**Allegheny County
Department *of*
Human Services**

Engaging Our Community in Multi-Sector Planning

The Master Plan for Older Adults

September 2024

Dr. Shannah Tharp-Gilliam, Director
Dr. Hannah E. Hardy, Assistant Director

**Area
Agency
on Aging**

Table of Contents

Contents

Background

In January of 2023, Pennsylvania's Governor Josh Shapiro assumed office and introduced the initiative of developing a Master Plan for Older Adults as part of his first budget address. Executive Order 2023-09, signed on May 25, 2023, by Governor Shapiro, formalized the project by directing the Secretary of Aging to lead the plan development, appointing the Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Council (LTCC) as a steering committee, and commissioning other state agencies to support this project.[1] Governor Shapiro set an ambitious deadline for *Aging Our Way, PA's* completion by February 1, 2024, ahead of his next budget address.

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) began the Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) effort immediately after the Executive Order was signed, using the guidelines set by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) and recommendations from The SCAN Foundation and AARP. An MPA, also known as a Master Plan for Aging, is a general term for a state-led planning process that convenes multiple departments and agencies designed to foster cross-sector collaboration and improve the infrastructure and coordination of services for older adult populations.[2]

In June of 2023, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Area Agency on Aging (AAA) welcomed the Secretary of PDA, Jason Kavulich, to Allegheny County to kick off the community engagement portion of the statewide Master Plan for Aging, Aging Our Way PA. From August to October 2023, the AAA sponsored 17 virtual and in-person listening sessions to gather input from individuals and groups engaged with or affected by older adult and disability-related services, programs, and infrastructures.

This report documents the results of the community engagement effort that was conducted by the AAA as part of the statewide MPA and analysis of the data gathered. In addition, this report documents how the information gathered was used to develop the priorities for the AAA as part

---

[1] https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/eo/Documents/2023-09.pdf
[2] https://www.chcs.org/resource/getting-started-with-a-master-plan-for-aging/

of the development of the agency's Four-Year Plan that is required by PDA and the Administration for Community Living (ACL), which is the federal agency that regulates the work of the AAA.

Key Findings

- The top three concerns of older adults in Allegheny County are housing, health services and community supports, and transportation. These are the same priorities of older adults across Pennsylvania that were documented in the statewide MPA.
- Ageism is a pervasive issue impacting older adults in a variety of ways. Ageism is a cross-cutting theme impacting older adults and should be a priority for the AAA to address.

Methodology

Community Engagement

Listening Sessions

From August to October 2023, the AAA sponsored 17 virtual and in-person listening sessions to gather input from individuals and groups engaged with or affected by older adult and disability-related services, programs, and infrastructures. AAA organized these sessions with local partners who served as hosts and conducted outreach in their community to attract attendees. Following is a list of the partners with which we worked to implement the listening sessions:

- Age Friendly Greater Pittsburgh
- Jewish Community Center
- Macedonia FACE
- Muslim Older Adults of Greater Pittsburgh – Islamic Center of Pittsburgh
- PERSAD Center
- Plum Senior Center
- Senior Companion Program
- Veterans Breakfast Club
- Vintage Senior Center
- Virtual Senior Academy

Allegheny Engage

Figure 1. Allegheny Engage Web Page
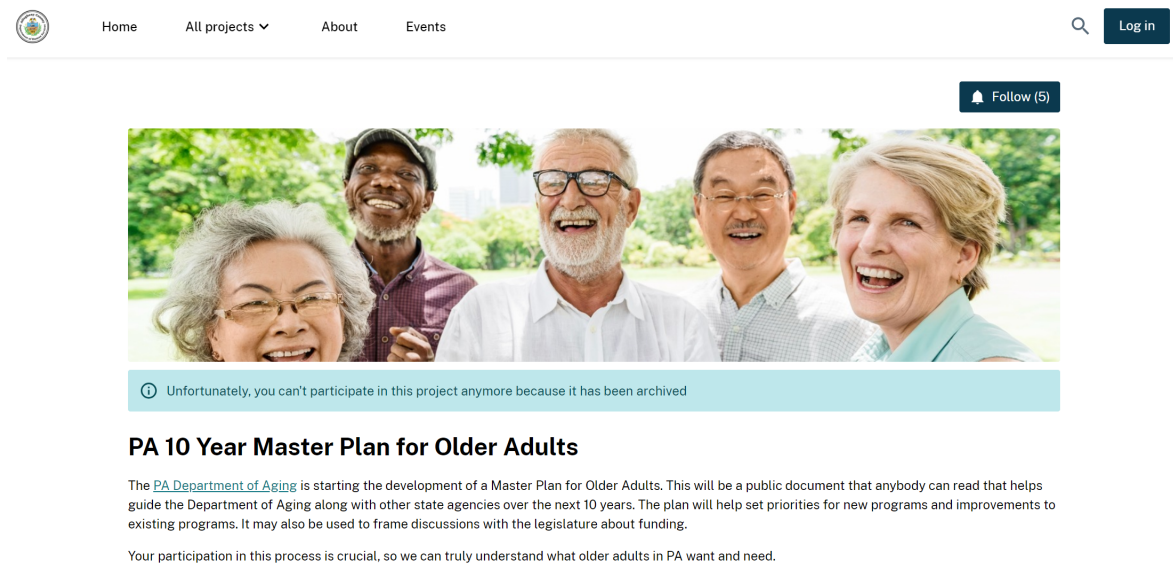
Allegheny Engage is an online platform used by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Equity and Engagement (OEE) to share resources, offer support, and gather feedback from the community. The platform serves two purposes: it is informative and gives residents a place to let their voices be heard. AAA used Allegheny Engage to share information about the MPA and to gather input from individuals who wanted to submit info electronically. Content on the web site included:

- An overview of the MPA,
- Information about the eight domains of livability as described below, and
- A video with PA Secretary for Aging, Jason Kavulich inviting people to participate.

To ensure as many residents as possible could access this information we included information translated into the three most spoken languages in Allegheny County on the page (English, Spanish and Nepali). After the informational content, a link directed residents to the listening session nearest them where they could make their voices heard and ways for individuals to submit information electronically or over the phone by calling the SeniorLine[3]. In addition, AAA printed 2,500 palm cards with information about the MPA linking people to the Allegheny

---

[3] https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Services/Seniors/SeniorLine

Engage page. These printed materials were put into home delivered meal boxes that were delivered to individual homes.

Figure 2. Master Plan Palm Cards

Figure 3. Summary of Engagement Activities

- Almost 600 comments for analysis
- 260 Listening Session Participants
- 17 Listening Sessions
- 10 Host Organization Partners
- Resources Provided by SeniorLine and ADRC
- Engage Allegheny Platform
- 2,500 Palm Cards Distributed (HDM)

Allegheny County's listening sessions adopted PDA's framework, which drew on the eight domains of Age Friendly communities created by the World Health Organization and adapted for the United States by AARP. The eight domains include (1) Health Services and Social Supports (2) Transportation (3) Housing (4) Communication and Information (5) Social Participation (6) Respect and Social Inclusion (7) Civic Participation and Employment, and (8) Outdoor Spaces and Buildings (See Figure 1).

Figure 4. Eight Domains of Livability, AARP
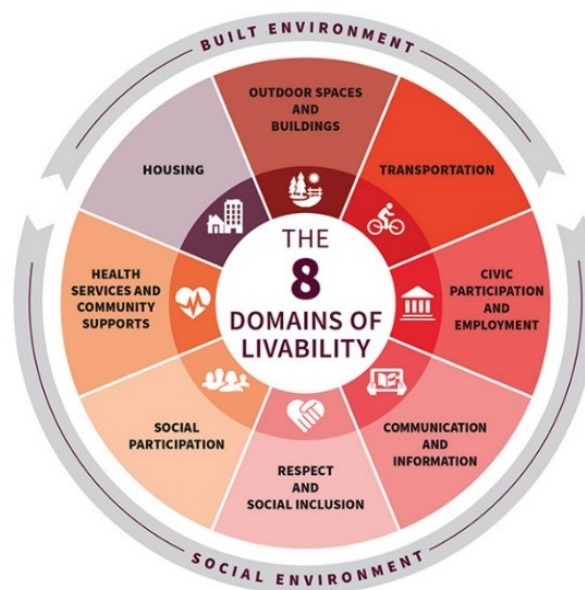
Each listening session was staffed by a trained presenter and a notetaker and guided by a structured protocol. A total of 260 participants attended the sessions in Allegheny County. In addition to the in-person sessions, AAA telephonically collected responses to the protocol through the SeniorLine.

DHS AAA compiled responses from in-person and telephonic sources and submitted them to PDA for inclusion in the statewide MPA. Residents were also able to submit comments directly to PDA by email. PDA shared any comments they received from Allegheny County residents with the DHS AAA. Similarly, across the Commonwealth, AAAs sent their notes from the

listening sessions to the PDA team to inform the 10-year Statewide plan, Aging Our Way, PA.
(Refer to the Appendix for a copy of the listening session interview and note-taking guide.)

Analysis

The DHS AAA's staff analyzed the information gathered from the Listening Sessions. The notes
were coded in Microsoft Word using the comment feature and then uploaded into Excel for
further analysis. AAA then used cluster analysis to identify cross-cutting themes and secondary
codes. The information was sorted and re-analyzed so that findings could be synthesized
according to geography and within the eight domains of age-friendly living (Figure 1).

Findings

Domains of Livability & Cross-Cutting Themes

The first step in the analysis process was to look at the data through the lens of the Eight Domains of Livability from the AARP (Figure 1). The top three domains by comment were 1. Housing (26%), 2. Health Services and Community Supports (19%), 2. Transportation (15%). Figure 2 shows all the responses.

Figure 5. Percent of Responses by Livability Domain from the Allegheny County
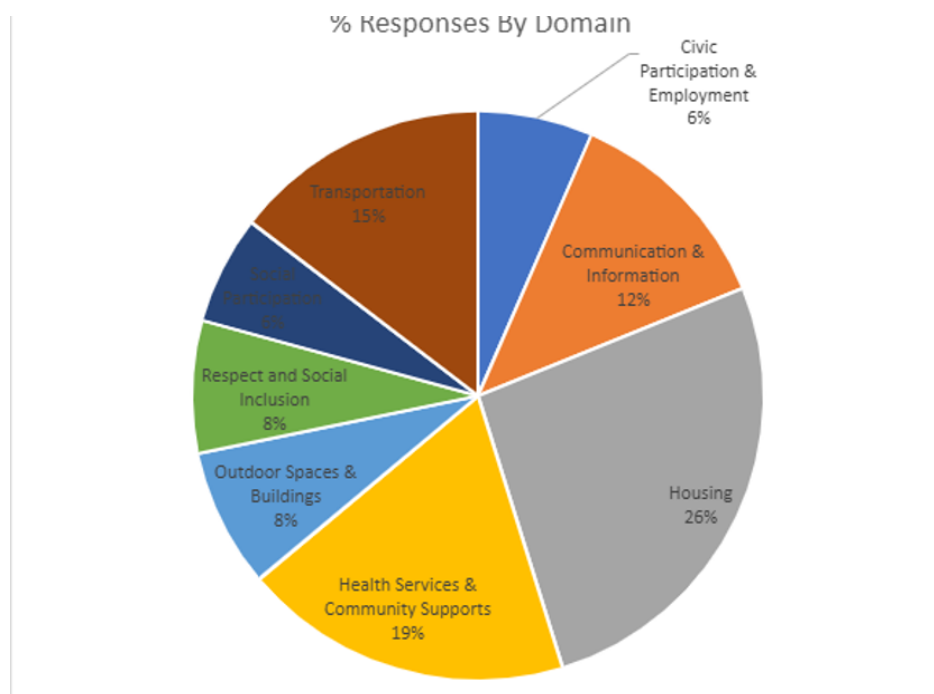
There were several cross-cutting themes that were found in almost every domain. These were identified during the data review process. The cross-cutting themes include:

- Access
- Affordability

- Climate (there were only a couple of comments; however, we wanted to document this)

- Discrimination

- Education

- Idea (highlighting a new idea offered by participants)

- Isolation

- Location (comments related to a specific place)

- Navigation

- Policy

- Quality

- Safety

- Staffing

Ageism surfaced as an important issue across the following domains: civic participation and employment, housing, respect and social inclusion, and transportation. Therefore, we elevated "ageism" as a cross-cutting theme undergirding our work in the next 4 years. These findings are consistent with the statewide data analyzed by PDA.

Our team based much of our approach on the "top 3" domains of interest that surfaced from the AAA's analyses (i.e., Housing, Health Services & Community Support, and Transportation; See Figure 2) and the Aging Our Way PA Plan and the associated sub-themes (i.e., increased access, affordability, and safety; support for navigating services; threats from discrimination; and a need for supportive policies).

Figure 6. Themes from Listening Sessions

"Top 3" Domains, Sub-themes, and Cross Cutting Themes from the Listening Sessions		
Housing	**Health Services & Community Support**	**Transportation**
1. Access	1. Navigation	1. Access
2. Affordability	2. Affordability	2. Safety
3. Navigation	3. Discrimination	3. Affordability
4. Safety		4. Policy

Ageism

As part of the analysis, the AAA looked more closely at the top three to four cross-cutting themes in the top three domains. Following are some quotes pulled from the data that provide more detail and information about the concerns that we heard during this process.

Domain 1: Housing

Sub-theme 1: Access

- Access: "Most housing is a 2-3 year wait, as older adults we often don't have that kind of time. In certain places, we must wait for someone to die."
- Accessibility: "Many units are VERY small. This is an issue for people who have equipment like wheelchairs and for people who must get rid of their things like furniture and personal items to get into apartments. This is an issue for people as they age."
- Affordability: "It is "terrible" to find housing that is affordable. People must "rob Peter to pay Paul.""
- Maintenance: "Housing: for those who do not have the capacity to keep up with the needs of our homes, we need more help keeping up with maintaining and modifying our homes."
- Modifications: "One individual talked about the need to make modifications for a disability, which is a major undertaking."

Sub-theme 2: Affordability

- "A participant indicated that they pay 2/3rds of their income on rent and there is very little money left for food, medicine, or transportation."
- Maintenance: "The affordability of livable, safe housing for older adults and folks with disabilities is reaching a crisis level in Allegheny County. For those who want to continue to stay in their homes, are there sufficient repair programs that can provide repairs or construct adaptations at a lower cost with subsidized interest rates for low-income elders

13

and folks with disabilities? I just spoke to an older man last week who resides in a home in the Hill District. He wants to stay in his community and in his home but can't afford the cost of a badly needed new roof. Folks like him need guidance, support, and financial assistance to stay in homes that they want to continue to live in and not be preyed upon by scammers."

- Taxes: "Taxes are a challenge for older adults. Older adults should be given a break on school taxes as they age. Often this is the issue that makes it so someone cannot keep their home. They should be able to pay ½ of the amount of school taxes as they age."
- Choice: "One woman described being on a waiting list for 18 years and then she ended up with a unit that was not well kept. Again, there is a lack of choices."

Sub-theme 3: Navigation

- "Income requirements and guidelines unclear."
- "Finding resources, money and contractors can be difficult. Need repository of information for minor home issues before they become large issues."
- Legal: "Need more information about legal steps around assets and inheritance related to property and the time it can take to pass that along to your loved ones."
- Modifications: "Home repairs and modifications on a fixed income- how do we access supports, grants from organizations that provide these services and supports? Whenever I reached out, instead of a grant, my information was shared out with contractors and got many calls for bids but none for help with money to pay for these repairs."
- Services: "There is a patchwork of programs to help people age in place and people need assistance in navigating the programs."

Sub-theme 4: Safety

- Affordability: "Affordable housing options are not always safe. Examples include broken elevators, gas leaks, etc."
- LGBTQ+: "Safety and inclusion-LGBTQ is always a consideration especially in their community."
- "Many people talked about a new challenge with housing for older adults as young people are increasingly living in the buildings. In some cases, tenants have younger

people staying with them and in other cases it is more of a mixed-age situation. People are not notified about these changes in advance, when younger people are moving into the buildings. They talked about increased people smoking in the area and safety concerns. One woman found someone in her apartment. This changes the culture of a building. People expressed a need for more security in high rises."

Domain2: Health Services and Community Supports

Sub-theme 1: Navigation
- Caregiver: "One person talked about trying to provide caregiving services for a friend who is disabled. This person is trying to piece together care with friends so that they can avoid being institutionalized. It is a big challenge.
- "New PA residents: when applying for PA benefits, there was no support, or information, no case managers to help her obtain support because there is a lot of gaps in the information. She cannot be proactive if she doesn't know how to help herself through the system."
- "Recommendation: reach out to refugee and immigrant serving organizations to proactively provide information about services for older adults so that people know the services right when they arrive in the United States."

Sub-theme 2: Affordability
- "One person described the donut of being overwhelmed with full time care for a family member. They could not afford full-time private care, and they made too much for low-income care so affordability is also an issue."
- "People are not receiving enough $$ in food benefits. The state needs to hear this and the state needs to advocate for more food benefits with the federal government. One person talked about receiving only $23/month in food stamps."
- "There are gaps in services, income-based gaps."
- Health: it would be wonderful if the state helps when a person falls into the donut hole and medications are impossible to afford. They ought to have more help for people

falling in between the cracks. We should be able to pay for a premium so we can afford full coverage.

Sub-theme 3: Access

- Case Management: "Case management for older people- we need more supports here. Like the service coordinator for families with children with disabilities, used to have one through FamilyLinks."
- "Programs do exist, but everyone agreed that there is a need for more services. One woman described our current situation as an epidemic, we are in an epidemic situation for services for older adults"
- Telehealth: "During the pandemic there was an increase in telehealth. We need reimbursement for telephone telehealth. This could make health services more accessible to people."
- "There was discussion about letting people stay in physical therapy for a longer time after they are discharged from the hospital and sent to a rehabilitation facility. People need more physical therapy to get stronger."
- Senior Center: "There is a need for a bigger community center for older adults. This center is great, but it is too small. Need for a larger space."

Sub-theme 4: Discrimination

- "It is difficult to live a "decent life" with physical and intellectual disabilities."
- "There is a need for mandated reporting for older adults related to neglect. Many people are abused by therapists and family members."
- LGBTQ+: "Personal care facilities need to be inclusive. Going to a facility should be welcoming."
- "Often there is cheerleading that happens for people who have different abilities, but not true inclusion."
- "Health care disparities: Black women's health disparities are enormous and begin at birth."

Sub-theme 1: Access

- Accessibility: "There are issues with Port Authority bus stops and where the stops are located. Sometimes the bus stop is not by the entrance to a store (Sam's Club for example) and individuals need to go through parking lots, along unsafe streets, etc. without sidewalks to get to the store. This is an issue for people with wheelchairs."
- "A lot of participants discussed issues with Access. Timing far off for pickups. Waiting times are usually extended. Need more drivers. Needs to be expanded, polished, and revamped. Trips cancelled halfway through (get ride one way and others cancelled for priority riders)."
- Services: "There are community organizations that support people with transportation to medical appointments and shopping (North Hills Area Services for example). One person from one of these organizations said that it is an opportunity to coordinate services to serve more people."
- "How do you reach people who are not enrolled in services? Lifespan helps with transportation, but what if you are not in a program?"
- "There is a need for transportation to medical appointments. The frequency of appointments for older adults can be very high and can exceed allowable trips from different programs."

Sub-theme 2: Safety

- Sidewalks: "One person described their community as a walking neighborhood, which is good. Sidewalks can be an issue. In some communities the sidewalks can be "pushed up" by trees and other things so there is a fear of falling when they are walking around. Sidewalk maintenance."
- Veterans: "There are specific safety issues for Veterans that need to be taken into account. Many Veterans experience anxiousness coming into the city and into more crowded areas. This is a barrier to getting services and for transportation."

- "Bus stops are sometimes not in safe places. The big one at the corner of Forbes and Murray, for example, has very little room for people to stand. It is very narrow and very busy."
- "People feel safe during the day, but not at night."

Sub-theme 3: Affordability

- "CONNECT Cards (for public transportation) are only free for 65+. What about people who are 60+?"
- Accessibility: "Transportation is a major issue for older adults and people with disabilities with modest means. The inadequacy of public transportation in Allegheny County forces many older adults to drive when they really can't afford the costs associated with a vehicle and/or shouldn't be driving due to impaired reflexes and vision."
- Maintenance: "Maintaining a car is a challenge and often unaffordable. This includes keeping up with the regular maintenance and required renewals. "
- "Public transit should be considered in the same light as having an airport. Our taxes and public funds are used to build and maintain the airport whether we fly or not. Public funds should be used to maintain/expand public transit so that low-income people, people with disabilities, older adults, as well as others, can get to where they need to go. A robust public transit system with affordable fares will take more vehicles off the roads (traffic calming) and reduce pollution. That benefits everyone, even the folks who never take a bus."

Sub-theme 4: Policy

- "Access will not transport across counties. This is an issue for people who live in eastern Allegheny County who want to and could perhaps access medical care in Greensburg in Westmoreland County."
- "Several people spoke in favor of traffic calming developments in communities."

From Engagement to Action: Recommendations and Next Steps

The following are action steps that were determined by the analysis of the data collected as part of this progress.

- Prioritize top three focus areas: Housing, Health Services & Community Supports, and Transportation.
- AAA Leadership to undertake an iterative process of 1. identifying, 2. piloting and 3. refinement of projects and programs to meet challenges in these domains.
- Transportation: Develop a staff lead at the AAA to assist with coordination and navigation of transportation services for older adults. Understand the history of transportation navigation in Community Based Services.
- Determine how we respond to individuals who have concerns about affordability of services. Implement training for staff to be able to assist with this issue to the best of our ability. There are two sub issues within this theme: eligibility cliff of services otherwise known as the 'donut hole' and property taxes for older adults.
- As the AAA we need to be an important voice in our community encouraging people to embrace and value older adults and to address the systematic ageism where possible. Refine a set of initiatives focused on increasing respect for older adults in Allegheny County.
- Public campaign about the importance of older adults and their value to the community. Consider partnership with Age Friendly Greater Pittsburgh.
- Connect the strategies from the Aging Your Way Plan with the results from Allegheny County to clearly identify how we will be implementing the statewide plan.

Four Year Plan

The information gathered from residents of Allegheny County as part of the MPA community engagement process has been and continues to be used in a number of ways. The most immediate opportunity following the completion of the listening sessions was to use this information to guide the development of the four-year plan that is required of the AAA to submit to the PDA. This plan was put together in the spring of 2024 and submitted to PDA in April 2024. PDA then puts together all of the plans from the 52 area agencies on aging from around the Commonwealth and submits them to the Administration for Community Living (ACL), which is the federal agency that distributes federal funding

for aging services. The development of this plan is a requirement of receiving federal funding. The purpose of these plans is to:

- Documenting the tangible outcomes planned and achieved as a result of state long-term care reform efforts.
- Translating activities, data, and outcomes into proven best practices, which can be used to leverage additional funding.
- Providing a Blueprint that spells out the activities the state will undertake in modernizing its long-term care system.
- Building Capacity for long-term care efforts in the state.

Appendix

Interview Guide

PA Department of Aging
Master Plan for Older Adults
Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging
Listening Session Notes

Listening Session Date	
Listening Session Location	
Local Partner	
# of Attendees	
Notes	
Notetaker Contact	

Social participation: Public events are activities that are open to the community for the purpose of entertainment or socializing. Social isolation and loneliness are major factors that affect health and well-being.
What do you think communities can do to make different activities more accessible to older people and people with disabilities?
What are the main barriers older people and people with disabilities face in participating in community events?
Other Comments

PA Master Plan for Older Adults

Report for the Allegheny County AAA Leadership
- Community Engagement and Outreach Activities
- Summary of Feedback with Recommendations

December 2023

Click on the image to see the presentation.