



Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults®

Preparing Your Community Now for the Next Generation of Older Adults



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What is CASOA?



Until recently, the younger generation has always far outnumbered the older adult population. With advancements in the medical field, fewer births, and healthier lifestyles, this is no longer true. Older adults will soon outnumber people under 18 for the first time ever. A larger population of older adults has potential ramifications for the economy, health care, and other critical aspects of livability. Many local government leaders are uncertain about how to plan for the demographic change.

Polco's Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults® (CASOA®) gives city managers, planners, and Area Agencies on Aging insights into the quality of life in their state, region, city, or town according to older residents. Results show leaders how they can better support the aging demographic and where they are succeeding.

With over 20 years of CASOA research across hundreds of US municipalities, Polco has amassed a powerful database of older adult insights. After mining our data, we identified a few of the most important issues local governments should understand about how aging baby boomers will affect the future.

In this white paper, you will find articles on how to build a community that allows people to age in place and the often overlooked economic value of older workers, retirees, and personal caregivers. You will also learn why older adults are working past retirement years and ageist workplace myths. To end, we present two CASOA case studies on the local and state level, so you can see how members of local and state governments and the aging network effectively put resident insights to use.

National Trends: Older Adults' Needs and Priorities

Community Readiness Scores



Community Design - 51



Employment and Finances - 46



Health and Wellness - 57



Equity and Inclusivity - 56



Productive Activities - 61



Information and Assistance - 46

Areas Where American Cities Are Doing Well to Support Successful Aging

6 Most Highly Rated Community Characteristics by Older Adults

Characteristics	Positive Responses
Opportunities to attend religious or spiritual activities	8 in 10
Opportunities to volunteer	8 in 10
Fitness opportunities (including exercise classes and paths or trails, etc.)	7 in 10
Making all residents feel welcome	7 in 10
Recreation opportunities (including games, arts, library services, etc.)	7 in 10
Ease of travel by car in your community	7 in 10

Challenges to Successful Aging

5 Lowest-rated Community Characteristics by Older Adults

Characteristics	Positive Responses
Availability of daytime care options for older adults	3 in 10
Availability of affordable quality housing	3 in 10
Ease of travel by public transportation in your community	4 in 10
Availability of long-term care options	4 in 10
Quality of employment opportunities for older adults	4 in 10

Top 10 Aging Population Needs

Characteristics	Positive Responses
Not knowing what services are available to older adults in your community	6 in 10
Physical health	6 in 10
Staying physically fit	6 in 10
Feeling like their voice is heard in the community	6 in 10
Doing heavy or intense housework	6 in 10
Having interesting social events or activities to attend	5 in 10
Maintaining the yard	4 in 10
Having interesting recreational or cultural activities to attend	4 in 10
Having adequate information or dealing with public programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid	4 in 10
Maintaining a healthy diet	4 in 10

Older Adults Are Working Longer, but for Very Different Reasons



Older adults are retiring later, but for two entirely different motives: necessity and desire. On one hand, it can mean that older workers are happily employed and fulfilled by their work. On the other hand, many continue the daily grind because they can't afford to retire.

Erin Fisher is the director of Vintage, a regional Colorado Area Agency on Aging (AAA). Vintage provides services for the older population in Northwest Colorado's Alpine region, which includes six mountain counties. Their area participated in the statewide Community Assessment Survey of Older Adults (CASOA), conducted by National Research Center at Polco, in 2010 and 2018. The survey is a needs assessment that tracks community livability for older adults.

In 2010, Vintage's CASOA report showed 55% of respondents in the Alpine Region were fully retired. In 2018, that number decreased by almost 10%. This decrease is reflective of a national trend. Today, about 19% of all workers are over 65, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. That's 10.6 million people, a number that is expected to increase to 16 million by 2030.

When Fisher was studying for her master's in gerontology, she learned the three-legged stool of retirement: savings, pension, and social security. Now that pensions are a thing of the past, particularly in the private sector, what's left is one precarious leg of the stool.

Adding to the challenge, social security is nearing depletion and the high price of just about everything is chipping away at personal savings. National 2022 CASOA data show that only 34% of older adults feel positive about affordable quality housing in their communities, and 38% feel good about the availability of affordable health insurance.

Fisher also often encounters older people who have diligently saved, but a catastrophic medical event has wiped out their safety net or they underestimate the costs of long-term care. Only 37% of CASOA respondents say they feel positive about the availability of long-term care in their communities.



“People say, I have \$400,000 saved,” Fisher said. “Well, if you're in a private, skilled nursing home, that will buy you four years of care and that's it.” **Erin Fisher,**
Director of Vintage



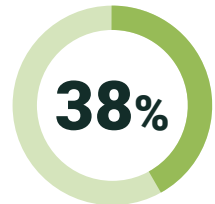
On the bright side, many older adults continue to work on their terms. Studies show that continuing a career is correlated with longevity. Working maintains physical and cognitive health, as well as positive relationships with coworkers.

“When you look at the Blue Zones, the areas where people live the longest, one of the factors that contribute to life expectancy is having a sense of purpose. Some people find that in working a paid job,” Fisher said.

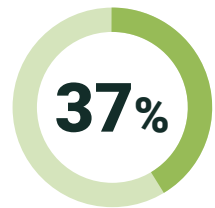
Working for the purpose of life fulfillment is changing ideas around traditional retirement.



feel positive about housing costs in their communities



feel positive about the availability of affordable health insurance



feel positive about the availability of long term care in their communities

“We are reimagining what retirement looks like,” Fisher said. “It’s having a flexible work environment that allows for more of a phase-out approach. It’s like, ‘Okay, my goal is to retire at this age but I am going to spend the next four years mentoring someone else as they move up. Or I am going to retire, but I am going to go back and contract with the company.’”

Regardless of full-time or part-time schedules, older adults working longer is also better for the economy as a whole. And right now, the economy needs them.

The Global Population is Aging

According to the World Health Organization, life expectancy increased by six years globally from 2000 to 2019. That’s a statistic to applaud, but it’s difficult to support those extra years of life without extra years of income.

And while life expectancy has increased, birth rates have continued to decline since 2008. It’s drastically altering the ratio between younger and older people within first-world communities. The US Census Bureau reported there will be more Americans over 65 than children under 18 by 2035, which means there will be fewer young people available to fill jobs. It also has implications for what the future of health care and caregiving might look like. Because of this, some have pushed the narrative that older adults will be a burden on society. But that’s not the case.



Older workers increase tax revenues and stimulate economic growth. In Colorado, older adults contribute about half of the state's GDP. Fisher says the contribution in her region is over \$604 million per year. On a national level, the 50-plus group (34% of the population) makes up 40% of the country's GDP. Older adults are also the biggest spenders and the wealthiest cohort.

However, contributing economic fuel won't bring comfort to older workers who want to retire but can't afford to do so. Fisher says making sure people are financially prepared for retirement is one of Colorado's main goals in older adult planning.

Saving is critical, but often a luxury. Fisher says the country needs bigger systemic changes in health care and social services at the state and federal levels to help older workers in a more practical way.

"We can support older adults now by talking to Congress and our senators," she said.



Ageism in the Workplace

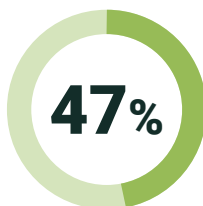
Four Ageist Workplace Myths and Why They're Untrue

Americans are more conscious of racism, gender discrimination, and sexism than ever before. However, ageism remains as prevalent as always, especially in the workplace. National CASOA data reveal the difficulty older adults face while on the job hunt. Only 37% feel positive about the quality of job opportunities in their communities, and 41% feel positive about the variety of work available.

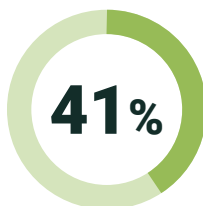
"It always takes older people longer to get a job," said Janine Vanderburg, director for Changing the Narrative, a national nonprofit that fights against ageism.

This is largely because of subconscious ageist biases. A report by the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that people over 40 are half as likely to be hired as younger people. Vanderburg says stereotypes prevent older people from getting job offers sooner. But in reality, these pervasive ideas about older adults in the workplace are myths.

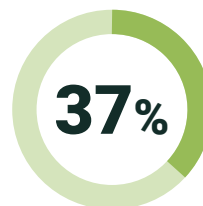
Older Adults' Attitudes Toward Work



feel positive about
the opportunities to
build work skills



feel positive about
the variety of
work available



feel positive about the
quality of job opportunities
in their communities

Myth One: Older People Working Longer Prevents Younger People From Moving Up

One common misconception is that older employees have blocked the younger generation from climbing the ladder. In some professions, Vanderburg said this dynamic is possible. If there is only one higher-level position, an older adult working in that position could block someone from moving up, but in most cases older workers are more helpful than harmful.

Vanderburg says 75% of younger people report that they want mentors, who are typically older and more experienced. Work wisdom is difficult to find without seasoned professionals in the office or on the field to offer guidance. There is an economic benefit as well.

"It's the classic us versus them argument," she said. "But what all the studies show is that the longer older adults stay in the labor market, the more economic activity overall, and that benefits workers of all ages."

Myth Two: Older People Don't Want to Learn

Another workplace myth is that older people lack coachability.

"Everything disputes that. There is a reason why life-long learning institutes are flourishing in the United States," Vanderburg said. She added that AARP released a study showing 57% of older working people are interested in professional development. CASOA data reveal only 47% feel positive about the opportunities to build work skills.

Myth Three: Older Workers Will Not Stay for Long

The reason employers don't offer additional learning programs is due in part to another ageist idea— that older workers will not stick around.

“All the research shows, on average, older people have four times the tenure of younger people. When you're younger you are looking for that next and better opportunity,” Vanderburg said. “The reality is that if you hire an older worker, they are more likely to stick around, and you are going to recoup the investment.”

Myth Four: Older Workers Are More Expensive

The idea that older workers always cost more is also untrue, Vanderburg said. Many companies hire younger workers because they are perceived to come cheaper, even if they are less skilled. But Vanderburg references a Mercer study that shows salaries rise faster earlier on in careers, then start to level off once people reach their 30s.

Plus, hiring younger people to pay them less is problematic in both directions. “The job is the job, and if someone has the skills and experience, why should somebody push out an older person and say ‘I am going to pay this person less’ instead?” Vanderburg said. “There is a fundamental injustice in that.”



Changes in Attitudes

Urgency is erasing some of these ageist biases. Today, the unemployment rate is at 3.6%, but the labor market is still on fire. “We’re Hiring” signs seem to be in every storefront window. Currently, there are over 11 million job openings in the US and only 6.5 million unemployed people, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ May job report.

To fill roles, some are looking directly to older adults. There are online job boards that specifically target retirees. In the public sector, programs like the Give 5 ask retired public servants to volunteer five days a month.

The fact is, businesses that ignore older workers will likely not survive. The good news is older workers are a benefit. Just like diversity in gender and ethnicity has been shown to create smarter teams, the same dynamic applies to age. “When employers have intergenerational teams, they are more creative, better at problem-solving, more productive, and more profitable,” Vanderburg said.

And if the data isn’t enough to sway ageist opinions, maybe one unavoidable fact will.

“Each one of us is the oldest we’ve ever been and before you go to sleep tonight, think of this: it’s the youngest we’ll ever be again,” Vanderburg said. “If we are fortunate, we are all going to wake up tomorrow a day older. So when we succumb to ageist stereotypes and beliefs, we are really discriminating toward our future selves.”

11 million job openings



6.5 million unemployed people



Age-Friendly Cities: The Importance of Community Design



As the older adult population grows, cities face a new challenge: designing spaces that both attract this demographic and empower them to age in place.

Meeting this challenge requires thoughtful community design. Community design is a process of creating livable environments that aim to meet residents' needs. Planning involves participatory decision-making at all levels, so that the built environment—from the neighborhood to regional scale—improves quality of life for everyone.

Community design is particularly important for older adults who may experience more physical and social challenges. As individuals grow older, some report problems with access to safe and affordable travel, housing, and care options. Older adults who desire to age in place may need assistance with heavy house and yard work. For these reasons, preparing for an increase in older adults means conscious planning around housing, outdoor spaces, buildings, and transportation.

The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA) provides a statistically valid measure of the strengths and needs of older adults. Developed by survey scientists at Polco's National Research Center (NRC), the survey seeks answers from older adults themselves about livability in their communities.

According to national results from CASOA, 87% of older adults say their community is a good place to live. Most older adults would recommend their community to others and plan to remain there, and 70% rate their community as a good place to retire. Also, 64% rate the overall design of the community (the layout of residential and commercial areas, like homes, buildings, streets, and parks) positively.

It behooves cities to keep older adults in their community: they make a significant economic contribution both as workers and mentors, they provide a wealth of experience and information to the community, and many volunteer and provide caregiving services to older family members for others.

Plus, smart growth and increased access to affordable housing, transportation, and outdoor spaces enhances livability for residents of all ages. “What’s best for older adults is best for everyone,” said Michelle Kobayashi, Polco’s Vice President of Innovation.

Housing

Polco’s research, along with data from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), consistently shows that most older adults want to stay in their home or community as long as possible. Of older adults surveyed by Polco, 84% say they plan to remain in their community throughout retirement.

“Many older adults don’t need 24-hour skilled nursing care. That’s why community organizations like ours have pivoted to provide services that allow older adults to stay at home with their families or caregivers more safely,” said John Sink. Sink is the Vice President of Enrichment Services at Avenidas, a nonprofit organization supporting older adults in Palo Alto, California, and surrounding cities.

For older adults to age in place, homes must facilitate their evolving needs. Data from CASOA show that only 44% of older adults are satisfied with the availability of accessible housing (e.g. homes with a no-step entry, single-floor living, and wide hallways and doorways). The same percentage say they are satisfied with the variety of housing options available to them.



Community leaders can work with urban planners, architects, and nonprofit organizations to provide housing options or modifications that accommodate wheelchairs and prevent falls.

“People are staying home more, and they’re more hesitant to enter congregant living situations. So we need to know what it takes for people to live alone and what role we play in supporting people in this community,” Sink said.

House maintenance is another barrier to aging in place. Polco’s data show that many older adults need assistance with maintaining their homes, including doing heavy or intense housework, and maintaining their yards. Fifty-five percent report problems with heavy housework and 43% have problems with yard maintenance.

Close proximity to shops, restaurants, work, and services is another area of need. Of those surveyed, 51% of older adults say they have housing options in mixed-use neighborhoods. Older adults want to stay close to their family and community, as well as access social and health services when they need them. Cities should keep this in mind as they develop areas where residents live, work, and play.



Transportation

Some people have a more difficult time driving as they age and need alternatives to get around. According to Polco's research, 69% of older adults are satisfied with the ease of travel by car in their communities. While many older adults are able to drive, making communities less car-oriented is beneficial for all. Plus, a variety of mobility options appeals to everyone in the community.

Lowering reliance on cars means that there must be other ways to get around. Plentiful sidewalks and safe, crossable streets encourage walking and foster an active lifestyle. In addition to more walking paths, drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians all benefit from dedicated bicycle lanes.

CASOA data reveals that 65% of older adults positively rate the ease of walking in their community, and 72% are satisfied with fitness opportunities in their community (including the ability to walk on paths or trails). Walking and biking access helps older adults get around in their community and stay healthy and active.

Other public transit options can include everything from taxis, shuttles, and rideshares to trains, buses, and light rail. CASOA results show that only 36% of older adults rate the ease of public transportation positively.





Communities lacking affordable public transportation are at risk of isolating older adults who no longer drive, increasing a sense of loneliness and decreasing their sense of belonging. When equitable and accessible transportation is easily available, older adults are more likely to participate in the community.

Local governments should consider a number of factors when designing a transit system that works for everyone, including older adults. These include ease of navigation, affordability, accessibility for a range of mobility needs, safety, and access to information that facilitates public transit use.

Municipalities that include suburban or more remote residential areas, where driving remains essential, can think about how to make driving safer. Improvements to traffic patterns, lighting, roads, parking, and signage can all help older adults navigate safely while driving.

Outdoor Spaces and Building Accessibility

Outdoor spaces are vital to older adults' quality of life, especially spaces that allow them to move outside of their homes easily and independently. Public gathering spaces are important for residents' physical health, social interaction, and fostering a sense of belonging. According to CASOA, 63% of older adults say they have access to public places where people want to spend time, and 69% are satisfied with the recreation opportunities available.

“Making land use choices that facilitate successful aging also does a lot of good things for the environment and the rest of the community,” Kobayashi said.

Especially in crowded urban environments, access to quiet, clean, and secure green spaces has a positive environmental and social impact.

Accessibility is an important factor in older adults' mobility. Accessible buildings with zero-step entrances, staircases with railings, and elevators are helpful for older adults, as well as people in wheelchairs or families with young children in strollers. Narrow or cracked sidewalks present hazards, especially for those with limited mobility.



Looking to the Future

As communities across the country continue to age, it's vital to have a plan for the future. Community design should be an ongoing conversation between stakeholders, including Area Agencies on Aging, local and state governments, older adults themselves, and organizations providing important resources and services. Needs assessments like CASOA can help local governments make data-informed decisions that serve the older adults in their community, while also making their community more livable for residents of all ages.



Indiana Gets a Statewide View of Older Adults' Needs With CASOA



States need to understand the unique circumstances of their aging population so they can create a flourishing community for all residents. This knowledge is more important than ever as baby boomers move through their golden years. Older adults may need better access to health services, new modes of transportation, or more information about programs available to them. But how do states know for certain where they are succeeding and what areas of livability need more focus?

The State of Indiana uses Polco's Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults® (CASOA®) to get a clear view of what older adults think about quality of life in their state.

The CASOA survey questions focus on seven aspects of livability.

- ✓ Community design
- ✓ Overall quality
- ✓ Employment and finances
- ✓ Equity and inclusivity
- ✓ Health and wellness
- ✓ Information and activities
- ✓ Productive activities

CASOA results provide Indiana leaders with thorough information so they can more accurately predict what resources the older generation might need. Once complete, Indiana leaders incorporate the survey findings into state plans, which are due every four years. CASOA fulfills the federal government's needs assessment requirement to demonstrate reasoning behind decision-making. Survey results also make the case for specific programs that require funding.

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“We want to identify a community’s strengths to support successful aging. We want to articulate and measure the specific needs, so when states build their four-year plans or programs, officials know how many people are impacted. We want to measure the contributions of older adults in their communities, and also develop estimates and projections of resident needs,” said **Michelle Kobayashi, Polco’s Vice President of Innovation.**

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Area Agencies on Aging

Indiana contains 16 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). An AAA is a private company, non-profit, or public entity that executes programs and services closer to the communities that they work in. Indiana AAAs include two to nine counties. Each runs their individual CASOA and receives results in their region. (AAAs also have the option for individual reports for each county within their agency as an add-on.) Then, the results from each AAA are run through an analysis at a statewide level. Polco data scientists create a separate report using the collective sample for the state.



The Process

In total, 85,000 surveys were mailed to randomly selected residents over age 65 in Indiana. (Each state has a different definition of what qualifies a person as an older adult.) Each randomly selected resident received a postcard with a weblink directing them to take the survey online, as well as a paper survey with return postage.

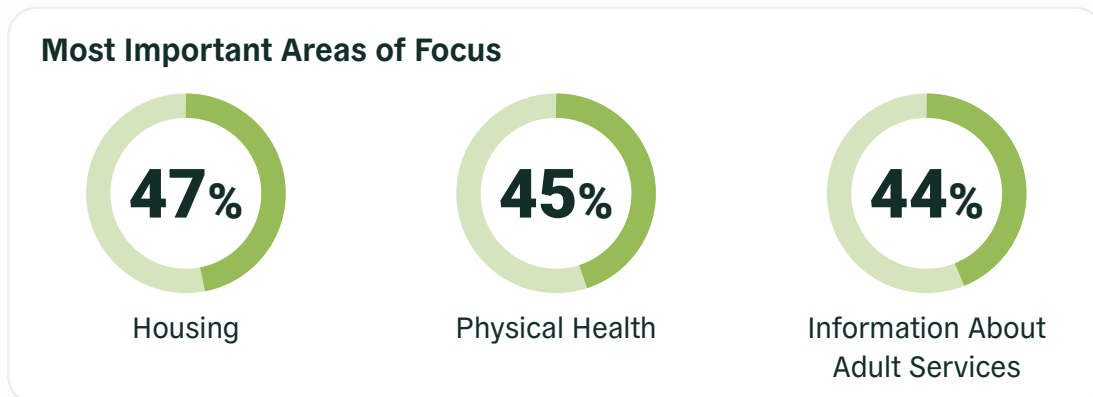
Indiana residents who were not selected in the random sample had the opportunity to take the survey online for additional insight.

The state received 7,845 responses from the randomly-selected pool, as well as 785 responses from the open participation portion.

Polco's data science team analyzed the results and presented the findings to Indiana's state and AAA leaders.

The Findings

CASOA data clearly lay out what priorities are most important to residents. Indiana community members cited housing (47%), physical health (45%), and information about adult services (44%) as the most important areas of focus.



Because dozens of municipalities have conducted CASOA, Indiana also can see where they stack up compared to jurisdictions across the US. And because Indiana leaders have conducted CASOA three times since 2013, leaders have a clear understanding of what metrics are improving, staying the same, or decreasing.

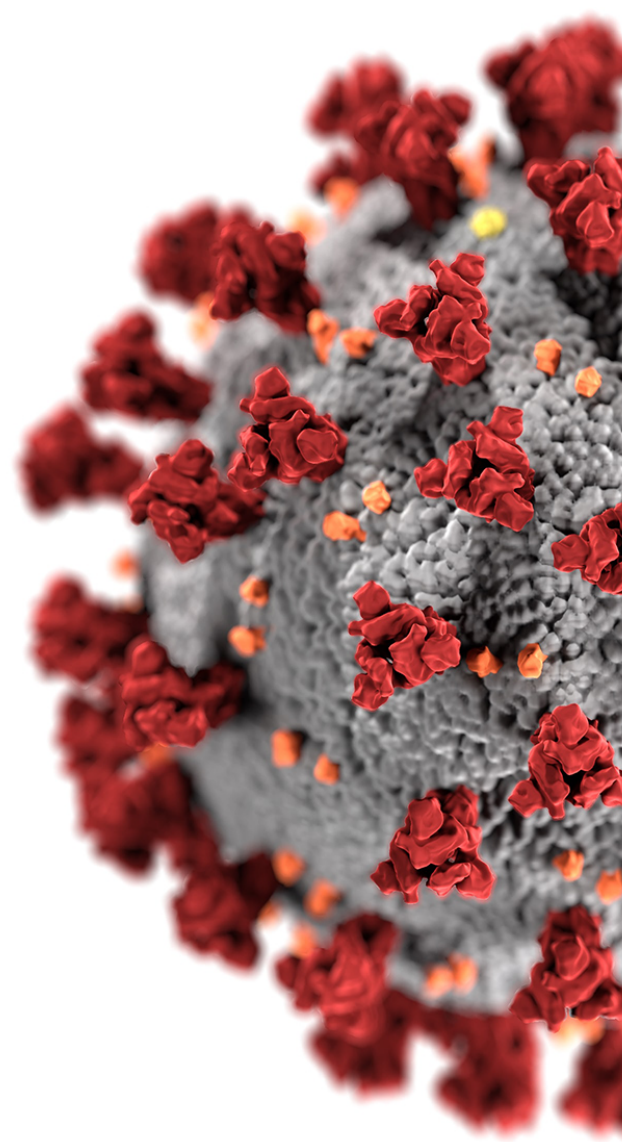
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“I really pushed for us to do CASOA again because we do have that longitudinal measure of the pulse that is going on around the state with older Hoosiers,” said Erin Wright, Director of Access & Engagement for Indiana’s Division of Aging. “So that is a huge benefit of CASOA.”

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Since 2017, the state has improved in safety, sense of community, and ease of travel by car. But many metrics were down as a result of the pandemic. Ratings for recreational opportunities, fitness, access to public places and where people want to spend time, as well as public transportation, all decreased.

“Covid has shaken everything up. It’s not strange some of those ratings have gone down given what the pandemic has done, especially with our older residents who are more vulnerable and have been more isolated in the past 24 months,” Kobayashi said.



Next Steps

Indiana's state plan is in draft form, and now state leaders are in the process of seeking public comment.

"We wrote the plan, and we put the plan out into the universe," Wright said. "We're holding a series of three in-person stakeholder feedback sessions, and then two virtual sessions to talk about the plan, our goals, objectives, and activities."

The state hired an external contractor to facilitate the feedback sessions so they have an impartial information gatherer. Depending on the feedback, the state will make revisions to the plan before it is solidified.

Indiana is also currently working on a master plan on aging, which will be broader than the state plan. So decision-makers are thinking about resurveying in two years for the master plan project. Plus, the strange pandemic year created many statistical anomalies that are hard to gauge.

"We're moving, sort of, out of the pandemic, so are we going to see if some of these significant changes remain, level out, or go back to where they were consistent in 2013 and 2017," Wright said.

With CASOA, Indiana officials now have a broad understanding of aging in their state. And because all 16 Indiana AAAs completed individual CASOAs in their regions, those agencies can put a more targeted plan into action. The state can direct resources to where they are needed now, and be better prepared for what's ahead.



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Statewide Insights From Indiana Older Adults



Overall Community Livability

Around 80% of older adult residents rate overall quality of life in Indiana positively



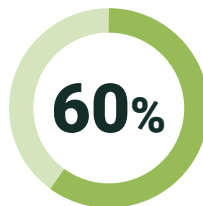
About 80% of residents plan to stay in their communities throughout retirement



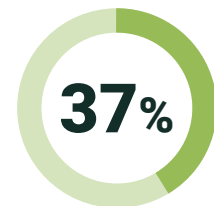
About 60% of respondents had lived in their communities for more than 20 years



of residents reported excellent or good mental health



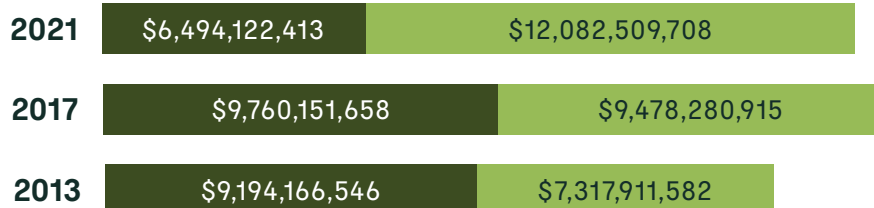
of residents reported being somewhat informed or very informed about available services and activities


















of residents reported providing care to individuals 55 and older

Economic Contribution by Year

 Paid  Volunteer/caregiving



Indiana Older Adults Community Priorities		Percent with need	Number affected in 2021
	Housing	47%	677,587
	Mobility	26%	374,280
	Employment	22%	318,413
	Finances	31%	451,577
	Equity	8%	117,218
	Community Inclusivity	25%	365,698
	Safety	13%	194,133
	Physical Health	45%	645,474
	Mental Health	33%	472,795
	Health Care	40%	572,055
	Independent Living	4%	62,259
	Information on Available Older Adult Services	44%	639,172
	Civic Engagement	20%	282,244
	Social Engagement	18%	259,906
	Caregiving	13%	193,875

How Local Governments Can Help Older Adults Age in Place

Assessing Livability

In order to prepare communities for the aging demographic, it is increasingly essential for local governments to understand the needs and strengths of their older adult populations. Federal and state-level funding supports age-friendly planning—but the local level is the best place to connect directly with older adult residents. Many local agencies use surveys as a practical and effective way to uncover the opinions of older adults in their community, so they can prepare for the future.

Surveys like CASOA are particularly useful for Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), public or private nonprofit agencies designated by the state that help older adults live independently. CASOA serves as a reporting tool for AAAs, which must demonstrate a needs assessment in order to comply with government guidelines every four years. And because Polco has surveyed thousands of older residents from across the US, agencies can compare their data to others around the nation.

Understanding Older Adulthood Today

Baby boomers are aging differently than previous generations. “Historically, they change everything they touch,” said Michelle Kobayashi, Polco’s Vice President of Innovation. “In the same way they changed youth, adulthood, and parenthood, they make retirement and older adulthood look different than it did before.”

Organizations need data to prepare for the aging population and to better serve current older adults now.

Avenidas is a private nonprofit organization in northern California that plans to conduct CASOA in the nine communities that make up its service area.



“We’re asking ourselves how the needs have changed coming out of the pandemic so that we know what sorts of issues we need to take into consideration for program planning going forward,” said **John Sink, Avenidas’ Vice President of Enrichment Services.**

Avenidas has been studying the needs of older adults since its inception in the 1950s. The agency’s largest source of municipal funding comes from the City of Palo Alto, where the organization’s headquarters is located. Palo Alto is one of its service areas and has more residents older than 65, which is more than the national average.

“We’re using CASOA to hear from a group we haven’t heard from as much, the 55 to 75-year-old age group, who are often caregivers for their parents. We want to know how to support that segment of the population,” Sink said.

For caregivers like these, helping their family members age in place requires a variety of services, from grocery delivery to trips to the doctor. Sometimes, the caregiver isn’t able to do all of these things. That’s where Avenidas comes in, providing services in both group settings and individually to families looking for enrichment.

The group is particularly interested in looking at social determinants of health and health-related social issues such as financial strain, food insecurity, loneliness, housing insecurity, housing quality, utility insecurity, and transportation.

What do people pay for? Where is the most demand? Where are there gaps in needs and services? What does it take to attract a retiring person to a city? These are some of the questions that Avenidas is hoping to answer through CASOA.

Evolving Needs

The pandemic brought a number of new challenges for organizations working with older adults.

“People are no longer getting their information by word-of-mouth. They’re looking elsewhere,” Sink said. “So we’re paying more attention to the different channels of communication we use, whether it’s social media or something else.”

As modes of communication have changed, so have older adults’ wants and desires.

“A lot of folks in this age group are just fine, health-wise. They are looking to give back, so their major need is involvement and volunteering,” Sink said. “We provide ways for them to do that depending on their interests.”

Understanding these ever-changing sentiments is a vital role for Avenidas and other organizations.



“You have to have a relationship with (residents), and it has to be deep enough for you to know what they want,” Sink said, adding that data is a big part of that. “That’s why there’s no substitute for this kind of needs assessment. Anecdotal evidence isn’t enough. A process that has the rigorous methodology that [Polco] brings is so valuable to us because we know we aren’t missing anything or anyone.”

Preparing for the Future

To meet these challenges and those to come, local governments can partner with community-based organizations, nonprofits, the private sector, and residents themselves.

Organizations like Avenidas will collaborate with local government leaders and residents on next steps. “Following this needs assessment, we will present the results at a city council meeting,” Sink said. “We’ll share what we’ve learned and where we’re going from here.” After sharing the results, Avenidas will incorporate this data into program planning efforts as they update the new strategic plan for the organization.

While each organization is different, this process demonstrates an effective use of surveys. The process doesn’t stop once the results are in, and instead requires further outreach. This lays the foundation of effective, long-term community engagement. With help from CASOA, agencies like Avenidas will be better prepared for the future and can create a high quality of life for all ages.



Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults®

The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults® (CASOA®) provides the answers to how older adult needs and strengths affect your town, city, county or state. CASOA results give you confidence in creating a community that supports older adults today and in the future.

Developed by experts in survey research and aging services, CASOA summarizes the key dimensions of community livability from the perspectives of older adults. Jurisdictions from all over the US have conducted CASOA, creating a national database of over 35,000 older adult responses. The database allows you to compare results from your community to others across the country. Results show local governments, states, and Area Agencies on Aging their strengths and services in most need of improvement.

Aging Services Professionals Use CASOA for:

- ✓ Budgeting
- ✓ Program and capital planning
- ✓ Communications
- ✓ Performance monitoring and service evaluation
- ✓ Fundraising
- ✓ Inter-agency engagement

CASOA helps you develop informed plans to support healthy aging and sustain a thriving, age-friendly community.

Visit polco.us/contact for more information