

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE AGEGUIDE NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

In preparation for a new three-year Area Plan cycle, AgeGuide hosted multiple stakeholders listening sessions and administered a needs assessment survey throughout its eight-county planning and service area. The intent was to ensure that AgeGuide and its funded partners were meeting the needs of older adults as well as their caregivers. In addition, the needs assessment aimed to explore whether programs and services were addressing the diverse challenges and needs of the eight-county region. Specifically, AgeGuide sought to evaluate its service delivery design to ensure that programs were targeting those in greatest social and economic need. In order to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, AgeGuide selected an award-winning assessment tool that best captures the input of communities of color, non-English speakers, and LGBT communities. The diversity methodology was then applied to the survey and listening session implementation tools.

Listening Sessions & Survey

AgeGuide held 25 listening sessions with a total of over 250 participants. Overall, AgeGuide spent 36 hours listening to the community. To supplement the listening sessions, AgeGuide released an on-line survey that was translated into the six most common languages in its region, besides English. Paper copies were also provided upon request. The survey had over 460 responses. Both the listening sessions and survey questions were organized around the following service categories:

- 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 Session Findings

The top identified challenges in the listening sessions were technology, need for cultural support as well as services in different languages, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of service categories, transportation was the most discussed. Participants indicated a need for increased availability, flexibility, and affordability. Nutrition was the second most common service category mentioned, with a need for more home delivered meals, congregate dining sites, and more nutritious meals.

Survey Findings

Survey respondents were largely older adults over the age of 65. The top three counties with the highest participation percentage were DuPage (25%), Will (21%), and Lake (17%). The demographic data indicated that the results capture a wide and representative segment of the targeted service population. Overall, 75% of respondents were White, and 25% were non-White. The 3 largest subgroups of non-White participants were Asian/Pacific Islander (11%), Black (7%), and Hispanic/Latino (3%).

Across all service categories, non-White participants reported that they did not use available services more often than White participants. This trend may be connected to the language and cultural barriers discussed in the listening session findings. Furthermore, the theme of language and cultural barriers was especially persistent within the service categories of transportation, nutritional health, and mental health.

The following information details the main identified need(s) in each service category.

Top Identified Needs by Service Category

Information/Referral & Outreach:

- Transportation – more information and referral options
- Outreach – Increased awareness/education on services and resources
- Mental health – more mental health services and outreach

Nutrition Services:

- Social dining – community dining and congregate meals
- Variety of meals – ethnic and culturally appropriate meals
- Specialized meals – meals for specialty diets and/or health conditions

Healthy Aging Services:

- Ease of accessibility – awareness/education on available services and how to access them

Caregiver Support & Education:

- Respite care services
- Adult day services (such as adult day care)
- Caregiver support groups – build personal connections and resources

Counseling & Mental Health:

- Outreach – increased education/awareness of available resources and services
- Counseling in multiple languages
- Mental health services that are covered by Medicare and Medicaid

Transportation Services:

- Accessibility – for those with disabilities and who are limited-English speaking
- flexibility – reduced wait times and rides outside township boundaries
- Affordability – public transit, Uber, and Lyft can be cost prohibitive

Legal Services:

- Outreach – Increased awareness/education on available legal services

Veterans Services:

- Increased services offered by Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Guidance for family members
- Mental health access and care
- Information and outreach

Housing Services:

- Affordable housing
- Accessible housing for disabled older adults
- Addressing long wait lists for housing availability

Abuse Prevention Services:

- Increased awareness/education on signs and types of abuse
- Outreach – where and how to report abuse
- Increased awareness/education of abuse prevention to the general public

Acknowledgement

AgeGuide would like to sincerely thank all respondents and funded partners who participated or assisted in any of the needs assessment activities. This input provided us with robust data that will be used to guide our work in the coming years. For a larger and more detailed review of AgeGuide's future plans, please see its Public Information Document at www.ageguide.org.