for abuse or neglect

Top Identified Needs:

- Increased awareness/education of signs of abuse
- Increased awareness/education of types of abuse
- Where & how to report abuse
- General Public Awareness



Participant Access Breakdown

- 42.79% - know where to get abuse prevention service
- 20.96% - do not know where to get service
- 36.24% - have not needed/used services

What We Learned

Before the global health threat of COVID-19 or the national conversation about systemic racism began last year, AgeGuide was preparing to address the question of how Older Americans Act services could better serve diverse older adults. With assistance from SAGE Care trainings, AgeGuide staff and our partner organizations are becoming SAGE Care bronze credentialed providers, which involves continued education in providing culturally competent care and fostering a welcoming environment for LGBT older adults.

AgeGuide offered training to members of its Board of Directors, Advisory Council, staff and funded partners to foster an open dialogue on prejudice, discrimination, and equity on an organizational level. The goal was to help participants understand how systemic racism impacts aging services and healthcare and to move toward increased equity and inclusion.

AgeGuide is focusing on service delivery and examining who is being served. As demographics shift, AgeGuide is taking a hard look at whether Older Americans Act services are reaching the full spectrum of the older adults in our communities. The AARP Disrupt Disparities Report states that 33% of Illinoisians age 50 and older are minorities. Our funded partners are deeply rooted in the communities they serve and are adapting to changing demographics by striving to hire multi-lingual, diverse staff who reflect their communities. To enhance these efforts, AgeGuide is partnering with the Coalition of Limited English-Speaking Elders to provide translation services and assistance to culturally and ethnically diverse older adults as they navigate aging services.

AgeGuide and its network of funded partners were already addressing social isolation and loneliness before the pandemic hit, but necessary mitigation strategies, such as sheltering in place and physical

distancing further exacerbated these challenges and required a swift ramp up of efforts to enhance existing services, pivot to virtual programming, and create new opportunities for connection. The pandemic exposed service gaps that AgeGuide is committed to addressing in the FY22-FY24 Area Plan cycle and beyond.

The results of this needs assessment will guide the work of AgeGuide for the next three years and beyond. Our funding priorities and advocacy priorities will reflect the feedback and community input we received. As we move forward with our Area Plan and planning process we will continue to seek input from the communities we serve in order to address emerging needs and serve the diverse region of Northeastern Illinois.

An overview of AgeGuide's plan for allocating funds AgeGuide's proposed service design, delivery, fund distributions, and other activities can be found in the Public Information Document [here](#).

Acknowledgement

AgeGuide would like to thank its funded partners who participated in the assessment and helped to generate the significant participation from older adults in the communities they serve. Without the support of these dedicated organizations, we would not have such robust data to help guide our work over the coming years.