



## Community Engagement Needs Assessment

### Key Finding #1 Aging in Place and Age-Friendly Community

- In 2041, it is predicted that a quarter of all individuals in the county will be 65+.
  - A higher percentage of 65+ householders live alone (44.9%) than in the state and nation (both 42.8%) which is equivalent to 26,238 older adults in 2021.
  - About 32% of older adults report having a disability which may complicate their efforts to manage in their own home.
- The ability to age in place is listed as the third most pressing health issue (56.7%) by Key Informants.
  - Seeking home and community-based services to support aging in place is the top transition challenge.
  - Over half list social isolation as one of the Top 5 key health issues facing older adults in the county.
- Support services including caregivers are in short supply and often necessitate moving to a residential care community.
  - 67.9% of Key Informants say that Adult Day Care is lacking.
  - 45.6% know of clients who are moving to a personal care, assisted living or nursing home.
  - 14% of people (all ages) were reported to be without a reliable source of food; worse when compared to the state (12%) and the nation (8%).

*"The current shortage of in-home care professionals prevents people from aging in place by low or inconsistent availability and overall costs. This leads to unintended elder abuse/neglect."*

### Key Finding #2 Affordable Housing and Income

- 56.7% of older adults who rent their homes in Buncombe County are spending more than 30% of their household income on rent and therefore are "cost burdened".
- 14.2% of the population (all ages) lived with severe housing problems in 2019.
- Key Informants identified affordable housing as the most pressing health issue facing older adults in the community.
  - Only 8.2% of respondents agree that there is a variety of affordable housing options available in the area for older people.
- In the county, living below 100% of the poverty line worsens as the population ages.
  - For households with members aged 65 to 74, 8.0% were below the poverty level in 2020.
  - For households 75+, 10.5% were below 100% of the poverty level.

*"There is plenty of support for affluent retirees, but the same supportive services are miserably lacking for those with lower incomes."*

### **Key Finding #3 Navigation of Services and Access to Care**

- A very small percentage (0.1%) of those aged 65+ are uninsured in Buncombe County yet,
- 73.3% indicate that the inability to pay out-of-pocket expenses (co-pays, prescriptions etc.) is the most significant barrier to receiving adequate healthcare.
  - Low-cost medical care including dental, vision and hearing as well as medications are cited as one of the top 5 missing healthcare services (57.0%).
  - Geriatricians/gerontologists, neurologists, behavioral health and mental health services and counseling are identified as lacking in the county.
- 2,110 hospitalizations may have been prevented if older adults were better able to access healthcare.
- 7,800 years of life were lost (also known as premature deaths) among people under age 75.
- Key Informants report that the lack of health insurance, available provider appointments and Medicaid providers as well as long wait times, getting time off from work and/or cognitive and physical limitations are barriers to accessing healthcare.
- Transportation and walkability are among the Top 5 most pressing issues facing older adults.
  - In Buncombe County, 2,457 persons age 65+ are without a vehicle.
- Case management services are perceived to be lacking as a support service by 61.6% of all respondents.

*"It seems to me if an older person has children and family to navigate the health system and the government bureaucracy, then they have a chance. Those that are missing this do not usually maintain a lifestyle that meets their needs"*

### **Key Finding #4 Chronic Disease Management and Prevention**

- Older adults are more likely to die from seemingly preventable accidents/unintentional injuries, osteoporosis, influenza and pneumonia, melanoma of the skin than more traditional causes such as cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease and diabetes.
- The percentage of those vaccinated (all ages) is 58% which leaves many people vulnerable to the flu, particularly older adults.
- Older adults are far more affected by depression, substance abuse, schizophrenia, and other psychoses than those in North Carolina or the United States.
- 2.2% of Buncombe County Medicare beneficiaries have substance abuse disorders, more than in North Carolina or the U.S., which is about 1,285 older adults.
- 18% of residents (all ages) reported excessive drinking, similar to the state (17%) and less than in the nation (19%).
  - Yet, the percentage of alcohol impaired deaths is higher (29%) than the state (26%) and much higher than the nation (10%).
- 39% of respondents identified dementia/memory challenges as one of the most pressing key health issues; 15.9% selected mental/behavioral health issues.

*"There is only one office in Asheville that offers colonoscopy services and appointments are very hard to get. This is but one example of a 'mandatory' health screening for older adults that is inaccessible to people with resource limitations."*