2014 Update of Age Well Boulder County
A Plan to Create Vibrant Communities

Summary Report of Findings
from Community Conversations

Submitted by:

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Age Well
Boulder County

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments 1

Introduction 2

Overall Findings 5

Findings by Plan Quadrant 9

Findings by Targeted Population, Geographic Area and Issue 20

A Circle of Connections 23

Appendices

Appendix A: Community Conversation Responses About Specific Communities

Appendix B: Community Conversation Aggregate Discussion Responses by Question

Appendix C: Community Conversation Discussion Responses by Group

Appendix D: Community Conversation Individual Response Form Responses by Question

Appendix E: Community Conversation Discussion Guide

Appendix F: Community Conversation Individual Response Form

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Boulder County
Boulder Senior Centers
Erie Community Center
The Hearthstone
Josephine Commons
Lafayette Go Services
Longmont Senior Center
Louisville Senior Center
Lydia Morgan
Meadows Library
Nederland Community Center

Introduction

Project Background

Building on a decade of collecting and analyzing information about the needs of older adults in Boulder County, an innovative group of managers responsible for aging services initiated the creation of a County-wide Strategic Plan in 2005. By 2006, the Plan, "Creating Vibrant Communities in Which We All Age Well" was in place as a community-owned guide to the future. Seventeen goals and 88 strategies were organized around four components, or quadrants, essential to a vibrant, healthy community that is committed to the strengths of its older adult population. Work groups were organized around major elements of the Plan, with progress reported to the community in 2007 and again in 2008-2009.

Circumstances surrounding community resources and priorities began to change with the economic downturn in the fall of 2008, and by 2010 it was clear that it was time to work with the community to update the plan with a "reality check" about what older adults were experiencing every day. Boulder County authorized a survey, Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA), to provide statistically-valid data based on a random sample of the County's population of adults over the age of 60.

To enrich and provide depth to that survey and other concurrent research, qualitative research was designed to meet the following objectives:

- To gain first-hand understanding of the day-to-day experiences of older adults in Boulder County;
- To identify any significant unmet needs for that population;
- To identify any barriers that exist preventing ease of access to services that older adults expect and need; and
- To identify priorities held by older adults for aging well.

In order to ensure that the Plan continues to address current needs and conditions of the County's aging population, an update of the Strategic Plan was undertaken in the spring of 2014. Pleased with the quality and thoroughness achieved through combining qualitative and quantitative research data in 2010, the Age Well Boulder County Leadership Team is using the same research and public engagement approaches to inform the current update, conducting the CASOA survey, Community Conversations, and Quadrant Work Group meetings.

Methodology

In assessing the effectiveness and adequacy of human services, there's nothing more powerful than talking and listening to those who are being served. As in 2010, Boulder County agencies serving the needs of the County's aging population once again convened hundreds of the people they serve in order to listen, to learn, and to respond with an updated 2014 Plan. Small group discussions called Community Conversations were convened as a way to reach older adults throughout the County. Between May 19 and July 20, 2014, a total of 18 sessions were held, 7 in distinct geographic areas and 5 with targeted groups of constituencies.

The discussion with participants in each group was carried out through a structured but comfortable and informal conversation. Participants were invited through agency managers serving as the Leadership Team overseeing the implementation of the Strategic Plan, and, as in 2010, efforts were made to reach beyond the "usual suspects" readily familiar with agency services and programs. As a result of low participation levels in some groups in 2010, an effort was made to "go to where the people are," tapping into existing groups as much as possible. Additionally, family caregivers were convened at a large event called the Caregiving Symposium. Local senior advisory boards and councils were helpful in recruiting attendees, as were managers of senior housing sites. Flyers were posted in community locations and individuals were also personally invited by service providers to participate.

Each Community Conversation group was moderated by a facilitator with assistance from a note-taking recorder, following a training session provided by Boulder County Area Agency on Aging staff. In addition to the small group discussion notes, each participant was asked to complete a written response form, allowing them to add to the session record with a greater degree of anonymity. The majority of questions asked in discussion were repeated on the response form. However, there were a few questions asked in discussion which were not asked on response form and vice versa. In addition, not every discussion question was asked in every group. When a question was duplicated in discussion and on the form, responses were compared to check for consistency of response. It's important to note that the results to the discussion questions reflect the comments from 249 participants, while the results from the response forms reflect the 143 response forms that were submitted.

Geographically-based Conversations were held in Allenspark, Boulder, Erie, Lafayette, Longmont, Louisville, and Nederland. Targeted constituency Conversations were held with groups of Latinos, family caregivers, lower income folks, residents of senior housing, and with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults (LGBT). The significant number of people participating in these Conversations provided a valuable level of detail about aging adults in Boulder County. The complete record of discussion comments and response forms from all Community Conversation groups can be found in the Appendices accompanying this report.

About This Report

This report includes analysis of the responses from the Community Conversations from both a broad perspective and a more detailed view. The Overall Findings section summarizes responses from the questions dealing with the factors which influence the ability to age well. The Findings by Plan Quadrant section provides greater depth to issues and responses and organizes them by goals within each quadrant. The last section summarizes responses from targeted populations and geographic areas. The Appendix contains both verbatim group discussion comments and individual written form responses from the Community Conversations.

Since in large part the discussion guide and the response form asked the same questions, the discussion responses and the response form responses have not been combined for an aggregate in this report and are referred to separately. The concern is that some responses would be given double weight. There were 269 total participants, 143 of whom completed written response forms and 126 who did not. To illustrate the double-weighting concern, imagine for example that participant A in a discussion group talked about his belief that RTD provides an excellent level of service and also wrote the same response on his form. Participant B, a member of the same discussion group, said in discussion that he/she believes that RTD service is quite poor but did not complete a written form. If the results of both the discussion notes and the written forms were combined for an aggregate result, that result would weight in favor of an excellent rating for RTD by a 2 to 1 margin, whereas in reality the results should actually be 1 to 1, excellent to poor.

A Note About Reliability

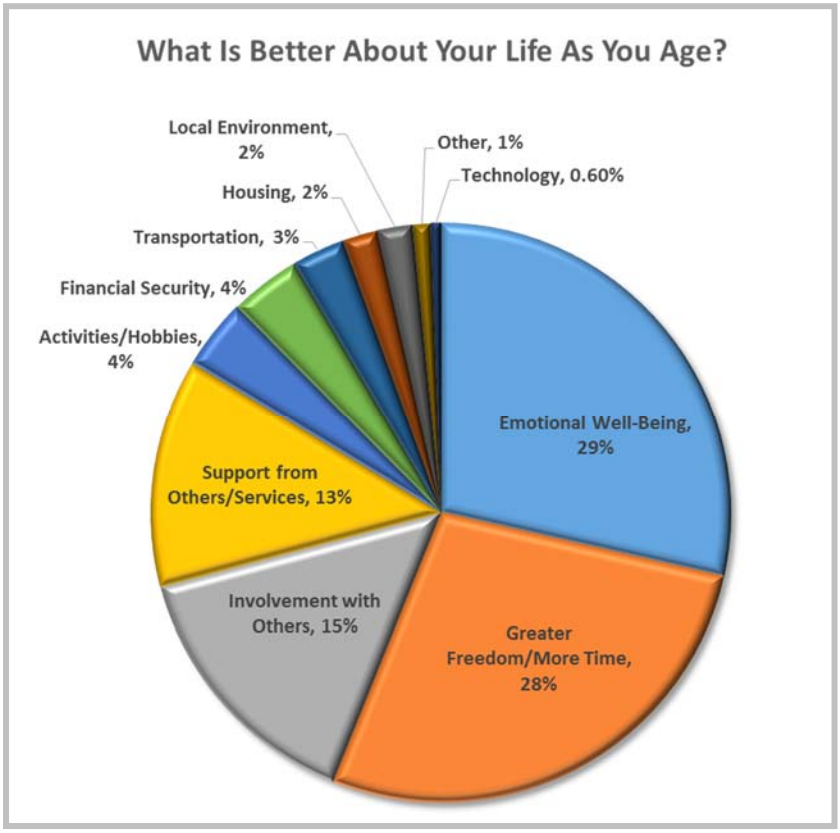
It's important to understand that the qualitative research represented through the Community Conversation results does not represent the responses of a statistically valid random sample of Boulder County's population of older adults. Nevertheless, the findings can be said to be a valid representation of those older adults who engaged in the discussions and whose interests, stories, and lives are reflected in the results. These discussions produce findings about attitudes and beliefs that are reliable and may be assumed to be held by a broader population.

Overall Findings

What Influences Aging Well?

A clear priority for respondents when it comes to the ability to age well is freedom. That sense of freedom applies to participants' stated ability to "be who you are" and the freedom to "spend your time and attention as you see fit."

The most frequently mentioned response to the question about influences on aging well focused on emotional well-being, reflecting 29% of the responses. Those responses spoke of no longer needing to try to impress others, the feeling that you no longer have anything to prove, and of the joys of accepting yourself and having wisdom and experience gained through a long life. As one respondent said, "I'm more comfortable and confident with myself." Closely following were responses focused on having greater freedom and more time. People spoke of more free time to spend as they wish, less structure and fewer responsibilities.



> ***"When you're young you have energy and enthusiasm. When you're old you have experience and judgment."***

Over one-quarter of the responses (28%) focused on others, with 15% stressing involvement with others and 13% talking about having the support of others, whether from family and friends or from agencies. Respondents spoke of the importance of their personal relationships with family and friends. They also cited getting involved with and helping others through volunteering their time and skills to help others or getting engaged with community groups.

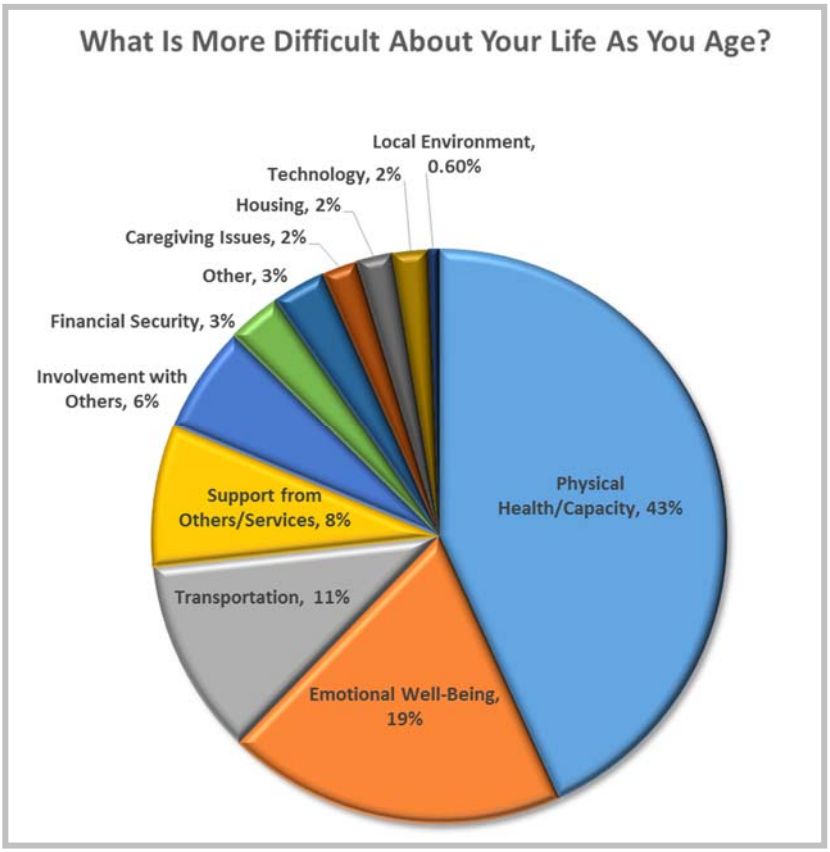
When it comes to aging well, Latino participants cited support from others and services proportionally more often than participants in other groups. One Latino participant said, "As a senior you need to receive help from some community programs in order to survive." Another Latino participant concurred, "There are resources available such as meals, community agencies for help, and the senior center for activities."

Other aspects of life that participants said impact their ability to age well include keeping busy through activities and hobbies, financial security and transportation. Comments related to transportation focused primarily on the ability to drive and to drive when you want to, not when you have to. As two respondents said, “You don’t have to drive on stormy days,” and “You don’t have to commute to work.”

The only respondents who consistently mentioned physical health and capacity as being better as they aged were participants in one Latino group who expressed appreciation for improved health care and medicine. That same group mentioned community assistance and Medicare when referring to receiving support from others.

What Makes Aging More Difficult?

By a large measure, participants in the Community Conversations reported the physical aspects of aging as the most difficult, with a response of 43%. It’s apparent from the comments that most troubling for respondents is the loss of physical ability and capacity, rather than disease or sickness. Almost three-fourths of the comments about health dealt with items such as reduced mobility and energy along with difficulties with balance and stamina. As one person simply stated, “The body just doesn’t work like it used to.” About one-quarter of the responses related to personal health and capacity were from mountain community residents who reported physical capacity issues similar to others, in additional to experiencing chronic effects of altitude.



The emotional impacts from aging generated the second-most number of mentions with 19%. Most of the comments related to adjusting to the changes aging inevitably brings, such as the loss of loved ones, the need to “re-define” oneself after a career is over, acceptance of physical decline, loneliness and isolation.

Difficulties with transportation made up 11% of the responses. Most of the focus was on driving, either because of no longer being able to drive or concerns about the amount of traffic on the streets. About one-third of the comments related to transportation came from mountain community respondents who talked about “driving in the canyon,” the difficulty during the floods last

year to get to medical services, and the dearth of Via transportation services in the mountains. A small number of participants also cited pedestrian safety as a transportation difficulty.

Nine percent of the responses focused on the difficulties related to getting support from others. A number of the comments referred to 'navigating,' whether "Navigating the health care system," "More complicated to navigate services," or "Navigating mental decline" and "Navigating physical decline." Some Latino participants cited difficulties with the language barrier in receiving and applying for assistance.

"Lots of forms at various agencies are in English, like for BHP's Section 8 program. It has been difficult to navigate the forms because I don't speak English."

There is a significant finding related to financial security as a difficult aspect of aging when comparing the Community Conversation findings in 2014 and 2010. In 2014, just a few of the comments regarding difficulties were related to financial security (3%). In 2010, 16% of the responses to the question "What is your biggest struggle?" focused on financial security. The reason for this dramatic change is most likely that economic conditions in the country have improved considerably in the past four years, making one's personal financial security seem, if not better, at least more predictable.

What Helps People Age Well?

In considering the influences on aging well, the focus of 40% of participants' comments was on others. Support from others and services made up 22% of the comments, while involvement with others reflected 18% of the comments.

Many spoke about the services and facilities they enjoy now, such as Meals on Wheels, services that are bilingual, adult day care, the Library, and Senior Centers. Others talked about services or support they don't currently have, but which they believe would help them age well, including a clearinghouse to match up volunteers with needs and in-home services such as snow removal, yard work and immediate health care services in Allenspark. A smaller number of the comments were about the very valued help respondents get from their friends and family, whether it's the phone chain among community members in Allenspark checking on each other or the value of having bi-lingual neighbors and family nearby for Latino residents.

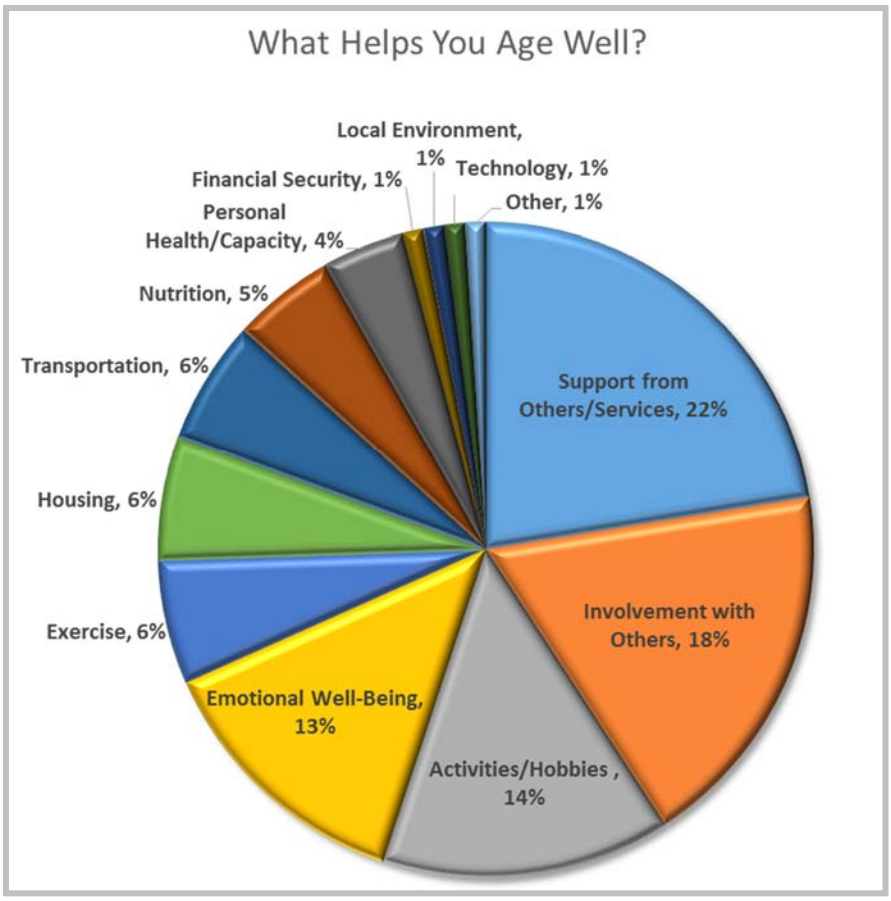
"Boulder has outstanding community services. Outstanding medical treatment helps one age better."

In commenting about involvement with others, people spoke about the importance of personal connections with family and friends as well as the need for social networks. Some stressed the importance of involvement with people of all ages. Others emphasized the value of staying involved, with one respondent explaining, "Socialization and maintaining activities of daily living are important." Others focused on the benefits to volunteering and giving back to the community, or as one respondent termed it, "Finding opportunities to leave a legacy."

Comments related to having hobbies and participating in activities made up 14% of the responses to this question, with some citing the simple enjoyment of staying active. Others believe they benefit from staying active: "It gets you out of the house" and "It stimulates your mind."

Respondents also recognized the value of emotional health and well-being, with 13% of the responses related to keeping a positive attitude and feeling valued and accepted, both by yourself and by others. Factors related to physical well-being were also cited in 11% of the comments, with 6% focused on the value of exercise and 5% on the benefits that come with good nutrition.

Comments about transportation made up 6% of the responses. Some of those comments spoke of the need for more transportation services, whether it's more bus routes, Via service in Allenspark, or the need for in-town bus service and bus shelters in Louisville. Other comments focused on the affordability of transportation services and the importance of safe, reliable transportation.



In two of the Community Conversation groups — the Nederland group and the group of family caregivers — facilitators asked about barriers to aging well. Nederland participants talked about the lack of access to health care, the fact that there are few or no in-home service providers, no hospice services and a lack of long-term care options. In the family caregiver group, people spoke of financial challenges and the lack of reliable help with financial planning as well as the need for caregiver respite services.

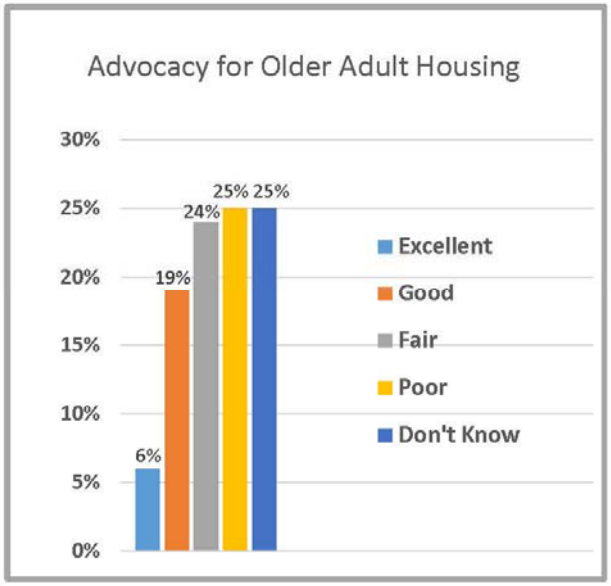
When asked what the community could do to support their ability to age well, participants most often talked about improved transportation, including more options, more accommodating schedules and greater affordability. Affordability was also a concern related to health care, as was the need for reliable/trustworthy home care professionals, and the need for mobile medical services in Nederland.

Latino respondents said providing more information about available services and where to find services without a language barrier would be helpful. Also, Latino participants in particular expressed the need for caregiving support, citing a high level of burnout among caregivers who are simultaneously caring for their children and their parents.

Findings: Basic Needs Quadrant

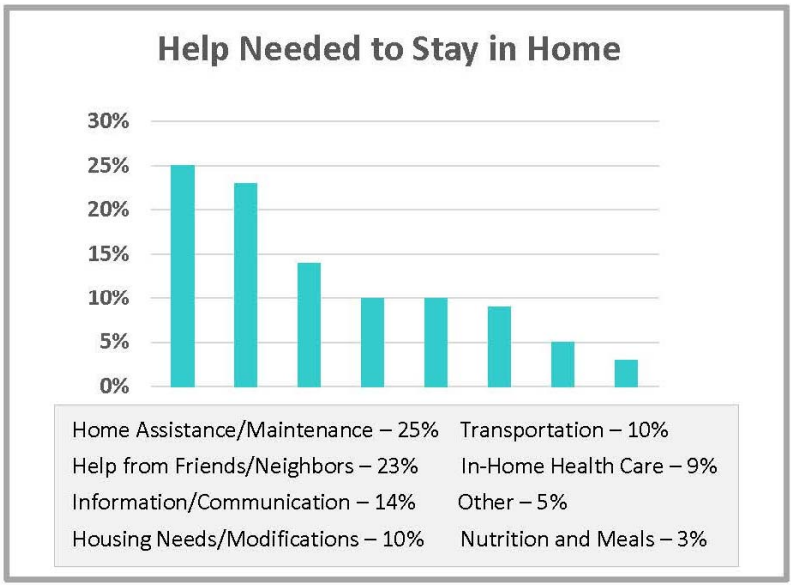
Goal 1: Housing is affordable, appropriate, and accessible

Housing influences one's ability to age well. People stressed the need for aging-in-place appropriate housing that is affordable and safe and that does not come with language barriers. Some called for more senior housing. Participants' rating of the effectiveness of advocacy for housing for people 60+ in Boulder County shows that only one-quarter of participants gave it an excellent or good rating.



Participants expressed the need for two levels of assistance with housing: systemic community support through the provision of a variety of housing options for the County's aging population and personal assistance with specific housing needs.

Conversation participants were asked to identify what people need in the way of support in order to stay in their homes. The results were clear and consistent: they need assistance with routine tasks like yard work, snow removal, house-cleaning, and house maintenance. They also need help making home safety modifications, such as installing grab bars, alarms, walk-in bathtubs and finding solutions to climbing stairs.



In addition, participants said they need people to check in on them to simply visit and to provide personal assistance. They also need to be able to communicate easily by telephone and they need information about available resources. Finally, they need access to in-home personal care and nursing care, particularly in Boulder County's mountain communities.

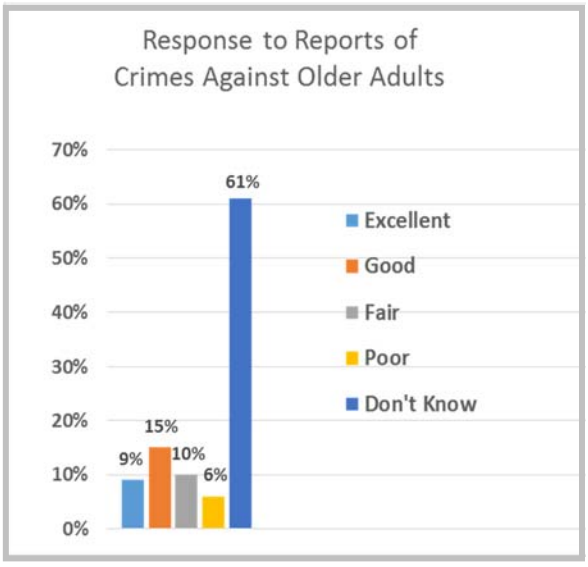
When asked about successful ideas in other places, among the housing ideas mentioned were the Greenhouse Project in Loveland, converting big box stores into housing, inter-generational housing, the Tiny Home movement and the Affinity housing complex in Lafayette.

Goal 2: Personal, financial, and environmental safety is a community priority

In order to gauge how effectively this goal is being met for the aging population in Boulder County, each of the Community Conversation groups was asked, "What makes you feel safe?" Responses generally fell into two categories: feeling unsafe because of perceived threat or need for help from others, such as an intruder in the home or police access and responsiveness, versus feeling unsafe because of one's own actions, such as falling in the bathtub or forgetting to turn off a burner on the stove.

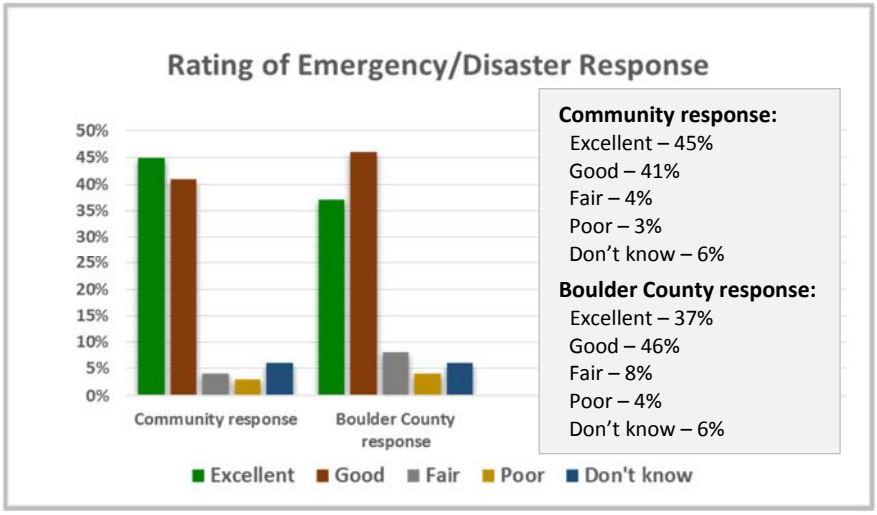
A number of participants talked about their strong belief that they live in safe communities. Others spoke about resources as an influence on their feelings of safety, both from a community perspective and a personal perspective. In considering community resources, many indicated they hold public safety and first responders in high regard and believe they receive quality public safety services. Personal factors cited which influence feelings of safety included ability to have access to communication tools such as cell phones, having people nearby who can help if needed, and their own financial resources, or the lack of them.

Also influencing feelings of safety is the reinforcement of "others who speak my language," knowing one's neighbors and feeling a sense of community. Personal habits and security-related conditions, such as closing garage doors before exiting the car, having a pet, owning a gun, adequate lighting, and living in a secure building were all mentioned as factors which reinforce feelings of safety.



Participants were asked to rate the responsiveness to crimes against older adults. With only 24% of the ratings of excellent or good, and a "don't know" response of 61%, it's apparent that there is not a high level of awareness about that issue.

They were also asked to rate their community's and Boulder County's level of responsiveness during emergencies and such natural disasters as floods and wildfires. With 86% of the participants rating their community's responsiveness as excellent or good and 83% rating Boulder County's excellent or good, there obviously exists a significant sense of safety in times of community emergency.



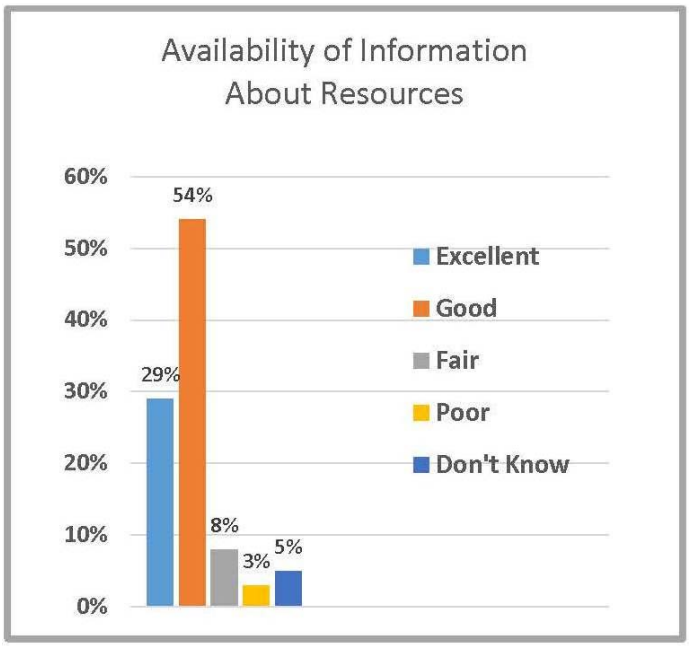
Goal 3: Everyone has enough to eat

"One has to really eat well, which will help maintain health and address medical conditions like arthritis. You have to love yourself to the max when you get older."

There were no comments reflecting concerns with having enough to eat. References to food focused on accessing the meals programs which exist and on nutrition. Participants recognized good nutrition as something that helped them age well, rather than as an unmet need in Boulder County.

Goal 4: Access to essential services is seamless, barrier-free, affordable, and welcoming

Participants in the Conversations obviously appreciate the wide array of services available to them in Boulder County and consider access to them part of aging well. Latino participants in particular commented about access to medicine being better here than in Mexico, feeling a sense of health security as a result of governmental support for chemo treatments, having health care costs covered by Medicare, access to nutrition classes. A number of people offered up positive comments about enjoying access to a wide range of recreation, library, and senior center facilities as well as services. One need consistently mentioned by participants from mountain communities is access to in-home services and to Via transit.



Interestingly, when asked to rate the availability of information about resources for older adults in Boulder County, 83% rated it excellent or good. In the discussion responses, the only difficulty consistently mentioned regarding access to services was the need for more information about how to find assistance and how to "navigate" the system.

Goal 5: Individuals have the financial resources to meet their basic needs

As mentioned previously in this report, those participating in the Community Conversations appear to feel much more secure about their financial situations than they did in 2010 when the Plan was last updated. Relatively few comments were received regarding financial security; some participants talked about feeling secure financially, while a few spoke of living paycheck-to-paycheck, the desire for senior pricing and the need to find financial assistance. Perhaps because respondents are feeling an increased sense of financial security, they are able to focus on their own emotional well-being, as reflected in the responses to the question, "What's better about life as you age?"

Findings: Individual and Community Involvement Quadrant

Goal 6: Everyone in the community feels connected to others

Goal 7: People of all ages participate in social, civic, cultural, educational and recreational activities

Goal 8: Opportunities exist for meaningful volunteer work

These goals, taken together, convey the idea that aging well requires connection to others. Acknowledging that Boulder County residents who agreed to participate in these Community Conversations are already connected in some way to other individuals or agencies, there nevertheless is a consistent theme about the importance of connection.

"Coffee Clutch at the East Senior Center is great.I talk with people about the exicitng things that they do, which I wouldn't have heard about otherwise."

Participants explained that once working life is over, there is more time for involvement with others, whether to contribute as volunteers, to socialize, or just to be neighborly. While many participants said they loved increased opportunities to be involved with others, a few pointed out that "younger people don't understand us," and that "old people don't want to be around just old people." Intergenerational experiences, they believe, enrich everyone. Many of the discussions included suggestions for having fun. Day trips, shared lunches, community games in the parks were mentioned as experiences that could provide opportunities for social fun. In sum, friendship and involvement with other people of all ages are seen as vital keys to aging well.

Goal 7: People of all ages participate in social, civic, cultural, educational and recreational activities

Activities, hobbies, and recreation are important components of improved life as we age. Participants in these Conversations talked about volunteering for various interests as much as they talked about pursuing hobbies. Some people mentioned specific activities, such as bridge, puzzles or gardening, while others described the importance of maintaining multiple interests and staying generally active in the community. Community events such as Street Faire, summer concerts, and the spaces designed for people were mentioned as important venues for active experiences. The message about the benefits of staying active has been clearly received by people who participated in these Conversations.

"We play cards everyday at Lydia Morgan and laugh at ourselves."

Findings: Health and Wellness Quadrant

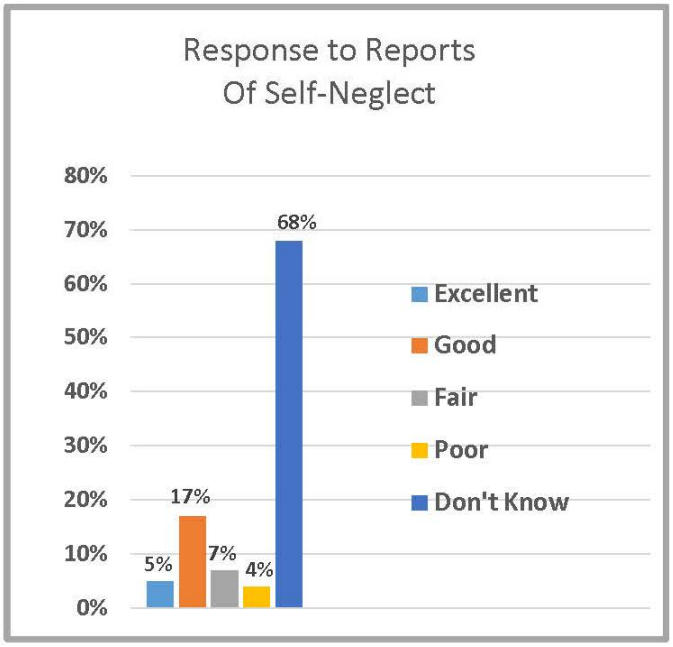
Goal 10: Wellness is a personal priority

Goal 11: Wellness is a community priority

Emotional wellness emerged as a clear personal priority for aging well in Boulder County, generating nearly one-third of the responses to the question "What's better about your life as you age?" The second most-mentioned category of responses (28%) to that question focused on having greater freedom and more time as elements of aging well.

"I play pool. I used to think that that wasn't an important activity, that I wasn't doing something meaningful in my old age. I think deciding that something's important is all we need in order to say it's important."

Respondents enjoyed sharing perspectives about the value of having less to worry about, more life experience, more confidence, and less stress as characteristics of aging well. Others focused on having more time and more freedom to do what they want to do with it.



From a personal wellness perspective, physical health was also mentioned in the context of exercise and good nutrition having an impact on aging well and being a personal priority for some.

Related to wellness as a community priority, Conversation participants were asked to rate the response to reports of self-neglect. As the accompanying chart indicates, only 22% rated it excellent or good, and 68% assigned it an "don't know" rating. While there may be adequate community response to instances of self-neglect, those participating clearly do not feel informed about that response.

Goal 12: Health and wellness services are affordable, accessible, and readily available

Support from others, including community services, was one of the categories reflecting the most responses from participants to the questions dealing with the influences on aging well and on the difficulties of aging well. Respondents appreciate the community's offering of services and facilities that help keep them healthy and well, such as Meals on Wheels, the Alzheimer's Association's help line, access to swimming pools, and nutrition classes. Unmet needs that were mentioned include help with interpreting the mental health of care recipients, navigating the health care system, hospice care, and in-home services such as visiting nurses, caregivers, at-home physical and occupational therapy, foot care, dialysis and Consumer-Directed Attendant Services.

"The body just doesn't work like it used to!"

It's important to note that while physical health and capacity was by far (43%) the most frequently mentioned difficulty when it comes to aging well, the focus of participants' comments was less on the need for services to help with illness and disease and more on the loss of personal capacity, as reviewed on page 6 of this report.

Goal 13: Wellness includes end-of-life and dying as a natural part of life

Participants in the caregiving group expressed the desire to have assistance with end-of-life conversations, indicating some level of awareness that such services exist and that they could be more readily available in Boulder County.

Goal 14: A welcoming environment fosters physical activity and participation

It's important to recognize that many of the participants were recruited to participate in the Community Conversations as a result of their using a service or facility. It's reasonable to expect that they would be more aware of and comfortable with the services and facilities Boulder County agencies provide and the staff members providing those services. That said, the comments received from some of the Conversation participants indicate they feel welcomed by and connected to the staffs of service providers and seem right at home at recreation and other area facilities. There also seemed to be a general consensus among participants that the array of services offered to the aging population in Boulder County is more extensive than in other communities. A determining factor for how welcome Latino residents feels is whether their language needs are met.

"The City and County listen to people; as a resident, who could want more?"

The challenge in achieving Goal 14 will be to continue to "widen the circle" so that a continually increasing number of residents in Boulder County are aware of and feel welcome to take advantage of the facilities and services available to them.

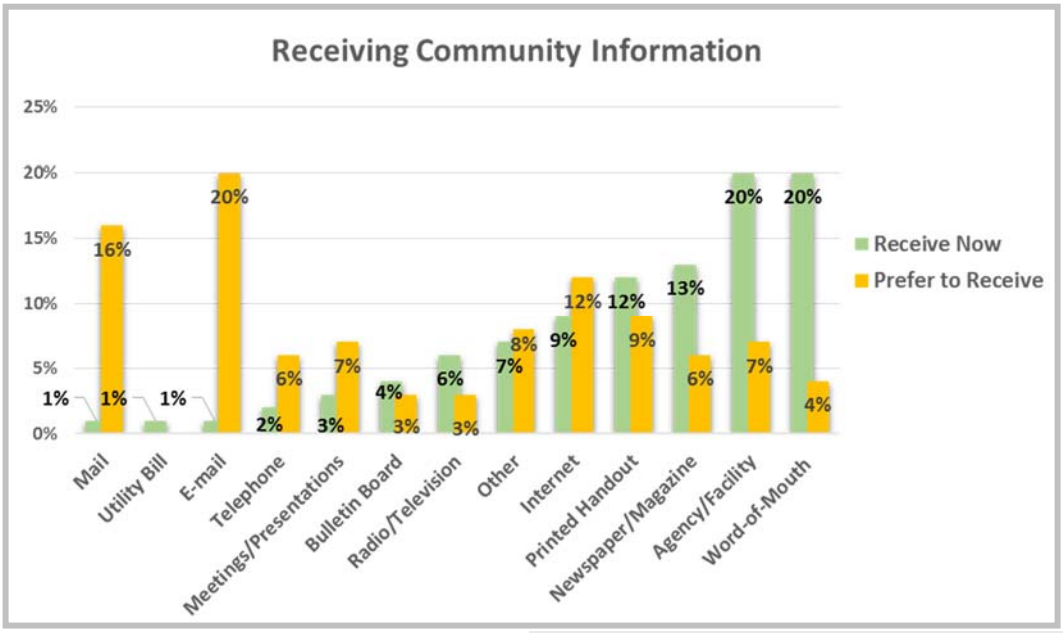
Findings: Independence and Caregiving Quadrant

Goal 15: People are informed and motivated to rely on each other and existing systems

An underlying assumption in this goal is that older adults in Boulder County will have the information they need or will know where to find it as they reach out for assistance from people they know and from service systems they trust. That people will trust the information sources available to them is essential to the achievement of this goal.

In discussing information, communication and technology, people in these Community Conversations offered perspectives on two discrete levels of information and communication. The first level is the community itself which provides people community-wide information. Those sources include traditional means such as print media, brochures, and newsletters as well as increasing use of the Internet and technology to explore resources and services. Some said they felt this community resource needed to be stronger and more coordinated. "I need more information, outreach, better communication of new resources available," said one person. A clearinghouse of reliable service providers was also suggested. In addition, the cell phone network is another community-wide avenue that people rely on for contact, often mentioned as an element of feeling safe.

There is an interesting finding regarding how people receive community information currently and how they would prefer to receive information. The question about how people receive information was part of the group discussion and a question regarding how they would prefer to receive it was on the response form. Comparing responses to both, there is a great difference in how people report currently receiving information and how they prefer to receive it. For example, only 1% of the respondents said they currently receive information through e-mail, while 20% said they would prefer to receive it that way. Likewise, 20% reported currently receiving information through word-of-mouth, with only 4% indicating they prefer to receive it that way. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned from these findings.



The second level of information is personal. People reported the benefit of "trusted referrals from friends," and one's "personal network" in finding reliable information about services and resources that are available to them. Word-of-mouth was reported as a useful channel for information, with the Post Office cited as a site for information exchange in Nederland. In the mountain community of Allenspark, once again word-of-mouth was mentioned as an important way to get information about programs and services as people are present at existing venues.

Of course, there are also barriers to the effective delivery of information. In the Latino community, the language barrier is clearly the factor that determines whether someone will find information and join a program or enroll in a service. Latinos report that they rely heavily on their personal connections with family members and their churches to provide information about resources.

Technology, while useful to many as an effective tool to secure information, is also a barrier to those for whom use of a computer and the Internet is a foreign experience. Many who are unfamiliar with technology rely on younger relatives, friends or agency staff to help them. Others requested classes offered through community centers so they can learn. "Trying to figure out new-fangled gadgets that 7-year-olds can operate" is one of the things making life more difficult, one participant said.

Goal 16: A comprehensive, coordinated continuum of services supports older adults through all stages of their lives, including end-of-life

People who participated in these Community Conversations repeatedly referred to their appreciation for the level and quality of services available to them in Boulder County. They cited many specific programs such as Meals on Wheels, the Alzheimer's Association help line, offerings through Senior Centers, and Allensparks Lunch Bunch. Latino groups talked about the availability and quality of health care services as well as the Tomando Control de Su Salud class assisting with improved nutrition. "Help from the community" was highlighted in one Latino group as helping them to age well.

"As a senior you need to receive from some community programs in order to survive."

Mention was also made in these discussions of difficulties in working one's way through service systems. 'Navigating' was a word used frequently as people described the challenges encountered. For Latinos, the ever-present language barrier creates difficulties in understanding and making use of any continuum of services. For others, actually finding assistance proves difficult. Mountain communities in particular were described as lacking programs and services, particularly in Allenspark, where lack of any in-home service was mentioned.

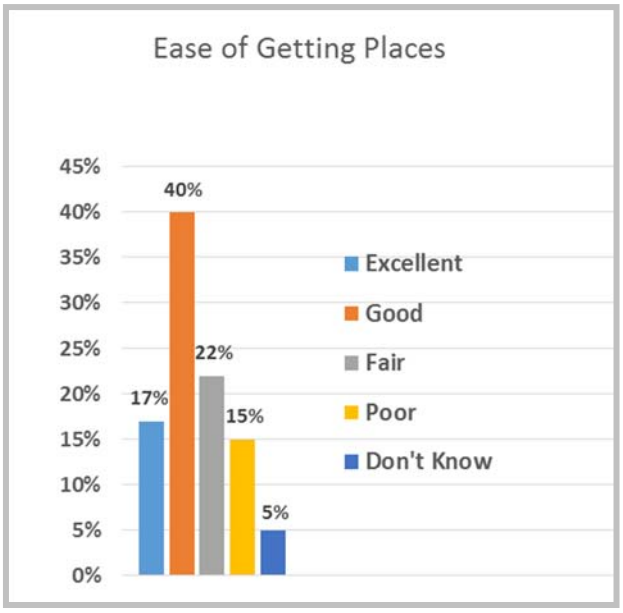
One topic of discussion centered on ideas people knew about from other communities successfully helping residents to age well. Participants were surprisingly familiar with the Village Model, allowing people to remain in their own homes by supporting them with readily available resources. Similar programs, such as "Staying Put" in New Canaan, Connecticut, and Hover at Home in Longmont, were described as worth exploring. The Village Model in particular was mentioned in several groups, along with Barry Barkan, a Chicago-based gerontologist. It's clear that as people age, they are increasingly aware of supports they would like to have to enable them to age well.

Goal 17: Transportation is affordable, accessible, flexible, reliable, safe, and easy to arrange

Transportation came up in almost every discussion group, indicating a topic of clear importance to aging well. It is a linchpin issue that determines how successful participating in and taking advantage of other programs can be.

Concerns about transportation included availability, access and cost of public transportation. In response to the discussion question, "What is the #1 thing your community could do to support you in aging well?" transportation was the issue generating the greatest number of mentions. One respondent summed up the relationship of transportation to aging well: "Keeping us mobile and active in the community through appropriate and available transportation, public or private [is important]. Society is based on mobility. We need it to access needed services. Government needs to address this. The challenge is that there are various schedules and needs to accommodate."

Comments about the quality and availability of transportation were varied, with some appreciative of transportation services available: "Via—great take and pick up," and "Via and RTD are great." Others spoke of the critical importance to their lives of transportation services: "[You need] access to transportation to get your needs met" or "Giving up driving at the appropriate time and having transportation services to rely on." Specific concerns were also expressed about unmet transportation needs in the mountain communities and in Erie.



Transportation again arose as a prominent issue as people discussed what support was needed so they could stay in their homes. Some cited transportation to health care and medical services as a particular concern.

There was an interesting variation on the topic of transportation-related responses. The discussion comments generally reflected a desire and/or need for more and better transportation options, with better in-town transportation, more options, and better affordability. However, on the response form completed by a little under two-thirds of the participants, a question was posed which asked respondents to rate "the ease of getting places you usually have to visit." The results generally indicate a relatively high level of satisfaction, with 57% of the respondents rating it excellent or good.

When asked about successful ideas from other communities that they would like to see in Boulder County, people had transportation-related suggestions to offer up, including electric bicycles, more bus/shuttle trips directly from senior housing, and the separation of cars, pedestrians, and bicycles on distinct corridors or paths.

Expense of the current system and the need for an affordable system were cited as important factors related to transportation. A response form question asked, "What do you think is a reasonable price to pay for transportation within and around your community?" As the chart illustrates, there is no clear consensus around an acceptable price. A combined total of 29% of the responses indicate support for a price anywhere from $.50 to $2.00. A combined total of 18% of the responses suggest the price should depend on a variable, such as distance or income. Other responses indicate serious concern about cost, with a combined total of 7% indicating any price is too much, transportation should be free to those over 65, or should be a donation system. And 20% of the respondents said they simply don't know.

In the mountain communities of Allenspark and Nederland, the transportation needs are a bit different and the responses to the price question reflect that, with 18% of the responses indicating the price should depend on distance. A combined total of 18% of the responses indicate support for a price anywhere from $.50 to $2.00.

Goal 18: Caregivers are informed, educated, acknowledged, and supported

There was high praise for the Caregiving Symposium held in Longmont in May, 2014. There seems to be acknowledgement of a high level of support both for those being cared for and for their caregivers in Boulder County. Caregivers expressed thanks for the support offered through the Symposium as well as from specific support groups and social support from friends. There are, however, issues that remain.

As always, there is a need for continuing respite, including overnight respite. The need for effective stress management is another constant. Critical informational updates about resources and their availability is an ongoing need. Transportation issues continue to affect caregivers' ability to provide needed support, particularly the lack of transportation options in outlying communities. And financial issues continue to be reported as ongoing concerns, especially the need for trustworthy information and planning, and assistance with long-term care expenses.

Some participants in discussions about caregiving mentioned the difficulties of caring for children and parents at the same time, referring to themselves as the "sandwich generation." More help for family caregivers in general was noted in many different responses. Latinos, in particular, described the cultural expectation that any caregiving needed will be done by family and the challenges that expectation creates. "Caregiver burnout is huge because you cannot admit that you have burnout to agencies," said one participant in a group of Latinos. Another explained, "It is not acceptable to <u>not</u> care for your family." There seems to be a need for the broader support community to understand that cultural context.

One issue of concern mentioned by caregivers centered on the lack of coordination among health care providers, particularly in medication management. As technology becomes increasingly important for caregivers, Epocrates, an online application, was specifically cited as helpful in finding information and coordinating care. Assistance with paperwork and the confusing forms required by some agencies was another need expressed.

Caregivers also talked about finding themselves at the center of assistance with difficult conversations about driving cessation, among family members about care decisions, and about end-of-life decisions. Also noted was their own need for after-death support and general mental health assistance. The rewards and difficulties of the caregiving role remain central to issues of aging – and dying – well.

Findings: Targeted Population, Geographic Areas and Issue

Latino Population

- Language is a significant and overriding issue that impacts almost every aspect of the aging Latino population, according to Latinos who participated in the Community Conversations. The ability to communicate with someone in their own language determines whether Latinos are aware of programs, their ability to register for them, and whether they are willing to participate in them. It affects their feeling safe in their own communities. Without bi-lingual communications, their ability to access such basic needs as transportation, health care, affordable housing, and caregiver information and assistance are compromised.
- Latino participants indicated they enjoy socializing and participating in community programs. They enjoy interaction with people of all ethnicities as well as social gatherings at the Senior Center with Latinos. Specific needs and desires for additional service offerings include: classes in Spanish on computer skills; more Senior Center programming opportunities in Spanish; evening programs for those who still work; a room for activities for Latinos at the Longmont Senior Center and someone to organize the activities. The reasons the Latino residents report for getting involved in programs and services is that they were personally invited, were able to go to a place where people speak their language, and they were offered programs targeted to Latinos, such as the Fiesta at the Senior Center and the Tomando Control de Su Salud class.
- Latinos report that health care services are better, health care costs are less, and access to medicine are all better in Boulder County than they were in Mexico.
- Feelings of safety are reinforced by finding people who speak Spanish, having financial resources, access to transportation and other community services, by where they live and knowing their neighbors.
- There are strong cultural influences that impact Latinos' ability to age well. Their ability to stay in their homes primarily comes from the support they receive from family. Additionally, there is a strong expectation by Latino parents that caregiving will be provided by one's children. As one Latino caregiver for her parents explained, "It's not culturally acceptable to use adult day care or to admit you cannot care for your parent. It is good when doctors tell us we have to get some help because it's hard to talk about."

Mountain Communities: Allenspark and Nederland

- Mountain community residents made up almost one-quarter of participants in the Community Conversations.
- The aspects of living in Nederland and Allenspark that are most treasured by residents are clearly reflected in notes from their discussions and in their written responses. They value the physical environment – clean air, the beauty, their proximity to nature, and the "different atmosphere" of the mountains. They also cite the close-knit nature of their communities, particularly the collegiality, the level of voluntarism, and that there are "more friends in a mountain community." In short, the character of their mountain communities is a strong source of identity for these residents.
- There is a strong desire among mountain residents for involvement, volunteering and learning, and there was enthusiastic response to a suggestion for pickleball.
- Life in mountain communities, however, is also reported as difficult, particularly in incidents such as flooding or in winter, when there can be a strong sense of isolation and when access is more difficult. This remoteness means that transportation and access to programs and services continue to be issues of major concern, and are of increasing importance as one ages.
- Housing is an emerging issue. People talked about the need both for housing designed and constructed specifically for an older adult population and for better ability to access home maintenance and modification services. "[We] need to have foresight regarding housing needs as people age; we need affordability and year-round access to services."
- There is no comprehensive continuum of care in the mountain communities. Participants in Nederland were asked about barriers to aging well in their community. They specifically cited limited access to health care, including a lack of hospice services, saying that only short-term funding for in-home health care services had been available through grants and those services are now absent. Residents in Nederland asked for Physicians Assistants, a primary care clinic, and mobile medical services to reach those who are remote and isolated.
- A major "take-away" from these Conversations concerns attitude and expectations. The fundamental message underlying many of the responses from residents of mountain communities is that, while it may be difficult, it is time for service providers to understand that services should be provided within those communities rather than expecting mountain residents to routinely travel to the Front Range for essential services.

Transportation Issue

- Transportation is a key determinant in Boulder County's aging population's ability to age well. Without it come isolation and overwhelming challenges with accessing the basic needs of health care and housing, including the ability to stay in one's home. With it, the community becomes a much friendlier place, offering up not only the ability to have essential needs met but also access to a wide array of services and programs that make life easier and more enjoyable.
- Transportation is an issue that came up as a topic in almost every discussion group, sometimes generating the greatest number of comments. Participants consider adequate transportation central to aging well, whether they're still able to drive or whether they are dependent upon public or agency-provided transportation.
- Conversation participants who use transportation services seem generally pleased by the service they get, whether it's Via or RTD. Those with critical comments were not unhappy with the service itself, but with the lack of service in some locations such as Erie, Louisville, and the mountain communities.
- Affordability of service is another issue of keen interest when considering transportation. A number of people spoke of the need to keep transportation affordable for the aging population, many of whom have limited budgets. In searching for a definition of 'affordable, ' the response form asked, "What do you think is a reasonable price to pay for transportation within and around your community?" There was no strong direction provided through the responses: about one-third support a price somewhere between $.50 and $2.00; about one-quarter think the price should depend on distance or on income; about one-tenth indicate serious concerns about cost, saying any price is too much, or that it should be free or should work on a donation system. And about one-quarter say they simply don't know what a reasonable price would be. There is some difference in responses to this question from mountain communities, with 18% of the responses indicating the price should be dependent upon distance and 18% indicating support for a price anywhere from $.50 to $2.00.
- During the group discussions on transportation, comments emphasized the need for more and better transportation options, including better in-town transportation, better schedules and new or better bus service in outlying and mountain communities. However, those completing the response form question which asked them to rate "the ease of getting places you usually have to visit," indicated a relatively high level of satisfaction with the methods they use to get places, with 57% of the respondents rating it excellent or good. It could be that some discussion participants were referring to the general need for a community to offer a variety of transportation options, rather than a Boulder County-specific need. Or it could be that those who brought up transportation-related concerns in discussions did not complete the response form, or that many of those who did are drivers.
- Even for those who are still driving, transportation has its challenges as physical capacity diminishes and the traffic levels increase as the community grows. Drivers reported enjoying the freedom of being able to travel when they want to instead of when they have to, but also expressed concerns about dealing with slowed reflexes and intimidating traffic. Those who walk as a means of transportation are not without their own worries, with some expressing concern about pedestrian safety.

A Circle of Connections

Although the Age Well Boulder County Plan is effectively and efficiently organized into quadrants and attached goals, so many of the goals, needs, and services are interconnected and circular. For example, to access information about resources available, older adults and often their caregivers increasingly rely on technology. Some ask for classes so they can learn, particularly if they don't have younger people around to help them. Those classes require presence at a community facility, which means transportation has to be easily available and convenient. Any changes, no matter how minor, in one of those needs or services affects every other aspect of that scenario. That small example illustrates the idea that as adjustments are made to service delivery, thought needs to be given to consequences that might surround that systemic change before decisions are final.

Well beyond issues of specific service delivery, the efficacy of programs designed for older adults, the health and capacity worries they express, and the greater community's ability to meet their needs, lies the integral question of connections. Throughout the responses gathered in Community Conversations, there is a fundamental value expressed for connected relationships. Regardless of the topic of discussion or the question posed, the value of connections is implicit. People access programs and services because they see an opportunity for a supportive and helpful relationship. They say they age well in large measure because of the relationships and connections they have with others. Latinos report satisfaction with services with which they can connect through language. Incredibly strong connections are reported within mountain communities. Every aspect of aging well requires a connection and relationship of trust, and that perspective should be a central part of every action plan generated to achieve the goals within each quadrant of this Plan to Create Vibrant Communities.